

# Reports of an 'Israeli aggression' south of Syria's Quneitra

Wed, 2021-02-03 23:57

CAIRO: Syria's air defense systems confronted Israeli missiles in the southern region late on Wednesday, state news agency SANA said. The Israeli military declined to comment. State media said the "Israeli aggression" targeted the southern region of Quneitra.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Syria](#)

[Israel](#)

[Quneitra](#)

Rights watchdog condemns Ankara over illegal transfer of Syrian detainees  
Syrian monitor says Iran continues military recruitment operations

---

# Sisi bid to end Lebanon crisis

Author:

Wed, 2021-02-03 23:01

CAIRO/BEIRUT: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi launched an effort on Wednesday to end the political stalemate that has left Lebanon without a government for six months.

El-Sisi held talks in Cairo with Saad Hariri, who was named prime minister last year after the previous administration quit following the Beirut port explosion. Hariri has been unable to appoint a cabinet because of squabbling over the distribution of ministerial portfolios among Lebanon's sectarian factions.

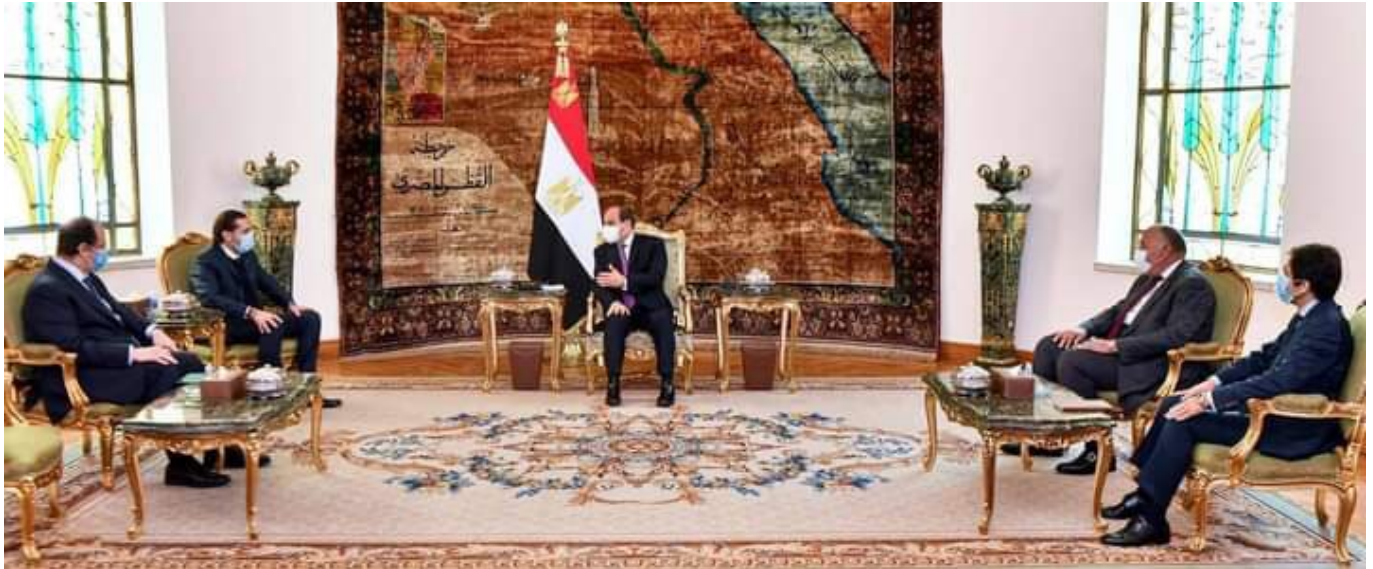
"In order to pull Lebanon out from its crisis, all political leaders must put the national interest first, settle their disputes and form an independent government," El-Sisi said.

His spokesman Bassam Radi added: "President El-Sisi ... wishes Hariri to form a new government that meets the aspirations of the Lebanese people. Egypt is ready to provide support and aid for Lebanon to overcome the crises, especially those created by the Beirut blast and the coronavirus."

Hariri will now visit Paris for talks with French President Emmanuel Macron, who has proposed a non-sectarian Lebanese government of experts and technocrats to launch political and economic reforms.

Former MP Mustafa Allouch, a member of the Future Movement led by Hariri, told Arab News attempts to form a government were being blocked by Gebran Bassil, leader of the Free Patriotic Movement. "There is an explicit insistence ... on including members of the FPM in the new government, and a total rejection of independents."

He said Hariri "does not mind making concessions if this would lead to an effective government, but the government Bassil has in mind will be worse than all the ones before."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Abdel Fattah El-Sisi](#)

[Saad Hariri](#)

[Egypt](#)

[Lebanon](#)

[Lebanon crisis](#)

Hariri urges Arabs: 'Do not give up on Lebanon' El-Sisi warns Arab intelligence officials over 'foreign intervention'

---

## [Lebanon seizes 5m captagon pills at Beirut port](#)

Wed, 2021-02-03 22:41

BEIRUT: Lebanese customs seized five million banned captagon pills at Beirut port on Wednesday, an amphetamine shipment intended for Greece and Saudi Arabia, a customs official said.

Following a tip-off, officers had found the drugs hidden inside a tile-making machine, the official said, asking to remain anonymous as he was not allowed to speak to the press.

Three Lebanese citizens were detained over the affair, he said.

It was latest in a string of similar drug busts in Lebanon.

Captagon is an amphetamine manufactured in Lebanon and probably also in Syria and Iraq. It has been one of the most commonly used drugs in the war in Syria, where fighters say it helps them stay awake for days.

Captagon is cheap and easy to manufacture, and experts say there have also been attempts to market it as a low-priced alternative to cocaine, including in the West.

In July last year, Italy seized a record 14-tonne haul of the drug – or 84

million pills – that had arrived from Syria.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[drugs](#)

Hariri urges Arabs: 'Do not give up on Lebanon' Missile fired at Israeli drone over south Lebanon

---

## [Egypt says commercial routes that threaten Suez Canal will not affect revenues](#)

Wed, 2021-02-03 22:03

CAIRO: The Egyptian government has rejected rumors about the impact of the construction of commercial routes to compete with the Suez Canal on its foreign currency earnings.

The Cabinet's media center said it had contacted the Suez Canal Authority, which stressed that the foreign currency revenues of the Suez Canal have not been affected.

The center confirmed that the reports of the Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline restarting the movement of oil trade through the canal are incorrect, explaining that the percentage of that impact will not exceed 12-16 percent of the volume of northbound oil trade.

The authority said the canal route will remain the shortest and safest way to connect the East and the West as shipping containers through the canal can transport larger quantities of goods at a lower cost than land routes.

Reports and analytical studies prepared by the authority's economic unit indicate several reasons for the lack of an actual impact from the pipeline on the traffic passing through the canal – especially the export of crude by the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to the Asian market.

The statistics of the oil trade crossing the canal also show that there is no reason to fear the competitiveness of the pipeline if it is operating.

The UAE oil trade represents about 0.7 percent of the total oil traffic passing through the canal; Saudi Arabia's 4.9 percent, and Kuwait's 1.4 percent.

Periodic reports indicate an increase in the proportion of trade in petroleum products crossing the canal to 14.2 percent, in contrast to the decline of crude oil to about 8.8 percent of the volume of trade passing through the canal.

The authority's economic unit monitors expect an increase in the costs and time of transportation using the pipeline instead of the Suez Canal, especially since that trade is mostly directed to northwest Europe and will need to be shipped on tankers in the Mediterranean, in addition to an increase in the time used for unloading and shipping.

The Suez Canal Authority indicated that the revenue generated during 2020 amounted to about \$5.61 billion and that the canal also recorded the crossing of 18,829 ships with a total net tonnage of 1.17 billion during 2020, which is the second-highest annual tonnage in the history of the canal, despite the coronavirus pandemic.

The Cabinet statement clarified that the canal revenues come from a variety of sources – the revenues from container ships represent about 50 percent of the canal's total revenue, while the percentage of dry bulk vessels represents about 17 percent, liquefied natural gas about 5 percent, car carriers about 4 percent, petroleum products and all kinds of chemicals about 12 percent, while crude oil revenues represent 6.4 percent and other types of ships 5.6 percent.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Egypt](#)

[suez canal](#)

[Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline](#)

Egypt steps up efforts to maintain Suez Canal's transport advantage  
Egypt's Suez Canal shipping traffic unaffected by coronavirus – chief

---

## [S-400s still an issue for US-Turkish ties under Biden](#)

Author:

Wed, 2021-02-03 21:58

ANKARA: Turkey had its first official contact with the administration of US President Joe Biden on Tuesday with a phone call between the top advisors of the two countries.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's top foreign policy adviser, Ibrahim Kalin, and US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, discussed the latest developments in Syria, Libya, the eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus, and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Many voices in Washington are questioning the alliance between the two countries following Ankara's purchase of a Russian missile defense system in 2019.

Turkey's S-400 system was installed last year, and Erdogan recently committed to proceed with talks for the procurement of a second batch of the missiles from Moscow despite the US opposition.

"We're not in a position to (have to) ask for permission from the Biden administration," he said.

The White House said in a statement that Sullivan expressed "concern that Turkey's acquisition of the Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile system undermines alliance cohesion and effectiveness."

But Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, the Ankara office director of the German Marshall Fund think tank, thinks that Washington is not considering a grand bargain or reset with Turkey.

"What the press release suggests is continuing cooperation on issues on which the two allies agree, resolving what disagreements can be resolved, but most importantly managing disagreements effectively, rather than just agreeing to disagree in a casual manner," he told Arab News.

"While disagreements on secondary issues are easier to manage, disagreements on issues that are related to the core of the treaty alliance between Turkey and the US are a different case," he said.

The conversation between Sullivan and Kalin came a week after another statement from the White House described China and Turkey as a mutual concern for both Washington and the EU, with whom the latter shares an eastern border.

Last December, Washington imposed sanctions on Ankara – including a ban on issuing export licences – over the S-400 acquisition, having already removed its NATO ally from the F-35 fighter jet program, despite several parts of the aircraft being manufactured in Turkey.

The US considers the presence of S-400 missiles on Turkish soil a serious threat to NATO's broader defense systems and the operation of F-35s, although Ankara claims the missiles will not be integrated into the alliance's defenses.

"The US attitude is that the ball is in Turkey's court on the S-400. The sanctions were a warning meant to convey that the US will go further but does not want to do so," Max Hoffman, a Turkey analyst from the Washington-based Center for American Progress, told Arab News.

Turkish concessions, including not buying more weapons systems and not fully activating the current array, were essential to avoid further escalation, he added.

"It will be hard for Erdogan to back down, but it's a situation of his own

making – the US consistently warned of the consequences,” Hoffman said.

In a recent interview to Deutsche Welle on Jan. 26, James Jeffrey, former US special envoy for Syria, said he did not anticipate any improvement in US-Turkey ties under Biden. He said Ankara failed to seize the “opportunities” on offer during the administration of former US President Donald Trump, failing to make any move to reach compromises.

“We have delayed the S-400 sanctions, we have later again delayed them, and then delayed them once again ... Well, did we manage to move forward? Of course not. This is the inheritance the Biden team has taken over,” Jeffrey said.

Antony Blinken, US secretary of state, recently referred to Turkey as a “so-called strategic” partner, hinting at challenging times ahead for bilateral relations.

“The new US administration sees Turkey’s ownership of S-400 systems as a problem related to alliance cohesion,” Unluhisarcikli said.

“Apparently, there is willingness on both sides to prevent the relationship from rolling over the cliff and improving it if possible, and what they need to do now is agree on a general framework of the relationship, including on how they will manage their disagreements,” he added.

The US sanctions received bipartisan support from the US Congress in December, and marked the first time the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) was used against a NATO ally.

The disagreement over the S-400s is likely to rank among the top challenges in relations unless Ankara takes a step back.

According to Hoffman, by promoting the S-400s so actively in the Turkish press, Erdogan has made it more difficult to compromise at home, particularly among nationalist voters.

Given that the F-35 ejection was a more significant punitive step than the CAATSA sanctions, and yet did not seem to change Erdogan’s mind, Hoffman is not optimistic about any future compromise.

“The tradeoff of the F-35 against the S-400 does not make sense in rational, realist foreign policy terms, pointing to the importance of domestic political and ideological concerns in Erdogan’s calculus,” he said.





Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Russian S-400 missile](#)

[Turkey](#)

Turkey says turning back on S-400s 'problematic', seeks US dialogue  
Turkey will not step back on S-400 missile systems despite US sanctions