

# US accuses Houthis in Yemen of 'behaving like a terrorist organization'

Thu, 2020-12-10 18:10

LONDON: Yemen's Houthi militia behaves like a terrorist organization and is deepening its relationship with Iran's elite military units, a senior US official said on Thursday.

The comments came as the [US issued new sanctions](#) against Houthi officials for human rights abuses and the Trump administration continued its deliberations on whether to designate the militants as a terrorist group.

The militia sparked the Yemen conflict in 2014 when it seized the capital Sanaa from the internationally recognized government and now controls much of northwest Yemen.

Timothy Lenderking, deputy assistant secretary of state for Arabian Gulf affairs, said he could not comment on internal deliberations about a possible designation, but added: "The Houthis do things that are akin to the behavior of a terrorist organization."

Speaking at a press briefing for regional media, Lenderking listed the Houthi actions that the US sees as most terrorist in nature and warned that Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) was increasingly helping fund and train the militants.

"They target civilians and civilian infrastructure, they use kidnapping as a tool of war and, if anything, they seem to be deepening their relationship with the IRGC, which from our point of view is a designated terrorist organization," he said.

Lenderking added that the Houthi's use of child soldiers, the barring of experts seeking to assess a stricken oil tanker, and the obstruction of aid operations in Yemen were "highly distasteful activities but not specifically terrorist."

He said these activities would have to stop if the Houthis wanted to be seen as a legitimate political actor inside the country.

Some aid agencies have warned that designating the Houthis as terrorists would further hamper their operations in Yemen, which is suffering one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters.

Lenderking's comments come after a flurry of diplomatic activity between the US and Arab Gulf states in recent months.

He said the US is working with Gulf countries to counter the Iranian threat in the region, which includes fueling the war in Yemen.

Officials have also been looking to reassure parties in the region amid concerns that the switch to the Joe Biden administration next month will lead to an easing of the “maximum pressure” campaign against Iran.

Under Donald Trump, the US pulled out of a landmark deal to curtail Tehran’s nuclear program and ramped up sanctions. Many in the region believe the 2015 agreement gave the Iranian regime political and financial muscle to pursue an expansive and aggressive foreign policy across the Middle East.

Biden was a key part of the Barack Obama government that oversaw the deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, and it is expected he will attempt to revive it.

Responding to Arab News, Lenderking said he could not speculate on how the new administration will tackle the “Iran problem,” but added that any administration would want to see a change in behavior.

“The goal of the Trump administration’s maximum pressure campaign has not been to destroy Iran or bring down the leadership. It has been to try to force a change in behavior,” Lenderking said.

“Any US administration would want to see different behavior from Iran because so much of that we see is very concerning. When you look at their support for various conflicts – I mentioned Yemen – but one could look at Syria, their support for proxy forces in Iraq, I mean all of these areas where Iranian influence has been brought to bear is destabilizing to our interests and also to the region.”

Lenderking also welcomed as “very reassuring” recent signs of an easing of tensions between Qatar and its Gulf neighbors Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain.

All four countries are key US allies and Washington has been pushing to resolve the dispute, which erupted in 2017 and led to a boycott of Qatar.

Saudi Arabia’s Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan [hinted at a resolution to the dispute](#), saying at the weekend that a breakthrough would come “soon.”

“It’s imperative that the GCC unites against regional threats,” Lenderking said.



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US sanctions five Houthi figures involved in torturing women, children US announces terror sanctions against Iran's 'ambassador' to Houthis in Yemen

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## [US sanctions five Houthi figures involved in torturing women, children](#)

Thu, 2020-12-10 18:26

RIYADH: The US Treasury has imposed sanctions on five Yemeni citizens and Houthi members in Yemen said to be involved in torturing women and children.

The statement said the figures are designated for "seniors human rights abuses."

The sanctions were imposed on several officials including Mutlaq Amer Al-

Marani, deputy head of the Houthi security office; Abdul Qader Al-Shami, a leader in the Houthi militia; Abdul Hakim Al-Khawani, head of the security apparatus of the Houthi militia.



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## [Iran faces UN probe into dissident massacres covered up for 30 years](#)

Thu, 2020-12-10 00:23

JEDDAH: Iran faces a UN investigation into massacres of imprisoned dissidents that the regime in Tehran has tried to cover up for more than 30 years.

Thousands of mainly young people were executed without trial in Iran in 1988,

as the war with Iraq was ending. Those killed were mainly supporters of the People's Mujahedin Organization of Iran (MEK), which had backed Baghdad in the conflict.

A group of seven special UN rapporteurs wrote to the Iranian government to say they were "seriously concerned by the continued refusal to disclose the fate and whereabouts" of those killed.

They demanded a "thorough and independent investigation" and "accurate death certificates" to be provided to family members.

"We are concerned that the situation may amount to crimes against humanity," the UN experts said. They warned that if Iran continued "to refuse to uphold its obligations" it would face an international investigation.

The UN team wrote their letter in September but it has only now been made public.

Diana Eltahawy, Amnesty International's deputy director for the Middle East and North Africa, said the letter was a "momentous breakthrough" that sent a message the killings could "no longer go unaddressed and unpunished."

Amnesty, which described the massacres as crimes against humanity in a 2018 report, wants the UN Human Rights Council to set up an international mechanism to investigate.

Activists say thousands were killed in the executions personally ordered by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini that took place without proper trials inside prisons across Iran from late July 1988. The National Council of Resistance of Iran, the country's dissident "government in exile," puts the figure as high as 30,000.

Activists accuse officials who still hold top positions in the Iranian government of being involved in the killings. In its 2018 report, Amnesty said Iran's judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi and former interior and justice minister Mostafa Pour Mohammadi took part in so-called "death commissions" that decided the executions.

The issue has remained taboo inside Iran, although in 2016 an audio clip was released of a meeting between Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, then Khomeini's designated successor, and the officials on a "death commission."

The Iranian-American political scientist Dr. Majid Rafizadeh told Arab News the UN intervention was "a step forward toward justice."

He said: "For decades, the Iranian regime has tried to systematically cover up one of its greatest crimes. As the regime struggles to curb growing protests and unrest linked to a disintegrating economy, the world must act to prevent future massacres.

"The foundations of the current regime's power structure, with Ali Khamenei as its head, were built on the 1988 massacre. The world must know that the authorities now in charge of Iran showed their true allegiance and unwavering fealty to the fundamentalist regime and its goals by having no qualms about ordering and implementing one of the greatest political crimes of the 20th century.

"That should be an indicator that the world must side with the Iranian people



and their organized opposition, which seek to overthrow the perpetrators of crimes against humanity.”



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## [Arab Coalition destroys two booby-trapped boats launched by Houthis south of Red Sea](#)

Wed, 2020-12-09 23:55

RIYADH: The Arab Coalition said it has destroyed and intercepted two booby-trapped boats south of the Red Sea that were launched by the Houthi militia.

The coalition, which is fighting to restore legitimacy in Yemen, said the

boats took off from Hodeidah, Yemen's principal port on the Red Sea.

In remarks over the incident, the coalition said the militia continues to threaten regional and international security.



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## [Netanyahu: Israel's vaccination campaign to begin Dec. 27](#)

Author:

By JON GAMBRELL and JOSEF FEDERMAN | AP

ID:

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Wed, 2020-12-09 19:22

TEL AVIV: Israel will start COVID-19 vaccinations from Dec. 27, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Wednesday, as the country received its first batch of Pfizer's coronavirus vaccine.

Netanyahu, who was on hand as an air freighter carrying the vaccines landed at Ben Gurion airport, near Tel Aviv, vowed to be the first Israeli to get the jab.

The shipment was the first of eight million doses Israel ordered from pharmaceutical giant Pfizer and its partner BioNTech.

"This is a great celebration for Israel," Netanyahu said as a fork-lift truck started unloading the cargo.

"The first vaccinations will be given on December 27," he said later, noting the public health service would be capable of administering 60,000 inoculations a day.

"Tomorrow another shipment is arriving, a much larger one," Netanyahu said.

"I'm asking that every Israeli citizen be vaccinated, and to do so, requested to set an example and be the first person being vaccinated in Israel," he added, without saying when.

It came ahead of Hanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights, which begins on Thursday.

"We've brought great light to Israel," he said.

The Pfizer vaccine has yet to receive the necessary regulatory approvals for use in Israel, but Netanyahu said he would be meeting with the health minister and heads of the public health system on Thursday to prepare "the massive national undertaking" of vaccinations.

The results of third-phase clinical trials showed the vaccine was 90 percent effective in preventing COVID-19 symptoms and did not produce adverse side effects among thousands of volunteers.

Britain started inoculating its citizens with the same vaccine on Tuesday.

Israel has also contracted to buy six million COVID-19 vaccine doses from US biotech firm Moderna which are expected to be delivered in 2021, giving a total of 14 million shots for its population of nine million.

Both medications require two doses to be administered for optimal protection.

The Pfizer vaccine needs to be stored at the ultra-low temperature of -70 degrees Celsius (-94 Fahrenheit), posing handling and storage challenges.

Speaking at the airport, Netanyahu praised "our amazing logistical storage center, which is a few minutes from here, with refrigeration and the highest medical standards in the world."

Israel imposed a second nationwide lockdown in September, when the country had one of the world's highest per capita infection rates.

Restrictions have since been gradually eased in the country but infection rates are again on the rise.

The virus has infected 349,916 Israelis, 2,934 of them fatally, according to Wednesday's official figures.

While reiterating the need to keep up with "masks, distancing, hygiene and preventing gatherings," Netanyahu was nonetheless upbeat.

"We're bringing an end to the plague," he said in his Wednesday evening address.

On Monday, Netanyahu's office announced a sweeping night-time curfew but it has so far not received the cabinet approval required for its implementation and no details have been published.

On Wednesday evening, Netanyahu said the government would meet the next



day to finalize the restrictions set to be issued.

"We decided on taking the gatherings expected on the holidays, Hannukah, Christmas and the New Year, and limiting them to save lives," he said.

Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi meanwhile suggested Israel might provide vaccinations for Palestinians in the occupied West Bank or the Gaza Strip.

"We don't rule out this opportunity once we will have the amount that we need for our first responders, health community and others, and as far as I know they have already engaged with some of the companies," he said.

The Palestinian Authority says over 75,500 people have so far been infected with coronavirus in the West Bank and 712 have died.

In the Israeli-blockaded Gaza Strip there have been about 25,500 infections and 155 fatalities.

On Monday, the enclave's Hamas rulers said Gaza had received 20,000 test kits from the World Health Organization, after warning it could no longer perform testing due to a shortage of equipment.

Facing a surge in cases, Hamas has also announced a lockdown on weekends lasting from December 11 to the end of the month. It also closed schools, universities, kindergartens and mosques.



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UAE says Sinopharm vaccine has 86% efficacy against COVID-19