

Israeli navy welcomes new generation of German-made warships

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HAIFA: Israel's navy on Wednesday welcomed the first of four German-made warships that will be at the vanguard of the country's efforts to protect its coastline and growing natural-gas industry.

The first missile boat of "Project Magen" docked at Israel's Haifa port, with three more of the corvettes scheduled to arrive over the next two years.

"The Israel Navy has proved it can initiate, plan, lead and implement a serious force build-up program for the long term that will answer the state of Israel's strategic needs – from maintaining our naval superiority in the area to protecting the gas rigs and securing the trade and import routes to Israel," President Reuven Rivlin told the welcoming ceremony.

The vessels, commonly known as the "Saar 6," will lead Israeli efforts to protect its 200-mile (320-kilometer) exclusive economic zone. The natural gas industry, seen as a national asset, is at the heart of those efforts.

Over a decade after finding sizeable reserves off its Mediterranean coast, Israel now generates some 60% of its electricity from natural gas, according to the national electric company, and has begun to export gas to its Arab neighbors Jordan and Egypt. Israel is also pursuing a project with Greece and Cyprus in hopes of creating an Eastern Mediterranean gas pipeline to Europe. With so much at stake, Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group has identified Israeli gas installations as high-priority targets. Israel takes such threats seriously. During a monthlong war in 2006, a Hezbollah cruise-missile strike on an Israeli "Saar 5" warship killed four soldiers.

The new ships are to be equipped with newer and more powerful radar and other electronic systems, and handle rough seas much better than their predecessors. The 90-meter (295-foot) vessels are equipped with rocket and missile defense systems, anti-aircraft and anti-ship missiles, torpedoes and an upgraded launching pad for Israel's newest attack helicopters.

"Behind me is one of the most advanced war machines in the world, which poses a significant leap forward in the Israeli military's ability to ensure our strength at sea and in naval operations," said the military's chief, Lt. Gen. Aviv Kohavi.

Israel agreed to buy the vessels in a 2015 deal valued at roughly 430 million euros (\$480 million at the time), with the German government covering about one quarter of the cost.

Several Israeli businessmen, including confidants of Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and a former commander of the navy, are suspects in a graft scandal connected to the purchase of the warships and submarines from German conglomerate ThyssenKrupp.

Netanyahu, who is on trial in three other corruption cases, was not named as a suspect in the scandal and no one active in the Israeli navy has been

connected. But critics, including his defense minister at the time, have claimed Netanyahu behaved improperly and may have had a conflict of interest. Netanyahu's rival and governing partner, Defense Minister Benny Gantz, recently opened an investigation into the affair.





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Israel expects \$220 million in non-defense trade with Bahrain in 2021
Israel sends Palestinians over \$1 billion in withheld funds

More than 900 Syrian fighters return home from Karabakh

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BEIRUT: More than 900 pro-Turkish Syrian fighters have returned to Syria after the end of fighting in the disputed area of Nagorno-Karabakh, a Britain-based Syrian war monitor said Wednesday.

A November 9 truce ended more than a month of fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the ethnic Armenian enclave that broke away from Baku's control in a war in the 1990s.

Turkey has been accused of sending hundreds of Syrian mercenaries to fight alongside Azeri forces in the conflict, though Ankara has denied this.

More than 2,580 Syrian combatants have been sent to back Baku in total, of whom 293 have died, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group.

"More than 900 fighters from pro-Ankara factions have returned to Syria in several waves," the latest on November 27, Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman said.

The rest of the fighters were expected home in the coming days.

Returning fighters went back to northern parts of war-torn Syria under control of pro-Turkey rebels, including Afrin, Jarabulus and Al-Bab, Abdel Rahman said.

France in mid-November called on Russia, which brokered the cease-fire deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan, to clear up related "ambiguities," including over the return of foreign fighters.

A French diplomatic source, who asked not to be named, at the time called the departure of foreign fighters deployed in the conflict "a fundamental element for stability in the region."



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[Yemenis suffer as UN bodies cut aid](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-12-02 01:55

AL-MUKALLA: Thousands of Yemenis, African migrants and internally displaced people have been deprived of vital healthcare services as UN organizations cut their programs throughout the war-torn country because of a shortage of funds, local Yemeni officials told Arab News.

The World Health Organization announced on Saturday that it was cutting support to thousands of health workers and health facilities across the country, which threatened to aggravate the country's humanitarian crisis.

"Due to an unprecedented financial gap, @WHO & health partners have been unable to continue their financial support to the health care workforce in #Yemen. Up to 10K health workers are affected. More funds are needed now more than ever to enable the continuation of this support," the WHO Yemen office said on Twitter.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) office in Yemen made a similar announcement about reducing their operations on the ground, including monitoring the flow of African migrants, due to a lack of funds and a sharp drop in the number of African migrants to the country this year.

"IOM is adapting its programming to the realities on the ground and available funding. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, migration to Yemen has greatly reduced since March," said Olivia Headon, IOM spokeswoman in Yemen, adding that the number of African migrants has decreased by 90 per cent over the past several months compared to last year, another reason for reducing the organization's activities at the entry points for the migrants in southern Yemen provinces.

"IOM's health assistance in Yemen is severely underfunded and, with such financial constraints, we have had to refocus our health programming. Unfortunately, this has affected assistance for both migrants and displaced people," Headon said.

Local Yemenis have felt the effects of UN humanitarian assistance cuts. Yemeni officials told Arab News that dozens of health workers at UN-funded facilities have been laid off, forcing many patients to travel hundreds of miles to get treatment.

In the densely populated central province of Marib, health officials said that slashed health assistance by WHO Yemen has had a huge impact on their ability to deliver services to thousands of internally displaced people and the war wounded.

Dr. Abdul Aziz Al-Shadadi, the director of Marib's Ministry of Health office, said on Tuesday that at least a dozen medical specialists in Marib were laid off, leading to the closure of many sections at three facilities in the province.

"The cut of the meager support from the UN body has placed unprecedented pressure on us," Al-Shadadi said, adding that surgery and mother and child departments at Marib's Harib district had been closed due to lack of funding. "We are facing huge pressure. We receive thousands of patients from Al-Bayda and Jouf after Houthis seized control of health facilities there," Al-Shadadi said, urging WHO to resume activities and financial support mainly to medical specialists.

Employees at IOM told Arab News that the organization informed them that it would end their contracts by the end of this month, even as the country is bracing for a new wave of migrants from Ethiopia fleeing violence at home.

IOM's spokeswoman said the organization would reduce its field teams in the

southern province of Shabwa, a key arrival entry for migrants, from three to one due to the sharp decrease in the number of African migrants and funds. According to IOM figures, the total number of migrants who arrived in Yemen in August, September and October this year is 1,703, compared to 27,260 migrants during the last three months last year.

However, residents in Shabwa talk about a continuing flow of migrants to the coasts of the province. One resident said migrants told him that a large number of Ethiopians who fled fighting at home were gathering in Bosaso in Somlia and were due to sail to Yemen.

Local officials in Shabwa said that they had been left to deal to the influx of migrants as the IOM reduces operations in the province. "The flow of African migrants has never stopped for the past 20 years. We want the UN to build camps for the migrants, feed them and arrange repatriation trip to them," said a government official.



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Zarif 'desperate' to blame Saudi Arabia for anything negative that happens in Iran: Al-Jubeir

Tue, 2020-12-01 19:54

JEDDAH: Iran's parliament on Tuesday approved a bill requiring the government to boost uranium enrichment by 20 percent and end UN inspections of its nuclear facilities.

The move is being viewed by analysts as a show of defiance after the recent killing of prominent Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, an assassination for which Tehran has accused other countries of masterminding.

Saudi Arabia's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel Al-Jubeir said on Tuesday that Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif was "desperate" to blame the Kingdom for anything negative that happened in Iran.

"Will he blame us for the next earthquake or flood?" he tweeted. "It is not the policy of Saudi Arabia to engage in assassinations; unlike Iran, which has done so since the Khomeini Revolution in 1979.

It is not the policy of Saudi Arabia to engage in assassinations; unlike Iran, which has done so since the Khomeini Revolution in 1979. Ask us, and ask many other countries who have lost many of their citizens due to Iran's criminal and illegal behavior!

– Adel Aljubeir عادل الجبير (@AdelAljubeir) [December 1, 2020](#)

"Ask us and ask many other countries who have lost many of their citizens due to Iran's criminal and illegal behavior," Al-Jubeir added.

The latest bill would require another parliamentary vote to pass, as well as approval by the Guardian Council, a constitutional watchdog. Moreover, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has the final say on all nuclear policies.

"There is no doubt that this step constitutes a threat, raising it to 20 percent means that it is close to building a nuclear bomb," political analyst and international relations scholar Dr. Hamdan Al-Shehri told Arab News. "The region is promised with a dark and unstable period."

He said that the move indicated the Iranian regime's insistence on destabilizing the region, and its determination to win the race to obtain nuclear weapons.

Enriching uranium to 20 percent is below the threshold needed for nuclear weapons but higher than that required for civilian applications. It would also commission new centrifuges at nuclear facilities at Natanz and the underground Fordo site.

"Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons or its proximity to achieving that goal will be a great danger to the region, and countries will seek to protect themselves, which will mean that everyone will resort to obtaining nuclear weapons. Fakhrizadeh's death suggests that Iran was waiting for this opportunity to escalate," Al-Shehri added.

The official IRNA news agency said 251 lawmakers in the 290-seat chamber voted in favor, after which many began chanting slogans against the US and Israel.

The bill would give European signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal three months to ease sanctions on Iran's key oil and gas sector, and to restore its access to the international banking system.

"Many technical issues related to the nuclear bomb creation were not closely followed up by P5+1 (the UN Security Council's permanent members of China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US, plus Germany)," said Al-Shehri.

"We also should not forget that Iran was not clear and was preventing and limiting inspections at its nuclear facilities, moreover, the International Atomic Energy Agency did not do its work properly so that the world could breathe easily.

"Iran may have the nuclear bomb by now without the international community taking any action against it.

"The assassination of a scientist will not change the equation, even the strikes on Iranian facilities would not affect the real Iranian infrastructure.

"Iran wasn't confronted the way that would make the world comfortable, nor

the way that a terrorist rogue state should have been treated as it distributed terrorism through its militias, ballistic missiles, and drones in the region,” he added.



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UAE condemns killing of Iranian scientist, calls on all parties to exercise self-restraint Saudi Arabia's Al-Jubeir: Iran should stop targeting Kingdom with missiles and militias

[Friends or foes? Syrian refugees divided on fate of defectors](#)

Tue, 2020-12-01 18:42

GERA, Germany: Should former members of the Syrian security forces who have defected from President Bashar Assad's government be prosecuted for war crimes, or should they serve as key witnesses in an effort to bring senior officials to justice?

The question has divided Syrian refugees and exiles who have fled a civil war in which hundreds of thousands of people have been killed and that has been marked by atrocities since it broke out in 2011.

In Germany, home to 600,000 Syrian refugees, prosecutors have used universal jurisdiction laws that allow them to prosecute crimes against humanity

committed anywhere in the world to seek justice for victims of alleged torture and extrajudicial killings by Assad's forces.

In the first case to be brought to a German court, the trial opened in April of two former Syrian intelligence officers on charges of torture and sexual assault.

The two suspects had defected in 2012 and were granted asylum in Germany. Many of the Syrians now in Germany are asking if the defectors are friends or foes.

"The trial in Germany is wrong, strategically and morally. Defectors risked their lives to join the opposition and discredit the regime," said Fawaz Tello, a veteran Syrian dissident.

"Who in their right mind is going to defect now when they see that people who had defected in the first months of the revolution are being put on trial?"

The Syrian government has regularly rejected reports of torture and extrajudicial killings documented by international human rights groups.

Mahmoud Alabdulah, a former colonel in the Syrian army's elite 4th Division, is one of hundreds of defectors who have given testimonies to German and French judicial officials collecting evidence of alleged war crimes by the Syrian government during the still-unresolved war.

He says a military card identifying his rank is the most valuable item of the few belongings he carried when he left Syria six years ago.

The pink, plastic-covered piece of paper has given more credence to testimonies he delivered in France and Germany against the Syrian government, he says.

"I saw soldiers being executed for refusing to open fire on protesters and heavy artillery fired toward civilian areas," said Alabdulah, a 56-year-old father of five, rolling a cigarette in a modest apartment in the eastern German city of Gera where he lives with his wife.

"I remember the night I decided to defect: February 13, 2012," Alabdulah said. "I was praying in my room, lights off, at the Saboura military base (west of Damascus) and I said, 'God, I don't want to take part in such crimes, please help me get out of here'."

Campaigners have hailed the process in Germany as a first step toward justice for thousands of Syrians who say they were tortured in government facilities after attempts to establish an international tribunal for Syria failed.

"No one has the right to tell victims they should not seek justice," said Anwar Al-Bunni of the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) which is representing victims in the torture trial.

"Ignoring suspected war criminals is equivalent to white-washing the Assad regime."

The main defendant in the trial, Anwar R., is charged with 58 murders in a Damascus prison where prosecutors say at least 4,000 opposition activists were tortured in 2011 and 2012. He has denied all the charges.

He was an intelligence colonel in Assad's security apparatus but defected in 2012 to Turkey, where he became active in the opposition Free Syrian Army. He came to Germany in 2014 and was granted asylum.

The dissident Tello said Anwar R. was a member of an opposition delegation at UN-sponsored talks in Geneva six years ago aimed at ending the conflict, which makes his trial a "humiliation" for opposition groups marred by infighting.

Former army colonel Alabdulah questioned whether it was realistic for

everyone who committed a crime to face justice.

Asked if he feared charges could be filed against him, Alabdulah told Reuters his conscience was clear. He fought against Assad's forces and Daesh militants before he fled to Turkey, he said.

"We are not even close to winning the war. Even if we did, there should be some kind of a general amnesty," he said. "The Assad family and its most loyal lieutenants should be tried."



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