

US navy denies carrier group moved into Gulf after any 'threats'

Author:

AFP

ID:

1606579288844269200

Sat, 2020-11-28 15:53

WASHINGTON: A US aircraft carrier group has moved back into the Gulf region, but a navy spokeswoman said Saturday its return was not triggered by any "threats" after the killing in Iran of a top nuclear scientist.

Tensions in the region are extraordinarily high after the assassination Friday of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, an act still unclaimed but which Iran has blamed on close US ally Israel.

But naval commander Rebecca Rebarich, a spokeswoman for the US 5th Fleet, told AFP the return Wednesday of the carrier group led by the nuclear-powered USS Nimitz was unconnected to any "specific threats."

"There were no specific threats that triggered the return of the Nimitz Carrier Strike Group," she said in a statement.

"The return of Nimitz is centered on maintaining CENTCOM's ability to remain postured and prepared to help preserve regional stability and security," Rebarich said, referring to the US Central Command.

The Pentagon said earlier that the carrier group would be providing combat support and air cover as the military withdraws thousands of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan by mid-January, under orders from President Donald Trump. About 2,000 troops will be pulled from Afghanistan and 500 from Iraq, leaving roughly 2,500 in each country.

The flotilla led by the Nimitz – one of the world's largest warships – had recently joined Australia, India and Japan in scheduled exercises in the Arabian Sea.

The 5th Fleet's Twitter account showed pictures of the Nimitz's air wing conducting flight operations there Saturday.

Carrier groups typically include a cruiser, a destroyer squadron and an air wing.

Nimitz-class carriers are more than 1,000 feet (300 meters) long, have a crew of more than 6,000, and carry up to 90 helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[US navy](#)

[Gulf](#)

Suspected Iranian nuclear mastermind Fakhrizadeh assassinated near TehranUS-Gulf trade ties set to begin new chapter

[4 killed in southern Yemen province as Arab coalition bombs Sanaa](#)

Sun, 2020-11-29 01:00

AL-MUKALLA: Four people were killed on Friday during a mortar fire exchange between government forces and separatists in the southern province of Abyan, local military officers told Arab News.

Government forces stationed in the Sheikh Salem area shelled forces loyal to the pro-independence Southern Transitional Council (STC) on Friday night, killing four fighters – including two officers – a government officer and STC media said. The STC forces responded by shelling army locations in Abyan, causing no casualties. The STC leader, Aidarous Al-Zubaidi, mourned the four fighters in a letter to their families, describing the government's attack on

his forces as a “treacherous terrorist operation.”

STC media outlets said that the deadly attack was carried out by a Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 drone that government forces have allegedly obtained recently. Local army commanders strongly denied receiving or using Turkish drones. “No, no, we did not use drones and we do not have any. We shelled them with 120mm mortars,” the government officer, who asked to remain anonymous, told Arab News.

Sporadic fierce fighting and an exchange of artillery fire between government and the STC have occurred over the past couple of months despite the two parties’ commitments to adhere to the Saudi-brokered Riyadh Agreement. The agreement, aimed at defusing tension between the two parties, started in early 2018 by including the STC in a shared government in exchange for removing forces from Aden and other contested areas in southern Yemen.

Prime Minister-designate Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed has missed several deadlines to form a new government as political forces wrangle over key ministries and which should come first; announcing the government or withdrawing forces from contested areas.

In Houthi-held Sanaa, Arab coalition warplanes on Friday targeted a number of military sites suspected of storing ballistic missiles and drones, Yemen’s defense ministry said. Warplanes hit Faj Attan and Ayban mountains west of the capital, Al-Sama military base in Arhab district, outside the capital, and the Houthi militia’s military gatherings in Jarban and Riyamat Hamed military bases south of Sanaa, the ministry said in a statement on its news site. Large explosions rocked Sanaa as thick smoke billowed from targeted sites.

At the same time, fighting raged on Friday and Saturday on major battlefields across the country as government forces fought off Houthi attacks in the provinces of Taiz, Jouf, Marib and Sanaa. Local media reported on Saturday that government forces and allied tribesmen engaged in heavy fighting with the Houthis in contested areas of the central province of Marib. Arab coalition warplanes launched many airstrikes in Marib, targeting Houthi military gatherings and military equipment, which enabled government forces to push back rebels.

In Sanaa province, a ballistic missile fired by the Houthis on Saturday from an area north of the capital failed to reach its target and landed in a village shortly after its launch. Yemen Today TV and other anti-Houthi local media outlets reported that the Houthis sealed off the area where the missile landed, preventing people from leaving or entering houses.

The current conflict in Yemen began in late 2014 when the Houthis stormed the capital, Sanaa, and later expanded rapidly across the country, triggering fierce fighting with government forces.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Sanaa](#)

[Yemen](#)

13 dead in south Yemen clashes: military sources
Saudi project empowers 500 orphans in Yemen

[A Saudi accelerator removes roadblocks from the path of female entrepreneurs](#)

Fri, 2020-11-27 23:33

JEDDAH: From cultural or self-imposed barriers to age-old beliefs, gender-role stereotyping remains one of the biggest obstacles to women's progress in the workplace and one of the main reasons for the lack of female representation at the executive level and in startup culture in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

Despite ongoing progress in the startup scene, the region still faces some unique challenges. These include the lowest female labor force participation rate (LFPR) in the world – at 24.6 percent, it trails far behind the global average of 47.8 percent.

According to Emon Shakoor, CEO of the region's first female-focused

accelerator, Blossom, women's participation in professional and technical jobs is not on a par with men's. "As it is, starting a company is pretty difficult, but starting a company as a woman often had additional challenges. Gender biases and cultural beliefs added an extra layer of difficulty for women who wanted to launch their own business," Shakoore said.



Since its launch, Blossom has mentored more than 300 female-focused startups and arranged three events. (Supplied)

In 2017, when she was just 23, Shakoore launched her own venture for a strong entrepreneurial network in Saudi Arabia. However, she found it especially hard to network with the upper echelons, which is when the idea for Blossom emerged.

"At that time in Saudi Arabia, there weren't any startup accelerators or network platforms that offered startup advice, especially ones that catered to women," Shakoore said. "That's when I realized that women who launched their own business in KSA faced a different set of challenges than the average Saudi male founder.

"With Blossom, I wanted to tailor an experience that met the needs of female founders while enabling and equipping them with everything they need to know to overcome the barriers they might face along the way. This is a global phenomenon; it happens even in Silicon Valley."

INNUMBERS

Female workplace progress

* 24.6% Female labor force participation rate in MENA.

* \$36m Total funding for startups founded by women in 2019.

As noted in a recent MAGNiTT report in relation to MENA, “5.1 percent (\$36 million) of total funding went to startups with only female founders in 2019, which is close to double the figure in the US. Beyond that, startups with only female founders accounted for 4.5 percent of all deals in 2019, more than twice the percentage in the US.”

While Shakoor acknowledges there have been noteworthy efforts to increase female participation in the economy, “we still have a long way to go.” The Jeddah-based accelerator gives early-stage startups the opportunity to participate in a boot camp and a demo day while also providing them with resources, knowledge, networking and access to mentors, speakers and investors.

“Startups get mentorship on everything – from business models, introduction to entrepreneurship, lean principles, hands-on implementation, marketing and finance, and a lot more,” Shakoor said.

“We believe one of our differentiation points here at Blossom is our heavily mentored programs that give access to mentors and speakers from both Silicon Valley and the region. Having that international exposure, alongside local expertise, gives our female-focused startups a 360-picture of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.”



The Jeddah-based accelerator gives early-stage startups the opportunity to participate in a boot camp and a demo day while also providing them with

resources, knowledge, networking and access to mentors, speakers and investors. (Supplied)

Since its launch, Blossom has mentored more than 300 female-focused startups and arranged three events: Techpreneurship Sprint (a one-day business plan competition for technology startup ideas), SELLA (a technology entrepreneurship function focused on idea-sharing, inspiration and networking), and THIQAH (a female-empowerment event teaching women how to be more confident and create the company they deserve). And a fourth virtual event is underway.

“The coronavirus has motivated us to take our event online. Going virtual means reaching more startups across the globe and expanding our Blossom network worldwide. We always had the idea for the online accelerator, but the virus expedited the process for us,” Shakoor said.

Blossom continues to grow and evolve, with mentorship programs spanning the GCC and MENA, but Shakoor says she is just getting started. “I see Blossom being the accelerator and platform for female founders in MENA, the place for any woman who wants to start or grow a company to go to and ultimately scale and succeed.

“We’re also planning on starting our own fund to grow our business and network and eventually invest in multiple talents across this part of the world.”

This report is being published by Arab News as a partner of the Middle East Exchange, which was launched by the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives to reflect the vision of the UAE prime minister and ruler of Dubai to explore the possibility of changing the status of the Arab region.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Middle East](#)

[Saudi Arabia](#)

[women empowerment](#)

[Editor's Choice](#)

Saudi startup competition encourages innovation among youth
Startup of the Week: Saudi startup aims to overtake leaders in last-mile delivery market

[Palestinian refugees benefit from revival of embroidery technique of tatreez](#)

Fri, 2020-11-27 23:12

DUBAI: When you think of the ancient embroidery technique of tatreez, what usually springs to mind is decorative clothing and elegant patterns on items like cushions. But for 81 Designs – a family-run social enterprise – it is an opportunity for a more comfortable and prosperous future for the female Palestinian refugee community in southern Lebanon.

Nadine Maalouf, alongside her mother Nesrine El-Tibi, is providing a group of refugee artists with a monthly salary by employing them and selling their artwork at fairs across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

“The work is quite detailed and it’s unconventional so it takes a lot of time,” Maalouf said. “Some pieces take four months for one item. We work towards the fair every year because it takes about six months to launch the project from its beginning to its end.”



Maalouf believes more social enterprises like hers could be created to help others. (Supplied)

Starting the company in 2015, then launching two years later at the annual UAE-based fair Art Dubai, Maalouf and El-Tibi set out to re-establish tatreez as an art form while making a positive humanitarian impact.

Three years later and the company employs 20 Palestinian refugee artists creating unique pieces that have preserved and modernized the ancient art of tatreez.

The inspiration for launching 81 Designs came to Maalouf following the birth of her first son. Having studied art direction and art history in her younger years, she worked at various jobs after graduation, but none incorporated the artistic elements she loved.

20

Palestinian artists employed by 81 Designs to create pieces that preserve and modernize tatreez.

“I developed this idea because I was doing a lot of research about traditional textiles and artistry,” she said. “I kept on asking myself, ‘Why are we only seeing a one-dimensional form of tatreez?’”

“It is an art form, so I wanted to figure out a way to recreate or give a stronger platform to these ladies to be able to sustain what they do as individuals.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has dealt a blow to businesses throughout the Middle East and has caused social and economic problems for many. For 81 Designs, however, it provided an opportunity to work on a non-profit collaboration with Abu Dhabi Health Services on the project “I Am Committed” to help tackle the coronavirus.

“We created wristbands for people to receive at every testing site at the UAE and they were sponsored by different companies throughout the community,” said Maalouf. “The wristbands were encouraging people to get tested.”



Maalouf and El-Tibi set out to re-establish tatreez as an art form while making a positive humanitarian impact. (Supplied)

Maalouf believes more social enterprises like hers could be created to help others. "When you create a social enterprise where you use someone's skill set to provide a job for them, I think that alone in itself inspires others to do the same," she said.

"You see a lot of different social enterprises sprouting up from the region and that impact in itself is important to create a hub of opportunities for those who are less fortunate, but not treating them as a charity case because these people are amazing."

However, 81 Designs was not always destined to be a success. Having contacted several NGOs around Lebanon for initial funding, some of them found the idea to be too abstract and something that would not work, while others were not able to visualize the end product. But none of these hurdles held back Maalouf's eventual success.

"When you set up as a business, you do face challenges and you just need to keep on going. Believe in yourself. Believe that what you're actually creating can impact others in a positive way."

This report is being published by Arab News as a partner of the Middle East Exchange, which was launched by the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives to reflect the vision of the UAE prime minister and ruler of Dubai to explore the possibility of changing the status of the Arab region.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Middle East](#)

[Palestine](#)

[refugees](#)

[Editor's Choice](#)

She's weaving home: Helping refugees keep the tradition of tatreez alive
Startup of the Week: The art of weaving masterpieces with yarn

[European Parliament resolution urges sanctions on Turkey](#)

Author:

Zaynab Khojji

ID:

1606506805999309700

Fri, 2020-11-27 23:16

ANKARA: The European Parliament has called for sanctions on Turkey following President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's controversial visit to Northern Cyprus on Nov. 15.

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), agreeing on a resolution in support of Cyprus, urged EU leaders to "take action and impose tough sanctions in response to Turkey's illegal actions."

The parliament's non-binding resolution on Nov. 26 emphasized that Turkey's gas exploration activities in the eastern Mediterranean were illegal. EU leaders are due to meet in Brussels between Dec. 10-11.

MEPs also found that Turkey's decision to partially reopen the fenced-off suburb of Varosha, in the city of Famagusta, weakened prospects of a far-reaching solution to the decades-long Cypriot conflict.

The Turkish army fenced off Varosha in 1974 after its military intervention, while Greek Cypriots who fled from the resort town could not return to their homes.

"MEPs call on Turkey to transfer Varosha to its lawful inhabitants under the temporary administration of the UN (in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 550 (1984) and to refrain from any actions that alter the demographic balance on the island through a policy of illegal settlement," the resolution said.

Ankara's move has been criticized by the US, Greece as well as Greek Cypriots.

The resolution was denounced by Turkey's Foreign Ministry, which criticized the European Parliament for "being prejudiced and disconnected from the realities" on Cyprus.

During the EU summit some sanctions, on sectors such as shipping, energy and banking, are expected to be adopted, depending on Germany's mediation efforts as the current holder of the EU's six-month presidency.

Laura Batalla Adam, a political analyst and the secretary general of the EU-Turkey Forum, said that even if EU leaders were divided, the possibility of sanctions remained on the table.

"The decision to reopen Varosha just adds to an already extremely tense situation between Turkey and the EU," she told Arab News. "The next days are going to be decisive as to what kind of sanctions could be imposed, depending on Ankara's moves in the Eastern Mediterranean."

According to Batalla Adam, a moratorium on drilling activities until the two sides can enter into negotiations to settle their dispute would be a way to ease tensions and start working on a more positive agenda.

Turkey will continue its seismic studies near Greek islands in the eastern Mediterranean until Nov. 29 with its Oruc Reis research vessel.

Ankara pulled the vessel back in September to allow more room for diplomacy and negotiations with Greece, but sent it back to the disputed area, provoking a harsh reaction from EU members Cyprus, Greece, Germany and France.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Turkey](#)

[North Cyprus](#)

[Varosha](#)

[Ersin Tatar](#)

Qatar comes to Turkey's 'rescue' amid public outcry
Turkey announces record coronavirus death toll for fifth consecutive day