

Child killed, several wounded in Houthi attacks on Taiz

Author:

Thu, 2020-11-05 21:45

AL-MUKALLA: Iran-backed Houthi mortar and drone attacks on military and civilian targets in Yemen's southern city of Taiz have killed a civilian and wounded at least 14 more, local military officers and residents said.

An explosive-laden drone hit a military post in Jabal Habashy district on Wednesday, wounding 10 soldiers, Abdul Basit Al-Baher, the Yemeni army spokesperson in Taiz, told Arab News by telephone on Thursday.

"The drone was carrying a large amount of explosive materials and detonated as soldiers were guarding their post," Al-Baher said.

Also on Wednesday, a primary school student was killed and four more wounded when a mortar shell fired by the Houthis exploded in a residential area in Camb district, east of Taiz, residents said.

The students were returning home from school when the shell landed, critically wounding one who later died at a local hospital.

Eshraq Al-Maqtari, a human rights activist in Taiz and who was at the scene of the explosion, said on Twitter that there had been no clashes between government forces and the Houthis in the area, currently under the control of government forces.

The Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF)-supported Al-Thawra Hospital in Taiz received three wounded children under the age of 10, and urged both sides to avoid targeting civilians.

"MSF reiterates its call to all armed groups to abide by international humanitarian law and take all necessary precautions to avoid civilian casualties," the charity said on Twitter.

Yemen's Ministry of Human Rights strongly condemned the Houthi shelling of residential areas, and called upon the international community to work on halting the deadly attacks and lifting the rebels' siege of Taiz.

Intense fighting between government forces and the Houthis continued in the city on Thursday for the sixth consecutive day, as loyalists pushed to expel the Houthis from the suburbs.

Al-Baher said the fighting raged in the eastern and northeastern parts of the city, and that government forces liberated a street and a number of hills in the last three days.

For the last five years, Houthi militiamen have been in control of the city's outskirts, from where they regularly shell Taiz's heavily populated downtown

areas.

The rebels have come under criticism from local and international rights organizations for blocking the deliveries of vital humanitarian supplies to millions of people in the city.

In the northern province of Jouf, fierce fighting between government forces and the Houthis raged on Wednesday and Thursday near the strategically important Al-Khanjer military base, leaving dozens dead on both sides.

Yemen's Ministry of Defense said on Wednesday that army troops and allied tribesmen, backed by air cover from Arab coalition warplanes, pushed the Houthis from a number of locations north of Al-Khanjer.

Yemeni army commanders said they were cutting key supply lines to the Houthis before marching toward the city of Hazem, the capital of Jouf, that fell to the rebels in March.

In the capital city of Sanaa, and other Houthi controlled areas in northern Yemen, the rebels have in the last three days held several mass funerals for dozens of their fighters, including many field commanders, who were killed in fighting in different contested areas of the country.

Yemen's Human Rights Minister Mohammed Askar told Arab News that the Houthi attacks on civilian areas in Taiz showed that the militias were not serious about making peace in Yemen.

"What happened is a crime against humanity and a new escalation by the Houthis. It confirms the militia has no intention to make peace," the minister said.

Abdu Abdullah Majili, a Yemeni army spokesman, told Arab News the Houthis had violated human right laws and religious and social norms that prohibit targeting residential areas during war.

"We call upon the UN to condemn Houthi violations and to designate this criminal militia as a terrorist organization," Majili said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Yemen](#)

[Taiz](#)

Arab coalition destroys armed Houthi drone targeting Saudi Arabia Houthis blamed for resurgence of infant polio in Yemen

[Assad blames Syria's current economic woes on Lebanese banks](#)

Author:

AP

ID:

1604586996515824000

Thu, 2020-11-05 13:22

DAMASCUS, Syria: Syrian President Bashar Assad said much of his country's current economic distress is a direct result of the banking crisis in neighboring Lebanon, where many Syrian businessmen have traditionally kept their money.

Assad said that between \$20 billion and \$42 billion, held by Syrians, is estimated to be tied up in Lebanese banks. He spoke during a tour of a trade fair in Damascus with his wife on Wednesday.

"This number for an economy like Syria is a scary number," Assad said, according to a recording published by SANA, the state news agency.

Lebanon is experiencing a serious banking crisis, which has led to the

introduction of informal capital controls to combat capital flight and prop a flailing local currency. Depositors are unable to make foreign transfers and there is a limit on how much they can withdraw.

Lebanese banks had offered a lifeline to the Syrian economy, which under the Assad family rule faced decades of Western sanctions that often targeted individual businessmen and cut off Syrian banks.

However, Assad did not blame the sanctions for the ongoing crisis as most government officials do. "When the banks in Lebanon closed, we paid the price. This is the essence of the problem," he said.

Low oil prices and poor access to the Kurdish-held northeast of Syria, where much of the country's wheat is grown, also played a part, he said.

Syria's economy is in shambles and the nine-year civil war has killed more than 400,000 and displaced half the country's population. The local Syrian currency crashed in recent months making it more difficult for many Syrians to buy food. More than 80% of the Syrian population live in poverty, according to UN

The spread of coronavirus in the war-torn country has further restricted economic activities and increased unemployment.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Syria](#)

[Lebanon](#)

[Bashar Assad](#)

Syria's Bashar Assad cuts tax for low-income workers
Lebanese banks under more pressure after landmark UK ruling

Egypt, France in joint Med naval exercise

Author:

Wed, 2020-11-04 22:25

CAIRO: Egyptian and French naval forces have carried out a joint naval training exercise in the northern Mediterranean amid growing tensions between the two countries and Turkey over Ankara's gas exploration ambitions in the region.

Two frigates were involved in the joint exercise, which is part of the Egyptian armed forces' plan to upgrade training and strengthen cooperation with the armed forces of "brotherly and friendly states," according to a statement issued by the armed forces.

An Egyptian military spokesman said that Egypt's Taba frigate and France's Jean Bart frigate took part in the exercise with the aim of "enhancing joint cooperation between the Egyptian and the French armed forces, and support naval security and stability in the region."

The Egyptian-French joint exercise comes as tension grows in the eastern Mediterranean due to economic and geopolitical conflicts between regional and international powers in an area where new sources of energy have been discovered.

The exercise included training on sailing formations, which highlighted the capacity of naval units to take their position with high speed and precision. The exercise also included training on evaluating air, land and below surface threats.

Air threats brought a response with strikes carried out by Egyptian F-16 fighter jets. The exercise reflected the high combat experiences of both the Egyptian and French sides, according to the official Facebook page of the army spokesman.

The exercise included training activities such as securing and protecting a strategic area against submarine threats at night, electronic warfare training, and responding to and deterring asymmetrical threats.

Training also involved different sailing formations as well as carrying out a range of communication exercises.

Other exercises included a simulation on protecting a strategic ship while crossing a dangerous zone, and measures taken by warships of various countries to protect economic zones. The exercise demonstrated the competence of the Egyptian and French sides in carrying out their assigned tasks, the spokesman said.

The exercises are part of Egyptian and French plans to strengthen cooperation between armed forces, and to updated military personnel on combat techniques and expertise. The training exercise is also aimed at boosting naval peace, security and stability in the Mediterranean.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Egypt](#)

[France](#)

[Mediterranean sea](#)

[Naval Exercise](#)

French navy identifies Turkish vessel accompanying cargo ship carrying armored vehicles to Tripoli Turkey irked over joint declaration by Cyprus, Greece and Egypt

[Banque du Liban responds to political pressure by adhering to banking secrecy](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-11-04 21:28

BEIRUT: Banque du Liban Governor Riad Salameh is using banking and

professional secrecy laws to avoid delivering documents to consultancy firm Alvarez and Marsal for its audit of the bank's accounts.

Alvarez and Marsal Managing Director James Daniell met with the Lebanese Minister of Finance Ghazi Wazni on Wednesday to discuss the contract signed by the firm and the government to carry out the process, and will meet President Michel Aoun on Thursday.

Aoun and the country's caretaker government, headed by Hassan Diab, are waging a political battle against Salameh to recover seized money, blaming the economic collapse of the country on financial engineering pursued by the governor.

Minister of Justice Marie Claude Najm has issued a circular requiring Salameh to provide Alvarez & Marsal with the necessary information and documents to conduct a financial audit, based on "the fact that the banking secrecy stipulated in Lebanese law does not apply to state accounts and the accounts of the Banque du Liban, especially since these funds are non-confidential under the law on the right to access information."

The bank announced on Wednesday in a statement that it had "handed over all its accounts to the minister of finance" according to due process.

"Concerning state accounts, the Lebanese state can request a detailed statement of its entire accounts and subsequently hand it over to the parties it deems appropriate to inform them, which makes the Banque du Liban avoid the violation of the legally binding secrecy laws, and whose violation will entail penal consequences," it added.

The bank said it regretted "the leakage of information and data provided to Alvarez and Marsal on social media, which violates the law and the provisions of the contract signed with the company."

Alvarez and Marsal had informed Lebanese officials that "the documents it received from the Banque du Liban (were) so far insufficient to continue their criminal audit duties."

But Deputy Speaker Elie Ferzli has refused to lift banking secrecy over the case, saying it would "harm the country's economic interests."

In a statement in Parliament, Ferzli said: "We lift banking secrecy when it comes to money laundering and terrorism, not because of indiscriminate accusations.

"What is the purpose of systematically destroying what little confidence remains in the international community in Lebanon, due to banking secrecy, to satisfy this person or that? If banking secrecy is lifted in the future, can you tell me: Where do we get what we live on? From apples and grapes? Think about Lebanon's best interests."

The Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), led by Gebran Bassil, organized a symbolic car rally on Wednesday in Baabda to demand the criminal audit go ahead.

Dr. Jassim Ajaka, an economist, told Arab News: "The Banque du Liban, according to the law, does not have the right to disclose any information. The contract signed between Lebanon and the auditing company (Alvarez and Marsal) provides for auditing only the accounts of the bank, and does not include ministries or any other official institutions.

"Therefore, what is required is not to pressure the bank's governance to reveal its information, but to go to Parliament to propose a law to amend banking secrecy, or to refer any request to audit anyone's accounts to the judiciary or the Audit Bureau, two bodies entitled to lift banking secrecy."

Ajaka added: "What is required is to start with the accounts of the ministries of energy and communications, for example, as the Banque du Liban is the bank of these ministries."

Former Justice Minister Ibrahim Najjar said: "The government's decision to sign a contract with Alvarez and Marsal for criminal auditing goes beyond the role of the Audit Bureau, which has the task of auditing public accounts. Moreover, there is no authority of the Council of Ministers over the bank, which enjoys complete independence like that enjoyed by central banks in most countries of the world, especially since the accounts of the bank are subject to the Monetary and Credit Law, specifically Article 15 on Banking Secrecy Law in Lebanon."

A source close to Wazni told Arab News that the ideal scenario would be to pause the contract. "The current caretaker government cannot hold a Cabinet session or decide on any action against the Banque du Liban," the source said. "This means that the suspension will be for a month or two, provided that Lebanon does not pay the cost of this suspension to the company. The source added that canceling the contract before its implementation would require the government to pay Alvarez and Marsal \$150,000.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Banque du Liban](#)

[Lebanon](#)

[Alvarez & Marsal](#)

Banque du Liban governor: State spenders must be held accountable Firm hired to audit Lebanon central bank has not received all requested info – sources

[**Egypt resumes negotiations on Renaissance Dam, despite Ethiopian obstinacy**](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-11-04 21:05

CAIRO: Despite continued Ethiopian intransigence, Egypt resumed negotiations on the filling and operating of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on Wednesday.

“The three countries agreed that each would present its views during the meeting of the Egyptian, Sudanese and Ethiopian irrigation ministers, scheduled to be held Nov. 4, 2020,” spokesman for the Egyptian Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation said.

On Nov. 2, Sudan demanded the necessity of abandoning the previous “unproductive” method in the negotiation process on the Renaissance Dam between itself, Egypt and Ethiopia, with the aim of speeding up the process of reaching an agreement.

The Sudanese negotiating team suggested moving forward with negotiations according to a specific timetable and a clear list of outputs to be submitted to the African Union (AU) Commission.

Negotiations had resumed under the auspices of the AU after they were paused in August, and after statements from US President Donald Trump, who claimed Egypt might blow the dam.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Egypt](#)

[Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam](#)

Renaissance Dam negotiations between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan resume
Egypt blames Ethiopia for US failure to resolve Renaissance Dam crisis