

[Egypt hands life sentence to Egyptian plane hijacker](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-09-24 20:22

CAIRO: An Egyptian court on Tuesday handed a life sentence to an Egyptian man who hijacked an airliner to Cyprus in 2016 using a fake explosive belt. The charges included using intimidation and threats to seize a plane and abduct its passengers for a terrorist purpose, according to a judicial source.

Seif Eldin Mustafa has the right to appeal within 60 days.

Mustafa commandeered a domestic Alexandria-Cairo flight with 72 passengers and crew on board in March 2016, ordering it to land at Larnaca airport in Cyprus.

Mustafa had taken control of the plane by showing flight attendants what appeared to be a belt stuffed with plastic wires and a remote control. He then asked for the release of all female prisoners held in Egypt, and also to have contact with his Cypriot ex-wife.

He surrendered to Cypriot authorities about six hours after he landed, having gradually released all passengers and crew unharmed.

The Cypriot authorities handed him over to Cairo after a court ruling cleared the way for his extradition.

Cypriot courts had heard appeals since 2016 against the extradition of the 61-year-old to Cairo, rejecting his arguments that he would not receive a fair trial in Egypt.



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Cyprus extradites Egyptian hijacker who dropped legal fight
Ex-wife in Cyprus denies EgyptAir hijacker's activist claim

[El-Sisi calls on US to take Sudan off terror-sponsor list](#)

Author:

Reuters

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1569345006339383500

Tue, 2019-09-24 16:50

NEW YORK: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi used his speech at the UN General Assembly to amplify a call to get neighboring Sudan off the US' list of countries deemed sponsors of terrorism.

El-Sisi told world leaders Tuesday that taking Sudan off the list would help the country tackle economic problems and reclaim what he called "the place it deserves among the international family."

Sudan has been on the US list since 1993. Khartoum says getting off it is crucial to rebuilding the country after years of sanctions.

The US administration began a process to take Sudan off the list. The procedure was put on hold when mass protests erupted in December against former ruler Omar Al-Bashir. The military ousted him in April. Sudan's new Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok recently said he'd discussed the issue with the Trump administration.

El-Sisi also said that a concerted effort was needed to stop militias taking control of Libya.

On Monday, US President Donald Trump voiced support to the Egyptian president, saying that El-Sisi "has done (in Egypt) some things that are absolutely amazing in a short period of time."

"When he took over not so long ago, it was in turmoil. And it's not in turmoil now," Trump said in a press conference along with El-Sisi after their meeting. "Egypt has a great leader. He's highly respected. He's brought order. Before he was here, there was very little order. There was chaos. And so I'm not worried about that at all."

El-Sisi, who has been waging a harsh crackdown on militants, blamed

“political Islam” for the protests and the turmoil in the Mideast. He stopped short of naming the Muslim Brotherhood directly.

“I want you to rest assured that, especially in Egypt, the public opinion and the people themselves are rejecting this kind of political Islam in Egypt,” he said.

“They have demonstrated their rejection before, and they reject those to have control on the country for only one year.” Egypt is fighting an insurgency led by a local affiliate of Daesh in the Sinai Peninsula as well as smaller militant groups allegedly belonging to the Brotherhood.

Meanwhile, Egyptian security forces killed six suspected members of the Muslim Brotherhood in a shootout in Cairo, the Interior Ministry said Tuesday.

The six were killed in a firefight when police raided their hideout in the Cairo suburb of Sixth of October, the ministry said in a brief statement.

The ministry oversees police forces. The statement said the suspects were planning militant attacks. It did not say when the raids took place. Egypt branded the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization in 2013 and arrested thousands of its members after the military’s ouster of President Mohammed Mursi, who hailed from the group, amid mass protests against his brief rule.



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Trump calls on world to stand up to 'Iran's bloodlust'**LIVE: UN General Assembly General Debate Day One**

[Lebanese held in Greece on hijacking suspicion to fly home](#)

Author:

By BASSEM MROUE | AP

ID:

1569344369399320600

Tue, 2019-09-24 09:01

BEIRUT: A Lebanese citizen who was detained in Greece on suspicion of involvement in a 1985 TWA hijacking and set free after it turned out to be a case of mistaken identity is in good health and expected to fly back to Lebanon, the man and his wife said Tuesday.

Mohammed Saleh's wife, Leila, told The Associated Press by telephone from her home in the southern Lebanese port city of Sidon that she spoke with her husband, who also sent her his photos as proof that he is fine and staying in a hotel while he completes necessary paperwork ahead of his return home.

The 65-year-old man was arrested Thursday on the resort island of Mykonos, where he stopped during a cruise. The name on his passport came up on a European police computer system as that of a man wanted by Germany over the hijacking, in which an American was killed.

The police statement said German authorities were unable to identify the suspect and finally said Monday afternoon that they wouldn't be seeking his extradition because he was not the man they wanted. The Greek police never released the man's name.

On Tuesday morning, Saleh sent the AP a short text message: "I am still working on the release documents. I am free but there are some measures in order to get a visa."

Saleh needs a visa now to be able to go to Athens as those going on cruises don't need one since they only spend a few hours on the island.

Saleh, a long time journalist for Lebanon's daily As-Safir daily that folded in 2016, was released without charges and was being put up at a hotel on the Aegean Sea island of Syros, where he had been detained the past four days, a Greek police statement said.

The Lebanese foreign ministry said authorities in Greece were told by the Germans that Mohammed Saleh is not the wanted man and was released late Monday. It said Saleh will later get his passport and go to Greece although there might be some delays because of a public transport strike in the

European country.

TWA Flight 847 was commandeered by hijackers shortly after taking off from Athens on June 14, 1985. It originated in Cairo and had San Diego as a final destination, with stops scheduled in Athens, Rome, Boston and Los Angeles. The hijackers shot and killed US Navy diver Robert Stethem, 23, after beating him unconscious. They released the other 146 passengers and crew members on the plane during an ordeal that included stops in Beirut and Algiers. The last hostage was freed after 17 days.

Several Greek media outlets had identified the Mykonos detainee as Mohammed Ali Hammadi, who was arrested in Frankfurt in 1987 and convicted in Germany for the hijacking and Stethem's slaying.

Hammadi, an alleged Hezbollah member, was sentenced to life in prison but was paroled in 2005 and returned to Lebanon.

Germany resisted pressure to extradite him to the United States after Hezbollah abducted two German citizens in Beirut and threatened to kill them. Hammadi, along with fellow hijacker Hasan Izz-Al-Din and accomplice Ali Atwa, remains on the FBI's list of most wanted terrorists. The FBI offered a reward of up to \$5 million for information leading to each man's capture.



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Lebanese PM, Saudi minister talk support for country's economy
Ship hijacked near Libya by migrants rescued at sea

Adrift in Iraq: Deportees from US describe fear and isolation

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1569343006069165100

Tue, 2019-09-24 10:08

BAGHDAD: Since being deported from the United States in January, Hani Al-Bazoni has spent most of the past eight months in a small room in the Iraqi city of Basra, waiting for his sister's daily visits.

Some days, he says, he struggles to get up from his mattress on the floor. On others, he looks at pictures of his wife and seven children, all US citizens: his eldest is a cadet in the US Marines, his youngest is three.

"I am too afraid to leave the house," Bazoni told Reuters. "I don't know anyone here and I don't have any money."

Bazoni is one of dozens of people of Iraqi origin deported from the United States since 2017, when Iraq agreed to take back its citizens with criminal convictions as part of a deal to remove itself from President Donald Trump's travel ban targeting people from several Muslim-majority countries.

US congressmen, lawyers and human rights activists say Iraq, still riven by sectarian divisions 16 years after the US-led invasion, remains unsafe for such returnees.

As a refugee in the 1990s, Bazoni moved to the United States, where he spent time in jail on assault charges. He also worked as a translator for the military. That job leaves him vulnerable in Iraq, where influential Iranian-backed militias oppose the presence of US troops.

His family won't let him go outside, scared that paramilitaries might round him up.

Prior to 2017, Baghdad had refused to allow such repatriations, citing political, logistical and human rights concerns.

"I never thought I'd come back to Iraq," Bazoni said. "I lost my job, I lost my family, I lost my kids. And maybe soon, I'm going to lose my life."

Following the 2017 deal, the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrested hundreds of the 1,400 Iraqis eligible for deportation because they had criminal convictions, which would have prevented them from gaining US citizenship.

It said at the time it was arresting people with convictions for violations from homicide to drug charges who had been ordered removed by an immigration judge.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) sued on their behalf. Though initially successful in stalling deportations, the case was overturned after

appeals, and deportations picked up in April.

ICE said 61 Iraqis were deported in the year to Sept. 30, 2017, and 48 in the following 12 months. The ACLU said it had been told by ICE that 30 Iraqis have been deported so far in 2019. Many of the more than 370 arrested since 2017 now await deportation.

"Deportees are treated with immediate suspicion, simply caused by their association with America," said Daniel Smith, a human rights researcher who has been an expert witness in dozens of deportation cases.

Some arrive in a country they haven't seen in decades, with no network, no identity documents and little Arabic. Their vulnerability leaves them open to accusations of spying, kidnapping for ransom and harassment from militias, Smith said.

Neither the authorities in Baghdad nor the White House responded to requests for comment for this story. The State Department referred questions to the Department of Homeland Security. The DHS and ICE did not respond to requests for comment.

'PERSECUTION, TORTURE OR DEATH'

In interviews with Reuters, nine men sent back to Iraq described their struggle to reintegrate. Separated from families and jobs, they said they were depressed, suicidal and feared for their safety.

Several claim mistreatment by ICE, which they said coerced them into signing deportation orders or stole money they were arrested with. ICE did not comment.

One of the men, Nash, 55, who asked Reuters not to use his full name, said he spent two days sleeping on a bench in Baghdad airport with nowhere to go after his deportation, until a stranger lent him a phone so he could find a place to stay.

He found a roommate, Jimmy Aldaoud, a fellow deportee from Michigan. Both were from minority Christian communities, which the Trump administration has said it wants to protect.

Aldaoud was born in a Greek refugee camp to Iraqi parents and had never been in Iraq before his deportation. The 41-year-old had mental health issues and diabetes. He died last month because he couldn't get access to care in Iraq, his family has said. He was buried in Michigan two weeks ago.

"There will be more Jimmy Aldaouds if this continues," said Congressman Andy Levin, a Democrat from Michigan who says the deportations violate US law and is seeking bipartisan support for a bill to stall them.

Levin's district has the highest number of Iraqi-born residents in the country, eight of whom have been deported since April, his office said. Most deportees committed their crimes young, and signed plea deals they hadn't understood would get their green cards revoked, Levin said.

"Most of these people they don't speak Arabic, they were never in Iraq or haven't been since childhood. They're totally Americanized," Levin said.

"You're basically sending them back to persecution, torture or death. Our policy doesn't allow that."

Nash, who worked as a roofer, was convicted in 1989 on a petty drug charge. An immigration court found him deportable in 1994, and his green card was revoked. He earned several stints in prison in the ensuing years for non-violent, drug-related charges.

'NO IDENTITY'

Levin, lawyers and human rights activists argue that if deportations can't be halted, the US and Iraqi governments should at least give deportees proper documents.

Most no longer have their original Iraqi papers and said their US documents were taken by ICE in detention. Iraq allows them to be deported on one-way travel documents, which last six months.

"These are not considered by local authorities to be an adequate proof of identity," said Smith, which he said meant they were left vulnerable to arrest by Iraqi authorities.

Iraq's Embassy in Washington referred Reuters to the ministry of foreign affairs in Baghdad, which did not respond to requests for comment.

Obtaining Iraqi documents is difficult. Some deportees have waited weeks, months and in one case more than a year.

Nash has hit multiple dead ends in getting a new ID. The travel document that allowed his return to Iraq expired last month, and his birth certificate was stolen 40 years ago.

"According to Iraq, I have no identity," said Nash. "But I was Iraqi enough to be deported."

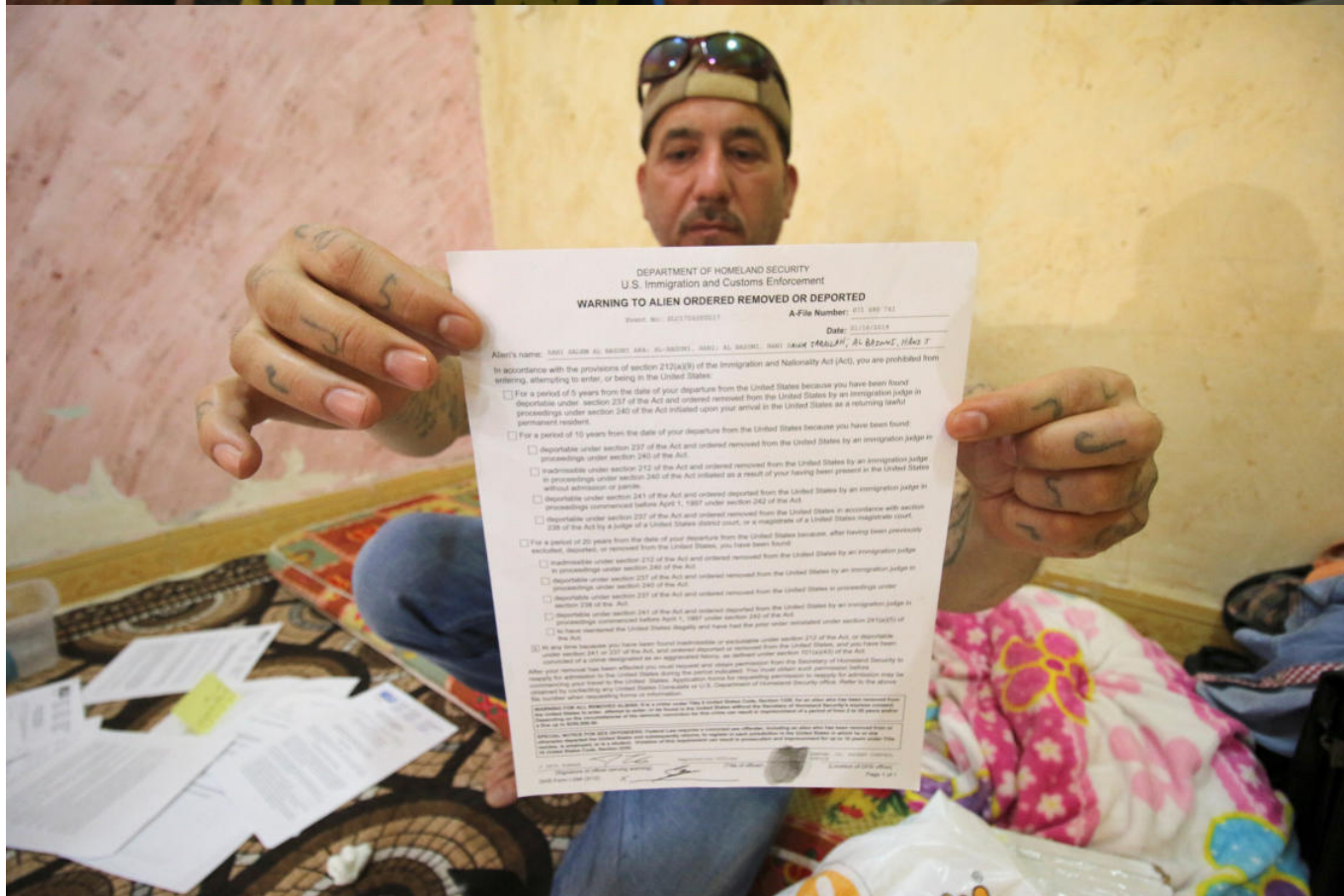
He said his efforts to obtain documents had involved digging through the rubble of his childhood home in Baghdad, tracking down relatives around the world on Facebook and trying to find his father's grave in Baghdad.

He's running out of options.

"I am 55 years old, I spent 40 years in Michigan, I never left: how much more American can I be?" he said. "I made a mistake when I was a kid, and I got locked up before I got citizenship, so fine I get it.

"But if I can't be an American, at least let me be Iraqi."





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For Kurdish Iraq's women entrepreneurs, persistence pays off Iraq detains suspect in deadly bombing that killed 12

[Combat drones usher in era of 'war by remote'](#)

Mon, 2019-09-23 22:10

ABU DHABI: It is a new chapter in Middle East warfare. Experts say "war by remote" is a growing trend in the region. And most countries are insufficiently prepared to deal with the growing security challenge posed by high-tech, remote-controlled unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or combat drones.

A combination of widespread availability, increasing technological sophistication and falling costs of drones is injecting a new dose of geopolitical uncertainty into the Middle East and North Africa.

Bigger armies with more lethal weaponry are finding themselves increasingly vulnerable as weaponized drones turn into a critical element of asymmetric warfare.

Michael Knights, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute, has been following warfare in the Middle East for the last 20 years.

According to him, the region is now "seeing players from all sides using drones – whether they are a very small group such as (Daesh) terrorists or a group with Iranian support" such as Yemen's Houthi militias, who have claimed responsibility for repeated attacks on Saudi civilian infrastructure.

The Houthis have claimed responsibility for the Sept. 14 attacks on the Saudi Aramco oil-processing facilities in Abqaiq and Khurais, which caused damage that halved the crude output of the world's top oil exporter. However, a US official has said the strike originated from southwestern Iran.

FASTFACT

60% – Israel's estimated share of global unarmed UAVs market

Saudi Arabia has said 18 drones, along with seven missiles, were used in the attacks. Iran has denied any involvement, but it is widely suspected of having armed its regional proxies, notably the Houthis, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Shia paramilitary groups in Iraq, with combat drones.

UAV refers to all types of small and mid-sized devices with no pilot in them. They can be controlled remotely by a ground-based pilot or can fly following a pre-defined flight plan.

Advanced drone models use GPS signals from satellites to connect as well as communicate their location to the pilot.

A UAV can be used for anything from simple photography, to surveillance, to carrying payloads including explosives and missiles.

The Reaper model, for instance, can carry more than 1.5 tons of ordnance and can be operated from by a ground-based pilot stationed hundreds of miles away.

The threat has been growing over the years, says Knights. "Almost everywhere you look nowadays, drones are being used for surveillance or for crashing into targets, drones that have explosives on them, or drones – the most recent versions – that drop bombs and are reusable."

The Houthi militias have been using UAVs in combat since the start of the Yemen war. They first appeared to be elementary, off-the-shelf models, but later ones have been nearly identical to Iranian-designed UAVs.

Targets have included the holy city of Makkah, airports, royal residences, oilfields and pipelines, oil installations and desalination plants.



An Iranian Army Air Defense Force drone is unveiled during a ceremony in the capital Tehran. Iran is suspected by the US of being behind the drone attacks on Saudi Aramco facilities in the Kingdom on Sept. 14, 2019. (AFP)

UN investigators have suggested that the Houthis' new UAV-X drone may have a range of up to 1,500 kilometers, which means they would be able to reach Saudi Arabia and the UAE from Yemen.

In mid-May this year, drone warfare grabbed the headlines when oil tankers and pipelines were targeted by remote-controlled bombs that forced Saudi Aramco briefly to suspend pipeline operations.

The UN said the Houthis were using small and medium-sized UAVs for reconnaissance, surveillance and attacks.

Incidentally, the country that was the first to create a national drone program in its military was Israel.

Companies such as Elbit Systems, Israel Aerospace Industries, Rafael, UVision and Aeronautics have been developing new technologies for both waging drone warfare and countering UAV attacks.

For decades now, Israel has invested in drone technology as part of its defense-arsenal mix. The strategy has proven its usefulness for a highly security-conscious country with multiple borders.

Israel has used combat drones to track and strike targets far beyond its

geographical borders instead of sending manned aircraft deep into enemy airspace.

“Israel has dozens of drones. Some drones have range as short as 10,000 miles. Others can travel from 20,000 miles to hundreds of thousands of miles,” Knights said.

Yossi Mekelberg, a professor of international relations at Regent’s University London, said the Middle East is “seeing more and more unmanned vehicles” on the battlefield.

“The thing is, drones are cheaper – you don’t risk pilots by using them as it’s all remote-controlled,” he told Arab News.

“It is high-tech, it is precise and, in many ways unfortunately, it will become the preferred option where possible.”

The most advanced users of drones by far are Iran and Iranian-backed groups such as the Houthis in Yemen.

Israel’s defense industry produces drones such as the Heron TP, which can fly more than 1,000 kilometers for 30 hours, to monitor threats from Hamas in the Gaza Strip and Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria.

Drones such as the SkyStriker and Harpy, which are equipped with warheads and can launch precise long-range strikes, belong to the category known as “loitering munitions.”

The most advanced users of drones “by far are Iran and Iranian-backed groups such as the Houthi militias in Yemen,” said Knights.

As examples, he cites airborne drones and stealth amphibious drone boats, such as nine Houthi explosive boats designed to target international shipping off Yemen’s Red Sea coast that were destroyed by airstrikes carried out by the Saudi-led military coalition.

“A drone boat guides itself using an electrical eye,” he said. “I have been on one. You can hear it try and turn the rudder of a ship. So the Iranians have provided the Houthis with really advanced capabilities: Drones that can hit and destroy with great precision.”

In this context, Yemen has been a testing ground for Iran-backed forces. “Basically, it is like a battle laboratory where Iran can test out these new capabilities. That is what Yemen is to them,” Knights said.

According to Knights, drones have been in play for more than two decades – a lot longer than most people think.

“They were used in the Iran-Iraq War while the Americans used drones as far back as the Vietnam War,” he said. “But drone use is now really starting to accelerate.”

According to Knights, Daesh, while fighting wars in Iraq and Syria, was the first to start using drones “extensively ... both for surveillance and bomb-dropping.”

The battle for Mosul – a huge military operation to recapture Iraq’s second-largest city from Daesh – was a “real turning point” in the use of drone warfare.

“This was when ISIS (Daesh) really upped the ante,” Knights said, adding that Daesh used helicopter drones to both “look around the neighborhood” and to spread fear.

Other militant groups have not been far behind. A UN Security Council report said the most commonly used UAV in the Houthi arsenal for “loitering munitions” was Qasef-1, which had a lot in common with the Iranian made Ababil-2/T UAV, which has been used in Yemen since 2016.

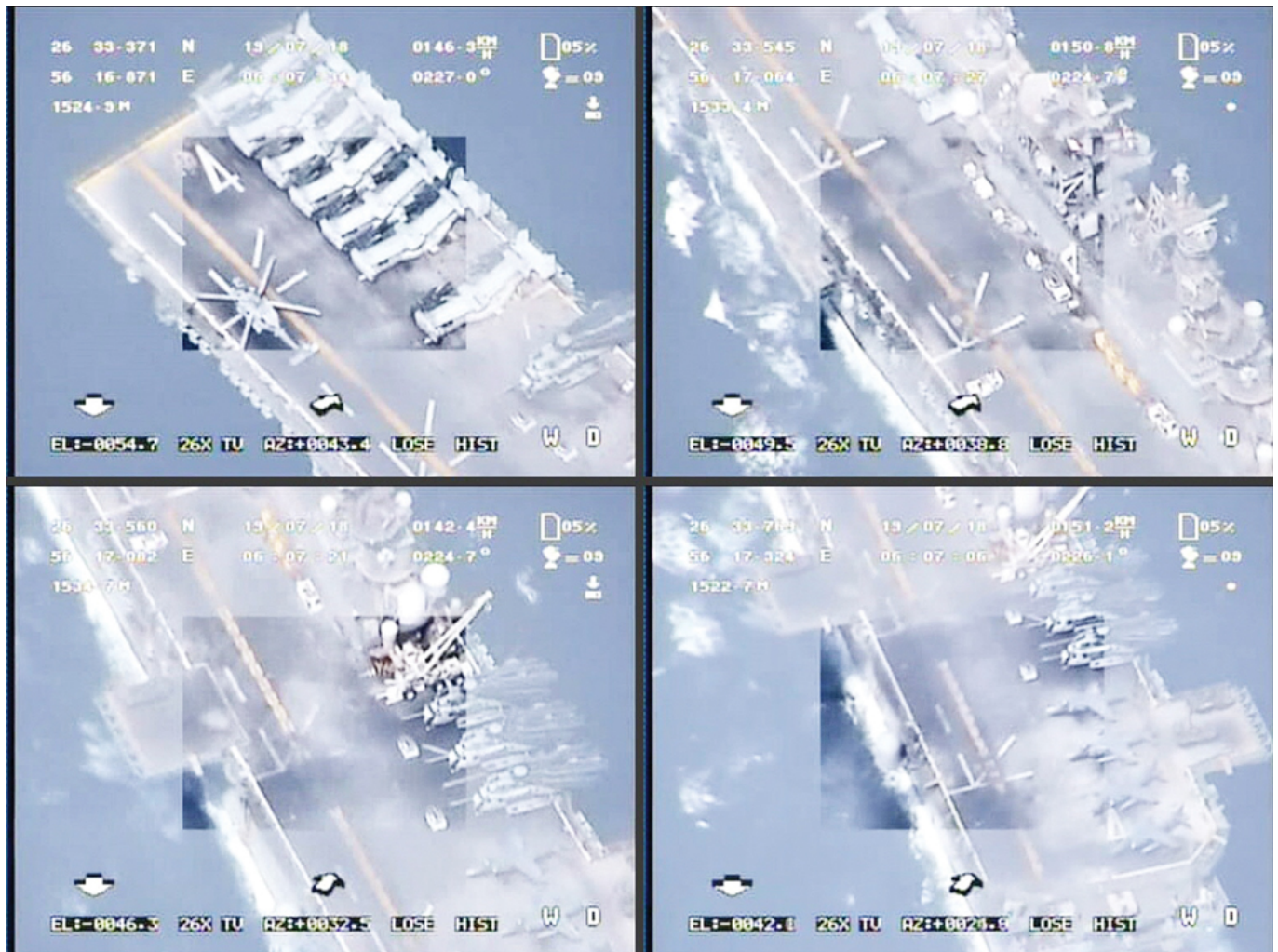
The UN investigators found that the new UAVs are characterized by distinctive V-shaped tail fins and a more powerful engine.

One of them, the Samad 2/3 UAV, carries a warhead with 18 kilograms of explosives mixed with ball bearings.

Hezbollah too is developing its drone technology. The Lebanese militia has been using combat drones based on Iranian designs since 2004, flying them into or near Israeli airspace.

Hezbollah is also said to have used drones in Syria to support the regime of President Bashar Assad.

Knights said all this is happening because drone technology is relatively simple. “As a result, particularly for small drones made of fiberglass and used by remote control and with nothing particularly complicated by it, anyone can pretty much operate them,” he said.



These images from a video broadcast by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) on July 19, 2019, reportedly shows footage obtained from an IRGC drone flying above an aircraft carrier in the Strait of Hormuz before it was shot down by the US Navy. (AFP)

"What the Iranians have done is they have developed a good formula. You only send to Yemen, for example, the specific electronic program.

"Inside Yemen, there are drone-making workshops using stuff you can legally buy off the open market, such as fiberglass.

"Iranians have learned to go low-tech and this has allowed groups in Yemen to use drones. It might seem very high-tech but it's actually quite low-tech."

From all accounts, Knights says, Israel's dominance in drone warfare is being challenged by Iran and its regional allies and proxies.

Experts say drones are useful in an important way: deniability. For example, Israel is widely suspected to have been the source of the drones that were deployed in Iraq and Lebanon in recent weeks, but the Israeli government saw no reason to own up.

"You don't risk pilots in doing this," said Knights, adding "you can deny you are behind any attack, which means it might sometimes be tempting for decision-makers to use it in their war and deny using it or to create battlefield ambiguity."

None of this is to say weaponized drones do not have their downsides. Knights said that once detected, drones can be destroyed instantly.

“You can send a signal to blow itself up and zap it once it gets closer to its target,” he told Arab News.

“You can shoot it down using a number of weapons, from an expensive missile to guns, sniper rifles, or even guns that fire nets, and snare it.”

A drawback about a drone guided by GPS, according to Knights, is “you can know exactly where it started if it is still intact.”

He pointed to an incident of a drone boat captured by Saudi authorities. The GPS coordinates and images, released by the US, pointed the finger at the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in Tehran.

“In the camera ... you could see all the IRGC members bored in their lavatories, taking pictures of themselves. It was almost laughable,” said Knights.

“Drones, if captured intact, leave a digital footprint. Deniability is not perfect with these things.”

Additionally, as Mekelberg points out, drone warfare is not risk-free, citing the incident earlier this month when Hezbollah downed an Israeli unmanned aircraft outside a southern Lebanese town.

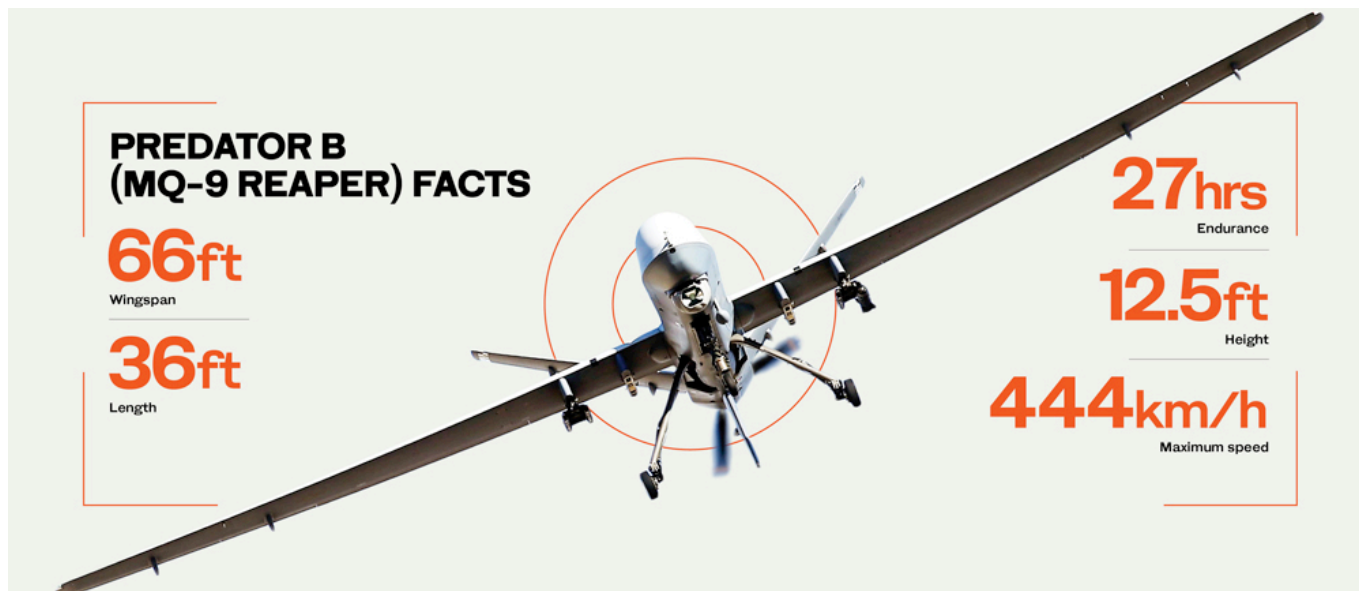
“It (drone use) brings a danger – when in Lebanon it didn’t go exactly to plan – it created tensions which could have led to a much bigger round of tensions between Hezbollah and Israel,” he said.

Furthermore, he says, with drones showing their growing value on the battlefield, more and more terror groups are turning to unmanned aircraft.

With the growing threat, Mekelberg said more countries need to step up their airspace security platform that detects, classifies, and mitigates all drone threats.

“Some countries have anti-drone systems, but drones are getting more advanced and sophisticated and lots of countries are not equipped to deal with it,” he said.

If recent developments are any guide, the world has yet to see the full capability of combat drones in the sprawling Middle East war theater.



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Saudi Arabia's Defense Ministry displays Iranian drones, cruise missiles used in Aramco attacks Suspected drones disrupt Dubai flights