

US will maintain pressure campaign on Iran, says Pompeo

Tue, 2019-06-18 19:51

WASHINGTON: The US will maintain its pressure campaign on Iran and continue to deter aggression in the region, but does not want the conflict with Tehran to escalate, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Tuesday.

“We have been engaged in many messages, even this moment right here, communicating to Iran that we are there to deter aggression,” Pompeo told reporters at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida.

“President Trump does not want war and we will continue to communicate that message while doing the things that are necessary to protect American interests in the region.”

Fears of a confrontation between Iran and the US have mounted since Washington blamed Iran for last Thursday’s attacks on two oil tankers near the strategic Strait of Hormuz shipping lane.

In an interview with Time magazine released Tuesday, Trump said he was prepared to take military action to stop Tehran from having a nuclear bomb but left open whether he would sanction the use of force to protect Gulf oil supplies.

“Now we need to make sure that we continue to do that so that we ultimately we get the opportunity to convince Iran that it’s not in their best interest to behave in this way.”



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[Syria clashes kill 45 fighters: monitor](#)

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Tue, 2019-06-18 10:55

BEIRUT: Clashes between pro-government forces and extremist-led groups that control Syria's northwest killed at least 45 combatants on Tuesday, a war monitor said.

The fighting flared on the edge of Hama province when extremist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham launched a dawn attack on regime positions, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

At least 14 pro-government forces died in ensuing clashes, said the Britain-based monitor.

“Regime forces foiled the attack,” Observatory head Rami Abdul Rahman told AFP.

State news agency SANA also said the offensive had been thwarted.

Hama’s northern countryside lies on the edge of an extremist-controlled region including most of Idlib province.

The frontline had been relatively calm since clashes on Saturday killed more than 35 combatants, including extremists and regime forces, Abdul Rahman said.

Regime airstrikes on northern Hama and neighboring Idlib had also paused for more than 24 hours, before resuming Tuesday following the latest bout of fighting, according to the monitor.

The bombardment killed one civilian in southern Idlib, it said.

The latest battles come after rocket fire by HTS – led by a former Al-Qaeda affiliate – and allied rebels killed more than 12 civilians in a regime-held village in Aleppo province late Sunday.

Parts of Aleppo, Hama and Idlib are supposed to be protected from a massive regime offensive by a buffer zone deal that Russia and Turkey signed in September.

But it was never fully implemented as extremists refused to withdraw from a planned demilitarised zone.

In January, HTS extended its administrative control over the region, which includes most of Idlib province as well as adjacent slivers of Latakia, Hama and Aleppo provinces.

The Syrian government and Russia have upped their bombardment of the region since late April, killing more than 400 civilians, according to the Observatory.

Syria’s war has killed more than 370,000 people and displaced millions since it started in 2011 with the repression of anti-government protests.



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[US to send 1,000 additional troops to the Middle East](#)

Tue, 2019-06-18 01:26

DUBAI/WASHINGTON: Acting US Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan announced on Monday the deployment of about 1,000 more troops to the Middle East for what he said were “defensive purposes,” citing concerns about a threat from Iran. “The recent Iranian attacks validate the reliable, credible intelligence we have received on hostile behavior by Iranian forces and their proxy groups that threaten United States personnel and interests across the region,” Shanahan said in a statement.

Reuters first reported plans to send US additional troops to the Middle East earlier on Monday.

Fears of a confrontation between Iran and the United States have mounted since last Thursday when two oil tankers were attacked, more than a year after President Donald Trump announced Washington was withdrawing from a 2015 nuclear deal.

Iran said on Monday it would soon breach limits on how much enriched uranium it can stockpile under the deal, which a White House National Security Council spokesman said amounted to “nuclear blackmail.”



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US military releases new images of Iranian forces removing mine from attacked tanker
Iran faces backlash over 'nuclear blackmail'

[US military releases new images of Iranian forces removing mine from attacked tanker](#)

Mon, 2019-06-17 23:35

WASHINGTON: The US military on Monday released new images it says showed Iran's Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) removing an unexploded limpet mine from a Japanese-owned tanker that was attacked on June 13 in the Gulf of Oman, as Washington blames Tehran for the attack.

“Iran is responsible for the attack based on video evidence and the resources and proficiency needed to quickly remove the unexploded limpet mine,” the US military’s Central Command said in a statement explaining the still-images.

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Pompeo says Iran attacked oil tankers to raise global oil price

[Lebanon arrests Syrian plotting Daesh bomb attacks on churches](#)

Mon, 2019-06-17 23:17

BEIRUT: A Syrian national has been arrested in southern Lebanon on suspicion of involvement with the Daesh terrorist group. It is alleged he discussed with other people potential locations, including churches, for attacks in

Lebanon where the largest numbers of people could be targeted and killed.

It is thought that they were aiming to emulate similar Easter attacks in Sri Lanka. Daesh leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi released a video message in April in which he praised the Sri Lankan terrorists.

A security source confirmed that a Syrian man has been detained and investigations are continuing. He added that the arrest "came on the basis of a professional intelligence operation" and that the security forces are working with external parties.

The General Directorate of Internal Security Forces (ISF) said that as a result of "preventive and proactive security operations conducted by the Information Division of the ISF concerning the monitoring of activities of serious terrorist cells, especially those affiliated with Daesh, the division was able to monitor and identify a resident of southern Lebanon who was active on social media spreading the ideology of the organization and recruiting people for it."

It continued: "A special force from the Information Division arrested a person named Z.M. who was born in 1999 and is a Syrian residing in the town of Yater. The investigation found that he was promoting the ideology of Daesh through social media by creating a large number of channels and groups on a number of applications that follow and publicize publications of the Daesh organization."

Yater is a village near Tyre in Southern Lebanon. Locals said that Z.M. was arrested six days ago. He worked in construction and agriculture and lived alone in a house without a family, they added.

The ISF said that the man "was associated with people outside Lebanon and cooperated with them to establish online groups to spread and promote Daesh ideology. After publishing the video in which Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi blessed the operations in Sri Lanka...the detainee bought spray paint and...sprayed on one of the walls at the entrance to Yater slogans containing the words 'Grandson of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi' and 'The Islamic state.'"

Preliminary ISF investigations found that the detainee "discussed with a number of those he communicated with the idea of carrying out actions for the organization in Lebanon, including entering a church and killing the largest number of people there.

"He also discussed with them the idea of targeting husseiniyas (congregation halls for Shiite ceremonies) in Shiite villages and towns. He also logged on to jihadist websites of the organization on the internet, including encyclopedias giving details of how to make explosives, and downloaded them to his phone."

The ISF also said that the detainee "communicated with the Syrian S.B. (born in 1990), who has also been arrested, and tried to recruit him to embrace the ideology of Daesh. He said that at the time of his arrest he was still in the process of planning and had not taken any practical steps."

The security source did not specify whether Z.M. is a Syrian refugee, a

laborer working under the sponsorship of a Lebanese citizen, or in the country illegally. However, he stressed: "What this person did has nothing to do with Syrian refugees in Lebanon."

Lebanese army commander Gen. Joseph Aoun said on Monday: "The army is dealing today with an unconventional terrorist enemy hiding among people, where the complexities are many and unclear."

He added: "The rapid response of the (security) units to the terrorist attack in Tripoli recently confirms the importance of the principles that we learn in the College of Command and Staff."

"Terrorism is waiting for opportunities, through sleeper cells, to spread hatred in society. However, the improvement and readiness of the intelligence community has thwarted many of these attempts, and those that managed to evade them were eliminated by other security units."



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