

Hezbollah chief warns Israel against continuing strikes in Syria

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BEIRUT: The chief of Lebanon's Hezbollah movement has warned Israel against continuing strikes in Syria targeting mainly Iranian positions, saying it could fuel war in the region.

Israel's army has since 2013 claimed hundreds of attacks on what it says are Iranian military targets and arms deliveries to Tehran-backed Hezbollah, with the goal of stopping its main enemy Iran from entrenching itself militarily in neighboring Syria.

In the latest strikes nearly a week ago 21 people were killed, the majority of them Iranians, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor.

Addressing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu directly, Hassan Nasrallah said Saturday in an interview with Al-Mayadeen television: "Don't make an error of judgment and don't lead the region toward war or a major clash."

"At any moment the Syrian leadership and the axis of resistance can take a decision to deal with the Israeli aggression in a different manner," he said, referring to the alliance between Syrian President Bashar Assad's government, Iran and its ally Hezbollah.

When asked whether a retaliation could take the form of air strikes on Tel Aviv, Nasrallah said "anything is possible," adding that Hezbollah possessed "high-precision missiles" capable of hitting anywhere in Israel.

The Israeli army announced the strikes against facilities it said belonged to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force on Monday as they were occurring.

It said they were in response to a medium-range missile the Quds Force fired from Syria at the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights on Sunday, which Israeli air defenses intercepted.

Israel has carried out hundreds of air strikes in Syria and its warplanes have been targeted by anti-aircraft fire during such raids, but it has rarely faced surface-to-surface missile fire in response.

Israel has warned it will continue to target positions in Syria held by Iran and its ally Hezbollah.

Netanyahu and other Israeli officials have been speaking more openly about the country's strikes in Syria in recent days, which some analysts partly attribute to the premier wanting to burnish his security credentials ahead of April 9 elections.

Others say it carries a strategic military purpose as well by sending a stronger message.

But Israel also risks an escalation with Syria and Iran, as well as possibly further angering Russia at a time when the United States is seeking to

withdraw its forces from Syria.

In Saturday's rare television interview – which was more than three hours long – Nasrallah also said that Israel took “years” to discover cross-border tunnels from Lebanon.

“The Israelis discovered a number of tunnels after many years, and it's not a surprise, the surprise is that these tunnels, they took some time to find,” he said.

Earlier this month Israel concluded an operation to unearth and destroy tunnels which the army accused Hezbollah of digging across the border from Lebanon.

“Yes, there are tunnels in southern Lebanon,” Nasrallah said, in his first comments on the issue since Israel announced the operation on December 4. The Hezbollah leader refused to specify whether they were built before the 2006 war between the militia group and Israel, or who had constructed them. The month-long war killed more than 1,200 Lebanese, mostly civilians, and more than 160 Israelis, mostly soldiers.



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US reiterates concern about Hezbollah agenda to destabilize region
Lebanon's Hezbollah believes solution to government impasse 'very close'

Sudan's Bashir to visit Egypt as protesters call for more rallies

Author:

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Sat, 2019-01-26 18:46

KHARTOUM: Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir will travel to Cairo for talks with his Egyptian counterpart, state media reported Saturday, as protesters called for more nationwide demonstrations against his government.

Bashir's visit to Cairo on Sunday will be his second trip abroad since deadly protests erupted at home on December 19.

On Wednesday, he met Qatar's ruler Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani on a trip to the Gulf state.

"President Omar Al-Bashir will travel to Cairo on Sunday for a one-day visit," Sudan's official news agency SUNA reported.

"He will hold bilateral talks with Egypt's President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and also discuss regional issues that concern the two countries."

Bashir's visit was also confirmed by Sudan's ambassador to Cairo, Mahmoud Abdel Halim.

Protests erupted in Sudan last month after a government decision to triple the price of bread.

The rallies swiftly mushroomed into nationwide calls for an end to Bashir's three decades in power, as protesters clashed with security forces.

Officials say 30 people have died in the violence, while rights groups say more than 40 people have been killed including medics and children.

The Sudanese group that is leading the protest campaign has called for more rallies over the next few days, including night-time demonstrations on Saturday.

Bashir, who came to power in an Islamist-backed coup in 1989, has remained steadfast in rejecting calls to resign.

While the spark for the first protests was the rise of bread prices, anger has been mounting for years over worsening economic hardships and deteriorating living conditions in Sudan.

That ire has now spilt onto the streets as protesters chant their main slogan calling for "freedom, peace, justice."

Bashir has blamed the economic woes on the United States.

Washington lifted its trade embargo on Sudan in October 2017 after two decades of bruising economic punishment, but that failed to revive the country's financial situation.

Experts say cash injections from the Gulf states, led by wealthy Qatar, have helped stave off economic collapse.

There was no announcement, however, of any financial assistance from Qatar for Bashir during his latest visit.

Egypt, which has deep historical ties with Sudan, has called repeatedly for

stability in its southern neighbor.

“Egypt fully supports the security and stability of Sudan, which is integral to Egypt’s national security,” El-Sisi told a top Bashir aide who visited Cairo earlier this month.

Relations between Cairo and Khartoum had deteriorated sharply in 2017 over territorial disputes and accusations from Bashir that Egypt’s intelligence services were supporting opposition forces fighting his troops in the country’s conflict zones like Darfur.

But in recent months the two governments have ironed out their differences, with Sudan lifting a 17-month ban on Egyptian agricultural produce.



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Sudan opposition head backs protesters’ call for Bashir to go
Sudan security forces tear gas protesters in Omdurman

[**Four police dead in back-to-back bomb**](#)

blasts in Iraq

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1548578941192656500

Sun, 2019-01-27 08:46

SAMARRA, Iraq: Four Iraqi policemen were killed Sunday in two back-to-back bomb blasts north of the capital, officials said, in an attack claimed by Daesh.

"At around 8:00 am, the police officers were taking up their post at the southern entrance of Al-Sharqat," the town's mayor, Ali Dodah, told AFP. "One bomb went off, killing two police officers and wounding eight. An hour and a half later, as reinforcements arrived, a second bomb went off," Dodah said.

A police officer speaking on condition of anonymity confirmed the first blast's toll to AFP and said the second explosion killed two officers and wounded three.

And a medical source at Al-Sharqat's hospital confirmed a total of four officers were killed.

Daesh's propaganda agency, Amaq, released a statement claiming the attack. Al-Sharqat, around 250 kilometers (150 miles) north of Baghdad, was held by Daesh until autumn 2017.

It was one of the last areas recaptured by the government, which announced several months later that it had ousted Daesh from Iraq.

But hit-and-run attacks – particularly assassinations and kidnappings of local officials – still take place and hint at an underground network of Daesh sleeper cells in some of the country's most remote areas.

On Thursday, a car bomb killed a police officer near Hawija, another former Daesh stronghold.



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Protesters storm Turkish base in north Iraq, teenager killed
Iraqi charged with rape, murder in Germany's 'Susanna case'

[Algerian opposition names its candidate for presidential poll](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-01-26 21:45

ALGIERS: Algeria's main conservative party, the Movement for the Society of Peace (MSP), said on Saturday it has decided to take part in April's presidential election.

During the night of Friday to Saturday "the consultative council decided by an overwhelming majority to take part in the presidential election and to present Dr. Abderrazak Makri as the party's candidate," the MSP's head of

communications Abdellah Bouadji told AFP.

Presenting itself as moderate, the MSP had supported aging incumbent President Abdelaziz Bouteflika within a governing alliance, before going its own way in 2012. Observers say if Bouteflika runs again he is set to win, as the opposition is divided into Islamists and secular parties.

Bouteflika, 81, who uses a wheelchair and has rarely been seen in public since a stroke in 2013, is due to complete a fourth term in office on April 28. The election is set for April 18. By law, would-be candidates now have until March 4 to register with the constitutional court.

Despite his advanced age and poor health, some of Bouteflika's supporters have called for him to stand again. But the president himself is yet to make his plans clear.

Ahead of the last presidential election in 2014, Bouteflika only declared his intention to run a few days ahead of the deadline.

Despite his advanced age and poor health, there have been calls from his supporters for him to stand for a fifth term.

Frozen politics

Uncertainty over whether Bouteflika will stand for re-election has frozen Algerian politics for months. No candidate of note has thrown their hat into the ring.

Algerian politics is notoriously opaque with the winner of every multiparty presidential election pre-selected by a shadowy elite, beginning in 1995 with victory by retired Gen. Liamine Zeroual.

For this year's election, the membership of the kingmaking elite has changed.

Bouteflika has proved himself a wily political survivor, navigating Arab Spring-inspired riots in 2011 by promising reforms that were never enacted and by playing on fears of a repeat of Algeria's 1991-2002 civil war.

Bouteflika's stewardship was key to the country's emergence from that conflict, as he introduced a civil reconciliation program that offered partial amnesty to extremists.

Analysts said Bouteflika's announcement of the election date will ease concerns that the vote might get postponed.

In 1991, the army cancelled elections which an Islamist party was set to win, triggering almost a decade of civil war that killed some 200,000 people.

Flooding kills five

Five people died after being swept away by flood waters as a cold snap in the Maghreb brought snow to several of the country's regions, Algeria's civil protection unit said on Saturday.

"All the victims have been retrieved over the last 48 hours after being swept away by waters in Annaba, El-Tarf, Tizi Ouzou and Tipaza," the civil protection body said.

Salvage operations took place in more than 17 areas and around 100 people have been rescued in the last 24 hours.

A total of 33 roads remain blocked in over 10 regions because of snow, the civil protection unit said, adding "snow clearing operations are progressing."

Elsewhere in North Africa, neighboring Tunisia's interior ministry said on Friday two people were killed by flooding and cold weather, after heavy snowfall.



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Algeria sets April election, no word on Bouteflika candidacy
Algeria's ancient pyramid tombs still shrouded in mystery

Palestinian killed by Israeli fire in West Bank clashes

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Sat, 2019-01-26 16:15

RAMALLAH: Israeli settlers shot and killed a Palestinian man in the occupied West Bank on Saturday, Palestinian officials and the Israeli military said. The incident followed a confrontation between settlers and Palestinians near the city of Ramallah in which a settler was lightly injured, the military said.

"Initial details suggest that shortly thereafter, a conflict erupted between Israeli civilians and Palestinians in the area, in which live rounds were fired by the civilians. One Palestinian died and several others are injured," the military said in a statement, adding that an investigation has begun. The Palestinians said the settlers had entered the village of al-Mughayer and that its residents tried to fend them off. The Israeli military said its forces dispersed the crowds. The Palestinian Health Ministry said that the man killed was 38 years old and that nine other people were wounded by gunfire.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas condemned the killing.

"The Israeli Government is continuing its policy of escalation," Abbas said in a statement published by the official Wafa news agency. "This will lead to serious consequences, further tension and the creation of a dangerous and uncontrollable atmosphere."

Peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians broke down in 2014, and a bid by U.S. President Donald Trump to restart negotiations has so far shown little progress.

The Palestinians want to establish a state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with a capital in east Jerusalem, territories Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East War.

Israel annexed east Jerusalem in a move unrecognized abroad and in 2005 pulled its settlers and army out of Gaza. It maintains a blockade of the territory, which is controlled by the Islamist Hamas movement. Hamas is designated as a terrorist organization by Israel and the West.

In the West Bank, the Palestinians have limited self-rule and most of the territory is controlled by Israel. Most countries view the settlements Israel has built there as illegal – a view that Israel disputes, citing biblical, historical and political ties to the land.



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Israeli troops kill 2 Palestinians