

'Yemen's Houthi militia using Iranian-made drone aircraft': Arab coalition

Sun, 2019-01-20 18:30

JEDDAH: The Arab coalition fighting to support the legitimate Yemeni government said on Sunday that the Houthi militia are in possession of Iranian-made drones – named Shahed 129 – and are using residential areas to hide the aircraft.

Spokesperson Col. Turki Al-Maliki said the Houthis have used the aircraft to carry out a number of attacks and are using Sanaa airport for military purposes.

Speaking at a press conference in the Saudi capital Riyadh, Al-Maliki said a coalition military operation that was conducted in Sanaa on Saturday night “targeted a Houthi manufacturing and assembly area for drone aircraft.”

He added: “We attacked a helicopter platform belonging to the Houthi militia in an area between Sanaa and Saada.”

Al-Maliki confirmed that Iran had provided the Houthi militia with “Ababil-T drones.”

During the press conference, he displayed videos and pictures of Saturday's operations against the militia group in Sanaa, models of aircraft used by the Houthis in their attacks and the bombing of a cave used by the Iran-backed terrorist group as a command center in Sanaa.

“Surveillance is ongoing and we will not allow the transfer of technology to terrorist groups,” he said, condemning the Houthi militia's attack on the Al-Anad Air Base in Lahij Governorate as a “terrorist act.”



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Arab coalition targets Yemen's Houthi drone capabilities in Sanaa
Yemen's Houthis imposed war on Arab coalition: Saudi FM Al-Jubeir

Sudanese security forces deploy in large numbers ahead of fresh protests

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Sun, 2019-01-20 (All day)

KHARTOUM: Sudanese police fired tear gas on Sunday at protesters ahead of a planned march on Parliament in Omdurman, the twin city of Khartoum, witnesses said.

Security forces were earlier deployed in large numbers in anticipation of fresh protests calling on longtime ruler Omar Bashir to step down, according to activists and video clips circulating online.

The videos show hundreds of security forces in all-terrain vehicles in Khartoum and heading to nearby Omdurman, a traditional hotbed of dissent that saw hours of pitched battles between police and protesters last week.

Sunday's anticipated protests come amid a series of strikes, already underway or planned for this week, by professional unions, including doctors, teachers, lawyers and pharmacists. Demonstrations are also expected in other cities on Sunday.

Bashir, who came to power nearly 30 years ago, insists there will be no change of leadership except through the ballot box. Already one of the longest serving leaders in the region, he is expected to run for a new term in office in elections next year.

Bashir has repeatedly warned that the protests could plunge Sudan into the kind of chaos convulsing other countries in the region.

The protests erupted Dec. 19, initially over price hikes and shortages, but soon shifted to calling on the president to step down. Rights groups last week said at least 40 people have been killed in the protests, while the government acknowledged 24 deaths. Analysts say the protests have emerged as the biggest challenge yet to the authority of the veteran leader.

The Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), an umbrella group of trade unions that is leading the ongoing protest movement, called for fresh demonstrations on Sunday and several days over the coming week.

"We are calling for a march to Parliament in Omdurman on Sunday," it said in a statement.

A doctors' committee linked to anti-government protests apologized on Sunday for incorrectly reporting that a child had been killed in demonstrations in Khartoum that took place on Jan. 17.

Sudanese police said that two people had died in demonstrations that rocked Khartoum on Thursday, but protest organizers had reported that three people were killed, including a child, in clashes with riot police.

“This mistake happened because we trusted a confident source, but we are now investigating the matter,” a committee of doctors linked to the SPA said in a statement on Facebook, confirming that two people had died in the demonstrations on Thursday.

Riot police had on Thursday broken up a march on the presidential palace in Khartoum, while a rally took place later that day in the capital’s Burri district, witnesses said.

Although participants have so far been in the hundreds or low thousands, the continuing protests and strikes pose a challenge to Bashir’s rule.

The absence of explicit support by Sudan’s Arab allies has made Bashir’s position even more tenuous.

However, the protests show a lack of clear leadership and their continuation could invite another military takeover. Union leaders say they want a transitional government of technocrats followed by free elections.

Bashir’s position was further weakened when a senior cleric revealed that he and fellow clerics have implicitly suggested to the Sudanese leader in a meeting that he step down, arguing that Islam takes precedence over individuals.

In a surprise disclosure in a Friday sermon, Sheikh Abdul-Hay Youssef said the clerics presented Bashir with a list of demands, including an end to corruption, bringing to justice anyone found responsible for the latest economic crisis and an end to the killing of protesters, something that the Sudanese leader has sought to justify on religious grounds.





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Sudan protesters plan march on parliament, more demos
Sudan police shoot live fire outside home of dead protester

[Syria says air defence responds to Israeli raids](#)

Sun, 2019-01-20 14:15

Syrian air defences on Sunday responded to Israeli air raids in the south of the country, state news agency SANA reported quoting a military source. The air defence systems “prevented Israeli air strikes from achieving their objectives in the south” of the country, the report said without giving further details.

Meanwhile, Israel’s military said its air defence systems intercepted a rocket fired from Syria on Sunday, after Damascus accused Israel of air raids in the country’s south.

“A short while ago, a rocket was fired at the northern Golan Heights and was

intercepted by the 'Iron Dome' aerial defence system," a military statement said.

A military spokeswoman confirmed to AFP the rocket was fired from Syria.



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[Yemeni govt questions exclusion from meeting in Germany](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-01-19 23:43

LONDON: Yemen's internationally recognized government expressed reservations about Germany's decision to hold an international conference on Yemen without consulting or coordinating with it.

Wednesday's conference, hosted by Germany's Foreign Ministry, brought together senior officials from 17 countries, including key actors and major donors.

Attendees included the UN special envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, and the UN humanitarian coordinator for the country, Lise Grande.

Yemen's foreign minister told Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper: "The launching of any programs, plans or mechanisms by the UN or the international community to assist states requires consultation and coordination with the beneficiary state ... in accordance with the principles of the UN."

Khaled Al-Yamani added: "UN Security Council resolutions... stipulated that the Yemeni government is the legitimate representative of Yemen."

He said: "The government of Yemen is currently in need of the international community's support and cooperation to enhance its ability to perform its functions in the service of all Yemeni people."

The Trump administration has thwarted "attempts to impose a solution that would give the Houthi militias and Iran a permanent foothold in Yemen to threaten regional and international security and stability," Al-Yamani added.

The reimposition of US sanctions on Iran is contributing to "cutting off its (Tehran's) expansionist arms in the region, including the Houthi militias in Yemen," the foreign minister said.

Yemen's government is "exerting great efforts ... to explain the dimensions and risks of the Houthi coup in Yemen, the dangers of the control of Iran-backed terrorist militias in the region, and the importance of supporting Yemen-led efforts to restore the state in accordance with UN resolutions, the Gulf (Cooperation Council) initiative, and the outputs of the comprehensive National Dialogue (Conference)," he added.

The Yemeni government is in "constant coordination" diplomatically with member states of the Arab coalition supporting it, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Al-Yamani said.

As part of his commitment to review the performance of Yemeni diplomatic missions abroad, he said the Foreign Ministry has adopted a plan to improve their performance.

"The leadership will make fundamental changes in the Yemeni diplomatic corps, in line with our aspirations to develop the political and media discourse of the legitimate government in these exceptional circumstances in Yemen," he added.



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Arab coalition targets Yemen's Houthi drone capabilities in Sanaa
UN experts: Fuel from Iran is financing Houthis in Yemen war

[Europe's patience with Iran wears thin, tiptoes toward Trump](#)

Sat, 2019-01-19 22:41

BRUSSELS/PARIS: In Tehran on Jan. 8 during a meeting with European envoys, Iranian officials abruptly stood up, walked out and slammed the door in an extraordinary break with protocol.

The French, British, German, Danish, Dutch, and Belgian diplomats in the Iranian Foreign Ministry room had incensed the officials with a message that Europe could no longer tolerate ballistic missile tests in Iran and assassination plots on European soil, according to four EU diplomats.

"There was a lot of drama, they didn't like it, but we felt we had to convey our serious concerns," one of the diplomats said. "It shows the relationship is becoming more tense," a second said.

An Iranian official declined to comment on the meeting.

The next day, the EU imposed its first sanctions on Iran since world powers agreed the 2015 Vienna nuclear arms control deal with Tehran.

The sanctions were largely symbolic but the stormy meeting encapsulated the unexpected shift in European diplomacy since the end of last year. Smaller, more dovish EU countries have joined France and Britain in a harder stance on Tehran, including considering new economic sanctions, diplomats say.

Those could include asset freezes and travel bans on Iran's Revolutionary Guards and Iranians developing the Islamic Republic's ballistic missile program, three diplomats said.

The new approach moves Europe closer to US President Donald Trump's policy of isolating Iran with tough sanctions even though European governments still support the 2015 Vienna deal from, which he withdrew in May.

Although there are diverging views in Europe, the shift could have consequences for President Hassan Rouhani's government as it looks to European capitals to salvage that deal.

It could also strengthen anti-Western sentiment in Iran and lead to more aggressive Iranian moves around the Middle East, where the Islamic Republic is involved in proxy wars with its main regional rival Saudi Arabia.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Smaller EU states taking a much tougher stance on Tehran.**
- **EU moving closer to aggressive US policy to isolate Iran.**
- **Warsaw conference with US seen as risky.**

Iran's firing of short-range ballistic missiles into Syria on Sept. 30, missile tests and a satellite launch this month have niggled Western powers.

For Europe, alleged assassination plots by Iran on French and Danish soil in 2018 were the last straw, diplomats say.

Tehran denies the plots and says the missile tests are purely defensive. "The accusations against Iran over the past few months have awoken a few countries in Europe that were against a tougher line on Iran," a European-based Middle East diplomat said.

The same day as the meeting, the Netherlands publicly blamed Iran for killings on its soil in 2015 and 2017. Tehran denies any involvement. Then on Jan. 9, the EU designated a unit of Iran's Intelligence Ministry a terrorist

organization, froze its assets and those of two men.

“Take the Dutch for example. They had kept very quiet until the Danish attack and now they are more hawkish than the French,” said the diplomat.

Alarmed by Trump’s “America First” policy, Europe considered his May 8 decision to pull out of the Iran accord a severe setback but Iran’s international ambitions appear to offer Brussels and Washington a chance to work more closely.

A US State Department official said there was now “a growing international consensus” on the range of Iranian threats.

“The US welcomes Europe’s efforts to counter Iranian terrorism on European soil, its missile launches, human rights abuses, and other threats,” the official said.

Dialogue falters

As the Trump administration accused Iran last year of harboring nuclear ambitions and fomenting instability in the Middle East through its support for militant groups in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen, the EU sought dialogue with Tehran.

At meetings between European and Iranian diplomats last year, Britain, France, Germany and Italy, pressed for gestures on Iran’s role in Syria’s war and for help to end the conflict in Yemen.

But multiple bilateral talks on the ballistic missile program have yielded no results.

The EU tried to show Iran that compliance with the nuclear accord would still mean economic benefits despite Trump’s decision to reimpose US sanctions and choke off Iranian oil exports by pressuring US allies.

The EU is set to officially launch a mechanism, the special purpose vehicle (SPV) to trade with Iran later this month but it will not be operational for several months.

It will be registered in France, run by a German and likely to include Britain as a shareholder.

“There’s a feeling of frustration among Britain, France and Germany, and others, after the first phase of diplomacy with Iran,” another senior EU diplomat said. “We thought we could get some effort from the Iranians in several areas.”

Iran says Europe may not be able to safeguard the nuclear deal anyway and accused European officials of dragging their feet.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister and senior nuclear negotiator Abbas Araqchi

said last week “operational steps” were needed from Europe as political support not enough.

Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, head of Iran’s powerful Assembly of Experts said on Thursday Europe “would do nothing in our interest.”

“The Europeans are worse than the Americans. If not, they are not any better,” he said, state TV reported.

EU disagreements

Last March, as part of efforts to convince Trump to stick to the nuclear deal, France, Britain and Germany proposed asset freezes and travel bans on the IRGC and Iranian companies and groups developing the missile program, according to a document seen by Reuters.

Now, a similar set of measures is being prepared, three diplomats say.

“We’d prefer not to take these measures, but they need to stop trying to kill people on our territory and over the last three years they have beefed up their ballistic program,” said one senior European diplomat.

The diplomats say getting all 28 EU members to agree will take time.

The EU’s top diplomat Federica Mogherini, who helped seal the 2015 deal, is wary of moving too fast for fear of provoking a complete collapse of the accord, four diplomats said.

EU foreign ministers planned to issue a rare joint statement on Jan. 21 about what they say is Iran’s interference in the region and calling for an end to missile tests. Diplomats said Mogherini wants to see the SPV established first.

An EU official denied any split in policy between Mogherini and EU governments, saying the statement will be published as soon as the SPV is launched.

EU diplomats said eastern European governments could also go too far against Iran to please Trump in return for security guarantees against Russia.

EU diplomats said there was a risk that a two-day conference in Poland in February focused on the Middle East, particularly Iran, convened by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, could divide eastern and western Europe.

Mogherini is unable to attend due to another official engagement, an EU official said, and it is not clear at what level France, Britain and Germany will be represented.

“There are clearly risks in attending,” another diplomat said. “While we don’t think Iran will withdraw from the nuclear deal, we don’t need to force them into the abyss and deepen an arms race in the Middle East.”



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UN experts: Fuel from Iran is financing Houthis in Yemen warIran 'shooting itself in the foot' with spying, diplomat warns