

[Egypt closes 7 ports temporarily due to bad weather -sources, port official](#)

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1546797513502184700

Sun, 2019-01-06 17:34

ALEXANDRIA: Egyptian authorities have closed the major ports of Alexandria and Dekheila on the Mediterranean Sea and Ain Sokhna and Suez on the Red Sea due to bad weather conditions, maritime sources and a port official said on Sunday.

Authorities also closed three smaller ports along the Gulf of Suez, the sources said.

“Strong winds and high waves do not allow the safe passage of speedboats and the ascent and descent of the guide onto ships,” a spokesman for the Alexandria port authority said, adding it affected the arrival and departure of ships in the ports of Alexandria and Dekheila.



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[Fatah withdraws officers from Gaza-Egypt crossing](#)

Sun, 2019-01-06 20:28

GAZA CITY: The Palestinian Authority says it is withdrawing its officers from a key crossing point between the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip and Egypt. The announcement on Sunday came amid rising tension between the militant movement, which took control of Gaza in a 2007, and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party.

The Palestinian Authority says Hamas has harassed and detained officers as part of a weeklong effort to stop its rival from holding a rally in Gaza to mark Fatah's anniversary. The PA's withdrawal of its officers from the Rafah crossing apparently aims to put pressure on Hamas.

Hamas handed control of the crossing to Abbas's Palestinian Authority in 2017 as part of Egyptian efforts to reconcile the two parties.

Abbas met with Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah El-Sissi in Cairo on Saturday.



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Hamas arrests 5 over Palestinian government media raid
Fatah says Hamas arrests members in Gaza ahead of rally

Trump confirms key plotter in USS Cole attack has been killed

Author:

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1546793627071929300

Sun, 2019-01-06 16:50

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump confirmed Sunday that the US military has killed one of the architects of the 2000 bombing of the USS Cole that left 17 American servicemen dead.

The military said Friday that Al-Qaeda operative Jamal Al-Badawi was believed to have been killed in a precision strike in Yemen.

Our GREAT MILITARY has delivered justice for the heroes lost and wounded in the cowardly attack on the USS Cole. We have just killed the leader of that attack, Jamal al-Badawi. Our work against al Qaeda continues. We will never stop in our fight against Radical Islamic Terrorism!

– Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) [January 6, 2019](#)

“Our GREAT MILITARY has delivered justice for the heroes lost and wounded in the cowardly attack on the USS Cole,” Trump tweeted. “We have just killed the leader of that attack, Jamal Al-Badawi.”

“We will never stop in our fight against Radical Islamic Terrorism!”

On October 12, 2000, a rubber boat loaded with explosives blew up as it rounded the bow of the guided-missile destroyer, which had just pulled into Aden for a refueling stop.

Seventeen American sailors were killed as well as the two perpetrators of the attack that was claimed by Al-Qaeda, in an early success for the terror group and its founder Osama bin Laden.

The chief suspect in the attack, Abd Al-Rahim Al-Nashiri, is being held in the US detention camp in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Badawi was indicted by a federal grand jury in 2003 and charged with 50 counts of various terrorism offenses, including murder of US nationals and murder of US military personnel.

He was said to have supplied boats and explosives for the attack on the destroyer.

Badawi was also charged with attempting with co-conspirators to attack a US Navy vessel in January 2000, and was on the FBI's Most Wanted list. According to the agency, he was captured by Yemeni authorities but escaped from prison in April 2003. He was recaptured in March 2004, but again escaped in February 2006.



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US says key plotter in USS Cole attack may have been killed in Yemen
Yemen government following up reports of aid looting

[New Palestinian party wants to 'unify](#)

resistance to occupation'

Sat, 2019-01-05 22:21

AMMAN: A new Palestinian political party wants to unify factions to increase resistance to the occupation, one of its members has told Arab News.

The Palestinian Democratic Group is the latest arrival on the territory's political scene, which is dominated by the rivalry between Hamas and Fatah.

It was formally launched on Jan. 3 in Gaza and Ramallah and comprises political parties and civil society organizations.

Qais Abu Layla said one of the group's most important goals was to unify Palestinian factions to increase resistance to the occupation, and to oppose policies designed to weaken Palestinian democracy and increase fragmentation.

A split between Hamas and Fatah, which has sometimes spilled over into deadly violence, has seen rival administrations run by Hamas in Gaza and by President Mahmoud Abbas' Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. Attempts to reconcile the two have failed.

"Our position is not only opposed to the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) leadership but also to Hamas. We feel both are responsible for the split and the negative results that it has produced," Abu Layla told Arab News.

"While we oppose the dissolving of the PLC (Palestinian Legislative Council) we believe that the idea of elections within six months can be a way out of the impasse for the reconciliation."

The elections must include Gaza and Jerusalem and they should be based on proportional representation, he added.

But the party's motives have been called into question by some.

Suheir Ismael, founding director of women's media NGO TAM, said the group's scope was too narrow.

"The group was created after people lost their salaries as members of the Palestinian Legislative Council. To be honest, most people are very skeptical of any political move that is largely on paper," she told Arab News.

"If they want to make a difference they need to address people's daily needs, such as the issue of the new social security law that has invigorated Palestinians more than any political position."

Najeeb Qaddoumi, a member of the Palestinian National Council and a senior Fatah leader in Jordan, said unity was an admirable goal but that the new party must be honest and take a stand if needed.

“Many of its policies are identical to those of Fatah and we call on this new coalition to denounce the undemocratic actions of Hamas especially their latest violent actions in Gaza and their destruction to the studios of the Palestinian Broadcasting corporation,” he told Arab News.

Abu Layla said he was aware of apathy among Palestinians when it came to politics – and even hinted at the party’s potential to flop.

“To be honest there is no guarantee that this group will succeed, but we have assembled a comprehensive group... we are realistic in our view and know that we have differences between us. But we need to find common ground that is based on the minimum policies that we all agree to,” he said.



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King Salman tells Abbas of Kingdom’s unwavering support for Palestinian rights
Hamas arrests 5 over Palestinian government media raid

[Idlib clashes stir debate over de-escalation deal](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-01-05 22:01

ANKARA: Escalating clashes between Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and Ankara-backed National Front for Liberation (NFL) in Syria's northwestern Idlib province have raised concerns about a deal to set up de-escalation zones in the region.

The deal was brokered between Turkey, Russia and Iran in September 2017.

The Al-Qaeda linked HTS, trying to control key roads in the province, has increased its activity in southern Idlib and the city of Hama and captured some villages from Turkish-backed militant groups.

The clashes led to the death of more than a 100 civilians and fighters, the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported.

A separate deal, signed last September in the Black Sea resort of Sochi, said the areas where the clashes took place were due to be cleared of heavy weaponry. The deal also required Russia to ensure the status quo in Idlib and avoid military attacks in the region.

But this deal is not yet fully implemented as Russia launched an airstrike in southern Idlib, resulting in significant damage.

In a joint declaration published Friday, local councils in Syria called for the establishment of a humanitarian corridor as a precaution in case the clashes spread to urban areas. The province is home to about 3 million people.

Turkey has 12 observation posts in the region and has raised the alert level as some of the posts, manned by Turkish troops, are close to areas where there has been fighting.

HTS, which dominates more than half the region, remains the most powerful rebel alliance in Idlib and is considered a terrorist group by Ankara.

Sinan Hatahet, an Istanbul-based expert on Syria, said clashes were expected because HTS has been trying to consolidate its power over Idlib.

"This is a major point of disagreement between Russia, Iran on the one hand, and Turkey on the other. Moscow and Tehran want Turkey to be more assertive to counter HTS in Idlib, but Turkey is not willing to spend any finances and resources for such a fight that is very complicated," he told Arab News.

Ankara had it made it clear that its strategic interest lay in northern Aleppo and some areas in northern Idlib, he added, but that the de-escalation deal was not currently under threat.

"The Syrian regime might exploit the chaos to attack certain areas to grab land around the demilitarized zone. But the de-escalation zone will remain even if the regime attacks, because the agreement is between Turkey and Russia and Turkey hasn't really intervened.

"It is an infighting spiral that will always keep on going unless Turkey gets guarantees that it stays definitely in Idlib. But even then Turkey's

engagement in Idlib is only to prevent major refugee spillover," he added.

Dr. Kerim Has, a Russia analyst, said Moscow was sticking to its position of eliminating armed groups in the region with the help of the Turkish army and its proxies.

"I think it's not the end of the de-escalation agreement yet. But it demonstrates on what the last Turkish-Russian negotiations with high level officials were principally locked in Moscow, and what Russia prioritizes in Syria for now, namely the Idlib dossier, on the background of US withdrawal from Syria," he told Arab News.

"Besides, the Russian side is becoming more inclined to functionalize the Idlib deadlock as a Damocles' sword on Turkey's own security during the bargaining process with Ankara on the east of the Euphrates."

Turkey was determined to carry out a new large-scale military operation in northeast Syria, he said, and Russia was reminding it of the responsibility its leaders had taken for the "gigantic powder keg" Idlib in the Sochi deal.

Has said Moscow would deploy this tactic for a while, at least until negotiations between Russia and the US and talks between Damascus and the People's Democratic Party (PYD) and its armed wing, the People's Protection Unit (YPG).

"Russia's possible 'green light' to the Turkish side for a new military operation in northeast Syria is directly and substantially related to the results of these negotiations," Has added.

The increasing clashes in Idlib were weakening Turkey's position in terms of its negotiations with Russia, and also undermining its ambitious military offensive plans ahead of a high-level US visit to Ankara next week, he added.

Big hitters John Bolton, Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., and James Jeffrey are due to meet their Turkish counterparts to discuss the latest developments in Syria.

"According to official statements, the Trump administration is aiming to keep the US' Kurdish allies, including YPG forces, which are the number one enemy of Ankara, in a 'safe basin' in Syria," Has said.

It would be harder for Turkey to realize its claims, he added, as requests would increasingly reflect US plans in Syria.



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US warns Syria over chemical weapons ahead of troops withdrawal
US gives no timeline for Syria withdrawal as fighting continues