

Lebanon says it foiled plots to stage attacks in May

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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BEIRUT: Lebanon foiled a plot by militants based in Syria to carry out two attacks this year against places of worship and Lebanese army positions, Interior Minister Nohad Machnouk said on Monday.

The attacks were planned from Syria's rebel-held Idlib province and were timed to coincide with Lebanon's general election that took place in May, he said in a televised news conference.

Lebanon's Internal Security Forces monitored the plot and thwarted it, he said. The country remains safe for both residents and visitors, he added. Lebanese authorities say they have disrupted or foiled numerous attacks in recent years, including some linked to the conflict in neighboring Syria. From 2013-2016 militants struck Lebanon repeatedly with bomb attacks. Idlib province is part of the last remaining stronghold in Syria outside government control and much of it is held by extremist rebel groups including the country's former Al-Qaeda affiliate.

Lebanon shares power among its religious sects and has maintained a "dissociation" policy of staying out of regional conflicts.

However, Lebanon's Iran-backed Shiite group Hezbollah has played a key military role in Syria supporting President Bashar Assad against mostly Sunni rebels seeking to oust him.



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[Iran can expand range of ballistic missiles: Guards commander](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Mon, 2018-12-10 10:56

GENEVA: Iran has the ability to build ballistic missiles with a broader range, a senior commander of the elite Revolutionary Guards said on Monday, according to the semi-official Fars News agency.

Iran's missiles currently cover a range of 2000 kilometers (1,240 miles) and many "enemy bases" are within 800 kilometers of the Islamic Republic, Amirali Hajjizadeh, head of the Revolutionary Guards' airspace division, was cited as saying.

US President Donald Trump pulled out of an international agreement on Iran's nuclear program in May and reimposed sanctions on Tehran. He said the deal was flawed because it did not include curbs on Iran's development of ballistic missiles or its support for proxies in Syria, Yemen, Lebanon and Iraq.

"We have the ability to build missiles with a broader range," Hajjizadeh said, according to Fars News. He added, "We don't have limitations from a technical perspective or by conventions with regard to missile range." The Iranian government has ruled out negotiations with Washington over its military capabilities, particularly its missile program run by the Guards. Last month, Hajjizadeh said that US bases in Afghanistan, the UAE and Qatar, and US aircraft carriers in the Gulf were within range of Iranian missiles. In October, the Revolutionary Guards fired missiles at Daesh militants in Syria after the extremist group took responsibility for an attack at a military parade in Iran that killed 25 people, nearly half of them members of the Guards.



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Iran arrests 10 suspects in suicide bombing that killed twoRouhani forecasts 'deluge' of drugs, refugees, attacks if sanctions hurt Iran

[US-backed Syrian fighters push into Daesh-held town](#)

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

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Mon, 2018-12-10 (All day)

BEIRUT: US-backed Syrian fighters have pushed deeper into the Daesh group's last remaining stronghold, capturing a hospital.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces entered the eastern Syrian town of Hajjin last week and intense fighting has been ongoing since.

SDF spokesman Mustafa Bali says it took full control of the hospital early Monday.

Omar Abu Layla, of the activist-run DeirEzzor 24 monitoring group, confirmed the hospital on the edge of town was retaken by the SDF.

SDF fighters launched an offensive to capture Hajjin and nearby villages on Sept. 10. They have made little progress since then, but last week intensified their attacks under the cover of airstrikes by the US-led coalition.



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Syria media says no attack on airport after reported air defense fireUS-led coalition strikes kill 9 civilians in east Syria

[Syrian girl born without legs walks on new prosthetics](#)

Author:

Aaref Watad | AFP

ID:

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Sun, 2018-12-09 16:50

SERJILLA, Syria: Eight-year-old Maya Merhi had to struggle around a Syrian displaced persons camp on artificial limbs made of plastic tubing and tin cans.

But now the girl, who was born with no legs due to a congenital condition, is walking on new prosthetics after undergoing treatment in Turkey.

Pictures of her plight, including those taken by AFP in Syria, were seen around the world in June, and she was taken to Istanbul for the life-changing procedure.

Dressed in a pink sweater and matching shoes, Maya on Saturday was able for the first time to walk along the rutted roads of the Serjilla camp after arriving back.

Finally she joined in the games and dancing with the other children.

"I was so happy when I saw her walking," says her father Mohammed, sitting in their makeshift tent.

"The whole family and all our loved ones were so happy."

Mohammed suffers the same condition as his daughter, known as congenital amputation which means the person is born without lower limbs.

He cobbled together the homemade prosthetics on which she used to shuffle around the camp.

Originally from Aleppo region, the father and daughter had to move to rebel-held Idlib province as fighting from Syria's civil war began to rage around their home.

After the pictures of Maya's difficulties sparked attention across the globe, the Turkish Red Crescent intervened.

The father and daughter were evacuated from Syria by the Turkish authorities and brought to Istanbul for treatment at a specialized clinic.

Mohammed received prosthetic limbs as well, but admits that he isn't yet as steady on them as his daughter.

Sitting on a foam mattress, his daughter unwraps the artificial legs and

attaches them.

“To begin with there were difficulties getting used to them,” says her uncle Hussein, who accompanied his brother and niece to Turkey.

“All of a sudden she found herself up high on the new prosthetics.”







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[Book promoting national dialogue in conflict-hit countries published](#)

Sun, 2018-12-09 22:17

BEIRUT: Two European peace-building institutes have jointly published an Arabic-language manual aimed at promoting national dialogue in countries plagued by war and extremism.

The Berghof Foundation, a not-for-profit peace-building organization that initiated Lebanese national dialogue efforts in 2007 and embarked on similar initiatives in Yemen and Sudan, collaborated with Swiss research institute Swisspeace to publish the guide.

Firas Khairallah, Berghof representative in Beirut, told Arab News that the aim of the guide is to “provide solid guidance and practical support to those who explore national dialogue as a means to transcend political obstacles or scenarios of divisive conflict or turbulent transition.”

At a recent meeting held in Lebanon, Germany’s ambassador to Lebanon, Georg Birgelen, stressed that “anything is better than war.”

“As German, we know war all too well,” he told politicians and officials at a recent meeting held by the foundation. “This is why avoiding conflict is key to German policy-making.”

Swiss ambassador to Lebanon, Monika Schmuts Kirgoz, said: “National dialogue and consensus-building are the subjects of the hour in the Middle East”, adding that “courage is needed to advance dialogue and reach agreements.”

“National dialogues provide an effective way to overcome internal faults and to rebuild relations between state and institutions,” said one official from the foundation. “Where national dialogue succeeds, social contracts are born.”

While peace-building initiatives hang in the balance in Lebanon, Berghof Foundation and Swisspeace officials concurred that Tunisia proved the most successful model for national dialogue in the region.

“The dialogue was the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Tunisia,” said Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Ouided Bouchamaoui, who founded the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet.

“We forced all parties to participate in the dialogue and held 1,700 hours worth of dialogue and one-on-one talks. We received many threats and faced problems with state actors, but we always reverted to dialogue. We set a new constitution and held elections. Our mission ended in 2014. We now have elected institutions.”

Bouchamaoui added: "The experience was successful thanks to a strong civil society and high education levels, which make Tunisians think 100 times before resorting to violence. Still, economic challenges are mounting."

In Jordan, where extremist rhetoric among youth facing soaring unemployment rates has become rampant in recent years, the foundation instigated dialogue to strengthen the culture of tolerance.

Musa Al-Maaitah, Jordan's political affairs minister and founder of the Jordanian Social Democratic Party, said that democracy essentially boils down to the right to disagree.

"Our problem is that we want to take without giving," he said. "Political parties always think that they have the truth, but the fact is that no one has one absolute form of truth."

In Libya, matters were not so simple and talks fell through.

"The Libyans elected a constituent assembly for the first time in 40 years and they were happy, but the Libyan people wanted a UN-sponsored dialogue," said Tariq Mitri, the former head of the UN Support Mission in Libya. "They thought the UN held the carrot and the stick."

He pointed out that one of the problems in Libya was trying to root out the other side under the slogan "no democracy for the enemies of the nation."

"Armed groups have strong sway over political parties," he said. "This is why it was difficult getting them on one table."

In Lebanon, meanwhile, efforts hang between success and failure.

"The dialogue broke down in Lebanon after failure to implement the constitution," said former President Michel Suleiman.

"Civil society must be included in dialogue. What we lack is the implementation of a social contract in accordance with a constitution. The only way out is limit weapons supply to the state, revisit agreements with Syria and form a committee to abolish sectarianism."

Former Prime Minister Fuad Siniora concurred. "Domination, marginalization, external and internal interventions, provocation, assassinations, intimidation, blackmail, populism and all sorts of other forms of sabotage rampantly increased between 2006 and 2018," he said.

As former Minister Yassine Jaber put it: "We need to agree on the rule of law because implementation of the law is not a point of view."



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