

Houthi claims of UAE airport drone attacks were 'propaganda fabrications'

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Thu, 2018-11-08 21:31

LONDON: Houthi militia claims that they attacked UAE airports with drones are probably "propaganda fabrications," according to a [report from investigative website Bellingcat](#).

The alleged attacks had been used by the Iran-backed Houthis as a tool to give the impression they had the capability of attacking strategic sites inside the Emirates, the report by risk consultant Khalil Dewan said.

In July and August, Houthi media claimed that Abu Dhabi and Dubai airports had been targeted by their forces with Sammad-3 drones. The claims, which were denied by the UAE, were also found to be baseless by the Bellingcat investigation.

The report also implicated Iran in arming the Houthis, citing the militia's use of Hudhuh-1, Qasef-1 and Sammad unmanned craft, all of which "resemble Iranian-made drones."

"The Houthi's primary method (of propaganda) is to show they have the capability to strike the UAE," the report said.

On both occasions of the alleged attacks, flights continued to operate unaffected – despite claims by the Houthis of flights redirecting from Abu Dhabi to Dubai.

The UAE General Civil Aviation Authority at the time denied the claims and said air traffic was operating as usual.

The Bellingcat report cited the lack of mobile footage captured by passengers of disruptions as they traveled through the airports as evidence that the attack did not take place.

"The disruption that occurred and the scale of it would not suggest that a lethal attack occurred," the report said.

The report also debunked Houthi claims that drone attacks had been carried out in Saudi Arabia.

Charts and infographics released by the militia list alleged drone operations in the Kingdom between December 2017 and July 2018, as well as the type of drones supposedly deployed.

While the drones may have entered Saudi Arabian airspace, the Bellingcat report said it was unlikely the drones actually carried out strikes.

On April 11, Saudi Arabia's air defense systems downed two Houthi drones in the south at Abha International Airport and Jazan. According to Arab Coalition spokesman, Col. Turki Al-Maliki, an "unidentified body" flew toward Abha International Airport but was destroyed.

Al-Maliki confirmed the remnants appeared to be those of a Houthi drone. On the same day in Jazan, Saudi defense forces destroyed another Houthi drone and according to Al-Maliki, the drone was identical to the remnants of the one downed at Abha International Airport.

According to a [Conflict Armament Research report](#), the use of drones shows the Houthis' ability to use "low-cost technology" against the Arab coalition's "sophisticated military assets," but that the use of the Iranian-designed Qasef-1 drones supports the claim that Iran is arming the Houthis in Yemen.



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Amnesty accuses Houthi militia of 'militarizing' Yemen hospital

[Two Iraq ministers risk sack over Saddam-era posts](#)

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Thu, 2018-11-08 15:30

BAGHDAD: Two ministers approved by Iraq's parliament may lose their jobs before the rest of cabinet is agreed, officials said Thursday, after a commission found they were members of Saddam Hussein's regime.

The Accountability and Justice Commission is responsible for the policy of "de-Baathification," or ensuring no Saddam-era officials or senior members of his Baath party play a role in Iraq's government.

Commission spokesman Fares Abdul Sattar said that the body had sent a letter to parliament over two nominees to the 22-minister government – a third of which has yet to be confirmed by parliament.

"Two names will be subject to procedures by the Accountability and Justice Commission," Abdul Sattar said, without specifying who.

A parliamentary source said that the endangered officials were Minister of Youth and Sports Ahmad Al-Obeidi and Minister of Communications Naim Al-Rubaye, who were only approved by lawmakers last month.

If sacked, it would be the first time the policy of "de-Baathification" unseats a minister confirmed by parliament since the 2003 ouster of Saddam by a US-led invasion.

Rubaye was reportedly a member of the intelligence services and a mid-level Baath party official, said a security source, but it was unclear what role Obeidi had.

Both received parliament's vote of confidence on October 25 along with 12 other ministers, including those in charge of finance, foreign affairs, and oil.

Due to deep divisions, the remaining eight portfolios, including the interior and defense ministers, have not been put to a vote.

Parliament has met twice since then, but a confirmation vote did not feature on either session's agenda and it has not set a new date to approve the remaining ministers.

Government formation has dragged on since Adel Abdel Mahdi, 76, was appointed prime minister in early October.

He had launched a website to allow Iraqis to apply for a ministerial position online and more than 15,000 sent in bids, but most of the names that were approved on October 25 were well-known political figures.



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Iraq parliament holds off vote on key ministers
Iraq gets US sanctions break to keep the lights on

[Egypt convicts 65 on terror charges, allegiance to Daesh](#)

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Thu, 2018-11-08 (All day)

CAIRO: An Egyptian court on Thursday sentenced 65 suspected Daesh extremists to between five years and life in prison for setting up a "terrorist cell", a court official said.

The alleged cell had members in various parts of impoverished upper Egypt and

was led by an “emir” Mostafa Ahmed Abdelaal.

The militants, charged in 2017, had “set up a terrorist cell in Upper Egypt which declared allegiance to (IS leader) Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi”, the court official said.

The court sentenced 18 of the defendants to life terms (25 years) and another 41 to 15-year prison terms.

It also handed six minors five years each in jail and acquitted two suspects. The sentences can be appealed.

Since Egypt’s military toppled president Mohamed Morsi in 2014, the government and security forces have cracked down hard on secular opposition and extremism.

The Egyptian branch of Daesh has led an insurgency in North Sinai and carried out attacks across the country.

Egypt’s army launched a major offensive in February dubbed “Sinai 2018” to dislodge the insurgents from the peninsula.

More than 450 suspected extremists and around 30 Egyptian soldiers have been killed since the offensive began, the army said in October.

Jihadist attacks in recent years have killed hundreds of police, soldiers and civilians.

Daesh claimed responsibility for an attack last week against Egyptian Christians in Minya province, which killed six Copts and one Anglican.

Egyptian courts have convicted many suspected extremists in mass trials which have been criticised by human rights groups.

An Egyptian military court on Wednesday sentenced eight Daesh members to death for a deadly attack against the army in 2016, officials said.



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Syria army frees 19 Druze hostages from Daesh Full horror of Daesh mass graves uncovered in Iraq

[US accuses Iranian oil tankers of turning off maritime transponders](#)

Wed, 2018-11-07 22:57

LONDON: The United States accused Iranian oil tankers of turning off their maritime transponders to try and hide their movements after Washington imposed a wave of sanctions on Tehran this week.

US Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook said on Wednesday that the move created a safety concern.

Speaking about the new sanctions, which target the energy, banking and shipping sectors, Hook said the US had been very careful and successful in applying maximum pressure on Iran through sanctions without allowing a spike in the oil price, Reuters reported. Wednesday.

He said an expected increase in oil supply in 2019 will help the United States to ask countries to further reduce their imports of Iranian oil.



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Facing new sanctions, Iranians vent anger at rich and powerful
Iranians fear more hardships as US sanctions begin to bite

[Frenchman accused of smuggling guns from Gaza to West Bank 'tricked'](#)

Wed, 2018-11-07 22:25

BEERSHEBA, Israel: A Frenchman formerly employed by his country's Jerusalem consulate and accused by Israel of smuggling guns between the Palestinian territories will argue he was "tricked," his lawyer said Wednesday. Romain Franck, who worked as a driver for the consulate, is standing trial for exploiting reduced security checks for diplomats to transport 70 pistols and two automatic rifles from the Gaza Strip to the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

The Shin Bet internal security agency said Franck, who was arrested in

February, was motivated by money in the five instances he smuggled guns for a network involving several Palestinians.

Speaking after a hearing at the district court in the southern Israeli city of Beersheba, Franck's lawyer Kenneth Mann stressed that his client's actions were not those of an ideologue seeking to empower Palestinian militants in their battle with Israel.

Mann said his client had been "tricked" by his alleged Palestinian accomplices.

"He was scared, he is young and inexperienced," Mann told reporters.

"He has no ideological or political involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

The Shin Bet said Franck had been paid a total of around \$5,500 for his efforts.

Israeli officials have stressed he acted on his own without the consulate's knowledge, adding that diplomatic relations with France were not affected.

The Wednesday hearing was limited to procedural discussions. Franck attended but said nothing.



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