

Officials: Iran behind drone attack on US base in Syria

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By LOLITA C. BALDOR and ROBERT BURNS | AP

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Mon, 2021-10-25 20:16

WASHINGTON: US officials say they believe Iran was behind the drone attack last week at the military outpost in southern Syria where American troops are based.

Officials said Monday the US believes that Iran resourced and encouraged the attack, but that the drones were not launched from Iran. They were Iranian drones, and Iran appears to have facilitated their use, officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss details that have not been made public.

Officials said they believe the attacks involved as many as five drones laden with explosive charges, and that they hit both the US side of Al-Tanf garrison and the side where Syrian opposition forces stay.

There were no reported injuries or deaths as a result of the attack.

US and coalition troops are based at Al-Tanf to train Syrian forces on patrols to counter Daesh militants. The base is also located on a road serving as a vital link for Iranian-backed forces from Tehran all the way to southern Lebanon and Israel.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby declined to provide details when asked about the report during a news conference Monday. He called it a “complex, coordinated and deliberate attack” and said the US has seen similar ones before from Shia militia groups that are backed by Iran. But he would not go into specifics and said he had no update on the munitions used in the attack. Kirby also declined to say if troops were warned ahead of time or whether the US intends to make a military response.

“The protection and security of our troops overseas remains a paramount concern for the secretary,” Kirby said, referring to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, “and that if there is to be a response, it will be at a time and a place and a manner of our choosing, and we certainly won’t get ahead of those kinds of decisions.”

Pro-Iran media outlets have been saying that the attack on Tanf was carried out by “Syria’s allies” – an apparent reference to Iran-backed groups – in retaliation for an attack days earlier near the historic Syrian town of Palmyra. Israel has been blamed for the attack, but US officials say America was not involved with it.

The Al-Tanf attack came in a period of rising tensions with Iran. The Biden administration this week said international diplomatic efforts to get Iran back into negotiations to return to a 2015 nuclear deal were at a “critical place” and that patience is wearing thin.

The last major Iranian attack on US forces was in January 2020, when Tehran launched a barrage of ballistic missiles on Al-Asad air base in Iraq. US and coalition troops were warned of the incoming missiles and were able to take

cover, but more than 100 US service members received traumatic brain injuries as a result of the blasts.

The Iran attack was in response to the US drone strike earlier that month near the Baghdad airport that killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis.

Two months after the Al-Asad assault, US fighter jets struck five sites in retaliation, targeting Iranian-backed Shiite militia members believed responsible for the January rocket attack.



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US outpost in Syria targeted in suspected drone attack Why drone war by proxy is Iran's favored form of asymmetric warfare

[Egypt's President El-Sisi ends state of emergency after more than four years](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-10-25 23:28

CAIRO: Egypt's president said Monday he will not extend the state of emergency that had been imposed across the country for the first time in years.

President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi announced his decision in a Facebook post. He said the move came because "Egypt has become an oasis of security and stability in the region."

Egypt first imposed a state of emergency in April 2017 and has extended it at three-month intervals since.

It was imposed following deadly church bombings and attacks on Coptic Christians that have killed more than 100 people and wounded scores. The government extended the order every three months after that.

The state of emergency allows for arrests without warrants, the swift prosecution of suspects and the establishment of special courts.

The emergency measure technically ended over the weekend.

(With AP and Reuters)



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Egypt's government projects to go 30% green by 2024Egypt's hotels to operate at full capacity for first time since start of pandemic

[Gaza fish restaurants thrive far from the foodie trail](#)

Tue, 2021-10-26 00:30

GAZA CITY: The Gaza Strip might be off-limits for foreign foodies but the coastal Palestinian enclave is brimming with seafood restaurants, many owned by one local family whose culinary hook is their matriarch's spicy fish tajine.

Munir Abu Hasira arrives at the Gaza port's fish market at daybreak, but holds back as traders snatch up sardines and other fish caught during the night.

He is angling for more discerning catches like grouper, sea bream and large shrimp, which can go for around 70 shekels (\$22) a kilo – a small fortune in the impoverished enclave, under Israeli blockade since 2007.

"It's expensive because of the economic situation, but we buy the fish to supply restaurants and to export" to the occupied West Bank, he says, as workers pile fresh fish into a van.

For decades, the Abu Hasira family were fishermen, but since opening their first restaurant in the 1970s, they have gradually traded their fishing kit for chef's tools.

Gaza fishermen say they struggle to eke out a living, snared by Israeli restrictions on the enclave's fishing zone and on importing equipment into the enclave, from boat motors to sonar devices for finding shoals.

Problems like overfishing and pollution blight the local industry.

Some 4,200 tons of fish and seafood were netted from Gaza's waters last year, according to the Israeli authorities. Just 300 tons were exported to the West Bank.

Sitting on a chair in a Gaza courtyard, Eid Abu Hasira, in his 80s, said he was the last of the family's fishermen.

"I sold everything in 2013," said the head of the family, sporting a white

moustache and wearing a traditional robe and headdress.

"Today, we are in the fish trade, and have 13 Abu Hasira restaurants," he said, clutching Muslim prayer beads as he leaned on a wooden cane.

One of his ancestors was a prominent Jewish Moroccan rabbi, who died during a trip to Egypt in the 19th century.

A descendent in Egypt had a vision that "they had to go to Gaza," Eid Abu Hasira said.

"So we came here. My grandfather chose to live off the sea," he said, adding that a Jewish branch of the family lives in Israel, while those in Gaza are Muslim.

As a young boy, his mother would cook up a seafood tajine that has become the Abu Hasira family chain's signature dish.

Moeen Abu Hasira, 56, paid homage to his family's culinary heritage, from their signature shrimp and tomato tajine, known as "zibdiyit," to a fish tajine made with tahini, herbs and pine nuts, to grilled grouper.

"The secret of Gaza cuisine is strong chili," he said from the kitchen of his restaurant, which he opened earlier this year.

The Abu Hasira family's clientele has changed over time.

"Until the start of the first intifada, our restaurants were packed. Israelis came to eat here and so did tourists," Moeen Abu Hasira said, referring to the first Palestinian uprising in 1987.

Since the Israeli blockade began in 2007 after the Islamist group Hamas took control of the enclave, few international tourists, foodies or gastronomic guide writers have visited.

Now, the family's restaurants cater to a well-off Palestinian clientele, but Moeen Abu Hasira said times were hard as unemployment in Gaza hovers around 50 percent.

"Nobody will give you a star" in recognition of your restaurant, said the chef, who trained in French cuisine in a restaurant in the Israeli city of Jaffa.

"We did not learn in cooking schools or universities. There is none of that in Gaza," he said. "We all learn from each other."



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Under Israel's blockade, Gaza fishermen struggle for a catch
Optimism in Gaza amid indications of reconstruction acceleration

[Dozens of Yemenis feared dead in botched Houthi missile launch](#)

Mon, 2021-10-25 00:13

AL-MUKALLA: Dozens of civilians were reportedly killed or wounded in Yemen's northern province of Dhamar on Saturday when a ballistic missile fired by the Iran-backed Houthis failed to reach its target and ripped through a residential area, residents and local media said.

Launched by the Houthis from a military base under their control in Dhamar city, the missile landed in a densely populated area close to the base, triggering a huge explosion that rocked the city.

The Houthis quickly sealed off the streets and banned people from entering or leaving the area.

Al-Sharae newspaper reported that the missile “destroyed many houses” in the Al-Najeda neighborhood as ambulances with blaring sirens were seen rushing to the area.

Images seen on social media showed a large fireball and smoke billowing from the site.

The Houthis have intensified drone and missile strikes on the central city of Marib as their ground forces have aggressively pushed to seize control of the strategic city since February.

During the last several days, Arab coalition jets targeted military sites in Houthi-held Hodeidah and Sanaa, where ballistic missiles, explosive drones and bomb boats are manufactured and stored.



Yemeni Prime Minister Maeen Abdul Malik Saeed. (AFP/File)

In the southern city of Aden, the interim capital, Yemeni Prime Minister Maeen Abdul Malik Saeed on Saturday urged factions to forge unified ranks for war against the Houthis and to end the Iranian regime’s strategy in the country.

During a virtual meeting with representatives of political parties included in the government, the prime minister warned that the Houthis are “seeking to seize control of Yemen and would target all opponents who challenged their rule,” urging Yemenis to “come together” to defeat the Houthis.

“The Houthi danger and the Iranian project in Yemen will not exclude anyone, and no party is immune. If we don’t fight it together today, no party will find the time and ground to fight this Iranian-led criminal project in the region,” Saeed said, according to the official news agency.

Yemeni political analysts and officials argue that ongoing infighting among the anti-Houthi camp has weakened it politically and militarily, and enabled the militia to expand across Yemen.

Najeeb Ghallab, undersecretary at Yemen’s information ministry and a political analyst, urged Yemeni parties to “positively respond” to the prime minister’s call, adding that unifying splintered groups and factions would lead to defeat of the Houthis and push them into accepting peace initiatives.

“The only beneficiary of the conflicts and splits within anti-Houthi forces is the Houthis. Unifying factions would place powerful pressure on them,” Ghallab told Arab News.

On the ground, dozens of Houthis and several government troops were killed in fierce clashes over the past day in Juba district, south of Marib province, a Yemeni military official who visited the battlefield told Arab News. The Yemeni army and allied tribesmen foiled consecutive attacks by more than 15 groups of Houthi fighters in Juba who staged a bid to break through Marib defenses.

“The Houthis seized control of a remote village in Juba in the morning and we liberated it by the end of the day,” the official, who requested anonymity, said.



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[Yemen Prime Minister Maeen Abdul Malik Saeed](#)

Arab coalition: Over 200 Houthis killed in strikes on Juba and Al-Kasarah
More than 90 Houthis killed, 16 military vehicles destroyed in coalition strikes on Jubah and Al-Kassarah

[Pope: Don't send migrants back to Libya and 'inhumane' camps](#)

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Sun, 2021-10-24 15:48

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis on Sunday made an impassioned plea to end the practice of returning migrants rescued at sea to Libya and other unsafe countries where they suffer "inhumane violence."

Francis also waded into a highly contentious political debate in Europe, calling on the international community to find concrete ways to manage the "migratory flows" in the Mediterranean.

"I express my closeness to the thousands of migrants, refugees and others in need of protection in Libya," Francis said. "I never forget you, I hear your cries and I pray for you."

Even as the pontiff appealed for changes of migrant policy and of heart in his remarks to the public in St. Peter's Square, hundreds of migrants were either at sea in the central Mediterranean awaiting a port after rescue or recently coming ashore in Sicily or the Italian mainland after setting sail from Libya or Turkey, according to authorities.

"So many of these men, women and children are subject to inhumane violence," he added. "Yet again I ask the international community to keep the promises to search for common, concrete and lasting solutions to manage the migratory flows in Libya and in all the Mediterranean."

"How they suffer, those who are sent back" after rescue at sea, the pope said. Detention facilities in Libya, he said "are true concentration camps."

"We need to stop sending back (migrants) to unsafe countries and to give priority to the saving of human lives at sea with protocols of rescue and predictable disembarking, to guarantee them dignified conditions of life, alternatives to detention, regular paths of migration and access to asylum procedures," Francis said.

UN refugee agency officials and human rights organizations have long denounced the conditions of detention centers for migrants in Libya, citing practices of beatings, rape and other forms of torture and insufficient food.

Migrants endure weeks and months of those conditions, awaiting passage in unseaworthy rubber dinghies or rickety fishing boats arranged by human traffickers.

Hours after the pope's appeal, the humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders said that its rescue ship, Geo Barents, reached a rubber boat that was taking on water, with the sea buffeted by strong winds and waves up to three meters (10 feet) high. It tweeted that "we managed to rescue all the 71 people on board."

The group thanked the charity group Alarm Phone for signaling that the boat crowded with migrants was in distressed.

Earlier, Geo Barents, then with 296 migrants aboard its rescue ship, was awaiting permission in waters off Malta to disembark. Six migrants tested positive for COVID-19, but because of the crowded conditions aboard, it was difficult to keep them sufficiently distant from the others, Doctors Without Borders said.

In Sicily, a ship operated by the German charity Sea-Watch, with 406 rescued migrants aboard, was granted permission to enter port. But Sea-Watch said that a rescue vessel operated by a Spanish charity, with 105 migrants aboard, has been awaiting a port assignment to disembark them for four days.

While hundreds of thousands of migrants have departed in traffickers' boats for European shores in recent years and set foot on Sicily or nearby Italian islands, many reach the Italian mainland.

Red Cross officials in Roccella Ionica, a town on the coast of the "toe" of the Italian peninsula said on Sunday that about 700 migrants, some of them from Afghanistan, reached the Calabrian coast in recent days on boats that apparently departed from Turkey.

Authorities said so far this year, about 3,400 migrants had reached Roccella Ionica, a town of 6,000 people, compared to 480 in all of 2019. The migrants who arrived in the last several days were being housed in tent shelters, RAI state television said.

Italy and Malta have come under criticism by human rights advocates for leaving migrants aboard crowded rescue boats before assigning them a safe port.

The Libyan coast guard, which has been trained and equipped by Italy, has also been criticized for rescuing migrants in Libyan waters and then returning them to land where the detention centers awaited them.

On Friday, Doctors Without Borders tweeted that crew aboard the Geo Barents had "witnessed an interception" by the Libyan coast guard and that the migrants ""will be forcibly taken to dangerous detention facilities and exposed to violence and exploitation."

With rising popularity of right-wing, anti-migrant parties in Italy in recent years, the Italian government has been under increasing domestic political pressure to crack down on illegal immigration.

Italy and Malta have lobbied their European Union partner countries, mainly in vain, to take in some of those rescued at sea.



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Evacuation flights for migrants start again in Libya
Another 50 migrants rescued off Libyan coast in past two days