

# 1 dead, dozens wounded in tribal clashes in southern Tunisia

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Mon, 2020-12-14 20:26

TUNIS: Tunisian authorities ordered a curfew in regions in southern Tunisia after at least a man was killed and dozens of people wounded, two seriously, in tribal clashes that broke out over a land dispute.

According to the official TAP news agency, the curfew from 4 p.m. to 5 a. m., starting on Monday, was decided by governors of Medenine and Kebili to prevent further violence.

The inhabitants were fighting over the ownership of an area called Aïn Sekhouna, which is located between the two and boasts a hot spring in the middle of the desert. The governorates of Medenine and Kebili are close to the Libyan and Algerian borders.

According to the official TAP news agency, security forces backed by military units used tear gas to disperse those involved, many of whom were armed with sticks and shotguns.

The security forces union reported 83 wounded who were transferred to nearby hospitals using ambulances from surrounding areas. TAP reported that four security officers were injured in the clashes and a security vehicle ransacked.

Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi gave instructions to the ministers of the interior and of defense to hold a crisis meeting in the hope of finding a solution to the dispute "by legal means."

Tunisian President Kais Saied traveled by helicopter to the disputed area. He urged residents to make reason prevail over violence and warned against internal threats to the Tunisian state, without providing details.

Meanwhile, Mechichi, on a visit to France on Monday, said he agreed with French Prime Minister Jean Castex on the need for a greater cooperation between the two countries on migrant issues, especially through development and investment policies in Tunisian regions where people entering illegally into Europe come from, according to TAP.

France said the visit comes out of solidarity between the two countries following an Oct. 29 Islamic extremist knife attack that killed three people in a Nice church. The chief suspect is a Tunisian man who illegally entered into Italy and then traveled to France.

Mechichi, who is on his first trip abroad since he took office on Sept. 2, is scheduled to visit Italy on Tuesday.



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'Keep up the fight,' urges Tunisian street vendor's sister  
Tunisian charged over fatal French church stabbings

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## [US sanctions NATO ally Turkey over Russian missile defense system](#)

Mon, 2020-12-14 20:57

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration on Monday imposed sanctions on its NATO ally Turkey over its purchase of a Russian air defense system, setting the stage for further confrontation between the two nations as President-elect Joe Biden prepares to take office.

The move comes at a delicate time in relations between Washington and Ankara, which have been at odds for more than a year over Turkey's acquisition from Russia of the S-400 missile defense system, along with Turkish actions in Syria, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and in the eastern

Mediterranean.

The US had previously kicked Turkey out of its F-35 stealth fighter development and training program over the purchase, but had taken no further steps despite persistent warnings from American officials who have long complained about the purchase of the S-400, which they say is incompatible with NATO equipment and a potential threat to allied security.

"The United States made clear to Turkey at the highest levels and on numerous occasions that its purchase of the S-400 system would endanger the security of US military technology and personnel and provide substantial funds to Russia's defense sector, as well as Russian access to the Turkish armed forces and defense industry," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said.

"Turkey nevertheless decided to move ahead with the procurement and testing of the S-400, despite the availability of alternative, NATO-interoperable systems to meet its defense requirements," he said in a statement.

"I urge Turkey to resolve the S-400 problem immediately in coordination with the United States," he said. "Turkey is a valued Ally and an important regional security partner for the United States, and we seek to continue our decades-long history of productive defense-sector cooperation by removing the obstacle of Turkey's S-400 possession as soon as possible."

The sanctions target Turkey's Presidency of Defense Industries, the country's military procurement agency, its chief Ismail Demir and three other senior officials. The penalties block any assets the four officials may have in US jurisdictions and bar their entry into the US. They also include a ban on most export licenses, loans and credits to the agency.

The administration had held off on imposing punitive sanctions outside of the fighter program for months, in part to give Turkish officials time to reconsider deploying it and, some suspect, due to President Donald Trump's personal relationship with Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

However, in past months Turkey has moved ahead with testing of the system drawing criticism from Congress and others who have demanded the sanctions be imposed under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, or CAATSA, which mandates penalties for transactions deemed harmful to US interests.

Coming just a month and-a-half before Biden assumes office, the sanctions pose a potential dilemma for the incoming administration, although the president-elect's team has signaled it is opposed to Turkey's use of the S-400 and the disunity within NATO it may cause.

Last month, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said Turkey was prepared to discuss with the US its "anxiety" over the interoperability of the S-400s and the F-35s. The US reacted coolly to the suggestion and Pompeo shortly thereafter pointedly did not meet with any Turkish government officials on a visit to Istanbul.

Turkey tested the missile defense system in October for the first time, drawing a condemnation from the Pentagon.

Ankara says it was forced to buy the Russian system because the US refused to sell it American-made Patriot missiles. The Turkish government has also pointed to what it considers a double standard, as NATO member Greece uses Russian-made missiles.



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Turkey's defense minister reaffirms Russian S-400 plans Turkey confirms NATO fears over testing of Russian S-400 missile defense system Video shows missile fired where Turkey cleared way for S-400 test, prompting US warning

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## [Christmas opens new market for small Gaza sewing business](#)

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By WAFSA SHURFAFA | AP

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Mon, 2020-12-14 15:02

GAZA CITY: In the blockaded Gaza Strip, the Christmas season is giving a

boost to a small women's business that produces pandemic face masks decorated with holiday symbols.

The masks, decorated with images of Santa Claus, reindeer and Christmas trees, have found markets as far away as Europe. They also have provided a small lift to a Palestinian enclave run by the Islamic militant Hamas group and where the vast majority of residents are Muslim.

"We exported the first 200 masks two weeks ago to France, last week about 300 to Germany and from 300 to 400 masks will be sent to Britain in the coming days," said Suhad Saidam, owner of the workshop.

It's a rare success story in impoverished Gaza, where unemployment has reached around 50%, and exports are severely restricted by Israel.

Saidam, who has been sewing for 16 years, says she sends the masks to Palestinian companies in the West Bank that export the goods. To be allowed out from Gaza through Israel and to the West Bank, the embroideries must be made of cloths and fabrics only. Decorated electronics, like watches, are forbidden, she said.

Israel, with Egypt's help, imposed the blockade on Gaza in 2007 to isolate Hamas. Both countries cite security concerns and fear of arms smuggling to Hamas in justifying the restrictions.

The Christian population in Gaza, home to some 2 million people, has dwindled to about 1,000 as members of the tiny community have steadily emigrated. However, Christmas decorations can be widely seen on store fronts and at restaurants across the Gaza Strip.

Saidam, 43, opened the workshop in 2017 with support from Care International humanitarian agency under a program for breast cancer survivors like herself. Saidam outsources the work to about 40 women, most of them suffering from cancer, to do the work at home "for a good income." The Christmas-themed masks are sold for 15 to 20 shekels (\$4 to \$6). In Gaza, a typical daily wage is about 30 shekels (\$9).

Wafa Tarifi, a resident of the West Bank city of Ramallah, learned of the masks from a Facebook page and was pleased when she saw them at a bazaar in Ramallah. "I bought some of them for my children's Christian teachers and they liked it so much," she said.

As COVID-19 vaccines are rolled out throughout the world, there might not be great demand for masks next year, but Saidam says she will continue to introduce traditional stitching for other occasions and events.

"We thought beyond the concept that hand-stitching is exclusive to the traditional Palestinian gowns," she said.





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Egyptian security delegation in Gaza to hold talks with Hamas Gaza imposes tighter virus restrictions, extends curfew

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## [US imposes sanctions on two Iranian individuals allegedly linked to agent's disappearance](#)

Mon, 2020-12-14 18:35

WASHINGTON: The US for the first time on Monday accused Iran of direct involvement in the "probable death" of former FBI agent Robert Levinson, who vanished 13 years ago, and imposed sanctions on two intelligence agents.

No agreement should ever be struck with Iran without its freeing all unjustly detained US citizens, a senior official added as Washington blacklisted two Iranian officials that it accused of involvement in the kidnapping and

probable death while in custody of the former agent.

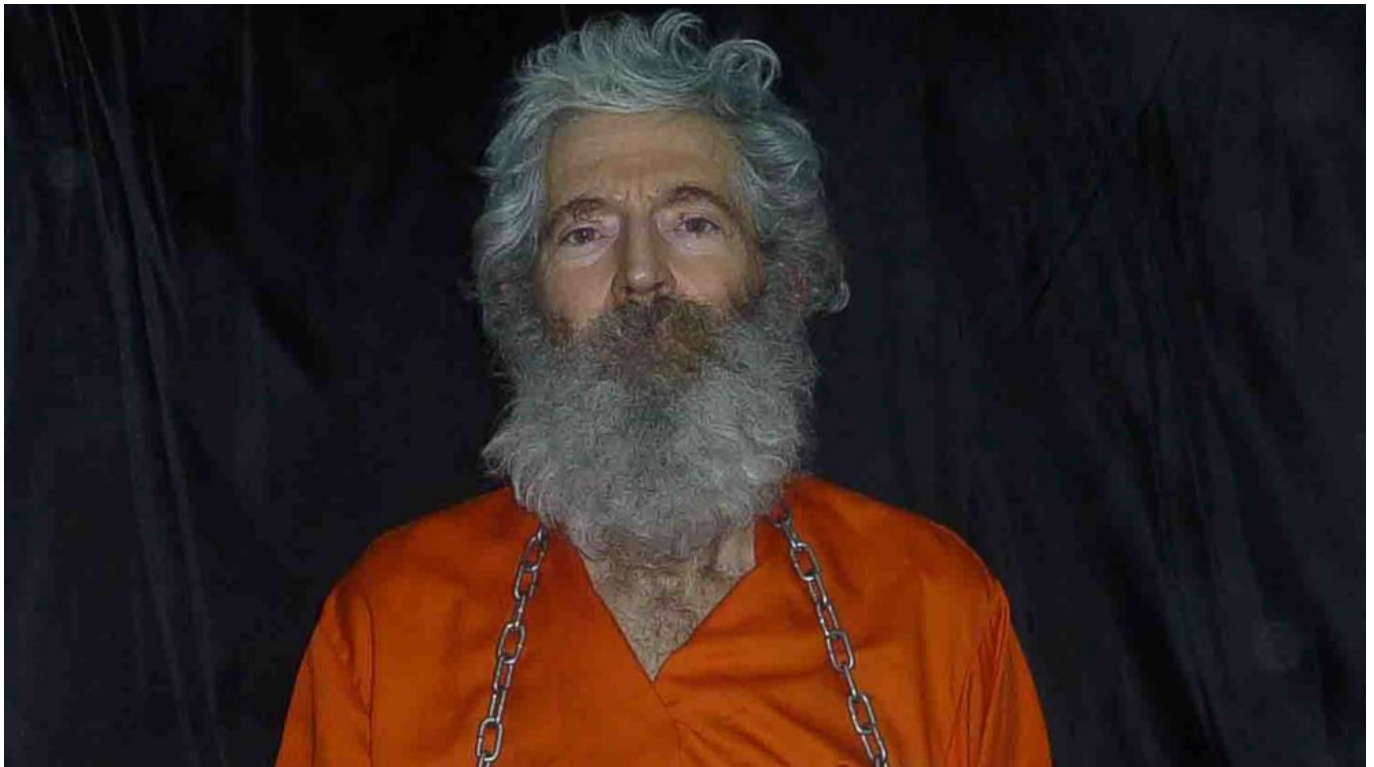
A second US official, speaking to reporters on condition of anonymity, said Washington believed senior Iranian officials Mohammad Baseri and Ahmad Khazai had signed off on the abduction of Levinson, who went missing on Iran's Kish Island in the Gulf in March 2007.

The official said he hoped the naming and sanctioning of the two men, who were separately identified by the US Treasury Department, would lead to further information about Levinson's fate.

"The government of Iran pledged to provide assistance in bringing Bob Levinson home, but it has never followed through," FBI Director Christopher Wray said in a statement.

"The truth is that Iranian intelligence officers – with the approval of senior Iranian officials – were involved in Bob's abduction and detention."

Releasing the finding a month before President-elect Joe Biden takes office, Donald Trump's administration urged his successor to prioritize the release of at least three Americans in Iranian custody as his team expects to resume diplomacy with Iran.



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## [Netanyahu: 'Business as usual with Iran' will be mistake](#)

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1607891778035066500

Sun, 2020-12-13 14:36

JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday said it would be a mistake "to go back to business as usual with Iran," signaling Israeli resistance to an expected push by President-elect Joe Biden to revive the international nuclear deal with Iran.

Netanyahu spoke at a press conference with Robert O'Brien, President Donald Trump's national security adviser.

But his comments appeared to be aimed at Biden, who has said the US will rejoin the nuclear deal if Iran agrees to strict adherence. The deal, which lifted sanctions on Iran in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program, has unraveled since Trump withdrew from it in 2018.

Netanyahu led an unsuccessful fight against the deal when it was negotiated by then-President Barack Obama in 2015 and welcomed Trump's withdrawal three years later. Netanyahu says the deal will not prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon and fails to address other belligerent Iranian behavior, such as its support for proxies across the region and its development of a long-range missile program.

"As long as Iran continues to subjugate and threaten its neighbors, as long as Iran continues calling for Israel's destruction, as long as Iran continues to bankroll, equip and train terrorist organizations throughout the region and the world, and as long as Iran persists in its dangerous quest for nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them, we shouldn't go back to business as usual with Iran," Netanyahu said Sunday. "We should all unite to prevent this major threat to world peace."

O'Brien arrived days after the US announced that Israel and Morocco were establishing full diplomatic relations – making it the fourth such deal between Israel and an Arab state brokered by the outgoing Trump administration.

O'Brien said the Trump administration's pressure campaign against Iran has been successful and said the string of agreements between Israel and Arab countries would cement what he called "the legacies of peacemakers" Trump and Netanyahu.



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US accuses Houthis in Yemen of 'behaving like a terrorist organization' Intelligence experts say Iranian regime hackers targeted dissidents during online rally