

US Navy official says 'uneasy deterrence' reached with Iran

Author:

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DUBAI: The top US Navy official in the Mideast said on Sunday America has reached an "uneasy deterrence" with Iran after months of regional attacks and seizures at sea, even as tensions remain high between Washington and Tehran over the Islamic Republic's nuclear program.

Vice Adm. Sam Paparo, who oversees the Navy's 5th Fleet based in Bahrain, struck an academic tone in comments to the annual Manama Dialogue hosted by the International Institute for Strategic Studies. He described having a "healthy respect" for both Iran's regular navy and the naval forces of its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

"We have achieved an uneasy deterrence. That uneasy deterrence is exacerbated by world events and by events along the way," the vice admiral said. "But I have found Iranian activity at sea to be cautious and circumspect and respectful, to not risk unnecessary miscalculation or escalation at sea." Iran's mission to the UN did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

While Iran has not directly seized or targeted a tanker in recent months, a mine recently struck an oil tanker off Saudi Arabia and a cargo ship near Yemen came under assault. Suspicion immediately fell on Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels for being behind both attacks. The Houthis have not commented on either attack.

Paparo, a former Navy fighter pilot who most recently served as director of operations at the US military's Central Command, offered a different stance than his immediate predecessor, Vice Adm. James Malloy. In one of his last comments to journalists in August, Malloy referred to Iran as "reckless and provocative" and always trying in dramatic naval drills to "lower the denominator until they're sure that they can look like they've won something."

HIGHLIGHT

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Malloy's tenure saw oil tankers seized by Iran and a series of limpet mine explosions targeting tankers that the Navy blamed on Iran. Tehran denied being involved, though Revolutionary Guard members were filmed taking an unexploded mine away from one tanker.

By contrast, the several months that Paparo's been in charge have not seen

any major crises.

The US Navy routinely has tense encounters with the Revolutionary Guard, whose speed boats race alongside American warships in the Arabian Gulf and sometimes conduct live-fire drills with machine guns and missile launches in their presence.

The Guard typically patrols the shallower waters of the Arabian Gulf and its narrow mouth, the Strait of Hormuz. Iran's regular navy largely operates in the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. While previous commanders have made a point to differentiate between the professionalism of the two, Paparo dismissed it as an "old idea" that included a lingering belief that the service was still loyal to Iran's former shah, who was toppled in the 1979 Islamic revolution.

"Forty-one years into the revolution, I think we can dispense with that notion," the vice admiral said. "I sincerely doubt there's a difference among them."

Paparo also said he did not believe the 5th Fleet's mission would be affected by the Navy potentially reconstituting a 1st Fleet responsible for the Indian Ocean.

Still, Paparo's remarks carried a clear warning, quoting former US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis at one point.

"Be polite, be professional and have a plan to kill everyone in the room," he said. "That's how we conduct ourselves at sea."



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GCC: Iran nuclear deal must take account of regional countries' interests

Israeli police cleared in shooting of maimed Palestinian boy

Author:

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JERUSALEM: Israeli authorities have cleared police of any wrongdoing in the case of a nine-year-old boy who lost an eye after apparently being shot in the face by an Israeli officer earlier this year.

Malik Eissa was struck by what appeared to be a sponge-tipped munition last February and lost vision in his left eye. Residents said he had just gotten off a school bus in the Palestinian neighborhood of Issawiya in East Jerusalem when police opened fire. Police said at the time they had responded to riots in the tense neighborhood and used what they call nonlethal weapons. In a statement sent to The Associated Press on Saturday, the Israeli Justice Ministry said its unit for internal police investigations concluded that while the incident was "sad," there were insufficient grounds for prosecution after interviewing witnesses and reviewing video footage and other evidence. It said police were conducting an arrest operation at the time and were attacked by a group of stone throwers. It also said that medical experts could not determine whether the boy had been struck by a bullet or a stone. It said, however, that the investigations unit ordered a review of operational conduct, including its use of sponge-tipped bullets in civilian areas.

HIGHLIGHT

Residents say Malik Eissa had just gotten off a school bus in the Palestinian neighborhood of Issawiya in East Jerusalem when police opened fire.

Malik's father, Wael Issa, told AP that his family had been the victim of injustice twice – first when the boy was shot and now with the investigation being closed.

"When my son was shot, the members of the investigative unit came to the hospital. They were about to cry. They told me, 'Don't worry, those responsible for shooting him will be held accountable,'" he said on Sunday. "But 10 months after investigating, they decided to close the file."

He said the boy suffers from constant headaches and psychological problems and has not returned to school because of repeated surgeries and embarrassment about his appearance.

He said his son finally agreed to return to school two weeks ago after receiving a glass eye but stopped going after a couple of days because of an embarrassing incident.

"The eye fell out in front of the students. He feels terrible," he said.

"Frankly speaking I don't believe I will ever get justice in this system."

Palestinians and Israeli human rights groups have long accused Israel of whitewashing wrongdoing by its security forces.

B'tselem, Israel's leading human rights group, said the case "exemplifies whitewashing at work."

"Every individual case is isolated to a series of technical details, as though this was a singular incident, rather than an open fire policy," it said. It accused police of operating within "an oppressed civilian population to enforce an occupation and annexation," leading to civilian casualties and impunity for those who harm them.

Issawiya is part of East Jerusalem, which Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East war along with the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, territories the Palestinians want for a future state.

Israel later annexed East Jerusalem in a step that is not internationally recognized and views all of the city as its capital. The Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as their future capital.

Issawiya has been the site of frequent police raids that often ignite demonstrations or clashes. Police blame the violence on local youths, whom they accuse of throwing stones and firebombs at patrol vehicles.



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UAE target of cyberattacks after Israel deal, official says
Top diplomats from Jordan and Israel hold rare meeting on Palestine issue

The empire that Kuwaiti retail pioneer Abdulaziz Mohammed Al-Shaya built

Sun, 2020-12-06 22:22

LONDON: Abdulaziz Mohammed Al-Shaya, widely regarded as a titan of Kuwait's economic and commercial renaissance, has died at the age of 94, local media reported on Saturday. He leaves behind a legacy that underpins the emirate's reputation as the Gulf's retail industry pioneer.

Many of those paying tributes to Al-Shaya have described him as a trailblazer on the basis of the notable successes he notched up early in his career. He is credited with founding the National Bank of Kuwait, the Avenues Mall Complex and the Oberoi Madina in Saudi Arabia, as well as co-founding the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society.

One of the early feathers in his cap was his role in opening Kuwait's Sheraton Hotel in 1966 – the firm's first managed hotel outside the US. Since then, his company, which his grandfather founded in the 1890s, has built an extensive portfolio of stores, cafes, restaurants and leisure destinations, real estate, trading and investments and car dealerships for Mazda and Peugeot.

Opening its first international franchise business in 1983, the group today manages more than 70 brands across 2,800 stores in the Middle East, North Africa, Russia, Turkey and Europe, employing 60,000 people, of which 45,000 are in the Middle East.

As a result of his legendary business acumen, the Alshaya Group has become one of the top brand franchise operators in the world, as well as one of the region's biggest retail conglomerates, counting The Body Shop, Starbucks, H&M, Mothercare, Debenhams, Victoria's Secret, P.F. Chang's, The Cheesecake Factory, KidZania, Le Pain Quotidien, Shake Shack, American Eagle Outfitters, Pottery Barn and Boots among its roster of well-known brands.



In 2017, the firm acquired a stake in the Emirati e-commerce platform Noon to retail its wide selection of fashion, health, beauty, home and lifestyle brands in the digital marketplace.

Al-Shaya's philanthropic instincts were reflected in the way the firm uses its profits to support charitable causes. In July this year, it donated more than 115,000 new clothing items worth around \$2 million to families supported by the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society, and in August teamed up with the Starbucks Foundation to donate \$200,000 to the Lebanon disaster relief effort.

Through its membership of the World Economic Forum's Regional Action Group for the Middle East and North Africa (RAG MENA), the Alshaya Group joined governments, businesses and civil society leaders in September to endorse the Principles of Stakeholder Capitalism for the Middle East and North Africa, which are designed to inform an inclusive, sustainable and resilient recovery for the region from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Al-Shaya, or Abu Hamad as he was affectionately known, spent some of his formative years in India, where he was sent by his father in 1939 at the age of 12 to learn English. A year later he enrolled for a two-year secondary education at Saint Joseph School in Bombay (now Mumbai).

He would return to India again as a fresh-faced young businessman to seek opportunities in Bombay, where he would remain until 1952 following India's independence and at the onset of Kuwait's oil boom. Fond memories of that time were a driver of the warm economic relations he helped forge between India and Kuwait years later.

Global Brands held by Alshaya Group

- The Body Shop
- Starbucks
- H&M
- Mothercare
- Debenhams
- Victoria's Secret
- P.F. Chang's
- The Cheesecake Factory
- KidZania
- Le Pain Quotidien
- Shake Shack
- American Eagle Outfitters
- Pottery Barn
- Boots

The depth of those ties was summed up by Sibi George, the Indian ambassador to Kuwait, in a tweet. "My sincere and heartfelt condolences on the sad demise of Mr. Abdulaziz Mohammed Hamoud Al-Shaya, chairman of Alshaya Group. Our thoughts are with his family and friends. We pray for the departed soul; may his soul rest in eternal peace," he wrote.

Al-Shaya returned to Kuwait as the Kingdom was in the throes of a sweeping modernization, underwritten by the world's sixth largest oil reserves. Today, the Kuwaiti dinar is the highest valued currency in the world.

Kuwaitis used their new-found oil wealth to splurge on high-street and boutique shopping brands imported from the West and around the world, making the emirate one of the top destinations for retail and entertainment in the region. Nowadays, glittering malls, supercar dealerships and trendy night spots bustle with affluent locals and expatriates.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, confronted the group with a painful reality check. In a statement to employees in April, the acting chief executive of Alshaya's retail arm, John Hadden, said the firm had seen revenue plummet by 95 percent, as the pandemic closed nearly all of its stores.



“Together with the rest of the world we all face a common crisis,” Hadden said at the time. “In just a few weeks everything we know has changed, the spread of COVID-19 has disrupted countries and communities around the globe, the impact on the global economy has been catastrophic.”

Although lockdown measures have since been relaxed to help ease the pressure on businesses and employees, it has come too late for some brands.

Famous department stores imported from Europe, which were already struggling in the age of online shopping and cheap competition, suffered when their sales collapsed as lockdown measures forced customers to remain indoors.

For Alshaya Group franchises from the UK, such as fashion conglomerate Arcadia and department store giant Debenhams, the pandemic was the last straw.

Debenhams, which was established in 1773, announced earlier this month it was to start liquidating proceedings, putting at risk another 12,000 retail jobs in the UK. The firm operates 124 stores in Britain and is currently seeking a buyer for the 242-year-old brand as part of the formal liquidation process.

“Debenhams were already on very shaky ground prior to the coronavirus outbreak, and 2020 is unfortunately looking like its break year,” Nigel Frith, a senior market analyst, told Fashion United. “COVID-19 has brought all the retailer’s problems to head a little earlier than expected.”



The firm had only recently bounced back from going into administration in early 2019. In September of that year it appeared to be expanding, opening two new stores in partnership with Alshaya in the Middle East. It opened its first outlets in Oman and capped off 29 stores in the UAE.

Arcadia, which owns popular British high street brands such as Topshop, Topman, Dorothy Perkins, Wallis, Miss Selfridge, Evans, Burton and Outfit, and which employs 13,000 people, has also said it is to go into administration, throwing the future of its Middle East stores into question.

Alshaya Group insisted earlier this month that its Debenhams and Arcadia stores in the Middle East will continue to operate as normal, despite the financial challenges announced by the British retailers.

The builder’s legacy, though, is secure. Al-Shaya has bequeathed a retail empire like no other in the Middle East. Economic turmoil may be accelerating the move to online shopping and forcing customers to tighten their belts across the region for now. But once the coronavirus pandemic storm passes, behemoths such as Alshaya will likely get another opportunity to reinvent themselves and thrive in a new age of retail commerce.

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Pandemic teaches Kuwait's fitness industry a healthy business lesson
A Kuwaiti NGO fights food waste while feeding needy households

[Tunisia extends night-time curfew until end of year](#)

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1607283604471403900

Sun, 2020-12-06 17:55

TUNIS: Tunisia on Sunday extended a night-time curfew until the end of the year in a bid to tackle spiking novel coronavirus cases, amid growing discontent and anti-government protests in the North African country. Following a meeting of its anti-coronavirus taskforce, the government decided to "maintain the curfew from 8:00 pm (1900 GMT) until 5:00 am in all governorates, every day of the week," the health ministry said in a statement on Facebook.

Under the new measures, which take effect on Monday, masks "remain mandatory in all open spaces", the statement said, adding that private parties will be allowed with up to 30 people.

Cafes may remain open until 7:00 pm but must remove their chairs from 4:00 pm onwards, while shisha pipes remain banned in all public spaces, it added. The statement did not mention a previous ban on travel between governorates. Sunday's decision follows a series of angry protests to demand better public services, jobs and help from the state in the face of an economic crisis, days ahead of the 10th anniversary of Tunisia's uprising demanding political freedom and jobs.

Doctors demonstrated this week to demand the resignation of the health minister, after a young medic died in a hospital lift accident.

Badreddedine Aloui, 27, plunged to his death Thursday after the lift doors opened but with no elevator in place, witnesses interviewed by local media said.

Hundreds of doctors, health workers and medical students gathered in front of the health ministry in the capital Tunis on Friday, demanding the health minister and other officials be sacked.

On Sunday, a group of medical unions called for a shutdown of all non-emergency medical services and a "national day of rage" on Tuesday in protest at his death.

Tunisia had managed to keep its coronavirus outbreak largely contained early on, but cases have soared since it opened its borders in June, with hospital officials warning they are struggling to cope.

The country of 11 million has officially registered over 100,000 cases of the Covid-19 illness and more than 3,500 deaths.

The pandemic has battered the country's economy, with GDP set to shrink by seven percent in 2020, according to International Monetary Fund projections.



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Tunisia-Libya border reopens after seven months
French minister holds Tunisia talks on return of extremists

[Kuwaitis vote in first parliamentary election since accession of new emir](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-12-06 01:50

JEDDAH: Kuwaitis voted in parliamentary elections on Saturday for the first time since Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah became emir in September.

More than 300 candidates, including 29 women, contested 50 seats in the Gulf's oldest and most outspoken assembly with legislative powers. Results are expected on Sunday.

Campaigning took place mostly on social media and local TV channels because of COVID-19 restrictions. Voters wore masks and gloves, and had their temperature taken before entering polling stations where election officials stood behind glass barriers.

Waiting areas with chairs at least 2 meters apart were set up in the playgrounds of some schools serving as polling stations, the Interior Ministry said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Sabah toured polling stations and said he was happy with voter turnout and health measures.

He cautioned Kuwaitis against gathering to celebrate when the results are announced.

The main campaign themes included promises to fight corruption and address youth employment, along with debates over freedom of expression, housing, education and the issue of the stateless "bidoon" minority.

BACKGROUND

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"Kuwait needs development. The streets are broken and there is no development and no economy ... and coronavirus has affected everything in every way," said Ibrahim, a government employee, after voting in Kuwait City.

Hoda Al-Hassan, who voted in the Al-Rawda area of the city, said: "We want change, new blood, to encourage the youth. I also hope that the parliament will resolve the issue of the bidoon and that of the demographic imbalance."

Yousef Ahmed Safar, who voted in Al-Nazha, also hoped for reform.

"We want to improve our situation, including in employment and housing, as well as the issue of combatting corruption," he said.

Kuwait's economy, which is worth nearly \$140 billion, is facing a deficit of \$46 billion this year. A government priority is to overcome parliamentary gridlock on legislation that would allow Kuwait to tap international debt markets.

Kuwaiti analyst Mohammed Al-Dawsari said the emirate may witness a struggle between the new national assembly and the government over economic legislation.

"The people were not satisfied with the performance of the previous parliament, and there are many who are calling for a comprehensive reconciliation between the government and the opposition," he said.



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Kuwait parliamentary race kicks off under shadow of pandemic
Emir of Kuwait thanks King Salman for efforts to resolve Gulf dispute