

# Fears of new bloodbath in Idlib as Assad troops go on the offensive

Mon, 2020-08-17 00:34

ANKARA: Syrian leader Bashar Assad has re-mobilized his forces in northwest Syria, raising fears of a new bloodbath in militant-controlled Idlib province.

The move follows Russia's suspension of joint military patrols with Turkish armed forces along the M4 highway in what is supposed to be a de-escalation zone.

The patrols began in March, along the Aleppo-Latakia road. The last one took place on Aug. 12 and Moscow suspended them two days later.

Since then, Assad regime forces have launched rocket attacks against Al-Fterah, Sfuhen and Kansafra in Jabal Al-Zawiyah in the southern countryside of Idlib.

The area is controlled by a former Al-Qaeda affiliate, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, who used rockets and heavy machine guns to attack the regime-controlled village of Beit Hasanou in Sahl Al-Ghab in northwest Hama.

The stage may be set for a new "battle of Idlib," experts told Arab News.

Navar Saban, a military analyst at the Omran Center for Strategic Studies in Istanbul, said the combatants were treading a thin line.

"Hezbollah moved some of its forces in a bid to launch an attack to the area in the south of the M4 highway," he told Arab News.

"This zone where the joint patrols are suspended is elevated, and whoever controls this region can control the whole of Idlib. So, it is a very strategic area where sooner or later some skirmish will happen.

"There is a high percentage chance of an operation by the regime. It will be a narrow-scale battle. The Turks are not ready to withdraw from this strategic area or allow the opposition to withdraw either. Sooner or later, the Russians will control this area.

"Moscow initially planned to monitor the area with no opposition forces present, but that did not happen because Turkey, unwilling to concede to Russia, mobilized some of its forces and opposition forces there, triggering another source of tension between Moscow and Ankara."

Kyle Orton, a Middle East analyst, said Russia's suspension of joint patrols in Idlib may be a temporary security matter as they consider their options.

"The patrols have been coming under attack, from peaceful protesters at first, but increasingly militarily, especially since last month," he said.

“Moscow’s intentions are obviously always suspect in Syria and there have been signs of a renewed regime coalition offensive against Idlib in recent days, so Russia’s suspension of the patrols could be a tactical issue related to that.”

“Turkey, likewise, continues to have the same policy of preserving at least northern Idlib as a buffer zone to avoid a destabilizing wave of refugees laced with terrorists being pushed into Turkish territory.”



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# Netanyahu says UAE deal signals end to 'land for peace'

Author:

Mon, 2020-08-17 00:29

JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday that a deal to establish full diplomatic ties with the UAE proves that Israel doesn't need to retreat from occupied land sought by the Palestinians in order to achieve peace and normalization with Arab states.

Israel and the UAE announced on Thursday they were establishing full diplomatic relations in a US-brokered deal that required Israel to halt its contentious plan to annex occupied West Bank land sought by the Palestinians. Netanyahu has insisted the annexation plans are only on "temporary hold" at the request of the US.

The UAE, like most of the Arab world, long rejected official diplomatic ties with Israel, saying recognition should only come in return for concessions in peace talks. Its accord with Israel breaks that long-held tenet and could usher in agreements with other Arab states, undermining an Arab consensus that was a rare source of leverage for the Palestinians.

"According to the Palestinians, and to many others in the world who agreed with them, peace can't be reached without conceding to the Palestinians' demands, including uprooting settlements, dividing Jerusalem and withdrawal to 1967 lines," Netanyahu said in a video statement. "No more. This concept of 'peace through withdrawal and weakness' has passed from the world."

The Palestinians want the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip for their hoped-for state, and peacemaking with them since the 1990s has been based on withdrawal from those lands to make way for a Palestinian homeland. Israel captured the territories in the 1967 Mideast war, although it withdrew its troops and settlers from Gaza in 2005.

But what has been a wall of Arab support for the Palestinians and their demands has begun to crack in recent years, in large part because of the shared enmity of Israel and other Arab states toward Iran and Iranian proxies in the region.

## **SPEEDREAD**

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The Palestinians bristled at Netanyahu's remarks.

"Peace should be established on the basis of the Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. This is the Arab and international consensus and anything else has no value," said Nabil Abu Rdeneh, a spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Netanyahu also reiterated on Sunday his interpretation of the UAE deal – that annexation was only being suspended and that it was still on the table, so long as it was done in coordination with Washington. UAE officials have indicated that the deal means annexation has been shelved entirely. After President Donald Trump released his Mideast plan earlier this year, which was favorable to Israel, Netanyahu said he would forge ahead with annexing parts of the West Bank. Netanyahu backed away from moving forward with annexation last month in the face of fierce international opposition and misgivings by White House officials. But Netanyahu, who has seen his popularity plummet over his handling of the coronavirus crisis, has faced searing criticism from settler leaders and their representatives in parliament over the annexation backtrack, and he has tried to reassure them that he remains committed to the move.



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[Saudi committee in Aden to oversee](#)

# forces withdrawal

Sun, 2020-08-16 23:07

AL-MUKALLA: A Saudi committee met on Sunday in the southern city of Aden with senior military officers from the Southern Transitional Council (STC) to discuss the withdrawal of forces from Aden and Abyan, local media and officials said.

Assigned by the Saudi government to oversee the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement, the committee touched down in Aden last week where members met with Gen. Ahmed Saeed Ben Break, the acting president of the STC, and other local officials.

Mohammed Al-Jaber, Saudi ambassador to Yemen, said that the Saudi Coordination and Liaison Team, led by Mohammed Al-Rubaie, in cooperation with Saudi-led troops in Aden, will supervise the withdrawal of STC military units from the region. They will also visit the southern province of Abyan to monitor the withdrawal of government and STC forces to previous locations under the Riyadh Agreement.

Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi appointed a new governor and chief security for Aden and mandated Prime Minister Maeen Abdul Malik Saeed to form a new government as the STC abandoned self-rule in southern Yemeni provinces.

Yemeni government and STC officials pledged to comply with the Saudi committee despite trading accusations about breaches to the truce. Mohammed Al-Naqeeb, a spokesperson for the STC forces in Abyan, told Arab News by telephone that their forces would adhere to the cease-fire announced in Riyadh and other terms of the Riyadh Agreement.

## **SPEEDREAD**

**The Saudi Coordination and Liaison Team in cooperation with Saudi-led troops in Aden will supervise the withdrawal of STC military units from the region, as their exit from southern Yemen paves way for peace.**

“We are committed to the Riyadh Agreement and we will work on smoothing the way for the success of the Saudi committee,” Al-Naqeeb said. Yemeni military officials also say their commanders asked them to follow the truce and comply with Saudi monitors that will visit contested areas in Abyan.

## **Consultations**

In Riyadh, the prime minister met with senior members of the General People’s Congress Party (GPC) as part of his discussions with political parties in Yemen to form the new government.

The official Saba news agency reported that the prime minister’s

consultations focused on the cabinet formation, its new priorities and the Riyadh Agreement. The GPC had ruled Yemen for more than three decades during the reign of Yemen's former president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Also in Riyadh, US Ambassador to Yemen Christopher Henzel congratulated new Aden Gov. Ahmed Hamid Lamli on his new post, describing his appointment as an important step towards peace and stability in Yemen.

"US Ambassador Christopher Henzel met Gov. of Aden Ahmed Lamli and congratulated him on his appointment, which is an important step in implementing the Riyadh Agreement and towards restoring stability and security to Yemen," the embassy said.

### **Fighting in Jawf**

Heavy fighting broke out on Saturday and Sunday in the northern province of Jawf after government forces launched an offensive aimed at clearing Iran-backed Houthis from areas in Khab and Shaaf district.

Yemen's Defense Ministry said that army troops and allied tribesmen liberated a number of locations in the district during the early hours of the offensive after killing and capturing dozens of Houthis.

Rabia Al-Qurashi, the army's spokesman in Al-Jawf, said that government forces seized seven abandoned military vehicles as a Saudi-led coalition aircraft destroyed three others and targeted Houthi gatherings and reinforcements, killing dozens of rebels.

Similar heavy fighting between government forces and Houthis broke out in the mountainous Nehim district, near Houthi-held Sanaa. The army posted a video of government forces firing at fleeing Houthi fighters on a battlefield in Nehim.



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## [Beirut counts the cost of devastating blast](#)

Sun, 2020-08-16 23:02

BEIRUT: Residents and businesses are counting the cost of a devastating blast that destroyed vast swathes of the city, as relief work continues in the affected areas.

The Aug. 4 explosion in the Port of Beirut killed at least 170 people and injured thousands. More than 80,000 homes have been damaged.

On Sunday people were removing wreckage from the main streets of Beirut's neighborhoods that were either destroyed or damaged by the explosion. The relief work has focused on clearing out houses, shops and other businesses that are still filled with rubble.

But the repair and restoration work has not yet started as it is waiting on a

field survey from engineers' committees and NGOs.

Residents affected by the blast said they no longer needed food aid, but help to repair their homes before winter. They have replaced windows with nylon coils, or blocked the doors of their damaged homes with wooden panels and temporary locks. Some are staying in their homes despite the damage caused because they have nowhere else to go.

The head of the Lebanese Order of Physicians in Beirut, Sharaf Abu Sharaf, said that 2,000 doctors had been affected, either through direct physical injury or severe damage to their clinics.

There are 13,000 doctors affiliated to the syndicate, and he feared the departure of doctors and nurses from Lebanon, saying: "Some of them have already begun to emigrate."

Three major hospitals were destroyed by the explosion, while three others were partly damaged. Geitaoui Hospital was one of those that was badly affected and it is the only hospital in Lebanon that specializes in treating burns. It is the first time the hospital has been damaged, as it has survived all the wars in Lebanon since 1975.

## **NUMBER**

**80,000 Homes have been damaged in the Aug. 4 explosion in the Port of Beirut that also killed at least 170 people and injured thousands.**

Abu Sharaf announced the establishment of a crisis unit, in cooperation with the World Health Organization, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the World Bank, to receive aid after conducting a field study on the damage to doctors and their clinics.

As the dust settled from the destruction of Beirut's seafront and its surrounding neighborhoods, it also revealed the destruction of thousands of businesses including 1,408 restaurants, clubs, and patisseries in Greater Beirut. According to a national syndicate representing them, some of these places were completely destroyed while others were partly damaged.

The head of the Syndicate of Owners of Restaurants, Cafés, Nightclubs and Pastries in Lebanon, Tony Ramy, estimated the losses at \$315 million.

"On the 25th of this month, the syndicate will launch an initiative to obtain regional and international assistance, because the owners of these institutions are unable to repair and renovate their stores," he told Arab News. "There is a need for fresh dollars, and nobody can secure this liquidity in light of the banking restrictions imposed on depositors and because of the collapse of the local currency against the dollar, in addition to the halt of business and therefore the lack of income."

The Lebanese Army said that 30 foreign countries have so far provided aid and

that dozens of planes were landing daily at Beirut airport. These countries include poorer nations such Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, which send hundreds of their nationals to work in Lebanon.

A top US official described the tragic event of Aug. 4 as a “symptom of the illnesses that lay in Lebanon.”

US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale made the remark at the end of a three-day visit to Beirut, reiterating the international community’s calls for a credible and transparent investigation into the explosion’s circumstances.

“These illnesses have lasted for a very long time, and almost everyone in power bears a certain extent of responsibility for them. I am talking about decades of mismanagement, corruption, and the repeated failure of Lebanese leaders to enact meaningful and sustainable reforms.”

He urged political leaders to respond to the demands of the Lebanese people for “good governance, sound economic and financial reform, and an end to the rampant corruption” that had stifled Lebanon’s energy.

“There should be no (financial) bailout for Lebanon,” he added. “America and its international partners will respond to systemic reforms with sustained financial support when they see Lebanese leaders committed to real change in word and deed. But we cannot, and will not, try to dictate any outcome. This is Lebanon’s moment to define a Lebanese – non-foreign – vision for Lebanon. What kind of Lebanon do you have and what kind of Lebanon do you wish for? Only the Lebanese can answer this question.”



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## [Iran threatens to attack UAE over Israel deal](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-08-16 00:04

DUBAI/PARIS/ANKARA: Iran issued an explicit threat on Saturday to launch an attack against the UAE over its agreement to normalize ties with Israel.

President Hassan Rouhani said the UAE had made a “huge mistake” and condemned what he called a betrayal.

The Iranian hard-line daily Kayhan, whose editor in chief is appointed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, went further. “The UAE’s great betrayal of the Palestinian people ... will turn this small, rich country, which is heavily dependent on security, into a legitimate and easy target,” it said in a front-page editorial.

Iran has already targeted Saudi civilians with missiles launched by its proxy forces in Iraq and Yemen, and security analyst Dr. Theodore Karasik told Arab News the new threat should be taken seriously.

“Iranian missiles could hit the UAE in eight minutes,” said Karasik, a senior adviser to Gulf State Analytics in Washington, D.C. “They can target critical infrastructure, or they can simply target the desert in an act of psychological warfare.

“Recent Iranian naval exercises featured missiles that came from an underground launcher. This was new and set off an alarm. Nevertheless, Dubai and other urban centers are still considered safe zones.”

Last week’s agreement, brokered by US President Donald Trump, established diplomatic relations between the two countries for the first time, while Israel halted plans to annex swaths of the West Bank.

Ali Abdullah Al-Ahmed, the UAE ambassador to France, told the French-language edition of Arab News there was more to come. “What will follow will not be confined to the political level but will equally cover the economic, technological, and academic levels,” he said.

“It is highly possible that the tempo of the development of these relations will be faster, we will see.”

The ambassador rejected claims that the Palestinians had been betrayed. “We do not negotiate in the name of the Palestinians and it is not up to us to do so,” he said.

“Our position regarding the Palestinian cause is in line with the Arab consensus regarding Jerusalem and other parameters of Arab unanimity, we adhere to them and we do not relinquish them.”

Meanwhile Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was accused of double standards after he threatened to sever relations with the UAE over the agreement, while maintaining diplomatic and trade ties with Israel.

“Turkey has a hypocritical stance,” said Seth J. Frantzman, executive director of the Middle East Center for Reporting and Analysis. It was a deliberate choice by Ankara to distract attention from economic failure, he said.

“Ankara, guided by its current ruling party, is moving toward becoming the most anti-Israel regime in the region.”

## Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

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