

Egypt police say killed 6 militants in northern Sinai

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1584376007820344800

Mon, 2020-03-16 15:42

CAIRO: Egyptian police have killed six militants in a shootout in the restive northern Sinai region, the interior ministry said Monday.

The firefight broke out as police forces raided a hideout of "terrorist elements" intent on carrying out "hostile operations," it said.

Egypt's security forces are battling a long-running insurgency in the peninsula, spearheaded by a local affiliate of the Daesh group.

Weapons and explosives were found in the militants' possession, the ministry added, in a statement released along with gruesome photos of the slain militants.

The date of the raid was not specified.

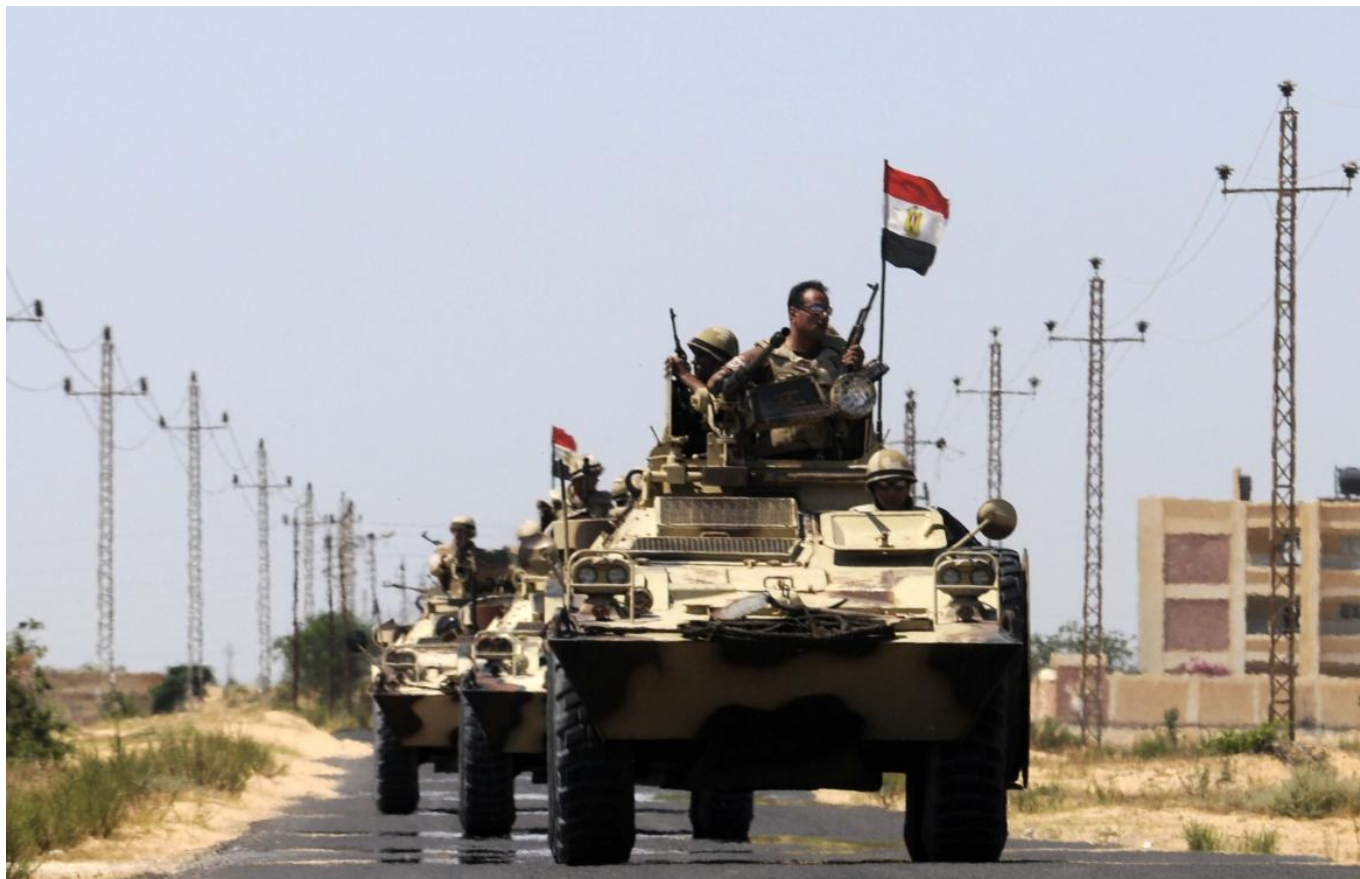
The Islamist insurgency in North Sinai escalated following the military's 2013 ouster of Islamist President Muhammad Mursi.

Scores of policemen and soldiers have since been killed in militant attacks. Last month, Daesh said it had blown up a gas pipeline in the Sinai Peninsula, saying it was connected to Israel.

Security sources however said the targeted pipeline was a domestic one.

Cairo launched a nationwide operation against militants in February 2018, mainly focusing on North Sinai province.

Since then, over 845 suspected militants have been killed in the region along with more than 60 security personnel, according to army figures.



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Death toll at 21 as Egypt storms, flooding enter second day

[Saudi, UAE labs and clinics lead bidding for express COVID-19 test](#)

Mon, 2020-03-16 17:46

DUBAI: Laboratories and clinics in Saudi Arabia and the UAE have made bids for a new accelerated testing system that could lead to the early detection of COVID-19.

The two Gulf countries joined Austria in their preliminary bids for the purchase of more than 500,000 kits.

The announcement comes after the system was granted funding by the Supervisory Board of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), Russia's sovereign wealth fund and could be ready by April, 2020.

"From the very beginning of the spread of the virus, RDIF, together with international partners, has been actively searching for the most effective technologies and methods for controlling coronavirus," Kirill Dmitriev, CEO of RDIF.

"The activities of the Centre of Expertise will make it possible to quickly find the best methods, which will significantly reduce the time of diagnosis and help scale the most effective world practices."

And he said the network of international partnerships with the leading investors around the world "strengthened RDIF's expertise on the best world practices in various fields, including the combat against coronavirus, and enables the promotion of successful Russian technologies in international markets."

The system uses special technology that helps to accelerate the detection of coronavirus without the need for a stationary laboratory, within 30 minutes.

"This express testing system reflects successful cooperation between Russian and Japanese companies and scientists," a statement from the RDIF explained.

"Full scale use of the testing system is expected in April 2020."

The system has been adapted so that it can be used in fixed and mobile lab environments – small enough to fit in a suitcase and can therefore be used anywhere, including hospitals and public institutions.

"Large-scale use of the system will help prevent the spread of coronavirus infection through the rapid detection of infected individuals," the statement added.

It went on to explain that the early detection will increase the effectiveness of treating infected people.

"According to RDIF's analysis of the best technologies for testing for coronavirus, this technology is the most advanced."

Russian-Japanese tests on the system began at the start of March, 2020 in the Vector scientific center of the Federal Service for Surveillance of Consumer Rights Protection and Human Wellbeing (Rospotrebnadzor).

The RDIF is promoting the technology in foreign markets, and the developed system is undergoing an accelerated certification process and obtaining the necessary permits in Europe, Asia and the Middle East.



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[Pompeo to Iraq PM: US will take action in self-defense if attacked](#)

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1584364011009142400

Mon, 2020-03-16 13:04

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warned Iraq's prime minister that the United States would take measures in self-defense if attacked, according to a statement on Monday after a rocket attack on an Iraqi base that houses US troops helping fight Islamic State.

Pompeo spoke to Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi on Sunday, a day after three American troops and several Iraqi forces were wounded in the second major

rocket attack in the past week on an Iraqi base north of Baghdad, US and Iraqi officials said, raising the stakes in an escalating cycle of attacks and reprisals.

He said Iraq's government should defend the US-led coalition helping it fight Daesh, according to the statement from State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus.

"Secretary Pompeo underscored that the groups responsible for these attacks must be held accountable. Secretary Pompeo noted that America will not tolerate attacks and threats to American lives and will take additional action as necessary in self-defense," it said.

Iraq's Joint Operations Command said 33 Katyusha rockets were launched near a section of the Taji base which houses US-led coalition troops. It said the military found seven rocket launchers and 24 unused rockets in the nearby Abu Izam area.

The Iraqi military said several Iraqi air defense servicemen were critically wounded. Two of the three wounded US troops are seriously injured and are being treated at a military hospital in Baghdad, the Pentagon said.

Longstanding antagonism between the United States and Iran has mostly played out on Iraqi soil in recent months.

Iranian-backed paramilitary groups have regularly rocketed and shelled bases in Iraq which host US forces and the area around the US Embassy in Baghdad.

The United States has in turn conducted several strikes inside Iraq, killing top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani and Kataib Hezbollah founder Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis in January.



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Yemen govt halts flights, closes schools

Mon, 2020-03-16 00:37

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen's internationally recognized government has canceled flights to and from the country's airports for two weeks, and ordered the closure of schools for one week, to prevent the spread of coronavirus. These decisions were made by the Yemeni Cabinet during a meeting in Riyadh on Saturday. Humanitarian flights are exempt from the ban.

Until last week, the country's national carrier Yemenia flew weekly to Jeddah, Cairo, Amman and Mumbai.

Yemen's Health Minister Nasir Baoum said health facilities across the war-torn country have not recorded any coronavirus cases, and all arrivals through air, land and seaports are subject to checks.

In Aden, health officials approved a plan to set up a quarantine for coronavirus patients at Al-Amel hospital after residents protested against establishing a quarantine at Al-Sadaka hospital for fear of an outbreak in densely populated areas of the port city.

In Hadramout, health officials said emergency teams in the province have not recorded any unusual deaths of patients at local intensive care units.

"Until now, there aren't even suspected cases of coronavirus," Dr. Riyadh Al-Jariri, head of the Health Ministry office in Hadramout, told Arab News on Sunday. "Why would we hide information about new cases?"

The absence of coronavirus cases in Yemen "is expected given that the country has been on lockdown since the beginning of the war," he said, denying rumors that some cases have been detected in Hadramout.

BACKGROUND

Measures come amid public skepticism that country is free of coronavirus.

In Houthi-controlled provinces, where most of the country's population lives, the Iran-backed militia halted UN flights from and into Sanaa and closed schools.

But in the streets of Al-Mukalla, Hadramout's capital, people expressed skepticism about official reports that the country is free of coronavirus. "I don't trust them," English teacher Abdullah Saleh told Arab News. "It's impossible that they haven't been able to record a suspected case. We've never seen them testing large gatherings inside cities."

On the streets, life has been largely uninterrupted by the government's precautionary measures as large gatherings are still taking place across the country.

On Saturday night, hundreds of football fans roamed the streets of Al-Mukalla honking cars, playing music and setting off fireworks following a local

football tournament. Mosques, malls and shops are bustling with people. "I can't stop working. I'll be burdened with debts if I stay at home," said Abdullah, a middle-aged fish seller. "The virus will face the fate of other diseases that die before spreading in Yemen. God will protect us."



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Saudi humanitarian agency provides aid in Lebanon, Yemen, Sudan
Saudi reconstruction program launches water project in Yemen

Life in quarantine in a Palestinian hotel

Author:

Mon, 2020-03-16 00:43

GAZA CITY: "I was shocked, I could not accept it. I could not believe I was infected, there was fear and anxiety. I thought about what would happen to my children after my death." This was how Mohammed Sarhan responded when he was informed by the Palestinian Health Ministry that he was infected with coronavirus.

Sarhan, 30, has been working as a chef at the Angel Hotel in Bethlehem for two years, along with his five brothers, two of whom are also infected. He is married and has three children, ranging in age from 3 to 6 years old.

"We were informed that we should come to the hotel on March 4, and samples were taken from us after a Greek tourist group that stayed at the hotel had discovered they were infected with coronavirus after returning to Greece," he told Arab News in interview over the phone. He added "The next morning, we were informed that seven people working at the hotel were infected, but we were all put in quarantine inside the hotel. On March 6, I was informed that I was infected along with others."

The Palestinian Health Ministry recorded the infection of 38 Palestinians, all in the city of Bethlehem except for one case in the city of Tulkarm in the northern West Bank.

The Palestinian government subsequently declared a state of emergency for a month, suspended schools and universities, closed cafes and restaurants, prevented gatherings in Palestinian cities and announced the closure of the borders with Jordan, as well as the closure of mosques and churches.

Sarhan is staying with 29 other infected cases of COVID-19 at the Angel Hotel, which the ministry has designated as a quarantine center, with a doctor who checks them daily.

Although Sarhan was shocked at first, he received a lot of support from the Palestinians who contacted him via Facebook, which gave him strength to cope with the situation.

FASTFACT

Muhammad Sarhan is staying with 29 other infected cases of COVID-19 at the Angel Hotel.

"In the beginning, I was thinking that death was inevitable. The situation was frightening, I was thinking about my family, and how my children will live after me, but over time I realized that this will come to an end and I will return to my normal life," he said.

His daily routine has not changed in the quarantine, because he goes to sleep at midnight and gets up at half past seven in the morning – but he does not go to work.

"Neither my siblings nor I have had any symptoms since we were quarantined. I am in very good health, eating my breakfast, spending most of my time on Facebook and TikTok, and talking to my wife and children and to my father and mother."

"My mother was the most affected at the beginning, but gradually she is feeling more at ease. She was crying all the time, but now she is used to it and knows that we are in good health and that the crisis will be over soon." He used to cook food daily for guests at the hotel, but today he takes the meals that are brought in for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and he also takes C & D vitamins that were provided to them by the ministry.

"I miss the Maqlouba, the traditional dish which I used to cook for myself and for my family. The food they provide us is not perfect but I cannot complain. I have to deal with the reality in which I live; it is not in my normal life."

Sarhan does not expect his life to return to normal after his release from quarantine and his recovery from coronavirus, at least in the first period, and there will be no normal interaction with relatives and neighbors.

"I miss my family, I miss cuddling my sons, who also miss me, and I wait for the day when this nightmare ends. This is the only thing I care about for now."



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Saudi desert offers respite from virus lockdownItalians sing out from balconies during coronavirus lockdown