

[Egypt's El-Sisi defends military against corruption claims](#)

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Sat, 2019-09-14 13:50

CAIRO: Egypt's president is refuting corruption allegations raised by a businessman about the country's military in a series of recorded testimonials that went viral on social media.

Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi said Saturday that allegations of embezzlement and misuse of public funds in building new presidential palaces are "sheer lies and defamation."

He said: "I've built presidential palaces and I will continue to do so. I am building a new country. ... All of this is not mine. It's Egypt's."

El-Sisi was responding to claims by contractor Mohammed Ali, who said he worked for the military for 15 years, alleging massive spending, abuse by authorities and misuse of public funds.

He has denied the allegations without elaborating. He has called the claims against the military an attempt to topple Egypt.



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Teen Egyptian girl's case puts legal system under spotlight
Egypt signs MoU with Chinese firm to expand production of electric vehicles

[Trump confirms death of Al-Qaeda heir Hamza bin Laden](#)

Sat, 2019-09-14 16:20

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump on Saturday confirmed that Hamza bin Laden, the son and designated heir of Al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden, was killed in a counter-terrorism operation along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

US media reported in late July and early August, citing intelligence officials, that the younger Bin Laden had been killed sometime in the last two years in an operation that involved the United States.

Secretary of Defense Mark Esper confirmed the death last month, saying it was "his understanding" that Bin Laden was dead, but Trump and other senior officials had not publicly confirmed the news.

"Hamza bin Laden, the high-ranking al-Qaeda member and son of Osama bin Laden, was killed in a United States counterterrorism operation in the Afghanistan/Pakistan region," Trump said in a brief statement issued by the White House.

"The loss of Hamza bin Laden not only deprives Al-Qaeda of important leadership skills and the symbolic connection to his father, but undermines important operational activities of the group."

The statement did not specify the timing of the operation.

The 15th of Osama bin Laden's 20 children and a son of his third wife, Hamza, thought to be about 30 years old, was "emerging as a leader in the Al-Qaeda franchise," the State Department said in announcing a \$1 million bounty on his head in February 2019 – perhaps after his actual demise.

He had put out audio and video messages calling for attacks on the United States and other countries, especially to avenge his father's killing by US forces in Pakistan in May 2011, the department said.

That work made him important in attracting a new generation of followers to the extremist group that carried out the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, which left nearly 3,000 dead.

Osama bin Laden's death and the rise of Daesh saw Al-Qaeda lose currency with younger extremists.

But the proliferation of branches and associated extremist groups in Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria and elsewhere have underscored its continuing potency.

Documents seized in the raid on his father's house in Abbottabad, Pakistan suggested Hamza was being groomed as heir to the Al-Qaeda leadership.

US forces also found a video of Hamza's wedding to the daughter of another senior Al-Qaeda official that is believed to have taken place in Iran. In 2017, Hamza was placed on the US terror blacklist, seen as a potent future figurehead for the group then led by Ayman al-Zawahiri.



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Pentagon chief confirms death of Qaeda's Hamza bin Laden
Hamza bin Laden killed in airstrike on Afghan-Pakistani border

[Return of Israeli agent to Lebanon](#)

angers former Khiam prisoners

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Fri, 2019-09-13 21:30

BEIRUT: The return of Israeli agent Amer Elias Fakhouri to Lebanon has sparked off heated debate about the Lebanese who fled to Israel during and after the Israeli occupation of the south of the country.

The depth of feeling aroused was demonstrated in the social media exchanges and the protests that have been taking place.

Fakhouri, 56, was the commander of a military battalion guarding the notorious Israeli detention camp, Khiam, in southern Lebanon during the 22-year Israeli occupation.

In 1998, two years before the Israeli troops pulled out of Lebanon, Fakhouri left Lebanon, going via Israel to the United States after a disagreement with his superiors.

He was sentenced in absentia to 15 years' imprisonment with hard labor in 1998. He was convicted of working for Israel, as well as arresting and torturing Lebanese citizens by order of the Israeli occupation forces, which supervised and ran the detention camp through the South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia, led by Antoine Lahad.

Judicial sources told Arab News: "Fakhouri arrived at Rafic Hariri International Airport a few days ago and was received by a Lebanese officer. He used his American passport to enter, and the officer accompanying him facilitated his passage at the Lebanese General Security checkpoint."

According to a security source, "the security officer in charge of checking the passports of those arriving in Beirut noticed that Fakhouri was wanted for arrest. However, when the matter was looked into, it was found that the judicial arrest decision had been withdrawn, preventing the Lebanese General Security Directorate from arresting him, but the security checkpoint seized his passport for further scrutiny."

Social media buzzed with the news of Fakhouri's arrival, which was shared under the hashtag "Jazzar Al-Khiam"—the butcher of Khiam. Activists expressed outrage at Fakhouri being allowed to return to Lebanon without being arrested. This prompted the General Security to interrogate him and refer him to the military prosecutor.

The General Security Directorate declared that, after interrogation, Fakhouri confessed to working for Israel. He also confessed that after he had fled into occupied Palestine he obtained an Israeli identity card and an Israeli passport, under which he left the occupied Palestinian territory.

Two views prevailed in Lebanon regarding the arrest of Fakhouri, judicial expert Katia Toa told Arab News. "The first view is that the sentence in absentia is 20 years old, so it was dropped with time. Therefore, he has a right to return to Lebanon in a normal manner.

"The second view is that Fakhouri's offense is a persistent offense, and thus it cannot be dropped with time. He must be tried again to determine his legal status in Lebanon."

On Friday, 34 lawyers and 10 freed prisoners filed a complaint with the Public Prosecution Office against Fakhouri.

Toa said: "The military court does not take into account individual complaints. This complaint is included in the original file, and if Fakhouri is to be tried, it would be for having acquired Israeli citizenship. But that offense is judicially classified as a misdemeanor, not a felony, and it has a reduced sentence."

An investigation is also being carried out to find out who requested the assistance of the officer who accompanied Fakhouri at the airport.

Dozens of former Khiam prisoners and their families gathered outside the military court building in Beirut to demand that Fakhouri be punished for his crimes.

MP Qassem Hashim, who participated in the protest, criticized the leniency in dealing with agents, arguing that "it may lead in the future to an easier view of treachery and communicating with Israel."

Jihad Hassan Hammoud, a former Khiam prisoner, said: "Fakhouri was responsible for torturing Lebanese citizens and he came up with many creative torture methods. He must be tried for his crimes."

The process of clearing Fakhouri's record reminded some of a statement by the leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, Minister Gebran Bassil, who a few months ago talked of implementing a law for the return of Lebanese fugitives to Israel. However, this had aroused controversy among the political parties in Lebanon.

The Lebanese parliament approved a draft law submitted in 2011 by the Free Patriotic Movement to address the situation of Lebanese citizens in Israel, but no implementing decree was issued.

An estimated 7,500 Lebanese citizens, most of whom were from Christian villages, fled to Israel after the withdrawal of the occupying forces from southern Lebanon in 2000. The majority left for Europe and the United States, while 3,000 remained in Israel.

Those trying to return to Lebanon through the Naqoura border crossing in coordination with UNIFIL are subject to investigation. Some of them have received lenient sentences while others have been acquitted.

Toa pointed out that the fugitives known to the Lebanese judiciary have been sentenced in absentia to 10-15 years in prison. A new generation was born in Israel, and these are not affected by the sentences, except for the charge of obtaining Israeli citizenship.



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Can Lebanon ever get its house in order?

[US to continue economic pressure on Iran and Hezbollah](#)

Fri, 2019-09-13 17:52

WASHINGTON: The US is to continue its economic pressure on Iran and its Lebanese proxy Hezbollah, the Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing Marshall Billingslea said on Friday.

Speaking at the Atlantic Council, Billingslea added that the drug trade in South America was financing the terrorist organization, and that other

sources of funding included money laundering. He also said that South America was starting to turn against Hezbollah, which is backed by Iran.

Billingslea said that the US Treasury will continue to exert economic pressure on Iran and Hezbollah, and that it considers the buying of Iranian oil as funding terrorism.

Due to Iraq's proximity to Iran, the Iraqi people "are victims," Billingslea said. However, any Iraqi party that colludes with Iran's Revolutionary Guards will have sanctions imposed on it.

He continued by saying that NATO countries supported the US and consider Iran a terrorist state.

The US Treasury has had no difficulty in convincing Europe that the regime in Iran is corrupt and that corruption is widespread, the Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing said. He added that the US has informed European countries that dealing with Iran will harm their trade with the country.

Shipping companies must know who they are dealing with, otherwise they will be sanctioned, Billingslea said.



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US Treasury sanctions Lebanon's Jammal Trust Bank for Hezbollah support
Lebanon's Hezbollah shoots down Israeli drone

Russia asks Iran to refrain from action that could jeopardize saving nuclear pact

Fri, 2019-09-13 16:42

MOSCOW: Russia has asked Iran to refrain from any action that could jeopardise saving its troubled nuclear pact after Washington pulled out if it, Yuri Ushakov, a senior Kremlin aide, said on Friday.

Ushakov added that the leaders of Russia, Turkey and Iran will discuss the difficult situation in Syria's Idlib province when they meet in Ankara early next week for a summit.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani are due to hold talks on Syria in Ankara on Monday.



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Israel's Netanyahu in Russia to meet Putin ahead of polls 'Russian' bombardment threatens Syrian cease-fire