

Tensions tail off in Lebanon after Hezbollah-Israel drone stand-off

Author:

Sat, 2022-02-19 22:53

BEIRUT: Tensions between Hezbollah and Israel tailed off on Saturday after a drone was launched on a 40-minute, 70-kilometer reconnaissance mission into Israeli airspace on Friday. It returned to Lebanon as the Israeli Iron Dome failed to down it.

Hezbollah claimed responsibility for launching the "Hassan" drone on Friday and said it carried out its reconnaissance mission over the targeted area despite all attempts to intercept it.

In retaliation, two Israeli warplanes violated Beirut airspace, flying at a low altitude.

Israeli news outlets quoted an Israeli army official as saying: "The Israeli response to the Hezbollah drone was exaggerated," noting that the response achieved the object Hezbollah was aiming for when it boasted about manufacturing drones.

Israel had downed a Hezbollah drone that infiltrated its airspace on Thursday.

The Lebanese authorities took no official stance in response to the Israeli violation of Beirut's airspace, which caused panic among residents since the planes flew very low.

Retired Lebanese Armed Forces Brig. Gen. Hisham Jaber told Arab News: "What happened over the past couple of days can be summarized according to military science as 'show off your strength so you would not have to use it'."

Jaber said Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah's speech on Wednesday about manufacturing drones did not reveal any new information.

"The Israeli enemy knew about this but was not sure it was true. The drone that escaped the Iron Dome was not a combat drone, but rather a recon drone; that's not enough to start a war," he said.

"I do not believe the recent escalation would lead to Hezbollah carrying out any military action on the southern border, because it has no interest in striking the first blow; whoever does so must bear full responsibility for the repercussions."

Jaber said: "Hezbollah will not violate the status quo unless Israel does so first. Meanwhile, Israel will not carry out any aggression now, because the US has previously prevented it from attacking Iran since all Iranian wings in Syria and Lebanon would respond. In addition, Israel's friend Russia, which is present in Syria, will not allow such an escalation."

Lebanese newspapers criticized “the absence of an official Lebanese position regarding recent developments and Nasrallah’s Wednesday speech.”

Some opposition newspapers wrote that Hezbollah has stripped the state of all strategic powers in deciding the country’s fate.

Nasrallah had boasted on Wednesday about “the resistance having the capability to convert its missiles into precision missiles.

He said: “In Lebanon, for a long time, we have started to manufacture drones. Whoever wants to buy them can place an order.”

Hezbollah MP Ali Fayyad said on Saturday: “The resistance’s strength and deterrence power, be it by land, sea or air, will force the Israelis to retreat.

“The balance of power is tilting day after day in favor of the resistance because the enemy is unable to adapt to its rules and logic.”

Walid Jumblatt, head of the Progressive Socialist Party, tweeted on Saturday: “I suggest investing the depositors’ money in locally made drones, missiles or explosives, as they have better returns for Lebanon.”

Samir Geagea, head of the Lebanese Forces Party, spoke of the recent developments during the announcement of his party’s candidates for the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Geagea said: “The Lebanon we want is not the Lebanon of illegitimate drones. It is not the Lebanon of mines and assassinations. The Lebanon that we want is the Lebanon of development, progress, science and success.”

He believed that the alliance forged between President Michel Aoun’s team and Hezbollah “has destroyed Lebanon, brought hell upon it, and yet they are still shamelessly carrying on with their agreement as if nothing had happened.”

Geagea mocked those who defend such an agreement and claim it has spared Lebanon civil war.

“I never understood this. Are they saying either we proceed according to Hezbollah’s wishes, or it wages a civil war against us? This logic is unacceptable, and no one can subdue anyone in Lebanon,” he said.



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Israel shoots down Hezbollah drone, fails to intercept another Israel shoots down alleged drone launched by Hezbollah

[Western hostages hope for freedom as part of new Iran nuclear deal](#)

Sat, 2022-02-19 17:34

LONDON: Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, the British-Iranian woman held in Iran, could soon be freed alongside other prisoners as hopes rise that Tehran may soon reach a new agreement with major powers over its nuclear program, The Times reported on Saturday.

Officials have suggested that a draft deal has been drawn up following months of talks in Vienna after the US withdrew from the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2018.

Iran's economy has been devastated by sanctions imposed after the US

withdrawal, and has increased its nuclear activity.

The new deal will see the lifting of sanctions, with Tehran reducing its program to levels agreed under the terms of the JCPOA, and downsizing its uranium-enrichment capabilities.

The election of hardliner Ebrahim Raisi as Iran's president in June 2021 had led to fears that the new talks could collapse, but there is new confidence that a deal might be struck in the coming months.

US Special Representative for Iran Robert Malley has said it is "hard to imagine" a nuclear deal being struck with Washington while its citizens, such as Morad Tahbaz, remain incarcerated in Tehran.

Those citizens could well be freed under the terms of the proposed deal in return for a lifting of US sanctions. That has prompted hope that other Westerners could also be freed if the deal is reached.

The daughter of imprisoned British Iranian Anousheh Ashoori told The Times that Western prisoners held in Tehran's notorious Evin prison are "cautiously optimistic" that they might be freed soon.

"Everyone knows that many times we've reached a crucial stage like this and nothing has come of it, so they are, as well as us, just waiting to see how the events unfold," she said.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe's husband Richard Ratcliffe said: "Nazanin is quite hopeful, in a way that she wasn't at Christmas. Who knows what will happen, but it feels that we will either get good news or we won't. Before, it was 'we will either get bad news or no news'."

Iran, though, will not receive a guarantee under the terms of a fresh deal that the US will not withdraw, as it did in 2018.

A source told The Times: "There is a sense that this text is it, that it's time for a political decision to be made in Tehran. The Americans have made a very fair offer and I don't think the Iranians will get a better one."



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[El-Sisi lauds WHO decision on vaccine tech for African countries](#)

Sat, 2022-02-19 17:07

CAIRO: President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has expressed his appreciation for the World Health Organization's decision to choose Egypt among six African countries to obtain vaccine-manufacturing technology.

In his speech at the European Union – African Union Summit, he stressed Egypt's ability to use this technology to ensure the continued availability

of vaccines to his country and Africa.

The WHO on Friday announced that Egypt, Tunisia, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa will be the first countries on the continent to obtain technology required to produce RNA vaccines. The technology-transfer project aims to help low- and middle-income countries.

“The (coronavirus) pandemic surprised the whole world, and therefore the move was to find a quick solution,” said El-Sisi. “Although it took some time, as we say in Africa, arriving late is better than not arriving at all.”

He praised the WHO’s efforts to enable Africa to overcome the negative health, economic and social effects of the pandemic. El-Sisi said Egypt is working on producing COVID-19 vaccines for local and continental use.

He urged international organizations and financial institutions to strengthen efforts to support African countries’ health sectors and international mechanisms related to distributing vaccines equitably.



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Egyptian, Chinese presidents discuss vaccine cooperation, electric cars in Beijing

[Coalition in Yemen launches 18 strikes on Houthis in Marib, Hajjah](#)

Author:

Sat, 2022-02-19 00:59

RIYADH: The Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen said it had launched 18 operations targeting the Iran-backed Houthi militia in the Yemeni provinces of Marib and Hajjah in the past 24 hours.

The coalition said casualties were inflicted on several Houthi militants and 13 military vehicles had been destroyed, Saudi state TV reported on Friday. Meanwhile, the coalition said it destroyed an explosive-laden boat belonging to the Houthi militia in the southern Red Sea from the port of Hodeidah. "The Houthis' use of the port for military purposes threatens freedom of navigation and global trade," the coalition said.



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[Iraqis queue for petrol in Mosul amid shortages](#)

Author:

Sat, 2022-02-19 00:29

MOSUL: Motorists in Iraq's main northern city of Mosul queued for hours on Friday to fill up their cars with petrol, with authorities blaming shortages on smuggling to the nearby Kurdistan region.

For the past week, long lines have formed at petrol stations in Mosul and the rest of Nineveh province, AFP journalists reported.

Soldiers were deployed in some stations to contain any violence, as tempers flared among motorists over the petrol shortage.

"Our lives are made of waiting in line. It has become a routine," taxi driver Abdel Khaliq Al-Mousalli complained.

Shortages are frequent in Nineveh, where petrol is subsidized by the federal government and sells at around 500 Iraqi dinars per liter (0.33 US cents).

But in the neighboring Kurdish autonomous region, petrol costs twice as much. Nineveh Gov. Nejm Al-Jibbouri said on Thursday that "information" suggested that the petrol shortage is due to "smuggling" toward Kurdistan.

He told a local television network that he had instructed security forces to "tighten checks at checkpoints to prevent petrol from leaving the province."

Nineveh received more than 2 million liters of petrol a day, "the highest amount after Baghdad," Ihsan Mussa Ghanem, deputy head of the Iraqi agency in charge of distributing petroleum products, said. "The price of oil in Kurdistan is 40 percent higher than in other provinces and that has put pressure on Nineveh, with many Kurdistan residents coming here to fill up," he added.

Iraq is the second-largest producer in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. The nearly 3.5 million barrels per day exported by the country account for more than 90 percent of its income.



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