

# US support for security in Mideast 'strong, sure': defense secretary

Author:

AFP, Reuters

ID:

1637444889065803300

Sun, 2021-11-21 00:47

MANAMA: The US warned on Saturday it was capable of deploying "overwhelming force" in the Middle East as it faced questions about its willingness to use its military power in the region.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told the Manama Dialogue in Bahrain's capital that all options would be open if diplomacy failed to halt Iran's nuclear program, but he was also forced to rebut claims that the US had become reluctant to use force.

The Pentagon chief was asked why Washington did not respond to last month's drone-and-artillery attack on a base used by the US-led coalition fighting Daesh in Syria.

"The United States of America maintains the right to defend itself. And we will defend ourselves and our interests, no matter what, at the time and place of our choosing," he replied. "And let no country, let no individual be mistaken about that. We are committed to defending ourselves and our interests and that includes our partners as well. And we're also committed to not allowing Iran to get a nuclear weapon."

Austin said Washington's major goal was to strengthen its "unmatched" alliances in the Middle East, but that military force remained an option with tens of thousands of its troops stationed in the region.

In brief remarks to the forum, Saudi Arabia's Prince Turki Al-Faisal called for "demonstrative action" in the region, including the "total enforcement" of the arms embargo on Yemen's Houthis.

Austin said: "America's commitment to security in the Middle East is strong and sure. Ultimately, our mission is to support diplomacy and to deter conflict and to defend the United States and our vital interests. If we're forced to turn back aggression, we will win and we will win decisively."

Addressing the forum, Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdullatif Al-Zayani said Lebanon needed to demonstrate that Hezbollah could change its behavior to mend a rift with Gulf states.

"We (can) extend support and try to find solutions in the future, but once it is demonstrated that Hezbollah can be changing its behavior,"

Al-Zayani said.



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Iranian navy seizes foreign ship in Gulf smuggling diesel – Iranian media  
France warns Iran against ‘sham’ nuclear negotiating stance

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## [Lebanese army stops boat carrying 90 people off coast](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1637442560975585500

Sat, 2021-11-20 00:11

BEIRUT: The Lebanese army said Saturday it had stopped a boatload of 91 people including Syrian and Palestinian refugees from departing Lebanon illegally.

Women and children were among the group intercepted Friday by a navy patrol off the coast of Qalamoun in northern Lebanon, the army said.

It said the boat almost sank in bad weather and that all on board were rescued and taken to shore.

The statement did not specify their intended destination.

The Republic of Cyprus, a European Union member just 160 kilometers (100 miles) away, is a common destination for would-be migrants trying to flee Lebanon, which is mired in economic and political crisis.

On Friday the Lebanese security forces said they had thwarted an attempt by 82 people to illegally cross by sea from the Lebanon into Europe.

The Internal Security Forces said they raided a "tourist resort" in the Qalamoun area on Thursday after being tipped off.

They found "82 people, including men, women, and children, who were planning to head to Europe via sea in an illegal manner for a fee of \$5,000 per person," without specify their nationality.

The number of people attempting to make deadly sea crossings out of Lebanon has surged since the country's financial crisis began in 2019.

Most of the would-be migrants are already refugees who fled the war in neighboring Syria, but an increasing number of Lebanese nationals are also attempting the perilous journey.

Around 80 percent of Lebanon's population is estimated to be living under the poverty line, as defined by international organizations, and the Lebanese pound has lost 90 percent of its value against the dollar on the black market.

Lebanon says it hosts more than 1.5 million Syrians, nearly a million of whom are registered as refugees with the UN.

Official estimates put the number of Palestinian refugees in the country at 180,000 but the actual number could be as high as 500,000.



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Iraqi migrants caught in border tensions in Belarus fly homeLebanon stops 82 people attempting sea crossing to Europe

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## Yemen's Joint Forces seize control of strategic areas in Hodeidah, Taiz

Sat, 2021-11-20 22:09

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen's Joint Forces on the country's western coast on Saturday seized control of strategic locations in the provinces of Taiz and Hodeidah, a local military official told Arab News.

Backed by air cover from the Arab coalition warplanes, the Joint Forces on Friday announced that they had seized control of Hays district in Hodeidah, including a strategic road that links the provinces of Ibb, Taiz and Hodeidah, shortly after launching an offensive to liberate strategic highlands south and east of the district.

On Saturday, some military units advanced into the Shamer area in Taiz's Maqbanah district as other forces announced the liberation of Al-Araf mountain, which overlooks the Al-Bareh district in Taiz.

"We are now in Shamer and are pushing to seize control of Maqbanah-Shamer," said a military official from the Joint Forces' Giants Brigades.

By seizing control of the main road that links Shamer with Maqbanah, the Joint Forces would effectively cut off Houthi supply routes west of Taiz, and would surround Industrial Al-Bareh, an area that hosts major factories in Taiz province.

Yemeni military experts and officials believe that if the anti-Houthi forces advanced further into Houthi-controlled territory west of Taiz, they could partially end the siege of Taiz from the west.

Officials said that they faced less resistance from the Houthis during fighting over the last two days, enabling them to rapidly advance in both provinces.

"Only a handful of Houthis put up fighting and resisted our advances," the Yemeni military official said.

Under the supervision of the Arab coalition, the Joint Forces on Nov. 12 announced a withdrawal from a large swath of land in the western province of Hodeidah on the Red Sea, including parts of Hodeidah city, to reinforce other battlefields and open new fronts across Yemen.

The Houthis have been greatly worn down by attrition tactics in the central

province of Marib by Yemeni government forces and the Arab coalition, which enabled the Joint Forces to score gains at quicker speed in Hodeidah and Taiz.

Yemeni military officials believe that the Houthis threw most of their military efforts behind their continuing offensive to seize control of the city of Marib, the government's bastion in the northern half of Yemen.

"These victories confuse and preoccupy Houthis and will lead to their depletion and later accelerate their defeat," Abdul Basit Al-Baher, a Yemen army officer in Taiz, told Arab News by telephone.

In the central province of Marib, Yemeni army troops and allied tribesmen liberated a number of locations after heavy fighting with the Houthis during the last 24 hours in Juba district.



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Arab coalition destroys 13 Houthi military targets in Sanaa, Saada, and Marib  
UK demands immediate release of UN staff detained by Houthis

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# US congressional delegation calls for end to political disagreements in Lebanon

Author:

Sat, 2021-11-20 21:42

BEIRUT: Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati stressed the government's commitment to implementing international resolutions and maintaining security and stability, as a US congressional delegation stressed the need to end political disagreements and focus on addressing the country's economic and social crises.

Mikati expressed his appreciation for the US standing by Lebanon's side and supporting the army. The delegation said it stood by Lebanon and supported the government.

President Michel Aoun told the visiting delegation that Lebanon had begun its journey out of the severe economic crisis by setting a program for negotiations with the International Monetary Fund and reforms of the financial and banking systems.

Mikati announced on Friday that he would soon call for a Cabinet session to discuss more than 100 items on the Cabinet's agenda.

Observers are counting on a meeting that will bring together Aoun, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and Mikati on the sidelines of Monday's Independence Day commemorations to make a breakthrough in the political crisis.

Labor Minister Mustafa Bayram said on Saturday: "There are positive signs that suggest that we are facing a real opportunity for an appropriate solution to hold Cabinet sessions again."

But he made it clear that he could not talk about Information Minister George Kordahi, who has angered Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia, with his comments on the war in Yemen and his refusal to resign over them.

"We support any solution that preserves Lebanon's ties, interests and sovereignty," said Bayram. "We learned that Kordahi is ready to do what is in Lebanon's best interest, through dialogue."

Hezbollah has thwarted Mikati's many attempts to hold Cabinet sessions, which have been suspended since Oct. 12, and several Hezbollah officials have stressed that the party stands firm in its conditions.

The party is refusing to make any efforts to resolve Lebanon's diplomatic and economic fallout with the Gulf states and insists on dismissing Judge Tarek Bitar, who is leading the investigation into the Beirut port blast.

Zafer Nasser, secretary-general of the Progressive Socialist Party headed by

Walid Jumblatt, told Arab News: "The party has no information about a close political solution to the crises that Lebanon is experiencing. While we agree on the need to separate government and judiciary, it seems that the Shiite duo, i.e. Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, are insisting that the Cabinet should not convene before Bitar is removed, since Hezbollah believes the investigations are leading to implicate it in the Beirut port blast, regardless of whether or not this is true."

Nasser said regional solutions were required to bridge the rift between Lebanon and the Gulf states, but that regional understandings had not yet been fruitful.

In a statement on Friday evening, Hezbollah's deputy secretary-general Sheikh Naim Qassem demanded finding a solution for the entire judicial system, meaning the removal of Judge Suhail Abboud as the head of the Supreme Judicial Council.

"The judicial scene in Lebanon is unhealthy," Qassem said. This has nothing to do with a certain incident or a specific judge. This is about an entire judicial system that overlaps in an unusual way, and it must be reconsidered – a solution must be found."

Sheikh Nabil Kaouk, head of Hezbollah's Executive Council, said Saturday there was a "real opportunity" to resolve the Cabinet impasse and that those concerned should not waste it.

Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdullah Bou Habib has traveled to Moscow where he plans to meet his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov on Monday.

The ministers are expected to discuss the issue of Syrian refugees and Russian aid, Russia's mediation to solve Lebanon's crises, and the possibility of employing Russian investments in the country.

Almarkazia news agency quoted a diplomatic source as saying: "Russia will consider the possibility of mediating between Lebanon and the Gulf states, but it would not like to take the issue upon itself and bear the consequences should its efforts fail."

Bou Habib will be receiving satellite images from the day of the Beirut port explosion, upon Lebanon's request. Russia's space agency Roscosmos sent the images to Lavrov so he could hand them over to Bou Habib.

Mikati is scheduled to head to the Vatican on Wednesday to meet Pope Francis.



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Lebanon PM says information minister will resign soon

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## [UK demands immediate release of UN staff detained by Houthis](#)

Sat, 2021-11-20 21:26

LONDON: The British ambassador to Yemen called on the Houthis to immediately release two Yemeni UN employees who are being detained by the militia.

“The UK is alarmed by reports of detention of UN staff in Yemen,” Richard Oppenheim said on Saturday.

“Aid workers must be allowed to do their work for the people of Yemen,” the

ambassador said.

One of the Yemeni men detained by the Houthis works for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and the other works for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. They were detained on Nov. 7 and Nov. 5 respectively.

UN officials were given assurances by senior Houthi officials that the men would be released, spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday. However, they are still being detained.

Oppenheim urged the Houthis to abide by international law and called the detention of the UN employees “unacceptable.”



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