

[Israel launches two missiles at southern Damascus building -Syrian state TV](#)

Wed, 2021-11-17 03:13

CAIRO: Israel launched two missiles targeting an empty building in southern Damascus from the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, Syrian state TV said early on Wednesday.

It said one of the missiles was shot down and there were no losses. There was no immediate confirmation from Israel on the strike.



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Israeli military complicit as settler violence hits record-high, UN experts say
Palestinians demand Israel release prisoner on 112-day hunger strike

[Biden, Xi discuss how to 'align' stances on Iran nuclear issue](#)

Author:

Reuters

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1637097706911134300

Tue, 2021-11-16 00:25

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping talked about how they might harmonize their positions ahead of the Nov. 29 resumption of indirect US-Iranian talks on reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, a top US official said on Tuesday.

Officials from Iran and the six nations that struck the pact – Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States – will meet in Vienna to see if Tehran and Washington can agree to resume compliance with the deal under which Iran curbed its nuclear program to gain relief from US, EU and UN sanctions.

In 2018 then-President Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the pact among the major powers known as the P5+1 and Iran and restored harsh US sanctions, prompting Tehran to begin violating its nuclear restrictions about a year later.

“The two presidents had the chance to talk about how we can align our perspectives heading into that (Nov. 29) meeting so that the P5+1 is united in dealing with Iran and trying to pave the way for a return to the (deal),” White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said in a virtual think tank appearance.

The US-Iranian talks are indirect, with officials from the other nations shuttling between them, because Iran refuses direct contact with US officials.

While China favors reviving the agreement, it has tended to place the onus on the United States, rather than Iran, blaming Washington for having abandoned the deal and giving Tehran an economic lifeline by buying Iranian oil despite US sanctions.



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[US President Joe Biden](#)

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Lack of contact from Iran govt 'astonishing': UN nuclear watchdogUK urges Iran to back plan to revive nuclear deal

[The return of Syrian refugees key topic in Cavusoglu's talks in Lebanon](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-11-16 23:43

BEIRUT: Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu called for support for the Lebanese government in overcoming the country's crises and holding parliamentary elections at a press conference in Beirut on Tuesday.

Cavusoglu stressed that "the Lebanese people should not have to pay the price of regional bargains," referring to the issue of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. "Lebanon is waiting for urgent solutions to its problems."

Cavusoglu was speaking alongside his Lebanese counterpart Abdallah Bou Habib, after holding talks with President Michel Aoun, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and Prime Minister Najib Mikati.

He also devoted part of his visit to highlighting Turkey's presence in Lebanon through several development projects funded by Ankara.

Cavusoglu was on his fourth visit to Lebanon since 2016.

He said he was in Beirut to "stress Turkey's support for Lebanon, as well as to invite (Prime Minister) Mikati to visit Turkey and make preliminary arrangements for the visit.

"We discussed how to develop tourism and energy fields, especially since the Lebanese people's top destination is Turkey and the Turkish people are known for how much they love Lebanon."

The minister added: "We discussed regional issues, since our countries are the most affected by the Syrian crisis; the brotherly Lebanese people should not have to pay the price of regional bargains."

The Lebanese presidency's media office noted that Aoun told the Turkish official that he welcomed "any assistance that Turkey can provide to ease the return of Syrian refugees to their homes, most of which have become safe, in terms of pressuring the international community to provide aid to refugees inside Syria, to encourage return."

Aoun said he supported "coordinating regional efforts to that end with Turkey, Jordan and Iraq" and called for "increasing the share of Turkey's imports of Lebanese products, especially since the trade balance is currently tilting in Turkey's favor."

The president also raised "a request to Turkey to help return the Maronite Cypriots to their villages in the northern part of Cyprus, after the delay that occurred for reasons related to logistics and the COVID-19 pandemic."

On the parliamentary elections scheduled for next March, Cavusoglu stressed the need to hold them on time.

"We have always given importance to the sovereignty, independence and security of Lebanon and provided the necessary support after the explosions in Beirut and Akkar," Cavusoglu said. "We also support the army and security forces fighting for Lebanon's stability and security."

He added: "We renewed our support by extending (commitment to) the UN Interim Force in Lebanon for a year, and we have a unit working in this regard."

Bou Habib stated he wished Turkey "to open its markets for the export of Lebanese products."

The minister added that Lebanon "is keen on maintaining good relations with all countries and highly appreciates the Turkish support and aid, as well as its participation as a country within the UNIFIL."

He said: “We, and the Turkish foreign minister, signed a cooperation agreement to enhance rapprochement between the two ministries and are working on a memorandum of understanding in other areas.”

Bou Habib noted that “Lebanon and Turkey are suffering from the burden of Syrian refugee issue.”

He called for “the necessity of unifying efforts to tackle the refugees’ issue and asking the international community to share the burden fairly among them or work on their return to their country.”



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6 Syrian refugees arrested in Lebanon at risk of deportation Unable to bear economic pressures in Lebanon, Syrian refugees head back home

[How can Iraq's destructive pro-Iran militias be tamed?](#)

Tue, 2021-11-16 22:53

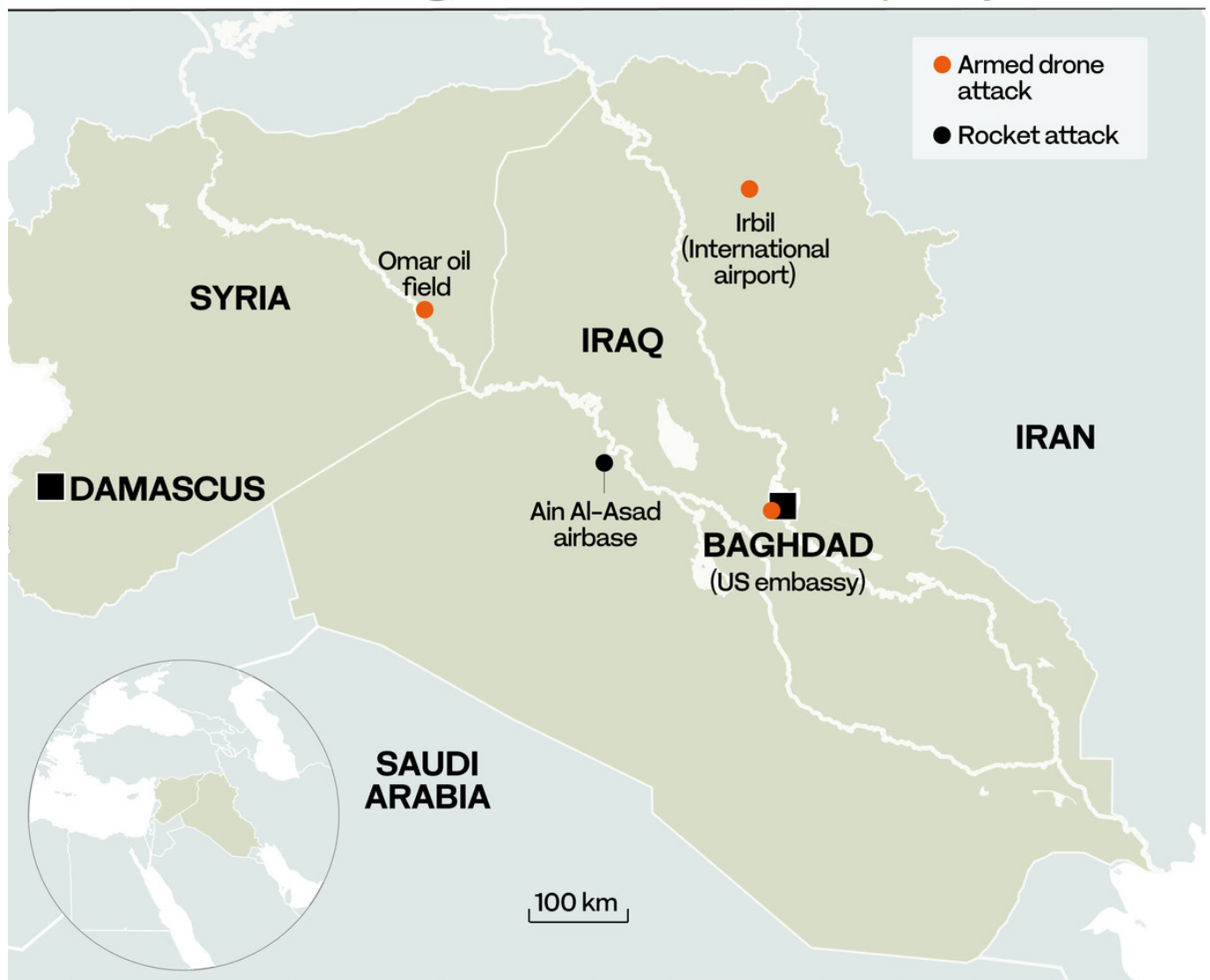
IRBIL, IRAQI KURDISTAN: Iran-backed Iraqi militias have rejected the results of Iraq's October parliamentary election, in which their political wings performed very poorly, and elements among them may well have been behind the attempt on Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi's life earlier this month.

But can anything be done on a practical level about the malignant menace of Iraq's pro-Iran militias?

For years now, there have been widespread fears that the Iran-backed elements of Hashd Al-Shaabi (or Popular Mobilization Forces) have amassed enough fighters and weaponry to outgun the Iraqi Security Forces and pose a Hezbollah-style threat to the Iraqi government and state.

FINGERPRINTS OF PRO-IRAN MILITIAS

Where the US has been targeted in recent months in Iraq and Syria



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That could lead to Iraq's "Lebanonization" – a situation whereby a powerful well-armed Iranian proxy, borrowing from Hezbollah's playbook, forcibly imposes its will on the country at Tehran's behest.

How likely is such an outcome in today's Iraq, where powerful, armed

rejectionist elements are challenging the outcome of an election that was monitored by the UN and even praised by the Security Council?

“The militias are a serious threat, but Iraq’s government and security forces are stronger – in contrast with Lebanon and Hezbollah,” David Pollock, Bernstein Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, told Arab News.

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Why Lebanon’s Iran-backed Hezbollah is unlikely to disarm voluntarily. [Click here to read.](#)



Even so, tackling the militias could prove challenging, even if they are not more militarily powerful than the state. Consequently, Baghdad might need foreign backing. But who could help?

The US has retained a small troop presence in Iraq as part of the multinational coalition it has led against Daesh.

However, under an agreement with the Iraqi government, those troops must only serve as advisers and trainers for Iraqi and Kurdish security forces from the end of this year.

MUSTAFA AL-KADHIMI IRAQI PRIME MINISTER

NATO is taking on a more active mission in Iraq, but that will also be a non-combat training mission to help Iraqi forces tackle Daesh and prevent its resurgence.



- Born in Baghdad in 1967. He studied law in Iraq but left for Europe to escape the dictator Saddam Hussein, working as an opposition journalist.

- Returned to Iraq after the US-led 2003 invasion toppled Hussein, working as a human rights advocate.

- Handpicked by then PM Haider Al-Abadi in 2016 to head the National Intelligence Service (INIS).

- Became prime minister in May 2020.

- Survived an assassination attempt on Nov. 7, 2021.

ARABNEWS

“The main responsibility lies inside Iraq, not foreign help. But friendly powers do support Iraq, and US forces will maintain that mission, just with a new title, after this year,” Pollock said.

“Arab governments also should contribute more to Iraq’s economy and public life, to balance Iran’s interference via its militias. The trend is actually positive in the past two years, and election results largely reinforce that.”

Al-Kadhimi has made substantial diplomatic efforts to foster closer ties between Iraq and other Arab countries during his short time in office. He has established improved links with Egypt and Jordan, resulting in a state visit to Iraq by Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi over the summer, the first such trip by an Egyptian leader to Iraq in 30 years.

The general consensus is that closer economic and political ties with these Arab countries, along with the Arab Gulf countries, could, over time, help reduce Tehran’s heavy-handed influence over Iraqi affairs.

Joel Wing, author of the Musings on Iraq website, says comparisons between Lebanon and Iraq are premature.



A demonstrator lifts a national flag by burning tyres amid clashes between Iraqi anti-government protesters and supporters of firebrand Shiite cleric Muqtada Sadr. (AFP/File Photo)

“In Iraq, every group wants to be part of the state so that it can exploit the oil money,” he told Arab News.

To be sure, the Iraqi Shiite militias are not a singular monolith eager to do Iran’s bidding in the country. The influential Iraqi Shiite leader Muqtada Al-Sadr, for example, has often opposed Iran’s influence in the country and has called for disbanding and disarming of militias outside of state control.

His alliance was victorious in the election and won far more seats in parliament than the Iran-backed political blocs.

Wing pointed out that the Sadrists and the Iran-backed factions had already fought each other in the past.

“The Sadrists and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq had a long-running battle for control of southern Iraq during the US occupation,” he said.

“The 2008 Charge of Knights (battle of Basra) operation was Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki’s attempt to take out his rival Muqtada Al-Sadr. So, you have precedent for Shiite parties fighting each other already.”

Wing also noted that the militias had been running amok in Iraq for almost 20

years. "Militias have had the power to largely do as they please since 2003. That's because they were part of, and supported by, the government. That doesn't look to be changing anytime soon," he told Arab News.



Iraqi Shiite members of the Asaib Ahl Al-Haq group (The League of the Righteous) units gather in the southern city of Basra. (AFP/File Photo)

Nevertheless, Wing believes that foreign support of the Baghdad government and security forces remains important for the future of Iraq.

"The role the West can play is to continue to support the Iraqi government and security forces," he said.

"This is not a perfect formula because there are all kinds of problems with both, but to step back would give the pro-Iran forces even more sway in the country."

Emily Hawthorne, Stratfor's senior Middle East and North Africa analyst at RANE, told Arab News that there appears to be no sign that Iraq's militias are "setting aside their aggressive tactics despite pressure from the government."

"But continued violence will mean they have to tolerate broader, popular backlash against their actions, negatively impacting their electoral popularity," she said.

PRO-IRAN GROUPS IN IRAQ

Paramilitary:

- * Hashd Al-Shaabi
- * Asaib Ahl Al-Haq
- * Kataib Hezbollah
- * Kataib Sayyid Al-Shuhada

Political:

- * Fatah (Conquest) Alliance
- * Al-Sadiqoun

Similar to Wing and Pollock, Hawthorne doubts that Iraq is on the verge of becoming another Lebanon.

“Both the Lebanese and Iraqi governments struggle to exert full control over state authority,” she said.

“But a big difference between Iraq and Lebanon is the Iraqi federal armed forces are more cohesive, well-armed, and well-trained compared with the array of non-state militias operating in the country. Whereas in Lebanon, Hezbollah is heavily armed and could challenge Lebanese federal forces if it chose.”

Hawthorne does not rule out the possibility of an intra-Shiite civil war in Iraq, but says it is “still more likely to play out in the political realm than in terms of a violent conflict in the streets.”

She believes that while Iraq will have to take the lead in any initiative to combat the militias, foreign assistance is still a very important factor.

“It is true that Baghdad will mostly be on its own in its struggle with the Iran-backed militias for control,” Hawthorne told Arab News.

“But the international support that the Iraqi government has, and which the militias lack, does help Baghdad maintain the financial and military aid that will help the federal government maintain the upper hand.”



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Why Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah is unlikely to disarm voluntarily Militia
'tried to murder Iraqi PM with Iranian-made drones'

[El-Sisi, Putin discuss nuclear plant, industrial zone](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-11-16 21:32

CAIRO: Egypt's President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin discussed by phone the latest developments regarding construction of the El-Dabaa nuclear power plant and a Russian industrial zone east of Port Said.

The nuclear plant will be Egypt's first, with capacity of 4,800 megawatts, following the signing of an agreement with Russian company Rosatom for its

construction in the city of El-Dabaa on the shores of the Mediterranean. The industrial zone will cover 5 million square meters and aim to attract Russian investments and industries.

Bassam Rady, spokesman for Egypt's presidency, said El-Sisi and Putin discussed economic, industrial and energy cooperation, as well as regional and international developments.

Rady added that Putin stressed Russia's keenness to continue promoting bilateral cooperation, and the importance he attaches to regular consultations with El-Sisi on regional and international issues. Putin expressed his appreciation for Egypt's mediating role in regional crises.



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Macron, Putin agree on 'de-escalation' of Belarus/Poland crisis: FranceWater is key to Egyptian national security, says El-Sisi