

Blast at US outpost in Syria, no American injuries – US officials

Wed, 2021-10-20 23:51

WASHINGTON: A US outpost in southern Syria was attacked on Wednesday, but there were no reports of any American casualties from the blast, US officials told Reuters.

The officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said it was too early to say who was responsible for the attack.

One of the officials said it was believed to have been a drone attack.

The garrison, known as Tanf, is located in a strategic area near Syria's Tanf border crossing with Iraq and Jordan.

The garrison was first set up when Islamic State fighters controlled eastern Syria bordering Iraq but since the militants were driven out, it is seen as part of the larger US strategy to contain Iran's military reach in the region.

Tanf is the only position with a significant US military presence in Syria outside the Kurdish-controlled north.

While it is not common for attacks on the US troops at the outpost, Iranian-backed forces have frequently attacked American troops with drones and rockets in eastern Syria and Iraq



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New violence erupts in Syria with 14 killed in Damascus bus bombing
Syrian army shelling kills at least 11 civilians

[Yemen counters Houthi attacks in Shabwa province](#)

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Wed, 2021-10-20 23:34

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen's army troops and allied tribesmen on Wednesday launched counterattacks in the southern province of Shabwa with the aim of liberating three strategic areas that the Iran-backed Houthis captured during the past couple of weeks.

Local officials said hundreds of Yemeni troops attacked Houthis in the district of Bayhan and managed to recapture a military base along with a large swathe of land in the district after killing and capturing dozens of rebels.

Rashad Al-Mekhlafi, a military official at Yemen's Armed Forces Guidance Department, told Arab News on Wednesday that military units from Shabwa's capital Attaq, Abyan province, along with security forces also took part in the offensive in Shabwa.

"This is a well-prepared military offensive," Al-Mekhlafi said. "There are great advances for the government forces."

After months of relentless attacks on government forces, the Houthis have recently managed to seize control of three areas in Shabwa and the besieged Abedia district in the province of Marib. The advancement put them closer to oil and gas fields and Marib city, the main goal of their continuing offensive in the province.

In Marib, dozens of combatants were killed in fierce fighting between government forces and the Houthis outside the city of Marib as the Arab coalition intensified airstrikes in the province.

Al-Mekhlafi said that at least three Houthi field leaders were killed in fighting with government forces or in the coalition's airstrikes. Several army officers and tribesmen were also killed in the fighting.

The focus of Wednesday's fighting was on the Juba and Hareb districts, south of Marib city, where government forces pushed to expel the Houthis from areas they controlled during their latest incursions.

Yemeni Prime Minister Maen Abdul Malik pledged full support to army troops and tribesmen who have fought off relentless Houthi attacks in Marib. He also urged international aid organizations to help displaced people and civilians

who come under Houthi missiles, drones, and ground strikes in Marib province. The official Yemen News Agency (SABA) reported that the prime minister called the governor of Marib, Sultan Al-Arada, to express the government's support with Marib's authorities in their battles against Houthis. He also praised their handling of the desperate humanitarian situation in the city of Marib, which hosts more than 2 million internally displaced people. Abdul Malik accused the Houthis of committing genocides in Abedia and other areas in the province. The Yemeni prime minister vowed to throw full weight behind government forces in order to win the "existential" battle in Marib. Thousands of combatants and civilians have been killed in Marib province since early this year when the Houthis resumed a major military offensive to control Marib city, the government's last stronghold in the northern half of the country.



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Saudi border patrols arrest 150 suspected drug smugglers along Yemen border
Blinken says Yemen conflict is top US foreign policy priority

UN Security Council condemns Houthi violations in Yemen, Saudi Arabia

Wed, 2021-10-20 23:17

LONDON: The UN Security Council on Wednesday condemned the threat posed by the Iran-backed Houthi militia to navigation in the Red Sea and its increasing attacks on commercial ships off the coast of Yemen. The Security Council called on the Houthis to reduce their military escalation in Marib, lift its blockade on nearby Abedia, and for an immediate nationwide cease-fire.

The Houthi militia has stepped up its offensive to take control of the strategic city of Marib in recent weeks, following a lull in September. The UN Security Council also condemned the Houthis' recruitment and exploitation of children in the conflict, some of whom are subjected to sexual abuse

The top UN body also expressed its concern about the faltering peace efforts in Yemen and called on all parties to constructively implement the Riyadh Agreement.

It said it welcomes and supports the Saudi initiative to end the war in Yemen and expressed its full support for the efforts of UN envoy to Yemen Hans Grundberg, calling on all parties to cooperate with him without preconditions.

The Security Council also condemned the Houthis' attempts to target Abha International Airport in Saudi Arabia using explosive-laden drones. Member countries also implicitly warned the Houthi militia against using Hodeidah port for military purposes, and renewed its warning of the risk posed by the lack of maintenance of a floating oil tanker moored in the Red Sea. They reminded the Houthis of their responsibility for the Safer tanker. The Security Council stressed its full commitment to the unity, sovereignty and independence of Yemen, and emphasized the need to respect the arms embargo on Yemen.

It also expressed its support for the return of the Yemeni government to the interim capital, Aden, while also condemning an assassination attempt on the governor of Aden and the Yemeni minister of agriculture on Oct. 10.

Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the UN Abdallah Al-Mouallimi welcomed the Security Council statement and said it constitutes a strong condemnation of the Houthi militia, Al Arabiya reported.

He also welcomed the statement on Abha airport and said he hoped that the UN envoy to Yemen has benefited from the council's statement.



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Blinken says Yemen conflict is top US foreign policy priority
Yemen counters Houthi attacks in Shabwa province

[US mediator and Lebanese officials discuss future of border talks with Israel](#)

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BEIRUT: Amos Hochstein, the US envoy appointed by the Biden administration this month to mediate Lebanon's maritime border dispute with Israel, held talks on Wednesday with Lebanese President Michel Aoun, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and Prime Minister Najib Mikati on the future of the negotiations.

Aoun expressed "Lebanon's readiness to continue to cooperate positively" with the process. However, the points of contention remain.

"The administration of President Joe Biden is ready to help Lebanon and Israel find a mutually acceptable solution to their common maritime borders," the State Department said.

Hochstein, who is also the State Department's senior adviser for energy security, also met Foreign Minister Abdullah Bou Habib, Energy Minister Walid Fayyad and army commander Gen. Joseph Aoun.

The speaker's office said Berri's discussion with Hochstein focused on "multiple files, particularly the demarcation of the maritime and land border between Lebanon and occupied Palestine. The framework agreement announced in October last year was confirmed."

The US administration's framework agreement for talks, which was implemented a year ago by Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs David Schenker, includes two demarcation zones, for land and maritime borders. In accordance with the agreement, the US acts as mediator at the request of both sides.

Lebanon has been seen as struggling with the demarcation of its maritime borders. After submitting a border proposal to the UN in 2011, Lebanese officials decided that it was based on mistaken estimates and demanded an additional 1,430 square kilometers, an area that includes part of Israel's Karish gas field. The Israelis oppose this.

Berri told Hochstein: "We have a new opportunity to resume negotiations in the southern Lebanese town of Naqoura, thanks to the new US efforts in this context."

He also highlighted "the importance of excluding Lebanon from the sanctions of Caesar's law in the topics of piping Egyptian gas and electricity from Jordan through Syria to Lebanon." Lebanon has been experiencing widespread power outages as a result of fuel shortages amid a crippling economic crisis. The Caesar Act is US legislation sanctioning the Syrian government for war crimes against the Syrian people.

"The US envoy conveyed to Berri an optimistic view about positive progress being achieved in what relates to these matters," the speaker's office said. Oil industry governance expert Diana Al-Qaisi told Arab News: "The US mediator has reached out to the Egyptian minister of electricity regarding redirecting the Egyptian gas into Lebanon."

She added that Hochstein's talks in Lebanon focused on diplomacy and how best to facilitate negotiations between Lebanon and Israel on their maritime border to agree a mutually acceptable solution, though Lebanon continues to stand firm in its demands.

Lebanese officials have yet to agree a strategy for the next phase of negotiations and their starting point for talks on the border.

The focus of Lebanese authorities then shifted on Wednesday to the nation's financial crisis and a forensic audit of Banque du Liban, the country's central bank. President Aoun met a delegation from the company Alvarez and Marsal, who informed him that the audit of the bank's accounts was due to begin on Thursday morning. Aoun urged them to work quickly due to the urgency of the task.

On Tuesday, the International Monetary Fund opened negotiations with the Lebanese government to agree a strategy to begin to address the country's insolvency.

Jihad Azour, director of the IMF's Middle East and Central Asia department, stressed the need to address the losses faced by the financial sector and determine an accurate picture of the current financial situation in the country.

"Last time we had a full update of the situation was August 2020, before the resignation of the previous government, therefore many things have happened and we need to update the numbers and have a new baseline," he said.





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Fueling car in Lebanon now more than salary
Lebanon elite united against Beirut port blast probe seen as survival threat

[Egypt: 19 killed in truck-microbus collision outside Cairo](#)

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CAIRO: A head-on vehicle collision Wednesday left at least 19 people dead and one other injured just outside the Egyptian capital of Cairo, state-run media said.

The Al-Ahram daily reported the crash took place when a passenger microbus collided with a truck on a highway that links Cairo's outskirts on the banks of the Nile River.

Another state-run daily, Akhbar el-Yom said the truck crossed to the wrong side of the highway and collided head-on with the microbus.

Footage circulating online purported to show bodies lying on the roadside as ambulances rushed to pick up casualties.

Traffic accidents kill thousands every year in Egypt, which has a poor transportation safety record. Crashes are mostly caused by speeding, bad roads or poor enforcement of traffic laws.

Last month, a bus overturned on a highway linking Cairo with the city of Suez, killing at least 12 people and injuring 30 others.

In April, a bus overturned while trying to pass a truck on a highway in the southern province of Assiut, leaving at least 21 people dead and three others injured.

Egypt's official statistics agency says around 10,000 road accidents took place in 2019, the most recent year for which statistics are available, leaving over 3,480 dead. In 2018, there were 8,480 car accidents, causing over 3,080 deaths.



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