

Houthis under fire for killing displaced civilians in Marib

Author:

Mon, 2021-10-04 22:35

AL-MUKALLA: Yemeni government officials, local and international activists and rights groups and western diplomats on Monday strongly condemned the Houthi shelling of a residential area in the central city of Marib that killed and wounded more than three dozen civilians.

On Sunday, three ballistic missiles fired by the Iran-backed Houthis hit the city of Marib, killing two children and wounding more than 30 people.

One of the three missiles landed in a house in Al-Rawada neighborhood hosting thousands of internally displaced people, flattening the building and killing Ghazlan Faisal Al-Bareq and her brother Rada and critically wounding their parents.

The family comes from the northern province of Amran, sheltering in Marib like thousands of Yemenis who fled the fighting and Houthi repression.

Graphic images taken by local journalists show the headless and burnt Ghazlan lying in a bed in a local hospital in Marib, with several other badly wounded children crying as they receive medication.

The US embassy in Yemen strongly condemned the “terrible” attack by the Houthis and demanded the militias work on achieving peace in Yemen.

“The Houthis only confirm their savagery with such attacks. They must abandon this aggression against their fellow Yemenis and seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict,” Cathy Westley, charge d’affaires for the US embassy to Yemen, said in a brief statement.

Yemeni officials said that the latest deadly strike by the Houthis showed the rebels seeking to obstruct peace efforts to end the war, and vowed to punish them for murdering civilians.

Yemen’s Vice President Ali Mohsen Ahmer on Monday accused the Houthis of “indifferently” snubbing calls and diplomatic activities to put an end to the conflict in Yemen and intensifying their deadly strikes on heavily populated civilian areas.

“Day after day, the terrorist militias prove to the Yemeni people, the region and the world their disregard for the blood of Yemenis and their rejection of everything that would lead to ending the bloodshed,” the official news agency SABA quoted the vice president as saying.

Similarly, Yemeni human rights activists and local rights groups have turned to social media and local press to voice their anger over the shelling, calling for greater pressure on the Houthis and blasting the rebels for

violating international laws.

"The international community, the UN, and the (UN Yemen) envoy's office are more concerned than ever to intensify pressure on the Houthi militia to immediately stop launching any attacks on civilian objects," said Mutahar Al-Badhiji, executive director of the Yemeni Coalition to Monitor Human Rights Violations.

Al-Badhiji told Arab News said that his organization has recorded the deaths of hundreds of civilians in Marib during the past seven years due to Houthi drone and missile strikes or land mines planted by the militia.

His organization said in a report released last week that land mines, missiles, explosive-laden and artillery rounds fired by the Houthis at central Marib had killed 440 civilians, including 61 children and 37 women, and wounded 914 civilians, including 124 children and 73 women, from December 2014 to June this year. During this period, the Houthis had fired 871 missiles, 119 projectiles and 44 exploding drones at 11 districts in Marib province.

"These are gross violations of human rights and international laws, and war crimes," Al-Badhiji said.

International rights and aid organizations also expressed concerns about the growing number of civilian casualties during the conflict, urging warring factions to protect civilians.

"Alarming reports from Marib, Yemen, where an attack on a neighborhood killed 2 children, injuring dozens others. Warring parties are duty bound to protect civilians. We need an end to fighting in Marib and across all Yemen," Jan Egeland, secretary-general of the Norwegian Refugee Council, said on Twitter.



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Yemen government troops make new advances in Jouf province Houthis reject calls for truce, intensify attacks on Marib

[Lavrov, Shoukry discuss solutions to regional crises in Moscow](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-10-04 20:53

CAIRO: Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, have discussed developments in several regional issues, including the Renaissance Dam project and the crises in Libya and Syria, at a meeting in Moscow.

Shoukry said the talks covered efforts to end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and strengthening the two-state solution, and sponsoring all means to reach a permanent, comprehensive and just solution to the Palestinian

issue that guarantees the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

“I thank Russia for the support that Egypt has received from its side to address this issue in the (UN) Security Council, and we look forward to cooperating with Moscow on this issue, and reaching a binding legal solution that guarantees the rights of all parties, away from any unilateral policies inconsistent with the policies of international law,” Shoukry said during a press conference with Lavrov in the Russian capital.

“We will continue to closely coordinate on this matter, including the issue of Palestinian national reconciliation, in which Egypt plays the main role in order to achieve Palestinian unity, in addition to working to fulfill the interests of the brotherly Palestinian people,” Shoukry said.

He expressed his appreciation for the ministerial meetings between Cairo and Moscow and the holding of the joint commercial committee to promote the common interests of both parties, whether in the Dabaa nuclear plant or in promoting tourism.

“We look forward to continuing work to activate all these areas, and for the return of trade exchange to its levels, which was affected by the pandemic, but there is still fruitful cooperation as well as searching for more areas that strengthen relations,” Shoukry continued.

Shoukry added that he and his Russian counterpart discussed ways to maintain stability and territorial integrity in Libya. The foreign minister said they covered activating the plan approved during the meetings of the Libyan National Forum, the importance of holding presidential and legislative elections on Dec. 24, and the need to maintain a ceasefire and the exit of all foreign forces from Libyan territory.

“We will continue to provide all care and support to achieve these goals so that the Libyan institutions regain their full authority, and to preserve the sovereignty of the Libyan territories, stability and security, and the complete elimination of terrorist organizations, which operate and use the Libyan territories as a haven to influence the stability of Libya and the stability of neighboring countries and the stability of the Sahel and Sahara region,” Shoukry added.

Shoukry said that he briefed his Russian counterpart on the latest developments regarding the Renaissance Dam issue against the background of the presidential statement issued by the UN Security Council, expressing his thanks to Moscow for the support that Egypt received in addressing this issue with the UNSC.

Shoukry expressed his aspiration to continue cooperation between the two countries – given the existential nature of this issue for the future of Egypt – and the importance of urgently reaching an agreement through the presidency of the African Union.

The ministers also discussed the crisis in Syria and possible solutions that

align with the decisions of international legitimacy.

Shoukry said: "With regard to my meeting with Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Miqdad on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, it was important for this meeting to take place in light of what the Syrian crisis has reached," stressing Egypt's keenness to help Syria out of its crisis.

The ministers also discussed the crisis in Syria and possible solutions that align with the decisions of international legitimacy.

"Cairo considers Syria an integral part of the Arab domain and Arab national security, and historically the Egyptian-Syrian relations have always been of importance at the bilateral level, in addition to being one of the pillars of cooperation and coordination and support for maintaining Arab national security," Shoukry added.

He said that Egypt will work with Syria to take measures that preserve the security and territorial integrity of the country.

"We await the measures that the Syrian government may take within the framework of the political solution in Syria, as well as activating the course of the constitutional committee's discussions and taking into account the humanitarian situation in Syria to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people and meet their needs."

Lavrov stressed the need to provide aid to the Syrians to overcome the repercussions of the decade-long crisis, and work to reach a political settlement on the basis of UNSC resolutions.

Lavrov added that the terror threat in the Idlib region remains high, and that the terrorist groups stationed there are attacking the units of the Syrian army as well as Russian forces.



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New Egyptian ambassador to Ethiopia presents his credentials
Egypt prevents students from entering universities without coronavirus vaccination certificate

[Libya's fate in the balance as UN-led peace efforts sputter](#)

Mon, 2021-10-04 18:18

DUBAI: Since dictator Muammar Gaddafi was toppled from power in 2011, Libya has been mired in chaos. A decade on from the protests that led to his downfall, the oil-rich country is wracked by political instability, violence, economic chaos, and, since last year, an explosion in COVID-19 infections.

On Sept. 21, Libya's eastern-based parliament passed a vote of no confidence in the country's Government of National Unity, which was installed earlier this year. The provisional body, established to replace two rival

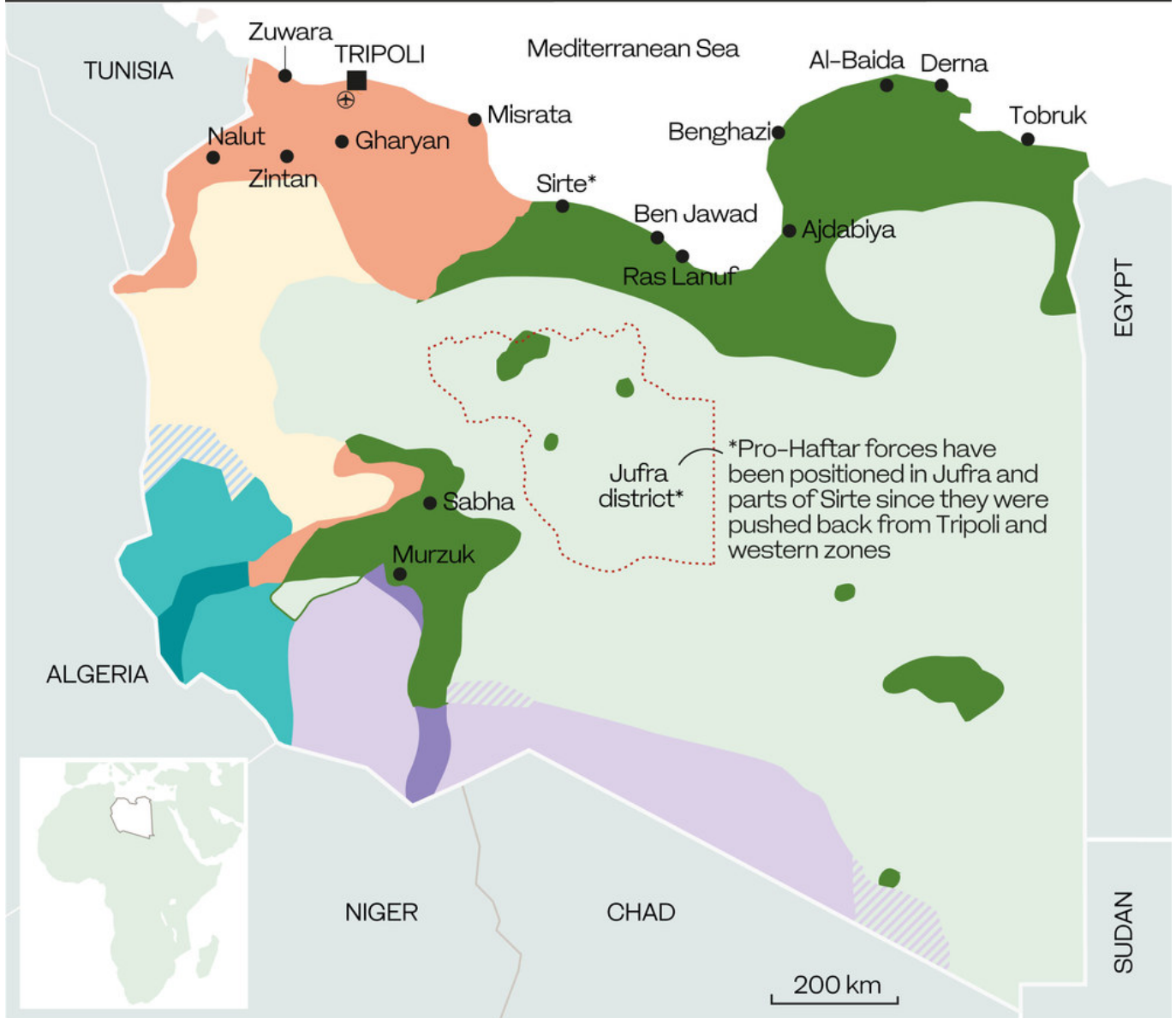
administrations that had long fought each other, is supposed to carry the country into national elections scheduled for December 24.

Thus, just as Libya seemed to be making progress toward peace and stability, it again risks sliding into civil war, with fierce clashes breaking out between rival factions in the capital Tripoli.

Foreign involvement is arguably the main reason why Libya has been unable to move on and establish a unified, stable administration. By sponsoring their preferred side in the conflict, experts say external actors have periodically added fuel to the fire.

FORCES IN LIBYA

An interim govt. is running the country until elections in December



Controls territory

Has influence (sparsely populated area)

- Abdul Hamid Dbeibah's Government of National Unity (GNU) and allies
- Rival Libyan National Army (LNA), led by Khalifa Haftar, and allies
- Tuareg militia
- Tubu tribal militia

Source: Risk Intelligence, AFP bureaus as of June 21, 2021

ARAB NEWS

"The main problem that stands against Libya's stability is foreign interference and the existence of foreign forces and mercenaries fighting on its soil," Dalia Al-Aqidi, a senior fellow at the Center for Security Policy in Washington, D.C., told Arab News.

"In a country like Libya, achieving security and political stability requires the unity of the different major political players. However, when you have local politicians with foreign agendas and loyalties, it makes it difficult

to unite around one shared goal.”

Indeed, experts believe Libya has become little more than a playground for competing foreign interests, with the spoils of war – oil, arms contracts, and strategic influence – up for grabs.

“The extra energy to conquer others has come from foreign support and it is this external support for different groups, patrons, and clients that has kept the conflict going, as has the war economy of smuggling, corruption, bribery, protection rackets, control of critical infrastructures like airports and seaports and oil terminals,” Jonathan Winer, a scholar at the Middle East Institute and a former US special envoy for Libya, told Arab News.

The only way such a corrupt and factious system is replaced, says Winer, is with a “unified civilian government that divides up the spoils in a way that is inclusive and provides something for (nearly) everyone.”



Libyan demonstrators lift placards and national flags during a rally in Martyrs Square in the capital Tripoli, to protest the deteriorating political, security, and living conditions in the country, on October 2, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

Things did not look so bleak for Libya when Gaddafi fell. Inspired by events in neighboring Tunisia and Egypt, young Libyans took to the streets in Feb. 2011 demanding an end to his 42-year rule. But when his security forces launched a deadly crackdown, the movement grew into an armed revolt.

Fearing the regime would slaughter the protesters to maintain its grip on power, the US, France, and Britain sent warplanes to support the uprising. As the conflict turned against him, Gaddafi fled Tripoli but was soon captured

and killed by rebels on Oct. 20, 2011.

In Aug. 2012, the rebel-led National Transitional Council handed power to an authority known as the General National Congress, which was given an 18-month mandate to establish a democratic constitution.

Instability persisted, however, with a string of major terrorist attacks targeting foreign diplomatic missions. In May 2012, an assault on the US consulate in Libya's eastern city of Benghazi left US ambassador Chris Stevens and three American staff dead.

Responding to the threat, a Libyan-American military officer Khalifa Haftar launched an offensive against armed groups in Benghazi in May 2014. He named his forces the Libyan National Army and soon won the backing of Arab countries that saw him as their best possible partner in curbing the spread of political Islam, most notably the Muslim Brotherhood.

Although they have both supported UN mediation efforts in Libya, France and Russia have also offered Haftar their backing, the latter allegedly green-lighting the use of mercenaries, a claim that Moscow denies.



Libyan Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh (L) gives a press conference; Libyan General Khalifa Haftar (R) writing on a paper at his desk in Benghazi. (AFP/File Photos)

Elections were held in June 2014, producing the eastern-based parliament, or the House of Representatives (HoR), dominated by anti-Islamists. However, in August that year, Islamist militias responded to the result by storming Tripoli and restoring the GNC to power. The Haftar-affiliated HoR took refuge in the city of Tobruk.

As a result, Libya was left with two governments and two parliaments.

In Dec. 2015, after months of talks and international pressure, the rival parliaments signed an accord in Morocco establishing a Government of National Accord. In March 2016, GNA chief Fayeze Al-Sarraj arrived in Tripoli to install the new administration.

However, the HoR did not hold a vote of confidence on the new government and Haftar refused to recognize it.

Then, in Jan. 2019, Haftar launched an offensive into oil-rich southern Libya, seizing the region's capital, Sabha, and one of the country's main oilfields. In April, he ordered his forces to advance on Tripoli. By the summer, however, with Turkey deploying troops to defend the Tripoli administration, the two sides had reached a stalemate.

What had begun as a popular uprising had degenerated into a proxy war, predominantly centered around competing Turkish and Russian interests in the region.

A UN-brokered ceasefire deal was finally reached in Geneva on Oct. 23, 2020, followed by an agreement in Tunis on holding both parliamentary and presidential elections in December this year.



Fayeze Al-Sarraj, former Libyan Prime Minister (GNA) speaking in 2019.
(AFP/File Photo)

The Government of National Unity, which is headed by Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, was approved by lawmakers on March 10, 2021.

However, on September 9, Aguila Saleh, the parliament speaker, ratified a law governing the presidential election that was seen as bypassing due process and favoring Haftar. Subsequently, parliament passed the aforementioned no-confidence vote in the unity government, casting the upcoming elections and the hard-won peace into uncertainty.

As a result of this prolonged political discord and internecine strife, ordinary Libyans have seen their living standards collapse and critical infrastructure crumble. Earlier this year the dinar crashed and consumer prices surged.

Fuel shortages and power outages have become commonplace, and even clean water is rare in a country that was once one of Africa's richest and remains the continent's second-biggest oil producer after Nigeria.

"Libya is a damaged society but not a wretched one," Karim Mezran, director of the North Africa Initiative and a resident senior fellow with the Rafik Hariri Center and Middle East Programs at the Atlantic Council, told Arab News.

"The biggest problems are the COVID-19 pandemic and the fact that the country serves as a major hub of African migration to Southern Europe. Yet, with a modicum of stability, Libya is and should be a wealthy state, given the copious oil and other natural resources it has combined with a relatively small population."

Instead of emerging from the Gaddafi era with greater openness, economic growth, and productive engagement with the international community, Libya has experienced lawlessness and institutional collapse, becoming something close to a failed state.



Former Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi salutes soldiers during a five-hour military parade in Tripoli on Sept. 7, 1999, to mark the 30th anniversary of the Libyan Revolution that brought him to power. (AFP/File Photo)

“A decade of violence and unrest, a struggling economy, and the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the challenges faced by all those living in the country,” Tom Garofalo, the International Rescue Committee’s Libya country director, said in a recent statement.

“Today, an estimated 1.3 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance – a 40 percent increase compared to 2020.”

Experts agree it is leadership that is lacking in Libya. In Winer’s view, the UN needs to be “much stronger, firmer, tougher, and steadier” if it hopes to stabilize the country.

“There needs to be consequences when countries say one thing, like promising to support peace and withdraw their forces and do another, like supporting their clients and keeping their mercenaries and military support in place,” he said.

Jan Kubis, who was appointed UN special envoy to Libya and head of the UN Support Mission in Libya in January, is yet to openly press all parties to force a resolution. “Though it is hard to blame him, given Russian and Turkish reluctance to move forward with removing their mercenary forces, as they promised to do,” Winer said.

Undoubtedly, there has been significant progress in the past year toward

resolving Libya's divisions. Still, many Libya experts, including Al-Aqidi, believe making sure elections take place is paramount.

"December elections represent the best opportunity for Libya to finally achieve peace and stability," she told Arab News. "It is the one and only way for Libya to recover from violence and chaos."

Twitter: [@rebeccaaproctor](https://twitter.com/rebeccaaproctor)



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UN extends mission to Libya, but only until January 'Leave us alone to heal,'
Libya's UN envoy tells foreign powers

Lebanon's former PM Diab says he gave up shares in company mentioned in 'Pandora Papers'

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1633365017846718700

Mon, 2021-10-04 19:34

BEIRUT: Lebanon's former prime minister Hassan Diab said on Monday he had given up shares in a company he was linked to in a leak of financial documents, and denied wrongdoing.

A statement by his office said he had taken part in founding the company in 2015 and owned 17 shares, but that the firm had no activity since then and he had since resigned his management role and sold his stake.

A Lebanese news organization, Daraj, was one of a number of international media outlets that reported the "Pandora Papers," a set of leaked documents purported to reveal offshore transactions involving global political and business figures.

Reuters has not verified the reports or the documents. The use of offshore companies is not illegal and not evidence of wrongdoing on its own, but the news organizations that published the trove said such arrangements could be intended to hide transactions from tax collectors or other authorities.

Daraj reported that top political figures in Lebanon, including Prime Minister Najib Mikati, had embraced offshore havens.

"Is founding a company against the law?" Diab said, adding that he reserved the right to sue anyone who tries to defame him.



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[Israeli PM discloses Mossad mission to find information about long-missing airman](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1633364550236686700

Mon, 2021-10-04 19:24

JERUSALEM: Israeli Mossad intelligence agents carried out a “wide-ranging and bold” operation last month to try to uncover the fate of Ron Arad, a long-missing Israeli airman, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said on Monday. Arad, an air force navigator, bailed out of a warplane that went down over Lebanon during a 1986 bombing mission. Initially taken prisoner by Lebanese Amal guerrillas, he is widely assumed to no longer be alive. The aircraft’s

pilot was rescued.

In a speech on government policy at the opening of parliament's winter session, Bennett said: "Last month, the women and men of the Mossad embarked on an operation aimed at finding new information about the fate and whereabouts of Ron Arad. "It was a complex, wide-ranging and bold operation. That is all that can be said right now." Arad's fate has long generated strong public interest in Israel, whose leaders have pledged over the years to discover what happened to him.



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