

TEHRAN – Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hussein Salami was awarded Sunday the Medal of Fath (Conquest) under a decree issued by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei. In remarks at the conclusion of a conference on compulsory military service held here, General Salami said he met Ayatollah Khamenei Sunday and received the medal. The general described it as an honor and a clear indication of the Leader's satisfaction with the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)'s endeavors.

TEHRAN – Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on Sunday congratulated his Pakistani counterpart Asif Ali Zardari on his election for a second term, expressing Tehran's readiness for enhanced cooperation with Islamabad. Highlighting the historical, cultural and religious bonds between the two nations, Raisi expressed hope that bilateral relations would grow during Zardari's new tenure. He described Pakistan as a brother and friend of Iran.

Viewpoint

Palestinian Heroism Versus Zionist-US Terrorism

Iranian Companies Awarded 20bn Worth of Gas Contracts



Iran's Women Team Wins Asian River Rafting Championships



UNRWA: Hunger Everywhere in Gaza



One Year on, Saudi-Iran Rapprochement Bears Fruit

Iran and Saudi Arabia have benefitted from a year of resumed diplomatic ties that have allowed them to contain their security risks despite the dangerous regional fallout of Israel's war in Gaza, analysts say.

On March 10, 2023, following negotiations facilitated by China, the regional foes agreed to re-establish their embassies and exchange ambassadors, concluding a diplomatic standoff that lasted for seven years, triggered by attacks on Saudi diplomatic premises in Iran.

The landmark agreement raised expectations for enhanced stability in the Middle East and beyond.

Saudi Ambassador to Iran, Abdullah bin Saud Al Anzi, arrived in Tehran last September to start his new mission, before the Iranian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Alireza Enayati, submitted his credentials in Riyadh shortly after.

"An Iran-Saudi detente has proved useful to both parties," Bader Alsaif, an assistant professor of history at Kuwait University, told The National.

It enabled "focus on more pressing domestic agendas, whether it is meeting the development needs of Vision 2030 for KSA or quelling unrest and internal strife in Iran", he added.

The two regional heavyweights have often found themselves on opposing sides of conflicts, particularly in Yemen.

Their rapprochement sparked optimism for a ceasefire that could bring an end to a decade-long war that has devastated Yemen.

Since the reconciliation, talks have progressed between the Saudis and Ansarullah, with the Yemeni fighters sending a delegation – a first since the war began – to Riyadh to discuss the possibility of a long-lasting ceasefire.

"There has been no breakthrough in Yemen yet in terms of an official deal with Ansarullah for instance, but there has not been a regression to past military escalation either," said Dr Alsaif.

While efforts to end the conflict in Yemen have gained traction, yet since November, the Yemenis have launched a series of attacks in the Red Sea, part of what they claim to be a solidarity campaign with the Palestinians amid Israel's devastating war in the Gaza Strip.

Their attacks on shipping have prompted retaliatory U.S. and UK strikes against Yemen.

Analysts say the year-old Saudi-Iranian reconciliation has largely shielded Riyadh from the continuing regional unrest.

"Direct attacks on the Kingdom from Yemen or elsewhere in the region have certainly stopped suggesting that the Iran-Saudi detente has improved domestic security dynamics for the time being," said Sanam Vakil, director of the Middle East and North Africa program at the Chatham House think tank.

"The problem is that such aggression could always recommence, so the broader risk has not been removed but rather contained," she emphasized.

Last December, sources close to the talks told The National that Yemen's warring parties were considering a preliminary ceasefire to allow peace negotiations and have largely agreed to a proposed road map. The sources insisted that the attacks in the Red Sea would not hinder the prospects of an agreement.

"It appears that the Houthis have deliberately avoided targeting GCC partners and their interests. This shows their pragmatism and hope that after the war comes to a close the Houthis hope to return to the status quo and the negotiating table with Saudi Arabia," Vakil added.

While containing security risks for Saudi Arabia, the rapprochement has also allowed Iran to secure diplomatic goals with the deal helping facilitate the return of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who is a close ally of Iran, to the Arab fold last May.

For Giorgio Cafiero, CEO and founder of the geopolitical risk consultancy based in Washington Gulf State Analytics, "there's no doubt that the GCC states restoring diplomatic relations with Damascus has constituted a geopolitical gain for the Islamic Republic".

At the same time, the restoration of diplomatic relations with Riyadh "has been a big boost to the [Iranian President Ebrahim] Raisi administration's Neighbors First foreign policy strategy," added Cafiero.

In November, a month into Israel's war on Gaza, both Syrian President Assad and President Raisi attended an emergency Arab League summit in Riyadh during which they both advocated more "punitive" measures against Israel.

Beyond the political gains, the reconciliation between two of the region's major economies has also led to discussions about boosting trade ties.

Farzad Piltan, West Asia director at Iran's Trade Promotion Organization, said Tehran has been eyeing a target of \$1 billion annual trade with Saudi Arabia, which he said could further expand to \$2 billion with a focus on steel, saffron, carpets, cement and dried fruit.

"The pace has been noticeably slow yet steady. It takes time to rebuild trust and enable different channels of communication to understand one another's needs and calculi," Alsaif said.

"A key question is whether this detente will translate to better understanding and accommodation of one another down the line or it is a temporary break for both sides to pick up pace and focus on internal issues before tensions resurface once again: a question of tactical versus strategic shifts."

Courtesy: The National

Revealed: Gaza 'Testing Ground' for U.S. Robots



The destruction of 80% of the residential buildings in Gaza is a testament to AI-assisted "precision" being used to rationalize mass killing and destruction.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- The Pentagon is using the besieged Gaza Strip which is under an all-out Israeli invasion for five months now as a testing ground for its autonomous weapons, commonly known as "killer robots", U.S. think tank Public Citizen has revealed.

Autonomous weapons "inherently dehumanize the people targeted and make it easier to tolerate widespread killing," which is in

violation of international human rights law, it said.

Yet American military contractors are developing autonomous weapons, and the introduction of AI into the Pentagon's battlefield decision-making and weapons systems "distracts" from the fact that humans remain in control of the "politics of dehumanization that legitimates war and killing, and the decision to wage war it-

self," said Jeremy Moses, an associate professor at the Department of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Canterbury, whose research focuses on the ethics of war and intervention.

Similar actions are being carried out in Gaza, where Israel has been experimenting with the use of robots and remote-controlled dogs, Haaretz reported. As the ar-

ticle points out, Gaza has become a "testing ground" for military robots where unmanned remote-control D9 bulldozers are also being used.

Israel is also using an Israeli AI intelligence processing system, called The Gospel, "which has significantly accelerated a lethal production line of targets that officials have compared to a 'factory,'" The Guardian reported. Israeli sources report that the system is producing "targets at a fast pace" compared to what the Israeli military was previously able to identify, enabling a far broader use of force.

AI technologies like The Gospel function more as a tool for "post-hoc rationalization of mass killing and destruction rather than promoting 'precision,'" Moses said. The destruction of 60% of the residential buildings in Gaza is a testament to that, he said.

The dog-shaped walking robot that the Zionist military is using in Gaza was made by Philadelphia-based Ghost Robotics. The robot's primary use is to surveil buildings, open spaces and tunnels without jeopardizing Oketz Unit soldiers and dogs, according to the report.

The use of such tools being discussed in media are "simultaneously represented as 'saving lives' whilst also dehumanizing the Palestinian people," Moses said.

(Continued on Page 7)

Hezbollah Strikes Zionist Targets in Massive Retaliation

BEIRUT (Dispatches) -- Hezbollah on Sunday launched a barrage of rocket and drone attacks on positions in the Israeli-occupied territories in retaliation for a deadly attack by the regime's military on southern Lebanon.

In a statement, Hezbollah said that its fighters had targeted the Meron settlement in the occupied territories with Katyusha rockets.

The group said it also launched a drone attack on Israeli artillery launchers in the Arar barracks and fired rockets at a gathering of the regime's soldiers east of the Birkat Risha outpost.

The operation came "in response to the enemy's attacks on the steadfast southern villages and civilian homes, the most recent of which was the attack on ... Khirbet Selm and the martyrdom" of five people, it said.

A family of four, including a father, his pregnant wife and their two sons, and another individual, were martyred in the Israeli strike on a house in the Khirbet Selm village in southern Lebanon on Sunday, Lebanon's official National News Agency reported.

The air raid also wounded at

least nine others who lived nearby.

In its statement, Hezbollah said that it had conducted the operation in solidarity with the "steadfast Palestinian people" in the Gaza Strip and their "brave and honorable resistance" against a genocidal Israeli war.

The Israeli military said some 37 rockets were fired in two volleys from Lebanon at Meron, claiming that its so-called Iron Dome system had intercepted seven of the rockets.

Hezbollah and Israel have been exchanging fire since early October, shortly after the occupying regime launched its bloody war on the besieged Gaza following a surprise operation by the Palestinian Hamas resistance movement.

The resistance group's constant rocket fire has prompted tens of thousands of Zionist settlers to flee from northern areas of the occupied territories.

Hezbollah has vowed to keep up its retaliatory operations as long as the usurping entity continues its aggression against Gaza.

In Yemen, armed forces simulated attacks on Israeli military command centers, strategic sites,

and illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories during a military exercise.

The war game, codenamed "Our path is destined to Al-Quds", was conducted by forces from the Sixth Region of the Yemeni military, and intended to send a warning to the occupying regime of Israel.

Lebanon's Al-Mayadeen television said the exercise involved various units of the Yemeni army such as the ground force and the aerospace force.

A series of military systems and heavy weapons were employed in the drill. The units taking part in the war game carried out offense operations at strategic levels, and practiced action against the origins of possible attacks.

Yemeni armed forces simulated attacks on Israeli military command centers in the Negev desert region as well as neighborhoods in the southern Israeli city of Dimona, and targeted mock American and British logistic supplies intended for the Israeli military.

Muhammad Ali al-Houthi, a senior member of Yemen's Supreme Political Council, warned the

United States against launching a ground military campaign against the Arab country, stressing that Washington should bear in mind that it will lose in any war against Sana'a.

"The U.S. should think twice before taking such a decision as it will be the loser of any war that wages against Yemen," Houthi said.

He said Washington is delusional to think the armament used by Yemeni forces in their retaliatory strikes is foreign-made.

Yemeni armed forces have reached a very commendable level of self-sufficiency in the production of essential combat equipment, and their weapons are entirely home-grown, the top-ranking Yemeni official noted.

Yemenis have declared their open support for Palestine's struggle against the Israeli occupation since the regime launched a devastating war on Gaza on October 7 after the territory's Palestinian resistance movements carried out the surprise Operation Al-Aqsa Storm.

The Yemeni armed forces have said they won't stop retaliatory strikes.