



SIGNS OF THE TIMES

News Articles for Episode 293

[Report: US alarmed as Israel talks of expanding war to Hezbollah – www.israelhayom.com](#)

#bibleprophecy, #israel, #hezbollah, #war

Jan 7, 2024

"US officials are concerned that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu may see an expanded fight in Lebanon as key to his political survival," the Washington Post says.

President Joe Biden has directed his top aides to the Middle East to prevent a full-scale between Israel and the Lebanon-based Hezbollah, *The Washington Post* reported on Sunday.

"US officials are concerned that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu may see an expanded fight in Lebanon as key to his political survival amid domestic criticism of his government's failure to prevent Hamas's Oct. 7 attack, which killed an estimated 1,200 people and resulted in some 240 hostages being taken to Gaza," the report said.

The report comes as Israeli officials have voiced their readiness to step up the hostilities with Hezbollah shall the security situation require it. "We prefer the path of an agreed-upon diplomatic settlement, but we are getting close to the point where the hourglass will turn over," Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said on Friday.

As Blinken toils to prevent a war between Israel and Hezbollah, someone should inform him that war is already ongoing,
says [@perry_dan pic.twitter.com/LQ5rO3uPDf](https://twitter.com/perry_dan/pic.twitter.com/LQ5rO3uPDf)

— *i24NEWS English (@i24NEWS_EN) [January 6, 2024](#)*

Additionally, Netanyahu earlier on Thursday stated: "We are resolute in bringing about fundamental change along our border with Lebanon, ensuring our citizens' safety and restoring peace to our northern region."

According to the *WP*, in private conversations, the White House warned Israel against escalation in Lebanon as officials fear the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) may struggle to succeed due to "its military assets and resources would be spread too thin given the conflict in Gaza," the report cited two people familiar with a new secret assessment from the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA).

"Officials fear that a full-scale conflict between Israel and Lebanon would surpass the bloodshed of the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war on account of Hezbollah's substantially larger arsenal of long-range and precision weaponry," read the report based on interviews with over a dozen of administration officials and diplomats.

Bilal Saab, a Lebanon expert at the Middle East Institute, a Washington think tank, cited by the article, said that "the number of casualties in Lebanon could be anywhere from 300,000 to 500,000 and entail a massive evacuation of all of northern Israel."

Biden's administration appears alarmed that Hezbollah could strike deeper into Israeli territory than before, "hitting sensitive targets like petrochemical plants and nuclear reactors, and Iran may activate militias across the region."

Hezbollah on Saturday claimed launching over 60 rockets towards northern Israel in its "initial" revenge for assassination of the Deputy Head of the Political Bureau of Hamas, Saleh al-Aroui earlier last week. The IDF confirmed approximately 40 launches.

Israel shifts to deadlier strikes on Iran-linked targets in Syria | Reuters

#bibleprophecy, #israel, #syria, #war

Jan 8, 2024

- Summary
- Israel shifts strategy in air strikes in Syria - sources
- Strikes target Iranian arms transfers, air defence systems
- Strikes deadlier, more frequent since Oct. 7, sources say

BEIRUT/AMMAN, Jan 8 (Reuters) - Israel is carrying out an unprecedented wave of deadly strikes in Syria targeting cargo trucks, infrastructure and people involved in Iran's weapons lifeline to its proxies in the region, six sources with direct knowledge of the matter told Reuters.

The sources, including a Syrian military intelligence officer and a commander in the regional alliance backing Damascus, said Israel had shifted strategies following the Oct. 7 rampage by Hamas fighters into Israeli territory and the ensuing Israeli bombing campaigns in [Gaza](#) and [Lebanon](#).

Although Israel has struck Iran-linked targets in Syria for years, including areas where Lebanese armed group Hezbollah has been active, it is now unleashing deadlier, more frequent air raids against Iranian arms transfers and air defence systems in Syria, the sources said.

The commander in the regional alliance and two additional sources familiar with Hezbollah's thinking said Israel had abandoned the unspoken "rules of the game" that previously characterised its strikes in Syria, and seemed "no longer cautious" about inflicting heavy casualties on Hezbollah there.

"They used to fire warning shots - they'd hit near the truck, our guys would get out of the truck, and then they'd hit the truck," the commander said, describing Israeli raids on arms transfers handled by Hezbollah before Oct. 7.

"Now that's over. Israel is now unleashing deadlier, more frequent air raids against Iranian arms transfers and air defence systems in Syria. They bomb everyone directly. They bomb to kill."

The intensified air campaign has killed 19 Hezbollah members in Syria in three months - more than twice the rest of 2023 combined, according to a Reuters count. More than 130 Hezbollah fighters have also been killed by Israeli shelling of southern Lebanon in the same period.

The Israeli military did not respond to questions from Reuters about its escalating campaign. A senior Israeli official, briefing journalists on condition of anonymity, said Hezbollah had initiated this round of fighting with attacks on Oct. 8, and that Israel's strategy was one of retaliation.

Asked last month about a reported Israeli strike in Syria, Israel's military chief [said](#) Israeli forces work throughout the region and take "whatever action necessary" to show Israel's determination to defend itself.

IRANIAN FORCES KILLED

Israel began striking Iran-linked targets in Syria years ago, but sources familiar with the strikes said it had appeared to avoid killing Hezbollah members if it could.

A regional intelligence officer said Israel feared a high casualty figure would prompt a retaliation from Hezbollah in Lebanon against Israeli villages just across the border.

But with exchanges of fire now taking place on a daily basis following the Oct. 7 attack, Israel is willing to be "less cautious and less restrained in killing Lebanese Hezbollah in Syria," the officer added.

In a televised address on Jan. 5, Hezbollah head Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said the group had lost "a number of fighters in Israeli shelling in Syria in several places in the last three months."

"We had a formula before the (Oct. 7) Aqsa Flood operation - if they killed any of our brothers in Syria, we would respond on the Lebanon front - which was calm. Practically, this formula's conditions have changed - why? Because the whole front is lit up now," he said.

An Israeli [drone strike](#) on Dec. 8 killed three Hezbollah fighters planning possible operations in northern Israel, and another strike on Quneitra in southern Syria targeted two Hezbollah fighters responsible for weapons transfers, the commander in the pro-Syrian alliance said.

Four more were killed in late December in a strike on [buildings and trucks](#) being used by Iran-aligned militia groups along Syria's eastern border with Iraq.

The strikes have also hit Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Syria. One in early December killed two Guards members, and another on Dec. 25 killed a [senior adviser](#) to the Guards who was overseeing military coordination between Syria and Iran.

"He would never have been killed before the new reality that came into force after Oct. 7," said one source familiar with Hezbollah's thinking and operations in Syria.

THREAT TO ASSAD

Others have hit infrastructure in southern Syria: one air defence base was [struck](#) on Dec. 28 after an anti-aircraft defence system was also hit.

The Syrian intelligence officer said the strikes were hitting defensive equipment even before troops could install it. The airports in Syria's capital Damascus and northern Aleppo, which Iran has used to [transfer arms](#), have been rendered almost continually out of service by strikes.

"Israel is telling (Syrian President Bashar) al-Assad: you are allowing Iranians and Hezbollah to transfer weapons and entrench themselves - so we will disrupt your lifeline and you will find yourself in a tight spot," the regional intelligence source said.

Israel has repeatedly said it does not seek a second war front in Lebanon or Syria.

Despite the intensification, the Syrian military - which leaned heavily on both Hezbollah and Iran while fighting rebels during its civil war - has not opened its own front.

"We don't want to put ourselves in a state of confrontation or open war with Israel," the Syrian intelligence officer said.

Assad himself was discouraged from taking any action in support of Hamas after he received threats by Israel, three sources with direct knowledge of the threat told Reuters.

Two of the sources said the threats of retaliation by Israel were delivered by the United Arab Emirates. A UAE official said such assertions were "baseless and unfounded." There was no response from Syria's information ministry to a request from Reuters for comment on the allegations.

The third source said the message resonated with Hezbollah.

"Hezbollah took that threat seriously as it would have cost them everything they had built in Syria in recent years," he said.

[Blinken delivers Arab message to Israel: Acceptance requires Palestinian state \(foxnews.com\)](#)

#bibleprophecy, #israel, #two state, #arabs

Jan 9, 2024

U.S. Secretary of State [Antony Blinken](#) told Israeli leaders on Tuesday the Jewish state's Arab neighbors may yet accept Israel if they can establish a viable Palestinian state.

Blinken [visited Tel Aviv](#) as part of a diplomatic mission in the Middle East to prevent war in Gaza from spreading into a regional conflict — his fourth such trip since the war started in October.

The top U.S. diplomat spoke with the Israeli war cabinet after several days of talks in Arab states including Jordan, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. The message Arab leaders had for Israel, delivered by Blinken, was that integration with the rest of the Middle East is only possible if the war in Gaza ends and the Palestinian people are granted a viable path to statehood.

The Palestinian terrorist group Hamas started the war on Oct. 7, with a surprise attack on Israel that killed 1,200 people, according to Israeli tallies.

Israel responded with an offensive in Gaza which [Hamas officials](#) claim has killed more than 23,000 Palestinians, reduced much of the Gaza Strip to rubble and displaced a majority of the 2.3 million people living there, creating a humanitarian crisis. The numbers reported by Hamas do not distinguish between civilian and military casualties and cannot be independently verified.

Blinken had already said he would press Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government on the "absolute imperative" to do more to protect Gaza's civilians and allow humanitarian aid to reach them. His boss, President Joe Biden, said overnight that Washington was quietly pushing Israel to begin withdrawing some of its forces.

[BIDEN INTERRUPTED BY 'CEASE-FIRE NOW' CHANTS, VOWS HE'S WORKING TO GET ISRAEL 'OUT OF GAZA'](#)

Blinken's meetings around the region have focused on trying to chart a longer-term approach to the decades-old [Israel-Palestinian conflict](#), as part of a path toward ending the Gaza war. After he met with Arab allies, he said they wanted integration with Israel — a long-term Israeli aim — but only if that included a "practical pathway" to a Palestinian state.

"I know of your own efforts, over many years, to build much greater connectivity and integration in the Middle East, and I think there are actually real opportunities there," he told Israeli foreign minister Israel Katz on Tuesday.

"But we have to get through this very challenging moment and ensure that October 7 can never happen again and work to build a much different and much better future."

Biden revealed the U.S. is urging Israel to withdraw some of its forces from Gaza on Monday night at a campaign event in [Charleston, S.C.](#)

As the president spoke at the site of the 2015 massacre where authorities said an admitted white supremacist shot and killed nine Black worshipers, a protester interrupted, shouting, "If you really care about the lives lost here, then you should honor the lives and call for a cease-fire in Palestine."

A group of demonstrators began shouting, "cease-fire now," drowning out Biden.

"I understand their passion," Biden said of the demonstrators, once things calmed down. "And I've been quietly working, I've been quietly working with the Israeli government to get them to reduce and significantly get out of Gaza using all that I can to do that. I understand the passion."

[IDF to intensify southern Gaza op, 'change tactics' in north, Gallant tells Blinken - JNS.org](#)

#bibleprophecy, #israel, #blinken, #gaza

Jan 9, 2024

"The Washington Post" cited a senior U.S. official as saying that Israel has already withdrawn several thousand troops from northern Gaza.

Israel will "intensify and continue" its military operation in the southern Gaza Strip until the Hamas leadership is found and the more than 120 hostages still held by the terrorist group are returned to the Jewish state, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant told U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Tel Aviv on Tuesday.

During their meeting held at the Kirya military headquarters, Gallant also briefed the American diplomat on "changes in combat tactics in the northern area of the Gaza Strip," according to a Defense Ministry statement.

"An important meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken," Gallant wrote in a post on X following the tête-à-tête.

"We are determined to complete the war goals and strengthen regional stability in the Middle East by dismantling Hamas in the south and changing the security situation in the north," he added, the latter a reference to the ongoing attacks by Iranian-backed [Hezbollah](#) from Lebanon.

פגישה חשובה עם מזכיר המדינה האמריקני אנתוני בלינקן.

אנחנו נחושים להשלים את מטרות הלחימה ולחזק את היציבות האזורית במזרח התיכון באמצעות פירוק החמאס בדרום, ושינוי המצב הביטחוני בצפון. pic.twitter.com/vTm6veNmFo

— יואב גלנט – Yoav Gallant (@yoavgallant) [January 9, 2024](#)

'The need to plan ahead'

Earlier this week, Hebrew media reported that Jerusalem knows the exact Gaza location of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar, who masterminded the Oct. 7 massacre of some 1,200 people in the northwestern Negev. Sinwar is believed to be hiding in the southern Hamas stronghold of Khan Yunis.

However, the terror mastermind has surrounded himself with a large number of living hostages, preventing the IDF from carrying out an airstrike on him, reports said.

The Washington Post on Tuesday cited an anonymous senior U.S. official as saying that Israel has already withdrawn several thousand troops from northern Gaza in “a significant drawdown” from the coastal enclave.

In a statement shared with JNS, the IDF confirmed that it was “currently adjusting deployment plans for forces in Gaza and the reserve system.

“These adaptations aim to ensure effective planning and preparation for the continuation of operations in 2024. The IDF recognizes the need to plan ahead, anticipating additional tasks and warfare throughout the year,” added the army statement.

Some reservists, including the 551st Reserve Paratrooper Brigade and the 14th Reserve Armored Brigade, will be released from military service this week. In addition, the 828th, 261st and 460th brigades will return to their scheduled training as part of the adjustment in deployment plans.

Forces operating in the Khan Yunis area continue to kill armed terrorists, expose weapon depots and destroy terrorist infrastructure, the IDF said on Tuesday afternoon.

During a raid on the Hamas-controlled Islamic University of Gaza, troops found numerous Kalashnikov assault rifles, ammunition and other terror equipment in classrooms, as well as safes containing terrorist funds.

In the area surrounding the university, soldiers discovered dozens of weapons depots containing more than 100 mortar bombs, explosive devices, grenades and maps used by Hamas operatives.

“Even in a place where the younger generation is supposed to be educated, the whole place is loaded with Kalashnikovs and Hamas videos,” an officer of the Givati Infantry Brigade said in a video shared by the IDF, adding that soldiers also encountered terrorists in the building.

Located in Gaza's Islamic University: AK-47 rifles, cartridges, ammunition, Hamas flags and safes containing terrorist funds.

Troops also located dozens of weapon storage facilities, mortar shells, explosives, grenades and combat equipment in the area of the university.

You'd... pic.twitter.com/PoeKfThwAS

— Israel Defense Forces (@IDF) [January 9, 2024](#)

On Monday, the IDF announced that Israeli forces found the largest weapons manufacturing site discovered since the start of the [war](#), containing rockets capable of reaching north of Tel Aviv.

The weapons plant was part of a massive tunnel system nearly 100 feet underneath the Al-Bureij camp in central Gaza, according to the IDF. The rockets produced in the facility had a range of more than 60 miles.

After almost 24 hours of quiet in southern Israel, Palestinian terrorists in Gaza resumed rocket fire at the border region on Tuesday, setting off air-raid sirens throughout the day in Sderot, Kibbutz Nir Am, Kibbutz Nahal Oz, Kibbutz Alumim and the village of Ibim, said *Army Radio*.

Earlier this week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered that displaced residents of [Sderot](#), Ibim and other communities located east of Route 232 will be allowed to return to their homes on Feb. 4.

[Ex-psyhic says Fox News pushed 'demonic agenda' with tarot cards | Entertainment News \(christianpost.com\)](#)

#bibleprophecy, #fox news, #demonic, #tarot cards

Jan 8, 2024

Jenn Nizza said tarot card segment with Jesse Watters was 'completely alarming'

A former psychic who repented of occult practices after turning to Jesus Christ warned that Fox News potentially opened their viewers to demonic activity by airing an act of divination during primetime last week.

"The deception of putting something that seems good out there while pushing a demonic agenda is heartbreaking," Jenn Nizza told The Christian Post.

Nizza, an author and podcaster who runs [Ex-PsyhicSaved.com](#) and has [written](#) about how dabbling with tarot cards as a young teenager ultimately led her deeply into occultism, said she found it "completely alarming" when Fox News host Jesse Watters invited a medium on his show last week to discern the country's political future using tarot cards.

[Listen to Ex-Psyhic Saved on the Edifi Podcast Network](#)

Watters, whose show "Jesse Watters Primetime" occupies Tucker Carlson's former time slot, [hosted](#) the so-called "English Psychic" Paula Roberts, who pulled a tarot card for Trump known as the Five of Cups, which depicts a cloaked figure lamenting three cups that have been overturned while ignoring the two that remain upturned.

The card symbolizes focusing on negativity, and Roberts claimed that it predicted a "sense of loss" for Trump in 2024.

Awkward moment on Fox last night. They brought on a psychic, asked her to predict Trump's 2024, she reaches into a stack of like 50 cards and pulls out a grim reaper. pic.twitter.com/M9nqqo2vp1

— Josh Power ???????? (@JoshPower80) [January 3, 2024](#)

Roberts, who identifies as a clairvoyant, paranormal investigator, and "ghost-hunter," according to her [website](#), claims to have ties to the [Spiritualist Association of Great Britain](#), which was founded in 1872 and included high-profile members such as "Sherlock Holmes" author Sir. Arthur Conan Doyle.

Roberts also claims to have known prominent occult figures such as [Ingo Swann](#), who was involved with the CIA's research into occult practices such as remote viewing, extrasensory perception, and astral projection.

Nizza made a [TikTok video](#) last week explaining that she had "a little bit of a bone to pick" with Fox News for airing the segment with Roberts, who she believes is a legitimate psychic who engages in communication with demons, even if she is unaware of it.

"[Roberts] a real psychic who's been doing this for a long time and who is serious about what she does," Nizza told CP. "A lot of people will say these people are hucksters. That's just not true. There are hucksters, but this woman is not a huckster. This woman is truly a psychic."

Based on her own experience as a former medium, Nizza explained that the cardboard and pictures of the tarot do not offer any insight by themselves, but that the purported information psychics obtain from them is "channeled" and inherently demonic.

"A tool of divination is one that's actually accessing the demonic realm, the spirit realm, and you're going against God's will of boundaries; God says not to," she said, citing [Deuteronomy 18:10-12](#), which prohibits witchcraft and divination as "detestable" acts that incur God's judgment on nations.

In broadcasting such a practice during primetime, she said Fox News risked piquing the curiosity of their viewers to dabble in such things, effectively "encouraging people to enter into demonic communication: going against God, going to divination, psychics, and the tarot cards to try to gain some sort of future information, when demons don't have any future information."

Nizza said demons can "hook" tarot practitioners in by offering "a couple pieces of accurate information," but she noted that they do not have the omniscience of God, and that they merely possess the knowledge of "intelligent, powerful, and old" beings who have been observing human affairs for a long time.

Nizza also maintained that the light-hearted tone of Jesse Watters' segment implied that such practices need not be taken seriously, which she warned is also potentially dangerous. Those who think divination and other occult practices are a form of entertainment are being deceived by what she described as "smoke and mirrors."

"That's another deception of the evil one," she said. "There's nothing funny about it. God condemns it."

"If [Satan] can get you to think that it's nothing, or it's fun and entertaining, then he gets you involved," she said. "And he starts planting seeds, and he gets you interested, and he gets you away from God. Because now you're looking at this show that you like, you're looking at this guy that you like, you're looking at the psychic."

By deceiving people into thinking occult activity is "no big deal" and "a big joke," Nizza said "the devil can do something blatant, like opening those demonic doors" that threaten to drag dabblers into a life of spiritual darkness and demonic oppression, which is what she claimed to have experienced until she became a Christian 10 years ago.

Nizza believes Americans are now particularly vulnerable to such things given the country's political turmoil, which she warned could lead them down a "rabbit hole of destruction" amid their concerns over what will happen in the near future.

"It's reaching people," she warned. "Especially in the culture that we live in and the climate that we live in, people [are] wondering what's going to happen. We have a lot of tension in the nations, and the election is coming up."

"This is what the devil does," she added. "He's the tempter, he's a liar, he's a manipulator. And the whole thing is to get you away from God, because if you're watching the psychic, you're not going to God. You're not putting your faith and trust in Him and His sovereignty over all things."

The Fox News segment also drew derision from users on X, some of whom mocked Fox News for airing an ominous prediction about Trump. Others echoed Nizza, striking a more serious tone by suggesting the network was treading into dangerous spiritual territory by airing divination at all.

"Could I just note that tarot cards are not things Christians should embrace and maybe Christians need to reconsider the content they consume," [tweeted](#) radio host Erick Erickson.

"If you're going to be upset by a calendar, stand up against normalizing this crap too," Erickson added, referencing Ultra Right Beer's "Real Women of America" 2024 calendar, which [caused an uproar](#) among some conservatives and Christians for featuring scantily-clad conservative women.

"Demonic! Satanic! The occult! People wake up!" former Republican Georgia gubernatorial candidate Kandiss Taylor [wrote](#). "Fox is supposed to be Republican Conservative news. Totally against Jesus. This is Satan worshippers [sic]."

Last July, an investigation by The Blaze [revealed](#) that Fox Corporation was willing to match Fox News employee donations of up to \$1,000 to a number of far-left organizations including The Satanic Temple.

The company never publicly addressed the revelation that reportedly emerged from multiple sources within Fox News, though they [removed](#) The Satanic Temple from their portal of eligible charities days after Blaze Media founder Glenn Beck broadcast the story.

[Iraq prepares to close down US-led coalition's mission - PM | Reuters](#)

#bibleprophecy, #iraq, #america, #military

Jan 5, 2024

BAGHDAD/WASHINGTON Jan 5 (Reuters) - The Iraqi government is beginning the process to remove the U.S.-led international military coalition from the country, Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani's office said on Friday.

The U.S. has 900 troops in Syria and 2,500 in Iraq on a mission it says advises and assists local forces trying to prevent a resurgence of Islamic State, which in 2014 seized large parts of both countries before being defeated.

Sudani's statement came a day after a [U.S. strike](#) killed a militia leader in Baghdad, prompting anger among Iran-aligned groups which demanded the government end the presence of the coalition in Iraq.

"Government is setting the date for the start of the bilateral committee to put arrangements to end the presence of the international coalition forces in Iraq permanently," a statement from the prime minister's office said.

The committee would include representatives of the military coalition, a government official said.

The U.S. military launched Thursday's strike in retaliation against recent attacks on U.S. personnel, the Pentagon said.

Iran-aligned militia groups in Iraq and Syria oppose Israel's campaign in the Gaza Strip and hold the U.S. partly responsible.

Iraqi PM Sudani has limited control over some Iran-backed factions, whose support he needed to win power a year ago and who now form a powerful bloc in his governing coalition.

"We stress our firm position in ending the existence of the international coalition after the justifications for its existence have ended," Sudani was quoted as saying in the statement.

[Islamic State](#) claimed responsibility on Thursday for two explosions in Iran that killed nearly 100 people and wounded scores at a memorial for top commander Qassem Soleimani.

A political adviser close to the Iraqi prime minister said Sudani was falling under huge pressure from powerful Shi'ite parties close to Iran seeking to end the U.S. presence in Iraq and his recent statement was aimed at "appeasing angry parties within the governing Shi'ite coalition against the United States".

Still, it was unclear if Baghdad's announcement on Friday was mainly posturing for internal, political purposes or if the newly announced committee would truly set into motion an inexorable process to end America's military presence in Iraq, a longtime goal of Iran and groups Iran supports.

U.S. PRESENCE

U.S. President Joe Biden's administration had initially avoided any response to wave after wave of attacks in Iraq due to fears about a political backlash there, U.S. officials told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity.

But Iraq's failure to rein in the militia amid escalating attacks against American personnel, including mortar fire against the U.S. embassy compound last month, appears to have pushed Washington into a more aggressive approach.

The [U.S. strike](#) in Baghdad on Thursday targeted Mushtaq Jawad Kazim al-Jawari, who the Pentagon said was a leader of an Iran-backed terrorist group involved in planning and carrying out attacks against American personnel.

The Pentagon declined to respond to Iraqi government comments suggesting he was part of its security forces, which include formal, legitimate institutions like the police and the Army.

The Iraqi government said the killed commander was part of the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), a group of many mainly Shi'ite Muslim armed groups formed in 2014 to fight Islamic State and subsequently recognised as an official security agency by Iraq's government.

In a sign that U.S. military sought to publicly acknowledge efforts by Iraq's formal security forces to address attacks against U.S. personnel, its Central Command thanked Iraq's police for their Jan. 3 discovery of a land-based cruise missile that a U.S. official said was aimed at American troops in the country.

"The Coalition is appreciative of the efforts of the legitimate security forces in Iraq for their efforts to prevent future attacks," it said in a post on social media platform X.

The Pentagon did not respond to requests for comment following the announcement from Sudani's office, referring journalists instead to comments on Thursday by the top U.S. military spokesperson calling Iraq a "valued partner."

"We will continue to consult closely with the Iraqi government about the safety and security of U.S. forces. In the meantime, we will continue to stay very focused on that Defeat ISIS mission," Major General Patrick Ryder told a news briefing on Thursday.

[North Korea again fires near the sea border with the South, as its leader's sister mocks Seoul - ABC News \(go.com\)](#)

#bibleprophecy, #north korea, #south korea, #war

Jan 7, 2024

North Korea has again fired artillery shells near its tense sea boundary with the South

SEOUL, South Korea -- North Korea again fired artillery shells near its tense sea boundary with the South on Sunday, as the influential sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un mocked the South's ability to detect its weapons launches.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff dismissed Kim Yo Jong's statement as "a comedy-like, vulgar propaganda" meant to undermine the South Korean people's trust in the military and stoke divisions.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff said North Korea fired more than more than 90 rounds near the rivals' disputed western sea boundary on Sunday afternoon. It said South Korea strongly urged North Korea to stop provocative acts immediately.

North Korea's military later confirmed it used coastal artillery systems to carry out live-firing exercises. It said the drills were part of its military training schedules and the direction of its shells fired didn't expose any threat to South Korea.

On Friday, North Korea launched about 200 shells. South Korea also claimed that the North fired more than 60 rounds on Saturday, but its rival has denied that.

Kim Yo Jong said that North Korea on Saturday only detonated blasting powder simulating the sound of its coastal artillery on the seashore, to test the South Korean military's detection capabilities.

"The result was clear as we expected. They misjudged the blasting sound as the sound of gunfire and conjectured it as a provocation. And they even made a false and impudent statement that the shells dropped north" of the sea boundary, Kim Yo Jong said in a statement carried by state media.

"I cannot but say that (South Korean) people are very pitiful as they entrust security to such blind persons and offer huge [taxes](#) to them," she said. "It is better 10 times to entrust security to a dog with a developed sense of hearing and smell."

Animosities between the two Koreas are running high because North Korea has conducted a barrage of missile tests since 2022 while South Korea has expanded its military training with the United States in a tit-for-tat cycle.

North Korea's artillery firings Friday prompted South Korea to have its troops on border islands fire artillery rounds near the sea boundary in response. The shells launched by the two Koreas fell at a maritime buffer zone they had established under a 2018 military agreement on lowering front-line military tensions.

The agreement requires the Koreas to halt live-fire exercises, aerial surveillance and other hostile acts along their border, but the deal is now in danger of collapsing because the two Koreas have taken measures breaching it.

Experts say North Korea is likely to ramp up weapons tests and escalate its trademark fiery rhetoric against its rivals ahead of South Korea's parliamentary [elections](#) in April and the U.S. presidential elections in November. They say Kim Jong Un likely thinks a bolstered weapons arsenal would allow him to wrest greater U.S. concessions if former President [Donald Trump](#) returns to the White House.

In her statement Sunday, Kim Yo Jong called South Korea's military "gangsters" and "clowns in military uniforms." She also suggested South Korea's possible future miscalculation of North Korean moves could cause an accidental clash between the rivals, jeopardizing the safety of Seoul, a city of 10 million people which is only an hour's drive from the land border.

On Tuesday, Kim Yo Jong issued a statement calling South Korean conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol "foolishly brave" but his liberal predecessor Moon Jae-in "very smart." South Korean analysts say she was attempting to help muster those opposing Yoon's tougher policy on North Korea ahead of the April elections.