

Eastern Libyan forces say Turkish drone killed 5 civilians

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By SAMY MAGDY | AP

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Tue, 2020-04-28 13:36

CAIRO: Eastern Libyan forces laying siege to the country's capital of Tripoli accused their rivals Tuesday of staging an attack in which a Turkish drone hit a food truck convoy in the country's west, killing at least five civilians.

The militia groups loosely allied with a UN-supported but weak government in Tripoli denied attacking civilians, saying they targeted trucks carrying equipment and ammunition for eastern forces trying to take the capital. Khalifa Haftar, who declared the start of an operation to root out the militias and unify the country in 2014, is commander of the east-based forces attempting to take control of Tripoli. They control most of eastern and southern Libya. The besieged administration in Tripoli rules just a corner of the country's west. Both sides are supported by a network of fractious militias and foreign powers.

Haftar launched his Tripoli offensive last April. In recent weeks, violence has escalated, with both sides accusing each other of shelling civilian neighborhoods. The UN has said the violence and worsening humanitarian crisis in Libya could amount to war crimes.

Turkey has sent armored drones, air defenses and more recently, Syrian militants with links to extremist groups to prop up the embattled Tripoli government.

There was no immediate comment from Turkish officials on the alleged drone attack.

Ahmed Al-Mosmari, a spokesman for Haftar forces, said the drone strike took place late Monday near the district of Mizda, 184 kilometers south of Tripoli.

The attack came after Haftar, in an attempted show of strength, declared Monday that a 2015 UN-brokered political deal to unite the oil-rich country was "a thing of the past."

The Tripoli-based government said it wasn't surprised by Haftar's announcement and urged Libyans to join "a comprehensive dialogue and continue on the democratic path to reach a comprehensive and permanent solution based on ballot boxes."

While the 2015 agreement has failed to bring unity or stability to the divided country, Haftar's announcement threatens to further complicate UN efforts to broker a political settlement to the civil war.

In Brussels, European Commission spokesman Peter Stano on Tuesday criticized Haftar's announcement. He said "any attempt to push forward unilateral solutions, even more so by force, will never provide a sustainable solution for the country."

Stano said the December 2015 agreement remains the most viable framework for a

political solution in Libya. He called on international stakeholders in Libya to “increase their pressure” on the warring parties to end the fighting and bring about a political settlement.

Jalel Harchaoui, a Libya expert at The Netherlands Institute of International Relations, said Haftar’s move was “pretty much a coup” that revealed “aspirations that aren’t new.”

“Haftar takes yet another step toward full military autocracy and absolute control over the territories currently aligned with the LNA,” he said. The move could also give the military commander an opportunity to take economic measures to address serious economic and financial crises in areas under his control.

Libya has been in turmoil since 2011, when a civil war toppled long-time dictator Muammar Qaddafi, who was later killed. The chaos has worsened in the recent round of fighting as foreign backers increasingly intervene, despite their pledges to the contrary at a high-profile peace summit in Berlin earlier this year.



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Libya’s Haftar declares UN unity deal ‘thing of the past’ War-weary Libyans view virus lockdown as another inconvenience

[Egypt registers highest number of new coronavirus infections](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Tue, 2020-04-28 15:46

CAIRO: Egypt registered 260 new infections of the novel coronavirus and 22 deaths, the health ministry said on Tuesday, the highest daily rise for both figures.

In total 5,042 people have been infected and 359 died since the start of the outbreak, the ministry said in a statement. A total of 1,304 have recovered. Egypt, a country of 100 million, has closed its airports to contain the pandemic and imposed a night curfew but pushed back the starting time to 9 p.m., two hours later than initially in place.



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Moroccans praised for solidarity, charity in Italy

Tue, 2020-04-28 18:04

ROME: Since the start of the coronavirus crisis, the 700,000-strong Moroccan community in Italy has strived to help those in need, in a country that has been hit particularly hard by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

They have no intention to stop doing so during Ramadan, Moroccan Ambassador to Italy Youssef Balla told Arab News.

“Moroccans in Italy have been living the coronavirus crisis just like their Italian brothers live it: In self-isolation, applying social distancing, respecting the rules imposed by the health emergency,” he said, adding that Moroccans constitute “the biggest Arab community in this country.”

According to Italian news agency ANSA, “Moroccans are currently the largest non-EU immigrant community in Italy.”

With the goal of promoting bilateral friendships, numerous cultural and religious projects have been initiated in recent years.

“We’re talking about a well-integrated community that acts as a human bridge between Italy and Morocco,” said Balla, who has been ambassador in Italy since July 2019, having previously been posted in Peru.

“It’s an economically active community – 20 percent of the Moroccan community is composed of entrepreneurs.”

In the previous legislature, Italy’s Parliament included two MPs of Moroccan origin. Many Moroccans are doctors who have been working in Italian hospitals to combat COVID-19.



The embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco in Italy. (Screenshot/AN Photo)

Moroccans in Italy mainly live in the north: In Lombardy, Piedmont and Emilia Romagna. Those are the regions suffering the highest death tolls due to COVID-19, and where infection rates have still not dramatically decreased.

“We’re in the month of Ramadan, a sacred month of spirituality, but also a month of joy during which visits are exchanged, and family and human ties become stronger and stronger. Unfortunately, these traditions this year can’t be respected,” Balla said.

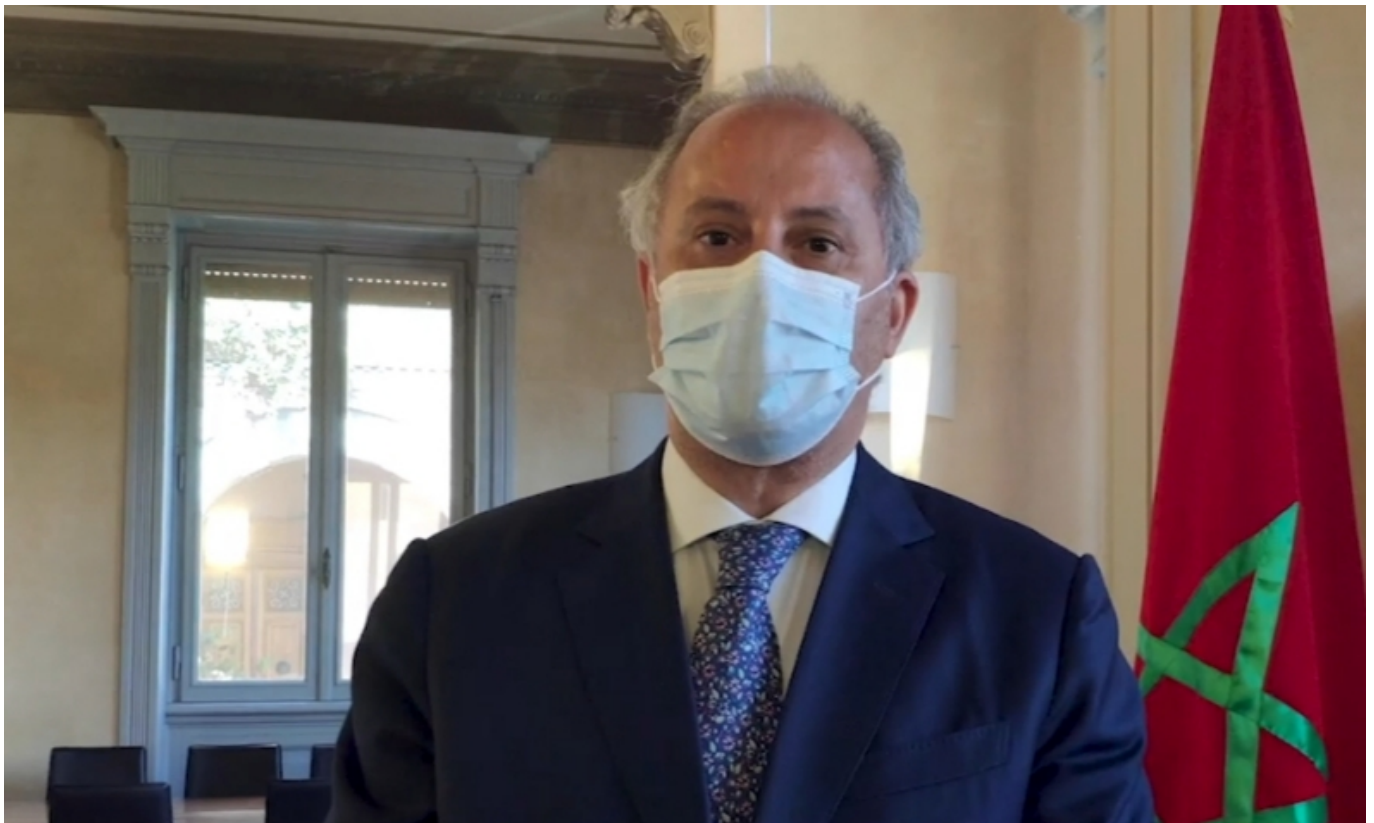
“From the very first moment of the COVID-19 crisis, the Moroccan community has mobilized together with the Italian brothers to bring support and help to both Italian and Moroccan families, without any distinction of race or

religion,” he added.

“Moroccans have helped support the impressive effort made so far by the Red Cross and Civil Protection with many donations,” he said.

“We’ve been witnessing many acts of solidarity among Moroccans ... Food aid is donated to the most needy families,” he added.

“There have also been many manifestations of solidarity from Moroccan entrepreneurs ... who have given food to the needy and to medical staff.”



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Virus hits Morocco’s small Jewish community hard
Morocco arrests over 4,300 for breaching emergency rules

[Fuel truck bomb kills more than 20 in northern Syria: monitor](#)

Author:

AFP

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Tue, 2020-04-28 14:51

Beirut: A fuel truck bomb killed more than 20 people, including at least six Turkey-backed rebel fighters, on Tuesday in a northern Syrian city controlled by Ankara's local proxies, a war monitor said.

"At least 22 people including civilians were killed and 27 others wounded when an explosive device inside a fuel truck exploded in a market" in the Afrin region, said Rami Abdul Rahman, the head of the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.



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[Iran's regional proxy machine has been derailed, says expert](#)

Mon, 2020-04-27 20:40

LONDON: The killing of Iranian Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani and the lack of dollars have derailed Tehran's regional proxy machine, which will need time

to recover, the editor in chief of Al Arabiya English said at a webinar on Monday.

“The Iranian regime needs US dollars to fund dozens and dozens of militias in Iraq. Many of them it exercises full control over, others a considerable amount – same in Syria and Lebanon,” said Mohammed Khalid Alyahya.

The lack of a charismatic leader to replace Soleimani, the commander of Iran’s Quds Force who was killed in a US drone strike in Iraq in January, is derailing the proxy machine even further, Alyahya added.

“In the region, limiting Iran’s ability to fund its proxy network is the strategy. The US strategy is working. It’s not perfect, but it’s working,” he said.

“What we’re seeing right now is the maximum-pressure campaign putting Iran in a corner scrambling for resources.”

Alyahya noted that none of the regional actors had a say in the talks that led to the Iran nuclear deal.

“Every country within range of Iran’s ballistic missiles, long range or short, or that contains militias, which are many in the region, wasn’t included in the nuclear negotiations,” he said.

“Those most at risk from Iranian aggression and expansionism were an afterthought of the discussions,” he added.

“Since the deal, Iran stepped up its activities across the region, doubled down on ethnic cleansing and genocide in Syria ... and empowered Hezbollah.” On Saudi-Iranian relations, Alyahya said: “If you go to Riyadh and ask what their biggest national security threat is, invariably you’d hear Iran. However, if you were to go to Iran to ask them what their biggest national security threat is, they’d say the US or Israel, or both ...

So primarily it’s a conflict between the US and Iran.”

The webinar was hosted by the Harvard Kennedy School’s Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, and was co-sponsored by Managing the Atom, the Iran Working Group and the Middle East Initiative.



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The strike on Iran's SoleimaniUS imposes fresh sanctions on Iranian individuals, companies amid coronavirus