

Lavrov rejects Idlib cease-fire as 'capitulating before terrorists'

Author:

Wed, 2020-02-26 01:27

GENEVA: Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Tuesday rejected calls for a halt to a Russia-backed Syrian offensive in Idlib in northwest Syria.

"This is capitulating before terrorists and even a reward for their activities in violation of international treaties and numerous UN Security Council resolutions," Lavrov told the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. Lavrov accused some governments of "a desire to justify outrageous acts committed by radical and terrorist groupings.

"Otherwise, it would be difficult to explain admonishments about the possibility of concluding peace agreements with bandits," he said, referring to the situation in Idlib.

Syrian rebels backed by the Turkish military have seized the town of Nairab in northwest Syria's Idlib province, the first area to be taken back from advancing Syrian regime forces.

"With the help of our Turkish friends, we have regained control of the strategic town of Nairab, the gateway of Saraqeb, after expelling the terrorist Russian militias," Yusef Hamoud, spokesman for the Turkish-backed National Army, said.

A Turkish security official said the Turkish military had supported the rebel offensive with shelling and that bomb disposal teams and the rebels were now clearing the town, located about 20 km southeast of rebel-held Idlib city. Their next goal was to capture the strategic town of Saraqeb, where Syria's main north-south highway linking Damascus and Aleppo meets the road west to the Mediterranean. "This will happen soon. The regime suffered heavy losses in the clashes last night. Also, a serious amount of weapons and ammunition was seized," the Turkish official said.

In Geneva, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) called on the warring sides to allow safe passage for civilians to escape attacks. It reminded them that hospitals, markets and schools are protected by law.

FASTFACT

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"We are urging parties to allow civilians to move to safety, either in areas they control or across the front lines," ICRC spokeswoman Ruth Hetherington told a news briefing.

An airstrike struck a school, killing three people, Syrian opposition activists said, as regime forces moved forward in their offensive toward a

town considered a symbol of the uprising against President Bashar Assad. The violence came as Turkey's president announced that a Russian delegation would arrive the following day to resume talks aimed at easing tensions in Idlib.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said no consensus was reached for a four-way meeting next month between the leaders of France, Germany, Russia and Turkey meant to address the crisis. He added, however, that Russia's Vladimir Putin may still come to Turkey next week for a bilateral meeting. Moscow has so far not confirmed a March 5 visit by the Russian president to Turkey.

"Russia supports Syria at the highest level," Erdogan told reporters before departing for a visit to Azerbaijan. "Even if they deny it, we have evidence. We are forced to be in this fight."



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Turkey's Erdogan says no agreement yet on four-way Syria summit
Syrian troops press ahead with campaign as strikes kill 16

Hosni Mubarak: Egypt's warrior leader left his mark on Middle East history

Wed, 2020-02-26 00:47



CAIRO: Former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who passed away on Tuesday, ruled Egypt for 30 years. His rule began in a spirit of reform, with the release of political prisoners, support for the independence of the judiciary and the freedom of the press and a great deal of tolerance for his political opponents.

What is certain is that Mubarak's role in the contemporary history of Egypt lies mainly in the military, as he belonged to a generation of warrior leaders. He was chosen by Gamal Abdel Nasser after the defeat of 1967, when he was a colonel, in order to rebuild the destroyed air force and prepare it for the victory of October 1973.

Some may disagree about Mubarak's legacy, but it is unfair and transgressive to underestimate his value and role as a pilot.

I will not forget a comment, from a friend of mine from the Gulf, on the change he witnessed in the character of Egypt during the country's rush to try Mubarak, and even execute him, after his fall. "The crisis that the Egyptian people suffer from is that, for the first time, they have lost their two most important characteristics: Patience and tolerance," he told me.

I will also never forget the comment of an English friend during Mubarak's trial, and his transfer from his home to the hospital, and from there to the courtroom cage that had been specially built for him, and then to prison. At that time, my friend wondered: "Didn't Mubarak fight with the army one day?" I replied: "He even participated in three wars: The Suez war in 1956, the June 1967 war, and finally the October 1973 war, which was truly the most important victory in the history of the Arabs." The man marveled at the insult Mubarak had to endure, saying: "Had he been in my country, the situation would have been different."



He resigned as president in 2011, ushering in elections won by the Muslim Brotherhood. (AP)

For sure, Mubarak belonged to the generation of great warrior leaders, and that is an undeniable role that cannot be erased. At the same time, he was the ruler of Egypt for 30 years, and he is certainly subject to criticism, agreements and differences.

It is possible to explain a part of Mubarak's behavior on the eve of his removal from power in order to preserve the blood of the Egyptians, and his decision to remain in the country, by saying that he was a leader who fought for the sake of Egypt. He did not kill tens of thousands or destroy cities to remain in power. He did not run away from the accusations leveled against him. Rather, he was tried in his country as a former president – acquitted in some cases and convicted in one – which gave a symbolic value to Egypt.

I still remember when he said to me with love and pride, after I interviewed him in 2009, how he preserved all of Egypt's history and topography, and how he had visited all of its cities. He spoke with a real passion, one that explains why he did not leave the country when he abdicated.

The trials of the former president were not the most severe acts against him – that, I think, was the moment when his successors decided to withdraw all the medals and decorations he had received from him. I think that was the most difficult moment.

Many believe – and I am one of them – that a politician's accountability for his errors should be in political action. I do not agree that accountability and justice for what are deemed political errors should be meted out through the use of vindictive punishments.



His final years as president saw rising discontent against him. (AFP)

There are those who considered Mubarak's reign as three decades of darkness and dictatorship, of looting, corruption and retreat, but it can be noticed that the number of these people has decreased significantly during recent years. On the other hand, there is a large sector that believes Mubarak made right and wrong decisions, and these people believe that, had Mubarak decided to withdraw from public life after the death of his grandson in 2009, and the surgery he underwent, he would have had a distinguished position in the hearts of the Egyptians. There is a third group that calls itself "Mubarak's children." These people find in their former president nothing but good, and their position was strengthened because of the way the Muslim Brotherhood

Timeline:

■ Born in the Nile Delta village of Kafr Musailha on May 4



1928



1972

■ Becomes commander of the air force

1975

■ Appointed vice president by President Anwar Sadat



1981

■ Takes office after his predecessor Anwar Sadat is assassinated during a military parade



1995

■ Survives assassination attempt by Islamist militants during his visit to Ethiopia

2005

■ Wins elections, despite street protests by the Kefaya movement opposing his fifth consecutive

1999

■ Sworn in as president for his fourth term



2012

■ Sentenced to three years in prison and transferred by helicopter to Torah prison hospital in Cairo

2011

■ Resigns as president in February, handing over power to the military, in response to weeks of Arab Spring protests demanding he step down

■ Denies all charges against him (and his two sons) involving corruption, abuse of power and the killing of protesters

2020

■ Mubarak dies at 91 due to health complications in a hospital in Cairo



ruled.

So, as we see, there are understandable difference in assessing Mubarak's legacy. What was not understood, however, was the sweeping and overpowering attack not on Mubarak the president, but on Mubarak the fighter pilot – Mubarak the man.

God was merciful to him. He gave him the chance to see a large part of his rehabilitation after he suffered a lot during the long months following the fall of his regime in 2011. He was ultimately cleared of all charges but, more importantly, he began to talk again about the role of the air force. His memoirs, which he wrote when he was vice president, were published to show him as a military commander and a fighter pilot who fought for his country.

For many Egyptians, it seemed he had been helped through divine intervention. He entered intensive care about a month ago. A few days before his death, he received the news that his sons, Alaa and Gamal, had been acquitted in their final case. And one of the last things Mubarak said, according to his lawyer, Farid Al-Deeb, after he learned of the news of the innocence of his two sons, was: "Praise be to God. Our Lord has done justice to us after so many years."

People will always remember that Mubarak gave a real margin to political forces and the media throughout his rule. This was one of the reasons he remained in power for so long, and was not the cause of his downfall.

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Mubarak to be buried in 'small' military funeral
Death of the 'accidental pharaoh': Arab and world leaders react to passing of Hosni Mubarak

[Iraqi protester killed, dozens injured by security forces in Baghdad](#)

Tue, 2020-02-25 23:47

BAGHDAD: Iraqi security forces killed at least one protester in Baghdad on Tuesday and wounded 24 others, police sources told Reuters. The death was due to birdshot fired from a hunting rifle, the sources said, adding that five of the injuries also resulted from birdshot. The remaining injuries were tear gas-related. At least 23 members of the security forces were also injured, the sources said.



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Iraqi nurse spends her weekends stitching wounds at protest site
Iraqi security forces open fire on Baghdad protesters

[UN Security Council approves resolution on Yemen sanctions](#)

Tue, 2020-02-25 23:17

UN, NEW YORK: The UN Security Council approved a resolution on Tuesday extending targeted sanctions in Yemen following contentious negotiations including on whether to refer to UN experts' findings that Yemen's Houthi militia are receiving parts for drones and weapons, some with technical characteristics similar to arms manufactured in Iran.

The UK, which drafted the resolution, along with the US and other Western nations supported including the experts' findings, but Russia and China objected.

The much-revised British draft voted on Tuesday afternoon eliminated all references to the Houthis and Iran, but Russia and China said their demands were not fully met and abstained.

That appeared to be a surprise to the UK and its Western allies who thought after negotiations into the early afternoon that all 15 council members would vote "yes."

The resolution does ask the UN panel of experts, whose mandate was renewed, to report on commercially available components used by individuals and entities under UN sanctions, without referring to any party.

The panel of experts reported in late January that the Houthis had acquired such weapons which were used to assemble drones, water-borne explosive devices and other weapons systems.

Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Yemen Mohammed bin Saeed Al-Jaber said the resolution stresses on the continuous rejection of the international community on the coup led by Iran-backed Houthis and their attacks against the Yemenis.



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Yemen envoy to US says Houthi escalation spoils peace hopesUN: Houthi militia impeding aid flow in Yemen

[UN calls for 'two state' solution to be respected in Middle East](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-02-25 01:46

UNITED NATIONS: The UN Security Council made a rare show of unity Monday when it called on all parties to maintain their support for a two state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

"Council Members reiterated their support for a negotiated two state solution ... where two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders," said a statement released by

Belgium, which holds the rotating presidency, and supported by all 14 other members, including the United States.

“All parties should refrain from undermining the viability of the two states solution in order to maintain the prospects for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace,” the statement added, an allusion to Israel’s recent threat to build thousands more homes in East Jerusalem, in an area claimed by the Palestinians.

The council also “stressed the need to exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations on all final status issues” and expressed “grave concern about acts of violence against civilians.”

The statement came after two days of rising tensions in the region after the Palestinian group Islamic Jihad fired rockets at Israel, following the killing of three of its members in the Gaza Strip and Syria.



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Pope appears to give thumbs down to Trump’s Middle East peace plan
Jordanians voice anger at Mideast peace plan