

Sudan must unite armed forces during political crisis: Former PM

Author:

Mon, 2019-07-01 23:12

KHARTOUM: Sudan must at all costs avoid tensions between a powerful paramilitary unit that controls Khartoum and the regular army or risk more instability following a military coup in April, leading opposition figure Sadiq Al-Mahdi said.

An influential former prime minister, Al-Mahdi called on high-profile military leader Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, commonly known as Hemedti, to fully integrate the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) which he commands with the regular army to promote unity within the armed forces.

"The fact that there are tensions between our armed groups must be resolved peacefully," Al-Mahdi, Sudan's last democratically elected premier, said in an interview.

"Either people fight it out, which would be very bad for Sudan, or they accept a reconciliation process," said Al-Mahdi, who heads the largest opposition party.

"All our political forces are going to have their minds concentrated on the need to avoid this civil war and all types of conflicts that are potentially there."

Sudanese activists said at least 11 people were killed in clashes with security forces during mass demonstrations demanding a transition to civilian rule.

Tens of thousands of Sudanese flooded the streets of Khartoum, and other areas on Sunday in the biggest protests since security forces cleared a sit-in last month.

They called for the military to hand over power to civilians following the coup that ousted Bashir in April.

Nazim Sirraj, a prominent activist, said three bodies were found next to a school in Omdurman, the twin city of Khartoum.

The three were shot dead in an area where security forces had barred protesters from marching toward a hospital and had fired tear gas to disperse them, he said.

One wounded person died on the way to the hospital in Khartoum, he added.

Sirraj said the total death toll was 11, including one killed in the city of Atbara, a railway hub north of Khartoum and the birthplace of the December uprising that eventually led to Bashir's ouster.

Speaking at his sprawling villa surrounded by gardens in the capital, Al-Mahdi also said the opposition had floated the idea of merging the forces to the Transitional Military Council (TMC), which has been in charge since President Omar Bashir was overthrown following protests triggered by an economic crisis.

There are no signs that a conflict is looming between the RSF and the military. And there are no apparent divisions between Hemedti, deputy head of the TMC, and its leader Lt. Gen. Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan.

But Al-Mahdi, himself toppled by Bashir in 1989, said Sudan cannot afford to take any chances during a turbulent period.

“All our minds will be concentrated on avoiding this catastrophic development which is very much on the horizon.”

The military has more firepower but taking on the RSF in the capital would inflict mass civilian casualties, say politicians, analysts and opposition figures.

Al-Mahdi's moderate Islamic Umma party is among opposition groups who have been pressing for a transition to civilian rule in talks with the TMC that ground to a halt last month.

Hemedti has indicated he has political ambitions, delivering frequent public speeches, and promising a brighter future for Sudanese, from the same palace occupied by Bashir.

“If he looks ahead to a leadership role it will be acceptable if he becomes a civilian citizen, and if he then either forms his own party or joins whatever party he thinks is closer to his ideas,” said Al-Mahdi.

Bashir used Hemedti and his men, now deployed across Khartoum armed with rocket-propelled grenades and machine guns mounted on vehicles, to counter perceived threats from rivals under a strategy that helped him stay in power for 30 years.

“We believe he (Hemedti) must accept now that this (integration of the RSF and army) should be developed.

His force will be part and parcel of a national defense force,” said Mahdi. This should be done “in a way that will be voluntary with the armed forces.”

Al-Mahdi said chances of reconciliation could be improved by an independent investigation of violence three weeks ago in which witnesses said the RSF led a raid on a protest camp. Opposition medics reported more than 100 people killed. The government put the death toll at 61, including three security personnel.



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[Tunisian president Essebsi leaves hospital](#)

Mon, 2019-07-01 22:03

TUNIS: Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi left hospital on Monday in "normal health" and the 92-year-old leader will resume work in the coming days, the president's son said on his Facebook page. Essebsi, a major player in the North African country's transition to democracy after a 2011 revolution, had been taken to a military hospital on Thursday after suffering a "severe health crisis".



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[Syrians dig, cook, fill sandbags in war with Bashar Assad](#)

Sun, 2019-06-30 22:33

ATARIB, SYRIA: Away from the frontlines, volunteers are helping in the war against Syria’s Bashar Assad by cooking, filling sandbags, collecting old tires and digging trenches, aiming to help ward off his assault on northwestern Syria.

It is part of the civilian effort to help defend the last major opposition stronghold from Assad and his Russian allies who have been pounding it for weeks.

Abu Abdo, 51, says he is playing his part by collecting old tires to be burned by fighters to create a smoke screen from hostile warplanes.

"We go to places where tires are repaired, collect them and take them to the fighters," said Abu Abdo, 51, as he piled tires into the back of a truck with the help of his sons in the town of Salqin.

"These tires have no value but protect (the fighters) and keep the enemy busy," said Abu Abdo, as two of sons sat atop the pile of tires in the back of the truck.

In recent years, Assad's opponents have poured into northwestern Syria from other parts of Syria that have been taken from opposition. The region, which includes Idlib province and parts of neighboring provinces, has an estimated 3 million inhabitants, about half of whom had already fled fighting elsewhere according to the UN.

With nowhere else for these people to flee, many have a stake in fending off the attack on the northwest. To this end, activists and religious leaders launched a campaign in May called "fire an arrow with them."

Volunteers at work in a kitchen in the town of Atarib are preparing 2,000 meals a day for fighters as part of the campaign. Yellow rice is spooned from large vats into polystyrene trays and lentil soup is poured into bags ready for delivery to fighters.

"The car leaves from here to the frontlines under airstrikes and surveillance sometimes," said a 40-year-old man at work in the kitchen who gave his name as Abu Wael. "God willing we continue so these meals reach the fighters."

At a nearby quarry, sacks that once contained rice were being filled with grit for use as sandbag defenses.

"We are filling according to the demand of the frontline. The command center, for example, requests 200 bags or 1,000 bags for one position," said Khaled Al-Jamal, 26, at work with a group of other volunteers.

He finished his high school education but was unable to register at university once the war began in 2011. He hopes his effort will help fighters so "all their effort is directed at repelling the regime."

In Salqin, men use shovels, pick axes and pneumatic drills to dig a trench in an olive grove as part of another civilian campaign, this one called "the Popular Resistance Battalions."

A long way from the frontline, Yehya Al-Sheikh, 38, says the trench he is digging with others will provide protection from airstrikes for a family living nearby.

"We came to dig trenches to defend ourselves and our people and to support our Mujahideen brothers against Bashar Assad."

Some 300,000 people in the northwest have been uprooted since late April and

Local sources have reported that hundreds of civilians including women and children have been killed, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs says.

The territory is largely controlled by Tahrir Al-Sham, a militant group representing the latest incarnation of the Nusra Front, formerly Al-Qaeda's Syrian wing, though groups fighting under the banner of the Free Syrian Army also have a presence.

The Syrian regime, which has vowed to recover "every inch" of Syria, says it is responding to attacks by Al-Qaeda-linked rebels.



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['Many injured' in Morocco migrant camp](#)

blaze

Sun, 2019-06-30 22:27

RABAT: A blaze ripped through a migrant camp in the Moroccan city of Casablanca on Sunday leaving “many injured,” authorities and camp residents said.

Illegal but tolerated by authorities, the Oulad Ziane camp near the coastal city’s main bus station has for years been home to hundreds of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa.

Largest camp

It is the largest and one of the last informal camps left in the kingdom, following a push by authorities to dismantle others.

“The camp burned down, and many injured were hospitalized,” said Camara Lassine, a community leader in the camp.

“There was a fight between a hundred migrants over a stolen phone, and one of them started the fire and called the police,” he said.

“We don’t know if we’ll be allowed to return.”

Authorities said the fire broke out amid “plastic tents and debris” but was later brought under control without causing any deaths.

Blighted by a poor hygiene and violence, Oulad Ziane camp was hit by four fires last year.

A steady flow of sub-Saharan migrants enter Morocco each year aiming to reach Europe by sea or via the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla at the kingdom’s northern tip.

But many eventually settle in Morocco, which has conducted two campaigns since 2014 granting residency to 50,000 illegal immigrants, according to authorities.

Most migrants at the camp hail from the West African countries of Guinea, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Mali, and Niger.

Since 2014, Morocco has regularized thousands of undocumented migrants residing in the country.



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[Algeria arrests prominent war veteran](#)

Author:

Sun, 2019-06-30 22:04

ALGIERS: Algerian authorities have arrested a well-known veteran of the war of independence against France, his grandson and media outlets said Sunday, after he reportedly criticised military chief Ahmed Gaid Saleh.

Lakhdar Bouregaa, 86, was arrested at his home in the upscale Hydra neighbourhood overlooking Algiers on Saturday and taken to a intelligence services base, grandson Imad Bouregaa said.

He told the DzVid news website that his grandfather's arrest was linked to comments he made about Gaid Salah, Algeria's strongman since the ouster in April of veteran president Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

"My grandfather said that Gaid Salah wanted to impose his own candidate in

presidential elections” to replace Bouteflika, he said.

National television reported that he had been detained for “insulting a state body and undermining the morale of the army”, charges for which he could face up to 10 years in prison.

Bouteflika resigned after weeks of protests against his rule, only hours after close ally Gaid Salah demanded impeachment proceedings against him. Gaid Salah has since been pushing for polls to choose a successor but a planned election on July 4 was scrapped after the only two candidates were rejected.

Bouregaa’s arrest was also reported by several media outlets in Algeria, including French-language daily Liberte, and sparked criticism on social media.

His arrest has “shocked” many of those who took part in the 1954-1962 war of independence against French colonial rule, human rights activist Fodil Boumala said in a statement posted on Facebook.

It was a “serious blunder”, said the statement signed by dozens of university professors.

Bouregaa, who was a commander of the National Liberation Army (ALN) which fought the French and a founder in 1963 of the Front for Socialist Forces (FFS), one of Algeria’s oldest opposition parties.

The FFS said it was “angry” and “dismayed” at his arrest.

Liberte said Bouregaa had contacted his children to inform them of his arrest but could not say where he was being held or the reason for his detention.



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Algerian protesters hold demonstrations despite arrests