

Sudan protesters urge night rallies amid standoff with army

Author:

Tue, 2019-06-18 20:31

KHARTOUM: Sudan's protest leaders on Monday called for nighttime demonstrations and marches in the capital, Khartoum, and elsewhere in the country, amid a tense standoff with the ruling military over who should lead the transition after the ouster of Omar Al-Bashir.

The protest leaders said they've begun a "revolutionary escalation" to pressure the country's generals to hand over power to civilians and to condemn the military's violent dispersal of their sit-in camp in Khartoum earlier this month.

At least 128 people have died since the security force's crackdown on June 3, according to the protest organizers. The military-backed authorities, however, say 61 people died, including three members of the security forces.

The group representing the protesters – known as the Forces for the Declaration of Freedom and Change – said the night rallies will begin on Tuesday and marches on Thursday.

The calls came a day after the deputy head of Sudan's ruling military council, Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, pushed back against demands from protest leaders concerning the composition of a transitional legislative body, seen by protest leaders as their "most important victory" in talks with the military.

Negotiations stalled

Dura Gambo, an activist with the Sudanese Professionals Association which has spearheaded the protest movement since December, said the protest leaders chose to return to the streets after they realized that the military "started to pull out of the previous deals."

"There is a total impasse. The negotiations have been suspended, internet services remain blocked, and the Ethiopian mediations apparently did not make progress," she said.

Negotiations between the military and protesters were called off after the deadly sit-in dispersal on June 3. The FDFC announced a package of conditions to be met before resuming talks, which included the formation of an international commission to investigate the killings of protesters, restoring internet services, and adherence to any deals struck before the breakdown in talks.

The military council rejected the idea of an international investigation, but the Ethiopian Foreign Ministry had said the council had agreed to adhere to the previous deals.

FASTFACT

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Both Ethiopia and the US, which has sent a special envoy to Sudan, have made efforts to revive the talks and find a peaceful solution.

The EU on Monday called for military and protest leaders to refrain from unilateral moves, and resume negotiations “immediately,” based on agreements reached so far.

The statement, issued by an EU council representing its member states, urged the military to take confidence-building measures, including lifting restrictions on freedom of assembly, freedom of the media, civic space and access to the internet, and for the FDFC to respond accordingly.

Gambo warned that the protesters were still facing repression as long as the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces and other security units were left on the streets in Khartoum and other cities.

“Street demonstrations are risky. It means more crackdown and deaths,” she said.

In a press conference in Khartoum on Monday, prominent activist Mohammed Naji Al-Asam reiterated the demand for an internationally-backed investigation into the protesters’ deaths, before resuming talks with the military.

“We are ready for any scenario. It seems that the military council intends to cling to power to rule Sudan alone,” he said.

“This will not happen,” he added.

He says 12 alleged rape cases were documented in the crackdown. He did not elaborate.

Last week, Pramila Patten, a UN special representative on sexual violence in conflict zones, expressed “grave concern” over reports of the rapes of protesters and female medical personnel by security forces and militias in Sudan.

Over the weekend, the hashtag #blueforSudan began to trend locally and internationally on social media, as a sign of solidarity with Sudan’s embattled protest movement.

Gambo, the activist, said the hashtag was created in memory of a protester, Mohammed Hashim Matter, a young engineer who was killed in the sit-in dispersal earlier this month.

“Mohammed had written on his social media: ‘I have painted the sky blue,’” she

said, referring to hopes for change in Sudan aroused by the protesters. "After his death, his friends launched a social media campaign and changed their profile pictures to blue, Mohammed's favorite."



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[US will maintain pressure campaign on Iran, says Pompeo](#)

Tue, 2019-06-18 19:51

WASHINGTON: The US will maintain its pressure campaign on Iran and continue to deter aggression in the region, but does not want the conflict with Tehran to escalate, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Tuesday.

"We have been engaged in many messages, even this moment right here, communicating to Iran that we are there to deter aggression," Pompeo told

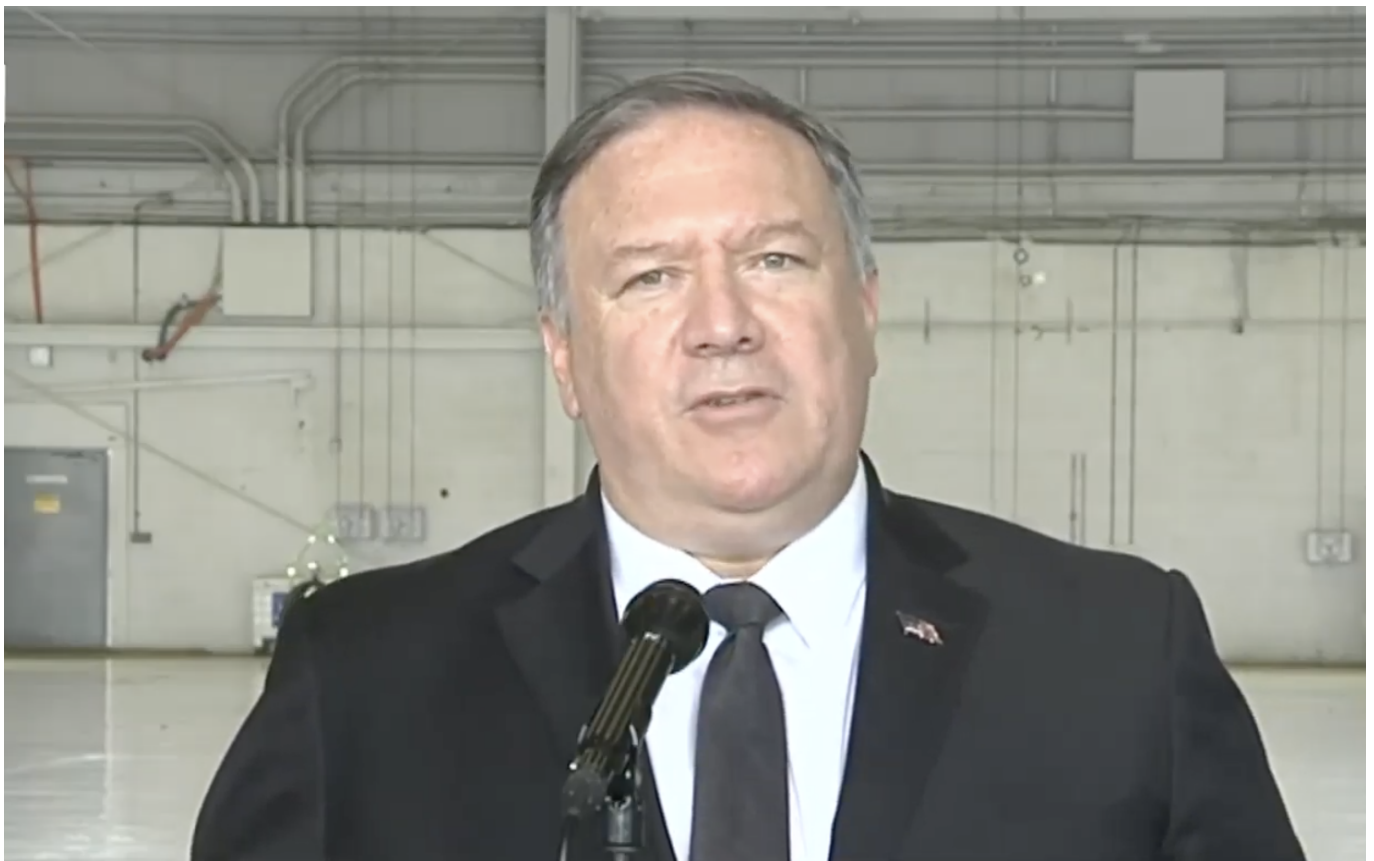
reporters at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida.

“President Trump does not want war and we will continue to communicate that message while doing the things that are necessary to protect American interests in the region.”

Fears of a confrontation between Iran and the US have mounted since Washington blamed Iran for last Thursday’s attacks on two oil tankers near the strategic Strait of Hormuz shipping lane.

In an interview with Time magazine released Tuesday, Trump said he was prepared to take military action to stop Tehran from having a nuclear bomb but left open whether he would sanction the use of force to protect Gulf oil supplies.

“Now we need to make sure that we continue to do that so that we ultimately we get the opportunity to convince Iran that it’s not in their best interest to behave in this way.”



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‘Hypocrite’ Rouhani rejects war as Iran’s drones target Saudi civiliansUS shares new images of Iranian activity after tanker attack

Syria clashes kill 45 fighters: monitor

Author:

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Tue, 2019-06-18 10:55

BEIRUT: Clashes between pro-government forces and extremist-led groups that control Syria's northwest killed at least 45 combatants on Tuesday, a war monitor said.

The fighting flared on the edge of Hama province when extremist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham launched a dawn attack on regime positions, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

At least 14 pro-government forces died in ensuing clashes, said the Britain-based monitor.

"Regime forces foiled the attack," Observatory head Rami Abdul Rahman told AFP.

State news agency SANA also said the offensive had been thwarted.

Hama's northern countryside lies on the edge of an extremist-controlled region including most of Idlib province.

The frontline had been relatively calm since clashes on Saturday killed more than 35 combatants, including extremists and regime forces, Abdul Rahman said.

Regime airstrikes on northern Hama and neighboring Idlib had also paused for more than 24 hours, before resuming Tuesday following the latest bout of fighting, according to the monitor.

The bombardment killed one civilian in southern Idlib, it said.

The latest battles come after rocket fire by HTS – led by a former Al-Qaeda affiliate – and allied rebels killed more than 12 civilians in a regime-held village in Aleppo province late Sunday.

Parts of Aleppo, Hama and Idlib are supposed to be protected from a massive regime offensive by a buffer zone deal that Russia and Turkey signed in September.

But it was never fully implemented as extremists refused to withdraw from a planned demilitarised zone.

In January, HTS extended its administrative control over the region, which includes most of Idlib province as well as adjacent slivers of Latakia, Hama and Aleppo provinces.

The Syrian government and Russia have upped their bombardment of the region since late April, killing more than 400 civilians, according to the Observatory.

Syria's war has killed more than 370,000 people and displaced millions since it started in 2011 with the repression of anti-government protests.



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[US to send 1,000 additional troops to](#)

the Middle East

Tue, 2019-06-18 01:26

DUBAI/WASHINGTON: Acting US Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan announced on Monday the deployment of about 1,000 more troops to the Middle East for what he said were “defensive purposes,” citing concerns about a threat from Iran. “The recent Iranian attacks validate the reliable, credible intelligence we have received on hostile behavior by Iranian forces and their proxy groups that threaten United States personnel and interests across the region,” Shanahan said in a statement.

Reuters first reported plans to send US additional troops to the Middle East earlier on Monday.

Fears of a confrontation between Iran and the United States have mounted since last Thursday when two oil tankers were attacked, more than a year after President Donald Trump announced Washington was withdrawing from a 2015 nuclear deal.

Iran said on Monday it would soon breach limits on how much enriched uranium it can stockpile under the deal, which a White House National Security Council spokesman said amounted to “nuclear blackmail.”



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US military releases new images of Iranian forces removing mine from attacked tanker
Iran faces backlash over ‘nuclear blackmail’

US military releases new images of Iranian forces removing mine from attacked tanker

Mon, 2019-06-17 23:35

WASHINGTON: The US military on Monday released new images it says showed Iran's Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) removing an unexploded limpet mine from a Japanese-owned tanker that was attacked on June 13 in the Gulf of Oman, as Washington blames Tehran for the attack.

"Iran is responsible for the attack based on video evidence and the resources and proficiency needed to quickly remove the unexploded limpet mine," the US military's Central Command said in a statement explaining the still-images.

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