

[Syria says it shot down projectiles fired from Israel](#)

Fri, 2019-05-17 22:13

BEIRUT: Loud blasts echoed across Damascus late on Friday, residents said, as Syrian state media reported “enemy targets” coming from the direction of Israel, which has previously acknowledged conducting repeated strikes inside Syria.

Syrian air defences detected objects coming from the direction of “occupied territory” and brought down several, Syrian state television reported a military source as saying.

The state television channel showed footage of the night sky with a point of light firing up into it and the sound of shooting. It did not immediately report casualties or material damage.

There was no immediate comment from Israel, but it has been increasingly open in recent months about targeting sites in Syria that it says are connected to Damascus’ close allies Iran and Hezbollah.

Israel regards Iran as its biggest threat and the Lebanese Shi’ite group Hezbollah as the biggest threat on its border.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor, said the blasts were caused by Israeli rocket fire targeting areas around the Syrian capital.



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Syrian refugees struggle to make ends meet during Ramadan
Iraqi Airways to resume flights to Syria after 8-year break

[Trump awaiting Iranian response on direct talks](#)

Fri, 2019-05-17 19:59

WASHINGTON: The United States is “sitting by the phone” but has heard no message yet from Iran that it is willing to accept President Donald Trump’s overtures for direct talks, a senior Trump administration official said on Friday.

“We think they should de-escalate and come to negotiations,” the official told a small group of reporters.



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Donald Trump ramps up battle against Chinese telecom giant Huawei
UAE minister blames Iran for heightened tensions in the region

Sudan protesters tear down roadblocks, want army to resume talks

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Fri, 2019-05-17 15:26

KHARTOUM: Hundreds of demonstrators worked to clear away bricks and debris Friday, after military rulers demanded that roadblocks which have paralysed parts of Khartoum be dismantled before talks on a new transitional body can resume.

The ruling military council suspended crucial talks Wednesday with protest leaders for 72 hours, insisting that the security in the capital had deteriorated after demonstrators erected roadblocks on several avenues. The council's decision came as army generals and protest leaders were due to meet to finalise the make-up of a new body to govern Sudan for a transitional period of three years.

The issue is the thorniest to have come up in ongoing talks on installing civilian rule after the generals took over following the ouster of autocratic president Omar al-Bashir last month.

But for the final talks to happen the military council chief, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, demanded that protesters dismantle roadblocks, open bridges and railway lines connecting the capital and "stop provoking security forces".

In the early hours of Friday, hundreds of demonstrators chanting revolutionary slogans tore down roadblocks on Nile Street, a key avenue, that had paralysed downtown Khartoum this week.

"We have removed the bricks... but if they do not respond to our demands then we will bring the bricks again," protester Sumeya Abdrahman told AFP while demonstrators cleared the debris.

Later on Friday an AFP correspondent who toured the area saw car traffic resume normally on Nile Street.

Protesters had erected the barricades to pressure the military rulers when talks began on Monday, but the roadblocks triggered clashes between demonstrators and security forces according to witnesses.

The military council said roadblocks are "totally unacceptable", but the generals will allow barricades set up by protesters outside the army headquarters to remain and a sit-in there to continue.

Talks between the two sides achieved significant breakthroughs on Monday, but were marred by violence which left five protesters and an army major dead. Protesters blamed the paramilitary Rapid Support Force, but Burhan said there

were "armed elements among demonstrators who were shooting at security forces".

On Friday, Sudanese protesters attended prayers at the sit-in outside the military headquarters, sitting on mats placed in rows on the street.

"We have all the respect for the army and the RSF. They are our partners in the revolution," said the prayer leader as teenagers sprinkled water on worshippers gathered under the scorching sun.

As the prayers ended, worshippers chanted "freedom, peace, justice," the catchcry of the protest movement that brought down Bashir.

Women worshippers, who offered prayers in separate tents chanted: "Peaceful, peaceful! Civilian, Civilian," referring to the protesters' demand for civilian rule.

"I don't care about the heat ... What I care about is to finish this thing (the political impasse)," said protester Mohamed Ismail as he poured cold water on his head to get relieve from the mid-day sun.

The Alliance for Freedom and Change, which is leading the protest movement, said the move to suspend talks was "regrettable".

"It ignores the developments achieved in negotiations so far... and the fact that Wednesday's meeting was to finalise the agreement, which would have stopped the escalations such as roadblocks."

The protest movement vowed to press on with the sit-in, and has urged supporters to converge at the army headquarters where thousands have been camped out for weeks.

Protesters are demanding a civilian-led transition, which the generals have steadfastly resisted since bowing to demonstrators' demands in toppling Bashir.

During the first two days of talks the two sides had agreed on an overall civilian structure, including a three-year period for the full transfer of power to a civilian administration.

They had also agreed that parliament be composed of 300 members for the transition, with around two-thirds from the protest alliance and the rest drawn from other political groups.

But the make-up of the new sovereign council has been the toughest part of the negotiations, with the two sides so far proposing different compositions of the body.

The council is expected to take all key decisions concerning national issues and the generals want it to be military-led, while the protesters insist it have a civilian majority.

The body is expected to form a transitional civilian government, which would then prepare for the first post-Bashir election after changeover period ends.





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Sudan protesters vow to press on after talks suspended Sudanese forces clear protesters with gunfire; talks suspended for 72 hours

[UAE minister blames Iran for heightened tensions in the region](#)

Fri, 2019-05-17 17:15

LONDON: Iranian behavior has led to the current heightened tensions in the region, a UAE minister has said, reiterating comments made earlier this week.

In an interview with CNN aired Thursday, Anwar Gargash, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, said a sabotage attack against four oil tankers off the Emirates' coast had come at a "sensitive and difficult period in the region."

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[@AnwarGargash](#) tells [@BeckyCNN](#) the [@UAE](#) is investigating recent incidents in the Gulf alongside France and the U.S. and calls for dealing with things in a "mature, rational" way. [#Iran](#)
pic.twitter.com/onQFm9zQnd

– Connect the World (@CNNConnect) [May 16, 2019](#)

"We are where we are largely because of Iran behaviour," Gargash said. "This is a behaviour that is not new to the region. This is a behaviour that has been basically compiling and clearly right now that – American sanctions on Iran are biting."

The attacks on the tankers came amid escalating rhetoric between the US and its Gulf allies on one side and Iran on the other. The US has deployed an aircraft carrier and B-52 bombers to the Gulf in response to an unspecified Iranian threat.

Saudi Arabia said Iran-backed Houthi rebels on Tuesday attacked an oil pipeline in the Kingdom with drones.

The investigations into the tanker attack were on going, Gargash said, adding that in a few days "we should know what took place."

"We are collaborating with France, and the United States, and other friends are also offering their help," he said. "Clearly this is a very, very serious

incident because it affects maritime commerce, and it comes also at a very very, what I would call a very sensitive and difficult period in the region.”

The minister said all parties have an interest in deescalating the situation and “dealing with things in a mature, rational way.”

But he added the onus was on Iran, not Washington, to deescalate the situation.

“Iranian behaviour over the last decade or two has led us to where we are today,” he said. “There’s very little trust in the region.”



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UAE slams Iranian aggression but calls for calm amid oil tanker attack investigation
Saudi oil tankers sabotaged off UAE coast as Trump warns Iran of ‘suffering greatly’ if Tehran attacks

UK warns British-Iranian dual nationals against visiting Iran

Fri, 2019-05-17 17:09

LONDON: London warned British-Iranian dual nationals against all travel to Iran on Friday due to Tehran's "continued arbitrary detention and mistreatment" of such citizens.

The move comes as Britain continues to try to secure the release from jail of dual national Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

Tehran has also recently sentenced an Iranian British Council employee, Aras Amiri, to 10 years in prison on charges of spying.

In a statement, the Foreign Office said British-Iranian dual nationals faced an "unacceptably higher risk of arbitrary detention and mistreatment" than nationals of other countries.

"The security forces may be suspicious of people with British connections, including those with links to institutions based in the UK, or which receive public funds from, or have perceived links to, the British government," the statement said.

British-Iranian mother Zaghari-Ratcliffe was arrested by Iranian authorities in 2016 as she was leaving Tehran.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who worked for the Thomson Reuters Foundation, was put on trial and is now serving a five-year jail sentence for allegedly trying to topple the Iranian government.

"Dual nationals face an intolerable risk of mistreatment if they visit Iran," Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said.

"Despite the UK providing repeated opportunities to resolve this issue, the Iranian regime's conduct has worsened.

"Having exhausted all other options, I must now advise all British-Iranian dual nationals against travelling to Iran.

"The dangers they face include arbitrary detention and lack of access to basic legal rights, as we have seen in the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who has been separated from her family since 2016."

The Iranian government does not recognise dual nationality, meaning the Foreign Office's ability to provide consular support is limited.

Hunt added: "Regrettably, I must also offer a message of caution to Iranian nationals resident in the UK – but who return to visit family and friends – especially where the Iranian government may perceive them to have personal links to UK institutions or the British government."



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UK raises threat level for personnel in Iraq due to Iran risk: Sky News Iran sentences British Council worker to 10 years for spying for UK