

Arab coalition: Over 200 Houthis killed in strikes on Juba and Al-Kasarah

Sun, 2021-10-24 16:30

RIYADH: The Arab coalition said on Sunday that more than 264 Houthis had been killed and 36 military vehicles destroyed in air strikes on two districts near the central Yemeni city of Marib.

The coalition said it had carried out 88 air strikes on the districts of Juba and Al-Kasarah during the last 72 hours.

Juba is some 50 km south of Marib, whilst Al-Kasarah is 30 km northwest of the city.

Later on Sunday, the coalition said it had destroyed an explosive-laden Houthi boat on the Kamaran Island that had been prepared to carry out an imminent attack.

The Houthi militia continues to violate the Stockholm Agreement and the cease-fire in Hodeidah, the coalition said.

The coalition added that the hostile behavior of the Houthi militia threatens navigation in the Bab Al-Mandab Strait and the southern Red Sea

On Saturday, the Arab coalition said it had destroyed four explosive-laden Houthi boats in Yemen's western province of Hodeidah.

Warplanes targeted Al-Jabanah coastal base, east of Hodeidah city, where the vessels had been prepared to attack international ships sailing through the Red Sea, the coalition said.



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More than 90 Houthis killed, 16 military vehicles destroyed in coalition strikes on Jubah and Al-KassarahArab coalition destroys four explosive-laden boats in Yemeni province

[Sudan: Political tensions continue as protesters block roads](#)

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Sun, 2021-10-24 10:15

CAIRO: Pro-military protesters briefly blocked major roads and bridges in

Sudan's capital Sunday, amid growing tensions between the generals and the pro-democracy movement that fueled the uprising against autocratic former president Omar Al-Bashir.

The development came a day after US Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Jeffrey Feltman met with military and civilian leaders in Khartoum to find a compromise to the dispute.

The souring ties between the military and civilians in the ruling government threaten Sudan's fragile transition to democracy since the military's ouster of Al-Bashir and his Islamist government in April 2019 after nearly three decades of autocratic rule.

The current crisis surfaced with a coup attempt last month. Officials blamed Al-Bashir loyalists for the move. But the generals lashed out at the civilian part of the government, accusing politicians of seeking government posts rather than helping ease people's economic suffering.

Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, the head of the ruling Sovereign Council, said that dissolving the government of Prime Minister Abdullah Hamdok could resolve the ongoing political crisis. That suggestion was rejected by hundreds of thousands of pro-democracy protesters who took to the streets of Khartoum and elsewhere in the country Thursday.

That generals' accusations, echoed by Burhan and his deputy, Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, commander of the feared paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, have aroused fears among civilians that the military may eventually hijack the country's transition to civilian rule.

Pro-military protesters rallied in Khartoum earlier this month, echoing Burhan's demands. The protesters have since held a sit-in outside the presidential palace in the capital. Last week, they attempted to storm the Cabinet headquarters as Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok met with his Cabinet. Security forces dispersed them using tear gas.

On Saturday, dozens of pro-military protesters stormed the reception area of the headquarters of the country's state-run news agency and set tires ablaze outside the agency offices. It delayed a news conference for pro-democracy activists, according to Mohamed Abdel-Hamid, director of SUNA news agency. In an escalation Sunday, pro-military demonstrators cut off major roads and bridges, including the Mec Nimr Bridge, which links Khartoum's downtown with other areas of the capital, according to activist and rights defender Tahani Abbas. The move caused traffic to clog the streets early Sunday, the first work day of the week, especially Nile Street, a main traffic artery in Khartoum.

"What is happening ... is an official coup sponsored by Burhan," she said. Abbas shared photos of protesters blocking a bridge with passenger buses and vehicles being turned back.

Later in the day, security forces dispersed the protesters using tear gas to open the blocked roads. Video on social media purportedly showed protesters fleeing over the bridge and on Nile Street.

Feltman, the US envoy, met in Khartoum with Buhan, Dagalo and Hamdok and "emphasized US support for a civilian democratic transition in accordance with the expressed wishes of the Sudanese people," the US Embassy in Khartoum said.

He urged Sudanese leaders "to commit to working together to implement the constitutional declaration and the Juba Peace Agreement" between the government and an alliance of rebel groups, the embassy said.

The tensions come weeks ahead of a scheduled rotation of the leadership on the ruling sovereign council from the military to civilians, according to the constitutional declaration that established the joint government in August 2019.



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[Middle East faced wave of cybersecurity threats since start of pandemic](#)

Sun, 2021-10-24 01:39

RIYADH: Since the start of the pandemic, a wave of advanced threat campaigns targeting the Middle East have been discovered by Kaspersky, a global cybersecurity firm.

An APT is an attack campaign in which intruders establish an illicit, long-term presence on a network to mine highly sensitive data. The targets, which are carefully chosen and researched, typically include large enterprises or government networks.

The region has always been a hotbed for such attacks due to geopolitical factors.

Kaspersky researchers, keeping a close eye on the region for APTs, worked on 68 investigative reports related to 29 cyber gangs actively targeting the Middle East since the start of the pandemic.

The researchers issued 49 threat intelligence reports due to investigations associated with cyberattacks on the UAE, which endured the highest number of reports for all Middle Eastern countries.

The second highest was Saudi Arabia with 39 reports, followed by Egypt with 30. Kuwait and Oman had 21 each, while Jordan had 20. Iraq, Qatar and Bahrain had fewer than 20 reports each.

APT attacks primarily targeted government agencies, followed by diplomatic institutions, the education sector, and telecommunication institutions. Other targeted sectors included finance, IT, healthcare, legal, military, and defense.

Some of the APT groups investigated were Oilrig, WIRTE, Lazarus, and Sofacy.

Fatemah Alharbi, a cybersecurity expert and assistant professor at Taibah University, told Arab News: "PowerShell-based malware are utilized by advanced cyberattacks targeting critical infrastructures in Saudi Arabia."

She said these cybercriminals were sending phishing emails that contained malicious Microsoft Office files impersonating legitimate entities.

To pass the firewall and the email protection techniques, she explained, these rigged files were protected by passwords and compressed as zip files.

"This approach facilitates the mission of these cybercriminals to take full control of the file system and to compromise every single file there. This means they would be able to control the operating system, applications, and data. Assuming the attack is detected, an in-depth analysis and investigation on the file system is highly recommended as a quick response to recover the system and stop the attack."

Referring to a report by Bitdefender, a cybersecurity technology company, Alharbi said: "Researchers shed light on a well-known APT cyber espionage campaign that targets mainly critical infrastructures in Saudi Arabia. This threat group is called Chafer APT (also known as APT39 or Remix Kitten). The report shows that these cybercriminals rely on social engineering to compromise victims in Saudi Arabia.

"Technically, the attack tricked victims to run a remote administration tool located in the downloads folder, similar to the RAT components used against Turkey and Kuwait back in 2014 and 2018, respectively."

Despite these threats, Alharbi said the Kingdom's cybersecurity resources had proven their ability to face such dangers.

“Saudi Arabia is ranked No.1 in the MENA region and Asia and No.2 globally according to the Global Cybersecurity Index issued by the UN’s specialized agency in information and communications technology, the International Telecommunication Union in 2021.”

This indexing evaluates countries periodically based on five main axes: Legal, technical, regulatory, capacity-building, and cooperation. The Kingdom scored advanced points in all of these axes, she said.

Amin Hasbini, head of the global research and analysis team for the Middle East, Turkey, and Africa at Kaspersky, said: “Our cybersecurity experts have always been at the forefront of detecting and reporting the latest APT threats. Our reports are the product of their visibility into the cybersecurity landscape and promptly identify what poses a threat.

“We use these insights to, of course, alert the concerned organizations on time and provide them with the protection as well as intelligence needed against both known and unknown threats. As companies move towards digitization, especially due to the pandemic, it is more important now than ever before to know about the threats that are constantly evolving.”

According to a recent report from Kaspersky and VMWare, working remotely during the pandemic made Saudi employees vulnerable to cyberattacks.

In the VMWare report, a survey of 252 Saudis showed 84 percent of them said that cyberattacks had increased due to working from home.

Alharbi talked about methods to protect users from social engineering threats. “Recently, we see a rise in the number of cyberattacks that are based on social engineering. According to a recent report by PurpleSec, 98 percent of cyberattacks rely on social engineering. Cyber criminals prefer to use social engineering techniques that can expose a victim’s natural inclination to trust easily compared to implementing malwares or any other tools to hack systems.

“For that, organizations must strengthen and diversify their cybersecurity awareness tactics, such as publishing cybersecurity awareness content, in-class training, videos, simulations and tests,” she said.



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Saudi Arabia to stage global cybersecurity forum in February
Mulkiya Investment creates first Saudi cybersecurity fund

Optimism in Gaza amid indications of reconstruction acceleration

Author:

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GAZA CITY: Some hope has returned to Gaza resident Ayman Dahman upon learning that his apartment building, completely destroyed during Israeli airstrikes last May, would be reconstructed.

Dahman has despaired over the past months, but Egyptian and Qatari statements regarding the acceleration of the reconstruction process have restored optimism.

Dahman and his family of six lived in a five-story residential building inhabited by 10 families, in the north of Gaza City.

After its destruction, he moved to live with his son in a small two-room apartment. Once the war ended, he relocated to a rented house, which was paid for by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

UNRWA provided \$1,500 in rent allowance and \$500 for the purchase of basic home furnishings for each victim who lost his or her home during the war.

Dahman said that the Ministry of Public Works and Housing in Hamas-run Gaza contacted him a few days ago to prepare the engineering plans for the building in preparation for reconstruction.

On Oct. 19, the Egyptian Committee for the Reconstruction of the Gaza Strip announced the launch of its first development project in Gaza: the construction of Al-Rasheed Street in Beit Lahia, northern Gaza.

At the same time, head of the Qatari Reconstruction Committee Mohammed Al-Emadi, currently in Gaza, announced that the coming days would witness an acceleration in the reconstruction process.

Hamas had received Egyptian promises during its leadership's visit to Cairo earlier this month to speed up the pace of reconstruction and to provide trade and economic facilities at the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt.

After the war, Egypt pledged a grant of \$500 million as a contribution to reconstruction and sent engineering delegations to remove rubble in

preparation.

Undersecretary of the Ministry of Public Works and Housing Naji Sarhan, said that the Egyptian grant projects include the construction of three residential cities in Beit Lahia; Jabalia, north of Gaza; and the Al-Zahra area, south of Gaza City.

According to the agreement, these three cities will include 2,000 housing units, giving priority to poor and low-income people. The construction of bridges and roads also will be supported.

Sarhan said that Egyptian officials promised – during meetings in Cairo with an official delegation from Gaza about two weeks ago – to start the reconstruction of the residential high-rises soon.

Egyptian crews had contributed to removing the rubble of damaged high-rises, as well as the construction of the first residential city in northern Gaza, he added.

The talks with the Egyptians, according to Sarhan, resulted in an agreement to operate the largest number of local contracting companies.

It was also agreed to import all the materials needed for reconstruction from the Rafah crossing to ensure the operation of local factories and to provide facilities for the movement of contractors and businessmen through the crossing.

The local authorities estimated the direct losses in the Gaza Strip during the war at \$479 million.

Sarhan said that the direct losses are related to the destruction that afflicted the housing and infrastructure sector, as 1,500 housing units were destroyed, and 880 units were severely damaged. Hundreds of units were moderately and slightly damaged, with the value of reconstruction estimated at \$145 million.

A great deal of damage was also caused to the infrastructure, including public buildings, roads, energy, communications and sanitation, with reconstruction estimated at \$293 million.

Losses were also incurred in the sectors of economy, trade, health, education and agriculture, apart from indirect losses caused by the war.

Sarhan estimates that Gaza needs \$2 billion in order to revive it after many years of wars and siege.

Palestinians see the latest Egyptian move as coming within a context of coordination with the US administration, which hopes to establish stability in Gaza.

A few days before the Hamas meetings in Cairo, Gaza reconstruction was discussed during talks between Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan.

Hamas-affiliated columnist Majed Al-Zibda believes that the recent Egyptian meeting with Hamas is consistent with the vision of the US administration, which desires to contain Gaza and ensure stability there so to avoid any deterioration that could lead to new confrontations.

Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported earlier that Egypt and the US were pressuring Hamas and the Palestinian Authority to work on forming a new unity government with the aim of pushing forward long-term stability and the reconstruction of Gaza.



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Health activists fight stigma to raise breast cancer awareness in Gaza
Thousands of Gazans apply for Israeli work permits

[Turkey to expel US envoy and nine others, Erdogan says](#)

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ISTANBUL: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Saturday that he had told his foreign ministry to expel the ambassadors of the United States and nine other Western countries for demanding the release of philanthropist Osman Kavala.

Seven of the ambassadors represent Turkey's NATO allies and the expulsions, if carried out, would open the deepest rift with the West in Erdogan's 19 years in power.

Kavala, a contributor to numerous civil society groups, has been in prison for four years, charged with financing nationwide protests in 2013 and with involvement in a failed coup in 2016. He has remained in detention while his latest trial continues, and denies the charges.

In a joint statement on Oct. 18, the ambassadors of Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Finland, New Zealand and the United States called for a just and speedy resolution to Kavala's case, and for his "urgent release." They were summoned by the foreign ministry, which called the statement irresponsible.

"I gave the necessary order to our foreign minister and said what must be done: These 10 ambassadors must be declared persona non grata (undesirable) at once. You will sort it out immediately," Erdogan said in a speech in the northwestern city of Eskisehir.

"They will know and understand Turkey. The day they do not know and understand Turkey, they will leave," he said to cheers from the crowd.

The US, and French embassies and the White House and US State Department did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Erdogan has said previously that he plans to meet US President Joe Biden at summit of the Group of 20 (G20) major economies in Rome next weekend.

Norway said its embassy had not received any notification from Turkish authorities.

"Our ambassador has not done anything that warrants an expulsion," said the ministry's chief spokesperson, Trude Maaseide, adding that Turkey was well aware of Norway's views.

"We will continue to call on Turkey to comply with democratic standards and the rule of law to which the country committed itself under the European Human Rights Convention," Maaseide said.

Kavala was acquitted last year of charges related to the 2013 protests, but the ruling was overturned this year and combined with charges related to the coup attempt.

Rights groups say his case is emblematic of a crackdown on dissent under Erdogan.

Six of the countries involved are EU members, including Germany and France. European Parliament President David Sassoli tweeted: "The expulsion of ten ambassadors is a sign of the authoritarian drift of the Turkish government. We will not be intimidated. Freedom for Osman Kavala."

Danish Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod said his ministry had not received any official notification, but was in contact with its friends and allies.

"We will continue to guard our common values and principles, as also expressed in the joint declaration," he said in a statement.

A source at the German Foreign Ministry also said the 10 countries were consulting with one another.

Kavala said on Friday

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/philanthropist-kavala-says-no-...> he would no longer attend his trial as a fair hearing was impossible after recent comments by Erdogan.

Erdogan was quoted on Thursday as saying the ambassadors in question would not release “bandits, murderers and terrorists” in their own countries. The European Court of Human Rights called for Kavala’s immediate release two years ago, saying there was no reasonable suspicion that he had committed an offense, and finding that his detention had been intended to silence him. It issued a similar ruling this year in the case of Selahattin Demirtas, former head of the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), who has been held in jail for nearly five years.

The Council of Europe, which oversees the implementation of ECHR decisions, has said it will begin infringement proceedings against Turkey if Kavala is not released.

The next hearing in Kavala’s trial is on Nov. 26.



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European court raps Turkey over presidential ‘insults’ lawUS jobless claims

fall; Turkey's central bank slashes interest rate again: Economic wrap