

Tough decisions are 'surgery' Sudan needs to prosper: PM

Author:

Benedict Spence

ID:

1633029073916121400

Thu, 2021-09-30 22:08

LONDON: Sudan is passing through "multiple transitions" in its efforts to move on from the 2019 ouster of Omar Bashir, but progress is fragile, Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok said on Thursday.

Speaking at the UN General Assembly High-Level Side Event on Sudan, he highlighted the great strides made by the country in putting a peace plan in place, rebuilding the economy, reforming public sector institutions, balancing foreign policy, establishing a legislative council and moving toward full democracy.

But Hamdok pointed to the severe economic and internal issues still faced by Khartoum as reasons for caution.

"Sudan is ... transitioning from war and conflict to peace, economic collapse and hardships to prosperity, from dictatorship to democracy and good governance, and from isolation, relinking to the world," he said.

Last week's failed coup attempt is a reminder of Sudan's fragility, with Hamdok saying: "I'd like to convey our profound thanks and appreciation to ... all our international and regional partners for their utmost solidarity for the transitional government in condemning and denouncing the aborted military coup attempt ... With your support, and the resolve of our people, there will be no reversal."

He added: "The No. 1 challenge is to get it right in the peace process. There are a number of issues here. Many armed groups, negotiations, regional and international actors and all that, complicate things.

"On the economic front, we've inherited a collapsing economy, serious macroeconomic imbalances. If I may just flag one indicator, today we collect less than 6 percent tax to GDP (gross domestic product) ... You can't run a decent government on that level of taxation."

He said further serious public sector reform is needed but strides have been made elsewhere, with Sudan recently taken off the list of global state sponsors of terrorism, and reforming swathes of its legal codes to bring up to date laws on apostasy, taxation, debt consolation, and recovery of stolen assets from abroad. "We knew these are very important decisions. It's a surgery, but we had to go through it," he added.

The talk was attended by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and

dignitaries from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE, the US, the EU and France, among others.

Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Faisal bin Farhan congratulated the people of Sudan on the reforms that the country has undertaken since 2019, saying the Kingdom remains keen to work closely with Khartoum as a provider of crucial aid, and as a mediating partner in the peace process.

“In April 2019, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia declared its unwavering solidarity with the people of Sudan and the choices they made for their future. We accorded the highest importance to Sudan’s peace and stability in the face of the many challenges it faced,” he said.

“The Kingdom continues to be at the forefront of global efforts to facilitate peaceful transition in Sudan. We’re proud of our work as part of the Friends of Sudan group.”

Egypt’s Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry echoed the prince’s sentiments, highlighting the importance of establishing strong institutions to secure Sudan’s long-term prosperity and security.

“Egypt commends the steps taken by the government of Sudan to enact various macroeconomic reforms, and calls on all international partners to foster Sudan’s economic development,” he added.

Economic prosperity was a theme also picked up on by other speakers, with Samantha Power, administrator of the US Agency for International Development, urging the international community to use investment to “shepherd” Sudan through its transition.

Bankole Adeoye, the African Union’s commissioner for political affairs, peace and security, raised the specter of violence potentially derailing the peace process, highlighting increasing conflict in Darfur.

He said Sudan’s economic recovery is crucial to ensuring such an outcome is avoided. This was echoed by Mansur Muhtar, vice president of the Islamic Development Bank, and the World Bank’s Ousmane Dione, who called the current moment a “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity” to put Sudan on the path toward “sustained prosperity.”

Maged Abdelaziz, permanent observer of the League of Arab States, said its members stand alongside Sudan to defend its sovereignty over its borders and its water rights, in reference to the dispute with Ethiopia over the Grand Renaissance Dam.



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World Bank head sees situation in Sudan improving, urges patience
US condemns failed coup attempt in Sudan

[Houthis reject calls for truce, intensify attacks on Marib](#)

Author:

Saeed Al-Batati

ID:

1633028524056041600

Thu, 2021-09-30 22:01

AL-MUKALLA: The Iran-backed Houthis on Thursday rejected the latest regional calls to cease fighting in Yemen and intensified their ground and missile attacks on government-controlled areas in the central province of Marib.

Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdul-Salam demanded the Arab coalition stop military operations and lift what he described as a blockade on their territory as preconditions for accepting the Saudi initiative and the UN-brokered peace efforts to end the war.

“Steps for peace include stopping the aggression, lifting the blockade, (the) withdrawal of foreign forces from the country, addressing the effects of the aggression and paying compensation,” Abdul-Salam said on Twitter.

The latest calls for peace follow an initiative that was announced in March last year, which proposed a nationwide ceasefire under UN supervision. This demand for a cessation in hostilities included halting the Houthi offensive on Marib, easing restrictions on Hodeidah seaport and a partial reopening of Sanaa airport before direct talks between warring factions in Yemen.

The Houthis immediately rejected the initiative and demanded unlimited and unchecked flights into and from Sanaa airport and a halt to the coalition’s airstrikes on their forces.

The Houthi rejection came as they intensified ground attacks and missile and drone strikes on government-controlled areas in Marib province.

Residents and local officials on Thursday said that Houthis had intensified the shelling of villages and towns in Marib province with ballistic missiles and drones packed with explosives, triggering a new wave of displacement among terrified residents.

Large explosions rocked the Juba district, in the south of Marib, after missiles fired by the Houthis ripped through residential areas.

Elsewhere, the Houthis have continued their siege on hundreds of families in the Al-Abedia district into the second week, preventing people from leaving or entering amid severe shortages of food, fuel and medicine.

Local aid workers say the Houthis blocked the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the besieged people and prevented the wounded from traveling to other areas for medication.

“Two aging people died from strokes because of the siege. Seven out of nine groceries have been closed due to shortages of goods and food. The situation is very grave there,” Khaled Al-Shajani, deputy head of the Marib office of the Executive Unit for IDP Camps, told Arab News by telephone.

Heavy fighting between the Houthis and government forces on Thursday broke out west and south of Marib, as the militia attacked new areas in Juba, Al-Mashjah, Al-Kasara, Serwah and Jabal Murad.

The escalation in fighting around Marib started in February when the Houthis restarted an offensive to capture the city, the government’s last stronghold in the north.



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Scores killed as fighting intensifies near Marib city
Houthis told to stop 'stalemated' Marib offensive

[Damascus and Tehran pledge to confront US sanctions](#)

Mon, 2021-08-30 01:42

DAMASCUS: Iran and Syria have vowed to take "mighty steps" to confront US sanctions imposed on the two regional allies, saying their relations will strengthen under Iran's new leadership.

The announcement was made by Iran's new Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

He was received at the airport in Damascus by Faisal Miqdad, foreign minister in the Syrian regime.

Iran has been one of Syrian President Bashar Assad's strongest backers, sending thousands of fighters from around the region to help his troops in Syria's 10-year conflict that has killed half a million and displaced half the country's pre-war population of 23 million.

With the help of Russia and Iran, Syrian regime forces now control much of Syria.

But the country has been suffering for years under American and EU sanctions. US Treasury sanctions have targeted a network that spans Syria, Iran and Russia, and which is responsible for shipping oil to the Syrian regime. American sanctions were imposed on Tehran after former President Donald Trump pulled America out of a nuclear deal between Iran and world powers in 2018. The sanctions have caused severe fuel shortages in Syria, which has been relying mostly on Iranian oil shipments that have been subjected to mysterious attacks over the past two years.

FASTFACT

US Treasury sanctions have targeted a network that spans Syria, Iran and Russia, and which is responsible for shipping oil to Bashar Assad's regime.

The regime has blamed Israel for the attacks.

"The leadership of the two countries will together take mighty steps to confront economic terrorism and reduce pressure on our people," Amir-Abdollahian said at the airport.

He did not say how the two countries will fight the sanctions.

Amir-Abdollahian's visit to Syria comes a day after he represented Iran in a conference attended by officials from around the Middle East aimed at easing regional tensions.

Amir-Abdollahian described Syria as the "land of resistance," adding that Damascus and Tehran had worked together "on the ground and achieved joint victories."



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Iran appoints ex-roads minister as head of nuclear agency
Iran's Khamenei says Biden has same demands as Trump on nuclear issue

[UN envoy calls on Libya's parliament to finalize election law](#)

Mon, 2021-08-30 20:09

ALGIERS: The UN envoy to Libya Jan Kubis said on Monday that time was pressing for Libyans to finalize a legal framework for elections to be held on time in December.

"The (Libyan) government has taken the necessary dispositions to hold elections but we need a legal framework," Kubis said at the opening of a meeting in Algeria of Libya's neighbors.

"The members of parliament are now trying to finalize the electoral law and time is running out," Kubis said in statements carried in French by the official Algerian news agency APS.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry affirmed his country's firm position toward strengthening the structure of Libya's security and stability, adding that Egypt prioritizes political solutions to preserve the country's unity and its national institutions to achieve a comprehensive settlement. Foreign ministry spokesman Ahmed Hafez, said Shoukry stressed during the meeting the important role of neighboring countries to ensure that security and political conditions in Libya are restored, and achieve the legitimate aspirations of the Libyan people.



Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry attends a meeting by Libya's neighbors as part of international efforts to reach a political settlement to the country's conflict, in the Algerian capital Algiers, on Aug. 30, 2021. (AFP)

Shoukry praised the achievements of the 5+5 Joint Military Commission, the latest of which was the opening of the coastal road between the east and west. He said that is why it needs to be provided with full support to complete its various tasks, including ensuring the exit of all foreign forces, as well as foreign fighters and mercenaries.

Shoukry called for the need to expedite all necessary measures to ensure that the elections are held on time.

The two-day ministerial meeting is aimed at helping Libyans achieve national reconciliation and draw a roadmap for organizing the polls.

But recent talks in Geneva have exposed deep divisions over when to hold elections, what elections to hold, and on what constitutional grounds, threatening to plunge Libya back into crisis.

The North African country was gripped by violence and political turmoil in the aftermath of the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that ousted dictator Muammar Qaddafi and in which he was killed.

In recent years, the oil-rich country split between two rival administrations backed by foreign powers and myriad militias.

After eastern strongman Khalifa Haftar's forces were routed from the country's west last year, the two camps signed a cease-fire in Geneva in October.

An interim administration was established in March this year to prepare for presidential and parliamentary polls on Dec. 24.

Kubis on Monday said that Libya's unity government backed by the UN has "allocated the necessary budget for the elections.

"But it is important that as soon as possible we have a legal framework" for the polls, he said.

Kubis said he told MPs to "assume their responsibilities and not waste time." He also called on Libya's neighbors to appoint observers to monitor the polls.

(With AFP)





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[Jan Kubis](#)

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Libyan interim PM pushes back against parliament in speech
UN hails joint Libya force to protect water network

[Palestinian president, Israeli defense minister hold rare talks](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1630317033752519200

Mon, 2021-08-30 09:47

RAMALLAH, Palestinian Territories: Israel's defense minister has met Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas for a rare high-level meeting, but a source close to Prime Minister Naftali Bennett insisted Monday his government had no plans to reboot peace talks.

Defense Minister Benny Gantz met Abbas in Ramallah for what were reportedly the first direct talks between an Israeli cabinet member and the 86-year-old Palestinian leader in several years.

The meeting, which Gantz's office said focused on "security policy, civilian and economic issues," came just hours after Bennett returned from Washington where he met US President Joe Biden.

Biden said he would urge Bennett to find ways "to advance peace and security and prosperity for Israelis and Palestinians."

According to a defense ministry statement, Gantz told Abbas that Israel "seeks to take measures that will strengthen the PA's economy."

"They also discussed shaping the security and economic situations in the West Bank and in Gaza," and agreed to "continue communicating further," it added.

A source close to Bennett said the meeting that he had approved focused on "issues between the defense establishment and the Palestinian Authority."

"There is no peace process with the Palestinians nor will there be," under Bennett's leadership, said the source who requested anonymity.

The Gantz-Abbas meeting included the head of the Israeli military branch responsible for civil affairs in the Palestinian territories, Ghasan Alyan, senior PA official Hussein Al Sheikh and Palestinian intelligence chief Majid Faraj.

Gantz's office said he and Abbas had held "a one-on-one meeting" after the broader talks.

Al Sheikh confirmed the meeting on Twitter but the PA was not immediately available to comment on its substance.

Bennett, 49, took office in June as head of an eclectic coalition in which his hawkish party holds only a handful of seats.

He is a long-standing opponent of Palestinian statehood and the former head of a council that lobbies for Jewish settlers in the West Bank, a territory occupied by Israel since 1967.

Jewish settlements in the West Bank are considered illegal under international law.

But despite Bennett's personal views, his government has sought to warm ties with the PA, which had effectively collapsed under former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in power from 2009 until June this year.

Netanyahu, also a pro-settlement right-winger long reviled by Palestinians, further alienated Abbas through his tight embrace of former US president Donald Trump, accused of extreme pro-Israel bias.

Bennett's government has indicated a desire to boost the PA amid concern over a fresh conflict with Hamas Islamists who control Israeli-blockaded Gaza and are rivals of Abbas's Fatah secular Fatah movement.

An 11-day conflict in May between Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza marked the worst hostilities in the area since 2014 and unrest has persisted despite an Egypt-brokered cease-fire.

Hamas condemned the Abbas-Gantz meeting, charging that it "deepens Palestinian political division."

Abbas has tightened his hold over the PA since his election in 2006.

He canceled elections set for May and July that would have been the first

Palestinian polls in 15 years.

The veteran leader cited Israel's refusal to allow voting in annexed east Jerusalem, which Palestinians see as their future capital.

But some Palestinian experts said Abbas balked when it seemed clear Hamas was poised to rout Fatah at the polls.

Abbas's PA has also come under mounting global criticism over an alleged crackdown on internal opposition following the death in Palestinian custody of a prominent activist.

The United Nations and European Union last week expressed alarm over a spate of arrests targeting leading critics of Abbas and the PA.



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Rocket fired from Gaza toward Israel after 4 Palestinians killed in West Bank clashes