

# Sudanese government, key rebel group to restart peace talks

Sat, 2020-09-05 00:53

CAIRO: Sudan's transitional government and a powerful rebel group that controls large swaths of the country's restive south said on Friday they have agreed to resume peace talks, a development that boosts hopes of ending the country's decades-long civil wars.

The commitment comes days after the government reached a deal with other rebel groups to quell conflicts stemming from the rule of ousted ruler Omar Bashir.

The Sudan Liberation Movement-North, led by Abdel-Aziz Al-Hilu, and Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok signed a joint letter of intention late Thursday in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa, stressing the "necessity" of finding "a comprehensive and just political solution" to the conflicts. It did not specify when the talks would restart.

Negotiating an end to the rebellions in Sudan's far-flung provinces has been a crucial goal for the transitional government, which took power after the military overthrew Bashir in April last year, following months of pro-democracy protests. Cash-strapped authorities are keen to slash military spending, which takes up 80 percent of the national budget.

Al-Hilu's faction of the Sudan Liberation Movement-North, also known as SLPM-North, is Sudan's single largest rebel group. It engaged in previous rounds of peace talks but remained skeptical of the country's ruling Sovereign Council, comprised of both civilian leaders and military generals, including some from Al-Bashir's tenure.

## **SPEEDREAD**

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Along with another major rebel group, the faction skipped the signing of the agreement earlier this week in South Sudan between the government and a rebel alliance known as the Sudan Revolutionary Front, dimming prospects for meaningful change on the ground.

The SLPM-North has also threatened to call for self-determination in the vast areas it controls if its demands are not met. Just days ago, Al-Hilu accused the transitional government of adopting the "evasive" tactics of Bashir's administration throughout tortuous peace negotiations that have dragged on for nearly a year.

To lay the groundwork for a future deal, Al-Hilu and Hamdok agreed in principle on a range of political issues that have frustrated efforts to reach a deal in the past.

Sudan's constitution "should be based on the principle of separation of religion and state," the statement said, acknowledging a long-held demand of the ardently secularist SPLM-North. The sides also agreed to let the rebel group retain its weapons until they ink an accord calling for new security arrangements.

Al-Hilu's movement controls large chunks of territory in the war-scarred Blue Nile and South Kordofan provinces, home to a significant Christian minority that long complained of discrimination under Bashir.

During Bashir's 30 years in power, the Khartoum government extended Islamic rule in Sudan and fanned tensions between the Muslim majority north and mainly Christian and animist south, precipitating brutal wars and ultimately, the secession of South Sudan in 2011.



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Sudan and rebels meet to implement peace deal  
Sudan's Omar Bashir's trial adjourned to Sept. 15

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## [UN laments 'blatant' violations of Libya arms embargo](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-09-04 02:39

NEW YORK: The interim UN envoy for Libya, Stephanie Williams, on Wednesday denounced what she called "blatant" ongoing violations of the arms embargo in effect on the war-wracked country.

Since UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres last briefed the Security Council on July 8 about 100 resupply flights landing in Libya to help forces loyal to the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) and its rival forces led by Khalifa Haftar in eastern Libya.

Nine cargo ships docked in western Libya, while three others reportedly arrived in the east of the country. She also accused foreign powers of "fortifying their assets" on both sides.

"The arms embargo remains totally ineffective," according to an interim report from UN experts, who added that the violations are "extensive, blatant and with complete disregard for the sanctions."

Williams said the activity "constitutes an alarming breach of Libya's sovereignty, a blatant violation of the UN arms embargo."

The UN mission in Libya, whose mandate is up for renewal in mid-September, "continues to receive reports of large-scale presence of foreign mercenaries and operatives," she said.

Williams added that their presence complicates "chances of a future settlement."

Russia's UN envoy, Vassily Nebenzia, rejected any accusation of Russian interference.

"Not a single Russian serviceman is currently in Libya," he said, while his US counterpart Kelly Craft slammed the presence of Russian mercenaries linked to the Kremlin.

"There is no place for foreign mercenaries or proxy forces in Libya, including the Russian Ministry of Defense proxy Wagner Group, which is fighting alongside" Haftar, she said.

France's UN Ambassador Nicolas de Riviere called for a reinforcement of the world body's mission in Libya, so that it can help shepherd an eventual cease-fire and ensure that the arms embargo is respected.

Several Council members called for a quick nomination of a permanent UN special envoy for Libya.

Ghassan Salame stepped down in March for health reasons, and bickering between the US and its partners on how the role should be defined has stalled naming a successor.

Libya has endured almost a decade of violent chaos since the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed veteran ruler Muammar Qaddafi.

The GNA and a Haftar-backed eastern administration are now vying for power against a backdrop of dozens of local conflicts.



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US: Turkey-sent Syrian fighters generate backlash in Libya  
EU top diplomat, Italian FM in Libya to push for peace talks

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## [Turkey: Russia to hold live-fire exercises in Mediterranean](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-09-04 02:36

ANKARA: Turkey has announced that Russia will hold live-fire naval exercises in the eastern Mediterranean, amid escalating tensions between Turkey and its coastal neighbors Greece and Cyprus over rights to search for energy resources in the region.

The navigational notice issued late on Wednesday said the Russian exercises will take place Sept. 8-22 and Sept. 17-25 in areas of the Mediterranean where Turkish seismic research vessels are operating.

There was no immediate comment from Russia on the exercises, which Turkey announced after the US said it was partially lifting a 33-year-old arms embargo against ethnically divided Cyprus.

It is unclear why NATO-member Turkey would announce such drills on Moscow's behalf, but the two countries have in recent years significantly strengthened their military, political and economic ties. They are coordinating closely on their military presence in Syria, while Turkey has purchased Russia's

advanced S-400 missiles and has broken ground on a Russian-built nuclear power plant on its southern coast.

Turkey has reacted angrily to the US move that it said went against the "spirit of alliance" between Washington and Ankara. It also warned that it would harm efforts to reunify Cyprus, which is split between Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities. Turkish officials have also vowed to take steps to guarantee the security of a self-declared Turkish state in the island's north.

Turkey's announcement comes at a time of increased friction between Turkey on the one side and Greece and Cyprus on the other over offshore energy exploration rights. Warships from Greece and Turkey have been shadowing each other in recent weeks as Turkish survey vessels and drill ships continue to prospect for hydrocarbons in waters where Greece and Cyprus claim exclusive economic rights.

## **HIGHLIGHT**

The navigational notice issued late on Wednesday said the Russian exercises will take place Sept. 8-22 and Sept. 17-25 in areas of the Mediterranean where Turkish seismic research vessels are operating.

In Athens, Greek government spokesman Stelios Petsas said the planned Russian exercises were being "monitored by all the countries in the region, as well as our NATO allies and European Union partners."

The US embargo, imposed in 1987, was designed to prevent an arms race that would hinder UN-facilitated reunification efforts for Cyprus. It was directed against the southern, Greek Cypriot part of the island, where Cyprus' internationally recognized government is seated.

Cyprus split in 1974 when Turkey invaded following a coup by supporters of union with Greece. Turkey is the only nation to recognize a Turkish Cypriot declaration of independence and it maintains more than 35,000 troops in northern Cyprus.

Washington said it was lifting the arms embargo against Cyprus for one year – with the option of renewal – to let it procure nonlethal equipment.

Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said Thursday that the lifting of the embargo will lead to a deadlock.

"If you lift the embargo on (Greek Cypriot-administered Cyprus) and try to disrupt the balance in this way, this will bring conflict, not peace. This will create a deadlock, not a solution," he said.

Akar also took aim at France, which joined Greece and Cyprus for military exercises in the region, accusing it of "bullying, making claims and playing the role of a guardian angel."

US Ambassador to Cyprus Judith Garber said the embargo lifting had no connection to "valued partner and ally" Turkey, but aimed to strengthen regional security and to "counter malign actors in the region."

Garber said Washington waived a requirement that Cyprus cease to offer refueling and other port services to Russian warships, but that it would continue to "encourage" Cypriot government authorities to deny those services.

“We believe that Russia is playing a very destabilizing role in the region, especially in Syria,” Garber said.

Russia maintains a sizable naval presence in the Eastern Mediterranean and regularly conducts naval maneuvers there. The announcement of the latest live-fire drill could clearly be a message from Moscow that it remains a major regional player whose influence won't be diminished by Washington's embargo move.



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Turkey's power projection risks military clash in Mediterranean, former PM says  
NATO: Turkey, Greece agree to talks about tensions at sea

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## [Turkey's power projection risks military clash in Mediterranean, former PM says](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-09-04 02:34

ANKARA: Turkey risks military confrontation in the Eastern Mediterranean because it prizes power over diplomacy, a former prime minister who championed a less confrontational policy in the first decade of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's rule told Reuters.

Ahmet Davutoglu, whose “zero problems with neighbors” mantra was a hallmark of Erdogan’s early dealings with Europe and the Middle East, broke with the president’s ruling AK Party last year to set up the rival Gelecek (Future) Party.

He criticized what he described as a lurch toward authoritarianism under Turkey’s new executive presidency, and accused the government of mishandling a series of challenges including the economy, the coronavirus outbreak and the growing tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Last month Turkey sent a survey vessel, escorted by frigates, to explore for oil and gas in waters claimed by Greece, a move Athens said was illegal. The two NATO allies are locked in a dispute over the extent of their continental shelves and maritime economic zones.

The European Union, backing EU members Greece and Cyprus, has imposed minor sanctions against Turkey, and a collision between Greek and Turkish warships shadowing the survey vessel last month highlighted the potential for military escalation.

Davutoglu said Ankara had genuine grievances over Greek claims to tens of thousands of square kilometers of sea extending up to Turkey’s Mediterranean coast, but added that Erdogan’s approach carried high risks.

“Unfortunately our government is not doing a proper diplomatic performance,” he said in an interview, warning that if both Greece and Turkey prefer “power projections” over diplomacy, “at any time any crisis may erupt and escalate.”

Time to talk

Turkey should say clearly to the EU: “‘Let’s come around the table and share all views’,” Davutoglu said. It should also sit down with Greece to “discuss all matters (and) deescalate the tension.”

Erdogan’s government said it was on the verge of announcing a resumption of talks with Greece last month when Athens signed a deal setting out its maritime border with Egypt – an agreement which cut across waters claimed by Turkey.

Ankara cut off the process in protest, and a visit to Greece and Turkey by Germany’s foreign minister last week appeared to make no headway. EU leaders will discuss the standoff later this month and could take further action against Turkey.

Davutoglu, who served as Erdogan’s foreign minister from 2009 to 2014 and then as prime minister for two subsequent years, worked to strengthen Turkish ties and influence in the Mediterranean and Middle East.

But years of talks with Greece were suspended in 2016, and Davutoglu’s Middle East strategy was derailed in the turmoil of the Arab uprisings, when relations with Syria and Egypt collapsed over Ankara’s support for Muslim Brotherhood groups.

Davutoglu’s Future Party is one of two which has broken away from Erdogan’s AKP. Neither has registered above low single figures in recent polls, but by eroding the AKP’s support they have made Erdogan’s quest for a majority in elections due by 2023 more challenging.



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## [US not opposed to French initiative but it won't adopt it](#)

Fri, 2020-09-04 00:42

BEIRUT: On the second day of his visit to Lebanon; the last stop of his Middle Eastern tour, US Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs David Schenker met with civil society activists.

An activist who was present at a luncheon organized at one of the activists' houses in the presence of Schenker told Arab News that the latter said: "The US will not stand against the French initiative, which will probably fail if it keeps betting on Hezbollah and covering its arms. Things do not work this way. We do not believe that Hezbollah is a legitimate political organization, but a terrorist one. A political organization certainly does not have militias."

According to the activist, Schenker said: "The sanctions considered by the American side against Hezbollah's allies have not yet reached an advanced stage."

The activist, who wished to remain anonymous, said that "Schenker is living with the prospect of the US presidential elections." According to the activist, Schenker said: "The French are leading an initiative without taking



into consideration the American perspective, so let them try. They have two months before the results, which will define the US perspective, depending on whether the Trump administration returns to power or not.”

The activist said that Schenker had listened to the activists’ opinions regarding the French initiative and their demand to hold early parliamentary elections or stick to the preset date without causing any delay.

According to Arab News sources, Schenker also met academics and economics from Lebanese banks, representatives from the World Bank in Lebanon and resigned lawmakers. He also met the Lebanese Army Commander Gen. Joseph Aoun, UNIFIL officials, and the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Jan Kubis. He also visited the USAIDS centers which are currently providing aids to the people affected by the Beirut blast.

Middle East and North Africa Director at the Natural Resource Governance Institute (NRGI) Laury Haytayan, who took part in the meeting between Schenker and civil society representatives said the meeting aimed at “getting to know each other and sharing our views regarding what is going to happen next and the efforts of the groups that emerged from the Lebanese uprising that broke out in October 2019.”

She said: “We stressed during the meeting our readiness for the parliamentary elections.”

Talking to Annahar, Schenker said: “Hezbollah is not interested in reforms, but has taken advantage of corruption.” He said his meetings with civil society activists aimed at checking “their vision for reforms and making the government commit to reforms, transparency and fight against corruption.”

“The US remains the principal donor for Lebanon and we are currently working on a large assistance package to help the Lebanese through NGOs and the World Food Program,” he added.

During his visit to Lebanon, Schenker avoided meeting with any Lebanese officials, as he considered that “a government is being formed in Lebanon, and this is a national affair.” However, he considered that “the next government should not be like the previous one or the one before, and should focus instead on implementing reforms, combating corruption and committing to accountability and impartiality.”

Mustapha Adib, Lebanon’s new PM-designate, briefed the Lebanese President Michel Aoun on the outcome of the parliamentary consultations he conducted on Wednesday. After the meeting, Adib said he is seeking “to form a coherent action team and a government of specialists to start implementing reforms immediately.”

Adib revealed that he prefers to form a government of 14 ministers, while Aoun is pushing for 24 ministers.

The French Embassy elaborated a draft program for the next government that President Macron delivered to the representatives of Lebanese parties he had met on Tuesday at the Pine Residence. Macron considered the draft as a road

map for the next cabinet.

The draft program “gives the priority to fighting the coronavirus pandemic and for the humanitarian situation, as well as addressing the repercussions of the Beirut blast, reconstructing Beirut, and facilitating the access of aids provided by the international community in an expeditious, transparent and effective manner.”

Regarding the reforms, the draft program required “the prompt resumption of negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and expeditious approval of the preventive measures required by the IMF, including the legislation related to capital control and the auditing of Banque du Liban’s (BDL) accounts.”

The French draft program also required implementing urgent reforms in the electricity sector within one month, appointing officials in the sector, launching bidding invitations related to the gas power plants and dropping the Selaata project as presently drafted (which the Free Patriotic Movement is still holding on to).

The draft also covered “the financial, judicial and sectoral designations, in line with transparent standards based on efficiency as well as the parliament’s approval of proposing a law related to the independence of the judiciary.” It also included “appointing members of the national anti-corruption commission, supporting the commission to carry out its tasks, implementing the urgent customs’ reforms and developing and adopting a homogeneous budget for 2021 before the end of 2020, in addition to holding new legislative elections within a maximum period of one year.”



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