

Sudanese demand reforms a year after deal with generals

Author:

Tue, 2020-08-18 00:39

CAIRO: Sudanese protesters returned to the streets Monday to call for more reforms a year after a power-sharing deal between the pro-democracy movement and the generals.

Sudan is on a fragile path to democracy after a popular uprising led the military to overthrow former President Omar Bashir in April 2019. A military-civilian government now rules the country, with elections possible in late 2022.

The demonstrations were organized by local groups linked to the Sudanese Professionals' Association, which spearheaded the uprising against Bashir. The crowds, waving Sudanese flags, gathered outside the Cabinet's headquarters in Khartoum to hand over a list of demands, including the formation of a legislative body.

Police later dispersed the protesters, and footage circulating online showed demonstrators running away from tear gas. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Organizers said the protesters were furious after Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok sent an aide to meet with them instead of coming out in person. Protesters also took to the streets in Khartoum's twin city, Omdurman, and several other cities.

Monday's protests marked a year after the generals signed a power-sharing agreement with the Forces for Declaration of Freedom and Change, a coalition of opposition parties and movements representing the protesters.

The deal created a joint civilian-military "sovereign council" to rule the country until elections and established a Cabinet appointed by the activists. A legislative body was supposed to be formed within three months but has yet to be established, and the civilian leadership has struggled to assert its authority.

BACKGROUND

Monday's protests in Sudan marked a year after the generals signed a power-sharing agreement with the Forces for Declaration of Freedom and Change.

"The course of the revolution should be corrected," activist Awatef Ossman said, calling the military's presence in the government a "clear and specific obstacle."

The protesters also called for a conference to decide how to address the country's daunting economic challenges, the official SUNA news agency reported.

Battered by decades of US sanctions, civil war and mismanagement under Bashir, Sudan suffers from high inflation, which reached over 100 percent in

recent months, a foreign debt at close to \$60 billion and widespread shortages of essential goods, including fuel, bread and medicine. Sudan is also struggling to contain a coronavirus outbreak that has infected around 12,500 people and caused more than 800 deaths. Testing is limited, and the country's health infrastructure is ill-equipped to cope with the pandemic.

The Sudanese economy contracted by 2.5 percent in 2019 and is projected to shrink by 8 percent in 2020, according the International Monetary Fund.



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[Oman opens tourist restaurants and swimming pools in hotels](#)

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1597694619819268400

Mon, 2020-08-17 18:36

CAIRO: Oman will allow as of Tuesday the reopening of tourist and international restaurants, as well as gyms and swimming pools located in hotels, under certain regulations and requirements. Oman's ministry of tourism said on Monday that the supreme committee for dealing with COVID-19 approved the reopening. The supreme committee had also announced the ending of the ban on night movement as of Saturday. Oman has recorded 83,226 coronavirus cases, including 588 deaths and 77,812 recoveries.



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Israel renews assaults on Gaza, shuts fishing zone

Mon, 2020-08-17 00:36

GAZA CITY/JERUSALEM: Israel's army launched new airstrikes on Sunday against Hamas positions in Gaza and closed the fishing zone around the Palestinian enclave in response to rockets and firebombs sent into Israeli territory. The Israeli measures came after a week of heightened tensions, including clashes on Saturday evening along the Gaza-Israeli border, the army said. Dozens of Palestinian "rioters burned tires, hurled explosive devices and grenades toward the security fence and attempted to approach it," an Israeli Army statement said.

Long simmering Palestinian anger has flared further since Israel and the UAE on Thursday agreed to normalize relations, a move Palestinians saw as a betrayal of their cause by the Gulf country.

In the days before the UAE deal was announced, Israel had carried out repeated night-time strikes on targets linked to Hamas, which controls Gaza. The army said the strikes were in response to makeshift firebombs attached to balloons and kites sent into southern Israel, causing thousands of fires. Israel said there were 19 such Palestinians attacks on Saturday alone, in addition to two rockets fired from Gaza, which were intercepted by its Iron Dome defense system.

Israel responded with strikes on several Hamas targets including "a military compound used to store rocket ammunition," the army said.

Defense Minister and alternate Prime Minister Benny Gantz charged that Hamas's refusal to stop the attacks is preventing Gazans from living "in dignity and security."

If Sderot, the southern Israel town most affected by the balloon attacks, "isn't quiet, then Gaza won't be either," Gantz said.

Sderot Mayor Alon Davidi said Israel needed to deal forcefully with "terrorists ... who try to murder us and our children."

But a durable solution also required providing better economic opportunities "to help civilians on both sides," including Palestinians in Gaza, Davidi said.

Israel also closed the Gaza Strip's offshore fishing zone on Sunday following a night of cross-border fighting with Palestinian militants, the most intense escalation of hostilities in recent months.

FASTFACT

A durable solution is required providing better economic opportunities 'to help civilians on both sides,' including Palestinians in Gaza, according to Sderot Mayor Alon Davidi.

After Saturday's clashes, Israel's military decided "to entirely shut down the fishing zone of the Gaza Strip, immediately and until further notice,

starting this morning (Sunday)," a military statement said.

Gaza fisherman Yasser Salah said he was out on the waters early Sunday and was "surprised" to learn from an Israeli patrol that the coastal sea area was "completely closed."

"We did nothing," said Salah. "We don't get involved in politics. We are fishermen who live off what we catch in the sea."

Israel has also closed its Kerem Shalom goods crossing with the Gaza Strip. Despite a truce last year backed by the UN, Egypt and Qatar, the two sides clash sporadically with rockets, mortar fire or incendiary balloons.

The Gaza Strip has a population of 2 million, more than half of whom live in poverty, according to the World Bank.

The IDF said Hamas "is responsible for all events transpiring in the Gaza Strip and emanating from it, and will bear the consequences for terror activity against Israeli civilians."

Dozens of Palestinians took part in the protests. The military said the protesters "burned tires, hurled explosive devices and grenades toward the security fence and attempted to approach it."

The Gaza health ministry said Israeli gunfire at protesters wounded two Palestinians.

Israel holds Hamas, the Islamist militant group ruling the Gaza Strip, responsible for all attacks emanating from the Palestinian territory.

Incendiary balloons from the Gaza Strip have caused extensive damage to Israeli fields in recent days. It comes as Hamas, like other Palestinian factions, denounced the UAE for agreeing to formal ties with Israel.

Following a meeting on Sunday with the top army brass, Gantz said in a statement that Israel "will respond forcefully to any violation of sovereignty until complete quiet is restored in the south. If Sderot isn't quiet, Gaza won't be either."

Israel and Egypt have maintained a blockade of the Gaza Strip since Hamas took power in an armed coup in 2007. Israel has fought three wars with Hamas in the Gaza Strip in the years since.

The two sides have largely upheld an informal truce, and fighting has ceased almost entirely since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic.



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Fears of new bloodbath in Idlib as Assad troops go on the offensive

Mon, 2020-08-17 00:34

ANKARA: Syrian leader Bashar Assad has re-mobilized his forces in northwest Syria, raising fears of a new bloodbath in militant-controlled Idlib province.

The move follows Russia's suspension of joint military patrols with Turkish armed forces along the M4 highway in what is supposed to be a de-escalation zone.

The patrols began in March, along the Aleppo-Latakia road. The last one took place on Aug. 12 and Moscow suspended them two days later.

Since then, Assad regime forces have launched rocket attacks against Al-Fterah, Sfuhen and Kansafra in Jabal Al-Zawiyah in the southern countryside of Idlib.

The area is controlled by a former Al-Qaeda affiliate, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, who used rockets and heavy machine guns to attack the regime-controlled village of Beit Hasanou in Sahl Al-Ghab in northwest Hama.

The stage may be set for a new "battle of Idlib," experts told Arab News.

Navar Saban, a military analyst at the Omran Center for Strategic Studies in Istanbul, said the combatants were treading a thin line.

"Hezbollah moved some of its forces in a bid to launch an attack to the area in the south of the M4 highway," he told Arab News.

"This zone where the joint patrols are suspended is elevated, and whoever controls this region can control the whole of Idlib. So, it is a very strategic area where sooner or later some skirmish will happen.

"There is a high percentage chance of an operation by the regime. It will be a narrow-scale battle. The Turks are not ready to withdraw from this strategic area or allow the opposition to withdraw either. Sooner or later, the Russians will control this area.

"Moscow initially planned to monitor the area with no opposition forces present, but that did not happen because Turkey, unwilling to concede to Russia, mobilized some of its forces and opposition forces there, triggering another source of tension between Moscow and Ankara."

Kyle Orton, a Middle East analyst, said Russia's suspension of joint patrols in Idlib may be a temporary security matter as they consider their options.

“The patrols have been coming under attack, from peaceful protesters at first, but increasingly militarily, especially since last month,” he said.

“Moscow’s intentions are obviously always suspect in Syria and there have been signs of a renewed regime coalition offensive against Idlib in recent days, so Russia’s suspension of the patrols could be a tactical issue related to that.”

“Turkey, likewise, continues to have the same policy of preserving at least northern Idlib as a buffer zone to avoid a destabilizing wave of refugees laced with terrorists being pushed into Turkish territory.”



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Netanyahu says UAE deal signals end to 'land for peace'

Author:

Mon, 2020-08-17 00:29

JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday that a deal to establish full diplomatic ties with the UAE proves that Israel doesn't need to retreat from occupied land sought by the Palestinians in order to achieve peace and normalization with Arab states.

Israel and the UAE announced on Thursday they were establishing full diplomatic relations in a US-brokered deal that required Israel to halt its contentious plan to annex occupied West Bank land sought by the Palestinians. Netanyahu has insisted the annexation plans are only on "temporary hold" at the request of the US.

The UAE, like most of the Arab world, long rejected official diplomatic ties with Israel, saying recognition should only come in return for concessions in peace talks. Its accord with Israel breaks that long-held tenet and could usher in agreements with other Arab states, undermining an Arab consensus that was a rare source of leverage for the Palestinians.

"According to the Palestinians, and to many others in the world who agreed with them, peace can't be reached without conceding to the Palestinians' demands, including uprooting settlements, dividing Jerusalem and withdrawal to 1967 lines," Netanyahu said in a video statement. "No more. This concept of 'peace through withdrawal and weakness' has passed from the world."

The Palestinians want the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip for their hoped-for state, and peacemaking with them since the 1990s has been based on withdrawal from those lands to make way for a Palestinian homeland. Israel captured the territories in the 1967 Mideast war, although it withdrew its troops and settlers from Gaza in 2005.

But what has been a wall of Arab support for the Palestinians and their demands has begun to crack in recent years, in large part because of the shared enmity of Israel and other Arab states toward Iran and Iranian proxies in the region.

SPEEDREAD

What has been a wall of Arab support for the Palestinians and their demands has begun to crack in recent years, in large part because of the shared enmity of Israel and other Arab states toward Iran and Iranian proxies in the region.

The Palestinians bristled at Netanyahu's remarks.

"Peace should be established on the basis of the Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. This is the Arab and international consensus and anything else has no value," said Nabil Abu Rdeneh, a spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Netanyahu also reiterated on Sunday his interpretation of the UAE deal – that annexation was only being suspended and that it was still on the table, so long as it was done in coordination with Washington. UAE officials have indicated that the deal means annexation has been shelved entirely. After President Donald Trump released his Mideast plan earlier this year, which was favorable to Israel, Netanyahu said he would forge ahead with annexing parts of the West Bank. Netanyahu backed away from moving forward with annexation last month in the face of fierce international opposition and misgivings by White House officials. But Netanyahu, who has seen his popularity plummet over his handling of the coronavirus crisis, has faced searing criticism from settler leaders and their representatives in parliament over the annexation backtrack, and he has tried to reassure them that he remains committed to the move.



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