

Sisi says Egypt seeks stability in Libya

Wed, 2020-06-24 21:56

CAIRO: Egypt is only interested in restoring stability in Libya, President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi said Wednesday, days after raising the prospect of a military intervention.

Earlier this week, El-Sisi said his country had a legitimate right to intervene in neighboring Libya to protect Egypt's western border. He ordered the military to be ready to carry out any mission outside the country and said such an operation would have international legitimacy.

Speaking during a cabinet meeting Wednesday, where he met with military and civilian officials, El-Sisi stressed the importance of restoring stability in Libya and its institutions to achieve security in the region, and "to protect the Egyptian national security from the western border," he said.

Earlier this week, El-Sisi raised concerns of a military operation when he said his country had a legitimate right to intervene in neighboring Libya. He ordered the military to be ready to carry out any mission outside the country. He said any direct Egyptian intervention would have international legitimacy and would be to protect Egypt's western border.

El-Sisi said in the meeting that a cease-fire should remain in place and he called for dismantling Libya's militias, and excluding mercenaries from the conflict in order to reach a comprehensive political solution.

Last month Egypt proposed an initiative for Libyan parties as a basis for resolving the country's conflict.

The move was welcomed by Arab countries and on Tuesday, the Arab league urged Libyan factions to "positively engage" with such initiatives.

The war in Libya started after the downfall of dictator Muammar Qaddafi with the country splitting into two rival administrations.

Fighting has escalated after Turkey intervened on the side of the Tripoli-based government, reversing a 14-month assault on Tripoli by forces loyal to the military commander Khalifa Haftar.



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Egypt to reopen cafes, places of worship, shisha ban stays Saudi Arabia, UAE support El-Sisi's 'right to self-defense' in Libya war

[UAE lifts coronavirus-related curfew](#)

Wed, 2020-06-24 22:01

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates' government has lifted its coronavirus-related curfew, it posted on Twitter on Wednesday.

"All members of society are allowed to freely enter and exit throughout the day without restrictions," it said in an announcement also tweeted by the country's National Emergency Crisis and Disaster Management Authority.



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UAE kicks off final stage of clinical trial of COVID-19 vaccine

[Al-Qaeda-linked group arrests British aid worker in Syria](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-06-24 22:23

LONDON: An aid worker who was stripped of his UK citizenship has been arrested in northwest Syria by a rebel group formerly linked to Al-Qaeda.

Tauqir Sharif was captured in Atmeh, a town in Idlib province, and taken to an “unknown location,” activists in the area said.

Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), which was formerly linked to Al-Qaeda, controls parts of northwest Syria, one of the last areas of the country still in rebel hands.

According to a post on the Facebook page of Sharif's wife, masked men searched their house in Idlib, where they live with their children. The reason for the 32-year-old Londoner's seizure remains unclear.

His wife, with whom he traveled to Syria in 2012, has called on HTS to provide an official reason for her husband's detention, but has not received a response.

A number of other foreign nationals linked to Sharif are said to have also been arrested, and their laptops and mobile phones confiscated.

Sharif ran an aid organization called Live Updates from Syria that works with orphans and widows and raises awareness of the humanitarian catastrophe that has unfolded in the country.

He had his British citizenship revoked in 2017 after he was assessed to be "aligned with an Al-Qaeda-aligned group," which rendered him stateless and stranded in Syria.

Sharif denies he is linked to Al-Qaeda. "I have never aligned myself with any group involved in the conflict or taken part in any operation that is not related to my aid work," he said in 2017.



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British aid worker, Nigerian man shot dead at resort, 4 tourists

abducted British-Iranian aid worker moved back to jail from hospital ward – husband

Any Israeli annexation a 'crime': Palestinians tell UN

Wed, 2020-06-24 18:31

JERUSALEM: Only a week before Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu intends to kick-start annexation plans in the occupied West Bank, Israel's premier is facing challenges at home and abroad.

When Netanyahu clinched a coalition deal with former rival Benny Gantz, the longtime premier said political steps on annexing Jewish settlements and the Jordan Valley could start from July 1.

The move forms part of a broader US peace plan, which foresees the eventual creation of a Palestinian state but denies their key demands such as a capital in east Jerusalem.

Palestinians reject annexation and thousands took part in a protest Monday in the town of Jericho, although other West Bank rallies have failed to draw large crowds.

For Netanyahu, Washington's plan and its green light provide a "historic opportunity" to "apply sovereignty" over swathes of the West Bank.

The premier has just months left before his pro-Israeli ally, US President Donald Trump, risks being booted out of office in November elections.

Despite a call supported by over 1,000 lawmakers from 25 countries for "decisive" action to prevent annexation, Israel stands to benefit from indecision within the European Union.

The country's top trade partner stands opposed but remains divided on possible retaliatory measures.

Israel's leader must still decide how much territory he intends to annex, according to a European diplomat closely following the developments.

"For Netanyahu it's a question of 'swallowing the elephant', of knowing the size of the piece he'll swallow," he told AFP.

The prime minister has stepped up meetings with leaders from settlements, home to more than 450,000 Israelis who live alongside more than 2.8 million West Bank Palestinians.

Netanyahu faces opposition from some settlement leaders and a scaled-down proposal has emerged, of annexing certain settlements or settlement blocs such as Ma'ale Adumim, Gush Etzion or Ariel.

"The scope of annexation will definitely impact the intensity of the international reaction," said Nimrod Goren from Jerusalem's Hebrew University.

The response from Palestinians would also affect steps taken abroad.

"Whether there will be violence erupting from Gaza or the West Bank, that will lead other countries to step up their response," said Goren, founder of the Mitvim think-tank for regional foreign policy.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has taken a back seat for the past decade, as Middle East leaders have contended with the Arab Spring uprisings and the emergence of the Daesh group.

Israel, for its part, continues to warn of dangers posed by its arch foe Iran and its increased influence in the region.

Netanyahu's government has also sought to improve relations with Gulf states, notably the United Arab Emirates.

For the first time, an Emirati official published an opinion piece in an Israeli newspaper earlier this month to warn against jeopardizing any warming of ties.

"Annexation will certainly and immediately upend Israeli aspirations for improved security, economic and cultural ties with the Arab world and with the UAE," Yousef Al-Otaiba, Emirati ambassador to Washington, wrote in top-selling daily Yediot Aharonot.

Israel has formal diplomatic ties with only two Arab states, neighbors Jordan and Egypt.

Senior Palestinian official Saeb Erekat told AFP that a "large international coalition" including Arab, African and European countries back the Palestinians against Israel's annexation plan.

In addition to opposition from the international community, Netanyahu must also weigh Washington's position on unilateral annexation.

On Wednesday, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo indicated that the US would not stand in Israel's way.

"Decisions about Israelis extending sovereignty to those places are decisions for the Israelis to make," he said, moments after the UN and the Arab League joined in calls for Israel to abandon its plans.

The UN coordinator for the Middle East, Nickolay Mladenov, said annexation risked "upending more than a quarter of a century of international efforts in support of a future viable Palestinian state."

Any Israeli annexation of Palestinian land would be a "crime," Palestinian representative Riad Al-Maliki told the UN Security Council.

The US peace deal anticipates the move as part of a negotiating process, although Palestinian officials cut ties with Washington in 2017 and have rejected the latest proposals out of hand.

Netanyahu's coalition partner, Defense Minister Gantz, has also warned against taking steps which would damage relations with Amman.

Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi last week said annexation posed an "unprecedented danger to the peace process."

Fears of violence have also raised concerns among the Israeli electorate, whose support for annexation has fallen below 50 percent.

With an economic crisis brought on by the coronavirus pandemic and a recent spike in infections, many Israelis are prioritising their daily lives over the annexation plans.



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European MPs reject Israeli West Bank annexation
Jericho Palestinians fear isolation in Israeli annexation

[US terror report: Iran continues to plot global attacks](#)

Wed, 2020-06-24 18:19

LONDON: Iran continues to plot global terrorist attacks and foment violence in the Middle East, a US government annual terrorism report said.

The same report praised Saudi Arabia for its cooperation in tackling terrorist groups and cutting off their funding.

The State Department's Country Reports on Terrorism 2019 said the US had managed to constrain some of Iran's activities through its "maximum pressure

campaign” to put overwhelming financial pressure on Iran.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

These included a slew of new sanctions on Tehran and its proxy forces in countries like Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen. In April, the US designated Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), including its Quds Force, a foreign terrorist organization.

“The Iranian regime and its proxies continued to plot and commit terrorist attacks on a global scale,” the report said. “The regime was directly involved in plotting terrorism through its IRGC and Ministry of Intelligence and Security, including plots in recent years in North and South America, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa.”



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Sanctions on Iran have produced 'excellent results' says Brian HookUS hopeful world will accept extension of UN arms embargo on Iran