

UN: Numerous reports of looting in Libyan towns retaken by Turkey-backed GNA

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CAIRO: The United Nations has received “numerous” reports of looting and destruction in two towns outside Tripoli retaken by the forces of Libya’s internationally recognized government, it said on Sunday.

Forces of the Turkish-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) on Thursday recaptured Tarhouna as part of an advance ending a 14-month offensive on the capital by the eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA) of Khalifa Haftar. Since the LNA retreated, videos have been posted online purportedly showing looting of shops and torching of homes of families associated with the LNA and its local backers.

The UN Libya mission (UNSMIL) said more than 16,000 people had been displaced in Tarhouna and southern Tripoli.

Opinion

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

“Reports of the discovery of a number of corpses at the hospital in Tarhouna are deeply disturbing,” UNSMIL said in a statement, urging the GNA to investigate impartially.

“We have also received numerous reports of the looting and destruction of public and private property in Tarhouna and Alasabaa, which in some cases appear to be acts of retribution and revenge that risk further fraying Libya’s social fabric.”

Alasabaa is another town south of Tripoli that was retaken by the GNA after changing hands several times. Tarhouna was a forward base for the LNA’s Tripoli offensive.

A spokesman for the GNA interior ministry sent Reuters a statement warning its forces that reprisals in recaptured areas would be punished.

The Tripoli-based justice ministry said the GNA forces that entered Tarhouna had discovered more than 100 bodies in a morgue.

Jalel Harchaoui, research fellow at the Clingendael Institute, said international diplomatic efforts that had supported the Tripoli government “will be predicated on that government providing security, imposing order and promoting robust transitional justice.”

Turkey said it hoped to expand its cooperation with the GNA with deals on energy and construction once the conflict is over.

“From roads to bridges, hospitals, hotels, housing, we already have a history. These stopped because of the war. The same goes for energy,” presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin told the Milliyet daily.



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[‘We want to breathe, too’: Solidarity](#)

from Iraq

Sun, 2020-06-07 00:19

BAGHDAD: Seventeen years after US troops invaded their country and eight months since protests engulfed their cities, Iraqis are sending solidarity, warnings and advice to demonstrators across America.

Whether in Baghdad's Tahrir Square or on Twitter, Iraqis are closely watching the unprecedented street protests sparked by the killing of George Floyd, an unarmed black man who died in Minneapolis as a police officer knelt on his neck.

"I think what the Americans are doing is brave and they should be angry, but rioting is not the solution," said Yassin Alaa, a scrawny 20-year-old camped out in Tahrir.

Only a few dozen Iraqis remain in tents in the capital's main protest square, which just months ago saw security forces fire tear gas and live bullets at demonstrators, who shot back with rocks or occasionally Molotov cocktails. Violence left more than 550 people dead, but virtually no one has been held accountable – mirroring a lack of accountability over deaths at the hands of security forces in the US, Iraqis say. Now, they want to share their lessons learned.

"Don't set anything on fire. Stay away from that, because the police will treat you with force right from the beginning and might react unpredictably," Alaa told AFP.

And most importantly, he insisted, stick together. "If blacks and whites were united and they threw racism away, the system can never stop them," he said. Across their country, Iraqis spotted parallels between the roots of America's protests and their own society.

"In the US it's a race war, while here it's a war of politics and religion," said Haider Kareem, 31, who protested often in Tahrir and whose family lives in the US.

"But the one thing we have in common is the injustice we both suffer from," he told AFP.

Iraq has its own history of racism, particularly against a minority of Afro-Iraqis in the south who trace their roots back to East Africa.

In 2013, leading Afro-Iraqi figure Jalal Thiyab was gunned down in the oil-rich city of Basra – but discrimination against the community is otherwise mostly nonviolent.

"Our racism is different than America's racism," said Ali Essam, a 34-year-old Afro-Iraqi who directed a wildly popular play about Iraq's protests last year.

"Here, we joke about dark skin but in America, being dark makes people think you're a threat," he told AFP.

Solidarity is spreading online, too, with Iraqis tweaking their own protest chants and slogans to fit the US.

In one video, an elderly Iraqi is seen reciting a "hosa" or rhythmic chant, used to rally people into the streets last year and now adapted to an American context.

"This is a vow, this a vow! Texas won't be quiet now," he bellowed, before advising Americans to keep their rallies independent of foreign interference

– mimicking a US government warning to Iraqis last year. Others shared the hashtag “America Revolts.”

Another Arabic hashtag going viral in Iraq translates as “We want to breathe, too,” referring to Floyd’s last words.

Not all the comparisons have been uplifting, however.

The governor of Minnesota, the state in which Minneapolis is located, said the US street violence “was reminiscent of Mogadishu or Baghdad.”

And the troops briefly deployed by US President Donald Trump to quell unrest in Washington were from the 82nd Airborne – which had just returned from duty in Iraq.

“Trump is using the American army against the American people,” said Democrat presidential candidate and former vice president Joe Biden.

Iraqis have fought back online, tweeting “Stop associating Baghdad with turmoil,” in response to comparisons with their homeland.

Others have used biting sarcasm.

In response to videos of crowds breaking into shops across US cities, Iraqis have dug up an infamous quote by ex-defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld. “Lawlessness and looting is a natural consequence of the transition from dictatorship to a free country,” he said in response to a journalist’s question on widespread looting and chaos in Baghdad following the 2003 US-led invasion.



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Iraqi lawmakers vote in new premier’s remaining ministers
In Iraq’s fields of black gold, thousands lose livelihoods

Eritrean navy urged to free dozens of Yemeni fishermen from custody

Sat, 2020-06-06 23:28

AL-MUKALLA: There have been calls for Eritrea to release dozens of Yemeni fishermen who were caught last week after sailing into a maritime flashpoint.

On Wednesday 15 armed boats from Eritrea's navy seized 120 Yemeni fishermen from the Red Sea between Hanish Islands and the coast of Khokha.

Eritrea briefly occupied the Hanish Islands in 1995 before retreating after the international arbitration court granted Yemen sovereignty over them. But Yemeni authorities complain that the Eritreans have attacked and seized hundreds of Yemeni fishermen over the last couple of years.

The most recent incursion triggered a brief clash with the Yemeni coastguards that ended with the capture of seven Eritreans, local security officials said. On Thursday the Eritreans released 62 Yemeni fishermen after confiscating their boats.

"We demand all concerned authorities to work on releasing our colleagues and their boats that are in Eritrea's custody," Khaled Al-Zarnouqi, the head of Yemen's Shabab Al- Khokha fishery association, told Arab News on Saturday. "We demand the international community, the (Saudi-led) coalition and the (Yemeni) government to protect us from the repeated attacks by Eritrea's navy that violates Yemeni sovereignty, attacks Yemeni fishermen and seizes boats."

Hashem, one of the fishermen who was released on Thursday, said that armed Eritrean vessels approached their boats on Tuesday and asked them to sail to Eritrea's Ras Tarma.

"They were tough," Hashem told Arab News, preferring to be identified by his first name. "Before releasing us, they gave us little fuel and rickety boats and asked us to sail back home."

NUMBER

120 Yemeni fishermen were captured by Eritrea's navy on Wednesday from the Red Sea between Hanish Islands and the coast of Khokha.

The Eritreans refused to release their boats. "Each boat costs YER2.5 million (\$9,987). They seized the finest and most expensive boats and allowed us to sail back with the worst ones."

Local security officials and fishermen say that Eritrea's naval attacks have

become more brazen and are getting closer to the Yemeni coastline.

“They have attacked Yemeni fishermen less than 17 miles from the Yemeni coastline,” a local security official who documents Eritrea’s navy attacks on Yemeni fishermen told Arab News. “The Eritreans are also still holding 24 fishermen who were detained in the Red Sea on Dec. 1, 2019 and refuse to release them,” he said, adding that many fishermen were thinking of taking up arms to protect themselves.

Yemen’s coast guard authority crumbled in early 2015 when the Iran-backed Houthis expanded across Yemen after taking over Sanaa, triggering heavy clashes with their opponents.

Since the beginning of its military operations in Yemen in support of the internationally- recognized government, the Saudi-led coalition has trained and armed hundreds of coast guard troops and deployed them along the country’s coastline.

Yemeni officials say they are battling Eritrea’s navy attacks, Houthi arms’ smugglers and drug gangs.



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Turkish military visit raises fears of Syrian operation

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ANKARA: A further visit by Turkey's Defense Minister, Hulusi Akar, and senior military officials to troops along the Syrian border, along with plans to hold meetings with commanders, have raised fears of a new Turkish military operation.

The Chief of General Staff, Gen. Yasar Guler, accompanied the high-profile visit, while President Recep Tayyip Erdogan also attended some meetings via telephone.

Turkey has conducted three cross-border operations in Syria against Daesh and the Kurdish YPG militia since 2016.

Navar Saban, a military analyst at the Omran Center for Strategic Studies in Istanbul, said an imminent operation is unlikely, due to the increasing cost of a military move.

"Logistically speaking, it doesn't make sense to launch another operation in an area that has this many complexities, including a Russian presence, Daesh cells and Syrian regime operations. Even if they win, it will bear significant costs for troops on the ground because of security problems in northwestern Afrin and northwestern Idlib provinces," he told Arab News.

However, Saban also said the visit is unlikely to be random.

"It is for coordination on the ground to manage clashes with different actors. But it wouldn't trigger a new operation in the short term," he said.

On Friday, US-backed Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces announced a new campaign to fight remnants of Daesh across the border with Iraq following a recent increase in attacks.

Last month, the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) blamed Daesh for exploiting the coronavirus pandemic to "regroup and inflict violence on the population."

"Intermittent clashes and ground-based strikes between pro-government forces and armed groups continue to be reported in western Aleppo and southern Idlib," the OHCHR said.

The resumption of violence in Idlib has sparked concern in Ankara about a possible wave of immigration toward the Turkish border, where Turkey has deployed troops.

On Friday, one Turkish soldier was killed and two were wounded following an attack on an armored ambulance in Idlib. The region has seen an increase in attacks since December.

On May 27, a Turkish soldier was killed in an explosion on a highway in Idlib.

Kyle Orton, a UK-based Syria researcher, said that another Turkish operation into Syria remains unlikely for now, as previous cross-border operations already gave the country a military foothold.

"The American presence in Syria has always been the major roadblock to Turkey

dismantling the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) statelet, and the Americans want a withdrawal from Syria, quite possibly before the election in November," he told Arab News.

Orton said that Turkey can get what it wants by maintaining its position, as there are potential political advantages in fighting Daesh in the vacuum left by the US.

"If the Americans are still in Syria in, say, a year, then Ankara might reconsider its view," he added.



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Russian envoy says Turkey can do what it wants with air defense system
Crackdown on Turkish opposition accelerates: Sign of a snap election?

[Turbulent times in parliament: A new](#)

normal for Turkish politics?

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ISTANBUL: After three opposition politicians were stripped of their status as members of parliament in Turkey on Thursday, June 4, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) made it clear that a new period had begun in Turkish politics, given the country's preoccupation with economic deterioration and rising unemployment that has already rendered many voters disenchanted.

Two deputies from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) and one deputy from the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) lost their positions, and were arrested in an overnight operation on terror charges. The Kurdish politicians, Leyla Guven and Musa Farisogullari, were detained, while the CHP deputy, Kadri Enis Berberoglu, was released from police custody after less than 24 hours as part of anti-coronavirus measures in Turkish prisons. Several HDP deputies were later beaten by police during a protest in Ankara over the imprisonment of their colleagues.

Insights from Ankara suggest two more parliamentarians from the HDP may be stripped of their seats soon as their files are being reviewed by the Turkish Court of Cassation.

The crackdown on opposition figures does not end with politicians. The government is also working on a legislative change to the way bar associations elect their board members. Fifty bar associations recently released a joint statement against any move to limit their power and to increase pressure on the country's already weakened judiciary.

The AKP and its coalition partner, the Nationalist Movement Party, are also working on another legislative amendment to ban the transfer of parliamentary deputies to other parties over fears that newly founded opposition parties could be strengthened with the transfer of deputies from the CHP to take part of upcoming elections.

Ten new political parties were established in Turkey over the past five months, bringing the total number to 91 – two of them, the Democracy and Progress Party, and the Future Party, to target disillusioned AKP voters and liberal segments of society.

"Turkey has been a consolidated authoritarian state for some time and attacks on the HDP are certainly not new," said Paul T. Levin, director of the Stockholm University Institute for Turkish Studies.

"Going after the CHP would be a dramatic escalation, but they have been focused on Berberoglu for some time due to his involvement in the arms truck scandal," he told Arab News.

Berberoglu, a former journalist, was arrested for providing dissident daily newspaper Cumhuriyet with confidential footage of Turkish National Intelligence Organization trucks allegedly carrying weapons to Syria.

According to Levin, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan may be trying to weaken the opposition in advance of a snap election, that is widely expected to be held next year.

“As for the bar associations, they have long been an important source of opposition to attempts to undermine the rule of law. It would really be a terrible blow to what remains of judicial independence if they were neutered,” he said.

There are still dozens of Kurdish politicians behind bars in Turkey, including parliamentarians, mayors and the party’s former co-chairs. The HDP released a statement following the arrests of Guven and Farisogullari, and said: “Turkey now witnesses yet another coup – this pro-coup mindset has been prevailing in parliament for 26 years.”



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US probes Turkey over ‘discriminatory’ taxes
Crackdown on Turkish opposition accelerates: Sign of a snap election?