

US' Pompeo, Egypt FM urge calm in Libya amid Tripoli offensive

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WASHINGTON: The United States and Egypt, a key backer of Libyan militia leader Khalifa Haftar, on Tuesday called for calm as the strongman pressed ahead in his offensive on Tripoli.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo addressed the crisis in Libya during a phone call with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, the State Department said. The two discussed "the urgent need to achieve a political solution in Libya and prevent further escalation," State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said.

Haftar is pressing ahead against the internationally backed government in Tripoli in fighting that has left 510 dead and driven more than 75,000 people from their homes, according to World Health Organization figures.

Haftar on a visit last week to France rejected a cease-fire urged by President Emmanuel Macron.

In an interview with the Journal de Dimanche newspaper, Haftar said he would continue the operation until "private militias and extremist groups," who he alleged were gaining influence under Prime Minister Fayez Al-Sarraj laid down their weapons.



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Libya's Haftar says to fight until Tripoli 'militias' defeated
Libya confirms it rescued 290 migrants in Mediterranean

[US warns Syria, Russia against 'reckless escalation' as 21 civilians killed in air strikes](#)

Author:

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Tue, 2019-05-28 17:13

BEIRUT: At least 21 civilians were killed on Tuesday as Syria's regime intensified its bombardment of the last extremist stronghold in the country's northwest, a monitor said.

Nine children were among the 21 killed in government fire on several towns in Idlib province and the countryside of neighboring Aleppo, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

And the US continues to be alarmed by Syrian government and Russian air strikes in northern Syria, saying recent attacks have killed more than 200 civilians, the State Department said on Tuesday.

"Indiscriminate attacks on civilians and public infrastructure such as schools, markets and hospitals is a reckless escalation of the conflict and is unacceptable," said State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus.

Strikes on a busy street in the village of Kafr Halab, on the western edge of Aleppo province, killed at least nine civilians.

An AFP photographer said the bodies of the victims were torn apart and several stores lining the side of the road were destroyed. The street was crowded with people out and about before breaking the daytime fast observed by Muslims during the holy month of Ramadan. A hospital in the Idlib town of Kafranbel was also hit by artillery shells, said David Swanson, a spokesman for the UN humanitarian office.

"The facility is reportedly out of service due to severe structural damage," he told AFP.

The hospital's administrative director Majed Al-Akraa confirmed the attack. The hospital is completely out of service," he said.

"It was a strong attack. The generators and even my car caught fire," he told AFP.

It follows two days of intensified regime bombardment on the region that killed a total of 31 civilians on Sunday and Monday, according to the Britain-based Observatory. Rescue volunteers and civilians were seen pulling dust-covered victims from the rubble of destroyed buildings in the wake of those strikes.

Idlib and parts of the neighboring provinces of Aleppo, Hama and Latakia are under the control of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, an extremist group led by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate.

The region is supposed to be protected from a massive government offensive by a September buffer zone deal, but the extremist bastion has come under increasing bombardment by the regime and its ally Russia since late April.

The Observatory says nearly 280 civilians have been killed in the spike in violence since then.

More than 200,000 civilians have already been displaced by the upsurge of violence, according to the United Nations.

The UN has warned an all-out offensive on the region would lead to a humanitarian catastrophe for its nearly three million residents.

At least 20 health facilities have been hit by the escalation – 19 of which remain out of service, the UN has said.

Also on Tuesday, France's top diplomat also said that the country had an "indication" that a chemical attack had been carried out in Syria's Idlib province this month, an attack alleged by Washington last week.

"We have an indication that chemical weapons were used in the Idlib region, but for now it has not been verified," Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told a parliamentary commission.

"We're being cautious because we consider that chemical weapons use has to be proven and be lethal, in which case we can react," he said.

President Emmanuel Macron has made use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government a "red line" that would trigger a military reprisal against the regime of President Bashar Assad.



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Satellite images show crops on fire in Syria rebel enclave
Regime bombing kills 12 civilians in Syria's northwest

[Kushner in Morocco to build support for Mideast peace plan](#)

Tue, 2019-05-28 16:06

RABAT: President Donald Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner is in Morocco to seek King Mohammed VI's backing for economic elements of the Trump administration's still-secret peace plan for Israel and Palestine.

The Trump administration is stepping up efforts to build support for the plan, as the architects of the proposal began a Mideast tour this week aimed at winning over uneasy Arab nations.

A White House official said on Tuesday the trip "is part of our ongoing efforts to achieve peace between Israel and the Palestinians" but offered no specifics about the team's agenda at its various stops.

Opinion

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

The administration is keen to win support from members of the Arab League on whom the plan will rely heavily for both economic and political support.

Kushner, Trump's special representative for international negotiations Jason Greenblatt and special US envoy for Iran, Brian Hook, will also travel to Jordan and Israel as part of the trip.

The Palestinians, who have cut off contact with the Trump administration and have rejected the peace plan, are urging fellow Arabs to steer clear of the Bahrain economic workshop to be held on June 25-26.

However, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar have all signaled they intend to participate.

Morocco and Jordan have yet to offer any public position on either the peace plan or the Bahrain meeting. Both have close ties with the Palestinian leadership.



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Palestinians turn to EU to counter Kushner plan

[Jordanian officials deny claims of rift with Riyadh](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-05-28 00:41

AMMAN: Jordanian officials have rejected Western media claims of a rift between Jordan and Saudi Arabia over Amman's attempts to forge new alliances in the face of a growing economic crisis. Jordanian Foreign Ministry spokesman Sufian Qudah said the claims failed to reflect Jordan's foreign

policy.

Qudah was responding to a report in the UK daily newspaper The Times which claimed that Jordan's King Abdullah in recent months had opened talks with Turkey and Qatar, and had made subtle overtures to Iran. The Jordanian ruler was also angered by US President Donald Trump's aggressive support for Israeli interests, the report claimed.

Foreign relations experts were also quick to dismiss the claims.

Musa Shteivi, head of Jordan University's strategic studies center, told Arab News there was "absolutely no change" in Jordanian foreign policy due to the US plans.

"There are some in the media who are on a fishing expedition, swinging in the dark and making accusations not based on the reality on the ground," he said.

Muhammad Momani, a former Jordan government spokesman, described claims of King Abdullah defying Trump and the Saudis as "surprising."

"Our relations with all Arab countries, and especially our Gulf brothers, is excellent," he told Arab News.

Momani, now chairman of the independent Amman daily Al-Ghad, rejected suggestions by the British newspaper that Jordan is moving closer to Iran and Qatar.

"The fact is there is no Jordanian ambassador in Iran and the same applies to Qatar," he said.

Several analysts pointed out that Jordan had ended its economic treaty with Turkey in November 2018 and was yet to renew the partnership despite pressure from some in the business community.

In its report on Monday, The Times claimed that "King Abdullah has in recent months opened talks with Turkey and Qatar, long-standing rivals of Saudi Arabia. It has even made subtle overtures to Iran, the Gulf state's main enemy and a country about which the king was issuing dire warnings until recently."

The newspaper said the Jordanian moves come amid a mounting economic crisis with Riyadh reducing cash subsidies that have kept the country afloat for decades.



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Houthis trying to target Saudi cities with ballistic missiles: Arab coalition
Qatar says invited to emergency Arab summits in Makkah by Saudi King

[A true taste of Egypt at Ramadan in Cairo's Midan Al-Hussein](#)

Mon, 2019-05-27 23:25

CAIRO: For many in Egypt, and beyond, Ramadan would not be complete without a short visit to the historical area of Midan Al-Hussein in the heart of Cairo.

It's a district that has come to symbolize the spirit of the country, particularly during the holy month. It's even earned itself an alternative name – Hayy Al-Bahga Al-Ramadenya (The "Ramadan Joy Neighborhood"). Throughout Ramadan, Midan Al-Hussein is full of life, its bustling streets echo with greetings, and there is a multitude of entertainment on offer.

This year, as it is every year, Midan Al-Hussein is lit with traditional Ramadan lanterns and decorations. The Al-Hussein Mosque, which towers over the area, is full of Muslims praying, reading the Qur'an, or reciting Zikr.

“Ramadan in Al-Hussein is completely different from any other place,” Ahmed Shawky, a frequent visitor to the area, told Arab News. “There is an amazing here, which is why I like to spend a lot of time here.”

Al-Fishawy – one of Cairo’s more-popular traditional coffee shops – is one of the spots that Shawky cites as a good place to spend time with his friends. “I also walk around the narrow alleys of Khan Al-Khalili, and I sometimes go to the mosque for taraweeh prayers. Then I end my day with sahoor.”

Sayyed Al-Noursi, one of the caretakers of Al-Hussein Mosque, echoes Al-Fishawy’s sentiments about the neighborhood’s unique Ramadan spirit.

“Blessings and prayers increase during Ramadan,” Al-Noursi told Arab News. “In Al-Hussein, I feel like I’m in the pulsing heart of Egypt. The area radiates with all shades of greatness, love and joy.

“Tourists also love to visit Midan Al-Hussein in Ramadan,” he continues. “They like to take part in the festivities. They don’t even eat or drink during daytime, which is why we love them and enjoy telling them about the characteristics of this neighborhood and the mosque.”

The coffee shops are another sign of the festivities of the month. Abdel Qader Biso, manager of an establishment near the mosque, told Arab News that he eagerly awaits the special atmosphere of the holy month every year.

“There are times in the year where business is slow, but in Ramadan the coffee shop is always a full house,” Biso said.

During Ramadan, customers crowd the coffee shops to drink traditional Ramadan drinks including karkadeh – which Biso says is the best-selling drink in his shop – and Egyptian tea with mint.

“We also serve sweets,” Biso said. “The top sellers are rice pudding and Om Ali. Both Egyptians and foreigners order these items.”

Perhaps the busiest spot of all in Al-Hussein during iftar is Farahat – a restaurant renowned for its stuffed pigeon dish. The restaurant was already crowded as we approached, and there were twice as many people again queuing up outside.

For Al Hajj Samir, one of the waiters, Farahat’s popularity has its drawbacks. “As waiters, we can’t eat until the last customer leaves,” he explained.

It’s clear the Ramadan Joy Neighborhood is living up to its name, and remains as popular as ever. Thousands of people flock here for its marvelous atmosphere, and it is in the rich culture and history of Midan Al-Hussein – more than any other place – that one finds the embodiment of Egyptian Ramadan.



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Egypt's street iftar comes with a community flavor
Detroit's Islamic Center organizes 'Iftar tent' to offer free meals