

Libyan government boasts of new weapons despite arms embargo

Author:

AFP, AP, Reuters

ID:

1558295542923915500

Sun, 2019-05-19 22:50

CAIRO/BENGHAZI, Libya: Fighters allied with the Tripoli government in Libya say they have received armored vehicles and "quality weapons" despite a UN arms embargo on the country.

A Facebook page linked to the Government of National Accord (GNA) posted photos appearing to show more than a dozen armored vehicles arriving at a port, without saying who supplied them.

The Facebook page is run by the media office for the GNA's counter-offensive against Khalifa Haftar's Libya National Army (LNA).

Supporters of the various militias allied with the government say the vehicles, which resemble Turkish-made Kirpi armored vehicles, were supplied by Turkey.

Spokesmen for Turkey's military and Foreign Ministry did not immediately respond to phone calls seeking comment.

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said last month his government would stand by Tripoli authorities as they repel an offensive launched by the LNA. The battle for the Libyan capital has threatened to ignite a civil war on the scale of the 2011 uprising that toppled and killed longtime ruler Muammar Qaddafi. The UN Security Council imposed an open-ended arms embargo on Libya in February of the same year.

Fathi Bashagha, the interior minister for the Tripoli-based government, also visited Turkey late in April to activate "security and defense agreements" between the two governments.

The offensive on Tripoli was launched April 4 by the LNA, which controls the country's eastern half.

Haftar, who in recent years has been battling extremists and other militias across eastern Libya, says he is determined to restore stability to the North African country. He has received support from several countries in the region including the UAE and Egypt.

"The GNA supplies armor, ammunition and ... weapons, to its forces who are defending Tripoli," read a statement published on Facebook.

The weapons embargo has been regularly violated by different groups in Libya, according to the UN. Haftar has accused Turkey and Qatar of supplying weapons to his rivals.

In a September report, the UN's group of experts on the country noted an increase in the number of armored vehicles supplied to LNA.

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said last month his government would stand by Tripoli authorities.

Initially controlling swathes of Libya's east, Haftar launched an offensive in the south of the country in January before attacking the coastal capital

last month.

His forces have been held back from the city center by pro-government forces, with fighting continuing on the outskirts of Tripoli and particularly in the southern suburbs.

Daesh attack

Two guards and a soldier were killed and four other people were kidnapped on Saturday in a suspected Daesh attack targeting Libya's Zella oilfield, a security source said.

The death toll was confirmed by the National Oil Company (NOC) which condemned the attack in a statement on Saturday evening.

The attackers struck at an entrance gate to the field, which lies near the town of Zella about 760 km southwest of the capital, Tripoli, before fleeing, according to the source and local residents who asked not to be named.

Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack through its Amaq news agency later on Saturday.

The Zella field belongs to Zueitina Oil Company, which pumped 19,000 barrels per day on average in the last quarter of 2018 across all its fields.

An engineer told Reuters workers at the field were safe and facilities had not been damaged.

Libya's NOC chief said on Saturday continued instability in the country could cause it to lose 95 percent of oil production.

Speaking in Saudi Arabia ahead of a ministerial panel gathering on Sunday of top OPEC and non-OPEC producers, Mustafa Sanalla also confirmed the Zella attack.

Islamic State has been active in Libya in the turmoil since the overthrow of Muammar Qaddafi in 2011. The militant group took control of the coastal city of Sirte in 2015 but lost it late in 2016 to local forces backed by US airstrikes.

In the last two years, the group has targeted three state institutions in Tripoli, home of the UN-backed government of national accord led by Prime Minister Fayez Serraj.

Saturday's assault took place as LNA, which is allied to a rival administration in eastern Libya, mounts an offensive to control Tripoli.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

[Investigators rule out as 'improbable' theory that exploding phone caused EgyptAir crash](#)

Author:

AFP Paris

ID:

1558295607453921800

Sun, 2019-05-19 23:58

PARIS: It is improbable that an exploding smartphone or tablet caused the crash of an Airbus jet operated by EgyptAir three years ago, according to an expert report commissioned by French authorities and seen by AFP on Sunday. The plane, flying from Paris Charles de Gaulle airport to Cairo, crashed over the Mediterranean between Crete and the northern coast of Egypt on May 19, 2016 killing all 66 people on board.

But the aftermath of the crash has been marked by tension, with the Egyptian authorities pointing to a terror attack as the likely cause but their French counterparts insisting on technical issues.

Paris investigating magistrates ordered separate expert reports on two subjects, the first looking at the maintenance of the plane and the second specifically at the phone issue.

There had been speculation that a thermal runaway – a drastic change in temperature – in batteries in an iPhone or iPad in the cockpit could have been the cause of a fire that brought down the plane.

But in the expert report, first reported by the Le Parisien daily and now seen by AFP, three experts said that this was improbable.

“If a spontaneous thermal runaway in a device with a lithium-ion battery can never be completely excluded, the analysis shows that for these devices such an event must be considered extremely improbable,” said the report.

It said that this conclusion was only valid if there had been no “external mechanical aggression” on the devices.

The report said there should have been no security impact even if the devices had been charging in the cockpit.

The report on the security of the plane, which was made known in April, said the aircraft should never have taken off because of a series of technical issues on previous flights.

All passengers and crew on board, including 40 Egyptians and 15 French citizens, lost their lives in the crash of the A320.

In December 2016, Egyptian officials said traces of explosives had been found on the remains of some victims, but French authorities were skeptical, as no organization had claimed responsibility for any attack.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Palestinian flags at Eurovision irks Israel minister

Author:

AFP Jerusalem

ID:

1558295619843922900

Sun, 2019-05-19 23:59

JERUSALEM: Israeli Culture Minister Miri Regev on Sunday criticized the display of Palestinian flags during the Eurovision song contest finals in Tel Aviv, including by one of Madonna's dancers.

"It was an error," Regev, a right-wing minister known for provocative stances, told journalists before a cabinet meeting.

"Politics and a cultural event should not be mixed, with all due respect to Madonna."

Regev criticized Israeli public broadcaster KAN for not having prevented the flags from being shown, though it was unclear what could have been done. During Madonna's performance at the Eurovision extravaganza, which began Saturday night and stretched into Sunday morning, two of her dancers could be seen side-by-side with Israeli and Palestinian flags on their backs.

The gesture was an apparent call for unity, but Eurovision organizers seek to keep all politics out of the event and the display of Palestinian flags inside Israel is deeply controversial.

Madonna had not commented on the flags.

Separately, Icelandic group Hatari displayed scarfs with Palestinian flags when results were being announced.

The European Broadcasting Union, which organizes the event, condemned both displays.

Referring to Madonna's dancers, it said "this element of the performance was not part of the rehearsals."

"The Eurovision Song Contest is a non-political event and Madonna had been made aware of this."

Madonna resisted calls from pro-Palestinian activists to boycott the event over Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory.

In a statement before the finals, Madonna said: "I'll never stop playing music to suit someone's political agenda nor will I stop speaking out against violations of human rights wherever in the world they may be."

Regev also criticized KAN for not having filmed any of its "postcards" of participating singers in the occupied West Bank.

Each singer was filmed in scenic areas of Israel and some of the footage was aired during the show.

Israel occupied the West Bank in the 1967 Six-Day War and it remains under occupation today.

Israeli settlements there are viewed as illegal under international law and are built on land the Palestinians see as part of their future state.

Israel won the right to host Eurovision thanks to last year's victory by Israeli singer Netta Barzilai.

The Netherlands' Duncan Laurence won this year's Eurovision with his power

ballad "Arcade."



Main category:
[Middle-East](#)

[Sudan army rulers say talks with protesters to resume Sunday](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1558198991274333300

Sat, 2019-05-18 13:48

KHARTOUM: Sudan's army rulers announced talks will resume with protest leaders Sunday, four days after the generals suspended negotiations on implementing civilian rule in the country.

"The Transitional Military Council announces the resumption of negotiations with the Alliance for Freedom and Change on Sunday at the presidential palace," the ruling army council said in a Saturday statement.

World powers have urged the generals to resume meetings on Sudan's future leadership, following the ouster last month of longtime leader Omar Al-Bashir after mass protest.

Representatives from the United Nations, African Union and European powers "called for an immediate resumption of talks," said Tibor Nagy, the US assistant secretary of state for Africa.

They called on both sides to “reach an agreement ASAP on an interim government that is truly civilian-led and reflects the will of the Sudanese people,” Nagy tweeted Friday. The generals and protest leaders had been expected to come to an agreement on Wednesday on the thorniest issue – the make-up of a new body to govern Sudan for three years. But that meeting never took place and on Thursday the head of the military council, Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, confirmed talks were suspended for 72 hours. Demonstrators subsequently spent hours meeting Burhan’s demand to dismantle roadblocks which had paralyzed parts of the capital. The generals have allowed protesters to hold onto their sit-in outside Khartoum’s army headquarters, where they remain camped out to demand a rapid transition to democracy.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Sudan](#)

[protestors](#)

Sudan protesters tear down roadblocks, want army to resume talks
Sudan protesters vow to press on after talks suspended

Libya's NOC chief says instability could lead to 95% oil production loss

Sat, 2019-05-18 15:57

JEDDAH: Libya's National Oil Corporation (NOC) chief said on Saturday continued instability in Libya could make it lose 95% of its oil production.

"Unfortunately if the situation will continue like this I'm afraid that maybe 95% of production will be lost," Mustafa Sanalla told reporters in Jeddah ahead of a ministerial panel gathering on Sunday of top OPEC and non-OPEC producers.

Sanalla also said an attack had happened near Zella oilfield earlier on Saturday.

Two guards were killed and four others were kidnapped early on Saturday in a suspected Daesh attack targeting the oilfield, a security source said.

The attackers struck at an entrance gate to the field, which lies near the town of Zella about 760 km (470 miles) southwest of the capital, Tripoli. They killed the two guards before fleeing, the source and local residents asking not to be named told Reuters.

Daesh claimed responsibility for the attack through its Amaq news agency later on Saturday.

The Zella field belongs to Zueitina Oil Company, which pumped 19,000 barrels per day on average in the last quarter of 2018 across all its fields.

An engineer told Reuters workers at the field were safe and facilities had not been damaged.

Daesh has been active in Libya in the turmoil since the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. The militant group took control of the coastal city of Sirte in 2015 but lost it late in 2016 to local forces backed by US air strikes.

In the last two years, the group has targeted three state institutions in Tripoli, home of the Tripoli-based government of national accord led by Prime Minister Fayez Serraj.

Saturday's assault took place as general Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA), which is allied to a rival administration in eastern Libya, mounts an offensive to control Tripoli.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Zella oilfield](#)

[Zueitina Oil Company](#)

[Libya](#)

Libyan officials: Militants kill 3 troops at LNA checkpoint
South Korean, 3 Filipinos freed after captivity in Libya