

Arab coalition rejects Yemen allegations

Author:

Zaynab Khojji

ID:

1556818999448369400

Thu, 2019-05-02 20:30

RIYADH: The Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT) of the Arab coalition on Thursday rejected allegations over airstrikes and rights violations in Yemen. It investigated three claims that were reported in the media and rights groups about the coalition's operational conduct in the conflict.

Saudi Arabia leads a coalition of nations to support the internationally recognized government in Yemen in its fight against the Iran-backed Houthi rebels.

JIAT spokesman Mansour Al-Mansour said the team concluded that the procedures followed by the coalition were proper and safe, taking into consideration the rules of engagement and international humanitarian law.

Al-Mansour referenced cases raised by Human Rights Watch.

In 2016 coalition forces were alleged to have attacked two warehouses in an industrial area in the port city of Hodeidah. Bombs were dropped on warehouses and production workshops. The first attack hit a warehouse for foodstuffs, said Al-Mansour, while the second hit a warehouse for vehicle spare parts. There were no civilian casualties, he added.

The JIAT examined the incident and reviewed all documents, including procedures and rules of engagement, daily mission schedule, after-mission report, mission video recordings, satellite images, provisions and principles of international humanitarian law and customary rules, and assessment of evidence. It found that, based on the intelligence report received by coalition forces, the Houthi militia had seized and were using the warehouses as weapons and ammunition storage.

It also found that coalition forces had taken "feasible precautions" to avoid casualties or any accidental damage to civilian objects, minimizing the possibility of damage, through several measures. These included choosing the right time on target and using guided bombs.

In 2017 coalition forces were alleged to have attacked a military police camp in Sana'a, which was seized and controlled by the Houthi militia with prisoners trained to fight against the legitimate government. Al-Mansour said the JIAT investigated the incident and reviewed all documents. It found that, based on the availability of verifiable intelligence information, Houthi militia had seized and controlled the police camp and were preparing for combat against the government.

Coalition forces carried out an air mission using precision bombs and took all necessary precautions in accordance with the Geneva Conventions, he said. The JIAT concluded that the procedures followed by coalition forces to target the detention camp were correct and in accordance with international humanitarian law and its customary rules.

Al-Mansour turned his attention to the report of the National Commission to

investigate allegations of human rights violations in Yemen. He said it was stated that, in December 2017, coalition forces bombed houses in the village of Al-Qataba, Al-Khawkhah Directorate in Hodeidah, killing 21 people. The JIAT verified the incident and reviewed all documents. It found that, in the course of armed clashes with the Houthi militia, coalition land forces requested close air support (CAS) because they were under direct fire. The militia were in two buildings, making these a legitimate military target of high value. The CAS struck three military targets, the two buildings where the armed groups had fortified and the shooting site, using guided bombs. The JIAT studied the claim. It was found that the nearest target area was 11.7 kilometers away from the coordinates of the claim and the time of the strike differed by four hours from what was stated in the claim. The JIAT also verified the actions taken by coalition forces to target Houthi armed militia.







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US Senate sustains Trump veto supporting Arab coalition in Yemen
Houthis detain 10 journalists in Yemen on 'trumped-up spy charges'

[Sudan orders Bashir interrogated over suspected money laundering, terrorism financing](#)

Thu, 2019-05-02 21:07

KHARTOUM: Sudan's public prosecutor has ordered the interrogation of ousted President Omar Al-Bashir on suspicion of money laundering and financing terrorism, a judicial source told Reuters on Thursday.

In April, the prosecutor began investigating Bashir over accusations of money laundering and possession of large sums of foreign currency without legal grounds. Large sums of money were found in suitcases in his home.



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Arab states support Sudan transition, want stability: UAE minister
Sudan army rulers, protest leaders differ on joint council make-up

[Merkel to push for single EU stance on Libya crisis](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

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Thu, 2019-05-02 14:44

OUAGADOUGOU: Europe must adopt a common position to resolve the Libyan crisis, which has boosted unrest in the Sahel, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Thursday in Burkina Faso, a country hard-hit by jihadist violence.

Her visit coincided with a summit of the leaders of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger – the “G5 Sahel” group set up to manage a coordinated response to jihadist attacks.

“We must now work on a political solution for Libya... which will be important for the future of your region,” Merkel told students at the University of Ouagadougou.

“What the presidents of the G5 Sahel explained to me once again yesterday, and they are right to say so, is that Europe must agree on the approach as there are still diverging perspectives within the European Union,” said Merkel.

“I will do my best to ensure that the Italian position and the French position are consistent and that there are no different voices or positions in Europe.”

The two neighbours have differences over how to respond to the Libya crisis. There is also anger in Rome at France’s perceived lack of support for the influx of African migrants arriving from Italy’s former colony.

Last month, Libya’s UN-backed Government of National Accord appealed for Europe’s support against military strongman Khalifa Haftar, waging an offensive on Tripoli.

Libya has been in turmoil since NATO-backed forces overthrew former dictator Muammar Qaddafi in 2011.

“As Europeans, we will not find a solution for Libya by ourselves, we will need the expertise of the African Union,” Merkel told the students in a near-two-hour exchange.

The chancellor expressed concern over the security situation in Burkina Faso, and said “we try to build links, to assist Burkina Faso in the fight against terrorism, so that you can have opportunities in your own country, so that you can live in security, well-being, and better prosperity.”

Merkel was due in Mali later Thursday, to meet hundreds of German soldiers deployed there as part of UN force MINUSMA, then to Libyan neighbour Niger.



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[Turkey detains dozens as protests mark May Day rally](#)

Author:

Wed, 2019-05-01 22:57

ISTANBUL, ANKARA: Istanbul police detained dozens of people who were trying to hold a May Day rally at city center square on Wednesday in defiance of a protest ban.

Some 127 people were detained attempting to make their way to an unauthorized demonstration at Taksim Square, a traditional focal point of protest in the city, according to Istanbul police, who barricaded nearby roads including the bustling Istiklal Avenue.

Protesters were pinned roughly to police vehicles during the arrests, AFP correspondents said, while tourists in the area were also subjected to

baggage searches.

The annual workers' holiday is often marked by confrontation between demonstrators and police.

Several thousand people were able to attend an officially approved event in the Istanbul district of Bakirkoy, including members of workers' unions and opposition political parties, a correspondent said.

Istanbul election

Tensions are heightened in Istanbul after March 31 local elections.

The opposition's Ekrem Imamoglu narrowly defeated the candidate of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) to become Istanbul mayor but the AKP has officially requested a rerun of the vote in the city.

One of the protesters taking part in Bakirkoy, Mustafa Comert, said Turkey was at "at a turning point, that change has begun."

He added: "This May 1 will be even more beautiful. It is obvious that this is a consequence of the elections."

Planned May Day rallies in Sanliurfa, southeastern Turkey, were marred when a bus carrying workers from the southern province of Kahramanmaras overturned, killing five people and injuring 12, state news agency Anadolu reported.

Poll setbacks

A month after local elections which saw it lose control of Turkey's two largest cities, officials in AKP are questioning an alliance with nationalists which some blame for one of its biggest electoral setbacks.

Under a deal between AKP and the smaller Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), the nationalists fielded no mayoral candidate in the capital Ankara or Istanbul in the March 31 vote, and the AKP stood aside in other regions.

But the deal failed to prevent the secularist Republican People's Party, which had a similar pact with other smaller opposition parties, winning the mayoralty in both cities, ending a quarter century of control by the AKP and its predecessors.

The AKP is still challenging its narrow loss in Istanbul, Turkey's largest city and business hub where Erdogan himself served as mayor before the party swept to power nationally in 2002. It has dominated Turkish politics ever since.

While the Istanbul appeal drags on, the rare defeat has prompted questions within the party over campaign strategy. Although the alliance helped them win a majority of votes nationwide, AKP officials say it has delivered limited benefits.

"The MHP gained a lot from this alliance, more than us," a senior AKP official in Ankara told Reuters.

Another AKP official said the MHP's 71-year-old leader Devlet Bahçeli, once a staunch critic of Erdogan, was an unpredictable ally.

The AKP relies on the MHP for its parliamentary majority, meaning any break in the pact would leave it looking for new partners – a significant challenge after Erdogan's blistering criticism of his opponents during the campaign.

Fracture

But that has not stopped talk of a split. The senior official said that if Turkey's electoral board rules against a re-run of the Istanbul vote requested by the AKP, there was little incentive to maintain the alliance.

"Depending on the decision, the fate of the alliance will be determined. It is not possible to say where the alliance will go in the short-term, but the fracture has become noticeable now," he said.

An MHP official said that while differences with the AKP were emerging in public, the nationalists would not be the side to end what the parties have called their "People's Alliance."

Bahçeli said he remained committed to the pact. "This is our basic choice, our national and strategic goal," he said in a statement on Wednesday. "There is undoubtedly no need to search for other alliances."

The stunning setbacks for the AKP in Ankara and Istanbul prompted sharp public criticism last week from a politician once at the heart of Erdogan's administration.

Former AKP prime minister Ahmet Davutoğlu condemned his party's alliance with the nationalists, saying it was damaging "both in terms of voter levels and the party's identity."

Davutoğlu, who served as premier between 2014 and 2016, also slammed the AKP's economic policies, media restrictions and the damage he said it had done to the separation of powers and Turkey's institutions.

Since the election, Erdogan has appeared to downplay the significance of the MHP, pointing to its 7 percent share of the vote. Bahçeli said the remarks were "unfair and unjust," given that his party had chosen not to stand in Turkey's three largest cities.

After CHP leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu was physically attacked at a soldier's funeral last month, Erdogan struck a more conciliatory tone with a call for unity.

"On matters that concern the survival of our country, we must move all together with 82 million as the TURKEY ALLIANCE, putting aside our political differences," he tweeted.

Analysts say his reference to national unity may be largely rhetorical, and the opposition says it rings hollow after he repeatedly accused the CHP and its İyi (Good) Party allies during the election campaign of supporting terrorism.

“Some people within the AKP are doing self-criticism. This bothers Erdogan. How could a person who can’t even tolerate self-criticism within his own party preach democracy?” CHP Deputy Chairman Muharrem Erkek said. “His own words show he is not sincere in the ‘Turkey Alliance’ rhetoric.”



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Turkish police block Armenian ‘genocide’ rally in IstanbulErdogan’s AKP loses Ankara in poll, opposition claims Istanbul too

[**Palestinians face financial crisis as**](#)

US prepares Mideast plan

Author:

Wed, 2019-05-01 22:44

RAMALLAH: Israel and the US are putting the financial squeeze on the Palestinian Authority (PA), where opposition to a long-awaited US peace plan and anger over Israeli sanctions remain strong.

Analysts see steep cuts in US aid to the Palestinians over the past year as an attempt to draw them toward a blueprint that Washington promises will have economic benefits but which the PA predicts will fall short of endorsing Palestinian statehood.

And during Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's successful re-election campaign, his right-wing government imposed sanctions that have pushed the Authority toward financial crisis.

In February, Israel announced it would cut by 5 percent the approximately \$190 million in tax revenues it transfers to the Palestinian Authority each month from imports that reach the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

The deducted sum represents the amount of money paid by the Authority, which exercises limited self-rule in the West Bank, to families of Palestinians convicted and jailed by Israel for security offenses, including lethal attacks on Israelis. Palestinians hail their jailed brethren as heroes in a struggle for an independent state and their families as deserving of support.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has refused to accept the partial tax remittances from Israel, saying the PA is entitled to all the money under interim peace deals.

Unless the issue is resolved, the World Bank says, the Palestinians' financing gap could exceed \$1 billion in 2019, putting further strain on an economy grappling with a 52 percent unemployment rate.

Already facing international donor fatigue, the Palestinians were dealt a heavy blow by the Trump administration's cut last year of hundreds of millions of dollars of aid. In February, the US Agency for International Development announced it had ceased all assistance to the West Bank and Gaza.

While the US and Israel are applying financial pressure to the Palestinian Authority for different reasons, it is happening just as the PA is being leant on to accept the US peace plan.

Palestinian suspicions over the still-secret US proposals, due to be announced in June, and defiance of Israeli sanctions continue to run deep despite the arm-twisting.

Salary cuts

Khalid Al-Asili, the PA's economy minister, told Reuters in an interview last

week that it has been struggling to manage on just 36 percent of budgeted revenues.

The Authority slashed the salaries of government employees in February, March and April to weather the budget crisis, with some Palestinian public servants' wages cut in half.

"Unless they find a solution ... it will be a disaster for the Palestinian economy," Asili said.

With Trump's "deal of the century" about to be unveiled, Tareq Baconi, an analyst with the International Crisis Group, questioned the wisdom of Washington's financial pressure on the Palestinians.

Such a strategy, he said, stemmed from the "misguided belief that economic benefits could be sufficiently compelling for Palestinians to relinquish their political demands."

One of the architects of the Trump plan, the president's adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner, declined to say in public remarks in Washington last week whether it called for a two-state solution, a goal of past efforts to end the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

Abbas and his officials have refused to deal at a political level with the Trump administration since the US president's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital in 2017 and his move of the US embassy to the holy city last May.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh has rejected out of hand "any political initiative that does not call for ending Israeli occupation and establishing an independent and sovereign Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital."

The Palestinians have long sought to set up a state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, territory Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East War.

Netanyahu further clouded the statehood issue when he said during the election race that he would annex Israeli settlements in the West Bank if he wins, a move that Palestinian leaders said would kill any prospects of peace.

Risks for both sides

While both sides await the US proposals, the financial sanctions on the Palestinian Authority could be a double-edged sword, posing risks to its stability and for Israel as well.

"Given that the PA's main source of legitimacy is its capacity to employ a considerable proportion of the Palestinian workforce, internal discontent could challenge its ability to govern effectively," Baconi said.

For Israel, weakening the Palestinian Authority could have an impact on Palestinian security forces that cooperate with the Israeli military in the West Bank.

"Israel takes it for granted that it has not experienced any major terrorist attack for years now," said Avraham Sela, professor emeritus of international relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

"Coordination with the PA is invaluable for Israel's security," he said.

Economy Minister Eli Cohen, a member of Netanyahu's security Cabinet, said on Monday that Israel has "no interest" in the Authority's collapse.

But, he said on Israel's Reshet TV, withholding tax revenues equivalent to the sums of "stipends and pensions being paid to terrorists" is justifiable.

'Catastrophic cuts'

In the West Bank city of Ramallah, Kadhim Harb, 50, who works in the Economy Ministry, said the salary reductions have forced him to delay loan payments.

"We are cutting back on everything. We only buy basic things," Harb, said.

A police officer in Gaza, who asked to be identified only by his first name, Ahmed, said his wages were slashed by 65 percent in March.

"Salary cuts? Please say: Catastrophic cuts. I haven't been able to pay my son's university tuition this semester," said Ahmed, 39.

Donor countries and institutions have stepped in to try to plug the growing budget deficit.

At Abbas's urging, the Arab League at a meeting in Cairo last week promised \$100 million per month to the PA.

Those pledges would add to an increase in funds from Gulf Arab states following the US cuts. Saudi Arabia in 2018 gave \$222 million to the Authority, up from \$92 million in 2017, the World Bank said. Kuwait contributed \$53 million last year.

Still, the PA faced a significant financing gap in 2018 – some \$400 million, or roughly 10 percent of its budget – forcing it to accrue arrears on loans from local banks and other private sector financiers.



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