

US officially designates Iran's Revolutionary Guards a terrorist group

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WASHINGTON: The United States officially designated Iran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a foreign terrorist organization, according to a notice published in the US Federal Register on Monday.

US President Donald Trump said last week he would make the symbolic but unprecedented move, which immediately was condemned by Iran and created concerns about reprisal attacks on US forces.

The IRGC is in charge of Iran's ballistic missile and nuclear programs. It also is involved with the country's banking and shipping industries. The new designation makes it easier to prosecute companies or people in the European Union that do business with Iran.

US law already punishes US persons who deal with the IRGC with up to 20 years in prison because of the group's designation under the US Specially Designated Global Terrorist list, a different US sanctions program.



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Sudan leaders face pressure for transfer to civilian rule as protesters reject attempts to clear camp

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Mon, 2019-04-15 12:39

KHARTOUM: Sudan's military rulers faced pressure from demonstrators and Western governments to hand power to a new civilian government Monday as activists warned of an attempt to disperse a 10-day-old mass protest outside army headquarters.

Thousands remained camped outside the complex in Khartoum overnight after protest leaders issued demands to the military council set up following the ouster of veteran president Omar Al-Bashir.

The organization that spearheaded the months of protests leading to Bashir's fall, the Sudanese Professionals Association, called on their supporters to boost the numbers at the complex.

"There is an attempt to disperse the sit-in from the army headquarters area, they are trying to remove the barricades," the SPA said in a statement, without saying who was responsible.

"We call on our people to come immediately to the sit-in area to protect our revolution."

Witnesses said several army vehicles had surrounded the area and that troops were seen removing the barricades which demonstrators had put up as a security measure.

Britain's ambassador to Khartoum, Irfan Siddiq, met the new military council's deputy and stated his "top request was no violence and no attempt to forcibly break the sit in."

In the meeting with Mohammad Hamdan Daglo, widely known as Himeidti, Siddik wrote on Twitter that he also backed the SPA's call for a civilian administration.

The talks came a day after the embassies of Britain, the United States and Norway issued a joint statement saying the "legitimate change" the Sudanese people demanded had not taken place.

"It is time for the transitional military council and all other parties to enter into an inclusive dialogue to effect a transition to civilian rule," they said.

The SPA has said a transitional government and the armed forces must bring to

justice both Bashir and officials from his feared National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS).

The military council on Sunday met with political parties and urged them to agree on an "independent figure" to be prime minister, an AFP correspondent at the meeting said.

"We want to set up a civilian state based on freedom, justice and democracy," a council member, Lt. Gen. Yasser Al-Ata, told members of several political parties.

A 10-member delegation representing the protesters delivered a list of demands during talks with the council late Saturday, according to a statement by the Alliance for Freedom and Change umbrella group.

But in a press conference, the council's spokesman did not respond to the protesters' latest demands.

He did however announce the appointment of a new NISS head after the intelligence agency's chief Salih Ghosh resigned on Saturday.

The foreign ministry said military council head General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan was "committed to having a complete civilian government" and urged other nations to back the council in order to achieve "the Sudanese goal of democratic transition."

In the latest shake-up, Burhan on Monday named Lt. Gen. Hashim Abdelmotalib as the army's chief of staff.

American actor George Clooney, who has campaigned hard to draw attention to the conflict in Sudan's Darfur region, over the weekend urged world powers to pressure the military "to turn over full executive power to a civilian-led transitional government."

"The most potent form of leverage would be to go after the assets laundered by Bashir and his allies through the international financial system," Clooney wrote in a joint Washington Post column with rights activist John Prendergast.

The military council's deputy Himeidti is a field commander for the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) counter-insurgency unit, which rights groups have accused of abuses in Darfur.

But at the protest site Monday, witnesses said demonstrators put up a banner with a photograph of Himeidti which read: "We will not forget that you stood with us."

Burhan has pledged that individuals implicated in killing protesters would face justice and that demonstrators detained under a state of emergency imposed by Bashir during his final weeks in power would be freed.

Bashir ruled Sudan with an iron fist for 30 years before he was deposed last week following mass protests that have rocked the country since December.

Tens of thousands of people have massed non-stop outside the army headquarters since April 6, initially urging the military to back their demand for Bashir's removal.

But his departure in a coup failed to satisfy the protesters, who have pushed for justice for Bashir-era officials.

The SPA has also called for the confiscation of properties belonging to the ousted president's National Congress Party and the release of soldiers who sided with their movement.

Late on Sunday, the military council said it has set up a committee to register NCP properties and seize control of them.



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Ruling military council in Sudan rejects demand for immediate civilian government
Sudan's new transitional leader promises civilian government and to 'uproot' Bashir regime

[US, France, UK navies hold Arabian Gulf mine drills off coast of Bahrain](#)

Author:

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Mon, 2019-04-15 08:17

MANAMA: The US, French and British navies have launched anti-mine exercises off Bahrain in support of the free movement of trade in Gulf waters, a military spokeswoman said Monday.

"As mines threaten maritime traffic indiscriminately, the US, France and United Kingdom are dedicated to conducting tactical training to counter the risk of mines in order to support the continued free flow of commerce and freedom of navigation in this critical region," said the US Fifth Fleet, which has been based in Bahrain since 1995.

The exercise is "purely defensive," Lt. Chloe Morgan, a spokesperson for the US Navy, told AFP.

The archipelago is also home to a permanent British military base.



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Saudi-Pak joint naval exercises conclude in Al Jubail waters
Saudi Arabia-Pakistan joint naval exercises begin

[Iraq begins trial proceedings for 900 militant suspects](#)

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Sun, 2019-04-14 13:22

BAGHDAD: Iraq has begun trial proceedings for nearly 900 Iraqi suspected members of the Daesh group caught fleeing extremist territory in neighboring Syria, a judicial source told AFP on Sunday. They were handed over to Iraqi authorities by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, which ousted Daesh from swathes of eastern Syria including territory

bordering Iraq.

"We received the interrogation files of nearly 900 Iraqi Daesh members coming from Syria," the court official said, speaking anonymously because he was not authorized to talk to the media.

"The specialized terrorism court has begun setting dates for their trial in batches," the source added.

The nearly 900 suspected militants were transferred by the SDF to Iraqi custody in recent months as the remnants of Daesh' once sprawling self-declared "caliphate" collapsed in neighboring Syria.

Additional Iraqi suspects are in SDF custody and awaiting transferral, a security source told AFP Sunday.

"They will be handed over in batches on the Syrian-Iraqi border. They include very influential leaders, but IS had sought to keep them hidden," the security source said using another acronym for Daesh.

One of those destined to be handed over was deeply involved in Daesh' efforts to develop chemical weapons, he said.

Iraq has already tried thousands of its own nationals arrested on home soil for joining Daesh – including women – and has sentenced hundreds to death.

The country remains in the top five "executioner" nations in the world, according to an Amnesty International report released last week.

The number of death sentences issued by Iraqi courts more than quadrupled from 65 in 2017 to at least 271 in 2018.

But fewer were actually carried out, according to Amnesty, with 52 executions in 2018 compared to 125 in 2017.

In addition to locals, Iraq has also tried hundreds of foreigners, condemning many to life in prison and others to death, although no foreign Daesh members have yet been executed.

Among those awaiting trial in Baghdad are 12 accused French Daesh members, who were caught in Syria and transferred to Iraqi custody in February.

Baghdad has offered to try all foreign fighters in SDF custody – estimated at around 1,000 – in exchange for millions of dollars, Iraqi government sources have told AFP.

Rights groups including Human Rights Watch have criticized these trials, which they say often rely on circumstantial evidence or confessions obtained under torture.



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[Egypt's Sisi meets Libyan commander Haftar in Cairo](#)

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Sun, 2019-04-14 10:46

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi met Sunday with Libyan commander Khalifa Haftar, whose forces are fighting for control of the capital Tripoli, state media reported.

They “are discussing the latest developments in Libya” at the presidential palace in Cairo, state newspaper Al Ahram said.

A presidential spokesperson did not return AFP's calls for confirmation.

El-Sisi has been an ardent supporter of Haftar's forces, which control swathes of eastern Libya and launched an offensive on April 4 to take the capital.

Fighting near Tripoli has killed 121 people and wounded 561, the World Health Organization said on Sunday.

Haftar has defied international calls to halt his battle against fighters loyal to the UN-backed Government of National Accord based in Tripoli.

Earlier this month, Egyptian foreign minister Sameh Shoukry cautioned that the conflict could not be solved militarily.

His remarks came at a Cairo press conference with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, who also called for a political solution among all sides in Libya.

The Libyan commander has modelled his political style of authoritarian leadership after El-Sisi, himself an army general turned president.

Egypt has provided funding and arms to his Libyan National Army, seeing him as a bulwark against Islamist militants.

Haftar, who was exiled in the United States for two decades, returned to Libya in 2011 when the revolution erupted, commanding forces that eventually toppled dictator Muammar Qaddafi.

The oil-rich north African country has been in turmoil ever since with successive weak governments in place and several Islamist militias battling for territorial control.



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121 killed, nearly 600 wounded in Libya fighting: WHO Eastern Libya parliament head says LNA forces will push Tripoli campaign