

Trump's Golan Heights move causes concern in Lebanon for land owners

Author:

Thu, 2019-04-11 21:36

CHEBBA, Lebanon: Akram Kanaan looked toward an Israeli military position on a snow-capped mountain that overlooks the village of Chebaa in southern Lebanon, pointing toward the scenic area captured by Israel more than five decades ago.

No matter how long it takes, he says, it will eventually return to Lebanon's sovereignty.

Like many others in this area where the borders of Lebanon, Syria and Israel meet, Kanaan – a member of Chebaa's municipal council – is angry about President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Israel's sovereignty over the occupied Golan Heights, seized from Syria in 1967 and annexed in 1981. The American president has no right to give Israel lands that belong to Syria and Lebanon, he says.

"These are Arab territories that will be liberated sooner or later the way the south was liberated," said Kanaan standing near Chebaa's main school as its buses left the compound at the end of a school day.

Trump's move last month has caused concern among Lebanese officials that it would mean also recognizing the occupied Chebaa Farms and nearby Kfar Chouba hills, captured along with the Golan, as Israeli territory. Lebanese President Michel Aoun said the US recognition undermines Lebanon's claim to the territory.

The origin of the dispute over ownership of the Chebaa farms dates back to the French colonial period, when France drew maps of the area without officially demarcating the border.

Following an 18-year occupation, Israel withdrew from south Lebanon in 2000, but held on to the farms. Hezbollah claimed the withdrawal to be incomplete and demanded, along with the Lebanese government, that Israel withdraws.

Israel rejected the demands, saying the land was Syrian when it was captured in 1967. Syria has held an ambiguous position and generally refuses to demarcate the border before Israel withdraws from the Golan.

The UN, which does not recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Golan, has said Lebanon's claim is to be settled along with the Golan's fate.

The territory is controversial, even among Lebanese themselves.

Although most Lebanese agree that the Chebaa Farms and Kfar Chouba hills are part of their country, anti-Syrian politicians have suggested it serves as a pretext for Hezbollah to hang on to its weapons and have called for the demarcation of the Lebanon-Syria border, a demand repeated by Prime Minister Saad Hariri on Wednesday even as he said the territory is Lebanese.

Politicians allied with the Syrian government say there is no need for such demarcation.

The area this week looked more like a tourist attraction, albeit deserted, rather than a front line, with rivers and springs flowing, birds chirping and shepherds leading their herds in the mostly green area amid clear weather.

According to Kanaan, the total size of the Lebanese area still occupied by Israel since June 1967 is about 250 sq km or about 2.5 percent of Lebanon's total territories.

Kanaan says the occupied area is owned by Lebanese citizens and that many of them have documents proving their ownership registered in the Lebanese coastal city of Sidon, the provincial capital of south Lebanon.

Arab countries have unanimously rejected the US recognition of Israeli control over the Golan, calling the Trump administration's policies unfairly biased toward Israel.

On the edge of Chebaa, shepherds were seen taking their herds of sheep and goats near a fence built by Israel. About every 100 meters white and blue barrels marked the so-called blue line, or the border that the UN drew after Israel's withdrawal in 2000.

The area has been calm since August 2006 after a UN Security Council resolution ended a 34-day war between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah group.

Soldiers at Lebanese army checkpoints on roads leading to Chebaa and Kfar Chouba checked the identity cards of people visiting the area to make sure no strangers enter. White UN vehicles with light blue flags could be seen along the fence that marks the border.

Near Al-Naqar lake, three UN peacekeepers stood outside their armored personnel carrier keeping an eye on any suspicious move. Next to them stood a giant poster with a picture of late Egyptian President Gamal Abdul-Nasser and one of his famous quotes that reads: "What was taken by force can only be regained by force."

Andrea Tenenti, spokesperson for the UN force in southern Lebanon known as UNIFIL, said the issue of Chebaa is one that is "discussed in New York at UN headquarters and not part of our mandate. Nevertheless, the position of member states is not necessarily the position of the United Nations," Tenenti said when asked about Trump's decision.

"Nothing has changed, and we are continuing with our work in the south of

Lebanon, to monitor the cessation of hostilities and to work closely with the Lebanese army," he said.

In nearby Kfar Chouba, shops were open in its main square where a group of people gathered at the main bakery, while others bought freshly picked vegetables and fruits.

"With deep regret, this guy who is called Trump who is the president of the United States of America, the most important country in the world, is acting like a thug," said grocer Riad Khalifeh who was 23 when Israeli forces captured the hills overlooking his hometown of Kfar Chouba in 1967.

"Who gave you the right to give a land that belongs to me or to Palestine or to Syria to an enemy that is occupying it?" Khalifeh asked.



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King Salman: We reject move to undermine Syrian sovereignty of Golan Heights
GCC speakers condemn US move on Golan Heights

[World reacts to the downfall of Omar](#)

Al-Bashir in Sudan

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Thu, 2019-04-11 20:43

KHARTOUM: Here are the reactions to the end of Omar Al-Bashir's 30-year rule:

United Nations:

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Thursday called for a transition in Sudan that will meet the "democratic aspirations" of the people, his spokesman said.

Guterres appealed for "calm and utmost restraint by all" after long-serving president Omar Al-Bashir was ousted by the army.

Bahrain:

Bahrain said that it is following the current developments in Sudan with great interest, and hopes that the country will overcome this critical stage. It also said that the country stands with Sudan.

Egypt:

Egypt said it backed the removal of longtime autocratic ruler Omar Al-Bashir in neighboring Sudan.

In a statement, Egypt's Foreign Ministry expressed support to the "Sudanese people's choice and will."

The statement called on the international community to help Sudan to have a peaceful transition.

African Union:

The African Union on Thursday criticised the military coup in Sudan and called for calm and restraint.

"The military take-over is not the appropriate response to the challenges facing Sudan and the aspirations of its people," said a statement from Moussa Faki, chairman of the AU Commission.

Britain:

British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt says two years of potential military rule in Sudan "is not the answer" for "real change" in the country.

Hunt tweeted Thursday that Sudan needs "a swift move to an inclusive, representative, civilian leadership" and an end to violence.

Turkey:

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Thursday said he hoped Sudan would return to a "normal democratic process" after an uprising led to the army toppling President Omar Al-Bashir, a close ally of Turkey.

"I hope that Sudan overcomes this affair with fraternity and ease, and I believe the country should work towards a normal democratic process," Erdogan said during a press conference in Ankara with the president of Burkina Faso, Roch Marc Christian Kabore.

Russia:

Russia on Thursday called for calm in Sudan and expressed hope that close bilateral ties would not be threatened, irrespective of who was in power.

“We are monitoring this situation very carefully,” Russian President Vladimir Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

“And we are hoping that first and foremost there won’t be an escalation that could claim human lives,” he said, calling the protests an “internal affair”. “We expect that whatever the outcome, Russian-Sudanese relations” will be a priority for Khartoum, Peskov said.

George Clooney:

Actor and activist George Clooney said Thursday that the fall of Sudan’s veteran strongman Omar al-Bashir was not enough and called for the dismantling of the military-led system.

The Hollywood star, who has been arrested protesting against Sudan’s campaign in Darfur that the United States described as genocide, called for Bashir to be extradited and prosecuted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court.

“The people of Sudan have been waiting for this day for a long time, but it is only a tentative first step towards real change,” Clooney said in a joint statement with John Prendergast, the human rights campaigner with whom the actor founded The Sentry Project, which researches illicit money and war crimes in Africa.

(With AP, AFP and Reuters)









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Sudan's military removes Omar Al-Bashir from power and declares state of emergency
Viral 'Nubian queen' rally leader says women key to Sudan protests

[US slaps sanctions on Lebanese 'money laundering' group](#)

Author:

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1555005663180341200

Thu, 2019-04-11 16:34

WASHINGTON: US officials on Thursday announced it has sanctioned a Lebanese network accused of laundering millions of dollars for "drug kingpins" and helping finance Hezbollah, the Iran-backed Shiite movement that Washington labels a terrorist organization.

The US Treasury Department said it has added Lebanese national Kassem Chams to its blacklist, along with two related entities: the "Chams Money Laundering Organization" and Chams Exchange, a money service business in Lebanon.

"Kassem Chams and his international money laundering network move tens of millions of dollars a month in illicit narcotics proceeds on behalf of drug kingpins and facilitate money movements for Hezbollah," Treasury said in a statement.

Treasury sanctions Lebanese money launderer Kassem Chams who moves money on behalf of narcotics trafficking organizations and Hizballah: <https://t.co/JfgH5E6ABC> pic.twitter.com/v0kEOPSEHZ

– Treasury Department (@USTreasury) [April 11, 2019](#)

The Chams network moves money to and from multiple countries including Australia, Brazil, Colombia, France, Italy, Lebanon, the Netherlands, Spain, the United States and Venezuela, according to the department.

The sanctions are part of the administration's "unprecedented campaign to prevent Hezbollah and its global terror affiliates from profiting off violence, corruption, and the drug trade," Treasury under secretary Sigal Mandelker said.

The department's Office of Foreign Assets Control said Chams Exchange operates under license and supervision of the Central Bank of Lebanon (BdL)

“despite US authorities long suspecting it” of significant money laundering. Treasury said it remains committed to working with BdL “to eliminate access to the Lebanese financial system by narcotics traffickers, money launderers, and terrorist groups such as Hezbollah.”

President Donald Trump’s administration has accused Iran of taking provocative measures to destabilize the Middle East.

It has increased sanctions on the Islamic republic in order to undercut its revenues and to financially squeeze regional allies like the Lebanese Hezbollah.

Earlier this week Washington designated Iran’s elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization.



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[Pompeo says Israeli-Palestinian peace plan to be presented ‘before too long’](#)

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1554914380189409800

Wed, 2019-04-10 16:15

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo declined on Wednesday to publicly say the Trump administration still backs a two-state solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

"We are now working with many parties to share what our vision (is) as to how to solve this problem," Pompeo told a US Senate hearing where he was pressed for a response on the issue.

Earlier, Donald Trump said Benjamin Netanyahu's election victory had improved the chances of peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

Pompeo said the administration "has been working on a set of ideas" for Middle East peace "that we hope to present before too long," adding that he hoped they would provide a basis for discussions on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Democratic Senator Tim Kaine asked Pompeo, a former Republican member of the House of Representatives, if he thought a peace agreement including one state for Israel and one state for the Palestinians was an outdated idea.

"It's certainly an idea that's been around a long time, senator," Pompeo responded.

"Ultimately the individuals in the region will sort this out," the secretary of state said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu secured re-election on Wednesday, and a record fifth term in office, with religious-rightist parties set to hand him a parliamentary majority, despite a close contest against his main centrist challenger, a vote tally showed.

In a rare turn during the campaign toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Netanyahu alarmed Palestinians by pledging to annex Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank if re-elected. Palestinians seek a state there and in the Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

That came after Trump signed a proclamation during Netanyahu's visit to Washington on March 25, officially granting US recognition of the Golan Heights as Israeli territory, a dramatic departure from decades of American policy.

The move, which Trump announced in a tweet days prior, was widely seen as an attempt to boost Netanyahu as he ran for re-election on April 9.

Israel captured the Golan in the 1967 Middle East war and annexed it in 1981 in a move not recognized internationally.

The Trump administration has been promising for many months that it would roll out a Middle East peace plan after Israel's election.



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Netanyahu rival concedes defeat in Israeli election

[Viral 'Nubian queen' rally leader says women key to Sudan protests](#)

Wed, 2019-04-10 18:47

KHARTOUM: A Sudanese woman propelled to Internet fame earlier this week after leading protest chants in the capital told AFP Wednesday that women are key to the uprising against President Omar Al-Bashir's iron-fisted rule.

"Sudanese women have always participated in revolutions in this country," Ala Saleh told AFP two days after video went viral of her standing on a car, conducting crowds outside the army headquarters in Khartoum.

"If you see Sudan's history, all our queens have led the state. It's part of our heritage."

كنداكة بلدي! #اعتصام_القيادة_العامه pic.twitter.com/PJvihN1bPb

– Mar² (@MarmarAlsayed) [April 8, 2019](https://pic.twitter.com/PJvihN1bPb)

Demonstrators have been camped outside the military complex for days asking the army to back them in demands that Bashir step down.

“I’m very proud to take part in this revolution and I hope our revolution will achieve its goal,” Saleh said.

In the clips, she stands atop a car wearing an elegant, long white dress as she sings and works the crowd, her golden moon earrings reflecting light from the sea of camera phones surrounding her.

pic.twitter.com/JZrNu6qhKo

– مليونية 16 أبريل # [J0tααθ](https://pic.twitter.com/JZrNu6qhKo) | جُوتارو (@ahmed_awad1997) [April 8, 2019](https://pic.twitter.com/JZrNu6qhKo)

Dubbed online as “Kandaka,” or Nubian queen, she has become a symbol of the protests which she says have traditionally had a female backbone in Sudan. Women have made up a large part of the demonstrators that since Saturday have thronged outside the sprawling army complex.

Braving regular volleys of tear gas, the crowds have been the biggest yet to rally against Al-Bashir’s rule since unrest broke out in late December.

“In such movements, women are widely participating not only for their rights but for the rights of the entire community... there’s no difference between women’s rights and community rights,” said Saleh.

“Women of Sudan always encourage their youths to fight. This is part of the history of Kandaka,” she added.

الكنداكة السودانية الملهمة آلاء صلاح التي لُقبت بأيقونة الثورة السودانية تنابعوها اليوم في مداخلة على شاشة #العربية في برنامج تفاعلكم الساعة 0 بتوقيت الخرطوم. #العربية #السودان pic.twitter.com/C9f00mzRY9

– رفيده ياسين (@Rofaidayassin) [April 10, 2019](https://pic.twitter.com/C9f00mzRY9)

Saleh said she has taken part in the protests since they first erupted on Dec. 19 in response to a government decision to triple the price of bread. The unrest quickly morphed into a nationwide campaign against Bashir’s rule with rallies held across cities, towns and villages.

The longtime leader has remained defiant and imposed a slew of tough measures including a state of emergency across the country.

Officials say 49 people have died in protest-related violence so far.

Taken by me@lana_hago#8aprile pic.twitter.com/o7pDUsOg84

– Lana H. Haroun (@lana_hago) [April 8, 2019](#)



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Sudan protesters rally for fifth day outside army HQ Tear gas, gun fire outside army HQ as Sudan protests press on