

[Iran orders 60,000 to evacuate flood-hit oil city: state media](#)

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Wed, 2019-04-10 11:39

AHVAZ, Iran: Iran ordered residents of five districts of the southwestern city of Ahvaz to evacuate immediately on Wednesday as floodwaters entered the capital of key oil-producing Khuzestan province, state television reported. The province's governor, Gholamreza Shariati, said he ordered the evacuations as a "precautionary and preventive move to avert any danger," Iran's Tasnim news agency reported.

The five districts have an estimated population of between 60,000 and 70,000.



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Pakistan sends first planeload of aid to flood-hit Iran
India delays order for Iran oil, pending sanctions waiver clarity

[Sudan protesters rally for fifth day outside army HQ](#)

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KHARTOUM: Thousands of Sudanese protesters were camped outside army headquarters for a fifth day on Wednesday demanding President Omar Al-Bashir step down, after the police ordered their forces not to intervene.

In what has become the biggest challenge yet to Bashir's three decades of iron-fisted rule, crowds of demonstrators thronged the sprawling complex through the night, singing and dancing to the tunes of revolutionary songs, witnesses said.

Hundreds of mobile phones were held aloft, shining a sea of lights on the tide of people massed outside the buildings.

"The night passed peacefully without any incident," said one protester who

spent the entire night at the complex.

"We believe that the support from the soldiers on the ground and now the police is definitely growing."

However, Bashir loyalists have called for a support rally for the president on Thursday, and urged all members of the ruling party to take part.

"The National Congress Party's executive bureau supports the national dialogue partners' initiative to organize a gathering to be seen by all the people on Thursday," the acting chief of Bashir's ruling party, Ahmed Harun, said in a statement.

"I call on all members of NCP across the state of Khartoum to participate in this rally."

The anti-government demonstrators have braved regular volleys of tear gas from members of the powerful National Intelligence and Security Service since they began camping at the army headquarters on April 6, protest organizers say.

But for the first time overnight Tuesday they did not face any "threat" from security agents during the night, said the protester who did not want to be named for security reasons.

"The soldiers at the complex are also angry after the attacks of tear gas and are determined to prevent them," another demonstrator told AFP.

Witnesses said the troops had stationed several vehicles loaded with machine-guns at the gates of the complex, which also houses Bashir's residence and the defense ministry.

On Tuesday, security agents had to abort bids to disperse the crowds when soldiers fired in the air to counter incoming volleys of tear gas from security agents.

"It seems the police too are now with us," said the protester.

"When we were coming to the army building last night we saw many policemen but they did not stop us."

The police on Tuesday ordered its officers on Tuesday to avoid intervening against the demonstrators.

"We call on God to preserve the security and calm of our country ... and to unite the Sudanese people... for an agreement which would support the peaceful transition of power," a police spokesman said in a statement.

On Wednesday, protesters were raising funds to ensure a regular supply of food and water for the crowd.

"Many shop owners and businessmen have offered us free supplies," said another demonstrator.

Protest organizers launched their latest campaign on Saturday as part of a months-long movement against Bashir's 30-year rule.

Demonstrations first erupted on December 19 in response to a government decision to triple the price of bread.

But they quickly mushroomed into a nationwide campaign against Bashir's rule with rallies held across cities, towns and villages.

Bashir has remained defiant, and imposed a slew of tough measures including a nationwide state of emergency, which has led to scores of arrests of journalists and activists.

Officials say 38 people have died in protest-related violence so far.

On Tuesday, the United States, Britain and Norway for the first time threw their weight behind the protesters, calling for a credible political transition plan in Sudan.

“The time has come for the Sudanese authorities to respond to these popular demands in a serious” way, the so-called troika of Western diplomatic players said.

“The Sudanese authorities must now respond and deliver a credible plan for this political transition.”

Defense Minister General Awad Ibnouf has vowed the army would prevent any slide into chaos.

“Sudan’s armed forces understand the reasons for the demonstrations and is not against the demands and aspirations of the citizens, but it will not allow the country to fall into chaos,” Ibnouf said on Monday, according to state media.

The umbrella group spearheading the protests has meanwhile appealed to the army for talks on forming a transitional government.



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Western nations call for Sudan 'transition plan' Tear gas, gun fire outside army HQ as Sudan protests press on

Battle for Tripoli escalates as UN prepares to meet

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Wed, 2019-04-10 11:13

TRIPOLI: The battle for Libya's capital intensified as the UN Security Council prepared to meet Wednesday to discuss the crisis gripping the North African country, where armed rivals are locked in a deadly power struggle. The closed-door talks in New York come a day after the United Nations postponed a Libyan national conference aimed at drawing up an election roadmap because of fighting raging on Tripoli's doorstep.

Libya has been riven by divisions since the NATO-backed overthrow of dictator Muammar Qaddafi in 2011, with various armed groups and two parallel governments vying for territory and oil wealth.

Heavy arms fire was heard during much of the night in the Ain Zara district on the southeastern outskirts of Tripoli as strongman Khalifa Haftar's forces pressed an assault aimed at taking the capital from the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA).

"The clashes have intensified. We're afraid to leave the house," a resident told AFP by telephone from the area, where roads were reported to have been blocked, hindering people's efforts to flee.

The violence has already displaced thousands and left several dozen people dead.

The UN warned that nearly half a million children in Tripoli were "at immediate risk."

Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA), which controls swathes of the country's east, said it had seized a barracks in the Aziziya area around 50 kilometers (31 miles) south of Tripoli after "ferocious clashes."

It said several fighters loyal to the UN-backed government had been detained and their weapons seized.

The internationally recognized government carried out several air raids against LNA positions south of Tripoli, and also hit supply lines in central Libya, GNA spokesman Col. Mohamed Gnounou said Tuesday.

Haftar's forces appear to be advancing on two fronts, from the south and southeast of Tripoli, while coastal roads to the east and west of the city are defended by fighters loyal to the GNA.

Haftar has defied international calls, including from the UN Security Council and the United States, to halt the surprise offensive launched on Thursday. The UN's high commissioner for refugees, Filippo Grandi, called for the warring parties to "spare civilians, including refugees and migrants trapped in the country."

The UN children's agency (UNICEF) urged all parties "to refrain from

committing grave violations” against children, including the recruitment of child soldiers.

“Nearly half a million children in Tripoli and tens of thousands more in the western areas are at a direct risk due to the intensification of fighting,” it said.

The GNA’s health ministry on Monday put the death toll in the fighting at 35. Haftar’s forces have said 14 of their fighters have died.

The UN said the clashes have displaced some 3,400 people.

Led by Fayez Al-Sarraj, the GNA’s authority is not recognized by a parallel administration in the east of the country, which is allied with Haftar.

LNA spokesman Ahmad Al-Mesmari accused the unity government of “allying itself with Islamist militias” from the city of Misrata 200 kilometers (120 miles) east of the capital.

International efforts to end the Libyan conflict have repeatedly failed. Rival leaders agreed last year to hold elections before December 10, 2018 under a French plan, but that vote never materialized.

The national conference, which had been scheduled for April 14-16 in the central city of Ghadames, aimed to fix dates for legislative and presidential elections, and work toward a new constitution.

UN envoy Ghassan Salame, announcing its postponement, said: “We cannot ask people to take part in the conference during gunfire and air strikes.”

He expressed hope the meeting would take place “as soon as possible.”

Haftar, whose key allies are the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Russia, is a former Qaddafi military chief who has emerged as a major player in Libya’s political struggle.

His offensive threatens to plunge the country into a full-blown civil war and has thrown into sharp relief the divisions between world powers over how to end the chaos that has riven Libya since 2011.



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Oil hits five-month high above \$71 on Libyan supply threat UN chief calls for immediate halt to Libya fighting

[Gaza will lose 'regardless of who wins Israel elections'](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-04-09 21:17

GAZA CITY: Palestinian analysts and experts agree that there is no difference between the strongest contenders in the Israeli elections on the Palestinian issue and the relationship with the Gaza Strip.

Even those who have previously supported the "two-state solution" agree on no independent Palestinian state but on a Palestinian "civil administration" for parts of the West Bank after the annexation of large settlement blocs to Israel and the granting of "economic facilities" to maintain calmness in Gaza Strip, and the survival of internal Palestinian division.

Hani Habib, a political analyst, said that the current Palestinian situation provides the greatest service to Israel. Therefore, in the recent rounds of limited military escalation in the Gaza Strip, Israel has shown that it is not interested in launching a broad assault that could contribute to the unification of the Palestinians.

He told Arab News that Israelis in all their political orientations have an interest in maintaining internal Palestinian division. They agree that Hamas should be weakened but not completely eliminated to ensure continued division and disagreement with Fatah and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

Habib explained that the two most powerful Israeli parties in the Israeli elections, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's "Likud" and the "Blue and White" alliance led by former chief of staff Benny Gantz, agree on core issues, most notably "separating Gaza from the West Bank."

A study prepared by the Israeli National Security Center stated that Gaza appears more prominent in the Likud program than in the "Blue and White" alliance program, which focuses on the West Bank, considering that Gaza poses no serious threat to Israel and that "the political battle and the strategic threat are coming in the West Bank."

Habib added: "I think that the Blue and White Alliance, which classifies itself as a "center left," is more right-wing than the Israeli right, and

adopts strict positions on foreign issues such as Iran, the annexation of settlements and the Jordan Valley to Israel and the adoption of an "economic solution" in Gaza, to prevent an "explosion of situations," and therefore recent "understandings of calm" will continue regardless of the winner of the elections.

Egypt is leading indirect talks between Hamas and the Palestinian factions in Gaza on the one hand and Israel on the other, resulting in an "undeclared calm." And the Netanyahu government has begun to implement its terms relating to easing the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip 13 years ago, in return for stopping "coarse tools" such as firing rockets, balloons and nighttime protests.

Adnan Abu Amer, a specialist on Israeli affairs, agrees with Habib that "the military option against Gaza is postponed (for) a while, unless there are developments to be fought, as well as for Hamas and factions that do not want to go to a major military confrontation."

Abu Amer told Arab News that even Gantz, who was chief of staff during the Israeli war in 2014, realizes that "Gaza has no military solution," and the generals in his coalition are aware of "what is waiting for the Israeli army in Gaza," and also fear the "unknown future after Hamas," such as the absence of the arena in Gaza for militant groups such as Daesh and others.

Based on these convictions, he said, the parties in Israel agree that "the solution in Gaza is economic," and therefore, regardless of who wins the elections, the trend toward the signing of understandings of calm, in line with the American willingness to put forward the "deal of the century."

Abu Amer said that Israel wants to achieve economic concessions unless it can achieve the war in Gaza, while dedicating itself to the dream of an independent Palestinian state by annexing settlements in the West Bank, taking advantage of the support of US President Donald Trump.

Ibrahim Al-Madhoun, the director of the Hamas-affiliated Palestine Institute for Strategic Studies, said that Gaza is following the Israeli elections, "especially because of the recent truce understanding between Hamas and Israel ... Gaza is waiting to see how Israel will deal with it after the election results."

Al-Madhoun believes that the winner of the Israeli elections, whoever he is, will be committed to these understandings to calm the Gaza front, because there is a collective Israeli realization in the political and military institutions that any armed confrontation with Gaza will be too expensive.

There is also no major political objective in Gaza, and there is an Israeli focus at the moment on the extension of sovereignty over the West Bank, he told Arab News.



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Israelis go to polls in election, as hidden cameras banned after Arab minority complaints
Could Israel's vote be the end for Netanyahu?

[Houthi militia blocking vital cholera vaccines from entering Yemen: AP investigation](#)

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LONDON: Houthi militia have consistently prevented doses of cholera vaccine from reaching those in desperate need of treatment in Yemen, according to an

Associated Press investigation published on Tuesday.

The investigation into efforts to fight the disease in the country – the worst cholera outbreak recorded in modern times and one that medical researchers say may have been avoided if vaccines had been deployed sooner – drew on confidential documents and interviews with 29 people.

The people included aid officials and officials from health ministries run by both the Iranian-backed Houthis and the legitimate government.

Almost all of these individuals, including six relief and health officials who say the Houthis were responsible for cancellation of a 2017 vaccine shipment of half a million doses, spoke on condition of anonymity.

The 2017 shipment was unable to enter northern Yemen until May 2018 because the Houthis refused to allow the vaccines to be delivered, after spending months demanding the UN to send ambulances and medical equipment for their forces as a condition for accepting the shipment.

The investigation highlighted the fact that the cancellation of the 2017 shipment was just one of the setbacks aid agencies face in battling the cholera epidemic, which has killed nearly 3,000 Yemenis.

“The Houthis are taking advantage of UN weakness,” an aid official told the AP investigation.

“Corruption or aid diversion and all of this are because of the UN’s weak position.”

The first significant cholera outbreak came in late 2016, leading to more than 25,000 suspected cases and killing at least 129. Soon after, in April 2017, the disease erupted again, this time spreading at an even more furious pace. Within two months, more than 185,000 suspected cases and 1,200 deaths were reported.

According to the AP report, when UN officials attempted to get oral vaccines into the country to halt the spread, a number of Houthi officials claimed the vaccines were “ineffective.” □Some officials circulated messages on social media claiming that the vaccines would be harmful to children, while other Houthi leaders suggested the vaccination plan was a “plot by the US and Israel to use Yemenis as guinea pigs.”

A former Houthi Health Ministry official told AP that the concerns were just a ruse, and that the militia leaders had list of demands they wanted met in a bid to bargain with UN officials for money and equipment, he said.

(With Associated Press)



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Suspected cholera cases in Yemen spike in 2019: UNWHO launches second cholera vaccine drive in Yemen as cases surge