

Western nations call for Sudan 'transition plan'

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Tue, 2019-04-09 13:21

KHARTOUM: The US, UK and Norway said Tuesday that Sudanese authorities must now deliver a "credible plan for political transition" as anti-government protests rocked Khartoum.

"The time has come for the Sudanese authorities to respond to these popular demands in a serious and credible way," the embassies of the three Western countries said in a joint statement in Khartoum.

"The Sudanese authorities must now respond and deliver a credible plan for this political transition," it added as thousands of protesters massed outside the army headquarters in the capital demanding an end to President Omar Al-Bashir's iron-fisted rule of three decades.

The three countries also called on the authorities to release all political detainees and stop using violence against "peaceful protesters."

The protests "continue to grow and the demand for political change from the courageous and resilient people of Sudan is becoming ever clearer and more powerful," the statement said.

"The Sudanese people are demanding a transition to a political system that is inclusive and has greater legitimacy."

The three countries vowed to support such a political process to help resolve the economic challenges facing the country.

"This is a pivotal moment for the future of Sudan," the statement said.

"The decisions the Sudanese authorities take now, in an inclusive dialogue, will have a dramatic impact on the lives of 40 million Sudanese people and the stability of the region."

Sudan has been rocked by protests against Bashir's rule since December, with angry crowds demanding the veteran leader step down.

They accuse his government of mismanaging the economy that has led to soaring food prices, and regular shortage of fuel and foreign currency.



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Heavy gunfire heard at protest in Sudan's capital – live TV Sudan protesters rally outside army HQ for first time

[Italy keeps troops in Libya despite Khalifa advance](#)

Author:

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Tue, 2019-04-09 12:02

ROME: Italy on Tuesday confirmed that it would keep its military missions in Tripoli and Misrata despite the advance of strongman Khalifa Haftar's forces on the Libyan capital.

Miasit, launched in January 2018, will "continue in order to make assistance activities in Libya more incisive and efficient", the Italian defence ministry said in a statement.

UN chief Antonio Guterres has appealed for an immediate halt to fighting in

Libya after Haftar's forces claimed an airstrike on Tripoli's only functioning airport.

Thousands have fled violence in the capital city, according to the United Nations, since Haftar launched a surprise assault last week which has left dozens dead.

Italy's Bilateral Mission of Assistance and Support in Libya "supports Libyan authorities in their pacification and stabilisation activities in the country and against human trafficking, smuggling and threats to security."

No figures were provided for the current deployment but the mission has previously included around 100 troops in Tripoli and 300 in Misrata, about 200 kilometres (130 miles) to the east.

Troops from former colonial power Italy are involved in "training and technical and infrastructure assistance for Libyan security forces," in Tripoli, the statement said.

In Misrata, the troops provide security and assistance to a hospital within a military academy for the UN-backed Government of National Accord.

The oil-rich northern African country has been rocked by violent power struggles between an array of armed groups since the NATO-backed overthrow of dictator Moamer Kadhafi in 2011.

The UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) controls the capital, but its authority is not recognised by a parallel administration in the east of the country, backed by Haftar.



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[Tripoli hospitals report 47 dead in recent fighting](#)

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Tue, 2019-04-09 10:02

TRIPOLI/GENEVA: Health facilities near Tripoli have reported 47 people killed and 181 wounded in recent days as eastern forces seek to take Libya's capital from an internationally-recognized government, the United Nations' health body said on Tuesday.

The renewed conflict in a nation splintered since the 2011 toppling of Muammar Qaddafi also risks depleting medical supplies, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned.

The death toll – higher than that given by either side yet – appeared to be mainly fighters, although it also included some civilians including two doctors, WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic told a Geneva news briefing.

The eastern Libyan National Army (LNA) forces of Khalifa Haftar – a former general in Qaddafi's army – seized largely-desert southern Libya earlier this year before heading to the coastal capital this month, where they are ensconced on the south side.

The United Nations, United States, European Union and G7 block have all appealed for a cease-fire and a return to UN peace plan, but Haftar has so far not heeded them.

A warplane took out Tripoli's only functioning airport on Monday, and the number of displaced – 3,400 at the last UN count – is mounting alongside the casualties.

The conflict threatens to disrupt oil supplies, boost migration to Europe and scupper hopes for an election to end rivalries between parallel administrations in east and west.

UN officials said they were concerned that civilians could be used as human shields or forcibly recruited to fight.

"The people of Libya have long been caught between numerous warring parties, with some of the most vulnerable suffering some of the gravest violations of their human rights," UN Human Rights High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet said.

"I appeal to all sides to come together to avoid further senseless violence and bloodshed."



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[Libyan National Army \(LNA\)](#)

[Khalifa Haftar](#)

US pulls forces from Libya as fighting approaches capital Tripoli
UN chief issues stark Libya warning as fighting rages south of Tripoli

[Netanyahu, Gantz make final pitches before Israeli vote](#)

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Mon, 2019-04-08 15:58

JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sought to energise supporters on the eve of Tuesday's elections with warnings and controversial promises, while his centrist challenger urged voters to tell the premier the country has had enough.

The general election – in which Netanyahu is seeking to extend his 13 years in office despite corruption allegations against him – is expected to be close, as ex-military chief Benny Gantz poses a serious challenge.

The two men spent the campaign's final hours exhorting voters with two different strategies: Netanyahu repeatedly warned that his Likud was at risk of losing, while Gantz made the case that Israel was on the verge of historic change.

The truth was more complicated, with opinion polls giving Netanyahu's Likud and Gantz's Blue and White a similar number of seats in the 120-seat parliament.

Under those polls, both would fall far short of an outright majority and would need to pull together a coalition.

If polling trends hold, Netanyahu would be best placed to build an alliance thanks to smaller right-wing parties close to him.

But there have been repeated warnings about opinion polls' historical unreliability and the fact that many voters say they remain undecided.

Netanyahu's claims that Likud may lose were widely seen as a way to encourage his base to turn out.

Netanyahu has made last-minute appeals to the right, issuing a deeply controversial pledge to annex settlements in the occupied West Bank.

If done on a large-scale, applying Israeli sovereignty there could extinguish remaining hopes for a two-state solution with the Palestinians.

In an interview on Sunday, Netanyahu said US President Donald Trump, who is expected to release his long-awaited deal for Israeli-Palestinian peace sometime after the election, was aware of his plans.

Netanyahu said he planned to apply sovereignty gradually, and that he did not differentiate between Israel's large West Bank settlement blocs and the isolated ones located deep in the territory on land the Palestinians see as part of a future state.

"Who else can do this? Who can do this? Come on. Honestly," Netanyahu said, making the case as he has throughout the campaign that he is Israel's essential statesman.

"Who can stand in front of the world? Who can stand in front of the American Congress? Who can move public opinion in that direction?"

Gantz has called Netanyahu's pledge an "irresponsible" bid for right-wing votes.

He says he favors a "globally backed peace agreement" that sees Israel hold on to the large settlement blocs in the West Bank and maintain security control over the territory.

Gantz has also highlighted his security credentials while saying he will heal divisions he accuses Netanyahu of exacerbating.

"There's a need for change and an opportunity for change," Gantz told Israel's army radio on Monday.

"Israel needs to choose a direction of unification, connection and hope – or of extremity."

The two were also engaging in typical pre-election campaigning, including Gantz riding a motorcycle to his rally on Sunday and Netanyahu visiting Jerusalem's main market on Monday.

"The only way to close the gap and to ensure that Likud will form the next government for sure is to have a big Likud," Netanyahu told supporters at the market.

Gantz said Monday at his party headquarters in Tel Aviv that supporters had to make sure "everyone goes to the polling stations because we are going to serve all voters from the right and from the left, all of the Israeli

citizens.”

Netanyahu will be on track to surpass founding father David Ben-Gurion as Israel’s longest-serving prime minister should he win on Tuesday. But even if he triumphs, he faces the prospect of becoming the first sitting prime minister to be indicted.

The attorney general has announced he intends to indict Netanyahu for bribery, fraud and breach of trust pending an upcoming hearing.

The premier’s opponents have seized on the allegations to argue that the 69-year-old Netanyahu has lost his way and must go.

But the premier has been defiant, calling the investigations a “witch hunt” and denouncing journalists reporting on them – similar to the tactics used by his ally Trump.

While the threat of indictment hangs over Netanyahu, he has also built a reputation as guarantor of Israel’s security and economic growth.

He has repeatedly claimed Trump’s recognition of the disputed city of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and Israel’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights as two of his major accomplishments.

Gantz has sought to overcome that in part by allying with two other former military chiefs of staff and ex-finance minister Yair Lapid.



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Anger over Netanyahu pledge to annex illegal settlementsPalestinian Authority

unsustainable if Netanyahu wins election, says chief negotiator

Israel jails French consulate worker for gun smuggling

Author:

Mon, 2019-04-08 18:28

BEERSHEBA, Israel: An Israeli court on Monday sentenced a former French consulate worker to seven years in prison for smuggling guns from the Gaza Strip after a plea bargain.

Romain Franck, who worked as a driver for the consulate, went on trial after being accused of exploiting reduced security checks for diplomats to smuggle 70 pistols and two automatic rifles from the Gaza Strip to the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

The plea bargain reached convicted Franck for smuggling 29 pistols after he confessed to most of what he was charged with.

He was also given a fine of 30,000 shekels (\$8,000, 7,500 euros) and an 18-month suspended sentence.

Franck's lawyer Kenneth Mann said he intended to request that he serve his sentence in France.

Mann said the judge was willing to issue a more lenient sentence than might otherwise have been given because Franck, 24, had shown remorse and was motivated by money, not by solidarity with Palestinian groups.

He had no prior criminal record.

Franck, relying on a court interpreter from Hebrew to French, showed no visible reaction when the sentence was announced.

"This is a very, very difficult thing for the whole family of course, but they understand that this is the law and they hope that their son will be returned to France as quickly as possible," Mann told AFP after Monday's hearing.

Franck was arrested in February 2018 and his trial began the following month at the district court in the southern Israeli city of Beersheba.

Israeli officials have said he acted on his own without the consulate's knowledge and that diplomatic relations with France were not affected.

The Shin Bet internal security agency has said he was paid a total of around \$5,500 for the guns he smuggled for a network involving several Palestinians. Travelers between the two Palestinian territories pass through Israel and are subject to Israeli security controls.



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Israel arrests brother of Palestinian protest icon
Israel's Arab minority urged to boycott election over divisive law