

Hamas West Bank leader given six-month detention without trial

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JERUSALEM: Israel on Monday handed down a six-month detention order without trial for a West Bank leader of Palestinian group Hamas, his family and an Israeli intelligence service said.

Hassan Yousef, a co-founder of Hamas, was arrested on April 2 at his home in the occupied West Bank, according to the Palestinian Prisoners' Club NGO. He was given a six-month administrative detention order Monday, his family said.

The Israeli Shin Bet intelligence service confirmed the decision.

Yousef had been released from a previous imprisonment in October 2018.

"We condemn this decision. He suffers from diabetes and high blood pressure," his son Owais said, pointing out he had spent around 20 years in prison.

A co-founder of Hamas and a member of the defunct Palestinian parliament, 64-year-old Yousef has been arrested multiple times by Israel.

The administrative detention system allows Israel to detain prisoners for renewable six-month periods without charge.

Israel says it allows authorities to hold suspects to prevent attacks while continuing to gather evidence, but critics and rights groups say the system is abused.

In total around 500 Palestinians are currently being held under administrative detention orders, according to the Palestinian Prisoners' Club.

Israel has fought three wars with Hamas in Gaza since 2008 and considers it a terrorist organization.



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[Hassan Yousef](#)

Hamas leader says rocket that hit Israeli house fired in errorDespite setbacks, Hamas' grip on Gaza has never been tighter

[Artificial limbs change lives for wounded Gaza protesters](#)

Author:

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1554735436602485300

Mon, 2019-04-08 14:02

GAZA: Walking up and down stairs at a Gaza medical center, Palestinian amputees are learning to use their new artificial limbs after being wounded by Israeli fire at border protests.

The Health Ministry in the Hamas Islamist-run territory said 136 wounded Palestinians have undergone amputations since the demonstrations began in March 2018.

"It was only one bullet, one bullet turned my life upside down," said Abdallah Qassem, 17, struggling to stand steady while trying on his new artificial legs.

Qassem said the bullet struck one leg and then penetrated the other as he sat on the ground with friends at a rally on May 14, the day the United States moved its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, fueling Palestinian anger. "I had dreamt of becoming a photojournalist but I aim to study computer science," he told Reuters.

The Gaza Artificial Limb and Polio Center is run by the Gaza municipality. On its first floor, technicians were producing limbs with material from the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Protesters at the demonstrations are demanding the end to a security blockade imposed on Gaza by Israel and Egypt, and want Palestinians to have the right to return to land from which their families fled or were forced to leave during Israel's founding in 1948.

Around 200 Gazans have been killed by Israeli troops so far in the protests, according to Palestinian Health Ministry figures. An Israeli soldier was also killed by a Palestinian sniper in July.

UN investigators say Israel has used excessive force. Israel says it has no choice but to use deadly force to protect the border from militants and infiltrators.

In the southern Gaza town of Khan Younis, Suhaib Qudeih and his sister Nazeeha each lost a leg to Israeli gunfire.

"Before the injury, I used to work and make 4,000 shekels (\$1,100 a month). I used to bring the sweetest food to my children. Now I can't get them most of what they ask for," the 33-year-old man told Reuters.

He needs more surgery to make sure an artificial right leg can fit well. His sister has already had her artificial limb fitted.

The World Health Organization said 6,872 Gazans suffered gunshot wounds, mostly to the limbs, in the past year of protests.

With funding from the European Union, the WHO is helping Palestinians set up a limb reconstruction unit in Nasser hospital in southern Gaza. It is expected to open as early as next month.

"This center is focused around restoring people's lives, preventing amputations, and making sure that they are able to move again," Sara Halimah, WHO trauma manager, said.

Halimah said each of the patients will need up to two years of treatment.

"If this center is not established and if we don't have the correct treatment centers for controlling the infection rates, then we will see this amputation rate go through the roof, it will skyrocket," Halimah told Reuters at Nasser hospital.





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[US designates Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps a terrorist organization](#)

Mon, 2019-04-08 17:16

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump announced Monday that the US is designating Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps a "foreign terrorist organization" to help stabilize the Middle East and bring maximum pressure on Tehran.

In an important step to counter the Iranian regime's terrorism, the U.S. has designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, incl. Qods Force, as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. We must help the

people of Iran get back their freedom. pic.twitter.com/T65CxJjRrr

– Secretary Pompeo (@SecPompeo) [April 8, 2019](#)

Trump said the “unprecedented” move “recognizes the reality that Iran is not only a State Sponsor of Terrorism, but that the IRGC actively participates in, finances, and promotes terrorism as a tool of statecraft.”

“The IRGC is the Iranian government’s primary means of directing and implementing its global terrorist campaign,” Trump said.

It is the first time the United States has designated part of a foreign government a terrorist organization, rather than guerrilla groups or other more informal entities.

The move comes on top of Trump’s decision to pull the United States out of an international deal with Iran that was meant to lift crippling economic sanctions in return for the government allowing its nuclear technology to be restricted and kept under close supervision.

The Trump administration argues that Iran’s government, which is locked in a deeply hostile standoff with top US ally Israel, cannot be trusted and should face “maximum pressure.”

Israeli’s prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, warmly welcomed the move by his “dear friend” Trump. The terrorist designation for the Revolutionary Guards is meant to strike at the heart of the Iranian government’s power structure.

The elite force was formed after the 1979 Islamic revolution with a mission to defend the clerical regime, in contrast to more traditional military units that protect borders.

At home, it has amassed strong political and economic influence.

Abroad, the Guards’ Quds Force supports Iranian allies, including Syrian President Bashar Assad and Lebanon’s Hezbollah.

Addressing reporters following Trump’s announcement, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warned all banks and business of consequences to dealing with the Revolutionary Guards from now on.

“The leaders of Iran are racketeers, not revolutionaries,” Pompeo said.

“Businesses and banks around the world now have a clear duty to ensure that companies with which they conduct financial transactions are not conducted with the IRGC in any material way.”

Brian Hook, the State Department’s special representative for Iran, said the Middle East can not be more stable without weakening the IRGC. “It is the blunt instrument of Iran’s foreign policy,” he added.

A senior Trump administration official said the new measure would criminalize contact with the Guards and “enable our prosecutors to bring charges to those that bring material support to the IRGC.”

“The IRGC is interwoven into the Iranian economy... The safest course is to stop doing business with the IRGC. If you do business with the IRGC you run the risk of bankrolling terrorism,” said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Another official said the force has “been a principal driver of violence on a vast scale for many decades” in an attempt “to reshape the Middle East in Iran’s favor.”

The dramatic escalation of Washington's attempt to undermine Iran's leaders comes on the eve of Israeli elections where close Trump ally Netanyahu is seeking to extend his 13 years in office.

"Thank you, my dear friend, US President Donald Trump, for having decided to declare Iran's Revolutionary Guards a terrorist organization," Netanyahu said in a statement issued minutes after the White House announcement.

"Thank you for responding to another important request of mine, which serves the interests of our countries and countries of the region."

Iran's parliament has vowed to retaliate by passing an urgent bill putting American troops on its own terrorism blacklist.

"Even though we believe one should not play along with America's extreme acts, the reality is that we must retaliate," the head of Iran's influential national security and foreign policy commission, Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh, told ISNA.

A statement signed by a majority of lawmakers in support of the bill said any action against Iran's national security and its armed forces was "crossing a red line" and the US administration would "regret" its decision.

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EU extends sanctions against Iran until 2020 Iran will retaliate in kind if US designates Guards as terrorists

[Escalating Libya conflict alarms world, US pulls some troops out](#)

Author:

AFP

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Sun, 2019-04-07 10:32

TRIPOLI, Libya: The military conflict shaking Libya escalated on Sunday as forces of strongman Khalifa Haftar launched an airstrike on a suburb of Tripoli and the UN-backed government vowed a major counteroffensive. The UN called for an urgent two-hour truce for the southern outskirts of the capital to allow evacuations of civilians and the wounded.

Rivalries between the two camps threaten to plunge the country into a full-blown civil war after Haftar on Thursday launched an offensive on Tripoli.

Libya has been riven by chaos since the NATO-backed uprising in 2011 that killed Muammar Qaddafi, with rival administrations and armed groups vying for power.

Repeated attempts to find a peaceful solution have failed.

After a pause overnight, fierce fighting flared anew on Sunday morning south of the capital between Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) and forces backing the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA).

Amid an upsurge of fighting in the North African country, the US military said it had temporarily pulled some of its forces out.

"Due to increased unrest in Libya, a contingent of US forces supporting US Africa Command temporarily relocated from the country in response to security conditions on the ground," it said in a statement. It did not detail how many military personnel had been withdrawn from Libya.

US Africa Command, headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany, said its mission in Libya involves "military support to diplomatic missions, counter-terrorism activities, enhancing partnerships and improving security across the region." It said it would "continue to monitor conditions on the ground in Libya and assess the feasibility for renewed US military presence as appropriate."

"The security realities on the ground in Libya are growing increasingly complex and unpredictable," said US Marine Corps General Thomas Waldhauser, commander of US Africa Command.

"Even with an adjustment of the force, we will continue to remain agile in support of existing US strategy."

As clashes raged in the mainly farmland region of Wadi Raba and the disused international airport south of the capital, a spokesman for pro-GNA forces said a "counteroffensive" had been launched to push back Haftar's forces.

Col. Mohamed Gnounou told reporters that operation "Volcano of Anger" was aimed at "purging all Libyan cities of aggressor and illegitimate forces," in reference to Haftar fighters.

The LNA meanwhile announced it had carried out its first air raid on a Tripoli suburb, despite calls by the international community to halt hostilities.

GNA head Fayez Al-Sarraj warned on Saturday of a "war without a winner" and said that reinforcements were pouring into Tripoli from several regions.

Powerful armed groups from the western city of Misrata and fighters from Zentan and Zawiya – all battle-hardened militiamen who took part in the 2011 uprising that toppled Qaddafi – have joined the battle.

At least one armed group from Misrata known as Brigade 166 arrived Saturday in eastern Tripoli with dozens of vehicles, some mounted with anti-aircraft guns, to join the counter-offensive, an AFP photographer said.

"We are waiting for orders to repel any advance by the enemy toward Tripoli," said the group's spokesman Khaled Abu Jazia.

Misrata fighters ousted the Daesh group from Libya's coastal city of Sirte, Qaddafi's hometown, in 2016 after months of bitter fighting.

Sunday's LNA air raid came a day after forces backing the GNA launched airstrikes on their rivals for the first time since the offensive began, with at least one targeting an LNA position south of Tripoli.

LNA spokesman Ahmed Mesmari had vowed the force would retaliate. On Saturday he said pro-Haftar fighters were "progressing on several fronts... as planned" and that Tripoli would soon be captured.

Analysts say Haftar has been buoyed by a series of successful military operations that have brought all of the east and much of the south of Libya under his control.

A field marshal who served under Qaddafi, Haftar was counting on a swift battle to capture Tripoli.

"To date, Haftar's operation has mostly failed to go according to plan, and it has now galvanized western Libyan forces against him," said analyst Wolfram Lacher.

"He now faces the prospect of a protracted war south of Tripoli, or of a decisive defeat," said Lacher, a researcher with the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP).

As the tension mounted, Tripoli residents were seen Saturday queueing outside petrol stations and supermarkets.

Haftar's offensive came as UN chief Antonio Guterres visited Libya Thursday days ahead of a planned UN-backed conference aimed at uniting Libya's rivals and paving the way for elections.

The UN Security Council has called on Haftar's forces to halt their advance, warning it was putting Libya's shaky stability at further risk.

But UN envoy Ghassan Salame insisted on Saturday the April 14-16 conference would go ahead.

"We are determined" to hold the talks, he said.

Sarraj said the conference was meant to pave the way for a "stable" government and accused Haftar of "betraying" an agreement reached during a meeting in February to push for elections and a new unity government before year's end.

Haftar is "motivated by personal interests and his own delusions" and is trying to "plunge the country into a cycle of violence," said Sarraj.

On Saturday Haftar chaired a meeting with the parallel Libyan administration

based in the east of the country to discuss a “security plan” for Tripoli that would be implemented at the end of the assault, his media office said.



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Libya talks to go ahead despite new fighting: UN envoy
UN chief issues stark Libya warning as fighting rages south of Tripoli

Palestinian minister denounces Netanyahu's poll pledge

Author:

Sun, 2019-04-07 23:21

DEAD SEA, Jordan/JERUSALEM: Israel's leader will face a "real problem" if he follows through with his election campaign promise to annex Jewish settlements in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, the Palestinian foreign minister said on Sunday.

Riad Malki told The Associated Press on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Jordan that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's pledge was likely aimed at rallying his nationalist base in the final stretch of a tight race.

He added that Palestinians would "resist" such a policy if carried out.

"If Netanyahu wants to declare Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank, then you know he has to face a real problem, the presence of 4.5 million Palestinians, what to do with them," Malki said.

He said Israel cannot expel the Palestinians. "We will stay there," he said. "Then you know the international community has to deal with us."

Malki accused the US of encouraging Netanyahu by recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and more recently, recognizing Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights.

Sergey Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, also expressed concerns about America's "illegitimate decisions" in the region. "We see the solution in dialogue between countries, because unilateral actions will never lead to anything good," he said.

Netanyahu has promoted Jewish settlement expansion in his four terms as prime minister, but until now refrained from presenting a detailed vision for the West Bank, viewed by Palestinians as the heartland of a future state.

It would mark a dramatic shift for Netanyahu, ahead of Tuesday's balloting. Annexing settlements would all but end any final chances for a two-state solution with the Palestinians and potentially push the sides toward a single, binational state.

Poll gimmick

The main challenger to Netanyahu in Israel's elections on Sunday condemned

the premier's deeply controversial pledge to annex West Bank settlements, calling it an "irresponsible" bid for votes.

Netanyahu said late Saturday he planned to apply sovereignty over at least parts of the occupied West Bank, a move that could prove the death knell for the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

His remarks were widely seen as an appeal to right-wing voters ahead of what is expected to be a close election on Tuesday.

Benny Gantz, the former military chief whose centrist Blue and White alliance has posed a stiff challenge to Netanyahu, condemned the premier's remarks in an interview with Israeli news site Ynet.

"Why not ask how in 13 years Netanyahu could have annexed and didn't?" said Gantz, in reference to Netanyahu's time as premier.

"I think that releasing a strategic and historic decision in an election campaign bubble is not serious and (is) irresponsible."

Pressed on his personal position, Gantz said he opposed "unilateral" moves.

"We said we will strive for a regionally and globally backed peace agreement while maintaining our basic principles," he said.

Those principles include keeping security control of the Jordan Valley, parts of which are in the West Bank, and maintaining the large settlement blocs in the West Bank. Gantz has in the past signalled openness to withdrawing at least some settlers from other areas.

He labelled Netanyahu's remarks as "a meaningless statement".

"It's a shame to play with people like that," he said.

Netanyahu is "irresponsible", says Turkey

Turkey on Sunday criticized Netanyahu as "irresponsible" for saying he would annex Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank if he wins Tuesday's election.

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said the West Bank, which Israel seized in the 1967 Middle East war, was Palestinian territory and Israel's occupation violated international law.

"Prime Minister Netanyahu's irresponsible statement to seek votes just before the Israeli general elections cannot and will not change this fact," Cavusoglu tweeted.

Netanyahu, asked why he had not declared Israeli sovereignty over large West Bank settlements as Israel has already done in the occupied Golan Heights and East Jerusalem, said he was already discussing the move.

Palestinian leaders reacted angrily, blaming what they said was a failure by world powers to stand up for international law.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan's spokesman echoed those charges on Sunday. "Will Western democracies react or will they keep appeasing? Shame on them all!" Ibrahim Kalin tweeted.

The Palestinians and many countries deem settlements to be illegal under the Geneva conventions that bar settling on land captured in war. Israel disputes this, citing security needs and biblical, historical and political connections to the land.

Palestinians want East Jerusalem to be the capital of a future state they are seeking. Peace talks with Israel have been frozen since 2014.



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Palestinian Authority unsustainable if Netanyahu wins election, says chief negotiator
Netanyahu pledges to annex West Bank settlements after vote