

Syrian Democratic Forces begin attack on Daesh's last enclave

Sun, 2019-03-10 19:48

BAGHOUZ, Syria: The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) launched an assault on Sunday against the final Daesh enclave in eastern Syria, aiming to wipe out the last vestige of its self-declared "caliphate" that once spanned a third of Iraq and Syria.

While the Baghouz enclave represents the last shred of populated land held by the extremists, the group is still widely seen as a big security threat with remote territory elsewhere and the continued capacity to launch guerrilla attacks.

The SDF, spearheaded by the Kurdish YPG militia, has been poised to advance into the enclave for weeks, but has repeatedly held back to allow for the evacuation of civilians, many of them wives and children of Daesh fighters. Mustafa Bali, head of the SDF media office, said no further civilians had emerged from the enclave at the Iraqi border since Saturday and the SDF had not observed any more civilians in the area, prompting the decision to attack.

"The military operations have started. Our forces are now clashing with the terrorists and the attack started," he said.

Tens of thousands of people have streamed out of the shrinking territory held by Islamic State over the last months.

Bali said more than 4,000 militants had surrendered to the SDF in the past month.

Earlier on Sunday, a Reuters correspondent saw SDF forces advance into a tented area of Baghouz after Daesh fighters withdrew from it. SDF fighters gathered some ammunition and rifles left behind by the extremists.



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[Syrian Democratic Forces](#)

SDF to resume attack on Daesh enclave if nobody else emerges by Saturday afternoon
Yazidi slave women emerging from Baghouz recount rape, torture

[Sudan opposition leader sentenced to jail for protest](#)

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1552234698800638000

Sun, 2019-03-10 14:26

KHARTOUM: A Sudanese emergency court Sunday sentenced an opposition leader to a week in jail as police detained several people intent on marching on parliament to protest a state of emergency.

Mariam Al-Mahdi – daughter of opposition Umma Party chief and ex-prime minister Sadiq Al-Mahdi – was sentenced to a week in prison by an emergency court, Mohamed Al-Mahdi, another of the party's leaders, told AFP.

Mariam Al-Mahdi and her sister Rabah were among those arrested earlier on Sunday.

Protest organizers had called for a march to challenge the state of emergency, imposed nationwide by President Omar Al-Bashir on February 22. Bashir's move came after an initial crackdown on demonstrations that have taken place against his iron-fisted rule since December failed to rein in the protest movement.

The president has ordered a slew of tough measures to quell the demonstrations, including banning all unauthorized rallies and setting up special emergency courts to probe transgressions.

Sunday's procession was to start at the Umma Party's offices in the capital's twin city of Omdurman.

"As some of our leaders came out of the party office to lead the march, security agents arrested them," said Mohamed Al-Mahdi, who is not connected to the former premier's family.

Bashir swept to power in an 1989 Islamist-backed coup that had toppled the then government of Sadiq Al-Mahdi.

Alongside the two daughters of the former premier, "five other leaders of our party have also been taken away by security agents," Mohamed Al-Mahdi said.

"We are still awaiting court verdicts for Rabah and the other five," he added.

He said riot police fired tear gas at protesters who had gathered outside the party office.

"Police dispersed the protesters before they could stage the march," a witness said.

"Protesters have now launched demonstrations in some areas of Omdurman. Many of them have been arrested," the witness added.

Protests initially broke out on December 19 after a government decision to triple the price of bread.

The demonstrations escalated into nationwide rallies against Bashir's rule. Anger has mounted for years over soaring inflation and an acute foreign currency shortage.

Officials say 31 people have died in protest-related violence so far, while Human Rights Watch says the death toll is at least 51, including medics and children.



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[Palestinian president appoints ally Shtayyeh as new PM](#)

Author:

AFP

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Sun, 2019-03-10 13:08

RAMALLAH: Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas appointed longtime ally Mohammad Shtayyeh as prime minister on Sunday, a senior official said, in a move seen as part of efforts to further isolate Hamas.

Abbas asked Shtayyeh, a member of the central committee of the Palestinian president's Fatah party, to form a new government, Fatah vice president Mahmoud Al-Aloul told AFP.

Official Palestinian news agency Wafa also reported the move.

Some analysts view bringing in Shtayyeh to replace outgoing prime minister Rami Hamdallah as part of Abbas's efforts to further isolate his political rivals from Hamas, the Islamist movement that runs the Gaza Strip.

Shtayyeh, born in 1958, is a long-term Abbas ally, while Hamdallah was

politically independent.

The previous government was formed during a period of improved relations and had the backing of Hamas.

This government is instead likely to be dominated by Fatah, though other smaller parties will be represented. Hamas is not expected to be included.



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[Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas](#)

[PM](#)

[Sudanese women protesters sentenced to 20 lashes, month in jail](#)

Author:

Reuters

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1552158837703371500

Sat, 2019-03-09 18:40

CAIRO: Nine female Sudanese protesters were sentenced on Saturday to 20 lashes and one month in prison for rioting, the Democratic Alliance of Lawyers said, a day after President Omar Al-Bashir ordered the release of all

women detained in anti-government demonstrations.

Bashir declared a state of emergency last month that produced a raft of measures including the establishment of emergency courts across the country such as the one in Khartoum that convicted the nine women.

The Democratic Alliance of Lawyers, part of the Sudanese Professionals' Association, the main organizer of the protests, has said more than 800 people have been tried in the emergency courts.

Protests against Bashir and his National Congress Party have taken place almost daily since Dec. 19 in towns and cities all over Sudan, in what has become the most sustained popular challenge to him since he took power in a coup 30 years ago.

On Friday, International Women's Day, Bashir ordered the release of all women arrested in connection with the demonstrations.

Hundreds turned out for protests in Khartoum and Omdurman that day, undeterred by the emergency measures.

Bashir has also dissolved the central government, replaced state governors with security officials, expanded the powers of security forces and banned unlicensed public gatherings.

The Sudanese Professionals' Association called for fresh demonstrations in Omdurman on Sunday.



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Hundreds protest against Sudan government after Friday prayers Bashir names new Sudan central bank chief amid economic woes

[Libya's Tripoli airport closed due to unidentified drone](#)

Author:

Reuters

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1552157554373268800

Sat, 2019-03-09 18:30

TRIPOLI: The airport in the Libyan capital Tripoli was closed on Saturday due to an unidentified drone flying in the area, the airport's director said. Residents have repeatedly spotted drones flying over Tripoli in the past few days but the reason is not clear.

Flights from Tripoli's Matiga airport have been halted until further notice, said its director Lutfi Al-Tayeb.

People in the capital have been on edge due to rumors that the eastern-based Libya National Army (LNA) loyal to Khalifa Haftar might seek to take it after gaining control of much of the south.

Haftar has not said he wants to march on Tripoli but a LNA website carried an unsourced report this week saying it could happen, adding that the LNA was working with people inside the city.

The United Nations, alarmed about the possibility of a military escalation, is mediating between Haftar, who is allied to a parallel government in the east, and Tripoli premier Fayez Al-Serraj who heads the UN-backed administration.

The UN has been trying for years to pull the oil producer out of conflict but made little progress.



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Libya's national oil company to reopen major oil field