

Diplomatic row heats up in Turkey over envoys' joint declaration

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ANKARA: The joint declaration by 10 ambassadors of Western countries urging the release of the 64-year-old jailed philanthropist Osman Kavala continues to shape domestic politics in Turkey, with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan ordering the Foreign Ministry to declare the envoys “persona non grata.”

The move is expected to have domestic and international political and economic repercussions.

Kavala, who denies the charges, is behind bars for four years, accused of financing nationwide anti-government protests in 2013.

The ambassadors of France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Finland, New Zealand, the US, Canada, Denmark and the Netherlands called for a quick and just resolution of Kavala's case on Oct. 18 – the day marking four years of the start of his detention.

We “believe a just and speedy resolution to his case must be in line with Turkey's international obligations and domestic laws. Noting the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights on the matter, we call for Turkey to secure his urgent release,” the ambassadors' statement read, echoing the European Court of Human Rights ruling on its member country Turkey.



An undated handout file photograph released on Oct. 15, 2021, by Anadolu Culture Center shows Osman Kavala speaking during an event in Istanbul. (AFP)

The ambassadors were summoned by the Foreign Ministry after the release of the statement.

"I gave the necessary instruction to our foreign minister and said what must be done: These ten ambassadors must be declared persona non grata immediately," Erdogan said in a speech on Saturday.

"They will know and understand Turkey. The day they do not know and understand it they will leave," he added, noting that these ambassadors would not release "terrorists" in their own countries.

A declaration of "persona non grata" – an envoy who is no longer welcome – is a diplomatic move that is one step before expulsion.

The Turkish government considers the ambassadors' declaration as direct interference into domestic politics, rather than reminding European top court's ruling.

In the meantime, Kavala, who served on the advisory board of US philanthropist George Soros' Open Society's national foundation in Turkey until 2018, released a statement on Friday saying that he would not attend his next trial on Nov. 26 to deliver his defense, as he believes his hearing would be not fair in light of recent circumstances.

The ambassadors referred to the ECHR in their declaration. The top European court urged the immediate release of the Turkish philanthropist in late 2019, saying that his detention was aimed at silencing him.

Last month, the Council of Europe warned that infringement proceedings against Ankara would begin at the end of November if Kavala was not released.

The Danish, Dutch and Norwegian embassies in Turkey said that they had not received any notification from Turkish authorities and would continue to urge Turkey to comply with its international obligations.

Experts, however, note that the expulsion of 10 European and North American ambassadors – unprecedented in Turkish political history – may trigger actions in kind from these countries.

"As elsewhere in the world, all politics is local," Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, Ankara director of the German Marshall Fund of the US, told Arab News.

"Turkish foreign policy has been excessively driven by domestic political considerations and this case is no different," he said.

According to Unluhisarcikli, Erdogan's instruction to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to declare these ambassadors as "persona non grata" may please his voters and divert attention from domestic troubles, but it will also contribute to Turkey's international isolation at a time when the country is already under US sanctions and came close to being sanctioned by

the EU last year.

Last year, the US administration sanctioned the Turkish defense industry over its purchase of the Russian-made S-400 surface-to-air missile system. The action was taken under the 2017 Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act.

"Moreover, Turkey is going through a currency crisis, which could trigger a financial crisis about 18 months before the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for June 2023," Unluhisarcikli said.

In public statements, Turkey's former ambassadors underlined that although harsh reactions could be given in diplomatic proceedings, the main goal should be the management and resolution of the crises.

Abdurrahman Bilgic, a retired envoy who served as the ambassador to Tokyo and the UK, said the ambassadors in Turkey had the right to declare their countries' stance on Kavala's release, either individually or through a joint declaration.

"In return, the Turkish Foreign Ministry can also retaliate with a declaration to show their uneasiness. But in the meantime the ambassadors should not target our ruling government and judiciary with their consecutive social media statements," he told Arab News.

However, for Bilgic, declaring these diplomats "persona non grata" would not serve Turkey's interests and could trigger retaliation.

"If the process is being handled like this, Turkey could not only lose its voting rights at the Council of Europe but even its membership," he said.

Article 90 of the Turkish Constitution provides that in the case of conflict between international agreements in the area of fundamental rights and freedoms, the provisions of international agreements shall prevail.

"Expelling ambassadors is not the way to defend national interests or to explain one's position on any given matter. Impulsive foreign policy with an eye on domestic politics has only served to aggravate Turkey's isolation. This should not be deepened through rash action," tweeted Alper Coskun, the former Turkish ambassador to Azerbaijan and senior fellow at Washington-based think-tank Carnegie Endowment.

In the past 50 years, Turkey has declared only three diplomats – one from Libya in 1986, Syria in 1986, and Iran in 1989 – as persona non grata, while the last foreign ambassador Ankara declared persona non grata was an Iranian envoy.



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Turkey extends detention of civil society leader Kavala

Arab coalition: Over 200 Houthis killed in strikes on Juba and Al-Kasarah

Sun, 2021-10-24 16:30

RIYADH: The Arab coalition said on Sunday that more than 264 Houthis had been killed and 36 military vehicles destroyed in air strikes on two districts near the central Yemeni city of Marib.

The coalition said it had carried out 88 air strikes on the districts of Juba and Al-Kasarah during the last 72 hours.

Juba is some 50 km south of Marib, whilst Al-Kasarah is 30 km northwest of the city.

Later on Sunday, the coalition said it had destroyed an explosive-laden Houthi boat on the Kamaran Island that had been prepared to carry out an imminent attack.

The Houthi militia continues to violate the Stockholm Agreement and the cease-fire in Hodeidah, the coalition said.

The coalition added that the hostile behavior of the Houthi militia threatens navigation in the Bab Al-Mandab Strait and the southern Red Sea

On Saturday, the Arab coalition said it had destroyed four explosive-laden Houthi boats in Yemen's western province of Hodeidah.

Warplanes targeted Al-Jabanah coastal base, east of Hodeidah city, where the vessels had been prepared to attack international ships sailing through the Red Sea, the coalition said.



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More than 90 Houthis killed, 16 military vehicles destroyed in coalition strikes on Jubah and Al-KassarahArab coalition destroys four explosive-laden boats in Yemeni province

[Sudan: Political tensions continue as protesters block roads](#)

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Sun, 2021-10-24 10:15

CAIRO: Pro-military protesters briefly blocked major roads and bridges in

Sudan's capital Sunday, amid growing tensions between the generals and the pro-democracy movement that fueled the uprising against autocratic former president Omar Al-Bashir.

The development came a day after US Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Jeffrey Feltman met with military and civilian leaders in Khartoum to find a compromise to the dispute.

The souring ties between the military and civilians in the ruling government threaten Sudan's fragile transition to democracy since the military's ouster of Al-Bashir and his Islamist government in April 2019 after nearly three decades of autocratic rule.

The current crisis surfaced with a coup attempt last month. Officials blamed Al-Bashir loyalists for the move. But the generals lashed out at the civilian part of the government, accusing politicians of seeking government posts rather than helping ease people's economic suffering.

Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, the head of the ruling Sovereign Council, said that dissolving the government of Prime Minister Abdullah Hamdok could resolve the ongoing political crisis. That suggestion was rejected by hundreds of thousands of pro-democracy protesters who took to the streets of Khartoum and elsewhere in the country Thursday.

That generals' accusations, echoed by Burhan and his deputy, Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, commander of the feared paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, have aroused fears among civilians that the military may eventually hijack the country's transition to civilian rule.

Pro-military protesters rallied in Khartoum earlier this month, echoing Burhan's demands. The protesters have since held a sit-in outside the presidential palace in the capital. Last week, they attempted to storm the Cabinet headquarters as Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok met with his Cabinet. Security forces dispersed them using tear gas.

On Saturday, dozens of pro-military protesters stormed the reception area of the headquarters of the country's state-run news agency and set tires ablaze outside the agency offices. It delayed a news conference for pro-democracy activists, according to Mohamed Abdel-Hamid, director of SUNA news agency. In an escalation Sunday, pro-military demonstrators cut off major roads and bridges, including the Mec Nimr Bridge, which links Khartoum's downtown with other areas of the capital, according to activist and rights defender Tahani Abbas. The move caused traffic to clog the streets early Sunday, the first work day of the week, especially Nile Street, a main traffic artery in Khartoum.

"What is happening ... is an official coup sponsored by Burhan," she said. Abbas shared photos of protesters blocking a bridge with passenger buses and vehicles being turned back.

Later in the day, security forces dispersed the protesters using tear gas to open the blocked roads. Video on social media purportedly showed protesters fleeing over the bridge and on Nile Street.

Feltman, the US envoy, met in Khartoum with Buhan, Dagalo and Hamdok and "emphasized US support for a civilian democratic transition in accordance with the expressed wishes of the Sudanese people," the US Embassy in Khartoum said.

He urged Sudanese leaders "to commit to working together to implement the constitutional declaration and the Juba Peace Agreement" between the government and an alliance of rebel groups, the embassy said.

The tensions come weeks ahead of a scheduled rotation of the leadership on the ruling sovereign council from the military to civilians, according to the constitutional declaration that established the joint government in August 2019.



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[Middle East faced wave of cybersecurity threats since start of pandemic](#)

Sun, 2021-10-24 01:39

RIYADH: Since the start of the pandemic, a wave of advanced threat campaigns targeting the Middle East have been discovered by Kaspersky, a global cybersecurity firm.

An APT is an attack campaign in which intruders establish an illicit, long-term presence on a network to mine highly sensitive data. The targets, which are carefully chosen and researched, typically include large enterprises or government networks.

The region has always been a hotbed for such attacks due to geopolitical factors.

Kaspersky researchers, keeping a close eye on the region for APTs, worked on 68 investigative reports related to 29 cyber gangs actively targeting the Middle East since the start of the pandemic.

The researchers issued 49 threat intelligence reports due to investigations associated with cyberattacks on the UAE, which endured the highest number of reports for all Middle Eastern countries.

The second highest was Saudi Arabia with 39 reports, followed by Egypt with 30. Kuwait and Oman had 21 each, while Jordan had 20. Iraq, Qatar and Bahrain had fewer than 20 reports each.

APT attacks primarily targeted government agencies, followed by diplomatic institutions, the education sector, and telecommunication institutions. Other targeted sectors included finance, IT, healthcare, legal, military, and defense.

Some of the APT groups investigated were Oilrig, WIRTE, Lazarus, and Sofacy.

Fatemah Alharbi, a cybersecurity expert and assistant professor at Taibah University, told Arab News: "PowerShell-based malware are utilized by advanced cyberattacks targeting critical infrastructures in Saudi Arabia."

She said these cybercriminals were sending phishing emails that contained malicious Microsoft Office files impersonating legitimate entities.

To pass the firewall and the email protection techniques, she explained, these rigged files were protected by passwords and compressed as zip files.

"This approach facilitates the mission of these cybercriminals to take full control of the file system and to compromise every single file there. This means they would be able to control the operating system, applications, and data. Assuming the attack is detected, an in-depth analysis and investigation on the file system is highly recommended as a quick response to recover the system and stop the attack."

Referring to a report by Bitdefender, a cybersecurity technology company, Alharbi said: "Researchers shed light on a well-known APT cyber espionage campaign that targets mainly critical infrastructures in Saudi Arabia. This threat group is called Chafer APT (also known as APT39 or Remix Kitten). The report shows that these cybercriminals rely on social engineering to compromise victims in Saudi Arabia.

"Technically, the attack tricked victims to run a remote administration tool located in the downloads folder, similar to the RAT components used against Turkey and Kuwait back in 2014 and 2018, respectively."

Despite these threats, Alharbi said the Kingdom's cybersecurity resources had proven their ability to face such dangers.

“Saudi Arabia is ranked No.1 in the MENA region and Asia and No.2 globally according to the Global Cybersecurity Index issued by the UN’s specialized agency in information and communications technology, the International Telecommunication Union in 2021.”

This indexing evaluates countries periodically based on five main axes: Legal, technical, regulatory, capacity-building, and cooperation. The Kingdom scored advanced points in all of these axes, she said.

Amin Hasbini, head of the global research and analysis team for the Middle East, Turkey, and Africa at Kaspersky, said: “Our cybersecurity experts have always been at the forefront of detecting and reporting the latest APT threats. Our reports are the product of their visibility into the cybersecurity landscape and promptly identify what poses a threat.

“We use these insights to, of course, alert the concerned organizations on time and provide them with the protection as well as intelligence needed against both known and unknown threats. As companies move towards digitization, especially due to the pandemic, it is more important now than ever before to know about the threats that are constantly evolving.”

According to a recent report from Kaspersky and VMWare, working remotely during the pandemic made Saudi employees vulnerable to cyberattacks.

In the VMWare report, a survey of 252 Saudis showed 84 percent of them said that cyberattacks had increased due to working from home.

Alharbi talked about methods to protect users from social engineering threats. “Recently, we see a rise in the number of cyberattacks that are based on social engineering. According to a recent report by PurpleSec, 98 percent of cyberattacks rely on social engineering. Cyber criminals prefer to use social engineering techniques that can expose a victim’s natural inclination to trust easily compared to implementing malwares or any other tools to hack systems.

“For that, organizations must strengthen and diversify their cybersecurity awareness tactics, such as publishing cybersecurity awareness content, in-class training, videos, simulations and tests,” she said.



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Saudi Arabia to stage global cybersecurity forum in February
Mulkiya Investment creates first Saudi cybersecurity fund

Optimism in Gaza amid indications of reconstruction acceleration

Author:

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GAZA CITY: Some hope has returned to Gaza resident Ayman Dahman upon learning that his apartment building, completely destroyed during Israeli airstrikes last May, would be reconstructed.

Dahman has despaired over the past months, but Egyptian and Qatari statements regarding the acceleration of the reconstruction process have restored optimism.

Dahman and his family of six lived in a five-story residential building inhabited by 10 families, in the north of Gaza City.

After its destruction, he moved to live with his son in a small two-room apartment. Once the war ended, he relocated to a rented house, which was paid for by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

UNRWA provided \$1,500 in rent allowance and \$500 for the purchase of basic home furnishings for each victim who lost his or her home during the war.

Dahman said that the Ministry of Public Works and Housing in Hamas-run Gaza contacted him a few days ago to prepare the engineering plans for the building in preparation for reconstruction.

On Oct. 19, the Egyptian Committee for the Reconstruction of the Gaza Strip announced the launch of its first development project in Gaza: the construction of Al-Rasheed Street in Beit Lahia, northern Gaza.

At the same time, head of the Qatari Reconstruction Committee Mohammed Al-Emadi, currently in Gaza, announced that the coming days would witness an acceleration in the reconstruction process.

Hamas had received Egyptian promises during its leadership's visit to Cairo earlier this month to speed up the pace of reconstruction and to provide trade and economic facilities at the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt.

After the war, Egypt pledged a grant of \$500 million as a contribution to reconstruction and sent engineering delegations to remove rubble in

preparation.

Undersecretary of the Ministry of Public Works and Housing Naji Sarhan, said that the Egyptian grant projects include the construction of three residential cities in Beit Lahia; Jabalia, north of Gaza; and the Al-Zahra area, south of Gaza City.

According to the agreement, these three cities will include 2,000 housing units, giving priority to poor and low-income people. The construction of bridges and roads also will be supported.

Sarhan said that Egyptian officials promised – during meetings in Cairo with an official delegation from Gaza about two weeks ago – to start the reconstruction of the residential high-rises soon.

Egyptian crews had contributed to removing the rubble of damaged high-rises, as well as the construction of the first residential city in northern Gaza, he added.

The talks with the Egyptians, according to Sarhan, resulted in an agreement to operate the largest number of local contracting companies.

It was also agreed to import all the materials needed for reconstruction from the Rafah crossing to ensure the operation of local factories and to provide facilities for the movement of contractors and businessmen through the crossing.

The local authorities estimated the direct losses in the Gaza Strip during the war at \$479 million.

Sarhan said that the direct losses are related to the destruction that afflicted the housing and infrastructure sector, as 1,500 housing units were destroyed, and 880 units were severely damaged. Hundreds of units were moderately and slightly damaged, with the value of reconstruction estimated at \$145 million.

A great deal of damage was also caused to the infrastructure, including public buildings, roads, energy, communications and sanitation, with reconstruction estimated at \$293 million.

Losses were also incurred in the sectors of economy, trade, health, education and agriculture, apart from indirect losses caused by the war.

Sarhan estimates that Gaza needs \$2 billion in order to revive it after many years of wars and siege.

Palestinians see the latest Egyptian move as coming within a context of coordination with the US administration, which hopes to establish stability in Gaza.

A few days before the Hamas meetings in Cairo, Gaza reconstruction was discussed during talks between Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan.

Hamas-affiliated columnist Majed Al-Zibda believes that the recent Egyptian meeting with Hamas is consistent with the vision of the US administration, which desires to contain Gaza and ensure stability there so to avoid any deterioration that could lead to new confrontations.

Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported earlier that Egypt and the US were pressuring Hamas and the Palestinian Authority to work on forming a new unity government with the aim of pushing forward long-term stability and the reconstruction of Gaza.



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