

Turkish ex-admirals' declaration no coup threat, says survey

Mon, 2021-04-12 20:25

ANKARA: A declaration about an artificial waterway project from retired navy chiefs is not a coup threat, according to 74 percent of people who were polled on the issue.

More than 100 admirals wrote an open letter to the government earlier this month about Kanal Istanbul, which will connect the Black Sea north of Istanbul to the Marmara Sea to the south and is estimated to cost in excess of \$9 billion.

While the government says it will ease traffic on the Bosphorus Strait, the admirals said it would lead to the loss of Turkey's absolute sovereignty over the status of its own straits.

They also said that the government's questioning of the Montreux Convention, an international treaty on passage between the Mediterranean and Black Seas, was not in Turkey's national interests.

The open letter sparked fury in government circles and accusations that the retired admirals were threatening a coup.

But the survey results painted a different picture. Of the 1,515 people polled in 12 provinces, 74 percent said the country was not facing a coup risk that could be triggered by the declaration.

The survey, from the prestigious Istanbul Economic Research firm, was carried out between April 5 and 7.

Turkish authorities launched an inspection into the Turkish Retired Army Officers Association, which said it did not condemn the declaration, in contrast to the 300 other NGOs that did.

Upon the order of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, authorities are reportedly examining changes to the current regulations for taking back the signatories' military ranks and stripping them of benefits like public housing and personal security guards.

Also on the government's punishment agenda is cancelling signatories' diplomatic passports and denying them use of a military officers' club, which has been a prestigious and elite meeting point for decades.

Some signatories have been in police custody for eight days under the ongoing investigation as they are charged of "committing crime against the security of the state and the constitutional order," while a further four were called to testify at the Ankara Security Directorate on Monday.

Erdogan accused the signatories of evoking a "militaristic tone" in their

phrasing, such as “otherwise” and “glorious Turkish nation,” while the timing of the declaration’s release also caused consternation in pro-government circles.

The duration of the Montreux Convention has been extended every five years since 1956, and this year marks the end of a five-year term. It will be extended until 2026, on Nov. 9, if parties express no single objection or launch a new deal.

Erdogan, under a presidential decree, has the authority to withdraw the country from any international treaty.

In the same survey, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) saw its vote share decrease to 36.1 percent, followed by the main opposition Republican People’s Party at 23.3 percent, the Good Party at 15.3 percent, and the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) at 11.3 percent. The AKP’s ally, the Nationalist Movement Party, stays below the 10 percent election threshold level if a general election were to take place this Sunday.



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Admiral crackdown ‘could signal the end of Erdogan’s Eurasianist shift’:
ExpertsErdogan says Turkey will hold Kanal Istanbul tender next year

Turkey, Libya committed to eastern Mediterranean maritime accord

Mon, 2021-04-12 20:16

ANAKARA: Turkey and Libya on Monday renewed their commitment to a controversial maritime deal signed in 2019, as Libyan Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah paid his first official visit to Ankara. Dbeibah was selected earlier this year through a UN-backed inter-Libyan dialogue to lead the country to national elections in December 2021. His government replaces two rival administrations based in Tripoli and the country's east, the latter loyal to military strongman Khalifa Haftar, whose forces tried but failed to seize the capital in a 2019-20 offensive. Under the 2019 deal agreed by Ankara and the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA), Turkey claimed greater rights over vast areas of the Mediterranean but was challenged by other countries including Greece. "Regarding the agreements signed by our countries, especially the maritime deal, we reaffirm that those agreements are valid," Dbeibah said after talks with Erdogan.

The Turkish leader said the 2019 deal "secured the national interests and future of the two countries".

"Today we reaffirmed our commitment to this matter," Erdogan said.

The two leaders also signed a series of agreements before a press conference in the capital.

The Libyan premier said Turkish companies would play "an important role in Libya's reconstruction given their long experience when it comes to working in Libya".

Dbeibah added that the two countries will soon work towards "a free trade agreement".

Turkey and the GNA had signed a military agreement alongside the maritime boundary deal which gave Ankara more rights to explore energy in the Mediterranean in November 2019.

Ankara's military backing to the GNA during an offensive by Haftar helped turn the tide of the war in favour of Tripoli.

Erdogan said Monday that Turkey would strengthen "solidarity and cooperation" with Libya.

"We will continue to give all kinds of support to the Government of National Accord as we did for the previous legitimate government," the Turkish leader added.

He said that from Tuesday, Turkey would provide Libya with 150,000 coronavirus vaccine doses, without offering further details.

Libya has been mired in conflict since the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed veteran dictator Moamer Kadhafi.

But in October last year the two sides signed a truce before a UN-led process saw a new transitional government installed in February.



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France says Turkey 'deliberately' snubbed EU Commission chief
Egypt, Tunisia presidents: 'We fully support' Libyan peace process

[Who is Entesar Al-Hammadi, the Yemeni model kidnapped by the Houthis?](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-04-12 18:00

AL-MUKALLA: The Iran-backed Houthi militia has kidnapped Entesar Al-Hammadi, a popular Yemeni model and actress, along with two other fashionistas in the capital Sanaa, residents and local media said.

The abduction is the latest in a string of attacks by the rebels on dissidents and liberal women in areas under Houthi control. The incident led to an angry response at home and abroad, as human rights groups and activists

called for Al-Hammadi's release.

Al-Hammadi was born to a Yemeni father and an Ethiopian mother, and pursued her ambition to become a supermodel despite growing up in a conservative country. When she was a child, Al-Hammadi wore her mother's clothes around the house and imitated famous models she watched on TV, saying that her parents "told me my dream of becoming a model was pie in the sky. I said that it was my dream and I would keep pursuing it," she told Balqees TV in an interview last year.

Living in Sanaa, Al-Hammadi, who planned to enroll at a college next year, found fame when a friend, who was a professional photographer, published photos of her on social media wearing traditional Yemeni outfits, all with her in a hijab. The acclaim the images received prompted her to pose for images without a hijab, drawing criticism from conservative observers.

"I did not care about anything, since I love this profession," she told the interviewer when asked about the criticism.

Since then she has continued to model, and also featured in two drama series on local TV. Al-Hammadi has also spoken out about her experience of racism on account of her dark skin, but has voiced her ambition to further her career, and model on international catwalks. "It would great if I was given an opportunity outside Yemen," she said.



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Yemeni journalists call for release of 4 sentenced to death by Houthis
Houthi actions towards minority groups threaten religious freedoms in Yemen:
Minister

[EU sanctions elite Iran commander over 2019 protests](#)

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Mon, 2021-04-12 14:09

BRUSSELS: The European Union has imposed sanctions on eight Iranian militia commanders and police chiefs, including the head of the elite Revolutionary Guards, over a deadly crackdown in November 2019, the bloc said in its Official Journal on Monday.

The travel bans and asset freezes are the first EU sanctions on Iran for human rights abuses since 2013, as the bloc had shied away from angering Tehran in the hope of safeguarding a nuclear accord Tehran signed with world powers in 2015.

Their preparation was first reported by Reuters last month.

The bloc, which also hit three Iranian prisons with asset freezes, blacklisted Hossein Salami, head of the Revolutionary Guards, the most powerful and heavily armed security force in the Islamic Republic.

"Hossein Salami took part in the sessions that resulted in the orders to use lethal force to suppress the November 2019 protests. Hossein Salami therefore bears responsibility for serious human rights violations in Iran," the EU said.

The three prisons sanctioned included two in the Tehran area where the EU said those detained after the 2019 protests were deliberately wounded with boiling water and denied medical treatment.

About 1,500 people were killed during less than two weeks of unrest that started on Nov. 15, 2019, according to a toll provided to Reuters by three Iranian interior ministry officials at the time. The United Nations said the total was at least 304.

Iran has called the toll given by sources "fake news."

Iran, which has repeatedly rejected accusations by the West of human rights abuses, dismissed the EU's sanctions as "invalid."

“In response, Iran suspends comprehensive talks with the EU, including human rights talks and all cooperation resulting from these talks, especially in the areas of terrorism, drugs and refugees,” Iranian media quoted Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh as saying.

On March 9, the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, Javaid Rehman, presented a report saying Tehran used lethal force during the protests and chided it for failing to conduct a proper investigation or failing to hold anyone accountable.

Other individuals targeted with EU sanctions, which take effect on Monday, include members of Iran’s hard-line Basij militia, who are under the command of the Revolutionary Guards, and its head Gholamreza Soleimani.

The eight Iranians were added to an EU sanctions list for human rights abuses in Iran that was first launched in 2011 and which now numbers 89 people and four entities. It includes a ban on exports of equipment that could be used for repression.

Diplomats said the sanctions were not linked to efforts to revive the nuclear deal, which the United States pulled out of but now seeks to re-join. That deal made it harder for Iran to amass the fissile material needed for a nuclear bomb – a goal it has long denied – in return for sanctions relief.



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Revolutionary Guards threaten to punish protesters for Iran

unrestRevolutionary Guards commander denies Iranian targets hit in Syria air strikes

[Egypt train driver 'not at controls' during deadly Sohag crash](#)

Author:

AFP

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Sun, 2021-04-11 14:49

CAIRO: The driver of a speeding Egyptian train and his assistant had both left the driver's cabin when it crashed into another train last month, the prosecution service alleged Sunday.

The prosecutor also alleged that the assistant of the other train, which was stationary, and a track signaller were under the influence of the powerful painkiller tramadol, and that the former had also used cannabis.

At least 20 people died and 199 were injured in the March 26 crash near Sohag in southern Egypt, according to the authorities' latest count which had already been revised several times.

Video images caught on a surveillance camera show the moving train hitting a stationary train at speed, sending one carriage hurtling into the air, in an immense cloud of dust.

According to an investigative report cited by the prosecutor on Sunday, the driver and his assistant "were not in the driver's cabin" at the time of the crash, "contrary to their claims."

President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has vowed to hold to account those responsible for the latest of several deadly train accidents in recent years.

Transport Minister Kamel el-Wazir – a former general named to the post after a deadly 2019 train collision – has blamed the latest crash on human error.

"We have a problem with the human element," he told a TV talk show, where he pledged to put in place an automated network by 2024.

At least eight people, including the driver of the moving train and his assistant, were arrested shortly after the crash in the village of Samaa Gharb, 460 kilometers (285 miles) south of Cairo.

One train was traveling between the southern city of Luxor and Alexandria on the Mediterranean coast, and the other was en route between the southern city of Aswan and Cairo.

After the disaster, a military conscript who was on the Cairo-bound train told AFP that the second train struck the one he was traveling on about 15 minutes after his had come to a stop.

Egyptian rail disasters are generally attributed to poor infrastructure and maintenance.

One of the country's deadliest train crashes came in 2002, when 373 people died as a fire ripped through a crowded train south of Cairo.

The African Development Bank announced a loan of 145 million euros (\$170 million) Tuesday to improve safety on Egypt's rail network, following the latest disaster.

The bank said the money would be used "to enhance operational safety and to increase network capacity on national rail lines."

"The planned upgrades are expected to benefit low-income Egyptians, about 40 percent of the population, who rely on trains as an affordable mode of transport," it said in a statement.



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Egypt orders eight arrests over fatal train crash
Global community mourns with Arab world after Egypt's deadly Sohag train crash