

Trump says all Daesh territory retaken, contradicting allied commander

Thu, 2019-02-28 22:11

ALASKA: President Donald Trump told American troops on Thursday that US-backed forces in Syria have retaken 100 percent of the territory once held by Daesh militants, contradicting the commander of the US-allied Syrian Democratic Forces, who said it would take another week.

"We just took over, you know, you kept hearing it was 90 percent, 92 percent, the caliphate in Syria. Now it's 100 percent we just took over, 100 percent caliphate," Trump told troops at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson during a refueling stop in Alaska.

Earlier on Thursday, the commander of Syrian Democratic Forces, Mazloum Kobani, said in a video released to the news media that the SDF would be able to announce "the complete victory over Daesh in a week."

Trump made his comments while talking to US troops in Alaska about the progress his administration has made in Afghanistan and the Middle East over the past two years. He stopped in Alaska on his way back from talks in Vietnam with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

The US president has been anxious to declare that Daesh has been driven out of all its territory since announcing in December that he would withdraw American forces from Syria, claiming they had succeeded in their mission to defeat the militant group.

While the United States has withdrawn some troops, Trump responded to criticism of his move by deciding to leave some 400 US troops in the country over the longer run: 200 to remain in the northeast as part of a multinational force and 200 to remain at an outpost in the southeast to counter Iranian influence.

The US president said on Feb. 6 he expected a formal announcement the following week that coalition forces had recaptured all territory previously held by Daesh in Syria. That announcement has yet to be made.



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[Protesters challenge emergency courts in Sudan, police fire tear gas](#)

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Thu, 2019-02-28 16:19

KHARTOUM: More than 1,000 anti-government protesters demonstrated in and around Sudan's capital Khartoum on Thursday, witnesses said, the first

rallies since emergency courts were set up nationwide on Tuesday to combat more than two months of unrest.

Security forces fired tear gas at about 400 protesters at Omdurman Grand Market, in Khartoum's twin city across the Nile, witnesses said. The protesters, who are calling for an end to Bashir's 30-year-rule, chanted "Down, that's it."

The protests, initially over high bread prices, have taken place nearly every day since Dec. 19 and have developed into the most sustained challenge that Bashir has faced.

Security forces have responded with tear gas and sometimes live fire. At least 33 people have been killed, according to official statistics, including three security personnel. Protesters believe the true death toll is significantly higher.

Bashir, who came to power in a 1989 Islamist-backed military coup, declared a nationwide state of emergency last Friday and sacked state governors, replacing them with military and security officials.

On Monday, he issued a raft of edicts banning unlicensed public gatherings and awarding tough new powers to police. Emergency courts and prosecutors were also established across every Sudanese state on Tuesday.

Security forces can now search any building, restrict movement of people and public transport, arrest individuals suspected of a crime related to the state of emergency and seize assets or property during investigations.

There was a noticeable increase in the spread of protests across Khartoum on Thursday. Demonstrators were apparently galvanized by a call from the Sudanese Professionals' Association, which has emerged as the main protests organizer, to challenge the emergency courts' establishment.

About 250 people protested on Sahafa Zalat Street, one of the capital's main arteries. Police fired tear gas after several demonstrators tried to block off side streets using stones and burning tires to prevent security forces from chasing them.

The protesters chanted "Revolution is the people's choice" and other slogans and some carried Sudanese flags. Women ululated as some passing cars honked at them in support.

In the east of the capital, police fired tear gas at some 250 protesters on Sitteen Street, an upscale area, witnesses said.

Police also confronted dozens of protesters in Khartoum's poor area of Al-Daim and the Shambat neighborhood of Khartoum North with tear gas, witnesses said. In Shambat, people stood for a moment of silence for the victims of Wednesday's train crash in Cairo that killed at least 22.

Hundreds of protesters also gathered at several other parts of Khartoum and Omdurman.

Bashir has blamed the protests on foreign "agents" and challenged his rivals to seek power through elections.



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[Heavy rainfall and flooding sparks chaos in Amman](#)

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Thu, 2019-02-28 16:16

AMMAN: Heavy rainfall and flooding sparked chaos in Amman's streets on Thursday.

Cars were washed away and people rescued after a deluge filled the Jordanian capital's roads with water.

Several vehicles broke down in the streets, causing traffic to stop, Ammon News reported.







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Brazil's far-right leader to visit Israel in potential boost for Netanyahu

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Thu, 2019-02-28 13:44

JERUSALEM: Brazil's nationalist President Jair Bolsonaro will visit Israel days before its April 9 election, the Israeli government said on Thursday, in a potential boost for fellow right-winger Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Installed in January, Bolsonaro has played up his pro-Israel ties, hosting Netanyahu and signalling a desire to move Brazil's embassy to Jerusalem, though no date has been given.

The prospect of relocating the embassy – after President Donald Trump moved the US mission – has worried Brazilian exporters who fear losing access to major Arab markets for halal meats, which comply with Muslim dietary rules. The Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem said Bolsonaro would visit Israel between March 31 and April 4. It gave no more details.

Netanyahu has emphasised international statecraft in his campaign for a fifth term. But his prospects looked clouded on Thursday by a widely-expected announcement that Israel's attorney-general wanted him prosecuted on corruption charges.

Bolsonaro, a far-right former army captain, swept into power promising to crack down on crime and corruption, but has struggled to consolidate his coalition as graft scandals and infighting by allies dogged his first month in office.



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Thu, 2019-02-28 10:21

TRIPOLI: The head of Libya's internationally recognized government and a military strongman who backs a rival administration in the country's east have met and agreed to hold elections, the United Nations said Thursday. Unity government leader Fayez Al-Sarraj met Khalifa Haftar on Wednesday in Abu Dhabi, where they agreed "on the need to end the transitional phase through general elections and on ways to preserve the stability of #Libya and unify its institutions," the UN's Libya mission UNSMIL tweeted. Libya has been torn between rival administrations and a myriad of militias since the NATO-backed overthrow and killing of dictator Muammar Qaddafi in 2011.

Chief among them are Sarraj's Government of National Accord, based in Tripoli, and an administration based in the east and backed by Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army.

The leaders had agreed to a Paris-brokered deal in May 2018 to hold a nationwide election by the end of the year.

But instability, territorial disputes and divisions in the oil-rich country delayed those plans.

Talks in Italy in November laid bare deep divisions between the key power brokers, with some delegates refusing to sit side by side and Haftar snubbing the main conference to organize separate talks with international leaders. United Nations envoy Ghassan Salame told the UN Security Council last month that he was planning to organize a national conference inside Libya within weeks to pave the way for elections.

But analysts have warned that the UN's efforts could be threatened after Haftar's forces launched an offensive into the south in mid-January, aimed at rooting out "terrorists" and foreign fighters.

The LNA already controls vital oil installations in Libya's east.

Powerful Tripoli-based militias have condemned Haftar's operation as a power grab, although the GNA itself has not been as explicit in its opposition.



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Libya's NOC chairman in UAE to discuss Sharara oilfield crisis