

# El-Sisi calls on army to be prepared amid Libya crisis

Thu, 2020-08-20 23:27

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has directed the army to maintain the highest levels of preparedness and combat readiness to protect Egypt's national security.

During a meeting with various senior military personnel, the president directed them to continue to maintain combat readiness to carry out any tasks entrusted to them, in light of the current challenges in the region.

The meeting came a day after El-Sisi sent an important message to the commander of the Libyan National Army (LNA), Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar. The message was delivered by the director of the Egyptian Military Intelligence, Maj. Gen. Khaled Megawer, at the LNA headquarters in Ar Rajma outside the eastern city of Benghazi. The content of the message was not revealed.

The message and El-Sisi's statements come after the Turkish and Qatari defense ministers visited Tripoli to meet with the Head of Turkish-backed Al-Wefaq Government, Fayez Al-Sarraj.

Libyan media reported that the two ministers held talks about military support with officials in the unconstitutional Al-Sarraj government that currently controls Tripoli. They also held meetings with some senior militia figures.

July 2020, the Egyptian president chaired a meeting of the National Defense Council to discuss the Libyan situation, as well as the Renaissance Dam crisis.

The spokesman for the Egyptian president stated that the council had addressed the country's current political, security and military situations, within the framework of various regional and international developments.

The council discussed the situation in Libya in the western theater, in light of Egypt's efforts to stabilize the current situation and to bring peace to all the various parties.

The council affirmed the strong ties between the two countries, and that Egypt would spare no effort to support its neighbor to help its people overcome the current crisis.



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## [Hundreds of Houthis killed in fighting in central Yemen, officials say](#)

Thu, 2020-08-20 22:53

AL-MUKALLA: Almost 1,000 Houthi fighters have been killed over the past four days in fierce clashes with government forces, which include allied tribesmen, in various contested areas of the central province of Marib, with hundreds more wounded or captured, local media and government officials said on Thursday.

The Iran-backed Houthis have stepped up their attacks on Marib's Serwah and Helan areas in an attempt to capture the oil- and gas-rich city of Marib.

"We have counted 966 Houthis, including senior officers, killed in the fighting in Marib over the last four days. Their bodies are still scattered on the battlefields," an army officer in Marib, who asked to remain anonymous, told Arab News by telephone. Dozens of government troops and their tribal allies have also reportedly died in the fighting.

On Wednesday, at least 35 Houthi fighters surrendered when government forces attacked their location in Marib's Serwah, local army commanders said. On the same day, senior army commanders in Marib attended the funeral of Brig. Mohammed Ali Alroken, the commander of 122 Infantry Brigade, who was killed in action in the northern province of Jawf.

Local army commanders say that warplanes belonging to the Arab coalition have been targeting Houthi military locations and reinforcements. On Thursday, state television showed footage of thick smoke billowing from Houthi locations in mountainous areas of Serwah.

Despite the heavy losses incurred during the Houthi offensive, Houthi official media outlets and Houthi supporters on social media claim the Iran-backed militia has made territorial gains in the province and is close to seizing control of Marib city.

The escalation in fighting comes as the United Nations Security Council and the UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths called upon warring factions to halt all military operations in Marib in order not to jeopardize peace in a city that is currently home to hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people who have taken shelter there over the last 5 years after fleeing their homes in the north.

Many local and international aid organizations have warned that Houthi attacks on the city have created panic among residents.

In neighboring Al-Bayda, Brig. Abdulrab Al-Asbahi, the commander of Al-Bayda Axis, said on Wednesday that at least 60 Houthis had been killed in heavy fighting with government forces in the district of Qania.

The Yemeni commander said air support and logistical support from the Saudi-led coalition and local tribesmen had enabled his troops to push back Houthi offensives in the area.

Lt. Gen. Sagheer bin Aziz, the army's chief of staff, has renewed his pledge to defeat the Houthis on the battlefield and drive them out of areas under their control, including the capital, Sanaa.

Speaking to a gathering of army soldiers in Marib on Wednesday, Bin Aziz thanked the Saudi-led coalition for its support and stressed that the army and allied tribesmen are "determined to expel the Houthis from all Yemeni areas."



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## [Pressure grows for Hariri's return as Lebanon leader](#)

Thu, 2020-08-20 22:43

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Michel Aoun said on Thursday that he plans to include "competent figures representing the voice of the street" in the new government.

Ten days after Prime Minister Hassan Diab's government resigned in the wake of the Beirut port blast, Aoun is yet to set a date for parliamentary consultations to name a leader for the next government.

In a tweet on Thursday, he added that it is not clear if talks will take place soon.

Diab's government stepped down amid widespread public anger following the port explosion that devastated Beirut, killing 180 people and causing widespread damage.

Opponents of Diab's leadership claim it was a "shadow government" dominated by Hezbollah that failed to carry out reforms demanded by the international community.

Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri is fighting to restore Saad Hariri as prime minister.

Hariri's government of national unity resigned in October, 2019, after violent protests broke out amid claims of growing government corruption.

Protesters called for a transitional government to implement reforms demanded by the global community to help Lebanon overcome its economic crisis.

Aoun and Berri held a meeting two days ago in which the parliament speaker suggested Hariri return to the leadership.

MPs have reported Berri saying that he considers Hariri "the perfect man for the stage."

Berri also claims that he has Hezbollah's backing for Hariri.

Sources say he is insisting on a political government, not a technocratic one, and wants Hariri to provide it with an acceptable cover in light of the political and economic crises facing Lebanon.

However, the dispute between Hariri and the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) worsened during his time as prime minister, bringing an end to the relationship between the two parties.

French President Emmanuel Macron told Lebanese leaders during his visit to Beirut two days after the port explosion that he would return to Lebanon on Sept. 1 to ensure reforms were being carried out.

He called on officials to "assume their responsibilities during the coming weeks, launch reforms and form a national unity government."

Future Movement leader Mustafa Alloush told Arab News: "The conditions for Hariri heading any future government have not changed. What is required is an independent government that convinces the international community of the possibility of helping Lebanon and persuades the Lebanese of its ability to rescue (the country).

"The government must enjoy wide and exceptional powers in order to be able to be productive and eliminate the burden of obstruction that parliament poses."

While Berri and Hariri are expected to continue discussions, Alloush could not predict a date for any meeting.

"There is a positive endeavor that Berri is undertaking and he has presented

a government project to Aoun,” Alloush said.

He said that “the political dispute with the FPM continues. What is required is that the FPM – and not Hariri – changes.”



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## [‘Several’ Arab states on path to normalizing ties with Israel, says UAE foreign minister](#)

Thu, 2020-08-20 17:27

LONDON: Arab countries were at “different stages” in establishing relations with Israel, UAE Foreign Minister Anwar Gargash said on Thursday.

Speaking during an event hosted by the US Atlantic Council think tank, Gargash said that “several Arab countries” are on the path to normalizing ties with Israel.

“The region does need a strategic breakthrough,” he said.

His comments came one week after the UAE and Israel signed a historic agreement to establish full diplomatic relations.

Gargash added that unlike Egypt and Jordan’s relations with Israel, the UAE’s relationship with Jerusalem in future will be a “warm peace.”

“This is going to be a warm peace because, unlike Jordan or Egypt, we have not fought a war with Israel,” Gargash said.

Israel signed a peace treaty with Egypt in 1979 and with Jordan in 1994.

The UAE minister said that while Palestinians were ultimately responsible for negotiations regarding their state, the suspension of a proposed annexation of Palestinian lands was one of the key tenets of the agreement for the Emiratis.

“The UAE saw an opportunity because we’ve always been urged by the Palestinians to help in stopping annexation. By linking (the agreement) to the suspension of annexation, we came out with a good deal.

“We expect our requests regarding the agreement with Israel to be fulfilled,” he added.

Gargash said that any potential UAE embassy in Israel “will be in Tel Aviv” – and not in Jerusalem.

US President Donald Trump moved the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in 2018, recognizing the city as Israel’s capital.

The Emirati minister said he was “very encouraged” by support for the agreement from both sides of the US political divide, after Trump pushed for the agreement and Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden gave it his backing.

Following the deal, “we expect our strategic relationship with the US will develop much further,” Gargash said.

On Tuesday, UAE National Security Adviser Sheikh Tahnoun bin Zayed Al-Nahyan was visited by Yossi Cohen, head of Israel’s foreign intelligence network Mossad.

The two discussed cooperation in several fields, according to Emirates News Agency.



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## [Israel bombs Gaza after warning Hamas it risks war](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-08-20 00:59

JERUSALEM: Israeli warplanes bombed the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip overnight after Palestinians fired a rocket into southern Israel, the army said.

The latest exchange came as Israel warned Hamas it was risking "war" by failing to stop fire balloons being launched across the border.

Egyptian security officials shuttled between the two sides in a bid to end

the flare-up, which has seen more than a week of rocket and fire balloon attacks from Gaza and nightly Israeli reprisals.

“Earlier tonight, a rocket was fired and during the day, explosive and arson balloons were launched from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory,” said a military statement released shortly before midnight.

In response, “fighter jets and (other) aircraft struck additional Hamas military targets in the Gaza Strip.

“During the strike, a military compound belonging to one of the special arrays of the Hamas terror organization was struck,” the English-language statement added. There were no reports from Gaza of casualties.

Israeli President Reuven Rivlin issued a warning to Hamas during a visit Tuesday to firefighters in southern Israel who said they were called out to 40 blazes caused by Gaza arson balloons during the day.

“Terrorism using incendiary kites and balloons is terrorism just like any other,” Rivlin told them, according to a statement from his office.

“Hamas should know that this is not a game. The time will come when they have to decide ... If they want war, they will get war,” said Rivlin, whose post is largely ceremonial.

Israel and Hamas have fought three wars since 2008.

Despite a truce last year backed by Egypt, the United Nations and Qatar, Hamas and Israel clash sporadically, with Palestinian incendiary balloons or rocket or mortar fire drawing retaliatory Israeli strikes and sanctions against civilians in Gaza.

A Hamas source told AFP the Islamists had held talks with the Egyptian delegation in Gaza on Monday before it left the territory for meetings with the Israelis and the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority.

The Egyptian delegation was expected to return to Gaza after those talks were concluded, the source added.

In response to the persistent balloon launches, Israel has banned fishing off Gaza’s coast and closed the Kerem Shalom goods crossing, cutting off deliveries of fuel to the territory’s sole power plant.

Power had been in short supply even before the shutdown, with consumers having access to mains electricity for only around eight hours a day. That will now be cut to just four hours a day using power supplied from the Israeli grid.

The plant’s spokesman Mohammed Thabet announced its “complete shutdown” on Tuesday after its fuel ran out.

For the rest of the time, those Gazans who can afford it rely on solar panels, or generators, which also need fuel.

Gaza security sources and witnesses said Tuesday's strikes hit Hamas lookout posts at Rafah in the south of the territory and Beit Lahia in the north.

Israeli police said that a balloon came down in the yard of a home in the town of Sderot, which is within walking distance of the Gaza border and a frequent target for attack.

It caused some damage but no casualties, a police statement said.



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