

Mount Lebanon incident suspects arrested

Author:

Mon, 2019-07-01 23:43

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Michel Aoun called for calm during a meeting of the Supreme Council of Defense on Monday, after the killing two members of Minister of State for Refugee Affairs Saleh Al-Gharib's entourage at Mount Lebanon on Sunday.

The council announced that security had been restored across the region in the immediate aftermath of the attack. Two other people were also wounded.

Political turmoil in Lebanon exploded on Sunday during the visit of Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil, the leader of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), to the western Shahhar region.

Supporters of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), headed by Walid Jumblatt, protested Bassil's visit and clashed with the convoy of Minister Al-Gharib, who is loyal to the Lebanese Democratic Party, led by Talal Arslan, an ally of Bassil and Jumblatt's rival.

Hezbollah announced on Sunday night their full solidarity with Arslan, to which Jumblatt responded: "I wish the upstarts in politics would understand the delicate balance (of) governing the mountain."

Interior Minister Raya Al-Hassan said on Monday that things were headed toward a de-escalation, in light of massive Lebanese army deployments to the area.

However, tension has continued, fueled by social media. A photo of Jumblatt's parliamentary bloc has reportedly been circulating online, with a caption stating: "We want to kill each one of you wherever you are."

In response to the photo, MP Marwan Hamadeh, a PSP official, wrote on Twitter: "We will investigate the matter. This kind of threat does not affect us, and this is not the security we want."

Arslan's rhetoric during a press conference held after receiving a presidential delegation urging him to de-escalate was defiant.

"What happened was an attempt to assassinate Minister Al-Gharib. His convoy was shot from several directions in a treacherous manner, and his vehicle was hit by about 19 bullets," he said.

Arslan accused Minister Akram Chehayeb – without naming him – of being "a man of strife who sits at the Cabinet table without respecting the simplest rules of coexistence."

Cheyayeb had said that while the Sunday events unfolded, he had been making

calls to prevent protests in the Mount Lebanon area.

Arslan also criticized Walid Jumblatt, and said: "The man who shed the blood of the Druze in Idlib, Jabal Al-Arab, Mount Hermon and Golan is not unlikely to shed our blood."

He criticized the Lebanese army and how it had dealt with the incident. He said he would inform the president of the names of those involved in the incident.

"If the state does not want to impose its prestige and existence, we know how to protect ourselves," he added.

Al-Akhbar, a pro-Hezbollah daily newspaper, accused Jumblatt on Monday of wanting to "continue to control the mountain while insisting on denying reality."

The media officer of the PSP, Rami Rayes, told Arab News: "The decision of the Supreme Council of Defense is unfair, but we have adopted a calm and reasonable stance and we believe that it is only respectful to bury the dead. We had buried our men who were killed during the Choueifat events a year ago, and Talal Arslan protected the man who was suspected of murdering them and smuggled him across the border into Syria. Justice here cannot be selective. We resort to justice and we abide by the law."



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Two shot dead in 'assassination attempt' on Druze minister in Mount Lebanon village
Lebanon forces Syrian refugees to tear down walls

[US officials inaugurated 'fake' archaeology project, says Saeb Erekat](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-07-01 23:17

RAMALLAH: A senior Palestinian official has condemned the participation of US envoys in an event linked to Israeli settlers and scoffed at their account that it was for a new archaeology project.

US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman and White House adviser Jason Greenblatt were among US officials attending the event organized by the City of David Foundation on Sunday night in Israeli-annexed East Jerusalem.

They helped open what organizers say is an ancient pilgrimage road, now underground in a tunnel, leading to the second Jewish temple some 2,000 years ago.

The tunnel, located in a highly sensitive area next to Jerusalem's Old City, passes underneath homes in the Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan.

Palestinians and anti-occupation activists see it as another attempt by Israel to cement its control over mainly Palestinian East Jerusalem.

Saeb Erekat, the chief Palestinian negotiator, said he believed the tunnel was a project being used by Israeli right-wingers to further Israel's claim on East Jerusalem and advance settlement growth there.

"It has nothing to do with religion, it is fake," he told journalists at his office in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank.

He cited reports by two Israeli NGOs questioning the archaeological methods used.

One of the organizations, Peace Now, also says cracks emerged in multiple houses in Silwan after the digging began.

Erekat said: "It's a settlement project. It's based on a lie that has nothing to do with history.

"This is a disgrace to any diplomat, to undermine the two-state solution, to

undermine the fact that there will never be peace without East Jerusalem being the capital of Palestine.”

Israel occupied East Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War and later annexed it in a move never recognized by the international community.

It sees the entire city as its capital while the Palestinians see the eastern sector as the capital of their future state.

Jordan, custodian of Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, said “Israeli efforts to Judaize the Holy City... risk further inflaming tension.”

The attendance of Greenblatt and Friedman was a further break with decades of protocol in the disputed city by US President Donald Trump’s administration.

They described the archaeological project as historic and further testament to the ancient Jewish presence in Jerusalem.

Greenblatt also criticized Palestinian officials’ criticism of the project, saying they should “stop pretending it isn’t true.”

Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank are viewed as illegal under international law and major obstacles to peace since they are located on land the Palestinians see as part of their future state.

Israel says Palestinian violence, incitement and the intransigence of their leaders are the main reasons for the lack of progress in peace efforts.



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US officials attend Israeli settler-linked event in east Jerusalem
Palestine says US ambassador helps Israel to annex part of West Bank

[Sudan must unite armed forces during political crisis: Former PM](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-07-01 23:12

KHARTOUM: Sudan must at all costs avoid tensions between a powerful paramilitary unit that controls Khartoum and the regular army or risk more instability following a military coup in April, leading opposition figure Sadiq Al-Mahdi said.

An influential former prime minister, Al-Mahdi called on high-profile military leader Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, commonly known as Hemedti, to fully integrate the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) which he commands with the regular army to promote unity within the armed forces.

"The fact that there are tensions between our armed groups must be resolved peacefully," Al-Mahdi, Sudan's last democratically elected premier, said in an interview.

"Either people fight it out, which would be very bad for Sudan, or they accept a reconciliation process," said Al-Mahdi, who heads the largest opposition party.

"All our political forces are going to have their minds concentrated on the need to avoid this civil war and all types of conflicts that are potentially there."

Sudanese activists said at least 11 people were killed in clashes with security forces during mass demonstrations demanding a transition to civilian rule.

Tens of thousands of Sudanese flooded the streets of Khartoum, and other areas on Sunday in the biggest protests since security forces cleared a sit-in last month.

They called for the military to hand over power to civilians following the coup that ousted Bashir in April.

Nazim Sirraj, a prominent activist, said three bodies were found next to a school in Omdurman, the twin city of Khartoum.

The three were shot dead in an area where security forces had barred protesters from marching toward a hospital and had fired tear gas to disperse them, he said.

One wounded person died on the way to the hospital in Khartoum, he added.

Sirraj said the total death toll was 11, including one killed in the city of Atbara, a railway hub north of Khartoum and the birthplace of the December uprising that eventually led to Bashir's ouster.

Speaking at his sprawling villa surrounded by gardens in the capital, Al-Mahdi also said the opposition had floated the idea of merging the forces to the Transitional Military Council (TMC), which has been in charge since President Omar Bashir was overthrown following protests triggered by an economic crisis.

There are no signs that a conflict is looming between the RSF and the military. And there are no apparent divisions between Hemedti, deputy head of the TMC, and its leader Lt. Gen. Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan.

But Al-Mahdi, himself toppled by Bashir in 1989, said Sudan cannot afford to take any chances during a turbulent period.

"All our minds will be concentrated on avoiding this catastrophic development which is very much on the horizon."

The military has more firepower but taking on the RSF in the capital would inflict mass civilian casualties, say politicians, analysts and opposition figures.

Al-Mahdi's moderate Islamic Umma party is among opposition groups who have been pressing for a transition to civilian rule in talks with the TMC that ground to a halt last month.

Hemedti has indicated he has political ambitions, delivering frequent public speeches, and promising a brighter future for Sudanese, from the same palace occupied by Bashir.

"If he looks ahead to a leadership role it will be acceptable if he becomes a civilian citizen, and if he then either forms his own party or joins whatever party he thinks is closer to his ideas," said Al-Mahdi.

Bashir used Hemedti and his men, now deployed across Khartoum armed with rocket-propelled grenades and machine guns mounted on vehicles, to counter perceived threats from rivals under a strategy that helped him stay in power for 30 years.

"We believe he (Hemedti) must accept now that this (integration of the RSF and army) should be developed.

His force will be part and parcel of a national defense force,” said Mahdi. This should be done “in a way that will be voluntary with the armed forces.”

Al-Mahdi said chances of reconciliation could be improved by an independent investigation of violence three weeks ago in which witnesses said the RSF led a raid on a protest camp. Opposition medics reported more than 100 people killed. The government put the death toll at 61, including three security personnel.



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Sudan's protesters take to streets against army rule
Sudan general warns against vandalism ahead of mass protest

[Tunisian president Essebsi leaves hospital](#)

Mon, 2019-07-01 22:03

TUNIS: Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi left hospital on Monday in

“normal health” and the 92-year-old leader will resume work in the coming days, the president’s son said on his Facebook page. Essebsi, a major player in the North African country’s transition to democracy after a 2011 revolution, had been taken to a military hospital on Thursday after suffering a “severe health crisis”.



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Tunisia rallies after a “black day,” president’s health improves
Tunisia president Essebsi says he does not want to run for a second term

[Syrians dig, cook, fill sandbags in war with Bashar Assad](#)

Sun, 2019-06-30 22:33

ATARIB, SYRIA: Away from the frontlines, volunteers are helping in the war against Syria’s Bashar Assad by cooking, filling sandbags, collecting old tires and digging trenches, aiming to help ward off his assault on

northwestern Syria.

It is part of the civilian effort to help defend the last major opposition stronghold from Assad and his Russian allies who have been pounding it for weeks.

Abu Abdo, 51, says he is playing his part by collecting old tires to be burned by fighters to create a smoke screen from hostile warplanes.

"We go to places where tires are repaired, collect them and take them to the fighters," said Abu Abdo, 51, as he piled tires into the back of a truck with the help of his sons in the town of Salqin.

"These tires have no value but protect (the fighters) and keep the enemy busy," said Abu Abdo, as two of sons sat atop the pile of tires in the back of the truck.

In recent years, Assad's opponents have poured into northwestern Syria from other parts of Syria that have been taken from opposition. The region, which includes Idlib province and parts of neighboring provinces, has an estimated 3 million inhabitants, about half of whom had already fled fighting elsewhere according to the UN.

With nowhere else for these people to flee, many have a stake in fending off the attack on the northwest. To this end, activists and religious leaders launched a campaign in May called "fire an arrow with them."

Volunteers at work in a kitchen in the town of Atarib are preparing 2,000 meals a day for fighters as part of the campaign. Yellow rice is spooned from large vats into polystyrene trays and lentil soup is poured into bags ready for delivery to fighters.

"The car leaves from here to the frontlines under airstrikes and surveillance sometimes," said a 40-year-old man at work in the kitchen who gave his name as Abu Wael. "God willing we continue so these meals reach the fighters."

At a nearby quarry, sacks that once contained rice were being filled with grit for use as sandbag defenses.

"We are filling according to the demand of the frontline. The command center, for example, requests 200 bags or 1,000 bags for one position," said Khaled Al-Jamal, 26, at work with a group of other volunteers.

He finished his high school education but was unable to register at university once the war began in 2011. He hopes his effort will help fighters so "all their effort is directed at repelling the regime."

In Salqin, men use shovels, pick axes and pneumatic drills to dig a trench in an olive grove as part of another civilian campaign, this one called "the Popular Resistance Battalions."

A long way from the frontline, Yehya Al-Sheikh, 38, says the trench he is digging with others will provide protection from airstrikes for a family

living nearby.

“We came to dig trenches to defend ourselves and our people and to support our Mujahideen brothers against Bashar Assad.”

Some 300,000 people in the northwest have been uprooted since late April and local sources have reported that hundreds of civilians including women and children have been killed, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs says.

The territory is largely controlled by Tahrir Al-Sham, a militant group representing the latest incarnation of the Nusra Front, formerly Al-Qaeda’s Syrian wing, though groups fighting under the banner of the Free Syrian Army also have a presence.

The Syrian regime, which has vowed to recover “every inch” of Syria, says it is responding to attacks by Al-Qaeda-linked rebels.



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Rights group says Syria co-opting humanitarian efforts Syria aid rigged, donors and aid agencies risk abetting abuse