

Security Council members report no progress on Yemen deal

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Wed, 2019-03-13 17:32

UNITED NATIONS: Security Council members said envoy Martin Griffiths reported no progress Wednesday in getting the warring parties in Yemen to withdraw their forces from the key port of Hodeidah and two smaller ports as called for in an agreement they signed in December.

France's Foreign Minister Francois Delattre, the current council president, told reporters after Wednesday's closed-door meeting that his report was "not good." Belgium's UN Ambassador Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve was blunter, telling reporters: "At this point of time there is no progress so the council might do something."

Griffiths had been more optimistic last month, telling the council he expected the imminent pullout of forces, which would provide an opportunity to move to the major goal of ending the four-year conflict in Yemen that has created the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

But Britain's UN Ambassador Karen Pierce said council members have always said the agreement between Yemen's government and Houthi militants reached in Stockholm "is fragile – and this is proof that it is fragile."

"I wouldn't say it was in more trouble than we expected," she said. "It's the age old problem of building trust and confidence between the parties."

"It's clear that one party has more problems than the other at the moment, but this tends to swing around," Pierce said, without naming the party.

Griffiths did not speak to reporters.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Griffiths "informed council members they were still working with the parties to make the redeployment in Hodeida a reality."

Responding to a question on whether the Hodeidah agreement was unraveling, Dujarric said, "I would not use the term unraveling. I think patience and determination are really the name of the game."

"No one expected this to be easy," Dujarric said. "This is the first agreement reached by the parties since the start of the conflict" and Griffiths and the UN redeployment monitoring team "are determined to help the parties to reach an agreement to implement what was actually agreed to."

Germany's UN Ambassador Christoph Heusgen said that at Wednesday's council meeting "there was frustration that we haven't made more progress."

"But what was clear is that there is no alternative but to continue on that process and to use all the different channels that are at our disposal to get the parties to implement the Stockholm agreement," he said.

On Tuesday, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council – China, France, Russia, Britain and the US– called on both sides to implement a peace deal on the port city.

Under the plan agreed on during talks in December, coalition-backed forces

and Houthi militiamen would pull out of Hodeidah, while allowing a local force to take control. But on Sunday, fighting erupted in Hodeidah, the first significant clashes since warring sides agreed to a cease-fire.

The conflict in Yemen began with the 2014 takeover of the capital, Sanaa, by the Iranian-backed Houthis.

An Arab coalition including Saudi Arabia has been fighting the Houthis since 2015.

The fighting in the Arab world's poorest country has killed thousands of civilians, left millions suffering from food and medical care shortages, and pushed the country to the brink of famine.



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[British MP demands World Cup probe after fans say Qatar should lose](#)

tournament

Wed, 2019-03-13 21:58

LONDON: A prominent British MP has called for an investigation into Qatar hosting the 2022 World Cup after a poll revealed that more than nine in 10 football fans want to see the tiny Gulf state being stripped of the tournament.

Former leader of the Liberal Democrat party, Tim Farron, was commenting on a survey conducted by UK newspaper The Sunday Times.

The poll, as of 6:30 p.m. GMT on Wednesday, revealed that 93 percent of the 6,240 people who voted were adamant that Qatar should be shown the red card and the tournament moved elsewhere. The poll runs until Friday 15 March.

Farron said that it should come as no shock to find out that so many fans are furious about where the 2022 sporting spectacle is set to be held.



“It’s not remotely surprising that so many fans want to see Qatar stripped of the World Cup,” he told Arab News.

“As fans they want the beautiful game to remain beautiful – not become mired in bribery and foul play,” added Farron, who headed the Liberal Democrats from 2015 to 2017.

“If these allegations remain unresolved, this could seriously damage the

reputation of sport's greatest competition. We need an independent investigation now."

The poll comes after yet more allegations of corruption surrounding the controversial decision to award hosting rights for the 2022 tournament to Qatar.

It has long been claimed that the Gulf state offered bribes to FIFA officials in its bid to host the 2022 World Cup – and last weekend The Sunday Times reported that Qatar allegedly offered football's governing body as much as \$880 million in secret payments at key stages in its efforts to host the 2022 World Cup.

Leaked files seen by The Sunday Times appear to show that Doha offered FIFA \$400 million 21 days before the decision to hold the tournament in the tiny Gulf state was announced

Executives from the Qatari state-run broadcaster Al Jazeera made the offer at the height of campaigning over the tournament, in a clear breach of FIFA's own anti-bribery rules, the newspaper claimed.

In response to the newspapers's allegations, a FIFA spokesperson said: "Allegations linked to the FIFA World Cup 2022 bid have already been extensively commented by FIFA, who in June 2017 published the Garcia report in full on FIFA.com. Furthermore, please note that FIFA lodged a criminal complaint with the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland, which is still pending. FIFA is and will continue to cooperate with the authorities.

"Generally speaking and since the implementation of the reforms in 2016, FIFA has consistently improved its governance and compliance standards also when it comes to transparency and fairness of its commercial agreements."



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Poll reveals 93 percent of fans want Qatar to be shown red card over 2022 World Cup hosting rights 'Risk to Qatar World Cup, contractors' following latest corruption allegations

UAE says 7 Emiratis, 2 Egyptians detained by Iran were freed

Author:

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Wed, 2019-03-13 15:40

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates says seven Emiratis and two Egyptians held by Iran since January after being detained in the Gulf have been freed.

The Emirati Foreign Ministry said in a statement Wednesday the nine were detained while on a fishing trip.

It said those detained were released into the care of the UAE Coast Guard.

Iranian media quoted Emirati media on the release, without elaborating on the case.



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Karen Pence, wife of US vice president, visits the UAE

[Syrian forces and Russian jets intensify attacks on last rebel bastion](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Wed, 2019-03-13 17:47

AMMAN: The Syrian army, aided by Russian warplanes, attacked rebel-held towns in northwestern Syria on Wednesday in the most extensive bombardment in weeks

against the last remaining rebel bastion in the country, rebels, rescuers and residents said.

Rebels who have fought to topple President Bashar Assad for eight years are now largely confined to the enclave in the northwest near the Turkish border. Around four million people now live there, including hundreds of thousands of opponents of Assad who fled there from other parts of the country.

The enclave is protected by a "de-escalation zone" agreement brokered last year by Assad's main international backers Russia and Iran, and Turkey which has supported the rebels in the past and has sent troops to monitor the truce.

Residents said at least 12 aerial raids had hit Idlib city, including a civilian prison on its outskirts, where they said dozens of prisoners escaped. At least four civilians were killed.

Russia's defense ministry confirmed it had hit Idlib in coordination with Turkey, targeting drones and weapons stores of the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) militants it said were intended for use in an attack on a major Russian air base near the Mediterranean coast.

The Syrian army has escalated its shelling of the enclave since early February. The attacks have killed dozens of civilians and injured hundreds, and led to tens of thousands of people fleeing frontline areas to camps and towns closer to the Turkish border, rescuers and aid agencies said.

The Syrian army denies targeting civilians and says the army is responding to stepped-up attacks staged by Al-Qaeda-inspired fighters who aim to wreck the truce and control the area.

Residents along the border area with Turkey could hear heavy overnight aerial strikes that covered a wide stretch of territory from rebel-held areas near government-held Latakia province on the Mediterranean to Idlib city toward the east and extending to adjoining opposition-held parts of northern Hama.

"They burnt the land... The sounds were heard very clearly," said Ibrahim al Sheikh, a father of five in the border town of Atmeh. He quoted relatives as saying the shelling was the heaviest yet in the two weeks of escalation.

The escalation in the northwest is taking place as a US-backed Kurdish-led militia has launched a separate assault on the final bastion of Islamic State fighters on the opposite, eastern end of the country, creating turning points on both major fronts of Syria's multi-sided civil war.

In the northwest, residents said white phosphorous munitions were fired overnight on the town of al Tamana in northwestern Idlib countryside, where rescue workers on Wednesday said they put out several fires caused by more than 80 rocket strikes.

Among the targets of the aerial campaign was a makeshift tent camp in Kfr Amim, east of Idlib city, that shelters displaced families, where two women were killed and at least 10 children injured when bombs landed after midnight.

"Whoever did this is a beast, truly a beast. It's a camp with only women and children. There is nothing we can say except that this Russian beast is coming to kill," said Laith al Abdullah, a civil defense worker in Sarqeb town who helped in the rescue effort, reached by mobile phone.

Rocket shelling from a major army base in Joreen, in Hama province, escalated a week-long bombardment of rural areas near the town of Jisr al Shaqour, said Ahmed Abdul Salam, a rebel commander in the Turkey-backed National Liberation Front.

A Russian army base, south of government-controlled Halafaya town, also targeted Kafr Zeita in northern Hama countryside while cluster bombs hit several rebel-held towns in southern Idlib, rebels said.

The stepped-up bombardment has depopulated opposition-held towns in the buffer zone that straddles parts of Idlib to northern Hama and parts of Latakia province.

The opposition-held city of Khan Sheikhon had become a ghost city with most of its more than 70,000 people fleeing, said Yousef al Idlibi, a former resident who moved to Idlib city.

Turkey, which began patrols in the buffer zone on Friday, has condemned what it said were increasing provocations to wreck the truce, and warned that a bombing campaign by the Russians and the Syrian army would cause a major humanitarian crisis.

Many residents are exasperated by the failure of Turkish forces to respond to the bombardments. The Syrian army has called for Turkish forces to withdraw.



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Daesh suicide bombers thwarted in last-stand battle for Baghouz: SDFaid groups appeal for Syria funds as donors head to Brussels

US report drops the word 'occupied' from reference to Palestinian territories

Wed, 2019-03-13 18:21

WASHINGTON: A US State Department report has dropped the words "occupation" or "occupied" before a section on the Palestinian territories of West Bank and Gaza.

The annual global human rights report also describes the Golan Heights as "Israeli-controlled" rather than "occupied," Reuters reported.

The three territories are considered occupied by Israel under international law.

Gaza, the West Bank, and the Golan heights were annexed by Israel during the 1967.

A State Department official said there had been no change in US policy on the status of Palestinian territories. The official told Reuters the word "occupied" was not used because the report was on human rights issues and not legal issues.



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