

Italy's Salvini says France has no interest in stabilising Libya

Author:

Tue, 2019-01-22 23:42

ROME: Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini, continuing a war of words between Rome and Paris, said on Tuesday that France was not looking to bring calm to violence-ravaged Libya because its energy interests there rivalled those of Italy.

Relations between Italy and France, traditionally close allies, have grown frosty since the far-right League and anti-establishment 5-Star Movement formed a coalition last year and took aim at pro-EU French President Emmanuel Macron.

France's Foreign Ministry and the French president's office declined to respond immediately.

On Monday France summoned Italy's ambassador after Salvini's fellow deputy prime minister, Luigi Di Maio, accused Paris of creating poverty in Africa and generating mass migration to Europe.

Salvini backed up Di Maio, saying France was looking to extract wealth from Africa rather than helping countries develop their own economies, and pointed particularly to Libya, which has been in turmoil since a NATO-backed uprising in 2011 that overthrew strongman Muammar Qaddafi.

"In Libya, France has no interest in stabilising the situation, probably because it has oil interests that are opposed to those of Italy," Salvini told Canale 5 TV station.

A French diplomatic source said it was not the first time that Salvini had made such comments and that it was probably because he felt he had been upstaged by Di Maio.

The source added that the accusation was baseless and reiterated that French efforts in Libya were aimed at stabilising the country, preventing the spread of terrorism and curbing the migration flows.

Italy's Eni and France's Total have separate joint ventures in Libya, but Eni's CEO Claudio Descalzi denied in a newspaper interview last year that there was any conflict between the two firms in the north African state.

Salvini is head of the League, while Di Maio leads 5-Star. Both are campaigning hard for European parliamentary elections in May and are eager to show they have broken with the consensual politics of center-left and center-right parties.

The two men have repeatedly targeted neighboring France and accused Macron of doing nothing to help handle the hundreds of thousands of mainly African migrants who have reached Italy from Libya in recent years.

Asked about the latest diplomatic spat with Paris, Salvini said on Tuesday: "France has no reason to get upset because it pushed away tens of thousands of migrants (at the French border), abandoning them there as though they were beasts. We won't take any lessons on humanity from Macron."



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Almost 500 migrants brought back to Libya after foiled attempts to reach Italy
HRW criticizes Italy, EU's Libya migrant policy

[Sudan security forces tear gas protesters in Omdurman](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-01-22 20:45

KHARTOUM: Sudanese police fired tear gas at crowds of demonstrators in the capital's twin city Omdurman on Tuesday protesting against the fatal wounding of a demonstrator last week, witnesses said.

The demonstration, which came ahead of planned nighttime rallies in both Omdurman and Khartoum just across the Nile, was the latest in more than a month of escalating protests against the three-decade rule of President Omar Bashir.

Bashir has made defiant appearances at loyalist rallies in Khartoum and other cities.

Chanting “overthrow, overthrow” and “freedom, peace and justice,” the catchword slogans of the protest movement, the demonstrators had gathered near the home of their dead comrade.

The doctors’ branch of the Sudanese Professionals’ Association (SPA) said he had died on Monday from wounds sustained when demonstrators clashed with security forces in Khartoum on Thursday.

The SPA has taken the lead in organizing the protests after hundreds of opposition activists were detained, and its doctors’ branch has taken casualties.

Human rights groups say that several medics have been among more than 40 people killed in clashes with the security forces since the protests erupted on Dec. 19, 2018.

The authorities say 26 people have been killed, including at least one doctor, but blame rebel provocateurs they say have infiltrated the protesters’ ranks.

The mushrooming protests are widely seen as the biggest threat to Bashir’s rule since he took power in an Islamist-backed coup in 1989.

Triggered by the government’s tripling of the price of bread, which brought demonstrators onto the streets of the eastern farming hub of Atbara and other provincial towns, the protests rapidly spread to the metropolis and other big cities as people vented their anger against the government.

A chronic shortage of foreign currency since the breakaway of South Sudan in 2011 deprived the government of most of its oil revenues, has stoked spiraling inflation and widespread shortages.

Bashir has survived previous protest movements in September 2013 and January last year.

But his efforts to blame the US for Sudan’s economic woes have fallen on increasingly deaf ears as people have struggled to buy even basic foods and medicines.

“I am tired of prices going up every minute and standing up in bread lines for hours only for the bakery’s owner to decide how many loaves I can buy,” a 42-year-old woman, Fatima, said during protests last week on the outskirts of the capital of Khartoum.

Fatima and others speaking to the AP would not provide their full names, insisting on anonymity because they fear reprisals by the authorities.

Protesters described using medical masks soaked in vinegar or yeast and tree leaves to fend off tear gas. They said they try to fatigue police by staging nighttime flash protests in residential alleys unfamiliar to the security forces.

“We have used tactics employed by the Egyptians, Tunisians and Syrians but we

have so far refrained from pelting security forces with rocks or firebombs,” said Ashraf, another demonstrator.

They said there was little they can do about live ammunition except to keep medics and doctors close by to administer first aid to casualties.

They also described checking paths of planned protests to identify escape routes and potential ambushes by police. Some of their slogans are borrowed from the Arab Spring days, like “the people want to bring down the regime.”



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Sudan protesters show resilience, employ Arab Spring tactics
Sudanese security forces deploy in large numbers ahead of fresh protests

[UN rebukes Europe for failing to allow rescued Arab migrants to land](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-01-22 20:34

GENEVA: UN aid agencies criticized European countries on Tuesday for not allowing migrants to disembark at safe ports, after more than 140 people rescued at sea were taken to a detention center in Misrata, Libya.

An estimated 170 migrants were lost in the Mediterranean in two incidents involving dinghies that left from Libya and Morocco, migrant organizations said on Saturday.

In all, 203 passengers have drowned at sea trying to reach Europe in January; 4,883 have arrived, mainly in Spain, Greece and Italy, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said.

Private rescue ships have been restricted from conducting search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean, putting more lives unnecessarily at risk, the UN refugee agency UNHCR said.

"IOM confirmed yesterday (Monday) that the Sierra Leonean flagged cargo vessel Lady Sham returned 144 rescued migrants to Libya. It remains unclear when and from where these individuals departed," IOM spokesman Joel Millman told a Geneva briefing.

"IOM staff counted 26 women and four children among those rescued and taken to a detention center in Misrata," he said.

Libya, wracked by violence, is no refuge, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said.

"In Libya's current context, where outbreaks of violence and widespread human rights violations prevail, no rescued refugees and migrants should be returned there," said UNHCR spokesman Charlie Yaxley.

"It has been well-documented at this point that the people in these detention centers face pretty appalling treatment, many report going hungry for days on end, not being able to receive dire urgent medical care that they require; others allege to have been tortured," he said.

Matteo Salvini, Italy's interior minister, who has closed off Italian ports to humanitarian rescue vessels since a populist government came to power in mid-2018, has said the ports would remain closed to deter human traffickers.

UNHCR denounced "politicking around sea rescues" by European states that have restricted aid groups from conducting missions.

"Currently, rescue at sea has been taken hostage by politics... decisive leadership that taps into fundamental values of humanity and compassion is sorely needed," Yaxley said.



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Almost 500 migrants brought back to Libya after foiled attempts to reach Italy
Boat with migrants rescued off Libya looks for port to dock

[Turkish journalist serving life gets another 6 years in prison](#)

Tue, 2019-01-22 20:21

ANKARA: A Turkish court on Tuesday sentenced a prominent journalist serving a life sentence to almost six additional years in prison for leaking information deemed secret by the government, the state-owned Anadolu news agency said.

Nazli Ilicak was sentenced to life in prison along with five other journalists last February for aiding plotters of a 2016 failed coup attempt. All six of the journalists, including Ilicak, have denied the charges.

On Tuesday, the court sentenced Ilicak to five years and 10 months in prison in a separate case where she was charged with “sharing information that needed to remain secret for the security of the state,” Anadolu said.

Ilicak, a journalist, columnist and former lawmaker, had also been sentenced to 14 months in prison last year for insulting the president, a crime punishable by up to four years in prison in Turkey.

Along with Ilicak, two prominent journalist brothers – Ahmet and Mehmet Altan – were sentenced to life in prison last February. The case had underscored deep concern about press freedom and the independence of the judiciary in Turkey under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The government blames followers of US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen for masterminding the coup, and has waged a crackdown on suspected members of his network since then. Gulen has denied involvement in the coup and condemned it.

Since the abortive putsch, some 77,000 people have been jailed and more than 150,000 sacked or suspended from their jobs in the military, public and private sectors.

Rights groups and Turkey’s western allies have voiced alarm over the scale of the crackdown, saying Erdogan is using the coup as a pretext to quash dissent.

The government, however, rejects the criticism and says the measures are necessary due to the gravity of the security threat it faces.



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Another Turkish journalist jailed over Gulen links
Turkish journalist missing for months in Syria freed

[Jordan upgrades diplomatic ties with Syria](#)

Tue, 2019-01-22 19:37

JEDDAH: Jordan has appointed a chargé d'affaires to Syria in an upgrade of diplomatic ties.

An unnamed Jordanian diplomat with the ranking of advisor will begin work again at the Jordanian embassy in Damascus, a foreign ministry spokesman said. "The decision is inline with the Jordanian stance since the Syrian revolution erupted in 2011," he said.

The decision is the latest move from Arab countries to improve relations with Bashar Al-Assad's government, which was ostracized by many countries in the region when the Syrian war started in 2011.

Last month, the UAE reopened its embassy in Damascus after seven years and there has been speculation that Syria will be allowed back into the Arab league after it was kicked out in 2011. Bahrain also plans to reopen its embassy in the Syrian capital.

Sudan president, Omar Al-Bashir, became the first Arab leader to visit Damascus when he traveled there in December.

Jordan recalled its ambassador in 2011 but diplomatic ties were never fully severed, despite Amman's support for some rebel groups fighting Assad's forces.

In recent months there have been signs of an improvement in relations. In October, Jordan reopened a border crossing with Syria that had been closed for three years. The route once carried billions of dollars of trade each year.

In November, a delegation of Jordanian MPs traveled to Damascus and met Assad in a visit to discuss ways to improve relations.



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