

Dozens of Yemenis feared dead in botched Houthi missile launch

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AL-MUKALLA: Dozens of civilians were reportedly killed or wounded in Yemen's northern province of Dhamar on Saturday when a ballistic missile fired by the Iran-backed Houthis failed to reach its target and ripped through a residential area, residents and local media said.

Launched by the Houthis from a military base under their control in Dhamar city, the missile landed in a densely populated area close to the base, triggering a huge explosion that rocked the city.

The Houthis quickly sealed off the streets and banned people from entering or leaving the area.

Al-Sharae newspaper reported that the missile "destroyed many houses" in the Al-Najeda neighborhood as ambulances with blaring sirens were seen rushing to the area.

Images seen on social media showed a large fireball and smoke billowing from the site.

The Houthis have intensified drone and missile strikes on the central city of Marib as their ground forces have aggressively pushed to seize control of the strategic city since February.

During the last several days, Arab coalition jets targeted military sites in Houthi-held Hodeidah and Sanaa, where ballistic missiles, explosive drones and bomb boats are manufactured and stored.



Yemeni Prime Minister Maen Abdul Malik Saeed. (AFP/File)

In the southern city of Aden, the interim capital, Yemeni Prime Minister Maen Abdul Malik Saeed on Saturday urged factions to forge unified ranks for war against the Houthis and to end the Iranian regime's strategy in the country.

During a virtual meeting with representatives of political parties included in the government, the prime minister warned that the Houthis are "seeking to seize control of Yemen and would target all opponents who challenged their rule," urging Yemenis to "come together" to defeat the Houthis.

"The Houthi danger and the Iranian project in Yemen will not exclude anyone, and no party is immune. If we don't fight it together today, no party will find the time and ground to fight this Iranian-led criminal project in the region," Saeed said, according to the official news agency.

Yemeni political analysts and officials argue that ongoing infighting among the anti-Houthi camp has weakened it politically and militarily, and enabled the militia to expand across Yemen.

Najeeb Ghallab, undersecretary at Yemen's information ministry and a political analyst, urged Yemeni parties to "positively respond" to the prime minister's call, adding that unifying splintered groups and factions would lead to defeat of the Houthis and push them into accepting peace initiatives.

"The only beneficiary of the conflicts and splits within anti-Houthi forces is the Houthis. Unifying factions would place powerful pressure on them," Ghallab told Arab News.

On the ground, dozens of Houthis and several government troops were killed in fierce clashes over the past day in Juba district, south of Marib province, a Yemeni military official who visited the battlefield told Arab News. The Yemeni army and allied tribesmen foiled consecutive attacks by more than 15 groups of Houthi fighters in Juba who staged a bid to break through Marib defenses.

“The Houthis seized control of a remote village in Juba in the morning and we liberated it by the end of the day,” the official, who requested anonymity, said.



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More than 90 Houthis killed, 16 military vehicles destroyed in coalition strikes on Jubah and Al-Kassarrah

[**Pope: Don't send migrants back to**](#)

Libya and 'inhumane' camps

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Sun, 2021-10-24 15:48

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis on Sunday made an impassioned plea to end the practice of returning migrants rescued at sea to Libya and other unsafe countries where they suffer "inhumane violence."

Francis also waded into a highly contentious political debate in Europe, calling on the international community to find concrete ways to manage the "migratory flows" in the Mediterranean.

"I express my closeness to the thousands of migrants, refugees and others in need of protection in Libya," Francis said. "I never forget you, I hear your cries and I pray for you."

Even as the pontiff appealed for changes of migrant policy and of heart in his remarks to the public in St. Peter's Square, hundreds of migrants were either at sea in the central Mediterranean awaiting a port after rescue or recently coming ashore in Sicily or the Italian mainland after setting sail from Libya or Turkey, according to authorities.

"So many of these men, women and children are subject to inhumane violence," he added. "Yet again I ask the international community to keep the promises to search for common, concrete and lasting solutions to manage the migratory flows in Libya and in all the Mediterranean."

"How they suffer, those who are sent back" after rescue at sea, the pope said. Detention facilities in Libya, he said "are true concentration camps."

"We need to stop sending back (migrants) to unsafe countries and to give priority to the saving of human lives at sea with protocols of rescue and predictable disembarking, to guarantee them dignified conditions of life, alternatives to detention, regular paths of migration and access to asylum procedures," Francis said.

UN refugee agency officials and human rights organizations have long denounced the conditions of detention centers for migrants in Libya, citing practices of beatings, rape and other forms of torture and insufficient food. Migrants endure weeks and months of those conditions, awaiting passage in unseaworthy rubber dinghies or rickety fishing boats arranged by human traffickers.

Hours after the pope's appeal, the humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders said that its rescue ship, Geo Barents, reached a rubber boat that was taking on water, with the sea buffeted by strong winds and waves up to three meters (10 feet) high. It tweeted that "we managed to rescue all the 71 people on board."

The group thanked the charity group Alarm Phone for signaling that the boat crowded with migrants was in distressed.

Earlier, Geo Barents, then with 296 migrants aboard its rescue ship, was awaiting permission in waters off Malta to disembark. Six migrants tested positive for COVID-19, but because of the crowded conditions aboard, it was difficult to keep them sufficiently distant from the others, Doctors Without

Borders said.

In Sicily, a ship operated by the German charity Sea-Watch, with 406 rescued migrants aboard, was granted permission to enter port. But Sea-Watch said that a rescue vessel operated by a Spanish charity, with 105 migrants aboard, has been awaiting a port assignment to disembark them for four days.

While hundreds of thousands of migrants have departed in traffickers' boats for European shores in recent years and set foot on Sicily or nearby Italian islands, many reach the Italian mainland.

Red Cross officials in Roccella Ionica, a town on the coast of the "toe" of the Italian peninsula said on Sunday that about 700 migrants, some of them from Afghanistan, reached the Calabrian coast in recent days on boats that apparently departed from Turkey.

Authorities said so far this year, about 3,400 migrants had reached Roccella Ionica, a town of 6,000 people, compared to 480 in all of 2019. The migrants who arrived in the last several days were being housed in tent shelters, RAI state television said.

Italy and Malta have come under criticism by human rights advocates for leaving migrants aboard crowded rescue boats before assigning them a safe port.

The Libyan coast guard, which has been trained and equipped by Italy, has also been criticized for rescuing migrants in Libyan waters and then returning them to land where the detention centers awaited them.

On Friday, Doctors Without Borders tweeted that crew aboard the Geo Barents had "witnessed an interception" by the Libyan coast guard and that the migrants ""will be forcibly taken to dangerous detention facilities and exposed to violence and exploitation."

With rising popularity of right-wing, anti-migrant parties in Italy in recent years, the Italian government has been under increasing domestic political pressure to crack down on illegal immigration.

Italy and Malta have lobbied their European Union partner countries, mainly in vain, to take in some of those rescued at sea.



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Evacuation flights for migrants start again in Libya
Another 50 migrants rescued off Libyan coast in past two days

[Diplomatic row heats up in Turkey over envoys' joint declaration](#)

Sun, 2021-10-24 23:31

ANKARA: The joint declaration by 10 ambassadors of Western countries urging the release of the 64-year-old jailed philanthropist Osman Kavala continues to shape domestic politics in Turkey, with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan ordering the Foreign Ministry to declare the envoys "persona non grata."

The move is expected to have domestic and international political and

economic repercussions.

Kavala, who denies the charges, is behind bars for four years, accused of financing nationwide anti-government protests in 2013.

The ambassadors of France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Finland, New Zealand, the US, Canada, Denmark and the Netherlands called for a quick and just resolution of Kavala's case on Oct. 18 – the day marking four years of the start of his detention.

We “believe a just and speedy resolution to his case must be in line with Turkey's international obligations and domestic laws. Noting the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights on the matter, we call for Turkey to secure his urgent release,” the ambassadors' statement read, echoing the European Court of Human Rights ruling on its member country Turkey.



An undated handout file photograph released on Oct. 15, 2021, by Anadolu Culture Center shows Osman Kavala speaking during an event in Istanbul. (AFP)

The ambassadors were summoned by the Foreign Ministry after the release of the statement.

“I gave the necessary instruction to our foreign minister and said what must be done: These ten ambassadors must be declared persona non grata immediately,” Erdogan said in a speech on Saturday.

“They will know and understand Turkey. The day they do not know and understand it they will leave,” he added, noting that these ambassadors would not release “terrorists” in their own countries.

A declaration of “persona non grata” – an envoy who is no longer welcome – is a diplomatic move that is one step before expulsion.

The Turkish government considers the ambassadors’ declaration as direct interference into domestic politics, rather than reminding European top court’s ruling.

In the meantime, Kavala, who served on the advisory board of US philanthropist George Soros’ Open Society’s national foundation in Turkey until 2018, released a statement on Friday saying that he would not attend his next trial on Nov. 26 to deliver his defense, as he believes his hearing would be not fair in light of recent circumstances.

The ambassadors referred to the ECHR in their declaration. The top European court urged the immediate release of the Turkish philanthropist in late 2019, saying that his detention was aimed at silencing him.

Last month, the Council of Europe warned that infringement proceedings against Ankara would begin at the end of November if Kavala was not released.

The Danish, Dutch and Norwegian embassies in Turkey said that they had not received any notification from Turkish authorities and would continue to urge Turkey to comply with its international obligations.

Experts, however, note that the expulsion of 10 European and North American ambassadors – unprecedented in Turkish political history – may trigger actions in kind from these countries.

“As elsewhere in the world, all politics is local,” Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, Ankara director of the German Marshall Fund of the US, told Arab News.

“Turkish foreign policy has been excessively driven by domestic political considerations and this case is no different,” he said.

According to Unluhisarcikli, Erdogan’s instruction to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to declare these ambassadors as “persona non grata” may please his voters and divert attention from domestic troubles, but it will also contribute to Turkey’s international isolation at a time when the country is already under US sanctions and came close to being sanctioned by the EU last year.

Last year, the US administration sanctioned the Turkish defense industry over its purchase of the Russian-made S-400 surface-to-air missile system. The action was taken under the 2017 Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act.

“Moreover ,Turkey is going through a currency crisis, which could trigger a financial crisis about 18 months before the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for June 2023,” Unluhisarcikli said.

In public statements, Turkey’s former ambassadors underlined that although harsh reactions could be given in diplomatic proceedings, the main goal should be the management and resolution of the crises.

Abdurrahman Bilgic, a retired envoy who served as the ambassador to Tokyo and the UK, said the ambassadors in Turkey had the right to declare their countries' stance on Kavala's release, either individually or through a joint declaration.

"In return, the Turkish Foreign Ministry can also retaliate with a declaration to show their uneasiness. But in the meantime the ambassadors should not target our ruling government and judiciary with their consecutive social media statements," he told Arab News.

However, for Bilgic, declaring these diplomats "persona non grata" would not serve Turkey's interests and could trigger retaliation.

"If the process is being handled like this, Turkey could not only lose its voting rights at the Council of Europe but even its membership," he said.

Article 90 of the Turkish Constitution provides that in the case of conflict between international agreements in the area of fundamental rights and freedoms, the provisions of international agreements shall prevail.

"Expelling ambassadors is not the way to defend national interests or to explain one's position on any given matter. Impulsive foreign policy with an eye on domestic politics has only served to aggravate Turkey's isolation. This should not be deepened through rash action," tweeted Alper Coskun, the former Turkish ambassador to Azerbaijan and senior fellow at Washington-based think-tank Carnegie Endowment.

In the past 50 years, Turkey has declared only three diplomats – one from Libya in 1986, Syria in 1986, and Iran in 1989 – as persona non grata, while the last foreign ambassador Ankara declared persona non grata was an Iranian envoy.



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[Arab coalition: Over 200 Houthis killed in strikes on Juba and Al-Kasarah](#)

Sun, 2021-10-24 16:30

RIYADH: The Arab coalition said on Sunday that more than 264 Houthis had been killed and 36 military vehicles destroyed in air strikes on two districts near the central Yemeni city of Marib.

The coalition said it had carried out 88 air strikes on the districts of Juba and Al-Kasarah during the last 72 hours.

Juba is some 50 km south of Marib, whilst Al-Kasarah is 30 km northwest of the city.

Later on Sunday, the coalition said it had destroyed an explosive-laden Houthi boat on the Kamaran Island that had been prepared to carry out an imminent attack.

The Houthi militia continues to violate the Stockholm Agreement and the cease-fire in Hodeidah, the coalition said.

The coalition added that the hostile behavior of the Houthi militia threatens navigation in the Bab Al-Mandab Strait and the southern Red Sea

On Saturday, the Arab coalition said it had destroyed four explosive-laden Houthi boats in Yemen's western province of Hodeidah.

Warplanes targeted Al-Jabanah coastal base, east of Hodeidah city, where the vessels had been prepared to attack international ships sailing through the Red Sea, the coalition said.



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More than 90 Houthis killed, 16 military vehicles destroyed in coalition strikes on Jubah and Al-KassarahArab coalition destroys four explosive-laden boats in Yemeni province

[Sudan: Political tensions continue as protesters block roads](#)

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Sun, 2021-10-24 10:15

CAIRO: Pro-military protesters briefly blocked major roads and bridges in

Sudan's capital Sunday, amid growing tensions between the generals and the pro-democracy movement that fueled the uprising against autocratic former president Omar Al-Bashir.

The development came a day after US Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Jeffrey Feltman met with military and civilian leaders in Khartoum to find a compromise to the dispute.

The souring ties between the military and civilians in the ruling government threaten Sudan's fragile transition to democracy since the military's ouster of Al-Bashir and his Islamist government in April 2019 after nearly three decades of autocratic rule.

The current crisis surfaced with a coup attempt last month. Officials blamed Al-Bashir loyalists for the move. But the generals lashed out at the civilian part of the government, accusing politicians of seeking government posts rather than helping ease people's economic suffering.

Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, the head of the ruling Sovereign Council, said that dissolving the government of Prime Minister Abdullah Hamdok could resolve the ongoing political crisis. That suggestion was rejected by hundreds of thousands of pro-democracy protesters who took to the streets of Khartoum and elsewhere in the country Thursday.

That generals' accusations, echoed by Burhan and his deputy, Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, commander of the feared paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, have aroused fears among civilians that the military may eventually hijack the country's transition to civilian rule.

Pro-military protesters rallied in Khartoum earlier this month, echoing Burhan's demands. The protesters have since held a sit-in outside the presidential palace in the capital. Last week, they attempted to storm the Cabinet headquarters as Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok met with his Cabinet. Security forces dispersed them using tear gas.

On Saturday, dozens of pro-military protesters stormed the reception area of the headquarters of the country's state-run news agency and set tires ablaze outside the agency offices. It delayed a news conference for pro-democracy activists, according to Mohamed Abdel-Hamid, director of SUNA news agency. In an escalation Sunday, pro-military demonstrators cut off major roads and bridges, including the Mec Nimr Bridge, which links Khartoum's downtown with other areas of the capital, according to activist and rights defender Tahani Abbas. The move caused traffic to clog the streets early Sunday, the first work day of the week, especially Nile Street, a main traffic artery in Khartoum.

"What is happening ... is an official coup sponsored by Burhan," she said. Abbas shared photos of protesters blocking a bridge with passenger buses and vehicles being turned back.

Later in the day, security forces dispersed the protesters using tear gas to open the blocked roads. Video on social media purportedly showed protesters fleeing over the bridge and on Nile Street.

Feltman, the US envoy, met in Khartoum with Buhan, Dagalo and Hamdok and "emphasized US support for a civilian democratic transition in accordance with the expressed wishes of the Sudanese people," the US Embassy in Khartoum said.

He urged Sudanese leaders "to commit to working together to implement the constitutional declaration and the Juba Peace Agreement" between the government and an alliance of rebel groups, the embassy said.

The tensions come weeks ahead of a scheduled rotation of the leadership on the ruling sovereign council from the military to civilians, according to the constitutional declaration that established the joint government in August 2019.



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