

Libya tensions rise

Libya parliament back Egyptian intervention if necessary

● UAE yesterday issued an implicit warning to GNA

AFP | Benghazi, Libya

A war of words was heating up yesterday in oil-rich and conflict-torn Libya, where two rival administrations are battling for control and tensions have risen between outside forces Egypt and Turkey.

The Libyan parliament aligned with strongman Khalifa Haftar issued a statement late Monday giving in-principle support to a threatened Egyptian military intervention against what it termed a "Turkish occupation".

Libya has been torn by violence since the 2011 ouster of long-time dictator Muammar Gaddafi in a NATO-backed uprising, and the conflict has since drawn in multiple foreign powers.

The Turkish-backed and UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli in the west has been fighting Haftar's forces, which are supported by Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Russia and others.

The GNA, with stepped-up Turkish support, in June repelled a 14-month siege of the capital by Haftar and launched a counter-offensive that is now stalled outside the coastal city of Sirte, Gaddafi's hometown.

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, alarmed by Haftar's setback, warned last month that Cairo could send troops into Libya. He threatened to send in his army if GNA forces capture Sirte, which is located more than 800 kilometres (500 miles) from the Egyptian border and now held by Haftar's troops backed by a local Salafist militia.

The parliament said Monday on its website that it would back an Egyptian intervention if necessary "to protect the national security of Libya and Egypt if they see an imminent danger to both our countries".

Libya and Egypt should work



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (L) and Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi



UAE MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, ANWAR GARGASH

The drums of the war raging around Sirte in Libya threaten serious developments and dangerous humanitarian and political consequences. We in the UAE call for an immediate ceasefire and for wisdom to prevail



Convoy of the "Tripoli Brigade", a militia loyal to the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA), parade through Martyrs' Square at the centre of the GNA-held Libyan capital Tripoli

together, the assembly said, "to guarantee the occupier's defeat and preserve our shared national security" in the face of "the dangers posed by the Turkish occupation".

'Drums of war'

Sisi's warning was perceived as a "declaration of war" by the GNA but received the full support of the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Jordan, all members of the pro-Haftar axis.

GNA spokesman Mohamad Gnounou pledged Tuesday that their forces would advance

toward the "cities taken hostage" and "eradicate all outlaw groups", an allusion to the pro-Haftar forces.

Egypt's military said Saturday it had carried out exercises involving navy, airforce and special forces near the Libyan border in response to the "severe and rapid changes" in the region.

The UAE yesterday issued an implicit warning to GNA forces advancing on Sirte.

"The drums of the war raging around Sirte in Libya threaten serious developments and dan-

gerous humanitarian and political consequences," tweeted its minister of state for foreign affairs, Anwar Gargash.

"We in the UAE call for an immediate ceasefire and for wisdom to prevail," he added, calling for inter-Libyan dialogue "within clear international frameworks".

Sisi in June called Sirte a "red line" for Egypt, while Ankara has urged Haftar to withdraw from the strategic city and negotiate a ceasefire.

Libya expert Jalel Harchaoui of the Clingendael Institute in The Hague said Tuesday that, despite the rhetoric, he did not see the imminent risk of major military escalation.

"The military reality around Sirte has not changed significantly in the past two weeks," he said.

Sirte remained well-defended by Russian and Syrian mercenaries with UAE logistical support as well by dangerous minefields to the west of the city.

"Cairo's political desire for a visible and official Egyptian intervention remains very tenuous," he added.

At a time of regional economic and pandemic woes, he said, "Egypt has other problems at the moment".

Saudi sees decrease in new COVID-19 infections



General view of Riyadh city, after the Saudi government eased a curfew

Reuters

Saudi Arabian officials said yesterday the kingdom has seen a decrease in the number of new coronavirus cases over the past seven days.

The kingdom recorded 2,692 new infections yesterday, the fourth day in a row the numbers have stayed below 3,000. Saudi Arabia has recorded a total of 237,803 cases with 2,283 deaths.

The number of new daily infections had reached their highest point of 4,919 on June 16, but those numbers have been steadily declining since early July, falling below 3,000 for the first time on July 10.

"We've noticed a decrease in the number of cases, and in particular the number of critical cases," Health Ministry spokesman Mohammed Abdelali told a news conference.

"We've noticed a stabilisation of the numbers of cases we're monitoring and a decline in the curve."

US says room for sanctions in response to China in South China Sea

Reuters | Washington

The top US diplomat for East Asia said yesterday that the United States could respond with sanctions against Chinese officials and enterprises involved in coercion in the South China Sea.

"Nothing is off the table ... there is room for that," David Stilwell, the assistant secretary for East Asia, told a Washington think tank when asked if sanctions were a possible US response to Chinese actions.

Stilwell spoke a day after the United States rejected China's claims to offshore resources in



David Stilwell, U.S. Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

most of the South China Sea as "completely unlawful," a stance Beijing said raised tensions in the region.

Stubborn fire aboard US warship in San Diego injures 21 people

Reuters | San Diego

Flames raged for hours on Sunday aboard a US warship docked at Naval Base San Diego, sending

21 people to the hospital with minor injuries and prompting a relocation of two other Navy vessels moored nearby, military and local fire officials said.

The San Diego Fire-Rescue Department reported an explosion in conjunction with the blaze, which broke

out at about 8:30 a.m. local time (1530 GMT) aboard the USS Bonhomme Richard, an amphibious assault vessel in port for routine maintenance.

The blast was believed to have been triggered by the rapid initial release of heat from a confined space under pressure, as opposed to an explosion of fuel or ordnance, Rear Admiral Philip Sobeck told a news conference on Sunday evening.

While the pre-

cise source of the blaze was unknown, the fire originated in a lower cargo hold of the ship and spread into the decks above it, consuming materials that typically burn in an office or apartment fire, Sobeck said.

No immediate evidence of foul play

Navy spokesman Mike Raney said there was no immediate evidence of foul play.

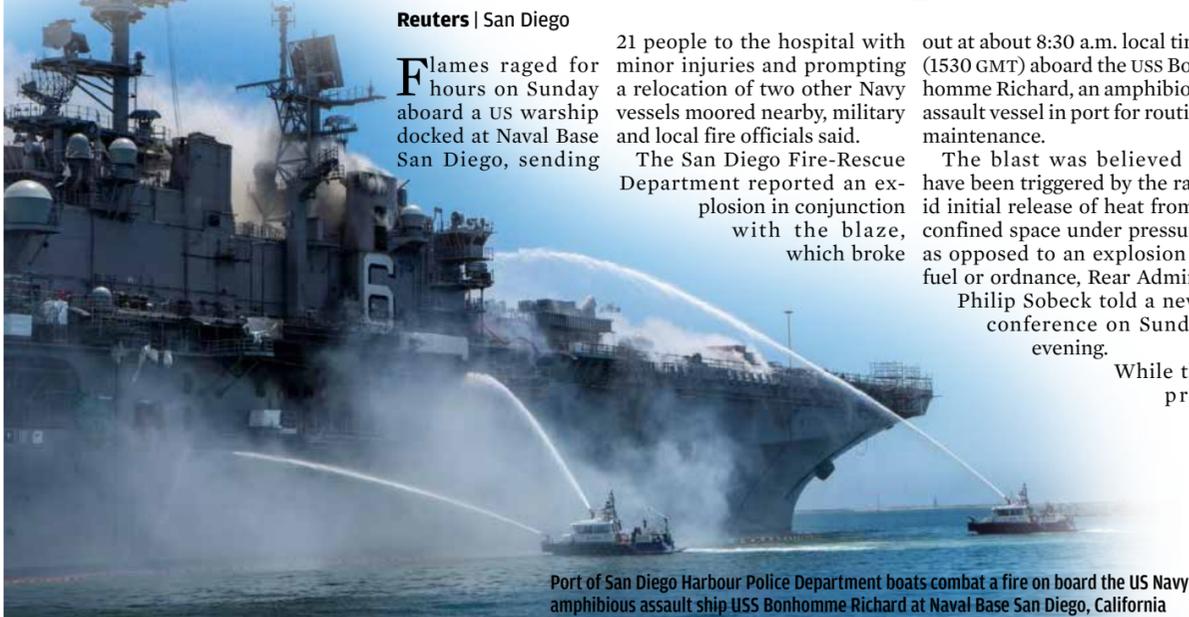
Ammunition normally carried aboard warships at sea had already been unloaded as a standard safety precaution before the vessel was placed into maintenance, Navy officials said.

Roughly 1 million gallons of fuel remained isolated "well below where any heat source is," and fire crews worked all day to "make sure that's not affected," the admiral said.

Palls of thick, acrid smoke visible for miles around the base engulfed much of the 844-foot (257 meter) warship for several hours, as about half a dozen firefighting boats in the harbor trained streams of water onto the burning vessel.

Seventeen sailors and four civilians were taken to local hospitals for treatment of non-life-threatening injuries, and all those who were aboard the warship - about 160 personnel - were accounted for, the Navy said in a statement.

Sobeck said the hospitalized sailors were all listed in stable condition. Navy officials said the injuries consisted mainly of smoke inhalation, heat exhaustion and minor burns. The vessel normally carries a crew of roughly 1,000.



Port of San Diego Harbour Police Department boats combat a fire on board the US Navy amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard at Naval Base San Diego, California