

International

# US Jewish community tries to defend itself as attacks rise

## Guards, 'Tactical Rabbi' to train volunteers on the use of weapons

LOS ANGELES: Armed guards, safety assessments and now even a "Tactical Rabbi" to train volunteers on the use of weapons—such is the reality today at synagogues in the United States facing mounting anti-Semitic attacks. It is at a shooting range in the hills overlooking Los Angeles that a team of AFP reporters met recently with Raziell Cohen, dubbed the "Tactical Rabbi," who was sporting a 9mm pistol on his hip and carrying a semi-automatic rifle over his shoulder.

Cohen was trying to determine how well books can stop bullets. The idea is to transform a library at a synagogue or Jewish school into a shelter in the event of an active shooter situation. "We're trying to bridge the gap between the time that the shooting begins and law enforcement arrives," he said. "The expression that goes on is that we carry guns because we can't carry police officers, which is not just a joke," added Cohen. "The reality is that there can't be police everywhere all the time."

Cohen, who has been passionate about guns since his youth, is a security expert and certified shooting instructor who has taken part in counter-terrorism courses given by retired and elite active-duty military personnel. Born into a religious family, Cohen is also a rabbi for the Chabad-Lubavitch community in Los Angeles. Chabad is a sect of Hasidic Judaism, and Los Angeles is second only to Brooklyn, New York in its number of Chabad congregations.

Cohen said his expertise in security took on more meaning after the April 27 shooting at the Chabad Poway Synagogue near San Diego that left one dead and three wounded. It came six months after a shooting at a Pittsburgh synagogue left 11 people dead—the worst attack against Jewish people in the modern history of the United States. "One of the Ten Commandments that's taught very incorrectly is 'Thou

shall not kill,'" Cohen said. "It's not 'Thou shall not kill,' it's 'Thou shall not murder.' In fact, in the Bible it says that you have the obligation to protect yourself."

Anti-Semitic incidents in the United States remained at near-record high levels in 2018, according to the Anti-Defamation League, which recorded 1,879 incidents, the third-highest level since the 1970s. 2017 had marked an unprecedented rise in such incidents, with 1,986 cases of harassment, vandalism or anti-Semitic attacks recorded, the organization said. Cohen said given the uptick, it was the duty of the Jewish community to learn to fend for itself. But not everyone agrees with Cohen's reasoning.

### 'Guns not the answer'

Ivan Wolkind, chief operating officer of the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles and founder of the federation's security program, said some 500 groups have joined the program, exchanging information and security tips with police or the FBI. Wolkind, a reserve officer with the Los Angeles Police Department, said while he wholeheartedly believes in prevention, he is not convinced that arming worshippers is the answer. "I can't make a judgment as to whether or not people should have weapons in their place of worship but what I can say is to have people carrying weapons without a huge amount of training... is potentially very dangerous," he said.

He said his program focuses on prevention rather than encouraging worshippers to arm themselves. "So we put 98 percent of our energy into what we call left of bang," he said. "So if you think of a timeline where there is pre-incident—everything that happens before an incident—and then the bang is what happens and then there's everything to the right. "We put 98 percent of our energy into left of bang—recognizing, pre-



PACOIMA: Rabbi Raziell Cohen, aka 'Tactical Rabbi', looks on as a student shoots a Glock 9mm pistol during a demonstration at the Angeles Shooting Ranges in Pacoima, California. —AFP

venting and mitigating the effects of an attack."

Wolkind said he fears that people who undergo weapons training may feel overconfident and ignore warning signs leading up to a shooting. "They may stop looking for some of the pre-incident indicators that I feel are so important," he said. He said his secu-

rity program has been so successful that churches, mosques and even the Church of Scientology have reached out for advice. "We've got a lot of experience," he said. "And we are absolutely open to sharing that with anyone and everyone as other people try to do the same thing in their communities." —AFP

## How the crisis in Sudan unfolded

KHARTOUM: The deadly crackdown by security forces on protesters in Sudan follows a building standoff between the ruling military and demonstrators demanding civilian rule. The unrest started in December 2018, when citizens revolted against a tripling of the price of bread. In April demonstrators launched a sit-in in front of the military headquarters in Khartoum to demand the departure of the regime of long-time president Omar Al-Bashir.

He was ousted by the army a few days later, but the protesters remained in place in their thousands to press their demand for the military to cede power. On June 3 security forces broke up the sit-in, launching a crackdown that left more than 100 dead in just a few days. Here is a summary of events leading up to the military's move to end the long-running protest.

### Talks break down

On May 20, after several breakthroughs, talks between the ruling military council and protest leaders reach a deadlock over who should head a new governing body which should oversee a three-year transition to civilian rule. Protest leaders insist a civilian must head the new sovereign council and that civilians should make up the majority of its members, proposals rejected by the ruling generals. Islamist movements back the military in the hope it will keep sharia, Islamic law, in place since a 1989 coup. On May 28-29, thousands of workers in both

the public and private sectors strike across the country to pressure the military rulers.

### Saudi, UAE, Egypt back military

In late May, the head of the military council, Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, visits Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. As commander of the country's ground forces, Burhan is reported to have coordinated the deployment of Sudanese troops within the Saudi-led coalition which intervened in 2015 in Yemen to support the government against Houthi rebels accused of links with Iran.

The three regional powers have thrown their weight behind the Sudanese military for fear of a repeat of the turbulence that followed the Arab Spring in several countries in 2011. Qatar, however, a long-time ally of Bashir but also a friend to Iran and involved in a bitter dispute with Saudi Arabia and its allies, has seen its influence in Sudan wane since the start of the crisis. On May 31, the military council closes down the Khartoum bureau of the Qatari news channel Al Jazeera, which regularly broadcasts footage of demonstrations. There is no reason given for the order.

### Bloody crackdown

On June 3, men in military fatigues move in on the protest camp outside the army headquarters and disperse the thousands gathered there with force. More than 100 have been killed and hundreds wounded since the start of the crackdown, according to the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors, close to the demonstrators. Internet connectivity is disrupted.

A day later the military announces that all previous agreements with protest leaders on the transition are scrapped and that elections will be called "within a period not



OMDURMAN, Sudan: A Sudanese man rides his motorbike around a makeshift barricade blocking a street for cars in Khartoum's twin city Omdurman on the first day of a civil disobedience campaign across Sudan. —AFP

exceeding nine months". Protesters denounce a putsch. In Khartoum and across the country, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) - paramilitaries with origins in the 16-year-old war in the western region of Darfur - are thought to have been behind the crackdown. They are accused of atrocities, including attacks on hospitals. The international community demands an end to the violence and resumption of dialogue.

### Civil disobedience

On June 5, as gunfire crackles across the capital, the army says it is open to negotiations "with no restriction". Protest leaders turn down the call for talks with the

military council "that kills people". Saudi Arabia expresses "great concern" at developments and calls for a resumption of dialogue. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, deputy chief of the ruling military council and head of the RSF, says the country will not be allowed to slip into "chaos". Opposition figures are arrested on June 8, a day after meeting Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed who had travelled to Khartoum as a mediator. On June 9, police fire warning shots and tear gas to disperse demonstrators building roadblocks in the capital, in response to a call by protest leaders for "civil disobedience" across the country. Markets and shops are closed in several Sudanese towns and cities. —AFP

## Algeria and Sudan: New chapters of Arab revolt

PARIS: The Arab world is again being rocked by revolt, with uprisings in Algeria and Sudan seeing long-time leaders ousted, although in both the military has frustrated popular demands for change. A first wave of revolt in 2011 caused shock waves across many Arab countries, starting in Tunisia where president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was ousted in January after 23 years in power. While Tunisia has since been able to transition to democracy, the results in other countries is bleak.

In Egypt, where mass uprisings forced Hosni Mubarak to quit in February 2011 after ruling for almost three decades, power has settled in the hands of former army chief Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, accused of repression. Other countries caught up in the 2011 "Arab Spring", such as Libya, Syria and Yemen, have descended into civil war and chaos. Here is a summary of main events in the new Arab world uprisings in Algeria and Sudan.

### Algeria

Unprecedented demonstrations erupt in February 2019 after President Abdelaziz Bouteflika says he is planning to stand for a fifth term in upcoming elections. In his 80s, weakened after a stroke in 2013 and rarely seen in public, the wheelchair-bound Bouteflika has been in power since 1999. As

protests grow to demand he step aside, army chief Ahmed Gaid Salah on March 10 pledges that the military shares the "values and principles" of the people.

It is a turning point, with Gaid Salah among those considered loyal to Bouteflika. Two weeks later he demands the president quits or be declared medically unfit to rule. On April 2 Gaid Salah demands impeachment proceedings against Bouteflika. Abandoned by his loyal supporters, the president submits his resignation hours later. But Algerians continue to protest, demanding the departure of the entire ruling system, including Gaid Salah who has become the country's powerbroker.

They reject plans for a presidential election in July, saying Algeria's institutions are too tarnished by corruption to guarantee a legitimate vote. There are massive demonstrations in the capital on May 31, for a 15th consecutive Friday and despite a spate of arrests and detentions. "No elections with this gang in power," the crowd shouts. The constitutional council says on June 2 that a July election would be impossible as only two people had submitted their candidature and both were rejected.

### Sudan

Protests in December against a hike in bread prices quickly grow into rolling demonstrations for Omar al-Bashir to quit after three decades of iron-fisted rule. On February 22, Bashir declares a nationwide state of emergency. But the protests grow and on April 6 thousands set up camp outside the army headquarters in Khartoum, some taking inspiration from Bouteflika's ouster days earlier.

On April 11, military authorities announce they have removed Bashir and

that a transitional military council will govern for two years. Protesters denounce a "military coup" and demand civilian rule. Talks between protest leaders and military rulers appear to make headway but break down on May 20 over the composition of a transitional authority. Protesters maintain pressure on the ruling military council, with demonstrations and a major strike on May 28-29.

In late May military council chief Abdel

Fattah al-Burhan visits Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, both firmly against popular uprisings, as he seeks regional support. On June 3, troops and paramilitaries disperse the protest camp outside the army HQ with force, leaving more than 100 dead, according to the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors that is close to the demonstrators. On June 5, protest leaders turn down a military council offer for elections and talks. —AFP

## Sudan's RSF, 'new version' of Darfur Arab militias

CAIRO: Heavily armed and dressed in desert fatigues, Sudan's Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have made their presence felt in Khartoum since military generals cracked down on a long-running sit-in. Piled onto pickup trucks mounted with machine guns or patrolling the streets on foot, they are seen by some protesters as a new version of the infamous Janjaweed militias accused of horrific abuses in Darfur. The RSF is a paramilitary force led by the deputy head of the ruling Transitional Military Council, Lieutenant General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, nicknamed Himeidi.

Dagalo was a former leader of one of the Arab Janjaweed militias at the height of the conflict in Darfur that started in 2003. The Janjaweed militias were recruited when Khartoum trained and equipped Arab raiders to crush an ethnic minority rebellion in the area. The groups were sent to attack villages on camel and horseback as part of a campaign of terror that saw now ousted president Omar al-Bashir indicted for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

In 2013, during clashes between the Arab militias and the security forces in Darfur, "Dagalo was one of the few commanders to stay loyal to the regime, which got him chosen for the RSF - the new paramilitary force aiming to control and strengthen the Janjaweed," said Jerome Tubiana, a researcher specialized in Sudan. Under the control of Sudan's powerful National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) and then the presidency, the RSF was sent to fight insurgents in Darfur, and in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states.

But the force was accused by rights groups of abuses against civilians in Darfur, such as rape, extrajudicial killings, looting, torture and burning villages. In 2014, the ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda called them the "new version of the Janjaweed". That same year, Abbas Abdelaziz, the NISS officer jointly in charge of the force with Dagalo, said calling the RSF "Janjaweed" was an insult, insisting the men had combat experience and had "become professionals". —AFP

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