

Lebanon sets out its claim in maritime border talks

Author:

Thu, 2020-10-29 01:12

BEIRUT: Lebanese negotiators laid out their claim to maritime territory on Wednesday as they began a second round of talks with Israel over their disputed sea border.

The contested zone in the Mediterranean is an estimated 860 square kilometers known as Block 9, which is rich in oil and gas. Future negotiations will also tackle the countries' land border.

Wednesday's meeting took place at the headquarters of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) amid tight security. An assistant of the UN special coordinator for Lebanon chaired the session, and the US Ambassador to Algeria, John Desrocher, was the mediator.

A military source told Arab News: "The Lebanese side considers that Israel, through the border line it drew for itself, is eating into huge areas of Lebanese economic waters."

The Lebanese delegation produced maps and documents to support their claim to the disputed waters.

In indirect talks between Lebanon and Israel in 2012, US diplomat Frederick Hoff proposed "a middle line for the maritime borders, whereby Lebanon would get 58 percent of the disputed area and Israel would be given the remaining 42 percent, which translates to 500 square kilometers for Lebanon and 300 square kilometers for Israel."

On the eve of Wednesday's meeting, Lebanese and Israeli officials met to discuss a framework to resolve the conflict through the implementation of UN Resolution 1701.

UNIFIL Commander Maj. Gen. Stefano Del Col praised the "constructive role that both parties played in calming tensions along the Blue Line" and stressed the necessity of "taking proactive measures and making a change in the prevailing dynamics regarding tension and escalation."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

Lebanon, Israel hold first round of talks
Lebanon, Israel set to hold first maritime talks

[US accuses Syria of delaying constitution ahead of election](#)

Thu, 2020-10-29 01:05

NEW YORK: The US and several Western allies on Tuesday accused the Syrian regime of deliberately delaying the drafting of a new constitution to waste time until presidential elections in 2021, and avoid UN-supervised voting as called for by the UN Security Council.

US Deputy Ambassador Richard Mills urged the Security Council to “do everything in its power” to prevent Bashar Assad regime from blocking agreement on a new constitution in 2020. The Trump administration believes Assad’s hope is to “invalidate the work” of UN special envoy Geir Pedersen who has been trying to spearhead action on a constitution, and the council’s call for a political transition.

The Security Council resolution adopted in December 2015 unanimously endorsed a road map to peace in Syria that was approved in Geneva on June 30, 2012 by representatives of the UN, Arab League, EU, Turkey and all five permanent

Security Council members – the US, Russia, China, France and Britain.

It calls for a Syrian-led political process starting with the establishment of a transitional governing body, followed by the drafting of a new constitution and ending with UN-supervised elections. The resolution says the free and fair elections should meet “the highest international standards” of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians – including members of the diaspora – eligible to participate.

At a Russian-hosted Syrian peace conference in January 2018, an agreement was reached to form a 150-member committee to draft a new constitution. That took until September 2019, and since then only three meetings have been held with little progress.

Pedersen, the UN envoy, told the Security Council on Tuesday he was unable to convene a fourth meeting in October because the government wouldn't accept a compromise agenda which the opposition agreed to. During his just concluded visit to Damascus, he said there was “some valuable narrowing of the differences” that could enable consensus on agendas for the next two meetings.

“If we are able to find agreement in the next two days, it should be possible to meet in Geneva sometime in the month of November,” Pedersen said, dropping the Nov. 23 date in his prepared speech.

Mills, the US envoy, urged Pedersen “to take any measures he thinks are appropriate to facilitate the parties' efforts ... and also to identify to the council who is blocking progress.”

“Syria is wholly unprepared to carry out elections in a free, fair and transparent manner that would include the participation of the Syrian diaspora,” Mills said. “This is why we need the constitutional committee to work, and why we need the UN to accelerate its planning to ensure Syria's upcoming elections are credible.”

German Ambassador Christoph Heusgen called Assad's “delaying and obstruction tactics” on the constitutional committee's work “just detestable.”

He said Russia, Syria's most important ally, “should finally use its influence by, for instance, just cutting military aid and stopping its support, so that the Syrian regime finally plays ball.”

Syria's tactics are clear, Heusgen said. “They want to waste time until the presidential elections in 2021. The regime should not have any illusions. The elections will not be recognized if they are held under the present circumstances.”

French Ambassador Nicolas De Riviere also criticized Assad's “refusal to engage in good faith” and called for preparations to begin for UN-supervised elections that include the diaspora. France won't recognize results that don't comply with these provisions, he said, stressing: “We will not be fooled by the regime's attempts to legitimize itself.”

Russia's ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, made no mention of the April presidential election and countered that Syrians must have "the opportunity to negotiate without interference from the outside."

"The work of the constitutional committee should not be subject to any deadlines," he said, expressing hope that Pedersen's mediation will enable the committee's work to continue "in line with the agenda agreed by the Syrians."

Russia also sparred with Western ambassadors over its veto threats that led to the closure of two border crossings to deliver aid to Syria – one in the northeast and one in the northwest – leaving only one crossing to Idlib in the northwest.

The US, Germany, France, Britain, Belgium and others criticized the border crossing closures.

UN humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock told the council that Syrian government deliveries across conflict lines to the northeast are "not delivering at the scale or frequency required to meet the current health needs." He said one hospital received only 450 gowns in April, and another received nothing for its maternity wing.

Lowcock also said "the situation of families across Syria is truly desperate," citing food prices more than 90 percent higher than six months ago.

Russia's Nebenzia responded, noting "with satisfaction the progress in UN humanitarian deliveries from inside Syria including through cross-line routes," saying this "proves" the government is providing aid to people including in areas not under its control.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[United States](#)

[Syria](#)

[Syrian regime](#)

[Bashar Assad](#)

Syrians spruce up famed Crusader castle after years of war Syria's Bashar Assad cuts tax for low-income workers

[Sudanese in Israel fear being returned after normalization](#)

Thu, 2020-10-29 00:33

TEL AVIV: Sudanese asylum seekers living in Israel fear being kicked out once ties are normalized between the two countries, though some hope their presence will be seen as an advantage.

Technically at war with Israel for decades, Sudan on Friday became the third Arab country this year to announce it is normalizing ties with the Jewish state, following the UAE and Bahrain in August.

But since the announcement, members of the Sudanese community in Israel have been "very afraid" of being sent back, said 26-year-old Barik Saleh, a

Sudanese asylum seeker who lives in a suburb of Tel Aviv.

Israel counts a Sudanese population of around 6,000, mostly asylum seekers.

Thousands of others left or were forced to return after Sudan split in 2011 when South Sudan won its independence – only for the fledgling country to plunge into civil war.

Some of the Sudanese – often labeled as “infiltrators” for crossing illegally into Israeli territory before being granted permission to stay – were minors when they arrived.

They are not always allowed to work, and they cannot gain Israeli citizenship.

Saleh, who grew up in West Darfur, was just nine when his family fled war to neighboring Chad.

“My parents are in a refugee camp,” said the young man, who arrived after journeying through Libya and Egypt, and has lived in Israel for 13 years.

“I will be the first one for normalization,” he said.

“But if I will be deported from here, then I will be in 100 percent danger,” he added.

Former President Omar Bashir oversaw Sudan’s civil war in the Darfur region from 2003. Some 300,000 people died in the conflict and 2.5 million were forced from their homes. Bashir, in detention in Khartoum, is wanted by the International Criminal Court over charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur.

“We are here because it is not safe to go back to Sudan yet,” said 31-year-old Monim Haroon, who comes from a stronghold region of Darfuri rebel leader Abdelwahid Nour’s Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) faction.

“The reason why we are here in Israel is not because of the lack of a diplomatic relationship between Sudan and Israel, but because of the genocide and ethnic cleansing that we went through,” Haroon said.

Sudan’s transitional government, in place after the fall of Bashir in 2019, signed a landmark peace deal with an alliance of rebel groups earlier this month.

But Nour’s rebel faction was not one of them.

Some of those in power in Sudan today were also in control under Bashir.

They include Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, vice president of Sudan’s ruling transitional sovereign council.

He heads the feared Rapid Support Forces, long accused by human rights groups of committing widespread abuses in Sudan’s Darfur provinces.

"For me it is very dangerous," said Haroon, who was previously head of Nour's office in Israel.

"Unless Abdelwahid signs a peace agreement, I cannot go back."

In Neve Shaanan, a suburb of Tel Aviv known for its asylum seeker community, stalls and restaurants offer Sudanese food, including a version of the popular bean dish "foul," served with grated cheese.

Usumain Baraka, a smartly dressed 26-year-old who works nearby, has finished a master's degree in public policy at a university in Herzliya, north of Tel Aviv.

Like Saleh, he too was nine when he fled Darfur for Chad, where his mother still lives in a refugee camp.

"They (militiamen) killed my dad and my big brother, and they took everything we had in the village," Baraka said.

"At one point I had two options: To go back to Darfur to fight for a rebel group, or leave the camp and try to have a normal life."

While the young men who AFP spoke to expressed fear that their presence in Israel would be at risk under the normalization agreement, some said they would like the Jewish state to see it as an asset rather than a burden.

Haroon said Sudanese in Israel could be a "bridge" between the countries, not only in the private sector, but also to help build understanding between the two peoples.

"I hope the Israeli government will see this potential asset, the important role that we can bring promoting the interest of the two countries," he said.

Both Sudan and Israel have said in recent days that migration would be one of the issues on the agenda during upcoming meetings on bilateral cooperation.

"Israel is my second home," said asylum seeker Saleh. "There is no language that I speak better than Hebrew, even my own local language."

But Jean-Marc Liling, an Israeli lawyer specialized in asylum issues, warned that with the normalization announcement, the return of Sudanese asylum seekers would likely be on the government's radar.

"The first thing that comes to the government's mind is: we'll be able to send back the 'infiltrators'," Liling said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Israel](#)

[Sudan](#)

[asylum seekers](#)

Sudan says it will discuss trade, migration deals with Israel Israeli envoys will travel to Sudan for normalization deal, Netanyahu says

[Algeria's president transferred to Germany for treatment](#)

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

1603911785759490000

Wed, 2020-10-28 19:01

ALGIERS: Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune was transferred to Germany for specialist medical treatment Wednesday, a day after his country's presidency announced he had been hospitalized but did not reveal why. Several senior officials in the 75-year-old president's entourage developed COVID-19 symptoms on Saturday, and the president was placed in what the government called "voluntary preventive confinement." It was unclear if Tebboune's current hospitalization was connected.

The transfer to Germany was made at the request of the presidency staff, according to a press release from the presidency broadcast on national television Wednesday.

The statement announcing the Algerian leader's hospitalization on Tuesday said his condition was stable. It did not reveal the cause of his illness or say when the hospitalization occurred.

The statement said that while Tebboune was admitted to a specialized care unit in Algiers on the recommendation of his doctors, "the state of health of the president of the republic...does not inspire any concern."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Algeria](#)

[President Abdelmadjid Tebboune](#)

Algeria to inaugurate Bouteflika-era mega mosque
Algeria's president enters specialised treatment unit, his condition is stable – statement

[**EU warns Houthis against blocking**](#)

access to decaying tanker

Wed, 2020-10-28 21:00

AL-MUKALLA: The Houthis will be held accountable for a “regional catastrophe” if they continue to block access to a decaying oil tanker in the Red Sea, the EU has warned.

The Iran-backed militia is under pressure to allow inspection and maintenance of the Safer tanker, amid reports that parts of it have been eroded by rust.

The Houthis insist on sharing the proceeds from the sale of the tanker’s cargo – more than a million barrels of oil – and including engineers from China, Russia and Germany in the UN team of experts that would visit the tanker.

“The EU Heads of Mission call on Ansarallah (Houthis) to fully cooperate with the UN by allowing the team of experts to have unhindered access to the vessel and without preconditions or delay,” the EU delegation to Yemen said on Tuesday. “Unless the UN team is provided unhindered access, Ansarallah would be accountable in the event of a regional catastrophe and must therefore act with a sense of urgency and responsibility.”

The delegation warned that an oil spill would paralyze the port of Hodeidah, where most of the country’s food, fuel and goods pass through, and exacerbate Yemen’s already dire humanitarian situation. “It would heavily affect fisheries in the Red Sea coast as well as the marine ecosystem and may affect maritime trade,” the EU statement added.

The internationally recognized government of Yemen has accused the Houthis of using the decaying tanker as leverage to extract concessions, putting the lives of millions of people at risk and endangering the Red Sea’s entire marine ecosystem.

On Sunday, Information Minister Muammar Al-Aryani told the official news agency Saba that the international community had not been able to convince the Houthis to allow UN experts to board the tanker.

“For years, the Houthi militia has continued to play with this file, using it to achieve political and financial gains,” the minister said.

Earlier this month, a virtual meeting between the UN Yemen envoy’s office and the UN Office for Project Services with the Houthis about access ended in a deadlock after the rebels rejected the request.

On the battlefields, heavy fighting broke out in the northern province of Jouf during the last two days as government forces announced recapturing areas from the Houthis.

Yemen’s Ministry of Defense and local media reports said that army troops and allied tribesmen seized control of mountains near Al-Khanjer military base, east of Jouf, following a fresh assault on the Houthis.

Arab coalition aircraft targeted Houthi military gatherings and equipment east of Hazen, the provincial capital, preventing the Houthis from launching counterattacks on government forces.

At least two dozen Houthis were killed on Tuesday in heavy fighting in the Al-Makhdara region, west of Marib province. Fighting also claimed the lives of dozens of government troops, including high-ranking officers.

State media reported that Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi and his deputy Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmer were mourning Brig. Saleh Al-Farja Al-Shanani, a military commander, who was killed in Jouf.

Col. Abdullah Bin Dhaen, the director of Jouf's Al-Matammah District, was killed on Tuesday during an offensive, Rabia Al-Qurashi, the Yemeni army spokesman in the province, tweeted.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[European Union \(EU\)](#)

[Houthis](#)

[FSO Safer](#)

Yemen minister: UN failed to convince Houthis to allow access to decaying oil tanker
UN chief urges Yemen's Houthis to grant access to decaying oil tanker