

Turkey irked over joint declaration by Cyprus, Greece and Egypt

Author:

Fri, 2020-10-23 02:08

ISTANBUL: Turkey's Foreign Ministry on Thursday slammed a joint statement by Greece, Cyprus and Egypt that condemns Turkish energy exploration in the eastern Mediterranean and numerous "provocations" that they maintain are threatening regional peace.

The Foreign Ministry said in a statement that it "fully rejected the declaration containing baseless accusations and allegations."

During a trilateral regional summit on Wednesday in Nicosia, Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis urged Ankara to end its "aggressive" actions.

The joint statement also asked Turkey to accept Cyprus' invitation to enter negotiations for an agreement on maritime delimitations. Greece and Cyprus have signed maritime border agreements with Egypt while dismissing a similar deal that Ankara signed with Libya's Tripoli-based government as "legally invalid."

The Turkish Foreign Ministry said the declaration attacked Ankara rather than supporting peace and stability in the region. It repeated Turkey's position that cooperation could only take place with the inclusion of Turkish Cypriots in governing and sharing the resources of the ethnically divided island nation.

"We will continue with determination to protect our rights and the rights of Turkish Cypriots in the eastern Mediterranean," the ministry statement said. The trilateral summit took place amid high tensions between nominal NATO allies Greece and Turkey over maritime borders and energy rights.

In late summer, Turkey dispatched a research vessel escorted by warships to conduct seismic research in a part of the Mediterranean Sea that Greece claims as its territory, which prompted the Greek government to deploy its own warships.

Turkey pulled the research ship back to shore for several weeks for maintenance and to allow time for diplomacy but redeployed the Oruc Reis on a new energy exploration mission. A maritime announcement by Turkey says the Oruc Reis and two other ships would continue working in the area until Oct. 27.

Turkey also has had ships prospecting for oil and gas reserves in waters that Cyprus claims as its exclusive economic zone.



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Egyptian-Cypriot-Greece summit discusses Turkey's provocations
Greece accuses Turkey of 'imperialist fantasies'

[US slams Iran for 'smuggling' envoy into Yemen](#)

Thu, 2020-10-22 21:44

AL-MUKALLA: The US on Wednesday slammed the Iranian regime for installing a new ambassador to the Houthi militia in Yemen – a move that the State Department spokesperson said shows the extent of Iran's influence in the war-torn country.

Morgan Ortagus said the new ambassador is a member of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), who has links to Hezbollah in Lebanon.

"The Iranian regime smuggled Hassan Irloo (Eyrlou), an IRGC member tied to Lebanese Hezbollah, into Yemen under the guise of 'ambassador' to the Houthi militia," Ortagus said on Twitter, urging Yemenis to denounce Iran and its ambassador. "Iran's intent to use the Houthis to expand its malign influence

is clear. The Yemeni people should say no to Irloo and Iran.”

On Saturday, Iran’s Foreign Ministry said Hassan Eyrlou, the country’s new ambassador to Yemen, had arrived in Houthi-controlled Sanaa, a move that triggered uproar among the Yemeni public and officials.

Yemen’s Foreign Ministry on Monday sent a letter to the UN Security Council to complain about Iran’s announcement, accusing the Iranians of violating “international law and Security Council resolutions, including Resolution 2216.”

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

Iran’s announcement came as the Houthis and the internationally recognized government were swapping hundreds of prisoners.

Protesting against Iran’s continuing military and financial support to the Houthis, Yemen’s government severed ties with Iran in late 2015, expelling Iran’s ambassador to Yemen and withdrawing the Yemeni envoy in Tehran.

Despite this, Iranian diplomats have remained in Sanaa, while Houthi officials have held numerous meetings with senior Iranian officials in Tehran.

Reacting to US criticism of Iran’s move, Yemen’s government said that it backs US efforts to restrict Iran’s interference in Yemen. “We highly commend the firm stance of the US administration in curbing Iran’s expansionist ambitions. Yemen’s government and people have been struggling for five years to end the coup that was plotted by Iran’s Revolutionary Guard,” Information Minister Muammar Al-Aryani said on Twitter on Thursday.

Yemeni military and political experts say the Iranian regime is seeking to shore up the Houthis politically and militarily because the rebels are becoming increasingly politically isolated as their forces fail to make gains on the ground.

Brig. Gen. Abdu Abdullah Majili, a Yemeni army spokesman, said Iran’s new ambassador would command military activities against government forces and would facilitate the arrival of arms shipments to the Houthis.

“He is a military ruler from Iran who will govern this militia,” Majili told state media.

Political analysts also argue that by sending a new ambassador to Yemen, the Iranian regime sends a message to the world that it recognizes the Houthis as a legitimate authority in Yemen and confirms its support for the group.

“Iran wants to say that the Houthis are part of its camp and anyone wants to

end the war in Yemen should come to Tehran,” Najeeb Ghallab, undersecretary at Yemen’s Information Ministry and a political analyst, told Arab News, adding that Iran’s move would prolong the war in Yemen rather than leading to peace.

“The Houthi decision has become dependent on Iran and its agenda. This Iranian behavior will lead to prolonging the war in Yemen,” Ghallab said.



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Saudi project clears 192,467 Houthi mines in YemenUN Security Council demands 'unconditional' access to decaying Yemen tanker

[**A 'Saad' day for Lebanon: Hariri's fourth term as PM met with skepticism**](#)

Thu, 2020-10-22 21:47

BEIRUT: The decision to name Saad Hariri as Lebanon's next prime minister on Thursday was met with anger, derision and ridicule from jaded Lebanese.

Hariri will hold the position for the fourth time despite months of widespread protests calling for a radical change to how the country is governed.

The massive August explosion in Beirut, which was blamed on corruption among officials, added to the anger towards Lebanon's ruling class – a patchwork of sectarian, dynastic fiefdoms.

However, it appears the weeks of wrangling to find a new government after the previous one stood down in the aftermath of the blast has not produced the sea change many in the country had hoped for.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

The sight of Hariri, who leads the Sunni Future movement, sitting grim-faced next to 85-year-old President Michel Aoun and the Hezbollah aligned parliament speaker Nabih Berri, did little to bring hope to Lebanese suffering under a dire economic meltdown.

“Hariri's return as PM is a serious slap in the face to all victims of Aug. 4,” Fatima Al-Mahmoud, a freelance journalist, wrote on Twitter in reference to the explosion that killed almost 200 people.

“Their blood has gone in vain and no one will pay the price.”

On a serious note, Hariri's return as PM is a serious slap in the face to all victims of August 4. Their blood has gone in vain and no one will pay the price.

– Fatima (@fatimalmahmoud) [October 22, 2020](#)

Myriam Sassine, a Beirut-based film producer, said Hariri's return showed there is nothing but “disappointment and heartbreak” in Lebanon.

“A year after October's revolution and the resignation of Saad Hariri, Saad Hariri comes back as PM and savior,” she said. “The only change that happened is that we got robbed, violated and murdered while they're stronger than

ever.”

A year after October’s revolution & the resignation of [@saadhariri](#), Saad Hariri comes back as PM & savior. The only change that happened is that we got robbed, violated & murdered while they’re stronger than ever. There’s nothing but disappointment & heartbreak in [#Lebanon](#)

– Myriam Sassine (@sacinephile) [October 22, 2020](#)

Even the UN’s Special Coordinator for Lebanon Jan Kubis expressed his disappointment at the move.

He said the decision to bring back Hariri was taken by the country’s traditional political forces “regardless of their numerous failures in the past and deep skepticism about the future.”

“It is up to them to help Hariri, the designated PM rapidly create an empowered, action-oriented government, to start delivering the well-known reforms. Do not count on miracles, foreign elections or external donors – the rescue must start in Lebanon, by Lebanon,” Kubis said.

2/3 It is the traditional political forces that have again put on themselves to choose the way forward, regardless their numerous failures in the past and deep skepticism about the future

– Jan Kubis (@UNJanKubis) [October 22, 2020](#)

Amid the anger there was also ridicule, as many took to social media to mock Hariri’s return.

“Hariri is like every ex that cheats on you and then cries for a second chance,” wrote one Twitter user.

Others played a game of “spot the difference” with the official photo released today of Hariri, Aoun and Berri, compared to the images used during his previous appointments.

I'm great at this game "spot the differences"

- Coffee table
- Istiz's tie
- Statue
- Plant
- Saad's belly is smaller
- Aoun's hair went bye bye
- They got richer
- Nabih is younger now

Similarities

- Same people in the 3 pictures
- We are still idiots
- Definition of insanity pic.twitter.com/ccbVqefUj3
- lebfinance (@lebfinance) [October 22, 2020](#)

Hariri, 50, stepped down as prime minister almost a year ago as anti-government protests against economic conditions and calling for an overhaul of the system of government raged across the country.

Hariri was replaced by Hassan Diab, whose ineffectual tenure came to an end days after the explosion. The relatively unknown Mustapha Adib lasted for just a month after he took the position from Diab.

The pressure on Lebanon's leaders has not just come from within. French President Emmanuel Macron set a series of conditions to make sure any new government enacted reforms to stop Lebanon's slide to financial ruin.

Hariri was returned to the post after he secured the backing of a majority of MPs.

He said he would form a cabinet of "non politically aligned experts with the mission of economic, financial and administrative reforms contained in the French initiative roadmap."



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Saad Hariri begins consultations with MPs to form Lebanon government
Hariri in line to lead next Lebanese government

[Turkey confirms NATO fears over testing of Russian S-400 missile defense system](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-10-22 21:18

ANKARA: Turkey on Thursday officially confirmed the fears of its NATO allies that it had carried out testing of its controversial Russian-made S-400 missile defense system.

Trials of the \$2.5 billion anti-aircraft weaponry bought last year from

Moscow took place last week in the northern Turkish province of Sinop, just across the Black Sea from Russian territory.

In a Bloomberg interview, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said that the S-400 would not be integrated into NATO's command-and-control infrastructure, but would instead be "used as a standalone system similar to the use of Russian-made S-300 weapons that exist within NATO."

With this comparison, Akar implicitly referred to Athens, currently the top challenger to Turkey, which possesses the Russian-produced missiles in its arsenal.

Experts believe that the official statement on Turkey's testing of the Russian air defense system could stoke tensions between Ankara and Washington, which claims that the missiles pose a serious threat to alliance military equipment.

Meanwhile, NATO defense ministers met on Thursday to discuss issues affecting the alliance's security.

Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, Ankara office director of think tank The German Marshall Fund of the US, said Turkey's argument that the S-400 would be a standalone system not connected to NATO's radar network had been made several times but had failed to reassure the Americans.

The main concern of the NATO allies is that the S-400 could be used to gather sensitive intelligence via systems linked to the F-35 stealth fighter, the next-generation warplane of the alliance.

But Ankara has said that its acquisition of the Russian missiles was necessary to defend itself against current and emerging security threats in its region.

Turkey's participation in the co-production of the F-35 system was suspended by Washington last year as punishment for buying the Russian military hardware. However, the US had held back from imposing sanctions while the missiles remained in crates, but harsh economic measures are expected to kick in once the missiles are activated.

US Senate Foreign Relations Chair Jim Risch said this week that further sanctions against Turkey, as part of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), for testing the S-400s still topped his agenda for initiation after the presidential election.

New Jersey Sen. Bob Menendez also issued a statement last week in which he said: "Turkey must be sanctioned immediately."

Unluhisarcikli told Arab News: "The S-400s being used as a standalone system is unlikely to prevent CAATSA sanctions being imposed on Turkey."

Ankara has been delaying the activation of the system since April, the planned date for its operationalization. Last month, during a visit to Turkey, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg repeated that the S-400

system could not be integrated into the NATO air and missile defense system.

But Unluhisarcikli believes that the efficiency of the S-400 as a standalone system is highly dubious.

Joe Macaron, a Middle East foreign-policy analyst at the Arab Center, said the US did not trust Turkey to block any Russian attempt to infiltrate the F-35 system.

“The Turkish message about not integrating them into the NATO system is being met with suspicions because Turkey has been playing both the US and Russia for a while and benefiting from their bilateral tensions,” he said.

He felt that Turkey had a two-fold objective. “The first is linked to US domestic politics with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan struggling to get his US counterpart Donald Trump’s attention in the middle of his campaign or he is using the election season to force new preconditions for a potential Joe Biden presidency.

“And second, Erdogan feels a shifting US policy toward Turkey and testing the Russia defense system is a signal that he wants to talk with Washington. Whether Trump or Biden wins, there is no easy recipe for US policy toward Turkey,” Macaron added.



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Video shows missile fired where Turkey cleared way for S-400 test, prompting US warning Turkey tests the controversial S-400 defense system next week. What then?

Iraq PM in talks with UK's Boris Johnson on security, political reforms

Thu, 2020-10-22 17:14

LONDON: Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi and his British counterpart Boris Johnson discussed security challenges in the Middle East on Thursday. A-Khadimi met the UK leader at Downing Street as part of an a European tour. Johnson expressed his strong support for the Iraq government as they discussed economic reforms, the coronavirus pandemic and the continued effort to defeat Daesh.

The Twitter account of Al-Kadhimi's office said both leaders discussed issues of bilateral interest, and discussed recent political and security issues in Iraq and the region.

They also agreed on more cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

"It was agreed to increase more cooperation in the field of combating terrorism, as well as in the political and economic sectors, in light of the economic challenges that Iraq faces," his office said.

Prior to his UK trip, Al-Kadhimi met with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris and German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin.

During these visits, Al-Kadhimi discussed Iraq's main challenges such as the fight against terrorism and foreign interference in its affairs.

The Iraqi leader, who became prime minister in May, has a particularly affinity with the UK, having lived there for many years after fleeing Iraq in the 1980s.





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Iraq PM arrives in UK on official visit For Iraq's persecuted Yazidis, return plan is fraught with risk