

US sanctions target Syrian president's son, Syrian army unit

Wed, 2020-07-29 17:52

WASHINGTON: The United States on Wednesday imposed fresh sanctions aimed at depriving the Syrian government of funds, and warned that Washington would blacklist anyone doing business with President Bashar Al-Assad's government until he supports a negotiated end to the country's nearly decade-long war. Among the 14 blacklisted Wednesday were Assad's son, Hafez, a Syrian businessman and nine entities a senior US official accused of helping to fund the Syrian government's "campaign of terror", as well as the Syrian Arab Army's First Division unit, among others.

"The steady drumbeat of designations on persons and entities that support the Assad regime will continue until the regime and its associates cease obstructing a peaceful political resolution of the conflict" as called for by the UN Security Council, a senior US official told reporters.

The sanctions, imposed under the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act and other measures, come as the Syrian leader grapples with a deepening economic crisis after a decade of war.

It marks the second round of sanctions imposed by the Washington under the Caesar Act, which aims to deter "bad actors who continue to aid and finance the Assad regime's atrocities against the Syrian people while simply enriching themselves."

"It is time for Assad's needless, brutal war to end. This, above all, is what our sanctions campaign is meant to bring about," US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement.

Already, US and European Union sanctions have frozen the assets of the Syrian state and hundreds of companies and individuals. Washington has banned American exports to and investment in Syria, as well as transactions involving oil and hydrocarbon products.

The new sanctions cover many more sectors, and they can freeze assets of anyone dealing with Syria, regardless of nationality. The measure also targets those dealing with entities from Russia and Iran, Assad's main backers.

Syrian authorities blame Western sanctions for widespread hardship among ordinary residents, where the currency collapse has led to soaring prices and people struggling to afford food and basic supplies.



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Syrian tycoon says front companies used to dodge sanctions as rift with Assad widens
UN Security Council credibility at stake on Syria sanctions talk - France

[Banksy painting raises millions for Palestinian children's hospital](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-07-29 14:30

LONDON: A triptych by British artist Banksy of the Mediterranean Sea

depicting the European refugee crisis has sold for more than £2.2 million (\$2.9 million) at auction in London.

The three-paneled work, "Mediterranean Sea View 2017," was put up for sale at Sotheby's auction house on July 29, where it was initially expected to fetch £1.2 million for a children's hospital in the West Bank, the Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation.

The money raised will be put toward an acute stroke unit and children's rehabilitation equipment.

The work was based on three romantic-period oil paintings of the sea, and depicted life jackets, oars and other detritus on the shore from abandoned refugee boats – a comment on the mass movement of people from the Middle East and North Africa to Europe due to a series of ongoing natural and man-made events, including the wars in Iraq, Syria and Libya.

"In 'Mediterranean Sea View 2017,' Banksy corrupts three found oil paintings with his own witty re-workings to create something that, while posing as a 19th-century seascape, spotlights one of the burning issues of the 21st century," said Alex Branczik, Sotheby's head of contemporary art for Europe.

"This triptych hangs in Sotheby's galleries alongside works by some of history's greatest landscape painters, including Bellotto, Van Goyen and Turner. Banksy's work, however, stands alone for its potent political message."

Banksy, who keeps his true identity a well-guarded secret, rose to international prominence on the back of graffiti art with strong themes of political and social commentary.

In recent years, the twin issues of the Mediterranean migration crisis and the Israel-Palestine conflict have played a major role in his work.

In 2015, he created an interactive work in the form of dystopian theme park "Dismaland," in the British town of Weston-super-Mare, featuring refugee boats and anarchist themes.

He also opened the Walled-Off Hotel in Bethlehem in 2017, a play on the name of the famous Waldorf hotel chain.

The Walled-Off Hotel boasts the "worst view of any hotel in the world," located next to Israel's barrier wall in the West Bank.

Guests can experience just 25 minutes of direct sunlight per day. "Mediterranean Sea View 2017" had previously hung in the hotel.

In "The Son of a Migrant from Syria," daubed on a wall in a French migrant camp dubbed "The Jungle" in the port of Calais in 2015, Banksy showed the deceased billionaire founder of tech giant Apple, Steve Jobs, as a refugee, carrying nothing but a sack of belongings and an early Apple computer. Jobs's biological father Abdulfattah Jandali was from the Syrian city of Homs.

Banksy's most recent work involved spraying a train carriage on the London Underground with messages about COVID-19.

Controversy was caused when it emerged that it was removed as part of routine cleaning by the network's operator, Transport for London.



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Banksy painting raises millions for Palestinian children's hospital
Banksy art to materialise in Vienna with a little Saudi help

[Extremists try to block honor for music legend Umm Kulthum](#)

Wed, 2020-07-29 02:43

JEDDAH: Right-wing extremists in Israel are trying to block the renaming of a street in honor of the late Egyptian music legend Umm Kulthum.

Authorities in Haifa – Israel's third largest city, about 10 percent of whose

300,000 residents are Arab – want to draw attention to its diversity. City councillor Raja Zaatreh said honoring Umm Kulthum was an appropriate way of recognizing the “presence and roots” of Israel’s Arab community, which regularly faces discrimination. Haifa was “a model of coexistence between Arabs and Jews,” council leader Einat Kalisch-Rotem said.

But opponents of the honor, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s notoriously divisive son Yair, are determined to block it. He said the proposal was “shameful and crazy.”

Right-wing Likud party Knesset member Ariel Kallner said he was saddened by Haifa’s decision to honor a woman “who called for the destruction of the Jewish state.”

Commentator Eldad Beck attacked the plan “to commemorate one of the biggest and most influential enemies of Israel, who wanted to annihilate the state.” Umm Kulthum, who died aged 76 in 1975, performed in Haifa in the 1930s. She was hugely popular in the Middle East and worldwide – among her fans were Bob Dylan and Beyonce – and not least in Israel itself.

Israeli musician Ariel Cohen said many Jews with Arab roots “grew up with Umm Kulthum,” and one of her most famous songs, Enta Omri, was translated into Hebrew.

Cohen said it was true that Umm Kulthum sang patriotic songs during conflicts between Egypt and Israel in the 1960s and 1970s, but, “it is natural for singers to sing patriotic songs in times of war.”

He added: “Umm Kulthum is not an enemy.”



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[Israel](#)

Bringing Umm Kulthum to London is my gift to her, says Saudi musical producer Umm Kulthum returns virtually for Tantora show in Al-Ula

Lebanon complains to UN over gun battle on border

Author:

Wed, 2020-07-29 02:25

BEIRUT: Lebanon is to complain to the UN Security Council over an "Israeli attack" on its southern border.

President Michel Aoun on Tuesday condemned Israel's action as "a threat to the stability of the south of Lebanon."

He said the strike on Monday was especially alarming because the Security Council is scheduled to discuss the renewal of the mandate of the UN force in Lebanon, which expires at the end of August.

Israel said its troops opened fire with small arms and artillery after Hezbollah militants armed with assault rifles crossed the border into the disputed Shebaa Farms area. No casualties were reported on either side. Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab described Israel's claim as "lies," and said the exchange of gunfire was "a dangerous military escalation."

He added: "The enemy is trying to change the rules of engagement with Lebanon. We should be very careful in the coming days because the enemy is reiterating its attacks and there are fears that things might get worse in light of rising tensions on our borders with Palestine."

The Future parliamentary bloc, led by former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, said it was "surprised that the government response to Monday's events came 24 hours later."

Israeli forces have been on alert along the border in anticipation of Hezbollah retaliation for the killing of one of its members a week ago in an Israeli attack on the edge of the Syrian capital, Damascus.

Visiting Israel's northern military headquarters on Tuesday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israeli forces would continue to take action "to prevent Iranian military entrenchment in the region."



Main category:

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[Lebanon reinstates lockdown measures after virus rebound](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-07-29 02:12

BEIRUT: The Lebanese government agreed on Tuesday to reinforce coronavirus lockdown measures after a spike in new cases threatened to overwhelm the crisis-hit country's health care system.

Lebanon, a country of some 6 million people, has recorded a total of 3,879 cases of COVID-19, including 51 deaths.

Activists on social media shared a video of a Lebanese man in his car arguing with security forces after being fined for failing to wear a face mask.

Authorities decided to shut down the country again following an alarming increase in the number of COVID-19 cases. Ministers on Tuesday were tested for the virus before taking part in ministerial session at the Presidential Palace.

President Michel Aoun called for "stricter application" of the lockdown order to limit the "negative repercussions on citizens and residents," criticizing "people's disregard for the preventive measures."

Minister of Health Hamad Hassan said: "People are not abiding by the preventive measures, and people traveling to Lebanon are not respecting the isolation period."

From Thursday, the country will shut down for five days with another five-day lockdown next week.

Bars, pubs, night clubs, malls, pools, gyms, churches, mosques and game centers will be closed, and all sports competitions, events and religious gatherings will be canceled. People over 65 will be told to stay at home and avoid social activity.

Security forces have arrested two Syrians who allegedly forged PCR tests showing a negative result for sale to Syrians wishing travel to their homeland.

Meanwhile, Iran reported 235 new deaths, a record toll for a single day in the Middle East's hardest-hit country.

"We have lost 235 of our compatriots due to COVID-19 in the past 24 hours," taking the overall toll to 16,147, said a health official.



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Lebanon to impose two-week coronavirus lockdown Lebanon 'botched virus response', say health advisers; return to tough lockdown urged