

# Bahrain to join US-led efforts to protect Gulf navigation

Author:

AFP

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DUBAI: Bahrain said Monday it would join US-led efforts to protect shipping in the Arabian Gulf amid tensions between Washington and Tehran after a series of attacks on tankers.

Bahrain's King Hamad voiced his country's appreciation of the "US role in supporting regional security and stability" during a meeting with US Central Command (CENTCOM) chief General Kenneth McKenzie, state media said.

"The king confirmed the kingdom of Bahrain's participation in the joint effort to preserve the safety of international maritime navigation and secure international corridors for trade and energy," the official Bahrain News Agency reported.

The US has been seeking to form a coalition to guarantee freedom of navigation in the Gulf.

Central Command welcomed the Bahrain's decision to join the coalition and take an "active role in preserving the freedom of navigation, promoting maritime security and de-escalating regional tensions."

"The free flow of commerce throughout international waterways is a linchpin of the global economy, and we appreciate the Kingdom of Bahrain's leadership and support in preventing aggression from curtailing that freedom,"

Britain, which already has warships on protection duty in the Gulf after a UK-flagged tanker was seized by Iranian Revolutionary Guards, has said it will join the planned operation.

But other European countries have declined to join, for fear of harming European efforts to rescue a 2015 treaty with Iran over its nuclear program. Bahrain, which hosts the US Fifth Fleet, said last month that it would co-host a conference with the US on "maritime and air navigation security," set for October.

Iran has seized three tankers in strategic Gulf waters since last month, including a British-flagged vessel.

That came after British Royal Marines helped impound a tanker carrying Iranian oil off the British overseas territory of Gibraltar on July 4. Britain suspected it was destined for Syria in defiance of European Union sanctions, which Iran denies.

The US and its Gulf allies have also accused the Islamic republic of carrying out several mysterious attacks on ships in the region, which Tehran denies.



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## [Feminist icon blasts Israel PM over travel ban](#)

Author:

Sun, 2019-08-18 23:21

JERUSALEM: Feminist icon Gloria Steinem has called Israel's prime minister a "bully" and says she will not visit as long as he remains the country's leader.

In a statement posted online on Saturday, she said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's decision to bar a visit by two Democratic congresswomen was "a welcome sign that I never have to enter any country or place under your authority."

Israel denied entry to Reps. Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar last week over their support for the Palestinian-led boycott movement. The two are outspoken critics of Trump and of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. They were subjected to a series of racist tweets from Trump last month, in which he told them to "go back" to their "broken" countries. Both are US citizens.

"I know that Donald Trump, the accidental occupant of the White House, is drawn to successful bullies," Steinem wrote, addressing Netanyahu. "If you and Trump continue to imitate each other, you will eventually be alone together at the table. I could wish both of you no greater punishment than that."

Israel later granted permission for Tlaib to visit her grandmother in the occupied West Bank on humanitarian grounds, and released a letter purportedly signed by Tlaib in which she promised not to advocate boycotts during her visit.

Tlaib declined to come, saying Israel's "oppressive" conditions were designed to humiliate her.

Israel accused her of staging a provocation.

Tlaib tweeted that she could not allow Israel to "use my love for my sity to bow down to their oppressive & racist policies."

"Sitty," spelled different ways in English, is an Arabic term of endearment for one's grandmother.

Online supporters have rallied under the hashtag #MyPalestinianSitty, posting pictures of their grandmothers and descriptions of their struggles under Israeli occupation. Many were said to have lived through what the Palestinians refer to as the "Nakba," or "Catastrophe," when hundreds of thousands fled or were forced from their homes in what is now Israel during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.

"#MyPalestinianSitty is trending and I am overcome with emotions realizing how we are finally humanizing one of the world's most dehumanized peoples," Omar tweeted.



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## [Facelift of Cairo's Baron Palace sparks outcry](#)

Author:

AFP

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Sun, 2019-08-18 18:03

CAIRO: Egyptian authorities have defended renovation works at a historic Cairo palace after the site's new look sparked mockery on social media. The site, dubbed the Baron Palace, was built between 1907 and 1911 by wealthy

Belgian industrialist Edouard Empain.

The baron also spearheaded the development of the surrounding upmarket neighborhood of Heliopolis.

Built in a style reminiscent of the Cambodian Hindu temple of Angkor Wat, the striking building set amid lush gardens has long since fallen into disrepair. But work to restore the building has sparked outcry.

Many have taken issue with white marble additions to the building's rosy pink stone exterior, saying the materials are of poor quality and not in keeping with the original style.

One Twitter user asked: "Who is the fool behind the restoration of Egypt's palaces? Our heritage is being systematically destroyed."

A Facebook page called Egyptian Historians chided officials for the "warped" restoration.

"Be honest with yourselves and admit that you ruined it... you are literally demolishing our monuments," a post on the group's page said.

Antiquities Minister Khaled El-Enany dismissed online criticisms as "fake news."

"I didn't hear one word of truth in all these social media comments," he said in a statement.

His ministry said the colors of the palace had faded from weather damage over many years.

"The restoration is a real dream and we will breathe life into this abandoned landmark," Enany added.

General Hisham Samir, who heads up the ministry's engineering branch, said the colors were "correct and are backed up by historical sources."

The works began in July 2017 in cooperation with the Belgian government and will cost 100 million Egyptian pounds (over \$6 million), the statement added. Samir told AFP that the work is expected to be completed by year's end with plans to open the building to the public by early 2020.

Egypt's multitude of historical monuments and buildings are a major draw for tourists, though the country has often faced accusations of neglecting these sites.

The government has recently launched various restoration projects to stimulate tourism, a key sector that has suffered in recent years due to political insecurity and sporadic militant attacks.





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## [Lebanon's Aoun vows to tend to economic, financial reforms](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sun, 2019-08-18 16:12

BEIRUT: Lebanon is expected to begin implementing in October a set of economic and financial measures agreed by its top leadership that will boost economic growth, President Michel Aoun said on Sunday, vowing that he would tend to this himself.

He was referring to decisions taken at a top-level meeting earlier this month with the aim of reviving an economy that has been growing slowly for years and is struggling with one of the world's heaviest public debt burdens.

After the Aug. 9 meeting, Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri said agreed steps included finishing the 2020 budget on time, drawing up a plan to start \$3.3 billion of projects approved by parliament, full implementation of a power sector reform plan, and laws to fight tax evasion and regulate public tenders.

"I will personally tend to the implementation path of the decisions of the financial and economic meeting" in cooperation with Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and other parties in government, Aoun said.

In written comments to Reuters, Aoun said this aimed "to guarantee political stability in cabinet and outside it and to secure the greatest amount of productivity," including in the implementation of the 2019 budget and its reforms.

Aoun said he expected "the implementation path" to begin "with the start of October after the conclusion of the current preparations ... which will lead to lifting of the growth rates, reflecting positively on the economic and financial situations."

After years of backsliding on economic reform, the impetus to act has grown due to economic stagnation and a slowdown in the flow of dollars into Lebanon's banks from abroad. Lebanon has depended on such flows from its diaspora to finance the current account and the state budget deficits.

Foreign governments and donor institutions last year pledged \$11 billion in financing to Lebanon for major infrastructure at the so-called Cedre conference in Paris, on condition that it carries out reforms.

Measures to reduce the budget deficit and reform the power sector, which



bleeds public funds while inflicting daily power cuts on Lebanese, are seen as two vital tests of the government's ability to reform. The International Monetary Fund said in July this year's deficit is likely to be well above a targeted 7.6% of national output. It said the power reform plan and a budget to reduce the deficit were "very welcome first steps" and "further substantial fiscal adjustment and structural reforms" were needed. Aoun said work was underway to approve the 2020 budget in the constitutional timeframe. It would include "new, resolute reforms" agreed at the Aug. 9 meeting to reduce the power sector deficit, improve tax collection and fight customs and tax evasion. Aoun also said frameworks must be put in place for implementing a plan drawn up by management consulting firm McKinsey for revamping the economy and this should coincide with the start of projects outlined at the Cedre conference.



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## [Kuwait's emir in good condition after medical setback](#)

Author:

Sun, 2019-08-18 20:52

JEDDAH: Kuwait's emir has recovered from a "medical setback" and is in good condition, the state KUNA news agency reported Sunday.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah underwent medical tests that turned out well, acting minister of the Amiri Diwan Mohammad Dhaifallah Sharar said.



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