

US blocks UN rebuke of Israeli demolition of Palestinian homes - diplomats

Author:

Thu, 2019-07-25 22:22

UNITED NATIONS, July 24 : The United States on Wednesday blocked an attempt by Kuwait, Indonesia and South Africa to get the United Nations Security Council to condemn Israel's demolition of Palestinian homes on the outskirts of Jerusalem, diplomats said.

Israel said the 10 apartment buildings demolished on Monday, most of them still under construction, had been built illegally and posed a security risk to Israeli armed forces operating along a barrier that runs through the occupied West Bank.

UN officials, who had called on Israel to halt the demolition plans, said 17 Palestinians faced displacement.

Kuwait, Indonesia and South Africa circulated a five-paragraph draft statement, seen by Reuters, to the 15-member Security Council on Tuesday that expressed grave concern and warned that the demolition "undermines the viability of the two-state solution and the prospect for just and lasting peace."

Such statements have to be agreed by consensus and on Wednesday the United States told its council counterparts it could not support the text, diplomats said. A revised three paragraph draft statement was circulated, but the United States again said it did not agree with the text, diplomats said. The United States has long accused the United Nations of anti-Israel bias and shielded its ally from council action.

The demolition of the Palestinian buildings is part of the latest round of protracted wrangling over the future of Jerusalem, home to more than 500,000 Israelis and 300,000 Palestinians.

The Palestinians want a state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip with east Jerusalem as the capital, all territory captured by Israel in 1967.

US President Donald Trump's Middle East envoy Jason Greenblatt and senior Trump adviser Jared Kushner have spent two years developing a peace plan they hope will provide a framework for renewed talks between Israel and the Palestinians.

Greenblatt told the Security Council on Tuesday a peace plan cannot rely on global consensus, inconclusive international law and "unclear" UN resolutions, sparking pushback from several countries. He said a decision on the release of the political component of the US plan would be made "soon."

The buildings demolished on Monday were near what Israel describes as a security barrier. The initial draft Security Council statement described the construction of the wall by Israel as contrary to international law.

Israel credits the barrier – projected to be 720 km (450 miles) long when complete – with stemming Palestinian attacks. Palestinians call it a land grab designed to annex parts of the West Bank, including Israeli settlements.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Israel](#)

Palestinian president says to stop agreements with IsraelIsrael to start exporting natural gas to Egypt in November – minister

[Turkish military chiefs discuss possible offensive in Syria](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-07-25 21:48

ANKARA: Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar met military officials on Thursday to discuss a possible offensive east of the Euphrates River in Syria as Ankara ramped up warnings of a cross-border operation.

The meeting came a day after Turkey said it would launch an offensive unless agreement on a planned safe zone in Syria could be reached with the United States, saying it had run “out of patience” with Washington.

The operation, which would mark the third Turkish incursion into Syria in as many years, was first signalled by President Tayyip Erdogan earlier this year but later put on hold.

Following President Donald Trump’s announcement of a planned US withdrawal from northern Syria, the two NATO allies agreed to create a zone inside Syria and along its northeastern border with Turkey that would be cleared of the

Kurdish YPG militia.

The YPG was Washington's main ally on the ground in Syria during the battle against Islamic State, but Turkey sees it as a terrorist organization, indistinguishable from Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants waging an insurgency inside Turkey.

Ankara says that the United States has stalled progress on setting up the safe zone and has demanded that Washington sever its relations with the YPG. A US delegation led by Syria Special Envoy James Jeffrey presented proposals this week which failed to satisfy Turkish officials, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said.

On Thursday Akar told Turkish military officers that Ankara had set out its view to the US delegation. "We emphasised to them once again that we have no tolerance for any delays, and that we will use our initiative if necessary," the Defense Ministry quoted Akar as saying.

In Washington, the Pentagon reiterated that coordination and consultation between the United States and Turkey was the only way to address security concerns.

"We have made clear that unilateral military action into northeast Syria by any party, particularly as US personnel may be present or in the vicinity, is of grave concern," Commander Sean Robertson, a Pentagon spokesman, said in a statement.

"We would find any such actions unacceptable," Robertson said.

Strained ties

Earlier on Thursday, Turkish military officials said that Ankara and Washington would continue to discuss the planned safe zone despite rising tensions between the allies.

"We cannot share details as efforts are under way. Our aims are clear. The Turkish army is the only force capable of doing this," one of the officials said regarding the safe zone.

He reiterated Turkey's frustration that an agreement reached a year ago with the United States to clear the northern Syrian town of Manbij of YPG fighters had not been implemented.

"Despite all our work, the end-goal of the Manbij roadmap, which is for the area to be cleared of the YPG, for heavy arms to be collected, and a local administration to be formed, has not been reached. There are still around 1,000 terrorists in the region," the official said, referring to the YPG. Ties between Ankara and Washington have been strained over a host of issues, but Turkey's purchase of Russian S-400 missile defense systems has brought the NATO allies to the brink of one of the biggest ruptures in ties.

The United States said it had suspended Turkey's involvement in the F-35 fighter jet program over the Russian systems and that it would later remove Ankara completely. It has also said that Turkey may face possible US sanctions over the deal.

Turkey has dismissed the warnings, instead pinning its hopes on sympathetic comments from Trump who has said that Ankara had been treated unfairly. Trump has not ruled out imposing sanctions on Turkey.

On Thursday, military officials said that while Russia had offered to provide Turkey with its SU-35 jets if Ankara asked for them, there were no talks to procure alternatives to the F-35s. Akar, however, said that Turkey would look

elsewhere if it was denied the jets.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Turkey](#)

[Syria](#)

Activists say 10 killed in bombing of Syria rebel stronghold
Turkey has not agreed with US on Syria safe zone: foreign minister

[Palestinian president says to stop agreements with Israel](#)

Thu, 2019-07-25 21:46

RAMALLAH, Palestine: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is calling Israel's demolition of several dozen Palestinian homes on the outskirts of east Jerusalem "ethnic cleansing" and says he will take steps to terminate all agreements with Israel.

Abbas issued a statement following a meeting of PLO leaders in Ramallah on Thursday. The president said he would form a committee to advance ending all signed agreements with Israel, but it wasn't clear such a move had a timeline.

The president's remarks came three days after Israel leveled several buildings it says were built too close to its West Bank separation barrier after a years-long legal battle.

Abbas restated his opposition to President Donald Trump's "Deal of the Century" between Israel and the Palestinians, and said that "Palestine and Jerusalem are not for sale or bargain."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Middle East](#)

[Palestine](#)

[Israel](#)

[Mahmoud Abbas](#)

[Israeli occupation](#)

Israel says 12 Palestinian buildings destroyed in controversial demolition
Israeli investigations into deaths of Palestinians often reach nowhere

Sudan protest leaders, rebels end rift over power deal

Author:

AFP

ID:

1564080015371097400

Thu, 2019-07-25 12:59

KHARTOUM: Sudanese protest leaders and their rebel partners have ended their differences over a power-sharing deal signed with the country's military rulers, vowing to work jointly for peace, a leading protest group said Thursday.

On July 17, the umbrella protest movement signed a power-sharing accord with Sudan's ruling generals that provides for a transitional civilian administration, the key demand of demonstrators.

But three armed groups who are members of the protest movement had objected to the deal, saying it failed to address peace in the war zones of Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile.

A group of protest leaders then flew to Addis Ababa for talks with the rebels, and after days of intense negotiations they reached an agreement that was announced on Thursday.

"This agreement has discussed the fundamental roots of war... and aims to reach a comprehensive peace accord with all armed groups," the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) said on its Facebook page.

"The agreement paves the way for establishing comprehensive peace urgently once the transitional process for a civilian government begins."

The SPA said the "Addis Ababa Declaration" aims to "speed up the forming of the transitional civilian government."

It said the three armed groups in the Sudan Revolutionary Front have "reconciled with the Alliance for Freedom and Change on the transitional government and connected peace-related issues with the process of transition."

The rebel groups also confirmed the differences they had with the protest leaders had ended.

"I think with this agreement we will be united, we will be stronger," rebel delegate Nuraddayim Taha told AFP in Addis Ababa.

"This is the first time that such an agreement is linked to issues of democracy and peace. For us, this is the first time in history that an agreement will address the root causes of the conflicts in Sudan."

The rebel groups had been fighting government forces of now ousted president Omar Al-Bashir for years in Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed in the three conflicts and millions displaced, with hundreds of thousands still living in sprawling camps.

The protest leaders and generals are still to sign what is called the "Constitutional Declaration" to thrash out some outstanding issues, including justice for demonstrators killed during months of protests.

The rebel groups had demanded that the "Constitutional Declaration" specify

that peace negotiations would be a top priority for the new government. Once a peace deal is finalized, sources said the rebel groups want their representatives to be part of the transitional government. It is still unclear whether this demand had been addressed in the agreement reached between the two sides. The rebels had also called for the extradition from Sudan of those accused of crimes by the Hague-based International Criminal Court, including Bashir. Bashir is charged with war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide for his alleged role in the conflict in Darfur that erupted in 2003. The ruling generals have steadfastly refused to hand over Bashir to the ICC.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Sudan](#)

[Protests](#)

Sudan military says coup attempt thwarted, senior officers arrested

[Security forces in crackdown on](#)

Lebanon-Syria border smuggling operations

Wed, 2019-07-24 22:50

BEIRUT: The Lebanese government has stepped up efforts to crack down on smuggling operations along its border with Syria which ministers claim are posing major security and economic threats to the country.

Despite Lebanese security forces making 449 arrests and thwarting 336 attempts to smuggle goods and people over a network of crossings, illegal movements to evade customs continue to impact on the Lebanese pound. And ministers have been told that more than 80 percent of illicit trade is taking place at legitimate border crossings between the two countries.

As well as the smuggling of people and goods and the infiltration of terrorists into Lebanese territory, officials have also been battling to prevent Hezbollah fighters from illegally crossing into Syria and back. Various moves have taken place over recent weeks to beef up border controls.

A UN delegation, presided over by the British Ministry of Defense's senior adviser on the Middle East, Lt. Gen. Sir John Lorimer, inspected Lebanon's southern borders with Israel and held meetings with Lebanese political and military officials to discuss the expansion of the eastern borders control area and the building, with UK assistance, of more observation towers.

Separately, Lebanese Defense Minister Elias Bou Saab visited the northern and eastern borders after the government put him in charge of finding a solution to illegal border crossings and smuggling operations.

And the US and UK ambassadors to Lebanon, Elizabeth Richard and Chris Rampling respectively, visited the eastern borders accompanied by the Lebanese Army Chief Joseph Aoun to oversee border control operations in the lead-up to the linking of observation towers equipped with satellite technology to assist with army monitoring work.

Lebanese Minister of Interior Raya Al-Hassan and Bou Saab briefed the country's Parliamentary Committee for Administration and Justice on measures being taken to deal with illegal border activities.

Bou Saab said the northern border with Syria was 100 km long, while the eastern border stretched for 210 km, adding that the Lebanese Army had thwarted 336 smuggling attempts and arrested 449 smugglers, of which 290 were Lebanese, 145 Syrians, seven Palestinians and seven of other nationalities.

Head of the committee, Georges Adwan, said: "There are dozens of illegal crossings that represent an important threat. Customs evasion through illegal crossing represents 10 percent but the larger portion of evasion takes place through legitimate crossings, with 80 percent or more.

"Some smugglers were arrested for two months before they were released and

went back to their smuggling operations.”

Addressing the committee, Bou Saab said: “There are 10 to 15 illegal crossings that were closed by the army. However, smugglers opened new crossing points about 50 meters away the next day. Without an actual demarcation of the borders, we cannot say that we control 100 percent of the borders. Vegetables and fruits are being smuggled from Syria, which is harming Lebanese farmers.”

Economist Ghazi Wazni said: “The Syrian pound has significantly lost its value. Smuggled goods are replaced by foreign currencies that go to Syria.” Bou Saab gave an example of how illegal trades took place.

“A Syrian truck arrives at the northern borders of Nahr Al-Kabir River where it unloads onto smaller trucks and motorcycles. They cross the border within half-an-hour using a wooden bridge placed above the river. We remove such bridges, only to find them again at a different location.”

The Lebanese Army has 200 border posts, of which 74 contain advanced towers provided mainly by the UK but also the US, Germany and Canada.

“There are pedestrian crossings to smuggle individuals and terrorists. They were also used to smuggle weapons from Lebanon to Syria during the war,” added Bou Saab. “There are goods that cross the border with a customs declaration.”

Lebanese MP, George Okais, told Arab News, that Bou Saab had “contacted the relevant parties in Syria to close some illegal borders with dirt” in a bid to stop people smuggling which represented “a dangerous threat.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon-syria border](#)

[Beirut](#)

[United Nations](#)

[Lebanon](#)

[Syria](#)

[smuggling](#)

Daesh fighters surrender Lebanon-Syria border enclaveThousands poised to leave Lebanon-Syria border zone under deal