

Crisis Group report slams Israeli's \$530m plan for occupied East Jerusalem

Tue, 2019-06-11 23:25

AMMAN: The International Crisis Group (ICG) has called on Israel not to implement controversial parts of a \$530 million, five-year plan to develop occupied East Jerusalem without any input from the Palestinian community.

In a 40-page report published on Tuesday, the ICG called on Israel not to separate Palestinian communities in parts of East Jerusalem from the city's municipality, force schools there to adopt Israel's curricula, and introduce a land registry.

The report, titled "Reversing Israel's Deepening Annexation of Occupied East Jerusalem," concludes that these actions "would exacerbate the conflict in and over Jerusalem."

Ofer Zalzburg, a senior analyst with the ICG and the report's main author, told Arab News that despite settlement construction in East Jerusalem and severe impediments placed on natural growth in Palestinian neighborhoods, Israel has failed to establish a durable and substantial Jewish majority in that part of the city.

Zalzburg said a former Israeli minister described the dilemma to him as follows: "East Jerusalem remains stuck in our throat: We can't swallow it and we can't spit it out."

Khaled Abu Arafah, a former Palestinian minister, said Israel is moving fast to Judaize East Jerusalem.

"It's very worrisome what's happening. This large amount of money is being set aside to tackle Palestinian aspirations, especially in the educational field," he told Arab News.

Abu Arafah said the report shows how Israeli authorities operate in East Jerusalem with impunity.

"This is very dangerous, and requires more than ever (Palestinian) national unity and a position from the Arab and Islamic world," he added.

Khalil Assali, a member of the Waqf, which manages Al-Aqsa Mosque, said Israel has been targeting education in East Jerusalem for some time.

"The Israelis have placed obstacles, closed schools and forced (Palestinian) students to attend Israeli municipal schools," he told Arab News.

"We have at least 30,000 students whose names aren't in any registry because they have no school seats."

Khalil Tufakji, head of the map department at the Arab Studies Center,

expressed opposition to the idea of a land registry for East Jerusalem.

“There are many Palestinian land owners from East Jerusalem who are living abroad, and this idea is aimed at transferring their properties to the Israeli government by means of putting them in the hands of the custodian of absentee properties,” he told Arab News.

The ICG called on Palestinians, Israelis, and allies of both leaderships to press Israel’s government not to carry out these plans.

“If it wants to reduce poverty and crime in East Jerusalem, Israel should allow Palestinians to establish civic leadership bodies in the city and end its ban on Palestinian Authority activities there,” the ICG wrote.

It urged outside powers “to allocate funds to help Palestinian Jerusalemites establish civic leadership bodies in East Jerusalem to operate both east and west of the separation barrier, in coordination with Israel.”



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Arabs seek recognition for Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital
Why Jerusalem’s Al-Aqsa Mosque matters for Muslims

US sanctions shut off Iranian oil feeding Assad's 'murderous regime'

Tue, 2019-06-11 23:17

LONDON: The US moved to shut off Iranian oil supplies to Syria Tuesday as Washington said Iran's conduct in the country was part of a "quest to dominate" the Middle East.

New Treasury Department sanctions targeted two Lebanese based firms, which have imported tens of thousands of metric tons of Iranian oil into Syria.

The sanctions focused on Syria's [most prominent tycoon Samer Foz](#), who has made a fortune luxury developments during the Syrian war.

State Department officials said the action against Synergy SAL and BS Company hit one of Iran's remaining outlets for oil exports, which have been reduced to a trickle by a crippling US sanctions regime.

"Some of Samer Foz's activities involved helping the Iranian regime illicitly ship oil to the Assad regime," special envoy for Syria Joel Rayburn said. "Today's actions against the Samer Foz network will also put pressure on the Assad regime's key supporters, such as the Iranian regime and Hezbollah."

Iran, along with Russia, has been one of the key backers of Bashar Assad during the eight-year Syrian conflict, which has killed more than 400,000 people. Tehran has supplied military muscle, deploying boots on the ground and arming and financing militias in the country.

Its presence in Syria ensures a territorial link from Tehran to the Mediterranean – something that deeply concerns Arab nations in the region, along with Israel and the US.

America and its allies in the Middle East are trying to make sure Iran will "pull these forces back" from Syria before a UN political solution can proceed, James Jeffrey, the US Special Representative for Syria Engagement, said.

He said this is being done through pressure on the Assad regime and through "talking with the Russians."

"The Syrian government invited the Iranians in as their allies in the civil war but in addition the Iranians have introduced as they have done in other places, Yemen, Lebanon, long-range weapon systems essentially as part of their hegemonic quest to dominate the Middle East," Jeffrey said.

The envoy was speaking in Cairo where, as part of a US delegation, he met with Egyptian and Arab League officials to discuss Syria and how to move

toward implementing a UN resolution designed to end the conflict.

Meetings between the US and Russia earlier this year offered some hope of progress, but a flare-up in fighting in Idlib province has infuriated the United States.

Hearing word that Russia, Syria and, to a lesser extent, Iran, are bombing the hell out of Idlib Province in Syria, and indiscriminately killing many innocent civilians. The World is watching this butchery. What is the purpose, what will it get you? STOP!

– Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) [June 2, 2019](#)

Donald Trump last week voiced his anger at the offensive by Syrian and Russian forces that has killed more than 300 civilians and driven nearly 300,000 people from their homes in the last six weeks.

Idlib province is the last significant territory held by rebels and extremist groups fighting against Assad.

The new US sanctions are probably timed to coincide with the spiralling death toll and humanitarian crisis in Idlib.

The sanctions “target those who are profiting from the misery and murder of the Syrian people,” Rayburn, the Syrian envoy said.

“Any effort at reestablishing or upgrading diplomatic relations or economic cooperation with the Assad regime will only undercut efforts to move toward a permanent, peaceful and political solution to the Syrian conflict.”



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US sanctions Syrian businessman Samer Foz, entities for links to AssadRussian jets kill at least 25 in north-western Syria

[How the Iranian regime crushed the reform movement in 2009](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-06-11 23:04

TEHRAN: A decade has passed since Iran held its most bitterly contested elections ever, the aftermath of which shook the country to its core over allegations of mass electoral fraud.

Massive demonstrations and counter-demonstrations by protesters and state

supporters raged across major cities for 19 months, nowhere more so than in the capital Tehran, in what was later described by Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as the "edge of the abyss."

As the world watched on in amazement, the so-called Green Movement that started out with "silent" demonstrations against ultra-conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's re-election as president and demands for an independent recount evolved into running battles between protesters and security forces.

The advent of camera-equipped mobile phones and the spread of the Internet-meant images of the protests fanned out quickly, causing the main focus of the demonstrations to switch from electoral fraud to repression.

The determination of the state to stamp out what it considered to be "sedition" at any cost, including mass trials and death sentences, gradually brought the movement to a standstill.

One of the reformists arrested in the first wave of the crackdown was journalist and activist Ahmad Zeidabadi.

"History will look back at the defeat of the Green Movement as a bitter event that left its supporters extremely and deeply frustrated and disillusioned," said Zeidabadi, who was detained the day after the election.

Amir Mohebbian, a conservative politician and analyst, said the circumstances had changed in many ways since 2009 when "the state realized that the opposition and America" were behind the riots, and therefore used its "full powers to take control of the situation."

The 2009 election campaign might well have been one of the most dynamic in the country's history.

The one-on-one TV debates between candidates changed the mood of the campaign from festive to a bitter face-off, none more so than an explosive encounter between Ahmadinejad and his main challenger Mir Hossein Mousavi.

On Friday, June 12 when polling stations opened, the turnout – officially at 85 percent – forced voting hours to be extended late into the night.

The first signs that something had gone awry came when Iranians realized the SMS messaging system had been disabled overnight.

Reformists soon claimed telephone lines to their vote tallying centers had been cut and many observers had not been allowed to enter polling stations.

Later on, some of Mousavi's main campaign centers in Tehran were closed by security forces.

Mousavi held an impromptu press conference late at night and claimed victory, warning that any reports to the contrary would be a sign of fraud.

The final official count showed Ahmadinejad had won with nearly 63 percent of the vote, and within hours sporadic protests began in Tehran and soon spread

to other major cities.

As the vote breakdown was published, reformists pointed to irregularities and claims of mass fraud gained traction.

Ahmadinejad's victory rally on June 14 in which he called protesters "dirt and rubbish" riled many voters.

When Mousavi and the other reformist candidate Mehdi Karroubi, who had officially gained 34 and 1 percent respectively, called for a counter rally in Tehran on June 15 the response by supporters was beyond expectations.

There is no official figure as to how many took part in the demonstration on that Monday but reports from different political factions claimed more than 3 million marched in silence onto Azadi (Freedom) Square.

Holding banners asking "Where is my vote?" they waved green flags, Mousavi's official campaign color.

Demonstrations continued throughout the week with reports of clashes between protesters and security forces. The authorities demanded that candidates pursue complaints through the Guardian Council, tasked with supervising elections. A recount of 10 percent of ballot boxes was held, confirming Ahmadinejad's victory, but his challengers contested the council's neutrality and refused to accept its ruling.

On Saturday, June 20, another massive rally in central Tehran turned violent as protesters and security forces clashed.

Though local and foreign media were now banned from attending the rallies, many powerful pictures and videos emerged.

One depicted the shooting that day of Neda Agha-Soltan, a student in her 20s, whose death was described as "heartbreaking" by then US President Barack Obama.

That Saturday's protests were among the bloodiest, only matched by the fierce clashes on Dec. 27, 2009.

Though gradually declining in size and frequency, the protests went on until February 2011, the last time Mousavi and Karroubi called for demonstrations before authorities placed them under house arrest, where they now remain.

It was never known how many people lost their lives or were wounded during the protests. The state says dozens were killed, mostly by "seditionists."

For Ali Shakouri-Rad, one of the last active reformist politicians, Iranians have since moved on and have become "occupied with issues other than elections, such as the economy."



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Iran protests 'won't end until regime falls' Iran protests show danger of economic woes

[Lebanese FM faces flak over 'racist' comments against foreign workers](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-06-11 01:12

BEIRUT: Lebanese Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil has responded to criticisms of a message that he posted on Twitter at the weekend about workers in his country. It sparked an angry response on social media, with many people describing his comment as racist and calling for his resignation.

On Saturday, he tweeted: "It is normal to defend Lebanese workers against any other foreign worker, whether Syrian, Palestinian, French, Saudi, Iranian or American. The Lebanese come first. Unfortunately, some people do not

understand that the Lebanese interests come first, nor do they understand the meaning of the bond of blood.”

It came on the same day that Bassil’s Free Patriotic Movement released a promotional video for a campaign encouraging businesses to hire Lebanese workers rather than foreigners. It shows campaigners visiting shops and telling Syrian workers to “go back to their country.”

On Monday, during a conference on “Active Diplomacy” in Beirut, Bassil addressed the controversy, saying his words had been “twisted.”

“My words have been misinterpreted and taken out of context,” he said. “When this happens, a correction is a must. I actually talked about Lebanese workers. Each state should give priority to its people for job opportunities and protect itself from illegal workers, and this what all of the states are doing.

“Lebanese people abroad are working according to the states’ needs and not against them, respecting the laws there. We call on any state to take necessary measures against any Lebanese expatriate who violates its laws, especially in Saudi Arabia, where we have a Lebanese community whose interests we should preserve.

“Our duty is to respect the state where we work and its laws. Countries, including Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, prioritize their own people in their laws. This is not racism. Defending the right of our people is not racist but patriotic. This is all I meant.”

His tweet sparked debate online, and while many were critical of Bassil’s comments, some supported him.

“Someone should remind him of Saudi Arabia’s efforts in reaching the Taif Agreement, back when the Lebanese were fighting, and he was hiding with his father-in-law 20 meters below the ground,” wrote Lebanese activist Nouf Al-Doussari, who called on Bassil to resign.

Naif bin Arwil wrote: “You have a Lebanese labor force that you stole, a Syrian labor force begging you that you cut off, a Palestinian work force that turned to you and that you humiliated while you kissed the French hands, humiliated, and finally an Iranian force trying to destroy you that you obeyed. However, the Saudi generous hand was extended to you and you bit it. Shame on you. And I am only talking here about Lebanon’s traitors.”

Lebanese MP Paula Yaacoubian called on Bassil to “apologize to the Lebanese as it is impossible for one to be responsible and say anything just to increase their cheap popularity.”

Lebanese State Minister for Presidential Affairs Salim Jreissati visited Dar Al-Fatwa on Monday, following Bassil’s tweet and speeches by others criticizing the political Sunnah last week, which provoked the anger of both Grand Mufti of Lebanon Sheikh Abdul Latif Deryan and the Future Movement.

After the meeting, Jreissati expressed surprise at “the extent reached by the

latest political speeches.”

He added: “Lebanese President Michel Aoun considers that political speech is determined by the laws in force, including the Charter of National Reconciliation and Constitution, i.e. the Taif Agreement and the constitution, and so we insisted on the need not to attribute statements to anyone other than those who voice them, and not to build up escalatory stances based on such statements.”

He stressed that “President Aoun considers that Prime Minister Saad Hariri is the most powerful...in terms of representation and he speaks in the name of the Lebanese government, according to our constitution, after drafting the policies, including foreign policy, and taking decisions in unanimity and majority of votes in the Cabinet. This is the Taif Agreement and the constitution that we make sure to respect.”

The Lebanese-Saudi Business Council called on Lebanese officials “to avoid dragging Lebanon into intense regional conflicts and pushing it to take positions that contravene its principles and the natural and historical partnerships with its Arab neighbors, especially the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.”

The council said it relied on “the Saudi authorities to understand the sensitive situation in Lebanon and to deal with Lebanon based on the historical ties between the two brotherly countries.”



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Tension forces evacuation of Syrian refugee camp in Lebanon
Lebanon army chief angry at budget measures

[Why more women should take up humanitarian work in Middle East and North Africa](#)

Author:

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DUBAI: "The need is so great for the work we do in this field." This comment, by Rana Sidani Cassou of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), sums up the state of her occupation as a female humanitarian worker in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

The phenomenon of women in the region devoting their lives to helping people affected by wars, natural disasters and humanitarian crises is scarcely new. But what is different now is the gap between the availability and demand for female volunteers and staff.

Cassou, based in Lebanon, has witnessed her fair share of tragedies while working on the frontlines for various aid organizations since 2004.

As the IFRC's head of communications for 21 countries, it is her responsibility to keep the world's attention focused on MENA's humanitarian needs, and "to give a voice to local communities."

Cassou has vivid memories of her deployment in the ancient city of Bam, in Iran's Kerman province, following the devastating earthquake in 2003. "I was in Bam within 48 hours of the earthquake," she told Arab News. "The whole city had been destroyed. Everything was gone: Homes, schools, villages. It was a city of rubble."

She especially remembers the rescue of an elderly woman from underneath the rubble 11 days later.

"She explained that she'd been in a state of partial paralysis and therefore confined to her bed. Her son would visit her every day to make sure she had an adequate stock of food and other necessities," Cassou said.

"When the earthquake hit, she was protected by a block of wood that sheltered her. She survived by rationing out the food, medicine and water that her son had left with her," Cassou added.

"This incident really touched my heart. I realized that when your time isn't

over, it isn't over. It made me into a person who believes I have to do my best to help people like this, regardless of war, disease, outbreaks or earthquakes."

Of course, not all stories have a happy ending. Cassou was sent to Tunisia after several migrants drowned when their boat – which had started out from the Libyan port of Zouara in the direction of Italy – capsized in the Mediterranean Sea. "I met a mother whose story haunts me to this day. She was on the boat with her 5-year-old son and 3-year-old daughter. She could tell the boat was going to capsize, and so asked another passenger to hold on to her son while she held on to her daughter when the vessel overturned," Cassou said.

"Rescue teams managed to save the mother and daughter and took them to Tunisia, while rescue helicopters were taking the survivors to Rome to a refugee camp there. The mother arrived in Tunisia with no idea if her son was dead or in some camp for refugees," Cassou added. "I tried to find the little boy, but I still don't know what happened to him. This is one of the downsides of the job. It hurts to be weighed down with questions without answers, to not be able to help everyone."

Salma Bahgat is another Arab woman who has devoted her working life to helping those in need of humanitarian assistance.

As director of the Egyptian Red Crescent's (ERC) department in charge of tracing and restoring family links, Bahgat's job is to find and reunite people, especially those separated from their families due to events beyond their control.

"When I got to do fieldwork, it changed my life. It's a two-way job, where you get to see the real impact of your efforts," she told Arab News from Cairo.

Bahgat joined the ERC barely 24 hours before Egypt's political upheaval of 2011. "So I pretty much participated as a humanitarian worker in the aftermath of the violent events," she said. "A stand-out moment for me early on in my career was during the evacuation of a camp. Helping many people belonging to different groups from the same place was overwhelming. For me, the best moment was when a young man published a Facebook post a year later describing how I saved his life. That day, I came to know how one could be touching people's lives without even realizing," she added.

"My job is to reunite separated family members, but it also involves offering protection and support to children, women and elders," Bahgat said.

"Recently, I was present during the reunification of several children with their families at the airport after years of separation. The hugs and tears of joy were very moving for everyone present there, but what moved me most was the sight of a stern security official looking at his own child's photo on his phone as he watched a girl being reunited with her aunt."

Bahgat said she would like to see more women in MENA pursuing a career in humanitarian work.

"Arab women are strong and caring at the same time, which is a perfect combination for a humanitarian worker," she said.

"Their work will have a huge impact on the upbringing of a new generation. I encourage women of the region to get exposure to humanitarian work. Any woman who joins this field will be following her heart."

One woman who has been doing so for more than three decades is Laila Toukan, director of training at the Jordan Red Crescent.

Having been raised in a household where “humanitarian volunteering is a habit and a way of life,” Toukan, a Palestinian, said she had no doubt about her career choice.

As part of her job, she runs a vocational training center which strives to empower women and young girls with a view to improving their economic status and self-esteem.

“We give them training in sewing, handicraft skills, beauty and hair care, culinary art and literacy,” Toukan told Arab News from Amman. “We teach them computer skills to enable them to access social media, as well as knowledge of business enterprise.”

Toukan said she has given socially and economically useful training to hundreds of young women every year. “We have many success stories,” she added. “For instance, two young women who met while doing a course together have launched a successful business from home together.”

Looking back on her life as a humanitarian worker, Toukan said she would not only like to see more Arab women in the profession, but also more of them in decision-making roles. “We need volunteers, committed volunteers, those who’ll stay and make a difference. Together, we can help girls and women in need,” she added. “If you give women cash or an in-kind donation, this eventually goes away. But once you teach them a skill, it stays with them for life.”

Toukan’s views are echoed by Cassou, who said there is a desperate need for dedicated female humanitarian workers in the region. But Cassou cautioned that anyone wanting to do humanitarian work has to be “realistic about their expectations” and realize they “can’t save the entire world.” Nevertheless, “there’s a real need for Arab women in our field. We’re based in a region where most countries have experienced wars, disasters, crises and upheavals, so there’s a need for more hands, especially in the form of Arab women,” she added. “We have empathy, we understand the culture and we speak the language. It makes a big difference.”





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