

Israel, furious over Lavrov's Hitler comment, cannot burn its bridges with Russia

Tue, 2022-05-03 19:24

RAMALLAH: There are signs that a diplomatic crisis between Israel and Russia, caused by a comment by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, could escalate.

Israeli leaders were furious when, during an interview with an Italian TV channel on Sunday, he suggested that Hitler was of Jewish origin.

Asked how Russia can claim to be fighting to "de-Nazify" Ukraine when President Volodymyr Zelensky is Jewish, Lavrov said: "I could be wrong but Hitler also had Jewish blood. (The fact that Zelensky is Jewish) means absolutely nothing. Wise Jewish people say that the most ardent antisemites are usually Jews."

Six million Jews were murdered by Hitler's Nazi Germany in the Holocaust during the Second World War. Lavrov's comment sparked a storm of anger in Israel and the country's Foreign Ministry summoned the Russian ambassador on Tuesday, demanding a clarification and an apology.

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid described Lavrov's words as "unforgivable and disgraceful," and "a grave historical mistake."

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said: "Such lies are meant to blame the Jews themselves for the most terrible crimes in history and thus free the oppressors of the Jews from their responsibility ... No war we are witnessing in this era is comparable to the Holocaust and there is no war similar to it."

Maria Zakharova, a spokesperson for the Russian Foreign Ministry, hit back, saying: "We have paid attention to the anti-historical statements of Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, which largely explain the current Israeli government's approach in support of the neo-Nazi regime in Kyiv."

Israeli political analyst Yoni Ben-Menahem told Arabs News that Bennett and Lapid are trying to put pressure on Russia to strengthen the position of US President Joe Biden against Iran, and to pave the way for the reopening of the US Consulate in East Jerusalem. Biden is planning to visit Israel and Palestine in June. However, he added that Israeli authorities face a balancing act as they do not want to strain ties with Russia so much that it threatens their operations against Iranian elements in Syria.

"Bennett and Lapid are trying to escalate against Russia to win Biden and assure him that Israel supports the US position regarding Ukraine," Ben-Menahem said. "But at the same time, Israel does not want to reach a rupture

with Russia so as not to impede the actions of the Israeli air force against Iranian targets in Syria.”

Israeli sources told Arab News that Lapid hates the Russians and is trying to show himself to be a supporter of democracy and human rights in Russia. In doing so, they added, he is trying to get closer to Biden and influence his policies.

Although tensions are rising in Russian-Israeli relations, the dispute has not reached the point of a diplomatic crisis just yet. However, with Israeli officials insisting on an official apology for Lavrov’s comment it is hard to predict how and when the tensions will ease.

Relations between Russia and Israel are currently largely based on shared interests in Syria. Moscow supports President Bashar Assad and wants to stabilize his regime and help to restore the country because this gives it the legitimacy to maintain Russian military bases there.

Israel has respected these objectives and has not targeted the Syrian regime. However, the option to attack Assad’s palace was considered by the head of the Israeli army more than two years ago because the Syrian president had allowed Iranians to enter the country and conduct military activities there. As a result the Iranians were considered legitimate targets for Israeli air attacks, in coordination with the Russians, who did not object.

Israeli experts told Arab News that if the relationship between Russia and Israel grows even more complicated the Israelis might bomb Syrian targets, which could weaken Assad and leave Moscow in the embarrassing position of being unable to protect an ally.

Ksenia Svetlova, a former member of the Knesset and a research fellow at the Institute for Policy and strategy at Reichman University, told Arab News: “Russia should mind its business. It has enough on its head and there is no need to open another front with Israel, which has no intention to anger anybody.

“However, it has to stand, as a Jewish state, for the victims of the Holocaust and it’s impossible to just move on, ignoring such horrific statements. Therefore, things will not get back to normal unless there is a formal apology from Russia.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Russia-Ukraine Conflict](#)

[Israel](#)

[Adolf Hitler](#)

Russia fires more rockets at steel plant, some evacuees reach safety
Israel lashes out at Russia over chief envoy's Nazism remarks

[8 dead from alcohol poisoning in Iranian city](#)

Tue, 2022-05-03 16:56

LONDON: Eight people have died from alcohol poisoning after drinking homemade concoctions in the Iranian city of Bandar Abbas.

Local media reported that another 51 people had been hospitalized. Health official Dr. Fatemeh Nowruzian told a news conference that 17 of those hospitalized were in a critical condition in intensive care, while another 30 were undergoing dialysis to clear their systems.

Producing and distributing alcohol are strictly prohibited in Iran. Local police said they had arrested eight people for the manufacture and selling of

the illicit drinks. The punishment for consuming alcohol can include 80 lashes.

It was not disclosed what caused the poisoning in the homemade drinks, but in recent years many Iranians have died after drinking illicit alcohol containing lethal amounts of methanol, which can cause blindness or death if ingested, even in small amounts. It is often added in homemade illegal drink production to increase the alcohol count.

Methanol poisonings rose sharply in Iran at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic after rumors spread that alcohol consumption could prevent infection.

The Health Ministry announced in April 2020 that some 500 people had died and a further 5,000 were treated for alcohol poisoning over just three months.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iran](#)

[Bandar Abbas](#)

[alcohol poisoning](#)

Death toll in Iran alcohol poisoning jumps to 84
Death toll up to 20 in Czech alcohol poisoning outbreak

Palestinians warn against plans to weaken their UN agency

Author:

Mon, 2022-05-02 23:30

RAMALLAH: A proposal by the UN agency for Palestinian refugees to delegate some services to other UN agencies has sparked outrage among Palestinians, who have warned of a plot to “dismantle” the body.

Established in 1949, a year after Israel was created, UNRWA is the only major UN body dedicated exclusively to one conflict and one people and holds a symbolic role that experts say matches its importance as provider for Palestinian refugees.

The agency has long been a target of Israeli criticism, with accusations it has fueled the conflict in part by teaching anti-Zionist messages at its schools.

UNRWA is “not just about the delivery of services,” said Muhammed Shehada from the Swiss-based Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor.

“As long as UNRWA is there, it’s a reminder that the international community has a responsibility to solve the issue of Palestinian refugees,” he said.

The agency tasked with assisting Palestinians who were forced from their homes during the war surrounding Israel’s creation – and their descendants – has faced a funding crunch for years, regularly falling tens of millions of dollars short of its stated needs.

At first glance, the announcement last month by agency chief Philippe Lazzarini that UNRWA could ask other UN bodies to help with service delivery may have looked like a bland, bureaucratic cost-sharing plan.

Counting primarily “on voluntary funding from donors would not be reasonable” going forward, he said in a statement. “One option that is currently being explored is to maximize partnerships within the broader UN system.”

Palestinians saw those remarks as a potentially devastating blow to UNRWA’s long-term mission.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said the plan would “violate” the UN resolutions that set up UNRWA, while the Palestine Liberation Organization said refugees would be outraged.

Mohammad Al-Madhoun, a senior official with Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, described the proposal as “an attempt to dismantle UNRWA as a prelude to ending its work.”

With more than 30,000 employees and a budget of some \$1.6 billion this year, UNRWA is a frontline provider of healthcare, education and other services to

some 5.7 million Palestinian refugees spread across the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank as well as in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

Former US President Donald Trump publicly sided with Israel in blasting UNRWA and cutting off its funding.

The agency has firmly defended its school curriculum against pro-Israel critics, though Lazzarini told EU lawmakers last year that problematic issues were being “addressed.”

President Joe Biden’s administration has since restored funding, but Lazzarini warned in November that UNRWA was facing an “existential threat” over budget gaps.

Agency spokeswoman Tamara Alrifai said that this year would see another \$100 million shortfall that could worsen given “the increased cost of commodities and food that the ongoing Ukraine crisis has provoked.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Palestinians](#)

[UN agency](#)

[UNRWA](#)

UN agency for Palestinian refugees has urgent budget crisis UN agency for refugees strives to help Gaza homeless

Iran tried to recruit agents via Facebook, claims Israel

Author:

Mon, 2022-05-02 23:27

JERUSALEM: Israel's internal security agency on Monday accused Iran of using a fake Facebook profile to try and get Israelis to collect information and harm people in their country.

Shin Bet's allegation comes days after Israel claimed that Iran had plotted to assassinate an Israeli diplomat in Turkey, as global powers seek to revive a nuclear deal with Tehran.

According to the Shin Bet, the profile of a young Jewish-Canadian woman called Sara Puppi with ties in Israel was fake and belonged to an Iranian agent using the social network to befriend primarily Israelis.

After contact was made, Puppi would use the WhatsApp messaging app to try and persuade her new friends "to gather information on Israeli figures while gauging their willingness to harm them, using pressure and promising thousands of dollars," the Shin Bet said.

"Emotional and romantic manipulations were also used," the agency added in a statement.

It said that Shin Bet agents had posed as "friends" of Puppi – whose account had more than 2,000 friends before disappearing on Monday – and received a bitcoin payment from her.

"The Iranian operative behind the account used a business cover story to give various missions," the Shin Bet said.

Those behind the account also tried to damage Israel's ties with Russia by encouraging people to criticize Russian President Vladimir Putin over the Ukraine war, the Shin Bet said.

The Shin Bet told AFP they could link the account to Iran with intelligence they obtained.

Meanwhile, Israel claimed on the weekend it had "foiled" alleged bids by Iran "to assassinate a US general in Germany, a journalist in France and an Israeli diplomat in Turkey."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iran](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Israel](#)

Iranian authorities urged to respect workers' rights amid protests
Israel lashes out at Russia over chief envoy's Nazism remarks

[Tunisia announces 'national dialogue'](#)

Author:

Mon, 2022-05-02 23:24

TUNIS: Tunisian President Kais Saied has announced the launch of "national dialogue" to help resolve a political crisis.

Saied, a former law professor elected in 2019, sacked the government on July 25 last year, later moving to rule by decree.

In a speech late on Sunday, Saied said a commission would manage "the national dialogue," a measure demanded repeatedly by the G7 nations and EU.

Saied's proposed talks will include four groups which, together as the "National Dialogue Quartet," jointly won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015 for its work in building what was, at the time, the only democracy that emerged

from the 2011 Arab Spring.

The four groups are the Tunisian General Labor Union, the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts, the Tunisian Human Rights League and the Tunisian Order of Lawyers.

On Sunday, UGTT leader Nouredine Taboubi appealed to Saied to launch the national dialogue, saying it was “probably the last chance” to bring the country together and avoid “a dismantling of the state and a financial and economic collapse.”

But Saied ruled out participation in the talks of those “who sabotaged, starved and mistreated the people,” suggesting it would not include parties and civil society organizations which have denounced his seizure of power.

That would cover his arch rivals, the Ennahdha party.

Ennahdha, which has played a central role in Tunisian politics, is part of the National Salvation Front coalition, forged last month between five political parties and five civil society groups.

Saied also said that a committee preparing constitutional reforms for “a New Republic” will be completed soon, with a referendum on the proposals slated for July 25, followed by legislative elections on Dec. 17.

Tunisia is also gripped by a dire social and economic crisis, and has been seeking a loan package from the International Monetary Fund.

Washington, the largest stakeholder in the IMF, has said Tunis must address concerns on democracy if it wants badly needed international economic support.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Tunisia](#)

[President Kais Saied](#)

Tunisian opposition announces alliance against president
Tunisian President Kais Saied promises 'free and fair' elections in talks with EU delegation