

# Jordan's king agreed with US Biden on need to defuse Jerusalem tension – state media

Author:

Mon, 2022-04-25 19:55

AMMAN: Jordan's King Abdullah agreed with US President Joe Biden on the need to prevent a repeat of recent confrontations in Jerusalem's Muslim holy sites that sparked concerns of wider conflict, state media said.

In a phone call on Monday, Abdullah was quoted as saying the cornerstone of peace was a comprehensive Arab Israeli settlement based on a two-state solution whereby a Palestinian state would emerge alongside Israel.

"Both his Majesty and President Biden stressed the importance of continued coordination and work on all levels to prevent a repeat of attacks on the city of Jerusalem and its holy sites and its people that would derail the chances of achieving peace and push toward more tensions," Petra state news agency said.

Abdullah, whose Hashemite dynasty is the custodian of Muslim and Christian sites in the Old City, has spearheaded a diplomatic offensive to put pressure on Israel, whom he blames for the escalation at the Aqsa compound, known to Jews as the Temple Mount and to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary.

The confrontations since the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan that have coincided with Passover have raised religious passions amid international concerns about a slide back into a wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Jordan and fellow Arab states accused Israel in a meeting on Thursday in Amman of restricting the right of worship of Muslims while allowing ultra-nationalist Jews under police protection to enter the mosque compound. Israel, which denies it was responsible for the escalation in violence, said on Thursday it was enforcing a long-standing ban on Jewish prayer at the compound of Al-Aqsa mosque, rejecting an Arab League accusation that it was allowing such worship to take place.

As in previous years, Israel halted Jewish visits during the final days of Ramadan.

Al-Aqsa sits atop the Old City plateau of East Jerusalem, which Israel captured in a 1967 war and annexed in a move that has not received international recognition. Palestinians want East Jerusalem as capital of their hoped-for future state.



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Rare flareup on Israel-Lebanon border after clashes in Jerusalem

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## [Houthis gather more forces outside Yemen's Marib city](#)

Mon, 2022-04-25 19:14

AL-MUKALLA: The Iran-backed Houthis continue to mobilize heavy military reinforcements outside Yemen's central city of Marib, exploiting the absence of the Arab coalition warplanes during the UN-brokered truce, a military official and local media reports said.

Hundreds of Houthi fighters, tanks and heavy artillery were repositioned on the western and southern edges of the strategic city from other Houthi-controlled areas, with the militia preparing to resume its push to seize control of Marib, the Yemeni government's last major urban bastion in the northern half of the country.

"The Houthis have moved hundreds of fighters and heavy equipment to west and south of Marib exploiting a cessation of Arab coalition airstrikes," a military official who spoke on condition of anonymity told Arab News, adding that government troops stuck to the truce and were prepared to push back any attacks by the Houthis.

The Houthis also launched an explosive-laden drone and a missile at the government-controlled Malla, south of Marib, an area that hosts dozens of internally displaced people, the official said.

Under the UN-brokered truce that came into effect on April 2, warring factions in Yemen agreed to halt fighting on battlefields and launch cross-border attacks on neighboring countries.

The Arab coalition also announced a halt to its airstrikes on Houthi targets in Yemen.

Since early last year, the Houthis have been aggressively attacking the city of Marib from the west and south, an offensive that claimed the lives of thousands of civilians and combatants and displaced thousands of people.

Yemen's army said that the Houthis have violated the truce hundreds of times in many provinces by moving troops, launching drones and missiles and fortifying their positions.

Similarly, the US special envoy for Yemen, Tim Lenderking, urged the Yemeni parties to adhere to their pledges to stop fighting for two months and voiced his disappointment over the postponement of the first commercial flight from the Houthi-controlled Sanaa airport.

"We're disappointed the 1st commercial flight from Sana'a was postponed, depriving Yemenis of an important opportunity to travel. We urge the parties to work together to resume flights as soon as possible & maintain their commitment to the truce for Yemenis," Lenderking said on Twitter on Sunday.

Yemen's government on Sunday announced that the first commercial flight from Sanaa airport to Amman was postponed after the Houthis insisted on adding dozens of passengers with unauthorized passports, accusing the Houthis of seeking to smuggle foreign military experts and fighters out of Yemen, using fake documents.

Only passengers with passports issued by the Yemeni government would be allowed to board planes from Sanaa airport, the government said.

Separately, unidentified men on Sunday evening blew up a pipeline that carries gas from Marib to Balhaf LNG Plant in the province of Shabwa.

Residents said that the attack took place in a desert area in Mayfa district in Shabwa and triggered a huge explosion and a giant plume of fire that turned night into day.

“The attackers blew up the pipeline with remotely controlled landmines. We do not know if they are Al-Qaeda or local tribesmen,” a resident, who preferred to be unknown, told Arab News by telephone.

The flow of gas and oil from Marib’s fields has largely been halted since late 2014 when the Houthis militarily seized power, forcing companies into deserting the country. Residents said that the attacked pipeline in Shabwa is used for supplying a power station and Balhaf LNG plant with gas.



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Fighting rages outside Marib as Houthis mount new attacks  
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# Israeli court rejects appeal in deadly Gaza beach airstrike

Author:

Mon, 2022-04-25 00:31

JERUSALEM: Israel's Supreme Court on Sunday rejected a request to reopen an investigation into the deaths of four Palestinian children who were killed by an Israeli airstrike while playing on the beach in the Gaza Strip during a 2014 war.

In its ruling, the court upheld earlier decisions by Israeli military investigators and legal authorities determining the incident was a tragic mistake.

"With all of the sorrow and heartache over the tragic and difficult outcome of the event in this petition, I did not find that the petitioners pointed to a flaw in the decision of the attorney general," said Sunday's ruling, signed by the court's president, Esther Hayut, and approved unanimously with two other justices.

The cousins from the Bakr family, all between 10 and 11 years old, were playing soccer on the beach when they were killed during the 2014 war between Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers.

The incident drew widespread international attention, in part because many foreign journalists staying in nearby hotels witnessed the incident. Images showed the children desperately running away from a jetty as a missile falls, and then the boys falling to the ground one after another.

The appeal to the Supreme Court was filed by three human rights organizations – the Israeli group Adalah and the Gaza-based Al-Mezan and Palestinian Center for Human Rights – who were seeking a criminal investigation into the incident.

In a joint statement, the groups said Sunday's decision "is further evidence that Israel is unable and unwilling to investigate and prosecute soldiers and commanders for war crimes against Palestinian civilians."

Critics have long accused Israel and its military of whitewashing wrongdoing by its troops. Last year, the International Criminal Court opened an investigation into alleged Israeli crimes in the Palestinian territories, including actions during the 2014 war. Bakr family members delivered testimony to the court during a preliminary inquiry.

Israel has rejected the ICC case, saying its legal system is capable of investigating the military and accusing the court of antisemitism.





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## [UNRWA plans to delegate services for Palestinians to other organisations](#)

Mon, 2022-04-25 00:01

RAMALLAH: The Palestinians are profoundly concerned by UNRWA Commissioner-General's declarations that the organisation will delegate its humanitarian services for 5 million Palestinian refugees living in 58 refugees camps to other organisations to overcome its severe financial crisis, Palestinian sources confirmed to Arab News on Sunday.

The UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini said in a letter to the Palestinian refugees dated April 23: "This year, a very harsh winter and the impact of the war in Ukraine on prices of food and fuel in the region add to the daily hardship you are facing. I witnessed this firsthand a few days ago when I met with Palestine refugees in Khan Danoun Camp and Yarmouk in Syria,

many refugees shared with me their struggle to meet their basic needs and how the socio-economic situation compels them to return to live amid the rubble in Yarmouk.”

He indicated the economic hardship the Palestinian refugees suffer in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan and Lebanon, due to security and unstable economic situations in those countries.

“The painful reality is that in the last ten years, and despite immense outreach and fundraising efforts, the resources available to UNRWA have stagnated, while the needs of Palestine refugees and cost of operations keep increasing,” Lazzarini said. “The now chronic underfunding of UNRWA is the result of a combination of shifting geopolitical priorities, new regional dynamics and the emergence of new humanitarian crises compounded by donor fatigue for one of the world’s longest unresolved conflicts. All these have led to a clear de-prioritization of the Palestinian issue, including most recently among some donors from the Arab region.”

## **HIGHLIGHT**

**The international organization has provided its services to 7 million Palestinian refugees living in Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon since 1948, with a noticeable reduction in the quality and quantity of those services.**

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“UNRWA has also increasingly been exposed to domestic politics in some of its traditional donor countries. Coordinated campaigns by organisations that aim to delegitimise and defund the Agency and erode the rights of Palestine refugees have increased in frequency and aggressivity,” the letter said.

Meanwhile, the UNRWA Commissioner-General toured several countries recently to recruit financial resources to enable the UNRWA to continue providing its services to Palestinian refugees, but no information regarding the outcome of his tour.

The sixth international conference on Syria will be organised in early May in Brussels to discuss the issue of Palestinian refugees in Syria and their return to the demolished houses in the Yarmouk refugees camp. In June, the Advisory Commission on UNRWA is gathering its major donors and hosts in Lebanon to discuss fundraising for the UN agency.

The Palestinians view with concern any step that affects the status and role of the UNRWA, transforming the Palestinian refugee issue into an issue of relief services, health and education and ignoring its political dimension related to the right of refugees to return to their homes from which they

were displaced, with compensation.

The Joint Refugee Committee called on the UNRWA Commissioner-General to search for creative and innovative ideas on recruiting financial support to fund services and not to search for ideas that intersect with the American and Israeli proposals that call for the gradual termination of UNRWA.

The PLO Department of Refugee Affairs categorically rejected the ideas contained in the letter. It said in a press statement on Sunday: "We express our shock at what was stated in the UNRWA Commissioner-General's letter about his acceptance of transferring some of UNRWA's powers to other international organisations to carry out them on its behalf, as one of the options presented to ensure the continuity of its services to Palestinian refugees without the threat of interruption due to UNRWA's lack of financial resources."

The Head of the Refugee Affairs Department at the PLO, Ahmed Abu Holy, said that "it is not within the authority of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA to propose solutions to address the financial deficit in the UNRWA budget that affects UNRWA's work mandate, and he does not have the mandate to transfer UNRWA's powers to other international organisations under the slogans of partnerships and synergy with UNRWA, whose slogans carry in its secret political dimensions to liquidate UNRWA and transfer its powers to international organisations and the governments of the host countries."

He said that the Palestinian leadership is consulting with all concerned parties, including UNRWA, donor countries and members of the Advisory Committee, in search of innovative models for boosting UNRWA's financial resources by finding new funders, urging traditional donors to increase their funding and communicating with international organisations, such as the World Bank, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and not by transferring the powers of UNRWA to other international organisations.

He said the commissioner-general's proposal for solutions could not be justified, knowing that it would prompt adverse reactions from Palestinian refugees, UNRWA staff and host countries.

He called on the UN to allocate an independent budget to UNRWA, similar to other United Nations institutions, to ensure the continuation of its relief and operational services to Palestinian refugees until a just solution is found.

The commissioner-general's letter came three weeks before the Palestinian commemoration of the Nakba, the Palestinian Catastrophe, on May 15.





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## [Turkey using airspace as leverage against Russia, experts say](#)

Mon, 2022-04-25 00:05

ANKARA: Turkey's blocking of Russian aircraft flying to Syria is a calculated move to maintain its balancing strategy, experts have said.

Following a meeting of top Turkish officials with their Russian and Ukrainian counterparts, Turkey closed its airspace to Russian civilian and military aircraft carrying soldiers to Syria.

The decision will be valid for three months.

During a visit to Uruguay on Saturday, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut

Cavusoglu told reporters that Turkey had been giving Russia consent to use its airspace in "three-month intervals."

However, the last period of consent expired earlier in April, and the flights have stopped.

On opposing sides, Russia, Iran and Turkey have been key players in the Syrian battleground, where the Kremlin and Tehran supported Syrian President Bashar Assad in political, logistical and military terms, while Turkey gave its support to rebel forces.

Following the closure of Turkish airspace, Russian aircraft will only be able to pass through Iran and Iraq to reach Syria.

## **BACKGROUND**

**Turkey has acted as a mediator between Russia and Ukraine since February. The much-awaited meeting between Russian and Ukrainian leaders is expected to take place in Turkey. The airspace move is seen by some experts as leverage for Turkey to persuade Russia to restart peace negotiations.**

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On Saturday, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar met his Ukrainian counterpart Oleksii Reznikov to discuss the war.

The Turkish economy enjoys significant tourist flow and energy imports from Russia, which could be threatened as a result of Ankara avoiding the renewal of the airspace agreement.

Samuel Ramani, associate fellow at the Royal United Service Institute, said that Turkey's blocking of Russian flights to Syria reflects its discontent with Russia's plans to annex southern Ukraine and much of the Black Sea coast.

"Turkey views itself as a Black Sea power, and would see such a major disruption of the geopolitical balance in the region as very problematic," he told Arab News.

As part of the Montreux Convention regarding the Regime of the Straits, Turkey also limited the passage of Russian warships from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean at the beginning of Ukraine war, but commercial flights from and to Russia remained intact despite Western embargoes on Russian flights.

According to Ramani, Turkey is also facing more pressure from the US and EU to sanction Russia, which it has so far resisted. He added that Turkey's new move is "a great way" to reinforce its commitment to NATO efforts to counter

Russia.

“It is unclear whether this move will fundamentally overhaul Turkey-Russia cooperation in Syria, especially in Idlib, where joint patrols are moving, and Turkey still seems interested in mediating between Russia and Ukraine. So far, Russian media outlets and officials have been relatively silent on this development, which suggests that they are hoping this issue blows over,” he said.

Emre Ersen, an expert on Russia-Turkey relations from Marmara University in Istanbul, said that though Turkey has avoided placing sanctions on Russia, it has also made its pro-Ukrainian stance “very clear” since the beginning of the war.

“This latest decision in this sense could be interpreted as a sign of Turkey’s support to the West, which has been critical about Ankara’s neutral position regarding the anti-Russia sanctions,” he told Arab News.

Ersen said that though the Turkish move will upset Russia, as it is increasingly isolated in the international arena, Moscow is unlikely to alienate Ankara as a result.

“Syria has already become secondary in terms of Russian foreign policy in the last few months due to the ongoing war in Ukraine. This is also why Russia will likely follow a wait-and-see policy about the implications of Turkey’s latest decision,” he said.

Although many analysts have already lauded the decision as a strong sign of support to Ukraine, Karol Wasilewski, director of Analytical Agency NEOSwiat, said the move has more to do with Turkey-Russia dynamics in Syria.

“Turkey wants to deter Russia from using humanitarian issues as an instrument of foreign policy and an element of pressure on Turkey, particularly from blocking the extension of the use of the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing for the delivery of humanitarian aid. Since the current mandate expires in July 2022, I think that the decision to close the airspace should be seen in this context,” he told Arab News.

Concerns are rising over the possibility that Russia may consider closing the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing – the last remaining point through which international humanitarian aid is delivered to Syria – if tensions escalate further between the West and Kremlin over the Ukrainian conflict.

More than 1,000 aid trucks cross the border crossing between Syria and Turkey each month to deliver basic needs to 3.4 million people living in the northwestern Idlib area.

Turkey’s restriction of Russian warships is a clear signal to Russia that Ankara intends to hit Moscow’s interests in Syria, Wasilewski said.

“It’s true that Russia has more burning problems now, but Syria has always been seen by Russian decision-makers as a card to use in their grand bargain with the US, a process that – in Russians’ eyes – was aimed to also decide

the fate of Ukraine,” he said.

Wasilewski added that Turkey’s signals on Syria are “worrying” for Russia, because they undermine Moscow’s ability to use Syria as a bargaining chip with the US.

“This not only serves the aim of distracting Russian decision-makers, but also forces them to rethink their grand strategy,” he said.



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Turkey’s refugee problem at the center of heated debates