

Fears grow over possible removal of Iran's Revolutionary Guard from US terror list

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JEDDAH: Concerns grew on Friday that the US planned to remove the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps from its blacklist of terrorist organizations as part of a revived nuclear deal with Iran.

The IRGC has been subject to US sanctions since 2007 as part of the US Specially Designated Global Terrorist list, and in 2017 it became the first national military to be designated by the US as a Foreign Terrorist Organization.

"The IRGC is the Iranian government's primary means of directing and implementing its global terrorist campaign," President Donald Trump said at the time.

The Revolutionary Guards control a business empire in Iran, as well as military and intelligence forces responsible for terrorist attacks throughout the world.

Analysts now believe the US plans to remove the terrorist designation in return for Iranian assurances about reining in the IRGC. It is thought to be the last and most troublesome issue in wider indirect talks on reviving the 2015 nuclear deal.

Such a move would be fiercely opposed by the Gulf states, and Israel made its concern known in a joint statement on Friday by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid. "The attempt to delist the IRGC as a terrorist organization is an insult to their victims and would ignore documented reality supported by unequivocal evidence," they said.

"We find it hard to believe that the IRGC's designation as a terrorist organization will be removed in exchange for a promise not to harm Americans. The US will not abandon its closest allies in exchange for empty promises from terrorists."



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Ballistic missiles hit Irbil, Iran's Revolutionary Guard claim responsibility

[Sudan group says 187 wounded in latest anti-coup protests](#)

Sat, 2022-03-19 00:02

CAIRO: Nearly 200 people have been wounded in the latest protests to erupt in the Sudanese capital over deteriorating economic conditions following a military take-over, a doctor's union said on Friday.

The Sudan's Doctors Committee issued a statement saying that 187 people were wounded in clashes with police in Khartoum on Thursday, 70 of whom were likely struck by rubber bullets.

Three of the wounded were shot in either the head or chest and are currently in intensive care, it added.

Riot police used tear gas to disperse thousands of protesters who had sought to reach the Republican Palace, seat of the military government.

Videos posted on social media showed police firing tear gas.

Thursday's marches were the latest in near-daily street protests since the military took over on Oct. 25, removing a civilian-led transitional government.

Since then, at least 87 people have been killed and thousands wounded in a bloody crackdown on protesters, according to the doctor's union.

Sudan has been facing a dire economic situation since the October military takeover.

FASTFACT

The inflation rate reached nearly 260 percent in February, according to Sudan's census agency.

On Wednesday, the state-owned news agency SUNA reported that the inflation rate reached nearly 260 percent in February, quoting the country's census agency.

Earlier this month, the country's Central Bank floated the Sudanese pound – a move expected to result in a swift increase in prices.

The ruling generals have been struggling to stabilize the country. Their coup has upended Sudan's democratic transition after a popular uprising forced the military to remove former President Omar Bashir in April 2019.

Following the military takeover, Western governments and world financial institutions suspended their assistance to Sudan in order to pressure the generals to return a civilian-led government.

Sudan has for years struggled with an array of economic woes, including a huge budget deficit and widespread shortages of essential goods and soaring prices of bread and other staples.

The country descended into economic crisis when the south seceded in 2011 after decades of war, taking with it more than half of public revenues and 95 percent of exports.

Thursday's rallies were called by the Sudanese Professionals Association and the Resistance Committees, which have been the backbone of the uprising against Bashir and relentless anti-coup protests in the past three months. Protesters also chanted slogans against Sudan's top military ruler Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan.

"The existing regime has no legitimacy. The Sudanese people want a national, civilian and democratic government," said Hussein Al-Safy, who was at the

protest.



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Gang rape of young woman leads to fresh protests in Sudan
Two dead as UN, AU warn of 'grave danger' in Sudan

[UAE Leaders receive Syrian President Assad](#)

Fri, 2022-03-18 23:02

LONDON: Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed on Friday welcomed Syrian President Bashar Assad in the UAE, saying he hoped his visit will be the beginning of good, peace and stability for Syria and the entire region, state news agency WAM reported.

The meeting, which took place at Al-Shati Palace, came within the framework of the common concern to continue consultation and coordination between the two countries on various issues, WAM also said.

Sheikh Mohammed was briefed by the Syrian leader on the latest developments

in his country, WAM said, adding that they also discussed contributing consolidating of security, stability and peace in the Arab and the Middle East region.

“During the meeting, the two sides discussed a number of issues of common concern, emphasizing the preserving the territorial integrity of Syria and the withdrawal of foreign forces, in addition to political and humanitarian support for Syria and its people to reach a peaceful solution to all the challenges it faces,” the WAM report added.

Sheikh Mohammed said that Syria is a fundamental pillar of Arab security, and that the UAE is keen to strengthen bilateral cooperation to achieve the aspirations of Syrian stability and development.

They also exchanged views and the two countries’ positions on all regional and international issues and developments of common interest, before he was seen off at Al-Bateen Airport by the Abu Dhabi crown prince.

Meanwhile, the UAE Vice President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid also met with Assad to discuss Syria and other Arab issues,

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid “affirmed the UAE’s keenness to discover new paths of constructive cooperation with Syria, and to monitor opportunities through which various aspects of cooperation can be pushed forward to achieve the interests of the two peoples.







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Crewman feared drowned after UAE cargo vessel capsizes, sinks in Gulf

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[brother denies claims](#)

Fri, 2022-03-18 21:41

Lawyer for Lebanon's Raja Salameh, brother of Central Bank governor, says evidence in case against him is "media speculation without any evidence"-statement.

Allegations of illicit enrichment and money laundering against Raja Salameh are absolutely unfounded, lawyer says in statement.



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[Documents detail Iran's sanction-dodging financial infrastructure](#)

Author:

Fri, 2022-03-18 20:41

LONDON: Iran has established a clandestine banking and finance system that allows it to handle billions of dollars and evade US-imposed sanctions, according to intelligence officials and documents seen by the Wall Street Journal.

The Islamic Republic uses a system of foreign commercial banks, proxy companies cooperative firms and a transaction clearing house within the country to move money and withstand sanctions.

According to documents seen by the WSJ and officials they have spoken with, Iran's clandestine banking system works as follows: Iranian banks that serve companies barred by US sanctions from exporting or importing engage affiliate firms – "Rahbar" companies – in Iran to manage sanctioned trade on their behalf. Those firms establish companies outside of Iran's borders to serve as proxies for the Iranian traders.

The proxies then trade with foreign purchasers of Iranian oil and other commodities, or sellers of goods for import into Iran, in dollars, euros or other foreign currencies, through accounts set up in foreign banks.

Some of that revenue is smuggled into Iran by couriers who carry cash withdrawn from the proxy company accounts abroad, officials told the WSJ, but much of it remains in bank accounts abroad. The Iranian importers and exporters use it to trade foreign currency among themselves, on ledgers maintained in Iran, according to the Iranian central bank.

These methods are used to facilitate the sale of Iranian oil and other goods and also the purchase and import of goods needed within Iran.

The system provides Iran the revenues and imports it needs to keep the economy and country running. It eases the pressure on the Iranian rial by giving the economy access to the dollars, euros and other reserve currencies in which world trade is denominated, according to diplomats and officials.

One Western official told the WSJ: "This is an unprecedented governmental money-laundering operation."

According to Gholamreza Mesbahi-Moghaddam, a senior Iranian political figure, covert import and export transactions amount to \$80 billion a year.

"The majority of our exports of gasoline, steel, petrochemicals – all are under hidden subsidiary activities," he said.

The International Monetary Fund estimates that the figure will grow to \$150 billion in 2022 including foreign sales that are banned under the sanctions, more than twice the levels during the brief period when Iran was freed from sanctions.

In this way, it appears, Iran has managed to evade sanctions, even managing to boost its trade to roughly pre-sanctions levels.

While the value of the rial has plummeted during the years of sanctions, the Iranian economy has withstood international isolation enough to allow Iran to conduct tough negotiations with the US over the future of its nuclear program.

Iran's mission to the UN did not respond to a WSJ request for comment about the finance system.



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US imposes new Iran sanctions over human rights violationsUS pressures UK on Iran sanctions at the UN