

[US envoy to Iran holds talks with GCC officials](#)

Tue, 2021-04-27 18:29

LONDON: The US envoy to Iran held talks on “regional security” with officials from the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on Tuesday, before heading to Vienna.

“Good discussion this morning with our GCC partners regarding the status of JCPOA talks and regional security,” said Robert Malley, referring to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, more commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal.

“Heading back to Vienna for the next round of talks toward our objective of a mutual return to JCPOA compliance,” Malley added.

World powers resumed high-level talks in Vienna on Tuesday focused on bringing the United States back into the nuclear deal with Iran.

The US is not at the table because it unilaterally pulled out of the deal in 2018 under then-President Donald Trump, who restored and augmented American sanctions in a campaign of “maximum pressure” to try and force Iran into renegotiating the pact with more concessions. President Joe Biden wants to rejoin the deal, however, and there is a US delegation in Vienna taking part in indirect talks with Iran, with diplomats from the other world powers acting as go-betweens.

(With AP)



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[United States](#)

[Iran](#)

[Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action \(JCPOA\)](#)

[Robert Malley](#)

Iran seeks production of weapons of mass destruction: German Intel Agency
Iran warns sabotage affects Vienna talks over nuclear deal

Full COVID-19 lockdown adds to financial strain in Turkey

Author:

AP

ID:

1619526804817646300

Tue, 2021-04-27 15:41

ISTANBUL: As cases and deaths soar, Turkey's president has instructed people to stay home for nearly three weeks and shut down many businesses as part of the country's strictest COVID-19 measures yet.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan did not announce a stimulus package to offset the economic impact of the new restrictions.

With Turkey's double digit inflation, sinking national currency and businesses in trouble, many Turks already have been struggling financially. Gozde Aslan, a newspaper seller in Istanbul, said the lockdown would be difficult to weather.

"We have to bring food to our homes, and we live in a period where everything is very expensive," she said. "May God help us."

Erdogan announced Monday that a "full lockdown" would begin Thursday and last until May 17. Residents will be required to stay home except for grocery shopping and other essential needs, while intercity travel only will be allowed with permission. Restaurants are allowed to deliver food.

Some businesses and industries will be exempt from the shutdown, including factories, agriculture, health care and supply chain and logistics companies. The Interior Ministry also published a list of exempt individuals, who include parliament members, health care workers, law enforcement officers and many others. Tourists are also exempt from the round-the-clock curfew.

Aslan's husband and business partner, Baris, said the Turkish government's decision came late but was correct. He added: "It's a very difficult decision for the shopkeepers, for the working people. For this, the state should provide great assistance."

Earlier this month, Erdogan announced an extension of short labor payments for registered workers whose hours were cut due to pandemic restrictions. Some payments previously were made to small businesses.

Shoe store manager Burcin Yilmaz lamented that he would again have to shut his business. During the past three months, several nearby shops that had been open a long time shut down for good, he said.

"We have to close down and wait and see what happens in the end," Yilmaz said.

Erdogan said daily confirmed cases would have to rapidly drop below 5,000 for Turkey "to not be left behind" as many European countries start reopening.

"Otherwise, we will inevitably face a heavy price in every area, from tourism to trade and education," the president said. Turkey relies heavily on tourism to bring in foreign currencies.

Opposition lawmakers blasted the government Tuesday. The leader of the main

opposition party, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, called on Erdogan to propose a social aid package that would help closed businesses and day laborers in Turkey's informal economies. He also said urged the suspension of debt enforcement proceedings for some time.

While agreeing with the necessity of a lockdown, Kilicdaroglu said, "People need to eat. They need to live."

The government has been distributing tons of onions and potatoes this month with much fanfare. Many see it as a clear example of how much Turks are suffering from rising food prices and poverty. The World Bank, in a report published Tuesday, said Turkey's poverty levels rose from 10.2 percent in 2019 to 12.2 percent in 2020.

In March, the Turkish government split the country into four risk tiers and lifted weekend curfews and allowed indoor dining in many provinces.

Coronavirus infections rose again before long, putting most Turkish cities into "very high-risk" categories.

Facing record numbers of confirmed cases, Erdogan in mid-April announced a partial lockdown during the month of Ramadan, bringing back weekend curfews, extending evening curfew hours and closing down restaurants for in-person dining.

Confirmed cases averaged around 60,000 per day during the peak week this month. The country recorded its highest daily death toll on April 21, with 362.

The latest Health Ministry statistics reported Monday showed 37,312 new confirmed cases and 353 deaths. Turkey's total death toll in the pandemic stands at 38,711.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Turkey](#)
[#covid-19](#)
[lockdown](#)
[President Recep Tayyip Erdogan](#)

Turkey said to mull tighter lockdown in bid to save tourism season
Rights abuses make closer ties hard with Turkey, EU says

[Leaked Zarif criticisms of IRGC reveal who really runs the show in Iran](#)

Mon, 2021-04-26 21:54

LONDON: Leaked recordings by Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, in which he criticized slain Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), are a sign of political infighting within the regime, analysts have said.

Most notable from the hours-long leaked recordings, first exposed by Persian-language TV channel Iran International, were Zarif's revelations that Soleimani and his accomplices in the IRGC exert near-total control over foreign policy.

Zarif complained that the IRGC's needs on the battlefield in Syria, for example, have often usurped those of Iranian diplomats and the country's foreign policy as a whole.

It is unclear who the leak came from, but it "comes at a sensitive point, at the end of the Rouhani administration and ahead of Iran's presidential elections," Jason Brodsky, senior Middle East analyst and editor at Iran International, told Arab News.

"We see the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs having to contend with various elements of Iran's broader media ecosystem, which is trying to put out an official line that's different at times to what Rouhani's administration is putting out," Brodsky said.

"It shows that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has really had a difficult past few weeks in terms of contending with domestic political infighting inside the regime. It's important to view this story in the context of that ongoing battle," he added.

"It has international elements, with the ongoing nuclear talks in Vienna, and it has domestic political elements, with the Iranian presidential elections scheduled for June."

But beyond the political rift between pro-nuclear-deal politicians such as

Zarif and hardliners from the clerical arm of government, the leaked audio also exposes a more ingrained aspect of Iranian foreign policy: Who makes the decisions?

“The power dynamic that Zarif portrays within the Islamic Republic is something that a lot of observers don’t necessarily appreciate: That the Ministry of Foreign Affairs doesn’t have independent decision-making authority within the Islamic Republic,” Brodsky said.

Asif Shuja, senior research fellow at the National University of Singapore’s Middle East Institute, told Arab News that this power imbalance is a result of the IRGC’s ascendancy to power since its formation during the Iran-Iraq war.

“The IRGC was designed to perform a specific role in Iranian society – to protect the Islamic revolution – and at the head of that whole system is the supreme leader,” said Shuja.

Over time, he explained, the IRGC’s role expanded to perform the traditional role of a military.

It transitioned from only guarding the office of the supreme leader and his ideology to territorial protection, which led to it sidelining the army and Foreign Ministry.

This has gone so far, Shuja said, that the IRGC has become “a mini-state, or a state within a state.”

The IRGC now controls the entirety of Iran’s ballistic missile arsenal. It has also taken an increasingly active role in suppressing domestic dissent against the regime – notably in November 2019, when hundreds of protestors were killed by security forces suspected to be from the Basij militia, the IRGC’s domestic army.

Shuja said the timing of the Zarif leak is hard to separate from the upcoming presidential elections, and competition from hardline factions could have spurred the leak in an attempt to dissuade the centrist foreign minister from a run at the presidency.

The Islamic revolution “was embodied by Qassem Soleimani, and if one negates him, then they also negate those ideas that are so integral to the Islamic Republic,” Shuja said. “That doesn’t augur well for Zarif’s chances in an election.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iran](#)

[Javad Zarif](#)

[Qassem Soleimani](#)

[Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps \(IRGC\)](#)

Iran International report: Zarif accused Soleimani of directing Iranian foreign policy
US denies Iran's Zarif a visa to attend UN Security Council meeting

[HRW slams Iran's 'undeserved' nomination to UN women's committee](#)

Mon, 2021-04-26 21:12

LONDON: Human Rights Watch (HRW) has denounced Iran's nomination to the UN women's committee, citing the country's "deplorable women's rights records."

Last week, Iran was elected by 54 UN member states to the Commission on the Status of Women, a New York-based body aimed at promoting gender equality and

female empowerment.

On its website, HRW lists a plethora of regressive Iranian laws that disproportionately target women.

For example, Iranian law allows girls to marry at 13 and boys at 15, there are widespread travel restrictions aimed exclusively at women, and female human rights campaigners are systematically targeted.

HRW also criticized the way the UN body's nominations were made. It said normally elections to UN bodies are made through competitive votes between member states, but "last week, the 54 member countries of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) did things the wrong way by holding uncompetitive elections."

The result "was undeserved prizes to abusive governments, notably Iran," HRW said. "UN delegations shouldn't be giving credibility to abusive states by rewarding them with human rights posts."

Their records "should now receive extra scrutiny," it added. "In the future, UN member states should avoid voting for abusive governments whenever possible and insist on competitive slates for all. Anything less only undermines the standing of UN bodies on human rights."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iran](#)

[Human Rights Watch \(HRW\)](#)

[United Nations \(UN\)](#)

Human Rights Watch denounces Iran's 'abusive charges against rights defenders'

Turkey 'seeking to repair' ties with Saudi Arabia, says it 'respects' court decision regarding Khashoggi

Mon, 2021-04-26 21:05

ISTANBUL: Turkey is looking to repair relations with Saudi Arabia, Erdogan's spokesman and adviser Ibrahim Kalin said Monday.

Trade between the two countries has dropped by 98% since last year, following an unofficial boycott of Turkish goods by businesses in the Kingdom in response to what they called hostility from Ankara.

Expressing hope the boycott could be lifted, Kalin said: "We will seek ways to repair the relationship with a more positive agenda with Saudi Arabia as well."

Kalin also said the Turkish presidency welcomed the trial in Saudi Arabia which last year jailed eight people for between seven and 20 years for the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

"They had a court. Trials have been held," Kalin said. "They made a decision so we respect that decision."

Kalin's comments to Reuters came ahead of talks between Turkey and Egypt next week, which Ankara hopes will forge renewed cooperation between the two countries.

Relations have been strained since Egypt's army ousted in 2013 Muslim Brotherhood president Mohamed Morsi, who was close to Turkey.

Recently, however, Turkey has begun working to rebuild ties with Egypt and other Gulf states, trying to overcome differences which have left Ankara increasingly isolated in the Arab world.

Intelligence chiefs as well as foreign ministers of both countries have been in contact, and a Turkish diplomatic mission will visit Egypt in early May, Kalin said.

"Given the realities on the ground I think it's in the interests of both countries and the region to normalise relations with Egypt," he said.

In a gesture to Cairo last month, Turkey asked Egyptian opposition television channels operating on its territory to moderate criticism of Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi.

Egypt welcomed the move but has been publicly cautious about Turkish calls for better ties between the two countries which have also supported rival sides in Libya's conflict.

"Rapprochement with Egypt...will certainly help the security situation in Libya because we fully understand that Egypt has a long border with Libya and that may sometimes pose a security threat for Egypt," Kalin said.

He said Turkey would discuss security in Libya, where a UN-backed transitional government took over last month, with Egypt and other countries.

But despite a UN call for all foreign forces to leave the country, he indicated that Turkish military officers and allied Syrian fighters would be staying.

"We have an agreement that is still holding there with the Libyan government," he said, referring to a 2019 accord which paved the way for decisive Turkish intervention in support of the Tripoli-based government.

* *With Reuters*



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Middle East](#)

[Turkey](#)

[Saudi Arabia](#)

[Jamal Khashoggi](#)

Turkey-US relations in the spotlight again after Biden's Armenia statement Turkey summons US ambassador over genocide announcement