

Israel would reject Iran deal enabling nukes: Netanyahu

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JERUSALEM: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Wednesday that Israel would not be bound to a nuclear deal between world powers and Iran if that would enable the Islamic republic to develop nuclear weapons.

"An agreement with Iran that would pave the way to nuclear weapons – weapons that threaten our extinction – would not compel us in any way," Netanyahu said in a speech, on the eve of Holocaust Remembrance Day.

"There is one thing that compels us – to prevent those who seek our extermination from carrying out their plot," he said at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem.

China, France, Germany, Russia, Britain and the European Union – acting as an intermediary for the US – met in Vienna Tuesday for talks with Iran, aimed at rescuing the 2015 international agreement on Tehran's nuclear program.

US President Joe Biden has said he is ready to reverse the decision of his predecessor Donald Trump to withdraw from the agreement and reimpose unilateral sanctions, raising concern in Israel.

The nuclear talks were set to continue on Friday.

Iran and Israel have both recently attacked each other's commercial vessels, according to reports.

Israel believes Iran was cheating on the deal and working toward a nuclear weapon, while Tehran denies such ambitions.

"During the Holocaust, we had neither the power to defend ourselves nor the sovereignty to do so," Netanyahu said at the Wednesday ceremony.

"Today we have a state, we have a defense force, and we have the full and natural right as the Jewish people's sovereign state to defend ourselves from our enemies," he said.

As tensions with Iran remained high, Israel in recent months has forged ties with Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, where Jewish communities were for the first time holding public Holocaust ceremonies.

"In these very moments, a museum in Dubai is holding a memorial event for Holocaust victims," Netanyahu noted. "Who would have believed?"

"These are indications of a welcome change in the ties between Arabs and Jews, outside of Israel and inside the country too," he said.

Ceremonies held by the Jewish communities in Dubai and Manama on Wednesday will be joined by Muslim neighbors, said Houda Nonoo, Bahrain's former ambassador to the US, who is a board member of the Association of Gulf Jewish Communities.

Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremonies will continue on Thursday, when sirens will blare across the country for two minutes in the morning, followed by a series of events in memory of the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust.



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Israeli president picks Netanyahu to try to form government
Iran's Rouhani says Vienna talks open 'new chapter'

[Egypt will make 'all possible efforts' to help resolve crisis in Lebanon](#)

Author:

Wed, 2021-04-07 21:48

BEIRUT: Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said on Wednesday his country will "continue to exert all possible efforts alongside the Lebanese political parties to overcome the crisis facing the formation of the new government."

Shoukry, who was visiting Lebanon for the first time since the explosion that destroyed Beirut's Port eight months ago, denounced "the ongoing political deadlock preventing the formation of a government of specialists capable of

meeting the needs of the brotherly Lebanese people and achieving stability, not only for Lebanon but for the region and Egypt.”

Shoukry passed on a message from Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi to his Lebanese counterpart, President Michel Aoun, that “stressed Egypt’s solidarity with Lebanon and its support of the efforts exerted to form a new government, as this would open the door for regional and international support and therefore serve the common interests of the region’s countries, but primarily those of the brotherly Lebanese people.”

Shoukry added: “The political framework of the upcoming government is ruled by the constitution, the Taif Agreement and the full commitment to those documents, considered the main pillars of stability.”

This latest attempt to encourage Lebanese politicians to make progress comes 167 days after Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri was instructed to form a new government to replace the one that resigned shortly after the Beirut explosion. Politicians have so far failed to reach a consensus as a result of Aoun’s reported determination to secure a blocking third – control over a third of cabinet portfolios for his allies, which would give them the power to veto any proposal that requires a two-thirds majority. Hariri refuses to grant this.

While the political deadlock continues, the financial crisis in the country deepens. A few days ago, Caretaker Finance Minister Ghazi Wazni warned that “the reserve dedicated to financing basic imports is depleting and may dry up completely by the end of May, unless we reduce subsidies by issuing ration cards to about 800,000 needy families.”

The agenda for Shoukry’s visit did not include meetings with Caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab, head of the Free Patriotic Movement Gebran Bassil, Caretaker Foreign Minister Charbel Wehbe or any Hezbollah officials.

Instead he met Hariri, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, Maronite Patriarch Bechara Al-Rahi, Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, Kataeb Party leader Sami Gemayel, and Marada Party leader Suleiman Frangieh. A scheduled meeting with Samir Geagea, head of the Lebanese Forces, was canceled after Geagea tested positive for COVID-19.

Shoukry praised Berri for his “role and his initiative aimed at putting an end to this crisis, while preserving the solid political and legal foundation by abiding by the constitution and the Taif Agreement.”

And after his meeting with the Maronite patriarch, he said: “We have agreed with Al-Rahi on the importance of rapidly forming a government to implement the required reforms, paving the way for regional and international support.”

Egypt has backed an economic-reform initiative launched by French President Emmanuel Macron during a visit to Beirut soon after the explosion, and indicated that it is ready to work with Paris to ensure it is successfully implemented by a new government formed by a political consensus.

Aoun’s office said the president “commended the role undertaken by Egypt,

under the leadership of El-Sisi, to help Lebanon address the various crises it is facing, particularly the governmental crisis.” He also expressed the hope that “the efforts will bear positive results through committing to the constitutional and distribution rules upon which the Lebanese system is built, and including all of the Lebanese parties without exclusion or discrimination.”

During a televised speech on Wednesday, Aoun stressed “his commitment to a forensic audit in order to hold accountable those who have stolen the money of the Lebanese people and state.”

In January, Mount Lebanon’s prosecutor, Ghada Aoun, charged the Governor of Lebanon’s central bank Riad Salameh over allegations relating to the use of foreign currency reserves.

Also on Wednesday, ministers gathered at the Ministry of Defense to discuss the demarcation of northern maritime borders, after a Syrian-Russian gas-exploration agreement ignored more than 750 kilometers of Lebanese borders.

“The parties agreed on the importance of the Lebanese authorities acquiring the official documents in order to set up a communication mechanism with the Syrian authorities,” the ministry said. “This stresses the position Lebanon has conveyed to the Syrian authorities repeatedly since 2010 and deposited at the UN.”

Foreign Minister Wehbe said on Tuesday: “President Aoun held a phone call with Syrian President Bashar Assad, during which he discussed the demarcation of the northern maritime borders with Syria and stressed that Lebanon will not accept the undermining of its maritime sovereignty.”



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Lebanon's President Aoun holds central bank responsible for crisis
Lebanon's dollar crisis dims future of students abroad

[Lebanon's President Aoun holds central bank responsible for crisis](#)

Author:

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Wed, 2021-04-07 21:35

BEIRUT – Lebanon's President Michel Aoun on Wednesday held the Central Bank responsible for the financial collapse and stalling an audit, which's a key condition for foreign aid the country badly needs.

In a national address, Aoun accused Lebanese banks of squandering people's savings and the Central Bank's governor of giving excuses for refusing to answer 73 out of 133 questions that consultancy Alvarez & Marsal had sent for the audit.

"To the central bank I say: the main responsibility befalls you," he said, in his strongest criticism yet. "You should have taken measures to protect people's money in the banks."

Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The paralyzed banking sector is at the heart of Lebanon's financial collapse, which came to a head in 2019 when dollar inflows dried up and protests swept the country.

The heavily indebted state and the banking sector, its biggest creditor, have since traded blame for the crisis, Lebanon's worst in decades.

Banks have frozen savers out of their dollar deposits, as the Lebanese currency lost most of its value, plunging many into poverty.

Leaders have failed to launch a rescue plan, instead wrangling over the make-up of a new government, with Aoun and veteran politician Saad Al-Hariri, who was designated premier in October, locked in a standoff.

Foreign donors have warned they will not give any aid without reforms to tackle crushing debt and entrenched graft, root causes of the crisis. An audit of the Central Bank is a key demand.

Aoun said in Wednesday's speech politicians shared the blame for providing the Central Bank with cover, without naming individuals.



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Riad Salameh: In Lebanon, depositors' money is still available
Aoun turns to diplomats in bid to break Lebanon's political deadlock

[Iranian ship linked to IRGC attacked in Red Sea](#)

Tue, 2021-04-06 21:24

JEDDAH: An Iranian ship linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has been attacked in the Red Sea.

The Saviz was hit by limpet mines, Iran's Tasnim news agency reported on Tuesday.

The attack took place off the coast of Eritrea and led to several injuries, according to Al Arabiya TV.

A US official told Reuters that the United States did not carry out the attack.

The Wall Street Journal reported last month that Israel has targeted at least 12 Iranian ships heading for Syria since late 2019.

The vessels have mostly been carrying oil in breach of US sanctions. However, the report said cargo and military ships have also been hit with weapons, that include water mines.



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US sanctions 5 Iranian ship captains for bringing oil to Venezuela - Pompeo
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shift,' says expert

Tue, 2021-04-06 21:23

ANKARA: Turkey's latest arrest wave targeting former admirals who signed a critical night-time declaration has stirred debate over whether the crackdown is a result of the country's "Eurasianist shift."

On Monday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused 104 former navy commanders of trying to stage a "political coup" through an open letter that criticized the government's new 45 kilometer-long artificial waterway, dubbed Kanal Istanbul, and its immediate impact on the 1936 Montreux Convention that regulates the traffic of warships in the Istanbul strait.

Among the signatories, the most notable name was Cem Gurdeniz, the mastermind of Turkey's controversial maximalist maritime doctrine, known as Blue Homeland.

Gurdeniz, who has been held in police custody since Monday, is a well-known member of the prominent Eurasianist faction within the Turkish military. The group advocates an anti-Western strategy, and stronger relations with Russia and China.

Dr. Berk Esen, a political scientist from Sabanci University in Istanbul, said that the admirals' statement came at a critical juncture when the Erdogan administration is recalibrating its position in the international arena.

"Over the last few years, the Turkish government has sought closer ties with authoritarian regimes like Russia and Qatar to draw support for its revisionist steps in the wider region," he told Arab News.

In response to Western criticism against undemocratic Turkish politics, Esen said that some Turkish government officials have gathered support from retired officers and analysts belonging to the Eurasianist faction.

For several years, the Eurasianist movement has pushed Turkey's leadership toward a rapprochement with Russia and China. It has been rumored that the faction has acquired significant clout in the government, letting it shape the direction of Turkey's foreign and security policies.

The predominant ideology of the Eurasianists, who originated in the Turkish far-left, is based on an anti-Western foreign policy coupled with ultra-nationalism in the domestic sphere.

They advocate for leaving NATO and abandoning the EU candidacy process in favor of membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

According to Esen, the anti-Western policy of the Turkish government may soon come to an end, judging from reports of an agreement between Turkey and the EU.

“To strengthen this trend, Erdogan is seeking to curry favors from the Biden administration by supporting the recent US offensive against Russia. The admirals’ statement came against the backdrop of this shifting geopolitical situation,” he said.

The latest Russian troop movements in zones bordering eastern Ukraine have enraged the Biden administration, leading the US State Department to demand that Moscow explain the reported “provocations.”

However, Russia sees the the proposed Kanal Istanbul project as a threat because it would provide NATO members with free access to the Black Sea and Crimean peninsula, including the strategic port of Sevastopol, which Moscow annexed in 2014.

Therefore, the group of admirals fear that the new canal could anger Russia, as Turkey might break from the Montreux Convention that governs the transit of naval vessels during times of peace and war.

The length of stay and tonnage of warships from non-Black Sea naval forces are restricted by the convention. They cannot stay in the region for more than 21 days, while there is a maximum vessel weight limit of 45,000 tons.

However, in a televised speech on Monday, Erdogan said that the government is not considering a withdrawal from the convention, adding: “But if the need emerges in the future, we could revise every convention to help our country get better.”

According to Esen, although not all the signatories to the letter subscribe to the Blue Homeland doctrine, the admirals are likely worried that Erdogan will use the Montreux Convention as a bargaining chip with the US, which has for decades tried to undermine the agreement in order to gain access to the Black Sea.

“After seeking a tacit alliance with the Eurasianists for the last couple of years, Erdogan may have gotten a convenient excuse to eliminate the retired officers affiliated with the Blue Homeland doctrine as he considers strengthening ties with the US,” Berk said.

Meanwhile, the Chinese embassy in Ankara condemned the capital’s mayor Mansur Yavas and Good Party leader Meral Aksener for penning messages commemorating the massacre of Uighurs by the Chinese military in 1990.

“China reserves the right to proportionately respond,” the embassy tweeted, adding: “The Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region is an integral part of Chinese territory. This is an internationally accepted and indisputable fact.”

Turkey’s opposition has long criticized the government for remaining silent on China’s oppression of Uighur Muslims.



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New turmoil in Turkey as veteran navy chiefs held EU chiefs express deep concerns on human rights in Turkey to Erdogan