

# [Bahrain sends delegate to Qatar for first time since ending rift](#)

Author:

Wed, 2021-02-24 22:27

CAIRO: A delegate from the Bahraini foreign ministry visited Doha on Wednesday in the first visit of its kind since an agreement last month to end a rift with Qatar.

The ministry sent a a correspondence aimed at renewing an invitation to send an official delegation to start bilateral talks between both countries “regarding outstanding issues and topics,” read a statement on the state-run news agency BNA.

The message was delivered by the ministry’s Undersecretary Ambassador Waheed Mubarak Sayyar.

The step comes as part of an implementation of the provisions of the Al-Ula agreement which was agreed in Saudi Arabia last month.

Delegations from Egypt and UAE have met Qatari delegates in in Kuwait over the past few days for the first time since the al-Ula agreement.

Since the agreement, air and travel links have resumed between Qatar and the four states – Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt.



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Egypt and Qatar hold first meeting since AlUla Declaration  
UAE, Qatari delegations meet in Kuwait to follow up on AlUla Declaration

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## Tensions rising between Athens, Ankara

Author:

Wed, 2021-02-24 21:22

ANKARA: While Turkey and Greece came together to resume talks over their maritime disputes, the decades-long tension between the countries has resurfaced again.

Ankara claimed four Greek F-16 jets harassed a Turkish research vessel in the Aegean Sea on Tuesday by dropping a flare two miles away from the ship near the Greek island of Lemnos – an accusation that was quickly denied by Athens.

Greece's Air Force was conducting an exercise in the Aegean Sea at the time, but allegedly far away from the Turkish vessel.

In a press briefing, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said his country responded with the "necessary retaliation in line with the rules. While we are carrying out scientific work, harassment is not correct. It doesn't fit in our good neighborly ties."

The Greek Defense Ministry insisted their jets never harassed the Turkish vessel.

Turkey's new research vessel, the TCG Cesme, conducted annual hydrographic survey work last week in international waters between the two countries, stirring Athens' anger.

The Greek Foreign Ministry criticized the presence of the Turkish vessel in the area, describing it as "an unnecessary move that doesn't help positive sentiment."

In retaliation, Ankara accused Greece of conducting similar military exercises in the Aegean Sea near islands that are supposed to be non-militarized by international and bilateral agreements.

The incident triggered, once again, the unresolved bilateral dispute over maritime zones as both countries continue to pursue energy resources in the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

The second round of exploratory talks was expected to be held in Athens in early March. It was scheduled ahead of the EU Summit on March 25-26, during which Brussels will decide on possible sanctions on Ankara over its energy exploration missions in the eastern Mediterranean.

"It is important that the resumption of exploratory talks between Greece and Turkey does not elicit hopes for a breakthrough," George Tzogopoulos, a senior fellow at the International Center of European Formation, told Arab News.

"The two countries interpret dialogue in different terms and employ relevant political communication strategies. New tensions concerning the research ship Cesme are nothing new in the modern history of bilateral relations, but they further deteriorate an already toxic climate."

Turkish-Greek relations have already been tested with the Cyprus conflict as Ankara ruled out discussing a federal system to reunify the divided island.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Feb. 10 that Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis "will get to know the crazy Turks as well."

The harsh rhetoric illustrates Turkey's anger about the bizonal and bicommunal federation offer from Greece, and it did not stop there.

"Exploratory talks were supposed to be held in Athens but Mitsotakis challenged me," Erdogan said in the Parliament. "How can we sit down with you now? Know your place first."

According to Tzogopoulos, without a positive agenda, long-term solutions are unlikely.

"For now the best we can hope for is avoiding a military accident, while experienced Greek and Turkish diplomats continue their work," he said.

Tzogopoulos said that from a European perspective, a model of selective engagement with Turkey is being studied in Brussels.

"This will continue despite new tensions," he said. "From a NATO perspective, deconfliction remains a priority and this goal has been met until now."



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## [Houthi demands delay mission to assess decaying tanker off Yemen: UN](#)

Wed, 2021-02-24 20:54

LONDON: There are new delays in deploying an expert mission to assess the condition of the Safer tanker and conduct initial repairs due to a new list of requests from the Houthis related to “logistics and security arrangements,” the United Nations said on Wednesday.

The tanker has been moored near Ras Issa oil terminal for more than five years. The UN previously warned that it could leak four times as much oil as was spilled during the 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster off the coast of Alaska.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the Security Council have

repeatedly called on the Houthi militia in Yemen to grant access to the tanker for a technical assessment and emergency repairs.

*More to follow*



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Houthi militants kidnap Safer. Co engineers, kill civilians Yemen's FM blames Houthis for looming Safer oil tanker disaster

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## [World Bank fury as Lebanon MPs jump vaccine queue](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-02-23 21:52

BEIRUT: Lebanese politicians have been accused of jumping the queue for the coronavirus vaccine, with the World Bank on Tuesday joining a chorus of condemnation and threatening to suspend its multi-million-dollar backing for the country's vaccination drive.

The controversy erupted after some MPs secretly received the COVID-19 jab in the parliament building – despite not being in priority groups.

Allegations of favoritism mounted after it was revealed President Michel Aoun and his wife were inoculated last Friday by a medical team sent to the Baabda Palace.

The claims added to widespread frustration among Lebanese over delays and breaches of the vaccination campaign.

World Bank regional director Saroj Kumar Jha tweeted that if the allegations were shown to be true, "it would be a breach of the national plan."

He warned that the bank may suspend financing for vaccines and support for the country's coronavirus response.

"I appeal to all, I mean all, regardless of your position, to please register and wait for your turn," Jha added.

The World Bank's reallocation of \$34 million has enabled Lebanon to receive its first two batches of about 60,000 Pfizer-BioNTech doses this month. The bank had said it would monitor the vaccine rollout and warned against favoritism.

A number of MPs are believed to have received the vaccine inside the parliament building in breach of an established plan that requires individuals to register through a dedicated platform and then wait for a hospital appointment.

The first stage of vaccination rollout, which entered its 10th day on Tuesday, includes doctors, nurses and paramedics treating virus patients, as well as those over 75 years of age.

The MPs' breach sparked a furious public response on social media under the hashtag #NoWasta (no favoritism).

Dr. Abdul Rahman Bizri, head of the National Committee for the Administration of the Coronavirus Vaccine, threatened to resign in protest at the breach, but later said he would wait on an official explanation by Wednesday.

Less than two hours later, information was leaked to local media that Aoun, along with his wife and 16 people from his presidential team, was given the vaccine last Friday.

Jha tweeted: "This is not in line with the national plan agreed with (the) World Bank, and we would record it (as a) breach of terms and conditions agreed with us for fair and equitable vaccination. Everyone has to register and wait their turn."

A leaked list of MPs who secretly received the vaccine showed that many were not in the priority groups.

Among politicians who sought to justify receiving the jab, Anis Nassar said he had registered through the platform and received a phone call from parliament.

“I was not aware of any of violation, and if a violation has taken place, I apologize profusely. Despite that I am not responsible for what happened.”

Parliament Secretary-General Adnan Daher claimed that the vaccinations were supervised by a team from the Ministry of Health and the Lebanese Red Cross.

He claimed the aim was to “help hospitals avoid overcrowding.”

However, the Red Cross said that it had no supervisory or operational role in the vaccination campaign.

“Our teams are present in all vaccination centers exclusively to assist or aid citizens of the age group 75 and over in the event of an emergency,” it explained.

Bizri later told a press conference: “What happened is a terrible thing and must be explained. The World Bank has said there will be consequences. The Ministry of Health committed this mistake and must explain it.”

He added: “This is discrimination.”

Doctors’ Syndicate chief Sharaf Abu Sharaf said that the vaccination rollout “has been slow, chaotic and far from transparent.”

He warned that without an improvement in the rollout, Lebanon “faces a great disaster.”

“We must accelerate the vaccination plan to reach herd immunity,” Abu Sharaf said.



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## [El-Sisi meets with head of US Central Command](#)

Author:

Tue, 2021-02-23 21:37

CAIRO: Egypt's President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and visiting Commander of US Central Command Kenneth McKenzie on Monday explored ways to strengthen military, security and counterterrorism cooperation.

El-Sisi said Egypt looks forward to developing bilateral cooperation in all areas in the face of common challenges in the region.

McKenzie said the US will continue to coordinate with Egypt on regional issues, and praised Cairo's efforts against terrorism and extremism.

They reviewed the latest regional developments, particularly in the Middle East, Africa and eastern Mediterranean.

Mohamed Farid, chief of staff of Egypt's Armed Forces, also met McKenzie and



his accompanying delegation.

Tamer Al-Rifai, spokesman for Egypt's Armed Forces, said: "The meeting dealt with the exchange of visions on a number of regional and international issues ... to achieve common interests in establishing security and stability."

He added: "The delegation confirmed the depth of Egyptian-American relations, and expressed its pride with partnerships that link the armed forces of both countries."



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