

Top diplomats from Jordan and Israel hold rare meeting on Palestine issue

Author:

Sat, 2020-12-05 00:51

AMMAN: Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi has held a rare meeting with his Israeli counterpart to press for the restart of stalled negotiations between the Palestinians and the Jewish state.

Thursday's meeting came days after Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas visited Jordan as part of an Arab tour to raise support for the Palestinian cause after Joe Biden beat Donald Trump in last month's US presidential election.

During the meeting at the King Hussein (Allenby) Bridge crossing between Jordan and the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Safadi said the creation of an independent Palestinian state was key to ending the conflict with Israel. "There is no alternative to a two-state solution" between Israel and the Palestinians, he told Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi, quoted by the official Petra news agency.

"It is necessary to return to the negotiating table according to international law in order to find a real solution to achieve a just peace," Safadi said.

Thursday's meeting was a rare encounter between officials from the two countries and the first officially reported between Safadi and Ashkenazi since the latter, a former army chief of staff, became foreign minister in May.

Jordan and Israel have been bound by a peace treaty since 1994, but relations between the two neighbors are often tense.

Safadi said resuming talks between Israel and the Palestinians was timely, "particularly in light of the Palestinian Authority's decision to resume security cooperation with Israel."

Last month the Palestinians announced they were restoring coordination with Israel that they had stopped in May over to Israeli plans to annex parts of the West Bank.

Israel put on hold its annexation plans, in return for an agreement to normalize ties with the United Arab Emirates announced in August.

Abbas held talks in Jordan last week with King Abdullah II ahead of visits to Egypt, where he met separately with President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and Arab League chief Ahmed Aboul Gheit.

During the tour, the Arab leaders he spoke to called for stepped-up international efforts for a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict based on a two-state solution.

Talks between Israel and the Palestinians have been frozen since 2014, and a US peace plan announced in January has been welcomed by Israel but rejected outright by the Palestinians as biased.

The plan was among moves pushed by Trump – including recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's "undivided capital" that has angered the Palestinians.

The Palestinians, who want to set up an independent state with east Jerusalem as its capital, broke ties with the Trump administration, and are now hoping

to improve relations with Biden's incoming administration.



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Israeli defense minister calls on Palestinians to return to negotiations
Jordan urges Israel to stop undermining peace opportunities with Palestine

[Lebanese security services warn of terror plot to destabilize country](#)

Fri, 2020-12-04 22:27

BEIRUT: Lebanon's security services revealed on Thursday that they had received information regarding a plot to destabilize the country through the assassination of public figures over the coming holiday period.

During a meeting of the Supreme Defense Council, the director-general of Lebanese General Security, Maj. Gen. Abbas Ibrahim, and his counterpart at State Security, Maj. Gen. Tony Saliba, said the information had been obtained from more than one security and intelligence service. They did not reveal the

names of those believed to have been targeted for assassination.

Supreme Defense Council meetings are usually confidential, but several local media outlets published reports of Thursday's meeting the next day, along with a story claiming that Hezbollah had thwarted a plot targeting its leaders, particularly Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah.

The information revealed in the council meeting included suggestions that the operations could target places of worship, commercial venues and tourist destinations. It also reportedly included details of a smuggling ring that has traditionally operated between Iraq and Syria but that now seems to be widening its reach into Lebanon.

The meeting concluded with a decision to develop a pre-emptive security plan to be carried out during the holiday period.

Also on Friday, Hezbollah filed lawsuits against former MP Fares Souaid and the website of the Lebanese Forces for "accusing Hezbollah of being involved in the Beirut port blast on Aug. 4."

HIGHLIGHT

Hezbollah files lawsuit against the Lebanese Forces and a former MP, and is preparing to sue Bahaa Hariri.

Ibrahim Al-Mousawi, a member of the Loyalty to Resistance parliamentary bloc, said to the media outside Beirut Justice Palace: "A lawsuit is also being prepared against Bahaa Hariri as well as other lawsuits that will soon be registered based on legal articles condemning those who try to sow discord."

Al-Mousawi added: "Accusations of Hezbollah's involvement in the explosion are false and constitute a continuation of the crime. When the real perpetrator is lost and the finger of blame is pointed at a party without any evidence, this conceals the real criminal, misleads public opinion, stirs hatred, incites sedition, and threatens civil peace."

Souaid told Arab News: "I do not recall directly accusing Hezbollah of the Beirut port blast. It does not matter that the party has resorted to the law to sue me – the most important issue is why it has resorted to the judiciary now, and what is behind the lawsuit?"

He went on to suggest that Hezbollah's public display of initiating legal proceedings against him could be a ruse to cover up its true intentions.

"Hezbollah's announcement that it will file a lawsuit against me when I am a permanent political opponent of the party is a step that intersects with security information about possible assassinations in Lebanon," he said. "Does Hezbollah want to clear its name of any assassinations that might take place in Lebanon by saying that it has resorted to the judiciary to prosecute its opponents? Does the party want to clear its name and tell us that it is

not a murderer?"

Charles Jabbour, head of the Lebanese Forces' Media and Communication Service, said: "We hope that Hezbollah will constantly resort to institutions and the judiciary, and that its commitment to institutions and resorting to the law will be an entry point to hand over its weapons to the state."

However, former minister May Chidiac, who is affiliated with the Lebanese Forces, described Hezbollah's move as "rude." She said: "You have no right to complain before the courts about defamation when everyone knows your crimes. You have no regard for the International Tribunal and consider accusing you of involvement in the port blast a false accusation. You have no shame."

Meanwhile, the British Embassy in Lebanon released a statement in which the UK Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa James Cleverly – who just finished a two-day visit to Beirut – said, "The people of Lebanon deserve a better future. Accountability, transparency and taking responsibility are key for Lebanon to rise again."

He added: "The UK is a proud partner of the Lebanese Armed Forces, Lebanon's sole legitimate defenders."

The EU delegation to Lebanon announced in a press conference on Friday the launch of its "Lebanon Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework," which was prepared by the EU, the UN, and the World Bank Group in response to the Beirut port blast and is intended to be implemented within 18 months.

Najat Rochdi, UN resident and humanitarian coordinator and deputy special coordinator for Lebanon, renewed the call for the formation of a new government that bears responsibility for its people. She added: "We have communicated this to those concerned."



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Lebanon investigates death of former customs official
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[In Iraq, virus revives traumas of Daesh survivors](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-12-04 01:47

BAJET KANDALA CAMP, Iraq: For half a decade, Zedan suffered recurring nightmares about militants overrunning his hometown in northern Iraq. The 21-year-old Yazidi was just starting to recover when COVID-19 revived his trauma.

Zedan had lost several relatives when Daesh stormed into Sinjar, the rugged heartland of the Yazidi religious minority in Iraq's northwest.

The militants killed Yazidi men, took the boys as child soldiers and forced the women into sexual slavery.

Zedan and the surviving members of his family fled, finding refuge in the Bajet Kandala camp near the Syrian border where they still live today.

"We used to be farmers living a good life. Then IS (Daesh) came," he said,

wringing his hands.

In a pre-fabricated building hosting the camp's mental health clinic, Zedan shared his traumas with Bayda Othman, a psychologist for international NGO Premiere Urgence. Zedan refers to the violence of 2014 vaguely as "the events."

The UN says they may constitute something much more serious: Genocide.

"I started having nightmares every night. I would see men in black coming to kill us," Zedan said, telling Othman that he had attempted suicide several times. He has been seeing her for years, learning how to cope with his Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) through breathing exercises that she taught him.

Earlier this year, his nightly panic attacks stopped. Finally, he could sleep again. But only for a few months.

In March, Iraq declared a nationwide lockdown to try to contain the spread of Covid-19. Zedan broke down.

"I fear that my family could catch the virus or give it to me," he said. "It obsesses me."

As lockdown dragged on, Zedan's brother lost his job at a stationery shop on the edge of the camp.

"There's no more money coming into the family now. Just thinking about it gives me a panic attack," he said.

"The nightmares returned, and so did my desire to die."

Out of Iraq's 40 million citizens, one in four is mentally vulnerable, the World Health Organization says.

But the country is in dire shortage of mental health specialists, with only three per 1 million people.

HIGHLIGHT

The Daesh extremists killed Yazidi men, took the boys as child soldiers and forced the women into sexual slavery.

Speaking about trauma or psychological problems is widely considered taboo, and patients who spoke to AFP agreed to do so on the condition that only their first names would be used.

In camps across Iraq, which still host some 200,000 people displaced by violence, the pandemic has pushed many people with psychological problems into remission, Othman said.

"We noticed a resurgence of PTSD cases, suicide attempts and suicidal thoughts," she told AFP.

In October, there were three attempted suicides in Bajet Kandala alone by displaced people, who said their movements outside the camp were restricted by the lockdown, or whose economic situation had deteriorated even further. A tissue factory who fired people en masse, a potato farm that shut down, a haberdashery in growing debt: Unemployment is a common thread among Othman's patients.

"It leads to financial problems, but also a loss of self-confidence, which rekindles trauma," she said.

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), about a quarter of

Iraqis who were employed prior to lockdown have been permanently laid off. Youth were particularly hard hit: 36 percent of 18-24 years old who had been employed were dismissed, the ILO said.

A new patient in her forties walked toward the clinic, her hair covered in a sky-blue veil.

Once settled in a faux-leather chair, Jamila revealed that she, too, feels destabilized by the pandemic.

The Yazidi survivor lives in a one-room tent with her son and four daughters. But she doesn't feel at home.

"I have totally abandoned my children. I feel all alone even though they're always at home. I hit them during my panic attacks – I didn't know what else to do," she said.

Othman tried to soothe Jamila, telling her: "Hatred is the result of untreated sadness. We take it out on relatives, especially when we feel devalued – men prey on women, and women on children."

But the trauma is not just an issue for the displaced, specialists warn.

"With the isolation and lack of access to care, children who have lived a genocide develop difficulties as they become adults," said Lina Villa, the head of the mental health unit at a hospital run by Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in northern Iraq.

"We fear suicide rates will go up in the years to come."



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Air strike kills IRGC commander at Iraq-Syria border
Rocket hits small oil refinery in Iraq's north, no casualties -officials

Gaza imposes tighter virus restrictions, extends curfew

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Thu, 2020-12-03 19:59

GAZA CITY: New measures to counter the spread of the novel coronavirus in the Gaza Strip were announced on Thursday by the interior ministry of Hamas, which rules the Palestinian enclave.

Mosques, schools, universities and kindergartens will be closed from Saturday in the Gaza Strip, excluding high schools and nurseries, the interior ministry said in a statement.

A night-time curfew was also set to start from Saturday, lasting from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 am, while a full lockdown will be imposed on Fridays and Saturdays from December 11 through to the end of the month.

Shops and other premises must close by 6:00 p.m. and people must be home by 6:30 pm, compared to 8:00 p.m. under the previous curfew rules.

Medical and political sources warned last week of a spike in Covid-19 cases in the Gaza Strip, saying the situation was "out of control."

The enclave, a small, densely populated territory with two million inhabitants under an Israeli blockade, closed its borders early in the pandemic and only allowed a limited number of people to enter, requiring them to isolate for three weeks in quarantine centers.

Up until mid-August, authorities in Gaza had only recorded around 100 Covid-19 cases.

But in the past two weeks, containment of the virus has deteriorated in Gaza, with hundreds of new infections announced per day, resulting in a total of 23,023 cases and 122 deaths.

Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar is among those who have recently been infected by the virus, the movement said Tuesday.





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Life in Gaza 'extraordinarily difficult' for disabled: HRWGaza gets vital medical aid as hospitals struggle with rising infections

[Israel warns Iran may target its facilities abroad](#)

Thu, 2020-12-03 22:23

JERUSALEM: Israel warned on Thursday that its facilities abroad could be targeted by Iran, which has been issuing new threats against Israel since the killing of a prominent Iranian nuclear scientist.

In its warning, Israel's counter-terrorism bureau said Iran could try to carry out attacks in nearby countries, including Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey.

"In light of the threats heard recently by Iranian officials and in light of

the involvement in the past of Iranian officials in terror attacks in various countries, there is a concern that Iran will try to act in this way against Israeli targets,” said a statement issued by the prime minister’s National Security Council.

Iran’s clerical and military rulers have blamed Israel for the killing of its top nuclear scientist last week. A top adviser to Iran’s supreme leader has said that Iran will give a “calculated and decisive” response.



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