

# Pompeo to visit Israel, UAE; peace agreement on agenda

Sat, 2020-08-22 21:07

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration will send two top officials to the Middle East this week in a bid to capitalize on momentum from the historic agreement between Israel and the UAE to establish diplomatic relations. Three diplomats say Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and President Donald Trump's senior adviser and son-in-law Jared Kushner plan to make separate, multiple-nation visits to the region in the coming days to push Arab-Israeli rapprochement in the aftermath of the Israel-UAE deal.

Pompeo is expected to depart on Sunday for Israel, Bahrain, Oman, UAE and Sudan, according to the diplomats, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the itinerary has not yet been finalized or publicly announced. Kushner plans to leave later in the week for Israel, Bahrain, Oman and Morocco, the diplomats said.

Neither trip is expected to result in announcements of immediate breakthrough, the diplomats said, although both are aimed at finalizing at least one, and potentially more, normalization deals with Israel in the near future.

Pompeo also plans to meet in Qatar with members of the Taliban to discuss intra-Afghan peace talks that are key to the withdrawal of remaining US forces in Afghanistan, the diplomats said.

The White House and State Department had no comment on the planned trips, which will come as the administration steps up efforts to push for Arab-Israeli normalization even without a resolution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

They also come as the administration has taken the step of triggering the restoration of all international sanctions on Iran.

Israel and the UAE announced on August 13 they would establish full diplomatic relations, in a US-brokered deal that required Israel to halt its contentious plan to annex occupied West Bank land sought by the Palestinians. The historic agreement delivered a key foreign policy victory to Trump as he seeks re-election.

US and Israeli officials have suggested that more Arab nations may soon follow the UAE's lead.



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Pompeo says US expects to trigger snapback on Iran soon  
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## [How coronavirus crisis reinvented online learning as a necessity](#)

Fri, 2020-08-21 21:06

CAIRO: In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, 110 million school-aged children stayed at home this term because of school closures, according to UNICEF. The pandemic has led to a regional surge of education technology (edtech) startups filling the gap in place of traditional and workplace settings.

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, edtech in the Middle East received only \$1.26 million in funding after a record \$20 million was invested in the sector in 2019, according to the startup and investor platform Magnitt.

“This is an exciting time for edtech,” said Bassil Khattab, co-founder and chief operating officer of Egypt’s Zedny, a newly launched Arabic learning and development platform.

“We believe that investors will always be interested in any business that solves a big problem online, and education is of major importance to our future.”



L-R: Badr Ward, founder and CEO of Lamsa World – Khadija Elbedweihi, co-founder PraxiLabs – Essam El-Saadi, co-founder PraxiLabs. (Supplied)

Online learning is no longer a buzz word or trend but a necessity that is here to stay.

“The world as we know it has changed, and it is not going back again,” said Khattab. “In the world today, if you are not online, then you will be offline.”

Zedny, which launched in mid-June 2020 with a \$1.2 million pre-seed investment, offers Arabic online courses and video summaries of best-sellers, applying artificial intelligence to enhance the user experience.

Lamsa World, an Arabic childhood education platform based in the UAE, is also witnessing an unprecedented shift toward online learning. Since the closure of schools in the UAE, the platform has had at least a 300 percent increase in downloads and content consumption, according to founder and CEO Badr Ward.

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“The pandemic has accelerated what has been in the making for years,” said Ward. “COVID-19 tested the importance of what we’ve been working on and proved that we can look at education differently.

“We need to examine how to deliver education in a more effective and creative way. It’s not a matter of e-learning, it’s a long-awaited innovation toward education.”

While edtech traditionally focused on providing tutoring, content and school management support, it now can be fully integrated into school curriculums.

“Online learning and classroom learning are not mutually exclusive,” Ward said. “We should think about it as a holistic experience where certain aspects are delivered via traditional classrooms and other aspects are delivered online. The goal is to bring the best learning experience.”

Similarly, PraxiLabs, an award-winning online STEM education provider based in Egypt, believes that edtech can complement traditional learning. Focusing on 3D interactive virtual simulations of science experiments, the startup provides students with ample hands-on experience to support in-class learning.

“Our goal is to complement and further enhance students’ experience,” said co-founder Essam El-Saaid.

“While the classroom offers learning that benefits (them), particularly when it comes to character building, teamwork and cooperation, it does not diminish the importance of edtech, specifically when it comes to providing online solutions.

“It’s more of a combined learning approach with enhanced outcomes and massive learning potential for students.”

**COVID-19 tested the importance of what we’ve worked on and proved we can look at education differently.**

Badr Ward, CEO of Lamsa World, an Arabic childhood education platform based in the UAE

While the shift to online learning was rapid and unplanned, it highlighted the gap between those from privileged and disadvantaged backgrounds – not everyone has Internet or technology access to take part in digital classes.

Recognizing this challenge, governments across the region launched initiatives to support remote learning and working to deal with the pandemic.



In Egypt, free e-education platforms were provided to students, and the UAE started a campaign to help low-income families unable to afford a laptop, computer or tablet to continue online learning.

According to PraxiLabs, the pandemic offers an opportunity to narrow the digital divide.

“Everyone started realizing the importance of Internet and remote setups, hence the focus is shifting toward (providing) different solutions in that direction, which can already be seen by initiatives not only in Egypt but everywhere,” said Kahdija El Bedweihi, co-founder of PraxiLabs.

Going forward, it is clear that the learning experience is forever changing, and all parts of society need to have access.

“It’s no longer an option,” said Ward of Lamsa World.

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## Iran detains UAE ship, its crew

Author:

Fri, 2020-08-21 00:40

JEDDAH: Iran seized a UAE-registered ship violating its territorial waters this week, Iran's Foreign Ministry said on Thursday, adding that UAE coast guards killed two Iranian fishermen on the same day.

Iran's state TV quoted a ministry statement as saying that the Emirati ship was seized by Iran's coast guards and its crew were detained due to illegal traffic in Iranian waters.

It added that on the same day, UAE guards shot dead two Iranian fishermen and seized a boat. It said the UAE has apologized for the incident.

The UAE Foreign Ministry refused to comment when contacted by Reuters. The Iranian statement said Iran summoned the UAE charge d'affaires in Tehran after the incident to demand the release of the detained boat and the fishermen.

"As a result of Iran's efforts, the UAE authorities ... in a note on Wednesday, expressed their deep regret over the incident and announced their readiness to compensate for all the damage caused," it said.

The Iranian boat and its crew have been released, the statement said, while the legal process of transferring the bodies of the dead is underway.

UAE state news agency WAM reported on Monday that the state's coast guard had tried to stop eight fishing boats which violated its territorial waters northwest of Sir Bu Nu'Ayr island. It did not mention any casualties or seizures of a boat.

Meanwhile, the US will demand that all UN sanctions be reimposed against Iran, President Donald Trump has announced.

"Two years ago I withdrew the United States from the disastrous Iran nuclear deal, which was a product of the Obama-Biden foreign policy failure – a failure like few people have seen in terms of the amount of money we paid for absolutely nothing and a short-term deal," Trump said. He pledged that under his administration, Iran will never have a nuclear weapon.

"If and when I win the election, within the first month, Iran will come to us and they are going to be asking for a deal so quickly because they are doing very poorly," he said, adding that sanctions have crippled Iran's economy and limited the amount of money it can use to support militant groups.

Trump said Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will travel to New York to present the US demand to reimpose the sanctions, accusing Iran of significant

noncompliance with the 2015 nuclear deal.

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh, a Harvard-educated Iranian-American political scientist, told Arab News that Iran's leaders believe they scored a major political victory against the US, its allies and regional powers when the UN Security Council last week voted down a proposal to extend the 13-year-old arms embargo on Tehran, which is due to expire in October.

"The lifting of the arms embargo on the world's top state sponsor of terrorism will further help the Iranian regime advance its military adventurism and arm terror and militia groups with advanced weapons. This is a dangerous threat to regional and global stability, and it will likely trigger a regional arms race," he added.

Separately, Iran's state TV reported the country unveiled two new missiles named after Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis, who were killed outside Baghdad's international airport in a US strike in January.



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US formally notifies Security Council of demand for restoration of UN sanctions against Iran  
Russia says US statements on fresh imposition of Iran sanctions are absurd

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## [El-Sisi calls on army to be prepared amid Libya crisis](#)

Thu, 2020-08-20 23:27

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has directed the army to maintain the highest levels of preparedness and combat readiness to protect Egypt's national security.

During a meeting with various senior military personnel, the president directed them to continue to maintain combat readiness to carry out any tasks entrusted to them, in light of the current challenges in the region.

The meeting came a day after El-Sisi sent an important message to the commander of the Libyan National Army (LNA), Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar. The message was delivered by the director of the Egyptian Military Intelligence, Maj. Gen. Khaled Megawer, at the LNA headquarters in Ar Rajma outside the eastern city of Benghazi. The content of the message was not revealed.

The message and El-Sisi's statements come after the Turkish and Qatari defense ministers visited Tripoli to meet with the Head of Turkish-backed Al-Wefaq Government, Fayez Al-Sarraj.

Libyan media reported that the two ministers held talks about military support with officials in the unconstitutional Al-Sarraj government that currently controls Tripoli. They also held meetings with some senior militia figures.

July 2020, the Egyptian president chaired a meeting of the National Defense Council to discuss the Libyan situation, as well as the Renaissance Dam crisis.

The spokesman for the Egyptian president stated that the council had addressed the country's current political, security and military situations, within the framework of various regional and international developments.

The council discussed the situation in Libya in the western theater, in light of Egypt's efforts to stabilize the current situation and to bring peace to all the various parties.

The council affirmed the strong ties between the two countries, and that Egypt would spare no effort to support its neighbor to help its people overcome the current crisis.





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## [Hundreds of Houthis killed in fighting in central Yemen, officials say](#)

Thu, 2020-08-20 22:53

AL-MUKALLA: Almost 1,000 Houthi fighters have been killed over the past four days in fierce clashes with government forces, which include allied tribesmen, in various contested areas of the central province of Marib, with hundreds more wounded or captured, local media and government officials said on Thursday.

The Iran-backed Houthis have stepped up their attacks on Marib's Serwah and Helan areas in an attempt to capture the oil- and gas-rich city of Marib.

"We have counted 966 Houthis, including senior officers, killed in the fighting in Marib over the last four days. Their bodies are still scattered on the battlefields," an army officer in Marib, who asked to remain anonymous, told Arab News by telephone. Dozens of government troops and their tribal allies have also reportedly died in the fighting.

On Wednesday, at least 35 Houthi fighters surrendered when government forces attacked their location in Marib's Serwah, local army commanders said. On the same day, senior army commanders in Marib attended the funeral of Brig. Mohammed Ali Alroken, the commander of 122 Infantry Brigade, who was killed in action in the northern province of Jawf.

Local army commanders say that warplanes belonging to the Arab coalition have been targeting Houthi military locations and reinforcements. On Thursday, state television showed footage of thick smoke billowing from Houthi locations in mountainous areas of Serwah.

Despite the heavy losses incurred during the Houthi offensive, Houthi official media outlets and Houthi supporters on social media claim the Iran-backed militia has made territorial gains in the province and is close to seizing control of Marib city.

The escalation in fighting comes as the United Nations Security Council and the UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths called upon warring factions to halt all military operations in Marib in order not to jeopardize peace in a city that is currently home to hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people who have taken shelter there over the last 5 years after fleeing their homes in the north.

Many local and international aid organizations have warned that Houthi attacks on the city have created panic among residents.

In neighboring Al-Bayda, Brig. Abdulrab Al-Asbahi, the commander of Al-Bayda Axis, said on Wednesday that at least 60 Houthis had been killed in heavy fighting with government forces in the district of Qania.

The Yemeni commander said air support and logistical support from the Saudi-led coalition and local tribesmen had enabled his troops to push back Houthi offensives in the area.

Lt. Gen. Sagheer bin Aziz, the army's chief of staff, has renewed his pledge to defeat the Houthis on the battlefield and drive them out of areas under their control, including the capital, Sanaa.

Speaking to a gathering of army soldiers in Marib on Wednesday, Bin Aziz thanked the Saudi-led coalition for its support and stressed that the army and allied tribesmen are "determined to expel the Houthis from all Yemeni areas."



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