

National security experts urge US to introduce Iran 'snapback' sanctions

Wed, 2020-08-19 23:13

LONDON: National security experts and former diplomats on Wednesday urged the US to introduce "snapback" sanctions on Iran, warning that lifting the arms embargo without any alternative restraints will amplify the threat that Tehran poses to the region.

"Iran was responsible for the missile attack on Saudi oil sites last year, and it funds and supplies proxy forces like Hezbollah, which have killed Americans in Iraq," former US Ambassador Paula Dobriansky told an online webinar organized by the National Council of Resistance in Iran (NCRI) and attended by Arab News.

"Removing the arms embargo would give Iran a free hand to destabilize the region by exporting terror in support of its hegemonic interests," said Dobriansky, now a senior fellow in the Future of Diplomacy Project at Harvard University.

In addition to Iran's hostile foreign policy, she said its treatment of its own people adds further impetus to the need to maintain pressure on Tehran.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

She said its countless executions, including of "young children," and the widespread use of lethal force against protesters in November 2019 "underscore the need for moving forward with the maximum-pressure campaign and the deployment and snapback of sanctions."

Matthew Kroenig, deputy director of the Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security at the Atlantic Council, said the US strategy toward Iran has so far been successful, but relaxing the economic pressure jeopardizes that progress.

The sanctions regime to date, he added, has "constrained Iran's resources, caused economic pain for Iran, and made it more difficult for them to fund their missile and nuclear programs.

"The regime is under more pressure now than it has ever been in its history. We've seen unprecedented protests and the economy is really suffering."

But Kroenig warned that if the current embargo is lifted without a replacement sanctions program, Tehran and its proxies could quickly acquire advanced weaponry, making "the threat posed by Iran even more significant."

The “best remaining option,” he said, “is to snapback sanctions on Iran.”

Formerly crippling sanctions on Iran were lifted as part of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – commonly referred to as the Iran nuclear deal – which eased sanctions pressure on the country in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program.

The snapback is a mechanism built into the JCPOA that allows any of the deal’s signatories to unilaterally re-apply all UN sanctions lifted as part of the deal if Iran violates its terms.

The US had pushed for UN Security Council (UNSC) members to vote in favor of collectively re-imposing those sanctions – which had also enforced an arms embargo – saying Tehran had broken the terms of the JCPOA.

But UNSC members voted against the US, allowing the blockade on Iran’s purchase of weaponry to expire.

The high-level diplomatic dispute has set the stage for a confrontation in the UN on Thursday, where US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is expected to invoke the snapback clause despite opposition from Russia, China and other UNSC members.



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Pompeo says US expects to trigger snapback on Iran soon UN crisis looms as US readies demand for Iran sanctions

[Sudan fires spokesman after comments on peace with Israel](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-08-20 00:54

CAIRO: Sudan on Wednesday fired the spokesman for the country's Foreign Ministry, a day after he remarked that the African country was looking forward to making a peace deal with Israel.

The development comes after last week's bombshell announcement of a deal between the UAE and Israel to normalize relations, which will make the UAE only the third Arab nation, after Egypt and Jordan, to have full ties with Israel.

Sudan's acting Foreign Minister Omar Qamar Al-Din said he dismissed Ambassador Haidar Badawi from his post after Badawi said his country was "looking forward to concluding a peace agreement with Israel."

"There is no reason to continue hostility between Sudan and Israel," Badawi was quoted as saying by Sky News Arabia. "We don't deny that there are communications" with Israel, he added, saying both countries would gain much from a deal. Badawi's remarks immediately drew a pledge from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to "do all that's needed" to wrap up a deal.

Qamar Al-Din, the foreign minister, sought to distance himself from Badawi's comments, saying they were received "with astonishment." He insisted his ministry had not discussed the issue of ties with Israel.

In February, Netanyahu met with Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, the head of Sudan's transitional government, during a secret trip to Uganda, where both leaders pledged to pursue normalization of ties.

"President Burhan put Sudan on the right track with his meeting with the Israeli prime minister," Badawi said.

A Sudanese government official told The Associated Press that deliberations between Sudanese and Israeli officials have been going on for months, with help from the US.

"It's a matter of time. We are finalizing everything," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to reporters. "The Emirati move encouraged us and helped calm some voices within the government who were afraid of backlash from the Sudanese public."

An Israeli deal with Sudan would mark another setback for the Palestinians, who have long counted on the Arab world to press Israel to make concessions to them as a condition for normalization. That wall of Arab support had long served as one of the Palestinians' few points of leverage against Israel.

Sudan, a majority Arab nation, hosted the landmark Arab conference after the 1967 Mideast war where eight Arab countries approved the "three no's": No peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel and no negotiations.

But in recent years those hostilities have softened.

Sudan is now on a fragile path to democracy after a popular uprising led the military to overthrow former President Omar Bashir in April 2019. A military-civilian government rules the country, with elections deemed possible in late 2022.

At the time of the Burhan-Netanyahu meeting, the Sudanese military said the talks with Israel were an effort to help end Sudan's status as an international pariah state.

Sudan is desperate to lift sanctions linked to its listing by the US as a state sponsor of terror. That would be a key step toward ending its isolation and rebuilding its battered economy. The US and Israel are staunch allies.

The designation dates back to the 1990s, when Sudan briefly hosted Osama bin Laden and other wanted militants. Sudan was also believed to have served as a pipeline for Iran to supply weapons to Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip. Israel was thought to have been behind airstrikes in Sudan that destroyed a convoy in 2009 and a weapons factory in 2012.



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[Rumors swirl about ex-president as potential Erdogan challenger](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-08-19 01:12

ANKARA: Rumors are swirling in Turkey about the possibility of former President Abdullah Gul being the opposition's pick to challenge President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the 2023 elections.

The two men founded the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) together in 2001.

Gul was president between 2007 and 2014 when Erdogan was prime minister. But Gul has become a staunch critic of his former ally in the last few years.

In an interview on Aug. 17, the leader of the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) Kemal Kilicdaroglu said the government was "very scared" about a Gul candidacy.

But Gul has been criticized by some secular sections of society for remaining silent while power became increasingly centralized over the years without any effective checks and balances in place.

He is also known to be steering the newly founded breakaway Democracy and Progress Party, which was founded by the country's former economy czar Ali Babacan.

Kilicdaroglu denied claims he was talking with Gul each week.

"Those who make accusations about 'weekly meetings' are under some others' control and they are psychologically troubled individuals," he said.

Gul is keeping quiet about a potential presidential comeback, although many think Turkey needs a better challenger.

Karol Wasilewski, an analyst at the Warsaw-based Polish Institute of International Affairs, viewed the CHP's possible nomination of Gul as a reflection of the changes the party had undergone under Kilicdaroglu, who decided that the CHP should be more open to conservative values in order to

better compete with the AKP. But he thought it was a bad idea to have Gul take on Erdogan for several reasons.

“First of all if they want to have a candidate acceptable to some AKP voters and able to compete with Erdogan, Ankara’s opposition mayor Mansur Yavas and Istanbul’s opposition mayor Ekrem Imamoglu seem to be far better choices, because of Gul’s image as a political impotent due to his constant inability to stand up to Erdogan,” Wasilewski told Arab News.

“Gul is not a political fighter able to defeat Erdogan contrary to, for example, the much younger and vigorous Imamoglu.”

According to Wasilewski, Gul’s nomination would discourage lots of CHP sympathizers from voting and this scenario would directly help Erdogan’s chances of winning.

“Lately there has been lots of criticism toward the AKP that it does not understand the younger generation which will most probably be decisive in 2023 elections. The nomination of Gul will show us that the CHP also has no clue as to how to approach younger voters as I can’t imagine Abdullah Gul would be able to attract Generation Z voters,” he added.

Berk Esen, a political analyst from Bilkent University in Ankara, said although some people portrayed Gul as a compromise candidate who could attract some AKP voters to defeat Erdogan, there was little proof that Gul actually resonated with the AKP base, which had been bombarded with anti-Gul discourse by pro-government media for years.

“Opposition voters also do not trust him due to his complicity in many of the AKP government’s measures as well as conspicuous silence since he stepped down from the presidency in 2014,” he told Arab News.

According to Esen, a Gul candidacy did not stand much of a chance and would almost certainly generate a challenge from the CHP camp.

Turkey’s political landscape changed dramatically after the opposition’s victory in last year’s local elections.

Esen remarked that the opposition had younger, more competent and credible candidates so it was difficult to contemplate a scenario in which Gul could energize the opposition voters, let alone draw votes from the AKP base.

“This debate around names is not a productive one but may push many in the opposition to contemplate the candidate nomination process. The CHP leadership may be pushed to allow open primaries to choose its candidate,” he added.

Dimitar Bechev, a nonresident fellow at Atlantic Council, said that nominating Gul would be a smart move but only if the opposition rallied behind him.

“Lots of secularists have hard feelings against him as Erdogan’s enabler,” he told Arab News. “He didn’t step up against Erdogan during the anti-government

Gezi protests either in 2013.”

Gul was mostly in favor of dialogue with the protesters and listening to their demands. Bechev said that if the opposition vote consolidated to back him, and some AKP supporters defected, then there would be a runoff.



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Speculation mounts over Abdullah Gul's election ambitions
Turkey on brink of recession as economy collapses

[Israel's Mossad spy chief visits UAE for security talks](#)

Tue, 2020-08-18 21:47

DUBAI: Israel's Mossad spy agency chief Yossi Cohen visited the UAE for security talks on Tuesday, only days after the countries agreed to establish diplomatic ties.

The head of Israel's foreign intelligence service discussed "cooperation in the fields of security" with the UAE's national security advisor, Sheikh Tahnoun bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, in Abu Dhabi, Emirates News Agency reported.

The US, Israel and UAE, along with several other Gulf states, have a common foe in Iran, which they accuse of seeking a nuclear bomb, fuelling regional instability and backing militant groups.

Cohen's trip marked the first visit to the UAE by an Israeli official after the announcement last week by US President Donald Trump that the two countries had agreed to normalise relations.

"The two sides discussed prospects for cooperation in the fields of security as well as exchanged points of view on regional developments and on issues of common interest" including efforts to contain the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), the report said.

As part of the landmark deal, the Israel agreed to suspend the annexation of occupied West Bank territories, although Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the plan was not off the table in the long run.

Trump said leaders from the two countries would sign the historic agreement at the White House in the coming weeks.

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Netanyahu last week called Cohen to thank him for the Mossad's assistance "in developing the ties with the Gulf states over the years, which assisted in bringing the peace treaty to fruition," the prime minister's office said.

Palestinians protested the deal which they saw as a betrayal by a major player in the Arab world, which has broadly held that normal ties with Israel are only possible once its dispute with the Palestinians is resolved.

Israel-UAE tensions had run high in 2010 after Mossad was widely blamed for the assassination in a Dubai hotel room of an operative for Hamas, Mahmoud Al-Mabhouh.

The deal is only the third such accord Israel has struck with an Arab country, and raises the prospect of similar deals with other Gulf states.

The Israeli prime minister appeared Monday on Sky News Arabia in his first ever interview with the Abu Dhabi-based network.

"This is a great moment ... we are making history," he said, adding: "This is a combination of limitless possibilities."

Meanwhile, Oman's minister responsible for foreign affairs spoke to his Israeli counterpart on Monday, the first publicised contact since the

announcement of the UAE-Israel deal.

Yusuf bin Alawi and Israel's Gabi Ashkenazi spoke via telephone about "recent developments in the region," Oman's foreign ministry said on Twitter.

Oman, along with Bahrain, had already expressed its support for the deal, and Bin Alawi told Ashkenazi that Muscat "clearly reaffirms its position calling for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace" in the Middle East.

Other Gulf countries have so far remained silent on the Israel-UAE agreement.



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Israel's Mossad chief meets with Qatar's head of intelligence Kushner slams Palestinians, critics of UAE-Israel peace deal

[Paws for thought: Egypt's grand mufti rules on purity of dogs](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-08-18 21:49

CAIRO: Muslims and dogs can coexist, according to Egypt's grand mufti who said that all living creatures were pure and it was the public's belief that dogs were unclean.

Grand Mufti Shawky Allam made the statement on the Sada Al-Balad channel, adding that there was a difference of opinion between scholars.

The public viewed dogs as impure but the Maliki doctrine said they were not. He said that the Malikis came to this conclusion from their logic that every living animal was pure.

"We adopt the Maliki doctrine here in Dar Al-Iftaa (Egypt's Islamic advisory body) and have ruled on this issue based on it," he added. "It is possible to coexist with a dog and still worship God. If you perform wudu (ablution) and there is saliva from the dog on your body or your garment, there is absolutely nothing wrong with praying and there is no need to repeat wudu or wash clothes."

The status of dogs in Egypt is a source of discord, mostly between dog owners and breeders and religious hardliners.

There was controversy when people on social media circulated a picture of the president's religious adviser Osama Al-Azhari shaking hands with a dog. He was subjected to insults. To clarify his position he explained that he followed the Seven Sleepers, a group of youths who hid in a cave to escape religious persecution and emerged hundreds of years later. They were a supreme example of goodness and divineness and had no shame in keeping a dog, he added.

Vocalist Mahmoud Al-Tohamy was subjected to verbal abuse last year. He took to Facebook to defend his position, sharing his pictures with a dog called Costa and accompanying these with evidence about the purity of dogs: "Whoever says a dog is impure, tell them God did not create anything impure."

"If the Seven Sleepers came into contact with the saliva of an unclean dog, the garment would be washed, then they would perform wudu and pray as usual ... The Seven Sleepers' dog died next to them and remained a companion to them all their lives, yet people found no objection to that," Al-Tohamy added.

Ahmed Karima, professor of comparative jurisprudence and Islamic law at Al-Azhar University, said that people should go back to scripture as God permitted hunting-dogs and guard-dogs. He also expressed his admiration for Imam Malik bin Anas' ruling that every living being was pure.

"In Dar Al-Iftaa, we are trying to make people's lives more sophisticated and, in the current period, people have become very attached to pets. We take the Maliki doctrine because it considers that every living thing is pure," Omar Al-Wardani, secretary general of fatwas at Dar Al-Iftaa, said.

The mufti's statements were welcomed, especially by dog owners and pet associations, but hardliners criticized him.



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