

Pompeo: West Bank annexation plans an 'Israeli decision'

Author:

Fri, 2020-04-24 15:34

CHICAGO: The Trump administration has no public comment to make about Israel's plans to push forward with its annexation of the West Bank, US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo said on Wednesday.

After Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and opposition leader Benny Gantz on Monday formed a coalition government, following the country's third election in a year, they announced that the annexation of major parts of the West Bank will begin on July 1.

Gantz said this would be subject to American support. However, Pompeo on Wednesday said annexation is an Israeli decision that the US will monitor.

"We're happy ... a new government is formed. A fourth election, we think, wouldn't have been in Israel's best interest ... We think it's not in the world's best interest," he added.

"As for the annexation in the West Bank, the Israelis will ultimately make those decisions. That's an Israeli decision, and we'll work closely with them to share with them our views of this in a private setting."

Pompeo was speaking at a press conference that began with him wishing Muslims a happy Ramadan, and during which he mentioned the first anniversary of the killing of hundreds of Christians in Sri Lanka last Easter, and Israel's commemoration of the Holocaust.

He also revealed that the US is sending \$5 million in aid to the Palestinian Authority to help combat coronavirus.

He reiterated that the Trump administration had halted other financial aid because of concerns about where the money would end up.

"The reason we stopped providing assistance previously was that these resources weren't getting to the place they needed to (go), to the Palestinian people," Pompeo said.

"We hope that this money, this \$5 million, will get where it needs to go to provide real assistance to the Palestinian people, who ... are going to need a lot of help as they move through this."

He said the Trump administration will evaluate whether the aid has been used properly and whether there are any additional resources "that are appropriate or can be delivered in a way that actually gets to the Palestinian people."

The administration began to suspend financial aid to the Palestinians in January 2018 when it halted all funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency,

which supports Palestinian refugees displaced by Israel's wars in 1948 and 1967.

The following August, US President Donald Trump ordered further cuts of more than \$200 million to funding for aid programs in the West Bank and Gaza, saying the money would instead be used to fund projects elsewhere.

This was seen by many analysts as an attempt to apply pressure on the Palestinians in an attempt to force them back to the negotiating table with Israel.

In February 2019, the US pushed through legislation that would potentially expose Palestinian aid recipients to lawsuits filed by Jews in America over acts of alleged terrorism in the Middle East.

As a result, the Palestinians asked that the aid they were still receiving from the US, which was provided by the US Agency for International Development, be suspended to avoid exposure to legal action.



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[Mike Pompeo](#)

Pompeo offers 'best wishes' to Muslims at start of Ramadan

Lebanon tightens security around refugee camp over virus

Author:

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Fri, 2020-04-24 11:01

BAALBEK, Lebanon: Authorities closed all entrances to a Palestinian refugee camp in eastern Lebanon on Friday after four more people tested positive for the coronavirus, heightening concerns the virus could further spread among its overcrowded population.

The four infected with the virus are relatives of a woman who tested positive earlier this week and are isolating inside their home, according to a statement from the UN agency for Palestinian refugees. It said they were so far not in need of hospitalization.

The Palestinian woman who was taken to a hospital in Beirut this week became the first refugee living in a camp in Lebanon to contract the virus, a finding that triggered a spate of testing in the camp. The five confirmed cases are residents of the Wavel camp in the city of Baalbek, known locally as the Jalil, or Galilee camp.

Lebanon, a tiny country of 5 million people, is home to more than 1 million Syrian refugees and other Syrians who are residents. It is also host to tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees and their descendants, most of them living in squalid camps with no access to public services, with limited employment opportunities and no rights to ownership.

On Friday, Palestinian fighters in charge of the camp security wore face masks as they patrolled the narrow streets and alleyways of the camp with an estimated population of up to 3,000. Posters of the late Palestinian President Yassir Arafat were plastered on the camp walls.

Camp residents hunkered down at home after being asked to stay indoors, while paramedics in protective suits sprayed down the few vehicles that were permitted to enter with disinfectant and took people's temperatures.

Lack of testing has stoked fears among millions of displaced people around the world packed into refugee camps and informal settlements.

Most people who become infected experience mild to moderate symptoms. But the virus can cause severe illness and lead to death, particularly among older people and those with underlying health problems. It is highly contagious and can be spread by those who appear healthy.

Health Minister Hamad Hassan told reporters that Lebanese authorities were working together with the UN and other agencies "to avoid an outbreak in the coming days."



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Lebanon's currency crashes amid financial turmoil, virus3,000 Palestinians under Lebanon lockdown after first camp virus case

[Kuwait revises curfew hours for Ramadan](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-04-24 11:25

DUBAI: Kuwait has called on its residents to follow the new curfew hours of 4 p.m to 8 a.m for Ramadan, local daily Arab Times has reported.

The Kuwait Minister of Interior emphasized the importance of following government directives to curb the spread of COVID-19, and said legal actions will be taken against curfew violators.

The move comes as other countries in the Middle East started to ease restrictions among their residents to revive their economies.



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Kuwaiti banks to provide SMEs with financing at 2.5% interest
Kuwait expands curfew, extends public sector work suspension

[Syria, Yemen among countries most at risk due to coronavirus, says UN](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-04-24 03:07

LONDON: The UN's World Food Programme (WFP) has raised concerns that the coronavirus pandemic could lead to worst famines in the Middle East and North Africa.

Around the world, the agency said those suffering from hunger could be pushed up from 135 million to 250 million. It said the 10 countries most at risk of famine are those embroiled in civil war and conflict, including Syria and Yemen. Addressing the UN Security Council, David Beasley, head of the WFP, said the world needs to "act wisely and fast" to prevent huge amounts of

suffering.

“I do believe that with our expertise and our partnerships, we can bring together the teams and the programs necessary to make certain the COVID-19 pandemic doesn’t become a human and food crisis catastrophe,” he said.

Partner nations and the UN “don’t have time on our side,” he added, warning: “We could be facing multiple famines of biblical proportions within a few short months.”

The WFP previously said it was set to halve aid to parts of war-torn Yemen controlled by the Iran-backed Houthis due to a funding crisis.

It said some donors had stopped their aid over concerns that deliveries were being obstructed by the Houthis. The comments came as Washington’s USAID program recently cut back aid it sends to Yemen due to concerns that the Houthis are using the supplies to control the population.

The WFP feeds some 12 million Yemenis every month, 80 percent of whom are in areas controlled by the Houthis, who have failed to maintain a cease-fire agreement with the country’s internationally recognized government.

This has led to further concerns about the safety of transporting aid into the country.

Yemen confirmed its first case of COVID-19 earlier this month. With a weak health system that relies on support from governments and external charities – such as Saudi Arabia’s King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center – aid agencies have warned that the disease could quickly spread in Yemen, causing havoc.



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Heavy rains, flash floods hit Yemen's Aden, Lahj, Abyan
Syria Kurds set up first coronavirus hospital

[Hadi vows to defeat Iran's 'evil designs' in Yemen](#)

Fri, 2020-04-24 01:46

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen's President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi has vowed to foil Iran's attempts to derail peace and security in Yemen through the Houthi militia, stressing that his government is committed to complying with all peace efforts to end the war.

At an annual speech on Wednesday on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan, Hadi said that his government had offered many concessions and positively responded to peace initiatives, seeking to end the suffering of the Yemenis.

He accused Iran of inciting hatred and sectarianism in Yemen through the Houthis.

"It is time, after the world has seen how the Houthi militia dealt with the truce, that the international community understands the nature of this bloody Houthi militia. It is just tools and dolls serving Tehran's suspicious designs," Hadi said, referring to a recent UN call for a truce in Yemen to allow health workers to fight the spread of the coronavirus.

Hadi said that his government would not allow the Houthis and their backers in Tehran to turn Yemen into a launching ground for attacks on neighboring countries.

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Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, President of Yemen

He expressed the country's appreciation of the Saudi-led coalition military intervention in Yemen, which reversed Houthi gains and enabled government forces to take the upper hand on the battlefields.

"We reiterate that we will not accept that Yemen becomes a hotbed for those

destructive ideas or used for undermining security of the region," he said.

"We pledge that Yemen will not dissociate itself from the Arab skin in favor of a culture alien to our people and history."

Hadi and his consecutive governments have long accused Iran of providing the Houthi militia with the arms, military know-how and funds that enabled them to expand militarily across Yemen.

Yemen's president also pledged quick assistance to residents of the port city of Aden who were affected by the destructive rainstorm on Tuesday.

In Aden, a senior government official told Arab News on Thursday that the death toll from Tuesday's downpour had reached 14 and heavy rains destroyed 66 houses and battered basic services in Yemen's temporary capital.

"Our focus now is on dispersing financial assistance to the families who lost members, opening roads and fixing power grids and water stations," the government official said on condition of anonymity as he was not authorized to brief reporters.

He said that the government had allocated more funds to help address the destruction caused by the floods.

On Wednesday, Yemen's army said that it had taken a defensive position since the beginning of the Saudi-led truce two weeks ago, despite Houthi breaches.

Abdu Abdullah Majili, a Yemeni army spokesperson, said that the Houthis had mounted hundreds of missile and mortar attacks on government forces and residential districts in the provinces of Al-Jawf, Marib, Taiz and Al-Baydha.

"The Iran-backed Houthi militia has carried out more than 1,428 attacks on national army positions on various battlefields and civilians since the beginning of the truce on Thursday, April 8," Majili said in a statement carried by the official news agency.



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