

Pompeo says Iran must be held accountable on nuclear commitments

Author:

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WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Thursday called on all nations to hold Iran accountable for its nuclear commitments and said Tehran's failure to report nuclear material was a clear violation of safeguard agreements.

The International Atomic Energy Agency, which is policing Iran's troubled nuclear deal with major powers, sounded an alarm on Tuesday over a lack of Iranian cooperation in clearing up what the IAEA suspects are undeclared activities and materials dating back to the early 2000s.

Iran on Thursday stood by its decision to deny UN nuclear inspectors access to sites where they have questions about past activities, arguing that the agency's case is based on "fabricated" Israeli intelligence.

Pompeo told a State Department news conference that all nations must hold Iran accountable under the global nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which has been the foundation of global nuclear arms control since the Cold War.

"Iran's intentional failure to declare such nuclear material, as reported by the IAEA this week, would constitute a clear violation of its safeguards agreements required by the NPT," Pompeo said.

"The regime must immediately cooperate with the IAEA and fully comply with its IAEA safeguards obligations. All nations must hold Iran accountable to its commitments, otherwise, the NPT isn't worth the paper that is written on."

Iran warned in January it would withdraw from the NPT if European nations referred Iran to the UN Security Council over its alleged violations of a 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

Under that deal, Tehran agreed to curb its nuclear activities in exchange for the lifting of most international sanctions, but the United States withdrew from the deal in 2018 and reimposed economic sanctions on Iran.



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[Egypt reopens its oldest pyramid after 14-year restoration](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-03-06 00:46

CAIRO: Egypt on Thursday reopened Djoser's Step Pyramid, the first pyramid ever built, after a 14-year restoration costing nearly \$6.6 million.

The pyramid, a UNESCO world heritage site, was constructed 4700 years ago during the era of Pharaoh Djoser, one of Ancient Egypt's Third Dynasty kings.

After decades of neglect and the risk of collapse, the Egyptian government started an ambitious project to restore it to splendour in 2006.

"Today we celebrate the completion of the project of warding off the danger and maintaining and restoring the first and oldest remaining pyramid in Egypt," said tourism and antiquities minister Khaled Al-Anani.

The structure was designed by Imhotep, described by some as the world's first architect.

"We are in awe as to how he was able to create this structure, which has remained standing for 4,700 years," said Anani.

Restoration work stopped in 2011 after Egypt's popular uprising that toppled longtime President Hosni Mubark, but resumed at the end of 2013.

Djoser's Step Pyramid, the first large-scale stone construction in history and the largest pyramidal funerary complex, is located at Saqqara archaeological site, west of Cairo.

The 60-meter-high pyramid consists of six stacked steps over a burial shaft tomb which is 28 meters deep and seven meters wide.

Speaking alongside the pyramid, Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly said Egypt was engaged in many large-scale projects, and the restoration of its heritage was one of them.

"Although of course we are very proud that this is an Egyptian legacy, we also know very well it is world and global heritage that we are very keen to maintain," he added.

The project saw efforts to prevent the pyramid from collapsing, and external and internal restoration work, including of the paths leading to the pyramid and the internal corridors leading to the burial chamber.

Experts also restored the sarcophagus of King Djoser within the pyramid and the walls of the burial shaft tomb.



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Thu, 2020-03-05 22:52

ANKARA: Amid the ongoing bloodshed in Syria's last rebel-held stronghold of Idlib, Turkey and Russia finally agreed a new ceasefire following a meeting in Moscow on March 5.

The meeting lasted almost six hours, signaling a tense negotiation process between powers supporting different sides in the Syrian conflict, now approaching its ninth year.

In a joint statement, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the establishment of a security corridor of 12 kilometers (km) in width, straddling the M4 highway running through the province.

No mention was made about the other strategic M5 highway, or whether regime forces would retreat behind the current Turkish observation post line.

Turkey would retaliate with full force if it came under Syrian attack, Erdogan added.

Ryan Bohl, Middle East and North Africa analyst at geopolitical intelligence platform Stratfor, said the announcement would mean that Turkey accepted Syria's territorial gains in Idlib as permanent.

"Ankara is accepting a smaller zone of influence in Idlib overall so that it can get on track with a de-escalation process with Russia, Syria, and Iran," he told Arab News.

According to the deal, joint patrols between Russia and Turkey will also start by March 15, along the M4 from the settlement of Trumba, 2 km west of Saraqib, to Ain-Al-Havr.

Bohl thinks that the deal was as good as Turkey could manage in current circumstances.

"Further military escalations put Turkish troops at risk of a fight with Russia. It has managed to successfully punish the Syrian army, so from that

standpoint it has a victory to take home to Turkish citizens. But it hasn't really reversed many of the key territorial gains Assad has made especially around Saraqib," he said.

Data from Turkish polling firm Metropoll shortly before Turkey launched a military operation into Idlib revealed that the Turkish government didn't have the majority of the public on side: Only 48.8 percent of people thought Turkish Armed Forces should not have been sent to northern Syria.

Danny Makki, an independent Syria analyst, doesn't expect a serious offensive in Idlib for now, because Russia and Turkey would focus on maintaining this deal.

"But in the long term it will be hard to stop the fighting," he told Arab News. This will be the 14th ceasefire that has been declared in Idlib since 2018.

"The M5 is not part of the agreement seemingly and that is the first major Turkish concession. While stopping the day-to-day fighting is a hard ask, both sides have put considerable consideration into this agreement, so it's a priority to be held up," he said.

Nicholas Danforth, senior visiting fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, thinks that Turkey's escalation in Idlib has partially checked the regime's advance, but had not fundamentally changed the dynamics of the conflict.

"In the new deal that was brokered between Turkey and Russia, Damascus kept the territory it gained, while Ankara prevented it from gaining any more for now. Moscow still has its mediation role to play," he told Arab News.



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Russian, Turkish presidents announce Syria cease-fire

[Palestinians resigned to status quo in Gaza after latest Israeli election](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-03-05 03:08

GAZA CITY: Palestinians were on Wednesday resigned to more of the same in the Gaza Strip following the results of Israel's third parliamentary election within the space of a year.

With further deadlock leaving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu struggling to form a government and the prospect of a possible fourth ballot in the pipeline, Palestinian factions in Gaza expected to see little if any change to the status quo.

Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum said: "We are not counting on any variables within Israeli society, as they are all the product of an occupation Zionist project aimed at stabilizing the pillars of the Zionist entity at the expense of the Palestinian right."

Islamic Jihad official Daoud Shehab said: "The election results will not change anything from reality, as there is ongoing occupation and aggression, and it is natural and self-evident that we face this occupation and its aggression."

Spokesman for the Fatah movement, Hussein Hamayel, said: "These results are clear evidence that whoever rules Israel and directs public opinion is the behavior of settlers based on repression, killing and attacks on the Palestinian people."

For two years the Gaza Strip witnessed protests demanding Israel lift its 14-year blockade. Hamas, with Egyptian mediation, agreed to de-escalate tensions along the borders a year ago, in exchange for the provision of facilities at crossings, an increased fishing zone, and an allowance for some materials that Israel considered of dual use.

The deal was divided into two phases, the first before the Israeli elections and the second after the formation of a government. Both sides could not

proceed to the second phase as the government has yet to be formed in Israel.

Ibrahim Zaid, 29, did not see much difference between Israeli candidates and thinks that the right-wing domination of the Israeli government will have a negative impact on Gaza.

“All the successive Israeli governments are trying to keep the Gaza Strip away from the scene, trying to facilitate the entry of aid, but not trying to make a real change. I do not think that there will be a complete lifting of the blockade,” he told Arab News.

Columnist, Fathi Sabbah, told Arab News: “The Israeli government, whether Netanyahu or an exchange between Netanyahu and (opposition leader Benny) Gantz, will not offer anything to the Gaza Strip except for some simple facilities that will not affect the Gaza Strip significantly or make any fundamental change.

“The reality in the Gaza Strip will remain as it is, neither complete calm nor extensive war, as long as Netanyahu or Gantz are unable to form a government, and the Palestinian factions don’t have many options but will accept additional Israeli facilities.”

Nawal Siksik, 24, said: “I live in the Gaza Strip and have not participated in any elections. The Israelis voted in three elections within one year.

“We need elections (in Palestine) in order for someone to represent us democratically, and to restore unity between the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In this way we can confront any Israeli government, whether from the right or otherwise.”

The last Palestinian elections were held in 2006, in which Hamas won a majority of seats. Since then, no elections have taken place despite promises made by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas more than once as a result of the political division.



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Calm returns after two-day flare-up in and around Gaza
Cease-fire by militants in Gaza after 7 die

[Yemeni army vows imminent offensive on Houthis](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-03-05 01:39

AL-MUKALLA: The internationally recognized government of Yemen has vowed to launch a military offensive to recapture strategic areas in northern Yemen taken by the Houthis over the past couple of weeks.

Prime Minister Maeen Abdul Malik said the war with the Iran-backed forces is in a critical phase since the Houthis made rapid military advances in the northern province of Jawf and the mountainous Nehim district, near Sanaa, stressing that the army is preparing a major offensive aimed at expelling the Houthis from those areas.

According to the official Saba news agency, Prime Minister Malik told military commanders on Tuesday that the Yemeni leadership would not tolerate

military setbacks, ordering the commanders to intensify military efforts to expel the Houthis from all Yemeni areas under their control.

Malik's remarks come as a government delegation led by the minister of local administration, Abdul Raqeeb Fateh, visited military bases in the city of Marib, where they met senior army commanders and soldiers.

Fateh told Al-Arabyia TV that President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi ordered them to travel to Marib to see what the army needed for its offensive against the Houthis and to assess humanitarian situation in city. "Victory is looming. We have seen great (military) preparations," Fateh said from a military base in Marib.

The latest circle of fighting in Yemen erupted in January when a Houthi missile and drone attack killed more than 110 soldiers at a training camp mosque in Marib.

The Houthis have attacked government forces in Sanaa and Jawf provinces over the past couple of months. After intense fighting, they wrested control of territory in Sanaa's Nehim district and stormed two districts in Jawf, including the city of Hazem, the province's capital.

Displacement

Fighting in Jawf province has forced thousands of residents to flee, fearing Houthi reprisal attacks, Yemeni government officials said on Wednesday.

Yemen's minister of information, Muammar Al-Aryani, said Houthi assaults drove more than 25,000 people out of their homes in Jawf, adding that the Houthis launched reprisal attacks on opponents who did not flee Hazem.

"Reports confirm the displacement of more than 25,000 people, including women and children, in the largest wave of displacement from the city since 2014," Al-Aryani said on Twitter.

Residents in Marib say that dozens of vehicles carrying displaced people are arriving in Marib, and many more people slept rough in Marib desert due to lack of shelters.

The Executive Unit for the Internally Displaced People in Marib said in a statement that local aid organizations managed to meet the needs of only 5 percent of the growing number of the displaced people, urging international humanitarian organizations to step in.

The first large wave of displacement this year was in January when more than 3,000 families fled their homes and camps in Marib province and Sanaa's Nehim district, in the wake of heavy fighting between loyalist forces and Houthis.

The fleeing families headed toward the city of Marib amid severe shortages of shelters, food and medication.



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