

Iraqi president appoints Mohammed Allawi as new PM

Sat, 2020-02-01 18:04

BAGHDAD: Iraqi President Barham Salih appointed on Saturday Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi as new prime minister, State TV reported, after squabbling political parties failed to name a candidate in the two months since the former premier was ousted by popular protests.

Allawi would run the country until early elections can be held. He must form a new government within a month.

Former Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi resigned in November amid mass anti-government unrest where hundreds of thousands of Iraqis took to the streets demanding the removal of Iraq's political elite. Nearly 500 protesters have been killed in a deadly crackdown by security forces.

Allawi was quoted by State TV as saying he would resign if political blocs sought to impose candidates for different ministries.

He also called on protesters to continue demonstrating until their demands are met.

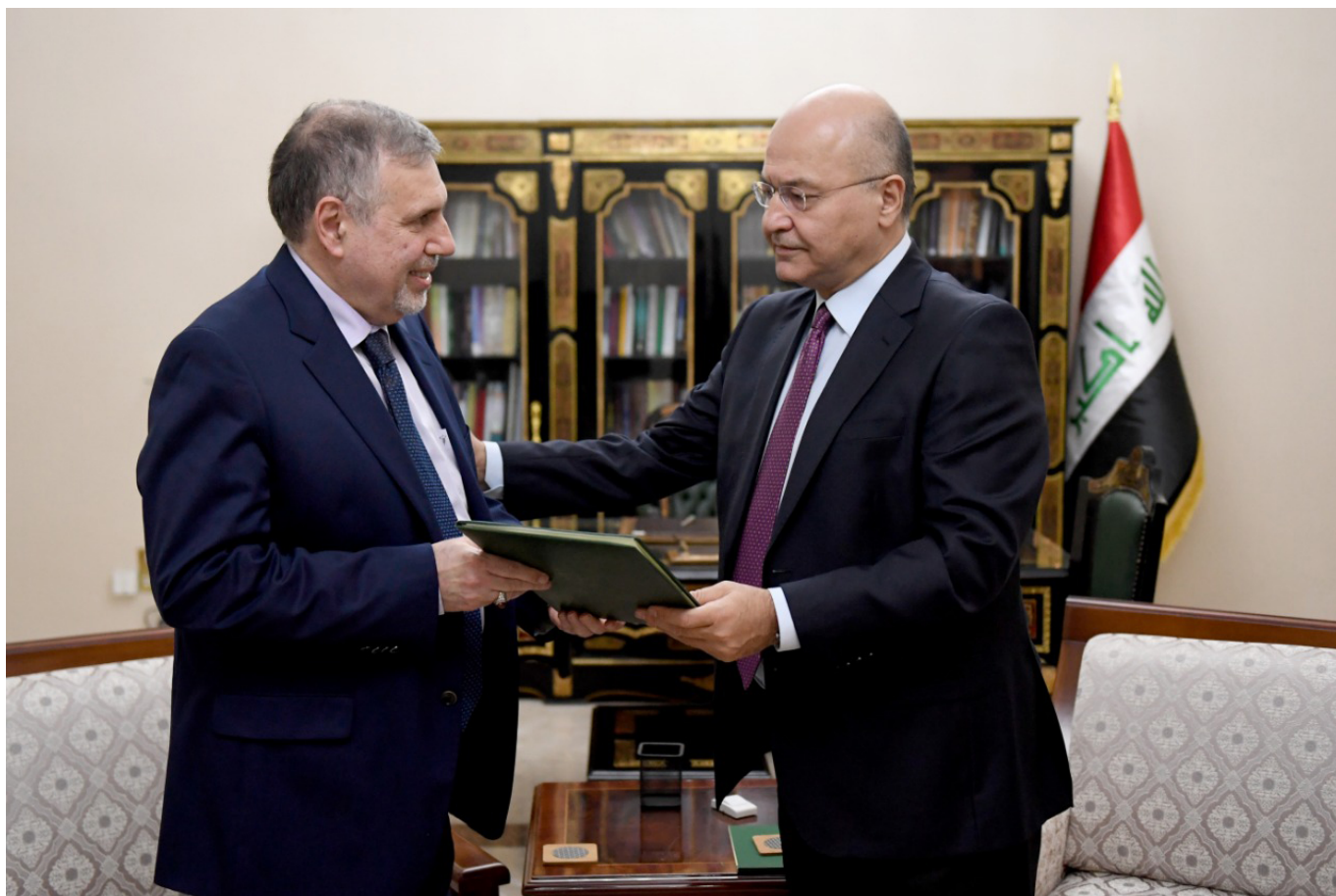
However, protesters are likely to oppose him as prime minister.

For demonstrators who demand a removal of what they say is a corrupt ruling elite, the former communications minister under ex-premier Nuri al-Maliki – who presided over the fall of multiple Iraqi cities to Daesh in 2014 and is accused of pro-Shiite sectarian policies – is part of the system and therefore unacceptable.

Iraq is facing its biggest crisis since the military defeat of Daesh in 2017. A mostly Shiite popular uprising in Baghdad and the south challenges the country's mainly Iran-backed Shiite Muslim ruling elite.

The country has been thrown into further disarray since the killing of Iranian military mastermind Qassem Soleimani in a US drone strike in Baghdad on Jan. 3. Iran responded with missile attacks on bases hosting US forces, pushing the region to the brink of an all-out conflict.

Pro-Iran politicians have tried to use those events to shift the focus away from popular discontent with their grip on power and towards anti-American rallies and demands for the withdrawal of US troops.



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Iraqi cleric Al-Sistani condemns use of force, 11 protesters wounded
Brain injuries in Iraq put attention on invisible war wounds

[**Egypt sentences officer-turned-militant and 36 others to death**](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sat, 2020-02-01 10:00

CAIRO: An Egyptian court on Saturday sentenced Hisham Al-Ashmawy, a former special forces officer turned militant, and 36 others to death after they were convicted of terrorism, court officials said. Ashmawy was captured in the eastern Libyan city of Derna in late 2018 and

transferred by authorities loyal to commander Khalifa Haftar to Egypt in May last year.

He was convicted on several charges including plotting a 2014 attack that killed 22 military guards near the frontier with Libya, and involvement in an attempt to kill a former interior minister in 2013, a military statement said.

Ashmawy led the Sinai-based Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis, Egypt's most active militant group, before it pledged allegiance to Daesh in 2014, it said. The other 36 defendants tried with him were also convicted of terrorism charges, the court ruled.

Their cases were referred to the Grand Mufti, Egypt's highest Islamic legal official. Egyptian law requires any capital sentence to be referred to him for an opinion before executions can take place.

The court set a new session for March 2 to confirm the convictions after receiving the Mufti's non-binding opinion.

In November, a military court had already sentenced Ashmawy to death in another terrorism case. Egyptian civilian and military courts had also sentenced Ashmawy to death in absentia before his extradition.



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Saudi-Egyptian joint maritime training exercise ends

Don't reject new Trump peace plan, Palestine's Abbas urged

Author:

By SAMY MAGDY | AP

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Sat, 2020-02-01 09:26

AMMAN: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas was urged on Saturday to take part in talks based on a new Middle East peace plan rather than reject it out of hand.

"It is important ... to come out with a constructive stance, a realistic stance and a positive strategy that goes beyond just condemnation," UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash said.

He spoke as Arab League foreign ministers meeting in Cairo rejected the new plan, announced last week by US President Donald Trump. They said it was unfair to the Palestinians and would not lead to a comprehensive and just peace.

Abbas himself not only condemned the Trump plan, but withdrew security cooperation with Israel in the occupied West Bank. "We've informed the Israeli side ... that there will be no relations at all with them and the US, including security ties," Abbas told the meeting.

Israel and the Palestinian Authority's security forces have long cooperated in policing areas of the occupied West Bank that are under Palestinian control. The PA also has intelligence cooperation agreements with the CIA, which continued even after the Palestinians began boycotting the Trump administration in 2017.

Abbas also said he had refused to discuss the plan by with Trump by phone, or to receive even a copy of it to study it. "Trump asked that I speak to him by phone but I said 'no,' and that he wants to send me a letter ... but I refused it."

Abbas said he did not want Trump to be able to say that he had been consulted.

The Trump peace plan, enthusiastically supported by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, calls for the creation of a demilitarized Palestinian state that excludes Jewish settlements built in occupied territory and is under near-total Israeli security control. It also proposes US recognition of Israeli settlements on occupied West Bank land and of Jerusalem as Israel's indivisible capital, along with Israeli annexation of the Jordan valley.

The Arab League foreign ministers meeting in Cairo said the plan would not lead to a comprehensive and just peace, and that the League would not cooperate with the US in implementing it.

The ministers affirmed Palestinian rights to create a future state based on the land captured and occupied by Israel in the 1967 Middle East war, with East Jerusalem as capital, the final communique said. They said there could be no peace without recognising Palestinian rights and a comprehensive solution, based on the 2002 Arab peace initiative.

The Saudi delegation was led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, who reaffirmed the Kingdom's support "for the Palestinian people and their just cause."

Abbas has threatened to withdraw security cooperation before and it was unclear whether he would carry it out, analysts told Arab News.

"If he does, then he might finally have some leverage to negotiate a better deal with the Israelis," said Fadi Elsalameen of the Foreign Policy Institute at The Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. "I am very skeptical about his ability to carry this through."

Hanna Issa, secretary-general of the Islamic-Christian committee to support Jerusalem and the holy sites, and a member of the Fatah revolutionary council, told Arab News the total suspension of security coordination would mean the end of the Oslo accords. "This will need time unless the Palestinian side wants to dissolve the Palestinian Authority and therefore make Israel responsible legally, politically, and financially as an occupying power," he said. "A vacuum will happen if this is decided and it is not clear how it will be filled."

Wadie Abunassar, director of the International Centre for Consultations, said the Palestinian president's statement was "vague," and due to a lack of alternatives. "It is a warning, hinting that dissolving the Palestinian Authority might be an option, despite knowing that such an option might be bad for him in particular, and Palestinians in general."

Ofer Zalberg, senior analyst with the International Crisis Group, said the US plan amounted to coercive diplomacy, with the Trump administration signaling to Palestinians that the cost of avoiding compromise was high and increasing.

"This coercive effort encounters two major obstacles: First, it pushes on several elements standing at the core of Palestinian identity, notably regarding Al-Aqsa Mosque and refugees' rights, which Palestinians deem non-negotiable. Such pressure backfires, only increasing resistance to the US plan.

"Second, not only Palestinian nationalism requires Palestinian statehood, so does Israeli-Jewish nationalism, to the extent that it seeks to maintain both a Jewish majority and a democratic system of governance."

Zalberg said the combination of these two seemed to lead the Palestinian

leadership to favor pursuing calculated escalation, “loosening security coordination in order to demonstrate the Palestinian Authority’s utility to Israel in curbing violence while counting on Israeli self-interest to rein in the kind of annexation measures that would render a genuine two-state agreement impossible.”

Mohammad Masharqa, head of the Center for Arab Progress in London and former adviser to the Palestinian embassy there, told Arab News it was unlikely that security coordination would end soon.

“The security coordination is the last wall left of the Oslo Accords and if it falls it must be replaced by a new form of struggle,” he said. “Ending security coordination and dissolving the Palestinian Authority requires a new strategy that would require time and national unity between all aspects of the Palestinian people, inside and outside.”

Jamal Dajani, former head of communications at the Palestinian prime ministry, said Abbas was left with no option but to end all cooperation with Israel based on the Oslo agreement. “President Trump did not offer a peace plan, he outlined a one-sided proposal in order to pave the way for Israel to annex large areas of the West Bank and lock up Palestinians in bantustans,” he said.

“I don’t think, however, that Palestinians should sever ties with the US, as Trump’s deal does not reflect the sentiment of the American people or US Congress. In fact, it has been condemned by many prominent people and politicians in the US.”



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Netanyahu to Putin: Trump's Middle East peace plan a 'new opportunity' OIC rights' body rejects Trump's Middle East peace plan

[UN slams violations of Berlin pledge](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-01-31 02:14

NEW YORK: A UN envoy charged on Thursday that foreign actors continue to meddle in Libya's conflict, resupplying the parties to the conflict in violation of recent international commitments.

Speaking before the UN Security Council, UN envoy Ghassan Salame warned that "these maneuvers to resupply the two parties threaten to precipitate a new and much more dangerous conflagration."

The envoy's report follows a conference in Berlin Jan. 12 in which commitments were made to end foreign meddling and halt arms shipments to the belligerents.

Separately, African leaders on Thursday began a diplomatic push in the Congolese capital Brazzaville aimed at bolstering efforts to end the Libyan crisis.

The talks include Moussa Faki Mahamat, chairman of the African Union (AU) Commission, and Ghassan Salame, the UN's secretary-general's special representative, along with several African presidents, an AFP journalist said.

They met behind closed doors with the head of Tripoli-based government Fayez Al-Sarraj, and separately with envoys from Libya's eastern commander Gen. Khalifa Haftar, who controls eastern Libya, a Congolese diplomat told AFP.

The aim is "to search for solutions for resolving the Libyan crisis, as recommended by the (Jan. 19) conference in Berlin," the office of the Congolese presidency said in a statement on Wednesday. Leaders of the 55-nation AU are to meet in Addis Ababa on Feb. 9 and 10.

The Berlin conference committed world leaders, including the presidents of Russia, Turkey and France, to an agreement to stop interfering in the long-

running conflict, be it through weapons, troops or financing. But it failed to forge “serious dialogue” between the warring parties or get them to sign up to a permanent truce.

The presidents of Congo, also called Congo-Brazzaville, of Mauritania and of Djibouti were present at the start of Thursday’s meeting, while Algeria’s new president, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, was represented by his prime minister.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, whose country had hosted the Berlin talks, had initially been expected for the talks but did not come.

Libya has been mired in chaos since a 2011 NATO-backed uprising that killed longtime ruler Muammar Qaddafi. Turkey is planning a military deployment to Libya to shore up the UN-backed government while Haftar is backed by Egypt, Russia and the UAE.

The crisis has deeply worried countries to the south of Libya, which are already battling a bloody jihadist insurgency.

“Africa’s worry is that there’s a risk that all these weapons (from Libya) will transit through the Sahel,” Senegalese President Macky Sall said on Tuesday.

On Saturday, the UN mission in Libya, UNSMIL, said there had been “continued blatant violations” of the arms embargo, with planes bringing in advanced weapons, armored vehicles, advisers and fighters.



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France-Turkey dispute escalates over Libya and Mediterranean Fighting rages as Libya force pushes toward key western city

[Palestinians protest Trump plan, Gaza militants fire rockets](#)

Author:

By JOSEPH KRAUSS | AP

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Fri, 2020-01-31 16:10

JERUSALEM: Palestinians held demonstrations across the region Friday to protest President Donald Trump's Middle East initiative, while militants in the Gaza Strip fired rockets and mortar rounds at Israel, drawing retaliatory strikes.

The Palestinians have rejected the Trump plan, which heavily favors Israel and would allow it to annex all of its Jewish settlements, along with the Jordan Valley, in the occupied West Bank. The Palestinians were offered limited self-rule in Gaza, parts of the West Bank and some sparsely populated areas of Israel in return for meeting a long list of conditions.

Israel launched airstrikes on militant targets in Gaza early Friday, shortly after Palestinians fired three rockets into Israel, two of which were intercepted, the military said.

It said Palestinian militants had also launched "explosive balloons" toward Israel and that a sniper had shot an observational antenna. It said it struck targets linked to the Hamas militant group in response, including "underground infrastructure used to manufacture weapons."

Later on Friday, the military said Gaza militants fired three mortar rounds.

In response, an Israeli tank fired on a Hamas military post.

No one was wounded in either exchange of fire.

Gaza has been relatively calm in recent months as Egyptian and UN mediators have worked to shore up an informal truce between Israel and Hamas, which rules the coastal territory.

Hamas has curbed rocket fire and rolled back weekly protests along the frontier that had often turned violent. In return, Israel has eased the blockade it imposed on Gaza after the militant group seized power from forces loyal to the Palestinian Authority in 2007.

Hamas rejected the Trump plan and vowed that "all options are open" in responding to the proposal, but the group is not believed to be seeking another war with Israel.

Thousands of people took to the streets after Friday prayers in neighboring Jordan to protest the plan. Jordan, a close US ally and key player in previous peace efforts, has warned Israel against annexing territory. Jordan

and Egypt are the only two Arab countries to have signed peace agreements with Israel.

The protesters waved Jordanian and Palestinian flags and burned Israeli flags despite the rainy weather. They chanted "Trump is a coward" and "Here we are, Al-Aqsa," referring to a Jerusalem mosque on a site sacred to Jews and Muslims.

In Lebanon, dozens of Palestinians gathered in the crowded Bourj Al-Barajneh refugee camp after Friday prayers, carrying Palestinian flags and pictures of the Al-Aqsa mosque. They chanted "We would die for Palestine to live" and "Revolution until we set Palestine free."

"Palestine is not for sale, even if it were for millions upon millions. If (Trump) gave all of his money we wouldn't sell to him," said 58-year-old Fatima Al-Khatib.

The plan anticipates \$50 billion of investment in the future Palestinian state and describes several ambitious development projects, without saying where the money would come from.

Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have held small, scattered protests in recent days condemning the Trump initiative, and thousands gathered in Gaza on Friday, where they burned US and Israeli flags and portraits of Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

At least 14 Palestinians were wounded by Israeli gunfire in scattered protests along the security fence surrounding Gaza, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent medical service.

There were concerns that larger demonstrations and clashes would break out at the compound housing the Al-Aqsa mosque, but Friday prayers there concluded peacefully. The Islamic trust that manages the site said an estimated 30,000 worshippers attended the weekly prayers.

The site, known to Muslims as the Haram Al-Sharif, or Noble Sanctuary, is the third holiest in Islam, after Makkah and Medina in Saudi Arabia. Jews refer to the site as the Temple Mount because it was the location of the First and Second Jewish Temples in antiquity.

The hilltop shrine is managed by an Islamic trust under Jordanian stewardship, and day-to-day affairs are governed by informal understandings with Israel known as the "status quo." Non-Muslims are allowed to visit during certain hours, but Jews cannot pray there.

In recent years, increasing numbers of religious and ultra-nationalist Jews have visited the site, stoking fears among the Palestinians that Israel intends to one day partition it and igniting clashes between Muslim worshippers and Israeli police. Israel has repeatedly said it has no intention of changing the status quo.

The Trump plan, which heavily favors Israel, says the status quo should "continue uninterrupted."

But the plan also says "people of every faith should be permitted to pray on the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif, in a manner that is fully respectful to their religion, taking into account the times of each religion's prayers and holidays, as well as other religious factors."

The site is part of the famed Old City in east Jerusalem, which Israel captured, along with the West Bank and Gaza, in the 1967 war. The Palestinians view east Jerusalem as their capital and want all three territories to form their future state.

Trump's Mideast plan would situate the Palestinian capital on the outskirts

of east Jerusalem, beyond the separation barrier built by Israel. The rest of Jerusalem, including the Old City, would remain Israel's capital.

"A lot of people are still in a state of shock over the proposal," said Christian Saunders, the acting head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, which provides basic services to some 5 million Palestinians scattered across the region.

"What will happen after that shock wears off, I don't know. We certainly have serious concerns that it will result in an escalation in clashes and in violence. We have contingency plans in place in order to support during such times of unrest."





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OIC rights' body rejects Trump's Middle East peace plan
Palestinian President Abbas to address UN Security Council on peace plan