

Lebanon's outgoing PM backs businessman to replace him

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Tue, 2019-12-03 18:49

BEIRUT: Lebanon's outgoing Prime Minister Saad Hariri said Tuesday he supports the nomination of a prominent contractor to become the country's next premier, a move that will likely pave the way for the formation of a new Cabinet amid a severe economic and financial crisis.

Hariri last week withdrew his candidacy for the premiership, saying he hoped to clear the way for a solution to the political impasse amid nearly eight weeks of anti-government protests.

Speaking to reporters Tuesday night, Hariri said he backs Samir Khatib to become the country's next prime minister adding that "there are still some details and God willing something good" will happen. Hariri added that "everyone is trying to pass through this difficult period."

Khatib heads one of Lebanon's largest engineering and contracting companies and did not hold any political roles in the past.

Over the past weeks, politicians failed to agree on the shape and form of a new government. Hariri had insisted on heading a government of technocrats, while his opponents, including the militant group Hezbollah, want a Cabinet made up of both experts and politicians.

Asked if he is going to take part in the new Cabinet, Hariri said: "I will not nominate political personalities but experts."

It was not clear how the protesters who have been demonstrating against widespread corruption and mismanagement in the country would respond to the possible formation of the government. The frustrated protesters have resorted to road closures and other tactics to pressure politicians into responding to their demands for a new government.

They have insisted that a new Cabinet be made up of independent figures that have nothing to do with the ruling elite that have been running the country since the 1975-90 civil war ended.

President Michel Aoun now is expected to call for binding consultations with heads of parliamentary blocs to name the new prime minister. But since Hariri, the most powerful Sunni leader in the country said he will back Khatib, the contractor is widely expected to get the post.

According to Lebanon's power sharing system implemented since independence from France in 1943, the president has to be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister should be a Sunni and the parliament speaker a Shiite. Cabinet and parliament seats are equally split between Christians and Muslims.

Earlier in the day, outgoing Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil hinted that he will not be part of the new government telling reporters that "the success of the Cabinet is more important than our presence in it."

The apparent breakthrough comes as Lebanon is passing through its worst economic and financial crisis in decades with one of the highest debt ratios

in the world, high unemployment and an expected contraction in the economy in 2020. Local banks have imposed capital control measures unseen before in the country known for its free market economy.

The possible breakthrough came a day after protesters hurled stones at soldiers while opening a highway south of Beirut, injuring several troops. The Lebanese army said in a statement on Tuesday that one of the protesters in the town of Naameh fired bullets from a pistol the night before adding that the shooting made the troops fire in the air to disperse the protesters.



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[Saad Hariri](#)

[Samir Khatib](#)

Hariri refuses to head new Lebanon government as tensions riseIt's austerity or catastrophe, Saad Hariri tells Lebanon

[Trump says world 'has to be watching' the violence in Iran](#)

Author:

By ZEKE MILLER | AP

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1575394496309451900

Tue, 2019-12-03 17:25

LONDON: President Donald Trump said Tuesday that he supports the demonstrations in Iran and urged the world to watch the Iranian government's violent effort to quash protests that he says have killed "thousands of people."

Speaking in London, where he is attending the NATO leaders summit, Trump said, "Iran is killing thousands and thousands of people right now as we speak."

He added they were killed "for the mere fact that they're protesting," and he called it a "terrible thing."

Trump was mum on what, if anything, the US could do in response to the violence, but he said, "I think the world has to be watching."

Later, during a meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Trump said he misunderstood an earlier question when he said he did not support the Iranian protesters. Trump explained that he thought the question, during an earlier meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron, pertained to financial support for the protesters. "We do support them totally," Trump explained.

The United States of America supports the brave people of Iran who are protesting for their FREEDOM. We have under the Trump Administration, and always will!

– Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) [December 3, 2019](#)

The president also sent out a tweet that said: "The United States of America supports the brave people of Iran who are protesting for their FREEDOM. We have under the Trump Administration and always will!"

Amnesty International said on Monday it believes at least 208 people were killed in the protests and the crackdown that followed. Iranian state television on Tuesday acknowledged for the first time that security forces shot and killed what it described as "rioters" in multiple cities amid recent protests over the spike in government-set gasoline prices.

The protests are viewed as a reflection of widespread economic discontent gripping the country since Trump reimposed nuclear sanctions on Iran last year.

Trump encouraged reporters "to get in there and see what's going on," noting that the Iranian government has curtailed Internet access to limit the spread of information about the violence.



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Amnesty puts Iran death toll above 200 as US says Tehran target of regional anger
New UN nuclear agency chief: 'firm and fair' stance on Iran

[Macron says time for Turkey to clarify ambiguous Daesh stance](#)

Author:

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Tue, 2019-12-03 16:47

LONDON: French President Emmanuel Macron accused Turkey on Tuesday of working with Daesh proxies and said Ankara's ambiguity toward the group was detrimental to its NATO allies fighting in Syria and Iraq. Relations between Macron and Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan have soured

ahead of Wednesday's NATO summit in London with the two leaders trading barbs over Ankara's cross-border offensive in northeast Syria targeting Kurdish militias.

Speaking alongside US President Donald Trump, Macron directly linked Turkey to Daesh fighters, while dismissing Trump's concerns that Paris was not bringing home French Daesh fighters held by Kurdish groups in Syria.

Macron also said there is a disconnect in allowing Turkey to buy an anti-aircraft S-400 missile system from Russia and also be a NATO member. Trump said he is weighing issuing sanctions against Ankara if they move forward with plans to buy the weapons.

"The common enemy today is the terrorist groups. I'm sorry to say, we don't have the same definition of terrorism around the table," Macron told reporters.

"When I look at Turkey they are fighting against those who fought with us shoulder to shoulder against Daesh and sometimes they work with Daesh proxies."

Turkey has threatened to block a plan to defend Baltic states and Poland against Russian attacks unless the alliance backs Ankara in recognizing the Kurdish YPG militia as a terrorist group.

The YPG's fighters have long been US and French allies on the ground against Daesh in Syria. Turkey considers them an enemy because of links to Kurdish insurgents in southeastern Turkey.

"I think any ambiguity with Turkey vis-a-vis these groups is detrimental to everybody for the situation on the ground," Macron said. "The number one (priority) is not to be ambiguous with these groups, which is why we started to discuss our relations with Turkey."

In an at times awkward news conference with Trump, Macron appeared exasperated when the US president said he would pass the question to Macron on whether France should do more to bring French Daesh fighters home.

Paris has about 400 nationals, including around 60 fighters, held in northern Syria. It has refused to bring adults home saying they must face trial where their crimes were committed.

"Would you like some nice Daesh fighters? You can take everyone you want," Trump said in a light-hearted tone.

Visibly irritated, Macron responded, saying "let's be serious" and argued that number of foreign fighters from European countries was small, and that it would be unhelpful to focus on them rather than on the broader problem.

"It is true you have fighters coming from Europe but this is a tiny minority and I think the number one priority, because it's not finished, is to get rid of Daesh and terrorist groups. This is our number one priority and it's not yet done," he said.

Trump suggested Macron had not answered the question.

"This is why he is a great politician because that was one of the greatest non-answers I have ever heard, and that's OK," Trump said.



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Trump slams European allies before NATO summit in London
NATO summit faces new row

[Pompeo: Iran the common villain in Mideast](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-12-03 00:00

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Monday that Iran was the uniting factor behind protests around the Middle East, saying demonstrators in Iraq, Lebanon and Iran itself opposed the clerical regime.

While acknowledging diverse local reasons for the unrest that has swept the

Middle East as well as other regions, Pompeo pointed the finger at Iran.

Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi resigned “because the people were demanding freedom and the security forces had killed dozens and dozens of people. That’s due in large part to Iranian influence,” Pompeo said.

“The same is true in Lebanon, the protests in Beirut,” he said at the University of Louisville.

“They want Hezbollah and Iran out of their country, out of their system as a violent and a repressive force,” he said.

He said that protests inside Iran – which Amnesty International says have killed more than 200 people – showed that Iranians were also “fed up.” “They see a theocracy that is stealing money, the ayatollahs stealing tens and tens of millions of dollars,” he said.

In both Iraq and Lebanon, protesters have primarily called for an end to corruption, greater efforts to create jobs and a restructuring of the political system.

In Iraq, Abdel Mahdi had close ties with fellow Shiite-majority Iran but also enjoyed support from the US. Protesters last week torched the Iranian consulate in Najaf.

In Lebanon, the US has been seeking to isolate Hezbollah, the pro-Iranian militant movement that is also a political party with berths in the previous government.

President Donald Trump’s administration has put a priority on curbing Tehran’s regional influence including by imposing sweeping sanctions.



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Pompeo: We will sanction Iranian officials over protests crackdown
Pompeo urges Iranians to share videos showing ‘regime’s crackdown’ on protesters

[Top rebel leader says more time needed for Sudan peace deal](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-12-02 22:20

KHARTOUM: A senior Sudanese rebel leader Monday called for a three-month extension to finalize a peace deal with the Khartoum government, as talks between the two sides are to resume next week.

Yasir Arman, deputy leader of the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), also called on Washington to remove Sudan from its blacklist of "state sponsors of terrorism."

Peace talks opened in October in Juba between Khartoum's new transitional government and rebels who fought now-ousted president Omar Al-Bashir's forces in Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan.

A second round of talks is set to begin next Tuesday in the South Sudanese capital, and a peace deal had been expected to be struck a few days later on December 14.

But Arman, who is a senior leader in the Sudan Revolutionary Front rebel alliance, said more time was needed.

"We call for an extension of the Juba Declaration by three months until March 8," he told reporters in Khartoum on Monday.

"We hope that the December 10 round will be the last and peace will be achieved," he added, without giving a specific reason for the extra time needed to reach that goal.

Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed and millions displaced in fighting between rebel groups and Sudanese security forces in the three conflict zones during Bashir's rule.

The transitional authorities, tasked with leading the way to civilian rule after Bashir's ouster in April, have made ending wars in these regions their top priority.

"We support peace ... We are looking for a national project and a strategic exit for armed rebel movements," Arman said.

He also urged Washington to drop Sudan from its blacklist.

"After the fall of the National Congress Party, Sudan is no longer a state that sponsors terrorism," Arman said, referring to Bashir's party.

Washington had added Sudan to its blacklist in 1993 for Khartoum's alleged support to Islamist militant groups.

Al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden lived in Sudan between 1992 to 1996.



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Hundreds march in Sudan capital seeking justice for those killed Sudan disbands Bashir's NCP party, overturns moral policing law