

Donald Trump tells Iran to 'get out of Yemen'

Tue, 2019-07-16 19:39

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday a lot of progress had been made with Iran and that he was not looking for regime change in Tehran, but said the US wanted the Islamic republic to "get out of Yemen."

Trump, who made the remarks at a Cabinet meeting in the White House, did not give details about the progress, but US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said at the meeting Iran had said it was prepared to negotiate about its missile program.

After threats from Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's ultimate authority, to push on with breaches of the nuclear deal, Trump suggested to the Cabinet meeting that Iran wanted to talk with its archenemy.

"A lot of progress has been made. We'll see what happens. But a lot of progress has been made," Trump said.

Trump said the Iran nuclear pact agreed under his predecessor Barack Obama was too weak to prevent Tehran developing atomic bombs. "They can't have a nuclear weapon. We want to help them. We'll be good to them, we'll work with them. We'll help them in any way we can, but they can't have a nuclear weapon. We're not looking, by the way, for regime change."

He added: "They (also) can't be testing ballistic missiles."

US Secretary State Mike Pompeo told the Cabinet meeting at the White House that Iran had signaled it was prepared to negotiate about its ballistic missiles.

"The Iranian regime is struggling to figure out what they're going to do with their economy because we've been terribly effective," Pompeo said.

"And the result is ... frankly, I think it was yesterday, maybe the day before, for the first time the Iranians have said that they're prepared to negotiate about their missile program. So we will have this opportunity, I hope, if we continue to execute our strategy appropriately, we'll have this opportunity to negotiate a deal that will actually prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon."



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Iran's Khamenei warns UK that Iran will not leave 'piracy' unansweredIran's top diplomat warns US is 'playing with fire'

[France, Britain, Egypt, UAE, United States, Italy call for immediate end of hostilities in Libya](#)

Tue, 2019-07-16 19:41

LONDON: France, UK, Egypt, the UAE, US and Italy on Tuesday called for an immediate end of hostilities around Tripoli and warned of attempts by "terrorist groups" to take advantage of the political void in Libya.

The six countries reiterated in a rare joint statement their deep concern over the ongoing hostilities in Tripoli and called for an immediate de-escalation, end of the current fighting, and urged a rapid return to the political process under the auspices of the UN.

They warned that the fighting “has fueled a growing humanitarian emergency,” aggravating a crisis with migrants, and voiced fear that extremists would thrive in the security vacuum.

The countries “call on all parties to the Tripoli conflict to dissociate themselves from all such terrorists and individuals designated by the UN Sanctions Committee, and renew our commitment to see those responsible for further instability held accountable,” they said.

Nearly 1,100 people have been killed in the fighting.

While backing the government, Western powers earlier this year sent mixed signals, with US President Donald Trump praising Khalifa Haftar in a phone call and France and Italy welcoming him on visits.



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Four killed as car bomb targets funeral in Libya's Benghazi UN says death toll

from Libya fighting passes 1,000

[For a few Gazans, a trip to a chalet offers an alternative to the heavily polluted seaside](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-07-15 22:50

GAZA CITY: During the summer, middle-class Palestinians in the Gaza Strip head for chalets and swimming pools for a short break, rather than the seaside. The prospect of a trip to the beach is not so attractive when the waters are heavily polluted after years of raw, untreated sewage being pumped into the sea.

Demand for the chalets has been growing since the start of the siege that was imposed on the Gaza Strip in 2007, and has increased particularly sharply in the past few years as a result of the total pollution of more than 60 percent of the waters along the coast and the partial pollution of the rest, extending to about 40 kilometers offshore.

While the chalets offer relatively better-off Gazans the chance to avoid the polluted sea, the majority – who rely on relief aid to survive, as a result of high levels of poverty and unemployment – are not so lucky. For them, swimming in the filthy waters is the only option if they want a break.

Ibrahim Abu Dibaa worked as a beach lifeguard for several years and loved it, but gave it up five years ago over fears of disease from the pollution.

Unofficial estimates suggest that hospitals in the Gaza Strip treat dozens of people daily, children in particular, for intestinal infections and skin diseases caused by swimming in contaminated sea water.

Dibaa said he takes his family on a one-day chalet vacation so his children can play and swim safely.

“I have a lot of memories with the sea, and when I see it like this I almost cry and I deeply grieve for the thousands of Gazans who have no alternative to the sea, despite the danger of swimming in it,” he said.

Khaled Altibi, the head of the water-treatment department at the Ministry of Health, said the latest statistics, from April, revealed that 62 percent of the sea around Gaza is polluted. He added that this is better than the same time last year, as a result of efforts to ensure wastewater treatment plants can operate for longer periods.

FASTFACT

While the chalets offer relatively better-off Gazans the chance to avoid the polluted sea, the majority are not so lucky. For them, swimming in the filthy waters is the only option if they want a break.

Altibi said that pollution poses a serious danger to the health of Gazans because contaminated water contains bacteria, fungi and viruses contain or cause diseases that can be transmitted to humans easily.

Mohammed Dawoud knows this only too well. He said his family went to a section of the shore at Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip, that was supposedly safe according to a map issued by the authorities. However, his 9-year-old daughter, Alia, subsequently fell ill with fever, severe diarrhea and red blisters on her body. When he took her to a hospital, medics told him she was suffering from intestinal disease caused by swimming in and swallowing sea water contaminated by sewage. As a result, Dawoud is boycotting the sea.

"I will never risk my family and my children again," he said. "Health is more important than the sea. If I have to swim I will go to a private swimming pool."

Ali Abu Hajjar does not have the money to go to a private pool instead of the sea. Instead, he wants to take with his family to a seaside area believed to be largely safe north of Rafah, which was an Israeli settlement before the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005.

He is government employee who is only being paid 40 percent of his salary because of the financial crisis in Gaza. He said that the cost of hiring a chalet for a day or a night is about 350 shekels (\$100), which is equivalent to about a third of his monthly salary. A few years ago, the cost of a chalet was up to \$ 250, but the economic situation as forced the prices down.

Heba Abu Hamad and 12 of her friends decided to share the costs and take their children on a group trip to chalets during the summer instead of going to the seaside.

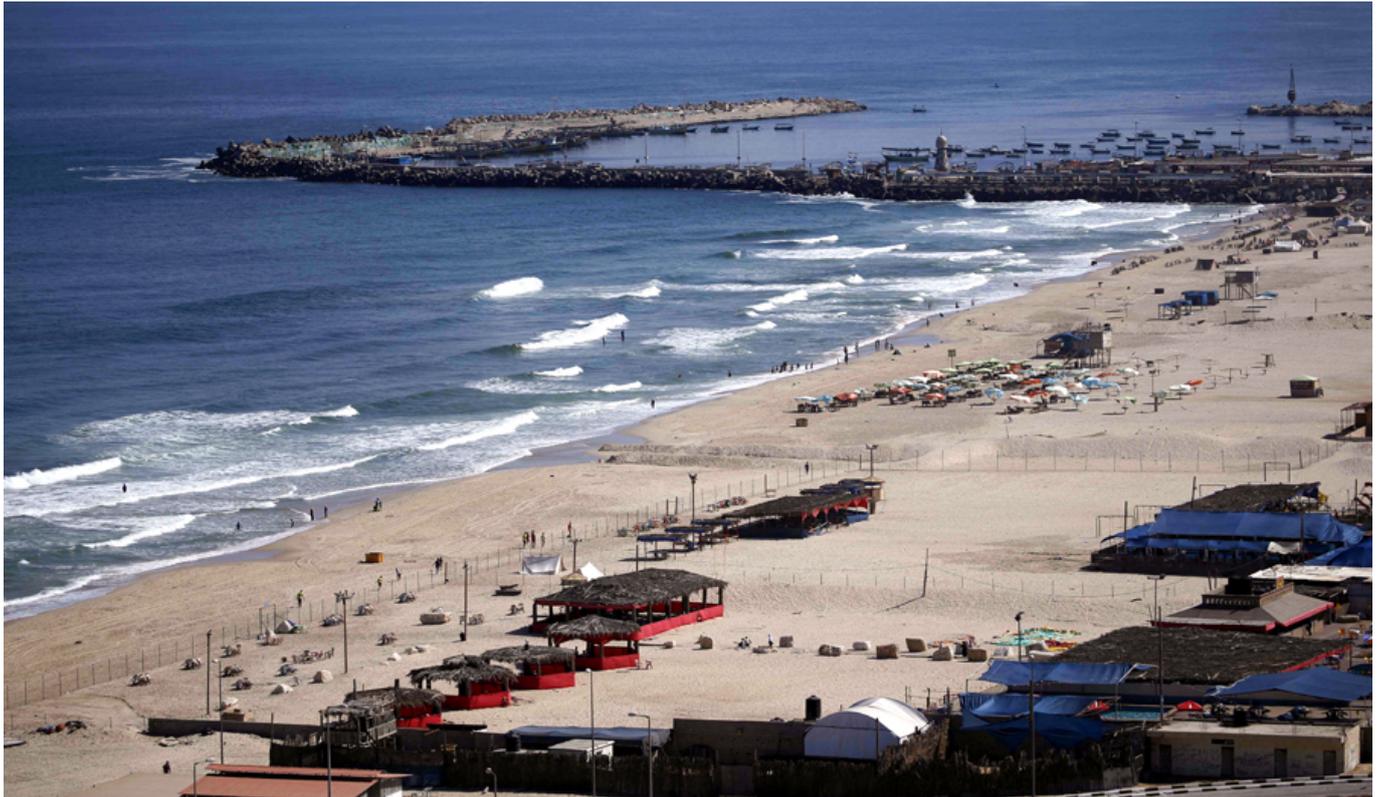
"These collective group trips, in which we share the financial cost, make them available several times during the summer without burdening us under difficult economic conditions," she said. Such group trips cost about 50 shekels, depending on numbers.

Chalet owner Mohamed Sobh said he tries to keep his prices are affordable. They range from about \$100 to \$120, slightly higher on Thursdays and Fridays, and vary depending on the length of the booking and whether people stay during the night or day.

He noted that many people are joining with friends to take advantage of lower-cost group bookings.

Salah Abu Hasira, the head of the Palestinian Authority for Restaurants and Tourist Services, said there are about 300 holiday chalets in the Gaza Strip, and competition is high during the summer season to attract people who want to avoid the pollution of the sea and the difficulties that come with trying to travel to other countries. He added that the chalets have become a common "respite" for those with the financial ability to rent them.

"The spread of chalets and investment pools in Gaza is a natural phenomenon," said Hamed Jad, economic editor of Al-Ayyam newspaper, as a result of the Israeli siege, the inability of many people to travel further afield, as well as a desire to avoid the polluted sea.



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EU agrees sanctions against Turkey for drilling off Cyprus

Author:

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Mon, 2019-07-15 18:55

BRUSSELS: European Union officials on Monday agreed political and financial sanctions against Turkey after Ankara went ahead with drilling operations off Cyprus despite repeated warnings, European diplomats said.

"The conclusions on Turkey have been adopted and they will be made public in the coming hours," the EU's foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini told reporters after a meeting with members states' foreign ministers.

The most serious measure is understood to be a cut of 145.8 million euros (\$164 million) in the European funds allocated to Turkey for 2020.

The European Investment Bank has been asked to revisit the conditions set out for providing financial support to Ankara, according to several European sources.

The EU is also expected to downgrade its dialogue with Turkey, without cutting it off completely.

And one senior European diplomat added: "It has not be ruled out that targeted sanctions be adopted at some time or other."

The EU last month warned Turkey it could face sanctions if it did not cease what the bloc called "illegal" drilling in Cyprus's exclusive economic zone. Last week, diplomats began discussing what measures to impose.

It was the discovery of huge gas reserves in the eastern Mediterranean that sparked the dispute between EU member Cyprus and Turkey.

Ankara sent two ships to carry out drilling off the Cypriot coast despite the warnings from the EU.

Cyprus has been divided between the Republic of Cyprus and a northern third under Turkish military control since 1974 when Turkey invaded in response to a coup by a Greek military junta.

The tensions over gas drilling are also likely related to the collapse of peace talks in 2017, experts say.

While negotiations to reunify the island have not restarted, Cyprus has moved to start gas and oil exploration by issuing licenses.



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[Workers recover over 300 bodies from Syrian mass grave](#)

Author:
Mon, 2019-07-15 22:28

BEIRUT: A local official in Syria's Raqqa said workers have unearthed 313 bodies from a mass grave discovered last month near the northern city.

Yasser Al-Khamees who leads a team of first responders says among the bodies found are those belonging to civilians, including women and children, as well as people believed to have been shot dead by Daesh militants.

The mass grave was discovered in mid-June on the southern edges of Raqqa. The city was the de facto capital of the Daesh's so-called Islamic caliphate, which spanned territories in Syria and Iraq.

US-backed Syrian forces retook the city from Daesh in 2014 after gruesome

battles that killed thousands and left the city in ruins.

Several other mass graves have previously been discovered in and around Raqqa.

Separately, the Syrian regime said a gas plant resumed operations Monday after repairs to a key pipeline put out of service by a sabotage attack at the weekend.

“The Ebla gas plant resumed production at full capacity” at dawn Monday after repair of the sabotaged pipeline, the Ministry of Oil and Mineral Resources said in a statement.

The pipeline in the Badiya desert, where Daesh is present, transports gas from the regime-controlled Shaer gas field, the country’s largest, in the central province of Homs to the Ebla plant.

It feeds the Ebla plant with 2.5 million cubic meters of gas per day, according to the ministry.

On Sunday, regime’s news agency SANA said that a “terrorist attack” by unidentified perpetrators had put the pipeline out of service.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said a bomb blast targeted the pipeline.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

The Badiya desert is the scene of regular clashes between regime forces and Daesh, which retains the ability to strike despite losing all the territory it once held in Syria.

The country’s eight-year war has seen the regime lose control of key oil fields and caused state hydrocarbon revenues to plummet by billions of dollars.

The regime of President Bashar Assad has been slapped with a raft of Western economic sanctions, extending to hydrocarbons.

Last month, underwater pipelines connected to a refinery in western Syria were sabotaged.



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