

US official holds talks over land and maritime borders between Lebanon and Israel

Author:

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BEIRUT: US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Satterfield has held a new round of talks with Lebanese officials, regarding the negotiation mechanism between Lebanon and Israel on their land and maritime borders.

However, a Lebanese government source told Arab News that “things are still complicated.”

Satterfield, currently in Beirut, met with Lebanon’s Speaker Nabih Berri and Prime Minister Saad Hariri on Wednesday.

The source said: “Complications are not only limited to the negotiation’s time frame, but to every other detail, particularly the issue of setting the maritime border.

“The file of setting the land border, however, is not an issue, where there is an adopted and continuous negotiation mechanism,” the source added.

In 2012, US mediation by former envoys Frederic Hof and Amos Hochstein acknowledged Lebanon’s right to 500 square kilometers of the disputed area along the Lebanese-Israeli border.

Lebanon rejected Satterfield’s suggestion that Israel could invest oil wealth extracted from the area into a 360-sq km zone.

UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Jan Kubis informed Aoun and Berri on Monday that the UN had agreed to sponsor and host negotiations at its regional headquarters in Naqoura. Berri’s press office said the meeting discussed the issue of land and maritime borders, while Hariri’s said the meeting “reviewed the path of (Satterfield’s) mission.”

Maj. Gen. Stefano Del Col, UN head of mission and force commander in Lebanon, chaired Monday’s tripartite military meeting in Naqoura between official representatives of the Lebanese and Israeli armed forces.

Discussions “focused on air and ground violations, the situation along the Blue Line, the issue of permanent violations including in the northern part of the village of GHajjar, as well as other issues within the scope of the UN Security Council.”

Maj Gen. Del Col asserted that “the Tripartite mechanism is a successful conduit in finding solutions and minimizing tensions, as it allows us all to take stock of current pressing issues and security concerns along the Blue

Line, in an open and transparent manner.”

Meetings in Naqoura have been regularly held under the auspices of the UN since the 2006 war in southern Lebanon, as an “essential conflict management and confidence building mechanism,” according the UN’s media office.



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US in new push to resolve Israel-Lebanon sea border dispute
Lebanon tells Israel its border wall violates sovereignty

[Israel closes Gaza fishing zone due to fire balloons](#)

Wed, 2019-06-12 22:04

GAZA: The Israeli government said late Wednesday that the fishing zone off the coast of Gaza had been closed, in retaliation for the launch of incendiary balloons from the Palestinian enclave.

“Due to the continuous launching of incendiary balloons and kites from the Gaza Strip towards Israel, it has been decided tonight (Wednesday) not to allow access to Gaza’s maritime space until further notice,” a spokesperson for COGAT, a unit of Israel’s defence ministry, said in a statement.

The move came after COGAT said on Tuesday it had reduced the extent of the fishing zone to six nautical miles offshore from 10 nautical miles, having downscaled it from 15 nautical miles a week ago.

A spokesman for the Israeli fire service said incendiary balloons from Gaza caused seven fires just on Tuesday.

In the past year, Palestinians have succeeded in setting fire to large areas of farmland in southern Israel.

Israel had only restored the fishing limit to 15 miles on June 4, after a previous reduction in response to fire balloons.

Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza, run by Hamas, have fought three wars since 2008.



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UN chief calls for lifting of Gaza blockade Israel stops flotilla seeking to break Gaza blockade

'Complex' deal to release Lebanese businessman after 4 years in Iran jail

Wed, 2019-06-12 00:25

BEIRUT: The release of a Lebanese businessman on Tuesday after nearly four years in an Iranian prison may be linked to "complex" talks over two Lebanese prisoners being held in the US, analysts have told Arab News.

Nizar Zakka, an information technology specialist who holds US residency, was detained in Tehran in 2015. Iranian media described him as a US spy and he was sentenced to 10 years in jail and fined \$4.2 million.

Zakka arrived in Beirut on Tuesday after Lebanon's government secured his freedom. The circumstances of Zakka's release were "complex," Asaad Haidar, a Lebanese expert on Iran, told Arab News.

"This is a declaration of Iranian goodwill toward the Americans," he said. "Zakka's release is aimed at exchanging his freedom for the release of people who are being held by the US, including two Lebanese, Ali Kourani and Kassim Tajideen, who are important to Iran."

Kourani, 34, a Lebanese American, is being prosecuted in a New York court on charges of supporting terrorism. If convicted, he faces life imprisonment.

BACKGROUND

- Nizar Zakka, an information technology specialist who holds US residency, was detained in Tehran in 2015.
- Iranian media described him as a US spy and he was sentenced to 10 years in jail and fined \$4.2 million.

Tajideen, 63, a Lebanese businessman from the southern town of Hanaouay, built a global network of food and property companies with his brothers. He was accused by Washington of financing terrorism, and arrested in Morocco in March 2017.

"Tajideen is essential to Iran and they want to move reopen his case because no one has mentioned him since his arrest," Haidar said.

"It is important to monitor the outcome of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's visit to Tehran on Wednesday, and his meeting with Iranian officials. These are real negotiations whose results will emerge later."

Nevertheless, officials in Lebanon and Zakka himself denied on Tuesday that

his release was linked to a swap deal.

“This was an initiative that began and ended in Lebanon, a national job. The results were positive and stopped many actions that would have affected the region,” Zakka said.

Sources at the presidential palace told Arab News Zakka’s release was the result of “an intervention by President Michel Aoun with the Iranian authorities.

“He ... summoned the Iranian ambassador and asked him to refer his request to President Hassan Rouhani, and he responded positively. Everything said and written outside this context is absolutely unfounded.”

Zakka arrived in Beirut on a private jet, along with Lebanon’s national security chief, Maj. Gen. Abbas Ibrahim.

“I do not make deals,” Ibrahim said. “But Tajideen is on my mind. I met him in prison in 2017 and this matter is not up.”



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Lebanese businessman Nizar Zakka arrives in Beirut after Iran release

Egyptian swimmer dives into major UN role

Tue, 2019-06-11 23:57

CAIRO: Egyptian swimmer Mohamed Al-Husseini has been named spokesperson of the UN High Commission on Disability in Egypt and abroad.

Al-Husseini is the first Egyptian and Arab, as well as the first person with Down syndrome, to be appointed as the organization's spokesperson.

The swimmer will attend global conferences where he will share his life story, struggles and goals, according to Reda Abdel Aziz, the commission's director.

Al-Husseini was picked due to his swimming achievements, Abdel Aziz said.

In 2017, the 18-year-old became the first swimmer with Down syndrome to cross the English Channel after training for more than 10 hours a day in preparation for the marathon swim.

"For every 1,000 children with Down syndrome, maybe only one or two are recognized for their achievements," Mona Bassel, of the American University in Cairo, told Arab News.

"Some schools offer programs for children with Down syndrome, but there is a lot of ignorance among society in general. Realistically, we have a long way to go in terms of stigma and dealing with people with the disability," she said.

The UN selection of Al-Husseini comes at a time when Egypt is empowering people with disabilities, and the swimmer's story is an inspiration to many.

In March, President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi established the National Council of People with Disabilities, an independent body that encourages participation in decision-making processes.

Up to 10 percent of Egypt's population is made up of people with special needs, El-Sisi said in a speech celebrating International Day of Persons with Disabilities.



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“Age is no obstacle” – Egyptian swimmer still a champion at 76 Egyptian author Ahmed Khaled Tawfik featured on Google Doodle

[**Crisis Group report slams Israeli's \\$530m plan for occupied East Jerusalem**](#)

Tue, 2019-06-11 23:25

AMMAN: The International Crisis Group (ICG) has called on Israel not to implement controversial parts of a \$530 million, five-year plan to develop occupied East Jerusalem without any input from the Palestinian community.

In a 40-page report published on Tuesday, the ICG called on Israel not to separate Palestinian communities in parts of East Jerusalem from the city's municipality, force schools there to adopt Israel's curricula, and introduce a land registry.

The report, titled "Reversing Israel's Deepening Annexation of Occupied East Jerusalem," concludes that these actions "would exacerbate the conflict in and over Jerusalem."

Ofer Zalzburg, a senior analyst with the ICG and the report's main author, told Arab News that despite settlement construction in East Jerusalem and severe impediments placed on natural growth in Palestinian neighborhoods, Israel has failed to establish a durable and substantial Jewish majority in that part of the city.

Zalzburg said a former Israeli minister described the dilemma to him as follows: "East Jerusalem remains stuck in our throat: We can't swallow it and we can't spit it out."

Khaled Abu Arafah, a former Palestinian minister, said Israel is moving fast to Judaize East Jerusalem.

"It's very worrisome what's happening. This large amount of money is being set aside to tackle Palestinian aspirations, especially in the educational field," he told Arab News.

Abu Arafah said the report shows how Israeli authorities operate in East Jerusalem with impunity.

"This is very dangerous, and requires more than ever (Palestinian) national unity and a position from the Arab and Islamic world," he added.

Khalil Assali, a member of the Waqf, which manages Al-Aqsa Mosque, said Israel has been targeting education in East Jerusalem for some time.

"The Israelis have placed obstacles, closed schools and forced (Palestinian) students to attend Israeli municipal schools," he told Arab News.

"We have at least 30,000 students whose names aren't in any registry because they have no school seats."

Khalil Tufakji, head of the map department at the Arab Studies Center, expressed opposition to the idea of a land registry for East Jerusalem.

"There are many Palestinian land owners from East Jerusalem who are living abroad, and this idea is aimed at transferring their properties to the Israeli government by means of putting them in the hands of the custodian of absentee properties," he told Arab News.

The ICG called on Palestinians, Israelis, and allies of both leaderships to press Israel's government not to carry out these plans.

"If it wants to reduce poverty and crime in East Jerusalem, Israel should allow Palestinians to establish civic leadership bodies in the city and end its ban on Palestinian Authority activities there," the ICG wrote.

It urged outside powers "to allocate funds to help Palestinian Jerusalemites establish civic leadership bodies in East Jerusalem to operate both east and

west of the separation barrier, in coordination with Israel.”



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