

Iran deal 'cannot be postponed any longer': German chancellor

Author:

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JERUSALEM/VIENNA: Germany's Olaf Scholz said on Wednesday that a new Iran nuclear agreement "cannot be postponed any longer," during his first visit as chancellor to Israel, which staunchly opposes efforts to forge a deal with Tehran.

Policy differences on Iran surfaced at a Jerusalem joint press conference, with Scholz saying Germany "would like to see an agreement reached in Vienna."

The latest round of negotiations to salvage Iran's 2015 nuclear deal started in late November in the Austrian capital and the talks are expected to reach a crunch point in the coming days.

The so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action secured sanctions relief for Iran in return for strict curbs on its nuclear program to prevent it acquiring an atomic weapon, a goal Iran has always denied pursuing.

"Now is the time to make a decision," Scholz said. "This must not be postponed any longer and cannot be postponed any longer. Now is the time to finally say yes to something that represents a good and reasonable solution."

Israel's Premier Naftali Bennett has said he is "deeply troubled" by the outlines of a new deal taking shape, fearing it does too little to stop Iran from getting the nuclear bomb, while granting it sanctions relief.

Bennett stressed on Wednesday that Israel is "following the talks in Vienna with concern" and warned that "Israel will know how to defend itself and ensure its security and future."

"Bitter experience" with broken US promises has made it inevitable that Iran will push to defend its interests by securing a reliable nuclear deal, its top security official said on Wednesday, according to the Nour news website.

"Bitter experience with the US breach of promises and European inaction have made it inevitable to meet the requirements for a reliable, balanced and sustainable agreement," Ali Shamkhani, head of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, was quoted as saying at a meeting between the council and Iranian lawmakers.

Despite progress in the negotiations, the key sticking point is that Tehran wants the issue of uranium traces found at several old but undeclared sites in Iran to be dropped and closed forever, an Iranian official said.

Some alternative solutions have been discussed in protracted talks between Iranian negotiators and Western powers, sources said, without elaborating.

Russia's envoy to the talks, Mikhail Ulyanov, the most publicly optimistic among the delegation chiefs, told Reuters "we are one minute from the finish line" when asked about Iran's indirect negotiations with the US.



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UN nuclear watchdog will 'never abandon' Iran probe
US President Joe Biden confuses 'Ukrainian' with 'Iranian' people in televised speech

[From Syria to Ukraine, a saga of serial abandonment of Western allies](#)

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Wed, 2022-03-02 22:18

DUBAI: In October 2019, as Turkey massed its forces on the border with northeastern Syrian, threatening to invade and carve out a so-called safe zone, Kurdish communities just miles away turned to their powerful ally in

Washington for support. The US military could keep the forces of their fellow NATO member at bay, the Kurds believed.

Five years of close security cooperation and the sacrifice of more than 11,000 lives in their joint fight against Daesh had convinced the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces that the bond of trust that had grown between them and the Americans was unbreakable and that in the face of an even more formidable foe, their allies would surely have their back.

But what the Kurds had already seen was a tweet by President Donald Trump and a White House video on Dec. 19, 2018, announcing the withdrawal of all US forces from Syria – save for a few hundred to guard oil fields near Deir ez-Zor.



“We never had the slightest intention of defending Ukraine, not the slightest,” said Anatol Lieven. (AFP)

By October 2019, Russian troops and Syrian forces had taken over at least three abandoned US camps in northern Syria. “Russian mercenaries splashed their good fortune over social media and took selfies in front of US equipment, while Russian reporters gave walking tours of the base,” Business Insider said in a report on Oct. 16.

Meanwhile, the Turks had launched bombing raids against the SDF in the name of “Operation Peace Spring.” The war effort against the global menace of Daesh – the US administration’s top priority just five years before – meant nothing to Trump. The SDF soldiers who had helped them win were summarily left twisting in the wind.

If the abandonment of the Kurds was a one-off, it could be dismissed as a mere blip on an otherwise honorable record. But a recurrence of American about-turns in recent years, in the Middle East and Europe, points more to a pattern than to a mistake. In Georgia, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and now Ukraine, peoples and governments that believed they could count on the superpower's military support have all felt the crushing blow of its absence just when they needed it most.



Washington's Gulf allies have learned the lesson the hard way. (AFP)

In a recent interview with the American Prospect magazine, Anatol Lieven, author of "Ukraine and Russia: A Fraternal Rivalry," said: "We never had the slightest intention of defending Ukraine, not the slightest. Even though Britain and America and the NATO secretariat to the Bucharest Conference in 2008 came out for NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia (the NATO HQ was completely behind it on American orders), no contingency plans were drawn up, not the most remote or contingent ones, for how NATO could defend Ukraine and Georgia. There was no intention of ever doing that at all."

Lieven added: "Claiming that we were going to admit them to NATO: It goes beyond actual irresponsibility. In my view, this was deeply immoral, to make such a commitment that we had no intention of fulfilling."

Last August, shocking scenes of planes careering down the runway of Kabul airport as desperate stowaways fell to their death from American military cargo planes' wheel wells, came to be the defining image of a 20-year US occupation. Not far behind were scenes of Taliban fighters walking into Kabul as victors of a long war, their arch-foe having fled, and the national army raised by the US having folded almost overnight.



"There is no doubt that the Russian intervention in Ukraine is an accumulation of a series of Russian military interventions in Georgia in 2008," said Ibrahim Hamidi. (AFP)

Two decades after promising to bring democracy and freedom to Afghanistan, the US had simply given up. First Trump, and then Joe Biden, had walked away from a clear moral obligation to a population that had made a huge sacrifice in blood for America's protracted "war on terror." Nine months on, Afghanistan is a broken country, ruled by an unpopular Islamic fundamentalist group handed power practically on a platter by a nation that has lost the will to lead and the patience to keep fighting.

In the Middle East, where the US has trod with a heavy footprint since 9/11, there is little faith that a country suffering so much from political polarization itself has a coherent vision to offer.

Since 2000, the pendulum has swung between the missionary zeal of George W. Bush's advisers and the cold-hearted realism of Barack Obama loyalists, and between the transactional mindset of Trump and the "Obama lite" image of Biden.



The future of Europe and the EU looks much different today than it did just a week ago Carl Bildt, Co-chair of European Council on Foreign Relations. (AFP)

At different times in the past two decades, Washington's foreign policy priorities have been dictated either by human rights, commercial interests, democracy promotion or individual whims. Such a protean approach has taught

even friends to be wary.

Washington's Gulf allies have learned the lesson the hard way. The warm embrace of one administration as an essential regional security partner was replaced by the aloofness of the next, plus overtures to Iran.

UKRAINE: A CAUTIONARY TALE FOR WEST'S ALLIES

DEC. 1, 1991

Ukraine votes for independence in referendum amid dissolution of Soviet Union.

JAN. 14, 1994

Ukraine signs agreement to transfer all strategic warheads to Russia and dismantle strategic launchers.

FEB. 8, 1994

Ukraine joins NATO's Partnership for Peace, which is open to all non-NATO European countries and post-Soviet states.

DEC. 15, 2000

Chernobyl nuclear power plant shut down, 14 years after the accident.



APR. 26, 2001

Ukrainian parliament passes no-confidence motion to oust Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko.

NOV. 22, 2004—JAN. 23, 2005

Orange Revolution takes place amid rigged elections that gave victory to pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovich.

SEPT. 9, 2008

EU and Ukraine sign "association agreement" but stop short of an entry pledge.



NOV. 21, 2013

Yanukovich withdraws from talks with EU, resumes dialogue with Russia to join Eurasian Customs Union. Protests erupt.

NOV. 2013- FEB. 2014

Protests turn violent, killing more than 100 opposition members and injuring thousands. Yanukovich flees to Russia.

MARCH 21, 2014

Russia annexes Crimea. Russia expelled from Group of Eight.

JULY 17, 2014

Malaysian Airlines plane shot down by missile over eastern Ukraine territory controlled by Russian proxy forces. The strike kills all 298 passengers and crew.

SEPT. 5, 2014

Russian units enter Ukraine to push back Ukrainian forces that were on the verge of regaining control of Donbas. First Minsk Agreement signed

but terms not implemented, fighting continues.

FEB. 12, 2015

Second Minsk agreement signed, calling for immediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of all heavy weaponry in order to create a "security zone."

APRIL 9, 2021

More than 100,000 Russian troops mass on Ukraine's borders and Crimea, raising alarms in Europe.



DEC. 17, 2021

Russia releases detailed demands, asks NATO to cease all military activity in Eastern Europe and Ukraine, deny Ukraine membership to NATO or other former Soviet nations as members.

FEB. 21, 2022

Russian President Vladimir Putin recognizes the two breakaway regions of Ukraine, Donetsk and Luhansk, as independent entities.

FEB. 24, 2022

Russian forces launch full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

ARAB NEWS

The recognition of Iran as a malign actor and the threat posed by proliferating Iranian proxies in the region became history almost overnight,

while the Houthis were removed from the terror list, despite the group's implication in the destabilization of the region's poorest country, Yemen, and attacks on civilian facilities and population centers in Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Commenting recently on Twitter on America's Gulf partners' neutrality on the Ukraine crisis, Hasan Alhasan, a research fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, found "the subliminal message: this isn't our war" similar to the "one consistently (sent) by the US to the Gulf states on Yemen and Iran over the past several years."

Referring to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, Alhasan added: "Iran has wreaked havoc in the region and has been locked in proxy war with Saudi/UAE. But the US, and especially the EU, were ready to normalize ties with Iran following JCPOA regardless."



Two decades after promising to bring democracy and freedom to Afghanistan, the US had simply given up. (AFP)

More than two years on from Trump's Syria pullout, the SDF, a mixed Kurdish-Arab military unit raised and funded under the Obama administration to lead the fight against Daesh, has not recovered militarily from the US betrayal. Kurds across the border in Iraq, who also took part in the global coalition's campaign against Daesh, remain similarly wary. The notion about the US being an all-weather partner and natural ally in whom Kurds of the Middle East could blindly trust during times of need proved especially fanciful during the Trump presidency.

Six years before the Syrian withdrawal, Obama made another decision that likely changed the course of the country's civil war, while casting doubt on the ability or willingness of the West to demonstrate the courage of its stated convictions.

If any issue could stir Western leadership, the widespread use of nerve gas on civilians would surely be it. But when Syrian President Bashar Assad gassed opposition forces as they approached the gates of Damascus, killing more than 1,300 on a late summer morning in 2013, the "red line" Obama had set as a trigger for intervention suddenly became a negotiation point.

Rather than standing on the side of Syrian civilians, Obama ended up subjecting them to a further decade of misery. Impunity became entrenched in Syria, and within a few years Russia would be drinking from the same tap.



Washington's foreign policy priorities have been dictated either by human rights, commercial interests, democracy promotion or individual whims. (AFP)

In doing so, America's chief geopolitical adversary established a year's training ground preparation for the annexation of Crimea in 2016, which, in hindsight was a dress rehearsal for what was to come in February 2022 – the invasion of Ukraine.

"There is no doubt that the Russian intervention in Ukraine is an accumulation of a series of Russian military interventions in Georgia in 2008, Crimea in 2014 and Syria in 2015," Ibrahim Hamidi, senior diplomatic editor for Syrian affairs at Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper, told the Associated Press news agency recently.

Putin “believes that America is regressing, China’s role is increasing, and Europe is divided and preoccupied with its internal concerns, so he decided to intervene.”



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War sparks anxiety and dread for Ukrainians in the Arab worldA human tide flows out of Ukraine in search of shelter and security

[UK court orders Lebanese banks to pay \\$4m to saver](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Wed, 2022-03-02 19:15

BEIRUT: A London court has ordered two Lebanese banks to pay a depositor \$4 million of his money locked in Lebanon's crippled banking system by informal capital controls in place since a financial meltdown in 2019, the first such ruling in Britain.

The High Court of Justice, Queen's Bench Division, ordered Bank Audi and SGBL to make the payments, amounting to about \$1.1 million and \$2.9 million respectively, to claimant Vatche Manoukian by March 4, a copy of the ruling seen by Reuters said.

"Bank Audi will abide by the ruling of the British court," a Bank Audi official told Reuters.

SGBL did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Lebanon's financial system collapsed in 2019 after years of unsustainable financial policies, corruption and waste. Banks imposed tight controls on accounts, including a de facto ban on withdrawals of dollar-denominated deposits and limits on withdrawals in local currency.

These controls were never formalized with legislation and have been challenged in local and international courts, with mixed results.

A UK court in December ruled in favor of a Lebanese bank in a case brought by a depositor, considering the bank had discharged its debt to the plaintiff by issuing checks for the value of his deposits.

Many Lebanese banks have resorted to discharging dollar-denominated funds via banker's cheques which cannot be cashed out in dollars and are instead sold on the market at about a quarter of their value.

Just a week prior, a French court had ruled in favor of a saver residing in France in a case she brought against a bank which had also issued checks for her account balance, saying the unilateral move by the bank, opposed by the claimant, meant the bank had not fulfilled its obligations.



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Lebanon foils Daesh plan to carry out suicide attacks in Beirut
Lebanese judge issues subpoena for cenbank governor Riad Salameh

[Houthis pay a heavy price as coalition airstrikes hit convoy](#)

Wed, 2022-03-02 19:01

AL-MUKALLA: Dozens of Houthi militia have been killed in a series of airstrikes launched by the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen amid heavy fighting between government forces and rebels in the provinces of Marib and Hajjah.

Coalition warplanes struck a Houthi military convoy in the northern Abes district as the vehicles attempted to reach the battlefields in Hajjah province, local media said.

A Houthi field commander was among the dead, while the airstrikes also destroyed military supplies and paved the way for government troops to repulse attacks by the Iran-backed militia.

The coalition on Wednesday said that 18 airstrikes in the past 24 hours destroyed 12 Houthi military vehicles and killed a large number of rebel fighters in Hajjah province.

Meanwhile, the international medical charity Medecins sans Frontieres on Wednesday announced it will withdraw its staff and suspend its activities in the Houthi-controlled Abes district of Hajjah, citing security concerns.

“MSF took the decision to withdraw its staff and temporarily suspend its activities in the Abes hospital, in Hajjah governorate as of March 1, 2022, while we are negotiating with the authorities to ensure the safety and security of our staff and patients,” the organization said on Twitter.

Separately, the Houthis on Wednesday criticized the UN Security Council over its decision to extend an arms embargo on the Iran-backed militia and label it a terrorist organization.

Hisham Sharaf, the Houthi foreign minister, called the decision “provocative.”

On Monday, the Security Council approved a resolution renewing an arms embargo on the Houthis, referring to the movement for the first time as a “terrorist group.”

In Aden, the interim capital of Yemen, the country’s internationally recognized government hailed the UN decision and its description of the Houthis as terrorists, saying that the blockade will curb the militia’s destabilizing activities in the Red Sea and its obstruction of peace initiatives.

“This resolution will help in reducing Houthi threats to safety and security of international shipping lanes in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, and it is a positive step to pressure Houthis to abandon the path of war and return to the peace track,” Yemen’s government said on Twitter.

UN Yemen envoy Hans Grundberg said on Wednesday that he had met with Yemeni and Saudi officials, the US Yemen envoy and ambassadors for the five permanent UN members to discuss pushing Yemeni parties into more constructive discussions with the aim of achieving an immediate truce and, eventually, a peaceful settlement to end the war.

Grundberg thanked Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi for supporting his efforts to reach a deal in Yemen.

“We need to initiate an inclusive multitrack process that addresses short-

term and longer-term priorities, and that can lay the foundation for a peaceful and sustainable settlement to the conflict,” Grundberg said in a statement.



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[Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen](#)

Saudi Arabia welcomes Security Council's resolution to label Houthis terrorist group
Houthis recruit African migrants, refugees to shore up depleted ranks

[Arabs continue to bear the brunt of organized crime in Israel](#)

Tue, 2022-03-01 23:19

RAMALLAH: About a million and a half Palestinian citizens living in Israel are at the mercy of organized crime gangs operating largely with impunity in their communities. The activities of the gangs resulted in the deaths of 125 people in 2021, 62 of whom were below the age of 30, and another 14 have died since the start of this year.

According to police in Israel, seven criminal gangs are active in Arab communities. Some of their members previously worked as “contractors” for Jewish crime organizations but by 2016 many of these had been dismantled and Arab gangs filled the vacuum, with tens of thousands of weapons at their disposal.

A number of factors fuel organized crime and the violence that comes with it within Arab communities. Israeli banks will not give loans to people who do not possess construction licenses from the Israeli authorities, for example. Arabs instead seek loans from the black market or criminal gangs and families; if they fail to repay the money they owe on time, they are targeted with violence.

A career in crime is a tempting option for young people between the ages of 16 to 18 because it offers them quick and easy access to money.

The cash flows extend to arms trafficking, which is highly profitable: The price for a pistol ranges between \$3,086 and \$6,173, while an M16 assault rifle costs about \$21,605. The weapons offered for sale typically have been stolen from Israeli Army warehouses.

The majority of suspects arrested and prosecuted in connection with organized crime are the lower level “contractors,” not the gang leaders or those who fund the crimes.

A crucial obstacle to the efforts to tackle organized crime is the mistrust within the Palestinian community of the Israeli police and a belief that they do not adequately tackle crime in Arab areas. The police in turn blame the community for not cooperating with crime-fighting efforts.

Arabs say that if they do report the criminals, they are targeted by revenge attacks and the police do not protect them. They add that the police take action to confiscate weapons but do not arrest many suspects, and few of those who are arrested ever stand trial.

The police say they need sufficient evidence to prosecute suspects but this is difficult to obtain because they lack adequate staffing, budgets and technology.

There have been calls from some to use the Shin Bet, Israel’s internal security service, to assist the police but there are strong reservations about having the agency interfere in civil affairs.

Meanwhile, despite a pledge by Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Public Security Minister Omer Bar-Lev to crack down heavily on organized crime and illegal weapons, the violence continues largely unabated, though the Israeli police have established a unit called Saif to tackle violence within the Palestinian community.

According to a statement by the police obtained by Arab News, there has been a 36 percent decrease in the number of shootings since the start of this year.

Col. Yigal Ezra, head of the Anti-Crime Division in the Arab division of the Israeli Police, said: “The Israeli police have cracked several murders since the beginning of the year. We have filed indictments against 122 suspects who have been identified as the main perpetrators of the crime, and 102 of them have been arrested.”

Israel’s population of 9 million people, including 1.5 million Palestinian citizens, is currently policed by a 32,000-strong force. Law-enforcement authorities want to recruit more than 5,000 additional personnel, increase their budget and have access to better technology.

There are hopes that the police might step up their operations against organized crime in the Arab community because Arabs have recently started to move to Jewish towns adjacent to Arab villages, an issue the police cannot ignore.

In the meantime, organized crime and the violence that accompanies it continues in the Palestinian community, despite the claims by authorities about its decline. In fact the danger posed by the gangs has increased significantly with their adoption of car bombs as a weapon.

“There is an improvement in the performance of the police but it is less than what is required and they should redouble their efforts in combating crime and violence in the Arab community,” Rida Jaber, director of the Aman Center, which monitors organized crime and violence in the Arab community, told Arab News.



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Israel freezes Palestinian evictions in East Jerusalem
Israeli forces kill Palestinian in West Bank