

GCC calls on world powers to include Gulf concerns in Iran nuclear talks

Wed, 2021-04-14 22:39

LONDON: The Iranian nuclear talks in Vienna must address the concerns and interests of Gulf countries to enhance security and stability in the region, the GCC secretary general said on Wednesday.

The comments by Nayef Al-Hajraf came in letters sent to the foreign ministers of the permanent members of the UN Security Council – the US, UK, France, china and Russia – and Germany.

The talks in Vienna are aimed at finding a way for the US to re-enter Tehran's nuclear agreement with world powers and have Iran comply again with its limits.

Al-Hajraf said the GCC is a major contributor to strengthening the security and stability of the region, and that the negotiations currently underway in Vienna should not be limited to the Iranian nuclear program, but rather should include Iran's destabilizing behavior, ballistic missiles, and paths. The talks have been thrown into disarray by a weekend attack on Iran's main Natanz nuclear enrichment site suspected to have been carried out by Israel. Tehran retaliated by announcing it would enrich uranium up to 60 percent – higher than it ever has before but still lower than weapons-grade levels of 90 percent.

The GCC chief warned that Iran's announcement of uranium enrichment is a dangerous and worrying indicator for regional and international security. Saudi Arabia similarly issued a statement, saying enriching at that level "could not be considered a program intended for peaceful purposes."

Al-Hajraf also called on the "international community to shoulder its responsibilities toward this dangerous and threatening development to regional and global peace and security."

Arab League Secretary General Ahmed Aboul Gheit said he was "deeply concerned" over Iran's announcement of uranium enrichment, saying it is a "clear and certain step" toward developing a nuclear weapon and increases doubts about the real goals of Tehran's nuclear program.

He also said that ongoing negotiations in Vienna should not be restricted to the nuclear aspect, but should also address the concerns of Arab countries regarding Iran's destabilizing policies in the region and its continuous interference in their internal affairs.

(With AP)



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[Nayef Al-Hajraf](#)

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European powers warn Iran over 'dangerous' uranium enrichment move
Saudi Arabia: Iran must be prevented from obtaining nuclear weapons

[Explosives-laden drone targets US forces at Iraq's Erbil airport](#)

Wed, 2021-04-14 22:16

ERBIL: A drone dropped explosives near US forces stationed at Erbil airport in northern Iraq late on Wednesday, Kurdish officials said, with no immediate reports of casualties.

It was the first known attack carried out by an unmanned aerial drone against US forces in Erbil, amid a steady stream of rocket attacks on bases hosting US forces and the embassy in Baghdad that Washington blames on Iran-backed

militias.

The interior ministry of the autonomous Kurdistan regional government, based in Erbil, said in a statement the drone was carrying TNT which it used to target the US forces. It said no one was hurt in the attack.

A group that Western and some Iraqi officials say is aligned with Iran praised the attack, but did not explicitly claim it.

A barrage of rockets hit the same US-led military base in the Erbil International Airport vicinity in February, killing a non-American contractor working with the US military.

Shortly before Wednesday's attack in Erbil, at least two rockets landed on and near a base to the west of the city that hosts Turkish forces, Iraqi security officials said.

Sirens at the US consulate in Erbil blared during the airport attack, witnesses said.

Turkey also has troops in Iraq both as part of a NATO contingent and a force that has attacked Kurdish separatist militants in the north.

The Iran-backed militias oppose both the presence of the United States and Turkey and demand a full withdrawal of all foreign troops.

The United States has sometimes responded with air strikes against Iran-aligned militias including on the Iraqi-Syrian border.



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Iran-backed groups behind Erbil rocket attack -Iraqi Kurdish security agencyWhy was Iraqi Kurdistan's Irbil subjected to another rocket attack?

Turkey frees journalist Altan after European rights court ruling

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1618425921934238400

Wed, 2021-04-14 21:59

ISTANBUL : A Turkish court on Wednesday ordered the release of journalist and novelist Ahmet Altan after over four years in prison for involving in a failed 2016 coup attempt that he had always denied.

The Court of Cassation ruling came a day after the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) demanded the 71-year-old's freedom in a verdict that accused Turkey of violating his civil rights.

Altan's lawyer Figen Calikusu told AFP that the writer was released from the Silivri prison on Istanbul's western outskirts a few hours after the verdict was announced.

The award-winning novelist and newspaper editor was jailed after writing politically-sensitive articles and columns critical of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and supporting Kurdish rights.

The 71-year-old was arrested shortly after the putsch attempt as part of a purge of media organizations and accused of supporting the uprising by "disseminating subliminal messages to the public."

He was subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment for trying to overthrow the government – a ruling that was later quashed by Turkey's top court.

But the case was re-examined and he was sentenced to 10 years and six months in prison for "knowingly supporting a terrorist organization" that was involved in the 2016 coup attempt.

"Very happy to hear Turkey's Court of Cassation has just ordered the release of novelist Ahmet Altan after more than 4.5 years in jail," the European Parliament's Turkey rapporteur Nacho Sanchez Amor tweeted.

"Will be even happier after seeing him enjoying fully his freedom and all charges dropped. Hope all other (ECHR) rulings will be applied too."

The Court of Cassation ruling came as Erdogan mounts a charm offensive aimed at mending torn relations with the European Union and building a new rapport with the US administration of President Joe Biden.

EU leaders highlighted Turkey's deteriorating human rights record during a summit in Ankara last week.

Biden's White House has also made human rights a much bigger issue in US-Turkish relations than it had been in the former administration of Donald Trump.

Turkish officials argue that the courts are independent and not swayed by politics or Erdogan's whims.

But critics accuse Erdogan of stacking them with supporters during the sweeping purges that followed the coup attempt.

Western observers have thus been watching the case of Altan and some other

famous prisoners for signs of Turkey's diplomatic intentions and future political course.

Perhaps the most celebrated case involves civil society leader Osman Kavala – in custody without a conviction for nearly four years and re-arrested after being cleared of all charges in 2019.

Altan was also briefly freed and cleared of all charges before being almost immediately rearrested in 2019.

The Court of Cassation ruling on Wednesday overturned his conviction in the 2019 case related to charges of “assisting a terrorist organization.”

He had turned to the ECHR for help in 2017 after calling the charges against him “grotesque.”

The Strasbourg-based rights court on Tuesday found “no evidence that the actions of the applicant had been part of a plan to overthrow the government.”

It ordered Turkey to immediately release him and pay him 16,000 euros (\$19,000) in damages for violating his rights to freedom of expression.

“Deprivation of liberty, in particular continued detention, must be based on reasonable suspicion,” the ECHR ruling said.

The ECHR “found that the applicant’s criticisms of the president’s political approach could not be seen as an indication that he had had prior knowledge of the attempted coup,” it added.



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Top Turkish court reverses ban on news outlets Turkish court jails four in pro-Kurdish newspaper trial, lawyer says

Remains of Daesh-beheaded Syrian archaeologist still missing

Author:

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Wed, 2021-04-14 16:47

DAMASCUS: The remains of Khaled Al-Asaad, a Syrian archaeologist beheaded by Daesh group extremists, have yet to be recovered, his son told AFP on Wednesday.

The official SANA news agency reported in February that authorities had uncovered three corpses in Kahloul, 10 kilometers (six miles) east of the ancient city of Palmyra where Al-Asaad was killed in 2015.

Al-Asaad was believed to be among them, SANA said at the time, ahead of DNA testing.

But two months later, DNA results have shown that the remains of the archaeologist have yet to be found, his son Tareq said.

"Authorities have just informed us that the DNA test results are not compatible with my father," he said.

"Our sorrows and wounds have returned," he said. "We had hoped to close this wound."

Officials have yet to comment.

Al-Asaad, known as "the father of Palmyra," was 83 when Daesh extremists executed him on August 18, 2015, three months after they overran the so-called "Pearl of the Desert."

Seen as a pioneer of Syrian archaeology, Al-Asaad was director of antiquities in Palmyra for 40 years until 2003.

He was responsible for the discovery of several ancient cemeteries and oversaw the excavation of 1,000 columns as well as the site's stunning necropolis of 500 tombs.



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Archaeologists restore ancient Palmyra artefacts in Damascus museum
Syrian regime retakes town of Palmyra

[Israel shocked by self-immolation of traumatized ex-soldier](#)

Author:

Wed, 2021-04-14 00:33

JERUSALEM: Israel was shaken Tuesday after a 26-year-old former soldier suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder since the 2014 Gaza war set himself on fire, suffering severe injuries.

Itzik Saidian went to a support service for wounded soldiers near Tel Aviv on Monday, doused himself with a flammable liquid and lit it, “due to significant psychological distress,” the army said.

He was rushed to the intensive care unit of Tel Hashomer Hospital near Tel Aviv and was in “critical condition” with “deep burns all over his body,” the hospital said.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he was “very shocked” and “determined to undertake a complete reform of the way we take care of our disabled and wounded veterans.”

The young man had been recognized as partially disabled because he suffered from PTSD related to his service during the 2014 war between Israel and the armed Islamist movement Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Around 2,250 Palestinians were killed in the war, mostly civilians, and 74 Israelis, mostly soldiers.

Saidian’s self-immolation came on the eve of Israel’s Remembrance Day for fallen soldiers and attack victims.

It sparked controversy over the support system for wounded or psychologically ill soldiers, which is often deemed inefficient and bureaucratic.

“He saw horrible things and nobody took care of him,” his tearful brother Avi Saidian told journalists at the hospital.

Defense Minister Benny Gantz announced a “thorough investigation to find the reasons for this tragic event.” His ministry pledged to “substantially improve the treatment of post-traumatic soldiers.”

Military service is mandatory in Israel for 18-year-olds. Women serve two years and men two years and six months.



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Israeli-owned ship attacked off UAE coast
Israeli troops arrest 25
Palestinians in occupied West Bank