

Hook urges UN to heed US call for 'snapback' of sanctions on Iran

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NEW YORK: A day after US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo notified the UN Security Council of its demand that all UN sanctions on Iran be restored, Washington's special representative for Iran, Brian Hook, urged council members to act on it.

"President Trump restored American sanctions when he left the deal, and now it's time for the UN to restore its sanctions," said Hook, referring to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iran nuclear deal, from which the US withdrew in 2018.

"I have yet to hear anybody make the argument that Iran's behavior merits sanctions relief. I have yet to hear anybody argue that if the arms embargo expires on the world's leading sponsor of terrorism and anti-Semitism, that this would somehow advance national security."

He said the Security Council's failure on Aug. 14 to vote in favor of a US resolution to indefinitely extend the arms embargo on Iran, which is due to expire in October, left the US with no choice but to trigger a "snapback."

This is a mechanism within the JCPOA that allows any of the powers that signed the deal – the US, UK, China, Russia, France, Germany and the EU – to submit a complaint to the Security Council about any breach of the deal by Iran. If the concerns are not resolved, then all of the UN sanctions that were in place before the nuclear deal would be automatically restored, including an arms embargo. Iran would also be required to suspend all nuclear-enrichment activities.

While the Trump administration insists that under the Security Council resolution that endorsed the nuclear deal it retains the right to initiate a snapback, even after withdrawing from the agreement, most other council members say it does not because it is no longer a party to the deal.

In response to criticism of Washington's uncompromising attitude during negotiations with other council members, Hook said the US was the only member to table a proposal for an extension of the arms embargo.

"Since December 2018, the United States has been talking about how we are going to extend (it)," he said. "And we have been very methodical, very patient and very open to any ideas. We were never presented with any compromise, so I think this exists in the mind of the media."

During last week's vote, 11 members of the 15-member Security Council abstained from voting on the US resolution to extend the arms embargo. China and Russia opposed it, and only the Dominican Republic supported it.

Asked for his reaction to China's decision to vote against the resolution, Hook said that Beijing owes an explanation to the nations in the Middle East that asked the Security Council to extend the embargo.

"China should be asked to explain why they rejected the views of the Gulf Cooperation Council," he said. "The UN is obviously a very important multilateral body but it is not the most relevant.

"The most relevant multilateral body is the GCC, and all six (member) countries came together (and) put aside their differences (to) demand that the Security Council (extend) the arms embargo on Iran. These are the countries that are closest to the danger and the council had a responsibility to respect their views and to extend the arms embargo."

Hook accused council members of failing in their duty, saying: "If you are on the Security Council, your role is to advance international peace and security – and the council failed on Friday."

He said the US will take unilateral action to "freeze the assets and restrict the travel of Iranians who worked on the nuclear program and on missiles, and those Iranians who foment terror."

He added that a snapback would mean: "The UN is going to be restoring sanctions on Iranian banks that finance Iran's nuclear and missile programs. Restoring sanctions will encourage UN member states to interdict shipments of Iranian weapons (going) into conflict (zones)."

He also reiterated calls from Trump and Pompeo for the international community to abandon the nuclear deal, "which today is more form than substance, and to join us in getting a stronger deal."

Hook will step down at the end of August and hand over the Iran role to Elliot Abrams, who is currently the US special representative for Venezuela.



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[Iranian president calls Iraqi premier's visit 'turning point'](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-07-22 02:00

TEHRAN: Iran's President Hassan Rouhani called a visit on Tuesday by the new prime minister of Iraq, where the US military has a presence, "a turning point" in the countries' relations and vowed to continue supporting the neighboring Arab nation.

Mustafa Al-Kadhimi arrived on his first official visit abroad since taking office more than two months ago, Iranian media reported.

State television showed footage of Al-Kadhimi landing at Tehran's Mehrabad airport. The TV outlet said Al-Khadhimi would meet top Iranian leaders, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The official website of the office of the Iranian presidency later released a photo of Rouhani and Al-Kadhimi at a welcome ceremony in Tehran, showing both wearing protective face masks to help prevent spread of the coronavirus.

"We are certain that the visit will be a turning point in relations between the two countries," Rouhani said after meeting with the Iraqi premier. "We still remain ready to stand by the Iraqi nation and apply efforts for stability and security in Iraq and the region."

Al-Kadhimi replied: "Iraq will not allow the posing of any threat from its

soil against Iran.”

Iran sees the US military presence in Iraq a threat to Tehran.

The visit came after Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif traveled to Baghdad over the weekend. It was Zarif’s first visit to Iraq since a US airstrike in January killed a top Iranian general, Qassem Soleimani, outside Baghdad’s international airport. The strike catapulted Iraq to the brink of a US-Iran proxy war that could have destabilized the Middle East.

In Baghdad, Zarif paid a visit to the site where Soleimani was killed, saying “Iran-Iraq relations will not be shaken” despite the general’s death. Soleimani led Iran’s expeditionary Quds Force and was the architect of its regional military activities.

In Tehran, Al-Kadhimi said Iraq’s foreign policy is based on “balance and avoiding any alignment.” The Iraqi premier said his country seeks to improve relations with Iran “based on nonintervention in domestic affairs of the two countries.”

A former intelligence chief backed by Washington, Al-Kadhimi took office in May after he had played a significant part for years in the war against the Daesh group, which was declared defeated in Iraq in 2017.

The Iraqi prime minister had planned a visit to Saudi Arabia on Monday, before his trip to Tehran, but postponed it following news that Saudi King Salman was admitted to a hospital in the capital, Riyadh.

Iran sees Iraq as a possible route to bypass US sanctions that President Donald Trump reimposed on Tehran in 2018, after pulling America out of the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

Last year, Iran’s exports to Iraq amounted to nearly \$9 billion, the official IRNA news agency reported Tuesday. It said the two nations will discuss increasing that amount to \$20 billion.

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus, religious tourism between Iraq and Iran has stopped. Before the pandemic, some 5 million tourists – bringing in nearly \$5 billion a year – visited Shiite sites in the two countries. Under former dictator Saddam Hussein, Iraq waged an 8-year war in the 1980s against Iran, a conflict that left nearly 1 million killed on both sides.

In another development, a German national was kidnapped late on Monday outside her office in central Baghdad.

Hella Mewis, a who ran arts programs at the Iraqi art collective Tarkib, had left her office and was “riding her bicycle when two cars, one of them a white pickup truck (of the type) used by some security forces, were seen kidnapping her,” the security source said.



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[Iran admits fire at Natanz nuclear facility caused 'significant damage'](#)

Sun, 2020-07-05 20:06

DUBAI: A fire that broke out at Iran's Natanz nuclear facility on Thursday has caused significant damage that could slow the development of advanced centrifuges, an Iranian nuclear official said on Sunday.

Iran's top security body said on Friday that the cause of an incident and fire at Natanz had been determined and would be announced later. Some Iranian officials have said it may have been caused by cyber sabotage and one warned that Tehran would retaliate against any country carrying out such attacks. "The incident could slow down the development and production of advanced centrifuges in the medium term ... Iran will replace the damaged building with a bigger one that has more advanced equipment," state news agency IRNA quoted the spokesman for Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation, Behrouz Kamalvandi, as saying.

"The incident has caused significant damage but there were no casualties." Three Iranian officials who spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity on Friday said they believed the fire was the result of a cyber attack but did not cite any evidence.

On Thursday, an article by Iran's state news agency IRNA addressed what it called the possibility of sabotage by enemies such as Israel and the United States, although it stopped short of accusing either directly.

Israel's defence minister said on Sunday it was not "necessarily" behind every mysterious incident in Iran.

In 2010, the Stuxnet computer virus, widely believed to have been developed by the United States and Israel, was discovered after it was used to attack Natanz.

The Natanz Fuel Enrichment Plant (FEP), Iran's main uranium enrichment site which is mostly underground, is one of several Iranian facilities monitored by inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN nuclear watchdog.

The IAEA said on Friday the location of the fire did not contain nuclear materials and that none of its inspectors was present at the time.

Natanz is the centrepiece of Iran's enrichment programme, which Tehran says is only for peaceful purposes. Western intelligence agencies and the IAEA believe it had a coordinated, clandestine nuclear arms programme that it halted in 2003.

Tehran denies ever seeking nuclear weapons.

Iran agreed to curb its nuclear programme in exchange for the removal of most international sanctions in a deal reached between Tehran and six world powers in 2015.

But Iran has gradually reduced its commitments to the accord since US President Donald Trump's administration withdrew from the deal in 2018 and reimposed and intensified sanctions that have battered Iran's economy.

The deal only allows Iran to enrich uranium at its Natanz facility with just over 5,000 first-generation IR-1 centrifuges, but Iran has installed new cascades of advanced centrifuges.

Israel has backed Trump's "maximum pressure" policy on Tehran aimed at forcing it to agree a new deal that puts stricter limits on its nuclear work, curbs its ballistic missile programme and ends its regional proxy wars.

Iran says it will not negotiate as long as sanctions remain in place.



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