

Shattered Lebanon finds little peace in Hariri verdict

Author:

Wed, 2020-08-19 23:55

BEIRUT: Lebanon has been left shocked and disappointed by the UN-backed tribunal's findings on the 2005 assassination of former prime minister Rafik Hariri.

While supporters of the Future Movement largely accepted the Special Tribunal for Lebanon's verdict, some condemned the acquittal of three Hezbollah members accused of involvement in the Beirut truck bombing that killed 21 people along with the Lebanese leader.

Only one man, Salim Jamil Ayyash, 56, was guilty of involvement in the attack, according to the tribunal's findings handed down in The Hague on Tuesday.

In the wake of the verdict, opponents voiced their dismay on social media, describing the \$1 billion tribunal's declaration that it lacked evidence as a "failure."

Many said the tribunal had left too many questions unanswered, while others suggested its inability to uncover evidence meant the accused were innocent.

A legal source close to the tribunal told Arab News: "The reason for the shock and disappointment is that the Lebanese are used to Latin criminal law, while the tribunal relied on Anglo-Saxon criminal law.

"This means that Anglo-Saxon judiciaries do not rule except when given solid and convincing evidence, while Latin judiciaries rule against the accused if they contributed to the crime. Then they are tried as an accomplice and receive a lighter penalty, while those who planned the crime are immediately indicted."

The tribunal said in its verdict that Ayyash, an accused member of the assassination team, was "the primary person guilty of committing the crime of the assassination of Hariri."

It described Ayyash as "an accomplice in a conspiracy aimed at committing a terrorist act by means of an explosive device and killing 21 other people."

Ayyash "had organizational links to Hezbollah, according to available evidence," the tribunal said.

In a 2,600-page ruling, the court added that it "suspects Hezbollah and Syria had an interest in the assassination."

Many have questioned why the tribunal chose to rely on the Anglo-Saxon legal tradition.

"There were too many options available for the STL. It could have relied on more than one type of criminal law, yet it chose to rely on Anglo-Saxon law because all STL judges have expertise in that area," the source said.

The tribunal acquitted three suspects – Assad Hassan Sabra, 43, Hussein Hassan Oneissi, 46, and Hassan Habib Merhi, 54 – due to lack of evidence.

The source said: "The STL confirmed that there was coordination between the four accused, and that they cooperated regarding a special mission, yet it did not reach a decision that the three already knew their activity would result in the killing of Hariri, which means that the tribunal did not get clear-cut evidence to accuse them."

The tribunal said "it was hard to prove that Mustafa Badreddine headed the cell in charge of assassinating Hariri," adding: "He had the intention to commit the acts leading to the assassination. However, the tribunal cannot be convinced that Badreddine was the mastermind behind the crime."

Rachid Derbas, a former minister and head of the bar association, told Arab News: "The verdict needs to be read carefully since it contains contradictions, and seems like a political sponge that could be used by Hezbollah and Syria, as well as by the prosecution and victims. The verdict is multifaceted."

He added: "The verdict indicated that a Hezbollah official along with accomplices committed the crime. Now the prosecution should build on the existing work and pursue the case."

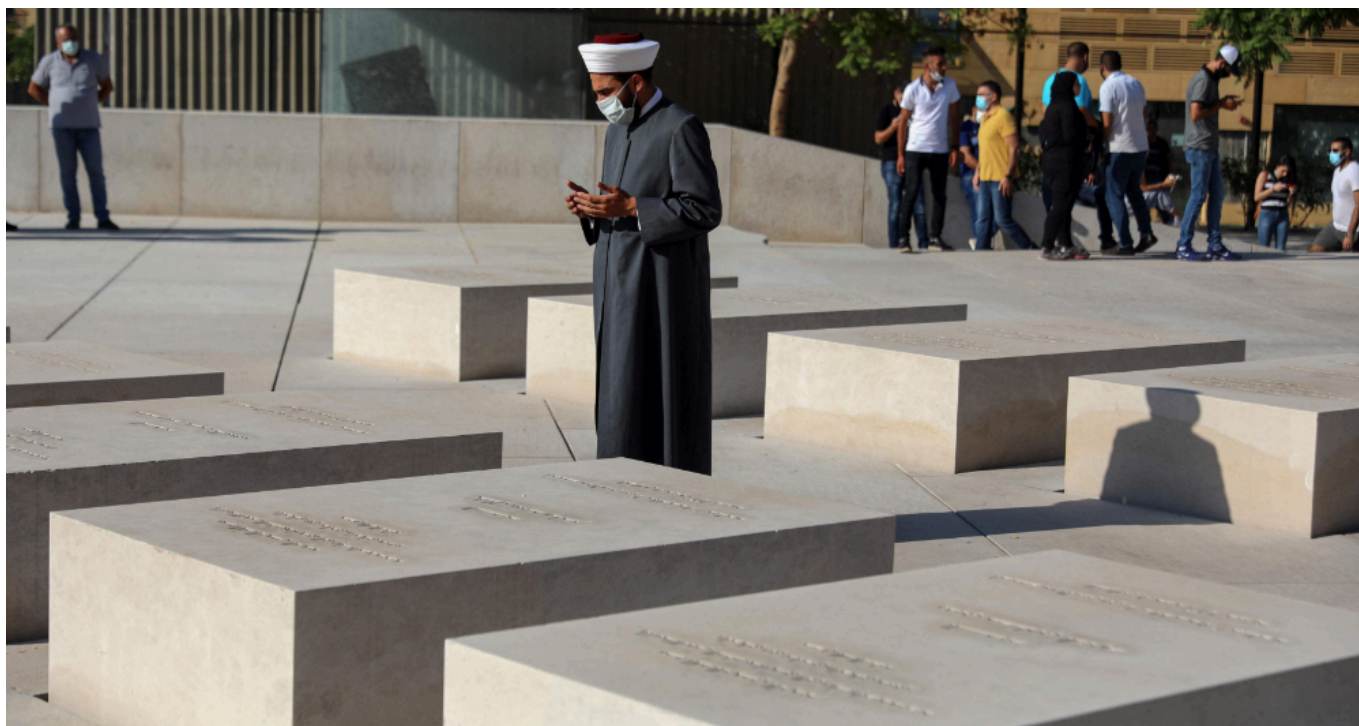
While Hezbollah MPs and leaders refused to comment on the ruling, the group's supporters expressed joy at the tribunal's findings on social media, saying they have never acknowledged the UN-backed court.

Former MP Fares Souaid said the verdict revealed the political motives of the crime.

"The opposition's call for Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon at the time was the core of the verdict that was issued," he said.

"The decision relies on facts and indicts individuals. However, it included a political link which was noted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the US. What is required from the political parties in Lebanon is to recognize this link and answer the following question: Can Hezbollah continue what it is doing?"

"The verdict indicted a terrorist group. Nobody will be convinced that Ayyash could have planned, prepared, financed and carried out the assassination had he not been part of an organization with long history of murder," Souaid said.



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Hariri verdict builds case for Hezbollah's accountability
Lebanon tribunal convicts Hezbollah member Salim Jamil Ayyash for Hariri assassination

[Wife of jailed Qatari royal speaks on her battle to get justice done](#)

Wed, 2020-08-19 23:37

RIYADH: Sheikh Talal Al-Thani, a senior member of the Qatari royal family, has been imprisoned in violation of his fundamental rights by Qatari authorities since February 2013. During this period, he has been allowed to see his wife Asma Arian and his four children – currently living in exile in Germany – only twice.

Sheikh Talal is the grandson of the late Qatari Emir Sheikh Ahmad bin Ali Al-Thani, whose reign lasted from 1960 to 1972. Sheikh Ahmad was deposed by his cousin Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad, grandfather of Tamim bin Hamad, Qatar's current emir, and father of former Emir Hamad bin Khalifa.

Tensions between family members escalated following the death of one of Qatar's founders, Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Ahmed, after his exile in Saudi Arabia in 2008. Shortly afterwards, Sheikh Talal's assets were frozen and the inheritance he was due to receive after his father's death withheld.

Since his arrest, which happened without a court order, Sheikh Talal has been frequently denied legal representation, family visits and medical care.

In May 2018, Sheikh Talal was sentenced by a Qatari court to more than 22 years. The prison term contradicts Qatar's basic obligation to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Also, in violation of Sheikh Talal's fundamental rights, his case has not been reviewed by an independent court.

Owing to the poor conditions in which he has been kept, Sheikh Talal today suffers from diabetes, loss of teeth, hypertension, pain in the back and joints and limited mobility.

He needs to be moved to hospital but is instead in a prison without access to medical care. The situation is compounded by Qatar's refusal to test prisoners for COVID-19, even though the official claim is that "detainees have free healthcare in prison."

Asma Arian, who married Sheikh Talal in 2007, spoke to Arab News from Germany on her uphill battle to make sure justice is done.

Q: Is it true that your appeal to the United Nations Human Rights Council got accepted?

A: It is true. We have made four appeals so far to the UNHRC. However, due to the coronavirus pandemic, they were stalled for a while, so the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) appealed on my behalf to the UNHRC as part of the annual review of Qatar's rights record and its obligations.

Qatar constantly claims that it respects its commitments to human rights. The UN has now endorsed four appeals from me. The first is on behalf of myself and the children at the highest possible level.

The other three appeals were presented to special committees for torture, arbitrary detention of my husband, and corruption of the judiciary.

The UN bodies are due to take a decision and we are in active contact with them. They have assured us that they have accepted the appeal and that, by next September 21, the issues related to this matter will be clarified.



Sheikh Talal has developed poor health and limited mobility due to the poor conditions in which he has been kept. (Supplied)

Q: What are your expectations with regard to handling of the case by the UNHRC?

A: Since the beginning of our correspondence, the UNHRC is convinced that the case as well as the documents provided by me prove Qatar's violation of human rights in various areas. These include violations of the "Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners" charter: torturing Sheikh Talal Al-Thani, preventing him from contacting his lawyer and detaining him without a valid reason, in addition to violating children's rights (by preventing Sheikh Talal's children from getting in contact with their father), and violating women's rights by preventing me from getting in contact with him.

In the beginning, we used kind words in dealing with the Qatari government in asking for the release of Sheikh Talal, given that the documents prove that he had been wronged. We communicated with Qatari prisons to find out the reasons for his detention. However, there was no answer from Qatari authorities.

After pressure mounted on them, Qatari authorities released Sheikh Talal for a week before arresting him again in the expectation of a freeze or waiver of the cases and appeals from me. The brief release was a form of deception on the part of the Qatari authorities.

As to what I expect from the UNHRC, of course they have mechanisms, and we have reached a point where the case has gained importance at the UN level. It is possible to win the case as it is a humanitarian, not political, one, with multiple dimensions – children's rights, women's rights, prisoners' rights and torture in prison – that expose Qatar's flouting of human-rights treaties in general.

As of today, Qatar is violating these treaties. Our children are forbidden from communicating with their father, and I have been forbidden from contacting the lawyer defending him since we launched our appeal to the UN. I have told the UNHRC that as a country that does not respect even its own laws, Qatar cannot be expected to respect international laws.

دولة قطر

Ministry of Interior
Public Security General Admin.
Reformatory and Penalty Institutions Dept.



وزارة الداخلية
الإدارة العامة للأمن العام
إدارة المؤسسات العقابية والإصلاحية

الرقم: أ م ع / ١ ش / س / 4575

التاريخ: ٢٠١٨/٠٥/٠٢ م
الموافق: ١٤٣٩/٠٨/١٧ هـ



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Letter from the Qatari Ministry of Interior's Reformatory and Penalty Institutions Department stating that "Qatari Talal bin Abdulaziz Ahmed Al-Thani" had been sentenced for more than 22 years in jail. (Supplied)

Q: Sheikh Talal was released for a short period before being arrested again. Why did this happen?

A: This is how Qatar behaves: it cannot be trusted. We do not know why he was back in prison after he was released, nor where they took him to after blockading the house where he was detained. One can never be safe from this kind of official Qatari behavior.

He was released and put under house arrest, and when they wanted him back in prison, they laid siege to the house for eight hours. They were already monitoring the house, so what was the need for the siege that lasted for so long?

Are the psychological mistreatment and intimidation of Sheikh Talal since his arrest till now not enough? Are they expecting me to give up my husband and my children's rights?

I will not give up, for they have not respected the most basic prisoner's right, which is to allow him to communicate with his lawyer. How can I even agree to talk to them?

Q: Have you been asked by Qatari authorities to give up your campaign and appeals to international organizations?

A: This has been happening through messages sent via Sheikh Talal's family members or directly to me to stop claiming his rights. But what is the use of being silent especially since the matter is limited to not just his condition. There are four children affected by this case and they do not know their father except through pictures.

READ MORE: [Wife of Sheikh Talal Al-Thani accuses Qatar of torturing husband](#)

Q: How many children does Sheikh Talal have?

A: Four children whose names are Alanoud, Aljawharah, Abdullah and Ahmed. The children are suffering owing to their displacement from their country and being away from their father. For example, Ahmed was born while Sheikh Talal was in prison. In addition, his children suffer as they are deprived of both their rights and those of their father.

All this suffering is caused by Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the former Emir of Qatar. As long as this person is in Doha, Sheikh Talal is not safe, and this is what I told the UNHRC. It is possible that I will win the case at the UN and Qatar will be indicted. However, as long as Sheikh Hamad is in Qatar, I do not expect that Sheikh Talal will be released.



Sheikh Talal's son Ahmad has developed an allergy due to the lack of air-conditioning in his accommodation. (Supplied)

Q: The case against Sheikh Talal is financial in nature. Is the allegation true? What is the real reason behind his detention?

A: Qatar filed a lawsuit against Sheikh Talal because of debt which resulted from security cheques related to his own companies. The lawsuit included 1,600 documents related to the financial case only.

The UN was wondering why Sheikh Talal would be put in prison over a financial issue, so I told them that he was neither a killer nor a violator, nor did he commit a crime deserving of a life sentence of 22 years. He will die and not get to see his children.

Hence, the case is not financial. Maybe there is a grudge against Sheikh Talal, for prior to his imprisonment he had claimed his rights and his inheritance. Qatari law and the international law do not say that a person under debt should be put in prison for 22 years. Worse, he was imprisoned without having the right to contact a lawyer.

The judge even asked me if I had enough money to pay off the debt, so I presented to him a land ownership deed belonging to Sheikh Talal and said

that the value of this land can pay off the debt and more. Then the judge raised his finger and said: "People on top are the ones to decide whether he will be released or not from prison."

We know that the case is not a financial one to be paid off. However, we reply in accordance with their allegations. Now the state has confiscated the properties of Sheikh Talal, and state enterprises are using them without his permission or authorization.

I have been calling the police to intervene against the state enterprises that are using his properties, for they are holding his properties and depriving his children of financial gain and allowances, in addition to trespassing on his land without permission or paying him in return for benefiting from his properties.

READ MORE: ["The Unforgiven": Qatar's Al-Ghufran tribe fights for justice – and right to citizenship](#)



The Unforgiven

How thousands of members of Qatar's Al-Ghufran tribe are still paying the price for a failed coup in which they played no part.

Enter

Q: Have they tried to settle the financial case with you?

A: Yes, it happened. I filed four cases related to the inheritance of Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al-Thani, Sheikh Talal's father, who died away from Qatar. These cases prove that Sheikh Abdul Aziz had big inheritance and properties, and that Sheikh Talal's share is substantial.

I told the judge to take all the farms and release Sheikh Talal. I even told them in the last communication: Take everything, and if Sheikh Hamad wants the farms let him take them, and if he wants to take everything, then let him. But to rob him of normal life, and deprive his children and torture them alongside him and displace them, this is not your right.

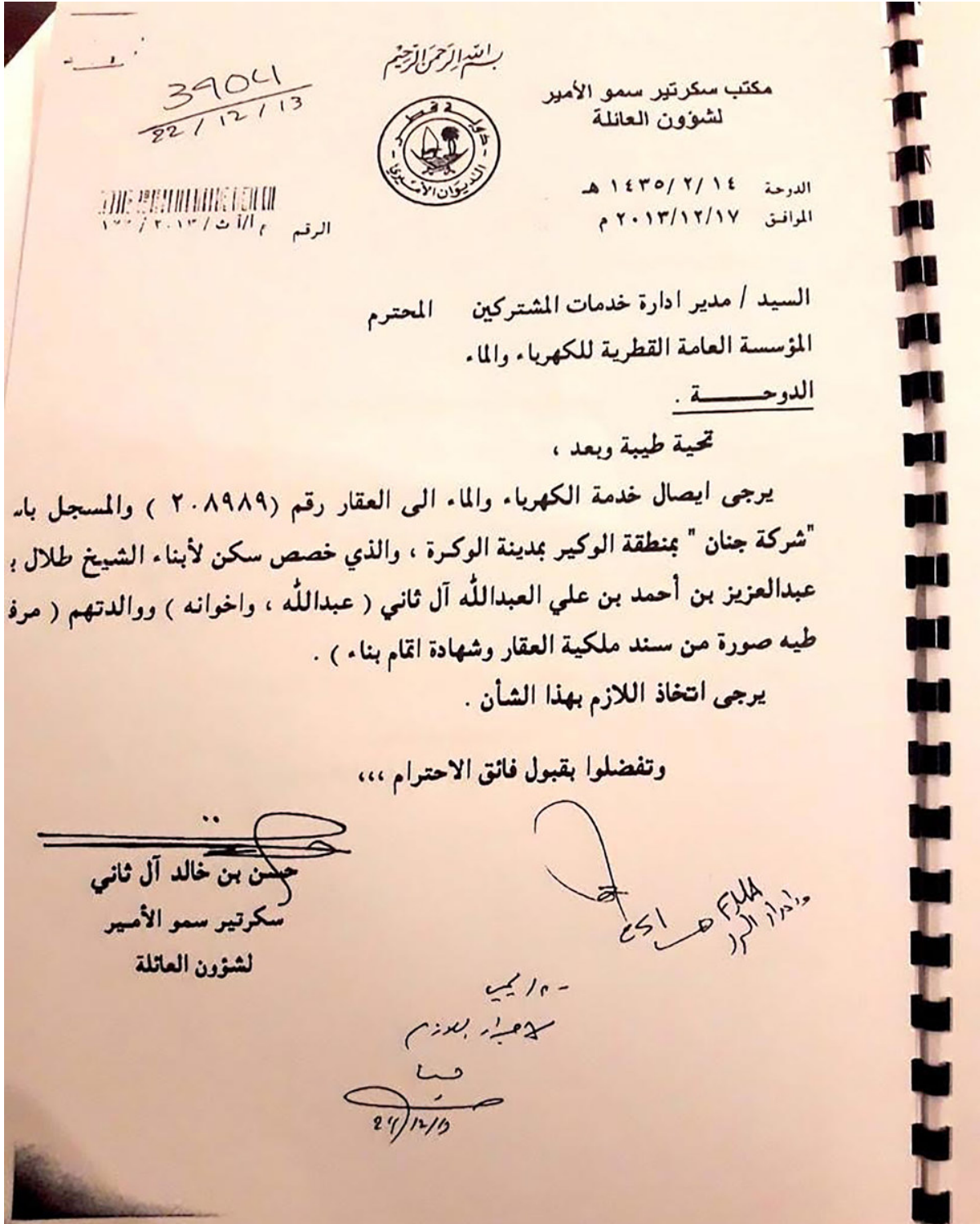
Q: Since when is Sheikh Talal in prison?

A: Since 2013, at the end of Sheikh Hamad's reign, before he abdicated in favor of his son, Sheikh Tamim. In addition, the verdict against Sheikh Talal and his imprisonment was also during the reign of Sheikh Hamad.

He was put in prison because of a cheque. The cheque was not valid. An Egyptian judge, Mohammed El-Minshawi, ordered Sheikh Talal's release but his decision was not implemented. I do not know if this judge is still in Qatar.

Q: How many times have Sheikh Talal's children been able to visit him?

A: His daughter Alanoud was the only one to see her father twice in seven years. As for the other children, they only know their father through pictures.



The request made by Sheikh Hassan bin Khalid Al-Thani for electricity and water connection for a property registered for housing Talal Al-Thani's children and their mother in Al-Wakrah. (Supplied)

Q: How is the health of Sheikh Talal?

A: His psychological and physical state is not fine. I was able to get a picture of him before he was back to prison. He looked very thin and appeared to have lost a lot of weight. I would not have wanted this picture to be published but for his health condition.

He suffers from diabetes at a time Qatar has experienced high numbers of coronavirus cases, especially in prisons. I fear for his life (eyes tearing

up). I asked him: "Are they starving you? He said: "Yes, they are starving me."

I could not imagine this happening in Qatar but after I saw the picture, I believed his words. I wonder how prisoners are fed, especially a prisoner who is suffering from diabetes and has already been operated twice in prison – the first time in his eye, the second time in his leg.

Q: Do you expect Sheikh Talal to be freed if Qatar is indicted for violating human rights in the cases relating to him and his children?

A: I expect an indictment by the UNHRC, but I do not expect Sheikh Talal to be released. However, I am convinced that I can prove to the world the shocking human-rights violations being committed by Qatari authorities. The international pressure they are feeling is a result of these rights violations. For a person of his nature, Sheikh Talal has been wronged in unimaginable ways.

Q: Do you intend to take further steps at the UN and the UNHRC?

A: I will pursue any legal procedure that serves to protect Sheikh Talal and his children from this injustice. Now I intend to file a lawsuit before the German judiciary against Qatar. This is something highly important to me, and I have started to take some steps in this regard. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic I stopped.

Now, as life is back to normal, I will continue the lawsuit especially for I endured damage after they pursued me in Geneva and even crashed into my car. Now I am under the protection of the German police as I have accused Qatar and its media of many violations.

Q: Have you received explicit threats from Qatar?

A: I received threats when I was at Le Club Suisse de la Presse (the Swiss Press Club) in Geneva. They were waiting for me outside and sent people to threaten me and accuse me of spying. The last threat was a week ago when they released Sheikh Talal from prison.

They told me if I do not remain silent, they will put him back in prison, and this is what really happened. I really fear these threats. You cannot imagine what my psychological condition was when I decided to continue defending my husband and children's rights. I feared that my husband would be liquidated and that I would be the cause of it.

Q: What is your message to international human rights organizations via Arab News?

A: I want to ask them to take my case seriously and remember that Qatar is not above the law. Had Qatar been respecting international human rights, it would have respected the charter of prisoners' rights.

If Qatar claims that it respects human rights, then let it respect children's rights and allow Sheikh Talal's children to get in touch with their father at

least via telephone once or twice per week. In addition, I ask the international organizations to intervene and mobilize their mechanisms.

Qatar is not above the law, and this is the right moment for them to mobilize to restore the rights of the prisoner, the child and the woman. I hope that pressure will be brought to bear on Qatar to release Sheikh Talal.

Twitter: [@md_sulami](https://twitter.com/md_sulami)



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Wife of Sheikh Talal Al-Thani accuses Qatar of torturing husband“*The Unforgiven*”: Qatar’s Al-Ghufran expulsions termed ‘breach of human rights’

[**National security experts urge US to**](#)

introduce Iran 'snapback' sanctions

Wed, 2020-08-19 23:13

LONDON: National security experts and former diplomats on Wednesday urged the US to introduce "snapback" sanctions on Iran, warning that lifting the arms embargo without any alternative restraints will amplify the threat that Tehran poses to the region.

"Iran was responsible for the missile attack on Saudi oil sites last year, and it funds and supplies proxy forces like Hezbollah, which have killed Americans in Iraq," former US Ambassador Paula Dobriansky told an online webinar organized by the National Council of Resistance in Iran (NCRI) and attended by Arab News.

"Removing the arms embargo would give Iran a free hand to destabilize the region by exporting terror in support of its hegemonic interests," said Dobriansky, now a senior fellow in the Future of Diplomacy Project at Harvard University.

In addition to Iran's hostile foreign policy, she said its treatment of its own people adds further impetus to the need to maintain pressure on Tehran.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

She said its countless executions, including of "young children," and the widespread use of lethal force against protesters in November 2019 "underscore the need for moving forward with the maximum-pressure campaign and the deployment and snapback of sanctions."

Matthew Kroenig, deputy director of the Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security at the Atlantic Council, said the US strategy toward Iran has so far been successful, but relaxing the economic pressure jeopardizes that progress.

The sanctions regime to date, he added, has "constrained Iran's resources, caused economic pain for Iran, and made it more difficult for them to fund their missile and nuclear programs.

"The regime is under more pressure now than it has ever been in its history. We've seen unprecedented protests and the economy is really suffering."

But Kroenig warned that if the current embargo is lifted without a replacement sanctions program, Tehran and its proxies could quickly acquire advanced weaponry, making "the threat posed by Iran even more significant." The "best remaining option," he said, "is to snapback sanctions on Iran."

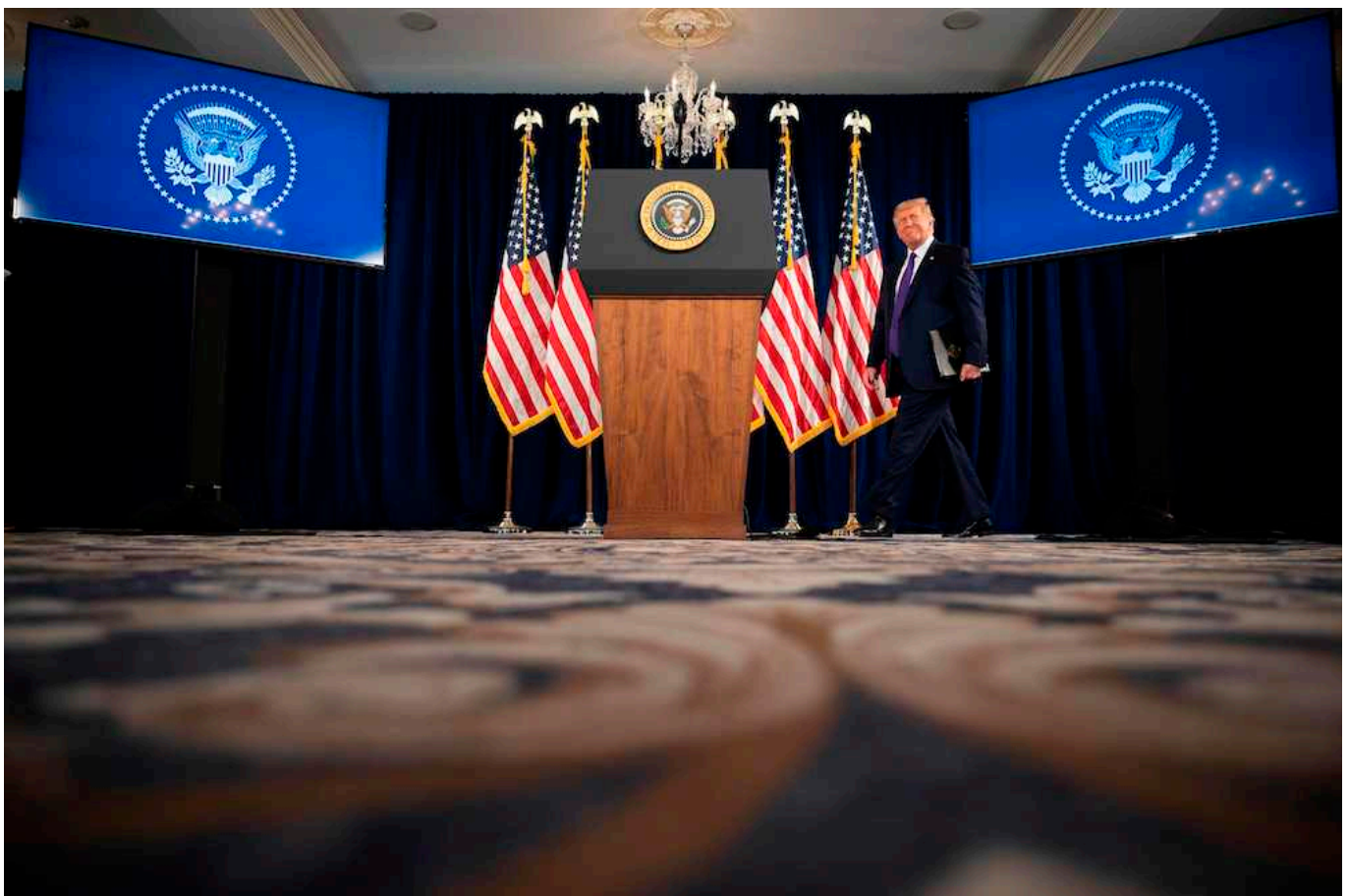
Formerly crippling sanctions on Iran were lifted as part of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – commonly referred to as the Iran nuclear deal – which eased sanctions pressure on the country in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program.

The snapback is a mechanism built into the JCPOA that allows any of the deal’s signatories to unilaterally re-apply all UN sanctions lifted as part of the deal if Iran violates its terms.

The US had pushed for UN Security Council (UNSC) members to vote in favor of collectively re-imposing those sanctions – which had also enforced an arms embargo – saying Tehran had broken the terms of the JCPOA.

But UNSC members voted against the US, allowing the blockade on Iran’s purchase of weaponry to expire.

The high-level diplomatic dispute has set the stage for a confrontation in the UN on Thursday, where US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is expected to invoke the snapback clause despite opposition from Russia, China and other UNSC members.



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Pompeo says US expects to trigger snapback on Iran soon UN crisis looms as US readies demand for Iran sanctions

Sudan fires spokesman after comments on peace with Israel

Author:

Thu, 2020-08-20 00:54

CAIRO: Sudan on Wednesday fired the spokesman for the country's Foreign Ministry, a day after he remarked that the African country was looking forward to making a peace deal with Israel.

The development comes after last week's bombshell announcement of a deal between the UAE and Israel to normalize relations, which will make the UAE only the third Arab nation, after Egypt and Jordan, to have full ties with Israel.

Sudan's acting Foreign Minister Omar Qamar Al-Din said he dismissed Ambassador Haidar Badawi from his post after Badawi said his country was "looking forward to concluding a peace agreement with Israel."

"There is no reason to continue hostility between Sudan and Israel," Badawi was quoted as saying by Sky News Arabia. "We don't deny that there are communications" with Israel, he added, saying both countries would gain much from a deal. Badawi's remarks immediately drew a pledge from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to "do all that's needed" to wrap up a deal.

Qamar Al-Din, the foreign minister, sought to distance himself from Badawi's comments, saying they were received "with astonishment." He insisted his ministry had not discussed the issue of ties with Israel.

In February, Netanyahu met with Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, the head of Sudan's transitional government, during a secret trip to Uganda, where both leaders pledged to pursue normalization of ties.

"President Burhan put Sudan on the right track with his meeting with the Israeli prime minister," Badawi said.

A Sudanese government official told The Associated Press that deliberations between Sudanese and Israeli officials have been going on for months, with help from the US.

"It's a matter of time. We are finalizing everything," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to reporters. "The Emirati move encouraged us and helped calm some voices within the government who were afraid of backlash from the Sudanese public."

An Israeli deal with Sudan would mark another setback for the Palestinians, who have long counted on the Arab world to press Israel to make concessions to them as a condition for normalization. That wall of Arab support had long

served as one of the Palestinians' few points of leverage against Israel.

Sudan, a majority Arab nation, hosted the landmark Arab conference after the 1967 Mideast war where eight Arab countries approved the "three no's": No peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel and no negotiations.

But in recent years those hostilities have softened.

Sudan is now on a fragile path to democracy after a popular uprising led the military to overthrow former President Omar Bashir in April 2019. A military-civilian government rules the country, with elections deemed possible in late 2022.

At the time of the Burhan-Netanyahu meeting, the Sudanese military said the talks with Israel were an effort to help end Sudan's status as an international pariah state.

Sudan is desperate to lift sanctions linked to its listing by the US as a state sponsor of terror. That would be a key step toward ending its isolation and rebuilding its battered economy. The US and Israel are staunch allies.

The designation dates back to the 1990s, when Sudan briefly hosted Osama bin Laden and other wanted militants. Sudan was also believed to have served as a pipeline for Iran to supply weapons to Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip. Israel was thought to have been behind airstrikes in Sudan that destroyed a convoy in 2009 and a weapons factory in 2012.



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Sudanese demand reforms a year after deal with generals Sudan, major rebel group sign deal to integrate rebels into army

Rumors swirl about ex-president as potential Erdogan challenger

Author:

Wed, 2020-08-19 01:12

ANKARA: Rumors are swirling in Turkey about the possibility of former President Abdullah Gul being the opposition's pick to challenge President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the 2023 elections.

The two men founded the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) together in 2001.

Gul was president between 2007 and 2014 when Erdogan was prime minister. But Gul has become a staunch critic of his former ally in the last few years.

In an interview on Aug. 17, the leader of the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) Kemal Kilicdaroglu said the government was "very scared" about a Gul candidacy.

But Gul has been criticized by some secular sections of society for remaining silent while power became increasingly centralized over the years without any effective checks and balances in place.

He is also known to be steering the newly founded breakaway Democracy and Progress Party, which was founded by the country's former economy czar Ali Babacan.

Kilicdaroglu denied claims he was talking with Gul each week.

"Those who make accusations about 'weekly meetings' are under some others' control and they are psychologically troubled individuals," he said.

Gul is keeping quiet about a potential presidential comeback, although many think Turkey needs a better challenger.

Karol Wasilewski, an analyst at the Warsaw-based Polish Institute of International Affairs, viewed the CHP's possible nomination of Gul as a reflection of the changes the party had undergone under Kilicdaroglu, who decided that the CHP should be more open to conservative values in order to better compete with the AKP. But he thought it was a bad idea to have Gul take on Erdogan for several reasons.

"First of all if they want to have a candidate acceptable to some AKP voters and able to compete with Erdogan, Ankara's opposition mayor Mansur Yavas and Istanbul's opposition mayor Ekrem Imamoglu seem to be far better choices, because of Gul's image as a political impotent due to his constant inability to stand up to Erdogan," Wasilewski told Arab News.

"Gul is not a political fighter able to defeat Erdogan contrary to, for example, the much younger and vigorous Imamoglu."

According to Wasilewski, Gul's nomination would discourage lots of CHP sympathizers from voting and this scenario would directly help Erdogan's chances of winning.

"Lately there has been lots of criticism toward the AKP that it does not understand the younger generation which will most probably be decisive in 2023 elections. The nomination of Gul will show us that the CHP also has no clue as to how to approach younger voters as I can't imagine Abdullah Gul would be able to attract Generation Z voters," he added.

Berk Esen, a political analyst from Bilkent University in Ankara, said although some people portrayed Gul as a compromise candidate who could attract some AKP voters to defeat Erdogan, there was little proof that Gul actually resonated with the AKP base, which had been bombarded with anti-Gul discourse by pro-government media for years.

"Opposition voters also do not trust him due to his complicity in many of the AKP government's measures as well as conspicuous silence since he stepped down from the presidency in 2014," he told Arab News.

According to Esen, a Gul candidacy did not stand much of a chance and would almost certainly generate a challenge from the CHP camp.

Turkey's political landscape changed dramatically after the opposition's victory in last year's local elections.

Esen remarked that the opposition had younger, more competent and credible candidates so it was difficult to contemplate a scenario in which Gul could energize the opposition voters, let alone draw votes from the AKP base.

"This debate around names is not a productive one but may push many in the opposition to contemplate the candidate nomination process. The CHP leadership may be pushed to allow open primaries to choose its candidate," he added.

Dimitar Bechev, a nonresident fellow at Atlantic Council, said that nominating Gul would be a smart move but only if the opposition rallied behind him.

"Lots of secularists have hard feelings against him as Erdogan's enabler," he told Arab News. "He didn't step up against Erdogan during the anti-government Gezi protests either in 2013."

Gul was mostly in favor of dialogue with the protesters and listening to

their demands. Bechev said that if the opposition vote consolidated to back him, and some AKP supporters defected, then there would be a runoff.



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Speculation mounts over Abdullah Gul's election ambitions
Turkey on brink of recession as economy collapses