

[US, France agree on urgent need for de-escalation in Libya](#)

Wed, 2020-05-20 20:08

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump and French counterpart Emmanuel Macron discussed their concern about “worsening foreign interference” in Libya and “agreed on the need for urgent de-escalation,” the White House said. The two leaders also discussed progress on reopening the United States and France, as well as global economies locked down during the coronavirus outbreak, it said. Trump said he looked forward to convening Group of Seven leaders soon.

Developing...



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UAE calls for Libya cease-fire, return to political process
Erdogan demotes military architect of Turkey's Libya policy

US sanctions Iran's interior minister over human rights abuses

Wed, 2020-05-20 17:28

WASHINGTON: The United States on Wednesday imposed sanctions on Iran's interior minister, accusing him of having a role in serious human rights abuse, including giving orders that led to violence against peaceful protesters, the US Treasury Department said.

The Treasury said in a statement that Iranian Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli gave orders authorizing the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF) to use lethal force in response to protests in November, leading to the killing of protesters, including at least 23 minors.

The Treasury's action on Wednesday also blacklisted seven senior officials of the LEF and a provincial commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

The LEF Cooperative Foundation – which the Treasury said is controlled by the LEF and which is active in Iran's energy, construction, services, technology and banking industries – was also blacklisted, as were its director and members of the board of trustees. The organization's name in Iran is Bonyad Taavon NAJA.

Wednesday's action freezes any US-held assets of those blacklisted and generally bars Americans from dealing with them.

"The United States will continue to hold accountable Iranian officials and institutions that oppress and abuse their own people," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in the statement.

Tensions between Washington and Tehran have spiked since US President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew in 2018 from the Iran nuclear deal struck by his predecessor, Barack Obama, and began reimposing sanctions that had been eased under the accord.



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A quarter of Iranian oil rigs idle as US sanctions bite into production

[UN tells Israel to abandon threats of West Bank annexation](#)

Wed, 2020-05-20 17:29

UNITED NATIONS: The UN's special Mideast envoy called Wednesday on Israel to drop plans to annex parts of the occupied West Bank, joining a growing international chorus of opposition.

Envoy Nickolay Mladenov also called on the Palestinians to resume talks with the so-called Quartet, comprising the US, Russia, the EU and the United Nations.

"Israel must abandon threats of annexation," Mladenov said during a meeting of the Security Council.

"I call on my colleagues in the Middle East Quartet to work with the UN and

quickly come forward with a proposal that will enable the Quartet to take up its mediation role and work jointly with countries in the region to advance the prospect of peace," he added.

The unusually direct statement came a day after Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas announced an end to the Palestinians' security arrangements with Israel, which plans to annex territories in the occupied West Bank.

Mladenov said he would speak Thursday with Palestinian leaders about the practical consequences of their announcement, which were not spelled out by Abbas.

"The continuing threat of annexation by Israel of parts of the West Bank would constitute a most serious violation of international law," Mladenov warned.

It would "deal a devastating blow to the two-state solution, close the door to a renewal of negotiations, and threaten efforts to advance regional peace and our broader efforts to maintain international peace and security," he added.

The US ambassador to the United Nations, Kelly Craft, stressed for her part that a solution could only result from the two parties sitting down at the same negotiating table.

"What is needed right now, if we hope to take even a first step in the right direction, is for the parties to sit down with one another," she said.

"This council cannot dictate the end of this conflict. We can only encourage the parties to sit down to determine how they wish to make progress."

The US diplomat once again called on the Palestinians to seize the opportunity offered by a US peace plan that it has previously rejected.

Several Security Council members such as Indonesia and the European countries have warned Israel against the planned annexations.

In a joint statement France, Belgium, Germany and Estonia reaffirmed that they "will not recognize any changes to the 1967 borders, unless agreed by Israelis and Palestinians."

"We strongly urge Israel to refrain from any unilateral decision that would lead to the annexation of any occupied Palestinian territory and would be, as such, contrary to international law," they said, reaffirming their support for a two state solution as the only one capable of bringing peace to the region.



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Palestinian president declares end to all agreements with Israel and US PLO official: Israel has 'destroyed 2-state solution'

[Egypt registers 720 new coronavirus cases in one day](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Tue, 2020-05-19 18:26

CAIRO: Egypt on Tuesday registered 720 new coronavirus cases, the health ministry said in a statement, its highest daily toll since detecting the first confirmed case in February.

The new cases brought the total infections to 13,484 cases, the ministry added in a statement.

The country's former daily record was 535 cases on Monday.

Egypt recorded 14 deaths on Tuesday, the statement said, bringing the total fatalities to 659. Nearly 3,740 people have recovered and been discharged from isolation hospitals.

The daily tally of cases has been rising after the government slightly eased a night curfew and other measures.

The most populous Arab country will bring forward the start of its curfew by four hours to 5 p.m. and halt public transport from May 24 for six days during the Eid holiday, as it seeks to curb the spread of the new coronavirus, Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly said on Sunday.



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[Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque to reopen after Eid holiday](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

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Tue, 2020-05-19 11:49

JERUSALEM: Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque will reopen to worshippers after the Eid holiday, a statement from its governing body said Tuesday, two months after closing due to the coronavirus.

"The council decided to lift the suspension on worshippers entering the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque after the Eid Al-Fitr holiday," a statement from the Waqf organization said, referring to the three-day holiday expected to begin this weekend.

Islam's third holiest site was closed in late March for the first time in more than 50 years as part of measures across the globe to stem the spread of the new coronavirus.

The mosque's director, Omar Al-Kiswani, told AFP he hoped for no restrictions on the number of worshippers but said the governing body would announce the exact "mechanisms and measures later."

He said the details would be worked out to "ensure we are not subjected to criticism on the pretext we have broken health rules."

The mosque compound, which lies in Jerusalem's Old City, has often been a flashpoint in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Known to Muslims as the Haram Al-Sharif, the mosque compound is under the custodianship of neighbouring Jordan which controlled the West Bank, including east Jerusalem, up until its occupation by Israel in the Six-Day War of 1967.

The site is also holy to Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount and believe it to be the location of the two biblical temples – the second of which was destroyed in 70 AD.

With the number of COVID-19 cases declining, in recent days both Israel and the Palestinian territories have eased restrictions.

The Western Wall, the holiest site at which Jews are permitted to pray, is one of the outer walls of the Al-Aqsa mosque compound.

It was closed by Israeli authorities but reopened earlier this month, though with only 300 people allowed at a time.

In total, Israel has recorded 16,650 coronavirus infections in its population of nine million and 277 deaths.

On the Palestinian side, fewer than 400 cases have been confirmed in the West Bank and Gaza – which have a combined population of more than 4.5 million.

Beaches in Israel are due to reopen from Wednesday, with restaurants and bars to follow from the 27th.

Flights are also due to resume from various locations in the coming weeks.



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Al-Aqsa to remain closed until after Eid Al-Fitr Muslims in Jerusalem pray outdoors amid virus lockdown