

British FM warns Israel against West Bank annexation

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Sat, 2020-02-01 21:23

LONDON: Britain's foreign secretary warned Israel on Friday against annexing parts of the occupied West Bank.

"The United Kingdom is concerned by reports of possible moves toward annexation of parts of the West Bank by Israel," Dominic Raab said in a statement.

"Any such unilateral moves would be damaging to renewed efforts to re-start peace negotiations, and contrary to international law," he added.

"Any changes to the status quo cannot be taken forward without an agreement negotiated by the parties themselves."

The US has proposed that Israel annex the Jordan Valley and all of its West Bank settlements as part of the Middle East peace plan that was announced on Tuesday.

Britain has cautiously welcomed the plan. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Wednesday in Parliament: "No peace plan is perfect, but this has the merit of a two-state solution ... It would ensure that Jerusalem is both the capital of Israel and of the Palestinian people."

Meanwhile, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Saturday said the Palestinian Authority has cut all ties with the US and Israel, including those relating to security, after rejecting the plan.

Speaking at an Arab League foreign ministers meeting in Cairo, he said:

"We've informed the Israeli side ... that there will be no relations at all with them and the United States, including security ties."

The final communique of the meeting said the ministers affirmed the Palestinian people's right to create a state based on the land captured and occupied by Israel in the 1967 Middle East war, with East Jerusalem as its capital.



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OIC rights' body rejects Trump's Middle East peace plan
Israeli Arabs fear for their future under Trump peace plan

[UAE announces new case of coronavirus](#)

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Sat, 2020-02-01 20:03

DUBAI: The UAE's Ministry of Health and Prevention announced that a new case of coronavirus had been diagnosed in the country on Saturday. The person, the fifth to be identified as having the virus in the country, arrived from Wuhan, the center of the virus' outbreak in China. All five patients are in a stable condition and the ministry called on all

citizens and residents to adhere to guidelines that it has provided. China is facing deepening isolation over the epidemic as the death toll soared to 259 on Saturday, with the US and Australia leading a growing list of nations to impose Chinese travel bans. With the UK, Russia and Sweden among the countries confirming their first infections, the virus has now spread to more than two dozen nations, sending governments scurrying to limit their exposure.



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Facebook fights spread of misinformation about virus online
Pakistan halts China flights amid coronavirus outbreak

[Iraqi president appoints Mohammed Allawi as new PM](#)

Sat, 2020-02-01 18:04

BAGHDAD: Iraqi President Barham Salih appointed on Saturday Mohammed Tawfiq

Allawi as new prime minister, State TV reported, after squabbling political parties failed to name a candidate in the two months since the former premier was ousted by popular protests.

Allawi would run the country until early elections can be held. He must form a new government within a month.

Former Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi resigned in November amid mass anti-government unrest where hundreds of thousands of Iraqis took to the streets demanding the removal of Iraq's political elite. Nearly 500 protesters have been killed in a deadly crackdown by security forces.

Allawi was quoted by State TV as saying he would resign if political blocs sought to impose candidates for different ministries.

He also called on protesters to continue demonstrating until their demands are met.

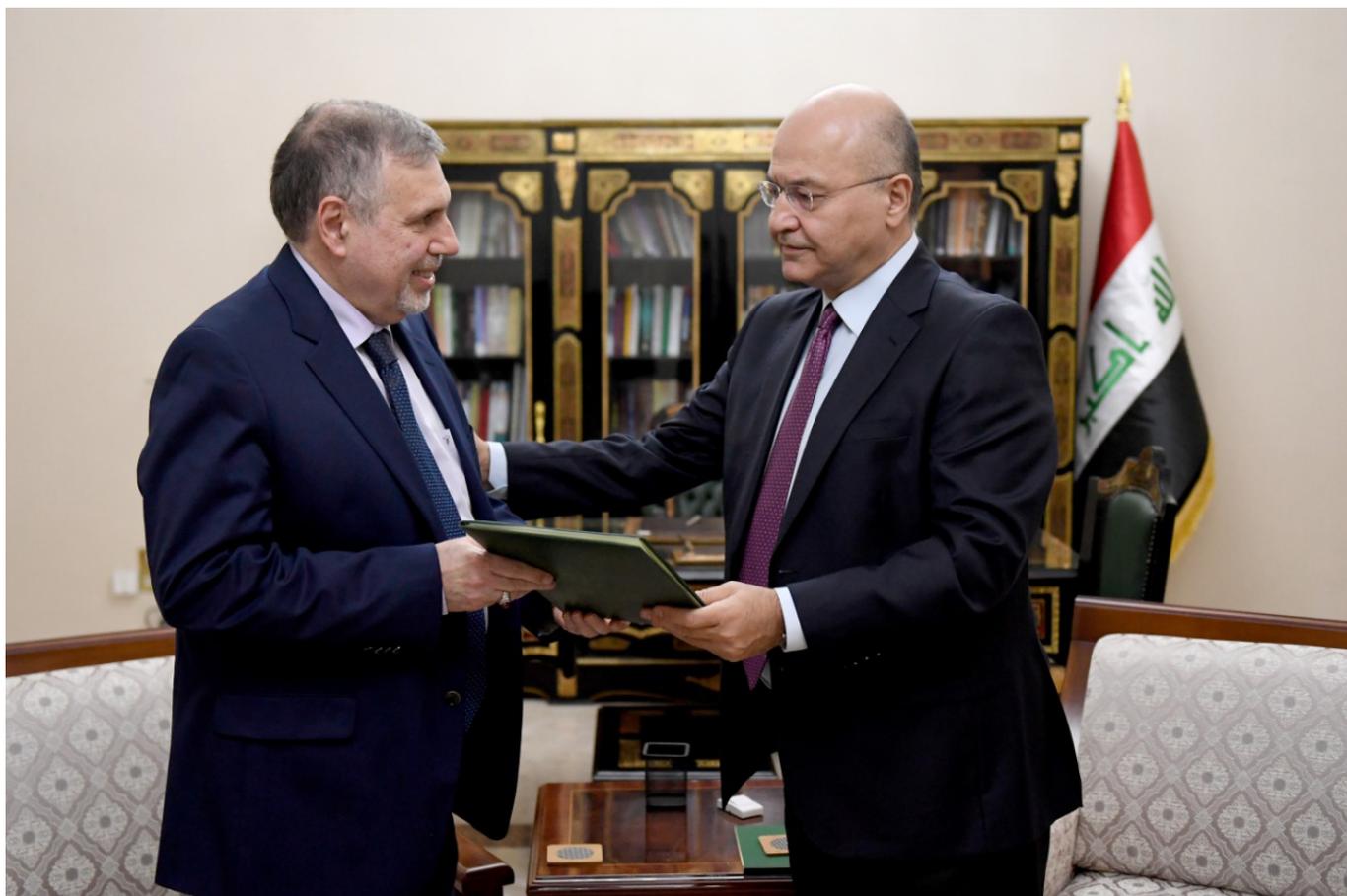
However, protesters are likely to oppose him as prime minister.

For demonstrators who demand a removal of what they say is a corrupt ruling elite, the former communications minister under ex-premier Nuri al-Maliki – who presided over the fall of multiple Iraqi cities to Daesh in 2014 and is accused of pro-Shiite sectarian policies – is part of the system and therefore unacceptable.

Iraq is facing its biggest crisis since the military defeat of Daesh in 2017. A mostly Shiite popular uprising in Baghdad and the south challenges the country's mainly Iran-backed Shiite Muslim ruling elite.

The country has been thrown into further disarray since the killing of Iranian military mastermind Qassem Soleimani in a US drone strike in Baghdad on Jan. 3. Iran responded with missile attacks on bases hosting US forces, pushing the region to the brink of an all-out conflict.

Pro-Iran politicians have tried to use those events to shift the focus away from popular discontent with their grip on power and towards anti-American rallies and demands for the withdrawal of US troops.



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Iraqi cleric Al-Sistani condemns use of force, 11 protesters wounded
Brain injuries in Iraq put attention on invisible war wounds

[**Egypt sentences officer-turned-militant and 36 others to death**](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sat, 2020-02-01 10:00

CAIRO: An Egyptian court on Saturday sentenced Hisham Al-Ashmawy, a former special forces officer turned militant, and 36 others to death after they were convicted of terrorism, court officials said. Ashmawy was captured in the eastern Libyan city of Derna in late 2018 and

transferred by authorities loyal to commander Khalifa Haftar to Egypt in May last year.

He was convicted on several charges including plotting a 2014 attack that killed 22 military guards near the frontier with Libya, and involvement in an attempt to kill a former interior minister in 2013, a military statement said.

Ashmawy led the Sinai-based Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis, Egypt's most active militant group, before it pledged allegiance to Daesh in 2014, it said. The other 36 defendants tried with him were also convicted of terrorism charges, the court ruled.

Their cases were referred to the Grand Mufti, Egypt's highest Islamic legal official. Egyptian law requires any capital sentence to be referred to him for an opinion before executions can take place.

The court set a new session for March 2 to confirm the convictions after receiving the Mufti's non-binding opinion.

In November, a military court had already sentenced Ashmawy to death in another terrorism case. Egyptian civilian and military courts had also sentenced Ashmawy to death in absentia before his extradition.



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Saudi-Egyptian joint maritime training exercise ends

Don't reject new Trump peace plan, Palestine's Abbas urged

Author:

By SAMY MAGDY | AP

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Sat, 2020-02-01 09:26

AMMAN: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas was urged on Saturday to take part in talks based on a new Middle East peace plan rather than reject it out of hand.

"It is important ... to come out with a constructive stance, a realistic stance and a positive strategy that goes beyond just condemnation," UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash said.

He spoke as Arab League foreign ministers meeting in Cairo rejected the new plan, announced last week by US President Donald Trump. They said it was unfair to the Palestinians and would not lead to a comprehensive and just peace.

Abbas himself not only condemned the Trump plan, but withdrew security cooperation with Israel in the occupied West Bank. "We've informed the Israeli side ... that there will be no relations at all with them and the US, including security ties," Abbas told the meeting.

Israel and the Palestinian Authority's security forces have long cooperated in policing areas of the occupied West Bank that are under Palestinian control. The PA also has intelligence cooperation agreements with the CIA, which continued even after the Palestinians began boycotting the Trump administration in 2017.

Abbas also said he had refused to discuss the plan by with Trump by phone, or to receive even a copy of it to study it. "Trump asked that I speak to him by phone but I said 'no,' and that he wants to send me a letter ... but I refused it."

Abbas said he did not want Trump to be able to say that he had been consulted.

The Trump peace plan, enthusiastically supported by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, calls for the creation of a demilitarized Palestinian state that excludes Jewish settlements built in occupied territory and is under near-total Israeli security control. It also proposes US recognition of Israeli settlements on occupied West Bank land and of Jerusalem as Israel's indivisible capital, along with Israeli annexation of the Jordan valley.

The Arab League foreign ministers meeting in Cairo said the plan would not lead to a comprehensive and just peace, and that the League would not cooperate with the US in implementing it.

The ministers affirmed Palestinian rights to create a future state based on the land captured and occupied by Israel in the 1967 Middle East war, with East Jerusalem as capital, the final communique said. They said there could be no peace without recognising Palestinian rights and a comprehensive solution, based on the 2002 Arab peace initiative.

The Saudi delegation was led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, who reaffirmed the Kingdom's support "for the Palestinian people and their just cause."

Abbas has threatened to withdraw security cooperation before and it was unclear whether he would carry it out, analysts told Arab News.

"If he does, then he might finally have some leverage to negotiate a better deal with the Israelis," said Fadi Elsalameen of the Foreign Policy Institute at The Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. "I am very skeptical about his ability to carry this through."

Hanna Issa, secretary-general of the Islamic-Christian committee to support Jerusalem and the holy sites, and a member of the Fatah revolutionary council, told Arab News the total suspension of security coordination would mean the end of the Oslo accords. "This will need time unless the Palestinian side wants to dissolve the Palestinian Authority and therefore make Israel responsible legally, politically, and financially as an occupying power," he said. "A vacuum will happen if this is decided and it is not clear how it will be filled."

Wadie Abunassar, director of the International Centre for Consultations, said the Palestinian president's statement was "vague," and due to a lack of alternatives. "It is a warning, hinting that dissolving the Palestinian Authority might be an option, despite knowing that such an option might be bad for him in particular, and Palestinians in general."

Ofer Zalberg, senior analyst with the International Crisis Group, said the US plan amounted to coercive diplomacy, with the Trump administration signaling to Palestinians that the cost of avoiding compromise was high and increasing.

"This coercive effort encounters two major obstacles: First, it pushes on several elements standing at the core of Palestinian identity, notably regarding Al-Aqsa Mosque and refugees' rights, which Palestinians deem non-negotiable. Such pressure backfires, only increasing resistance to the US plan.

"Second, not only Palestinian nationalism requires Palestinian statehood, so does Israeli-Jewish nationalism, to the extent that it seeks to maintain both a Jewish majority and a democratic system of governance."

Zalberg said the combination of these two seemed to lead the Palestinian

leadership to favor pursuing calculated escalation, “loosening security coordination in order to demonstrate the Palestinian Authority’s utility to Israel in curbing violence while counting on Israeli self-interest to rein in the kind of annexation measures that would render a genuine two-state agreement impossible.”

Mohammad Masharqa, head of the Center for Arab Progress in London and former adviser to the Palestinian embassy there, told Arab News it was unlikely that security coordination would end soon.

“The security coordination is the last wall left of the Oslo Accords and if it falls it must be replaced by a new form of struggle,” he said. “Ending security coordination and dissolving the Palestinian Authority requires a new strategy that would require time and national unity between all aspects of the Palestinian people, inside and outside.”

Jamal Dajani, former head of communications at the Palestinian prime ministry, said Abbas was left with no option but to end all cooperation with Israel based on the Oslo agreement. “President Trump did not offer a peace plan, he outlined a one-sided proposal in order to pave the way for Israel to annex large areas of the West Bank and lock up Palestinians in bantustans,” he said.

“I don’t think, however, that Palestinians should sever ties with the US, as Trump’s deal does not reflect the sentiment of the American people or US Congress. In fact, it has been condemned by many prominent people and politicians in the US.”



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