

Denmark backs Britain's proposed Hormuz naval mission

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1564154625637809400

Fri, 2019-07-26 10:36

COPENHAGEN: Denmark said on Friday it welcomed a British government proposal for a European-led naval mission to ensure safe shipping through the Strait of Hormuz and would consider a military maritime contribution.

Britain has sought to assemble the mission in Hormuz, used by tankers carrying about a fifth of the world's oil, following Iran's seizure of a British-flagged ship in what London said was an act of "state piracy."

The initiative won initial support from Denmark, France and Italy, three senior diplomats said on Tuesday.

"The Danish government looks positively toward a possible contribution to such initiative," Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod said in a statement. "The initiative will have a strong European footprint."

The backing contrasts with a lukewarm response shown by European allies to a similar American call first voiced at NATO in late June, which was resisted by France and Germany. They worried the US-led military alliance would be dragged into a possible confrontation with Iran.

EU-member Denmark is among the world's biggest seafaring nations and home to the world's biggest container shipping firm A.P. Moller-Maersk, which sails in the high-tension area.

"The Royal Danish Navy is strong and capable and would be able to contribute actively and effectively to this type of engagement," said Danish Defense Minister Trine Bramsen.

A final decision would still need to be discussed in parliament.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Denmark](#)

[Strait of Hormuz](#)

[UK](#)

[Iran tensions](#)

Germany remains uncertain over Hormuz naval mission with UK and France Britain tasks navy with accompanying British-flagged vessels through the Strait of Hormuz

[Lebanon secures release of American citizen from Syria](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1564156032177911300

Fri, 2019-07-26 14:59

BEIRUT: Syrian authorities have released a US citizen and he has been handed back to his family, thanks to the mediation of Lebanon, a Lebanese security official said on Friday.

The security official did not reveal the name of the released American, but said it was not Austin Tice, a journalist who disappeared in Syria in 2012.

The official said that Lebanon's security chief Abbas Ibrahim had conducted the mediation.

"Lebanon has worked on mediating through General Abbas Ibrahim to release an American and he was handed over to his family already. The American is not Tice because it is not known where he is," the security official said.

Several US citizens have been held in Syria since the war began there in 2011, including people held by militant groups such as Daesh.

The United States has declined to say who it believes is holding Tice, but has said it believes he is alive and has sought the help of the Syrian government's close ally Russia to free him.

Last year the family of another American, Majd Kamalmaz, told the New York Times that he had disappeared at a government checkpoint in Damascus in 2017.

Last month Ibrahim flew to Iran to complete the release and repatriation of Nizar Zakka, a Lebanese citizen with permanent residency in the United States who was detained there in 2015.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[US](#)

[citizen](#)

[Syria](#)

Lebanon ups pressure on Syrian refugees to returnSecurity forces in crackdown on Lebanon-Syria border smuggling operations

More than 100 migrants missing off Libyan coast

Author:

AFP

ID:

1564085572671516900

Thu, 2019-07-25 19:41

TRIPOLI: More than 100 migrants were missing after their boat sank off the coast of Libya in what might be the worst tragedy in the Mediterranean this year, aid agencies said Thursday.

"The sinking took place off the coast of the city of Khoms," some 100 kilometers (60 miles) from Tripoli, said Safa Msehli, spokesperson for the International Organization of Migration in Libya.

About 145 migrants were rescued by the Libyan coast guard, and survivors had reported that about 150 people remained missing, she said.

General Ayoub Kacem, a spokesman for the Libyan navy, said that "134 migrants were rescued and a body recovered, while 115 other migrants are still missing."

"A wooden boat carrying around 250 people, including women and children, sank some five nautical miles from the coast, according to witness testimony from the migrants who survived," Kacem said in a statement.

The charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said as many as 250 migrants were still missing.

The migrants had been apparently headed out to sea on three boats lashed together, MSF mission chief Julien Raickman told AFP by telephone.

He said survivors had reported a total of almost 400 people on board.

Kacem said most of the rescued migrants were from Ethiopia while others were Palestinians and Sudanese. The coast guard was waiting for authorities to provide accommodation for them.

The head of the UN refugee agency Filippo Grandi tweeted that it was "the worst Mediterranean tragedy of this year."

"Restoring rescue at sea, ending refugee + migrant detention in Libya, increasing safe pathways out of Libya must happen NOW, before it is too late for many more desperate people," he added.

The capsized boat came only a few weeks after some 68 migrants died when an Italy-bound boat sank off Tunisia.

That vessel, filled with mostly African migrants, tipped over shortly after setting out from the Libyan town of Zuwara, west of Tripoli, with the aim of reaching Italy.

Libya, which has been wracked by chaos since the 2011 uprising that killed president Muammar Qaddafi, has long been a major transit route for migrants, especially from sub-Saharan Africa, desperate to reach Europe.

Humanitarian group SOS Mediterranee said Sunday it had relaunched rescue efforts off Libya seven months after abandoning operations as European ports refused to accept the migrants.

The Norwegian-flagged Ocean Viking will “conduct search and rescue activities in the central Mediterranean” for SOS Mediterranee and MSF, the group said in a statement.

It said the exodus from Libya was “one of the most perilous sea crossings in the world.”

After nearly three years of operations in which it rescued some 30,000 migrants, the Aquarius had been forced to cease operations because of what the group said was obstruction by some European countries.

Italy’s populist-dominated government has become particularly hard-line against accepting undocumented migrants on its territory.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Libya](#)

[Khoms](#)

[migrants](#)

SOS Mediterranee relaunch migrant rescue missions off Libya ‘Alan Kurdi’
rescue ship picks up another 44 migrants

**[US blocks UN rebuke of Israeli
demolition of Palestinian homes -](#)**

diplomats

Author:

Thu, 2019-07-25 22:22

UNITED NATIONS, July 24 : The United States on Wednesday blocked an attempt by Kuwait, Indonesia and South Africa to get the United Nations Security Council to condemn Israel's demolition of Palestinian homes on the outskirts of Jerusalem, diplomats said.

Israel said the 10 apartment buildings demolished on Monday, most of them still under construction, had been built illegally and posed a security risk to Israeli armed forces operating along a barrier that runs through the occupied West Bank.

UN officials, who had called on Israel to halt the demolition plans, said 17 Palestinians faced displacement.

Kuwait, Indonesia and South Africa circulated a five-paragraph draft statement, seen by Reuters, to the 15-member Security Council on Tuesday that expressed grave concern and warned that the demolition "undermines the viability of the two-state solution and the prospect for just and lasting peace."

Such statements have to be agreed by consensus and on Wednesday the United States told its council counterparts it could not support the text, diplomats said. A revised three paragraph draft statement was circulated, but the United States again said it did not agree with the text, diplomats said. The United States has long accused the United Nations of anti-Israel bias and shielded its ally from council action.

The demolition of the Palestinian buildings is part of the latest round of protracted wrangling over the future of Jerusalem, home to more than 500,000 Israelis and 300,000 Palestinians.

The Palestinians want a state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip with east Jerusalem as the capital, all territory captured by Israel in 1967.

US President Donald Trump's Middle East envoy Jason Greenblatt and senior Trump adviser Jared Kushner have spent two years developing a peace plan they hope will provide a framework for renewed talks between Israel and the Palestinians.

Greenblatt told the Security Council on Tuesday a peace plan cannot rely on global consensus, inconclusive international law and "unclear" UN resolutions, sparking pushback from several countries. He said a decision on the release of the political component of the US plan would be made "soon."

The buildings demolished on Monday were near what Israel describes as a security barrier. The initial draft Security Council statement described the construction of the wall by Israel as contrary to international law.

Israel credits the barrier – projected to be 720 km (450 miles) long when complete – with stemming Palestinian attacks. Palestinians call it a land grab designed to annex parts of the West Bank, including Israeli settlements.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Israel](#)

Palestinian president says to stop agreements with IsraelIsrael to start exporting natural gas to Egypt in November – minister

[Turkish military chiefs discuss possible offensive in Syria](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-07-25 21:48

ANKARA: Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar met military officials on Thursday to discuss a possible offensive east of the Euphrates River in Syria as Ankara ramped up warnings of a cross-border operation.

The meeting came a day after Turkey said it would launch an offensive unless agreement on a planned safe zone in Syria could be reached with the United States, saying it had run “out of patience” with Washington.

The operation, which would mark the third Turkish incursion into Syria in as many years, was first signalled by President Tayyip Erdogan earlier this year but later put on hold.

Following President Donald Trump’s announcement of a planned US withdrawal from northern Syria, the two NATO allies agreed to create a zone inside Syria and along its northeastern border with Turkey that would be cleared of the

Kurdish YPG militia.

The YPG was Washington's main ally on the ground in Syria during the battle against Islamic State, but Turkey sees it as a terrorist organization, indistinguishable from Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants waging an insurgency inside Turkey.

Ankara says that the United States has stalled progress on setting up the safe zone and has demanded that Washington sever its relations with the YPG. A US delegation led by Syria Special Envoy James Jeffrey presented proposals this week which failed to satisfy Turkish officials, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said.

On Thursday Akar told Turkish military officers that Ankara had set out its view to the US delegation. "We emphasised to them once again that we have no tolerance for any delays, and that we will use our initiative if necessary," the Defense Ministry quoted Akar as saying.

In Washington, the Pentagon reiterated that coordination and consultation between the United States and Turkey was the only way to address security concerns.

"We have made clear that unilateral military action into northeast Syria by any party, particularly as US personnel may be present or in the vicinity, is of grave concern," Commander Sean Robertson, a Pentagon spokesman, said in a statement.

"We would find any such actions unacceptable," Robertson said.

Strained ties

Earlier on Thursday, Turkish military officials said that Ankara and Washington would continue to discuss the planned safe zone despite rising tensions between the allies.

"We cannot share details as efforts are under way. Our aims are clear. The Turkish army is the only force capable of doing this," one of the officials said regarding the safe zone.

He reiterated Turkey's frustration that an agreement reached a year ago with the United States to clear the northern Syrian town of Manbij of YPG fighters had not been implemented.

"Despite all our work, the end-goal of the Manbij roadmap, which is for the area to be cleared of the YPG, for heavy arms to be collected, and a local administration to be formed, has not been reached. There are still around 1,000 terrorists in the region," the official said, referring to the YPG. Ties between Ankara and Washington have been strained over a host of issues, but Turkey's purchase of Russian S-400 missile defense systems has brought the NATO allies to the brink of one of the biggest ruptures in ties.

The United States said it had suspended Turkey's involvement in the F-35 fighter jet program over the Russian systems and that it would later remove Ankara completely. It has also said that Turkey may face possible US sanctions over the deal.

Turkey has dismissed the warnings, instead pinning its hopes on sympathetic comments from Trump who has said that Ankara had been treated unfairly. Trump has not ruled out imposing sanctions on Turkey.

On Thursday, military officials said that while Russia had offered to provide Turkey with its SU-35 jets if Ankara asked for them, there were no talks to procure alternatives to the F-35s. Akar, however, said that Turkey would look

elsewhere if it was denied the jets.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Turkey](#)

[Syria](#)

Activists say 10 killed in bombing of Syria rebel stronghold
Turkey has not agreed with US on Syria safe zone: foreign minister