

Pence says US action has cut off Iran's ability to support terrorism

Mon, 2019-07-08 18:49

WASHINGTON: The United States will not waver from its course of maximum pressure against Iran, Vice President Mike Pence said Monday, as tensions rise and the US-brokered nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers appears to be unraveling with the Trump administration's pullout.

Pence's assertion to a pro-Israel Christian organization that the US "will never allow Iran to obtain a nuclear weapon" came on the same day that Iran began enriching uranium to 4.5 percent, breaking the limit set in the 2015 agreement sealed under President Barack Obama.

The speech, amplified in later remarks to the group by the Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and national security adviser John Bolton, also comes as the other partners in the agreement must decide how to respond to Iran's announcement. President Donald Trump discussed the issue by phone Monday with French President Emmanuel Macron.

Echoing comments made repeatedly by Trump, Pence said the international accord simply delayed Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon by "roughly a decade" and gave away billions in economic relief that Iran could then use to wage terrorist attacks.

Since Trump withdrew from that deal more than a year ago, his administration has reimposed crippling sanctions on Tehran and designated its Revolutionary Guard a foreign terrorist group.

"Iran must choose between caring for its people and continuing to fund its proxies who spread violence and terrorism throughout the region and breathe out murderous hatred against Israel," Pence said.

Pence said the US's actions have succeeded in "cutting off" Iran's ability to support terrorism in the Middle East, but he also charged that Iran had increased its "malign activity and violence in the region" over the past several months.

Tensions in the region have risen in recent weeks after oil tankers were attacked near the Strait of Hormuz and Iran downed an unmanned US military surveillance drone. The downing of the drone nearly led to a US military strike against Iran; it was called off at the last minute by Trump.

Instead, the US military's cyberforces launched a retaliatory strike against Iranian military computer systems that controlled the country's rocket and missile launchers.

The US has sent thousands of troops, an aircraft carrier, nuclear-capable B-52 bombers and advanced fighter jets to the Middle East.

"Let me be clear," Pence said. "Iran should not confuse American restraint with a lack of American resolve."

Iran has long maintained it was enriching uranium for peaceful reasons. While enriched uranium at the 3.67 percent level is enough for peaceful pursuits, it isn't close to the weapons-grade levels of 90 percent. At 4.5 percent, the enriched uranium is enough to help power Iran's Bushehr reactor, the country's only nuclear power plant.

Iran has been trying to gain European help in bypassing US sanctions, which

have targeted oil sales and top officials, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The remaining signatories to the deal include Britain, France, Germany, China and Russia.

"We hope for the best, but the United States of America and our military are prepared to protect our interests and to protect our personnel and citizens in the region," Pence said.

Later Monday, Bolton, the White House national security adviser and a longtime advocate of tough measures against Iran, devoted a large portion of his speech at the same summit to Iran, noting that the that the administration has expanded sanctions to cover metals and the petrochemical sector.

"As we pressure the Iranian regime, we will also continue to stand with the long-suffering Iranian people, who as President Trump has said, are the "rightful heirs to a rich culture and an ancient land," Bolton said.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the US has implemented the "strongest pressure campaign in history against the Iranian regime," before adding "and we are not done."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Mike Pence](#)

[US](#)

[Iran](#)

[Iran tensions](#)

Iran threatens to restart centrifuges and 20% uranium enrichmentIran faces one-week deadline to end its 'nuclear blackmail'

Morocco seizes 'record' 27.3 tons of cannabis resin

Author:

AFP

ID:

1562600480290109500

Mon, 2019-07-08 12:15

RABAT: Moroccan police seized a "record" 27.3 tons of cannabis resin hidden in trucks bound for Europe, the country's security service said Monday. The drugs were discovered Sunday evening at the vast Tanger Med port in three vehicles "believed to be transporting industrial equipment," the General Directorate for National Security said in a statement.

The "record" quantity of resin was found "divided among 16 containers in the trailers of the three trucks," the statement added.

The drivers and their three assistants, all Moroccan, were arrested and taken into police custody.

Tanger Med in northern Morocco is one of Africa's largest ports and is within sight of the Spanish coast.

Morocco is one of the main global producers and exporters of cannabis resin, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

Production is concentrated in the north of the country, where some 47,000 hectares of agricultural land were used for cannabis cultivation, according to UNODC statistics from 2016.

Moroccan police seized 52 tons of cannabis resin last year, according to official figures.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Morocco](#)

[Cannabis](#)

[drugs](#)

[Suitcase filled with \\$1.5m of gold and cash found at Beirut airport](#)

Mon, 2019-07-08 18:19

CAIRO: A suitcase containing \$1.5 million of gold and cash was discovered in the car park of Lebanon's main airport.

The gold was found inside a suitcase by a passerby on Sunday and handed to airport security, Lebanon's state news agency reported.

Internal security forces at Rafic Hariri International Airport examined the suitcase and found 14.95 kilograms of gold inside, worth approximately \$675,000, along with €632,000 and \$170,000 in cash.

The security forces said the suitcase belonged to a Lebanese national who had travelled from Togo to Ethiopia before boarding an Ethiopian Airlines flight

to Beirut.

After contacting the suitcase owner, the authorities found that the owner had announced the amount of gold that had been carried, but did not reveal the wads of cash inside the suitcase.

The statement said authorities had arrested the suitcase owner.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Beirut](#)

The News: Dollar hits record high, gold price soars by Rs2,700 per tola

[Syria replaces security chief – news reports](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-07-08 17:37

BEIRUT: Syria's government has replaced one of its top security chiefs Jamil Hassan, a subject of Western sanctions, pro-Damascus social media sites reported.

Hassan, who is in his mid 60s, has been replaced as head of Syrian Air Force Intelligence by his deputy Ghassan Ismail, said Tartous Now News Network and Homs News Network on Sunday. There was no official comment on Syrian state

media.

A US Treasury sanctions designation for Hassan in 2011 described Air Force Intelligence as one of Syria's four main security agencies.

Syria's pervasive security agencies have played a major role for President Bashar Assad since the start of the conflict in 2011 by rooting out and detaining those suspected of links with the opposition.

Rights group Amnesty International says more than 80,000 people have been subjected to enforced disappearance by the Syrian government since the start of the conflict.

Last year German prosecutors issued an international arrest warrant for Hassan, accusing him of "war crimes and crimes against humanity" for his part in Syria's war and the mass protests that preceded it.

The prosecutors accused him of overseeing the torture, rape and murder of "at least hundreds of people between 2011 and 2013."

Syria's government denies any widespread abuses by its security forces.

In an interview with Britain's Independent newspaper in 2016, Hassan was quoted as saying the government should have used more force against the opposition at the start of the war.

Comparing it to the crushing of a Muslim Brotherhood uprising in Hama in 1982, he was quoted as saying "if we did what we did in Hama at the beginning of the crisis, we would have saved a lot of Syrian blood."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Syria](#)

Regime bombardment kills 12 civilians in northwest Syria: monitorRussian-led

assault in Syria leaves over 500 civilians dead, say rights groups

[Tunisia finds bodies of pregnant migrant, toddler after boat sinks](#)

Author:

Sun, 2019-07-07 23:11

TUNIS: Tunisia's Red Crescent said Sunday three more bodies had been retrieved off the country's coast, including those of a pregnant woman and toddler, days after a boat carrying scores of migrants sank.

"The number of bodies retrieved (from the water) has reached 15," said Red Crescent official Mongi Slim.

The bodies of a three-year-old and two women, one pregnant, were recovered Saturday night off the island of Djerba in southern Tunisia, Slim said.

On Saturday the Red Crescent said 12 bodies had been retrieved by the coast guard from waters off southern Tunisia that morning.

Including the corpse of a woman that the National Guard said it found on a beach off Zarzis on Friday, the total number of bodies recovered since the boat sank on Monday stands at 16.

A Malian survivor told the UN's migration agency that 86 people had been on board the dinghy, which capsized.

"People were terrified as water started pouring in, some of them fell into the water. They stayed down there," survivor Soleiman Coulibaly told AFP.

Flavio Di Giacomo, a spokesman for the UN's International Organization for Migration, tweeted on Thursday that "about 80 migrants are feared dead."

The Red Crescent and the navy said three Malians and an Ivorian were rescued on Wednesday by the coast guard, who had been alerted by local fishermen.

The Ivorian, however, died in hospital and one of the Malians has also been hospitalized in intensive care.

The boat tipped over only hours after setting out to sea from the Libyan town of Zuwara, west of Tripoli, with the intention of reaching Italy.

Libya has in recent years been a major departure point for migrants seeking to reach Europe across the Mediterranean.

Rights groups say migrants face horrifying abuses in Libya, with many held in squalid detention facilities.

An air strike Tuesday on a migrant center in the capital Tripoli killed at least 53 people, according to the World Health Organization.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[migrants](#)

[Tunisia](#)

[Libya](#)

[Europe](#)

Malta to relocate 65 migrants after rescue ships defy Italy ban
Heatwave adds to the woes of migrants stranded Bosnia