

Lebanon ready to work with Cyprus on potential offshore gas

Author:

By MENELAOS HADJICOSTIS | AP

ID:

1650030935862292100

Fri, 2022-04-15 16:57

NICOSIA, Cyprus: Lebanon is ready to work with Cyprus to exploit potential gas deposits in waters between the two east Mediterranean countries, Lebanon's top diplomat said Friday, even though a deal on offshore rights hasn't been formally finalized.

Cyprus and Lebanon signed an agreement delineating their respective offshore exclusive economic zones in 2007, but the Lebanese parliament has yet to ratify it amid the country's ongoing maritime border dispute with Israel. Nevertheless, Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib said after talks with his Cypriot counterpart in Nicosia that "with Cyprus there's no problem, once we found gas we're ready to go, put it together."

"We talked about it and I can assure you that Lebanon is ready to do it," Bou Habib said.

The Lebanese top diplomat's remarks come as Europe is seeking new energy sources to wean itself off Russian gas in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Cyprus has issued exploration drilling licenses to ExxonMobil and partner Qatar Petroleum, a consortium made up of French energy company Total and Italy's Eni, as well as Chevron and partner Shell, to most of its 13 segments in its exclusive economic zone off its southern coast.

To the north, Cyprus faces an intense challenge from Turkey which claims much of the island's EEZ as its own and has sent warship-escorted survey ships into the area – earning condemnation from the European Union, of which Cyprus is a member.

Cyprus was split along ethnic lines in 1974 when Turkey invaded following a coup by supporters of union with Greece. The breakaway Turkish Cypriot north is only recognized by Turkey.

Lebanon's Bou Habib said a US written mediation proposal submitted earlier this year that aimed at resolving the Lebanese-Israeli dispute, while much better than previous attempts, is "not enough yet."

He said both Lebanon's government and its lawmakers are "all in agreement" on what they seek from a deal with Israel.

"Therefore the response to the Americans hopefully would be soon and it would be one response," Bou Habib said.

Any discoveries within Lebanon's own economic zone would be a long-term boon for the crisis-hit country's beleaguered economy.

Lebanon's economic crisis has been described by the World Bank as one of the world's worst since the 1850s. Tens of thousands of people have lost their jobs since October 2019 and the Lebanese pound lost more than 90 percent of its value.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[Cyprus](#)

[gas](#)

Lebanon to demolish blast-hit Beirut silos
Lebanon risks missing IMF preconditions for EFF owing to weak governance: S&P

[Iran's Quds Force vows to continue 'leading' militias across region](#)

Author:

Fri, 2022-04-15 15:19

LONDON: Iran's Quds Force has vowed to continue "leading" militias across the Middle East.

Brig. Gen. Esmail Ghaani, who heads the elite unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, said the Quds Force would back any anti-US and anti-Israel movement in the world.

“The US and the Zionists should know that this is our definite path,” he told supporters, including some of the IRGC’s most senior commanders.

“The Islamic revolution of Iran knows how to guide young, motivated Muslims to defend themselves,” he said.

“Our hands are not tied, and we will respond robustly wherever in the world our interests come under aggression.”

Commending the missile-making efforts of Yemen’s Houthi militia, which he described as Tehran’s “new children,” Ghaani said all militias would “undoubtedly” enjoy similar Iranian support.

Having designated the Quds Force as a terrorist organization in 2007, the US took this further in 2019, prescribing the IRGC in its entirety, before assassinating Ghaani’s predecessor Qassem Soleimani in Iraq a year later.

Tehran has refused to shift on its nuclear program as long as the terrorist designation remains in place.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Israeli strike near Syrian capital causes material damage

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

1650013417091309500

Fri, 2022-04-15 08:35

DAMASCUS: Israel has fired several missiles toward Syrian military positions near Damascus, causing material damage, Syria's military said Friday. State media quoted an unnamed military official as saying that the attack occurred shortly before midnight Thursday, adding that some of the Israeli missiles were shot down by Syrian air defenses.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said the missiles struck positions of Iran-backed fighters southwest of the capital, near the suburb of Qatana.

There was no comment from the Israeli military.

Israel has staged hundreds of strikes on targets inside government-controlled Syria over the years but rarely acknowledges or discusses such operations.

It has acknowledged, however, that it targets the bases of Iran-allied militias, such as Lebanon's Hezbollah group that has fighters deployed in Syria. It says it attacks arms shipments believed to be bound for the militias.

Israel justifies its strikes on facilities and weapons inside Syria by saying that an Iranian presence on its northern frontier is a red line.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Syria](#)

[Israel](#)

[Strikes](#)

Easing of Israeli-Palestinian tensions is vital as Ramadan, Easter and Passover coincide, US officials say
2 Palestinians killed in Israeli raid on West Bank: ministry

[158 worshippers injured as Israeli forces raid Al-Aqsa](#)

Author:

AP

ID:

1649997452270608300

Fri, 2022-04-15 04:26

JERUSALEM: Clashes between Israeli police and Palestinians at Al-Aqsa Mosque, a major holy site in Jerusalem, on Friday left 158 Palestinians injured, six seriously.

Three paramedics, three journalists, and 400 other people were arrested during a dawn raid on the mosque to evict 2,000 worshippers in which police officers used gas bombs and rubber bullets and were seen in videos pushing and beating individuals.

Palestinian sources said the Israeli police closed all the mosque doors, prevented Red Crescent crews from entering, and impeded the arrival of ambulances to transport the injured from inside the mosque compound to hospitals.

It was also alleged that police targeted Al-Aqsa guards, press, medical staff, and Red Crescent medics with rubber bullets and deliberately hit them with batons.

And they were accused of seizing ambulance keys and surrounding the Al-Aqsa clinic where first aid was being administered to dozens of wounded people. Witnesses said worshippers were hit by gas bombs and made to lie down before being savagely beaten.

As a result of the raid, violent confrontations broke out between Israeli police and hundreds of young men in the compound.

[#WATCH](#): Following clashes with [#Palestinian](#) worshippers, which wounded more than 150, there was a heavy presence of [#Israeli](#) security forces at [#AlAqsa](#) [#Israel](#) [#Palestine](#) [#Jerusalem](#)
<https://t.co/7b9J3ZtLN1> pic.twitter.com/X0TMUt53cn

– Arab News (@arabnews) [April 15, 2022](#)

A massive rally was organized after dawn prayers in support of Al-Aqsa and as a warning against settlers' incursions into the mosque during the Jewish Passover, which began on Friday evening. At the same time, Palestinian youths threw stones and firecrackers at Israeli police.

On Thursday, Al-Aqsa guards thwarted an attempt by three settlers in hoods disguised as Arabs to enter the courtyards of the mosque.

The doors of Al-Aqsa were reopened to worshippers shortly before the Friday prayer after Israeli forces arrested and evicted hundreds of young men from Al-Aqsa courtyards.

The morning violence caused panic and fear among those who had gone to Jerusalem to perform the second Friday prayer of Ramadan at Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Sheikh Omar Al-Kiswani, the director of Al-Aqsa Mosque, told Arab News: "The invasion of the mosque by the Israeli occupation police and the violent suppression of the worshippers at dawn on Friday led to a decline in the number of worshippers. There were 60,000 worshippers while we expected the number to reach 170,000."

And he accused Israel of consistently violating Al-Aqsa Mosque and provoking Muslims.

Al-Kiswani said: "Al-Aqsa Mosque is a sacred place for Muslims alone and does

not accept partnership or its division with Jews. Israeli provocations, whether by police forces or extremist Jews, are sponsored by the right-wing Israeli government.

“The (Israeli) occupation allows the invasion of Al-Aqsa on every Jewish occasion and feast, whether it coincides with Ramadan or not.

“Jewish extremists and the Israeli occupation have nothing to do with Al-Aqsa, which is a pure right of Muslims alone, but the Israelis want to turn the conflict into a religious conflict and impose a new reality on the mosque,” he added.

He pointed out that successive Israeli governments for 16 years had been far-right governments, claiming that each one had tried to be more extremist than the last and win elections by escalating its policy against Al-Aqsa Mosque and controlling it.

“Ramadan days are for worship, but the occupation forces turn them into farewells to martyrs and commit repeated violations of the sanctity of Al-Aqsa Mosque,” Al-Kiswani said.

A statement issued by the Israeli police blamed worshippers for rioting and disturbing public order.

In the Gaza Strip, thousands of Palestinians participated in mass rallies after Friday prayers, condemning Israeli police brutality at Al-Aqsa.

Khaled Al-Batsh, a prominent leader of the Islamic jihad, said: “The hand of (Palestinian) resistance is long in Gaza, Jenin, and Nablus, and we will not stand idly by in the face of these provocations.”

Tor Wennesland, the UN special coordinator for the Middle East peace process, expressed deep concern over “the deteriorating security situations in Jerusalem during these holy days,” and said, “the provocation on the Holy Esplanade must stop now.”

He called for an immediate halt to the provocations at Al-Aqsa, noted that the UN was in close contact with key regional partners and the parties to calm the situation, and urged authorities on both sides to immediately de-escalate the situation.

Egypt’s Al-Azhar University, a center of Islamic learning, strongly condemned what it described as Israel’s “repeated violations and aggressions against defenseless Palestinians, allowing members of its forces to invade Al-Aqsa Mosque and violate its sanctity.

“The Israeli occupation’s killing of innocent Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Palestinian cities during the blessed month of Ramadan is a disgrace to the international community and humanity.”

In a Facebook post, prominent Palestinian leader, Mohammed Dahlan, said: “The occupation’s attempt to escape its internal crises by escalating violence against our Palestinian people and to use Jewish holidays to implement its

Judaization plans will only lead to a further deterioration of the situation.

“Israel alone bears responsibility for its consequences and should be aware that it will not enjoy security and stability unless our Palestinian people enjoy it.”

Jordan condemned the Israeli police action and warned against the consequences of the dangerous escalation. It held the Israeli authorities responsible for the safety of Al-Aqsa Mosque and worshippers.





Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Jerusalem](#)

[Israel](#)

Uproar over Israeli FM's 'provocative' visit to Damascus Gate in East Jerusalem
Palestinian stabs Israeli in Jerusalem, shot by police

[Lebanese Cabinet to review draft legislation on bank secrecy](#)

Author:

Thu, 2022-04-14 21:08

BEIRUT: The Lebanese Cabinet decided on Thursday to review a draft amendment to the bank secrecy law during its next session before referring it for parliamentary approval.

The decision comes after such a requirement was stated in a staff-level agreement between the International Monetary Fund and the Lebanese negotiating team on April 7.

It required: "Parliament approval of a reformed bank secrecy law to bring it in line with international standards to fight corruption and remove impediments to effective banking sector restructuring and supervision, tax administration, as well as detection and investigation of financial crimes, and asset recovery."

Lebanon must meet all of the conditions set by the IMF before a final agreement can be reached, though the requirements have hampered progress in the negotiations over recent months.

According to the agreement: "Lebanon is facing an unprecedented crisis, which has led to a dramatic economic contraction and a large increase in poverty, unemployment, and emigration. This crisis is a manifestation of deep and persistent vulnerabilities generated by many years of unsustainable macroeconomic policies fueling large twin deficits (fiscal and external), support for an overvalued exchange rate and an oversized financial sector, combined with severe accountability and transparency problems and lack of structural reforms."

Following the Cabinet session, Information Minister Ziad Makari said: "We reviewed the agreement with the IMF and the ministers were asked to submit their suggestions to be reviewed in a later session."

The Cabinet agreed to create a headquarters for the National Anti-Corruption Commission in Beirut to enable it to carry out its duties.

Makari added: "We tasked the Council for Development and Reconstruction with supervising the demolition process of the wheat silos," the bulk of which were destroyed and the rest severely damaged in the Beirut port explosion on Aug. 4, 2020.

"Subsidies on wheat used for Arabic bread will not be lifted. They might be, however, lifted on wheat and flour used for other products such as sweets and pastries," he said.

Over the past few days, Lebanon had experienced a flour crisis against the backdrop of the central bank's failure to open credits for the purchase of imported wheat. The stampede to buy bread from bakeries in the southern suburb of Beirut led to shootings.

As a temporary solution, the Cabinet agreed on Thursday to use the \$15 million worth of IMF special drawing rights to subsidize wheat, \$13 million to subsidize medicine and \$60 million to subsidize electricity.

Meanwhile, the United Nations on Thursday launched the Strategic Framework for UN Action in Lebanon for the 2022-25 period.

Najat Rochdi, UN resident and humanitarian coordinator for Lebanon, said the world body would provide support in cooperation with the relevant ministries and the government, and in consultation with the private sector, governorates, civil society and local communities.

She identified corruption as the main issue to be tackled, as well as energy

and electricity, education, unemployment and health, insecurity, environmental protection and poverty.

“Poverty rates have doubled, and this is a significant deterioration compared to cases of poverty in other countries,” Rochdi said. “We are witnessing a severe deterioration in the provision of social and basic services at the level of health, education, water and energy.”

She added that there was a “structural defect in the economic model, which must be redesigned and restructured, taking into account the current economic context, the collapse of the exchange rate, the capital control, the lifting of subsidies, and inappropriate policies in terms of supporting infrastructure and the brain drain.”

She called for “thinking outside the box in terms of production,” and noted a deliberate delay in implementing the required reforms.

Rochdi also stressed the need to implement reforms, control corruption, and protect the judiciary and the rule of law.

“We are working on a three-year emergency development plan to curb the economic collapse in Lebanon. We consulted with civil society, the private sector and embassies. We wanted to discuss the possibility of returning refugees who have no work here and we have consulted all parties in Lebanon in this regard,” she said.

“I hope we will reach an agreement on the priorities of cooperation and sign this strategic framework soon, to start actual work for the next three years,” she added.

“We need a high coordination structure and we need to define various priorities. Based on joint programs, we will mobilize resources for the plan and we have actually started contacts in this framework. We must act quickly for the good of the people of Lebanon.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[Ziad Makari](#)

[Najat Rochdi](#)

[Lebanese banks](#)

Lebanese Cabinet urges judiciary not to fall for populism as banks plan strike
Investors pay high price as judges target Lebanese banks