

GCC-UK FMs: Strategic partnership essential to promoting Middle East security and stability

Mon, 2021-12-20 23:43

LONDON: Foreign Ministers from the Gulf Cooperation Council and the UK said that the strategic UK-GCC relationship is essential in promoting peace, security, stability, and economic growth in the Middle East region and beyond.

Britain's Foreign Secretary Liz Truss met foreign ministers of the GCC and its Secretary General at Chevening, England on Monday.

During the meeting, the foreign ministers agreed the UK-GCC relationship will be strengthened across all fields and that they were committed to developing the partnership in emerging areas such as clean technology, digital infrastructure, and cyber.

The UK and the GCC already cooperate closely in a wide range of areas including political dialogue, security, foreign policy, trade and investment, and development.

The reenergised UK-GCC partnership will help keep UK and GCC citizens safe, and generate business opportunities and jobs, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office said.

The UK and GCC member states emphasised the importance of enhancing people-to-people links, which are an essential element in promoting understanding between their peoples, and a key driver of innovation, business opportunities, and cultural and educational exchange.

The UK and GCC member states underlined their commitment to work together to identify bilateral opportunities for joint investment in infrastructure and clean technology in the developing world.

As a first step, they committed to develop mechanisms for strong partnerships on these issues and work together to develop a pipeline of potential joint investment projects.

The foreign ministers welcomed the ambitious five-year strategy and enlarged remit of British Investment International (BII), the UK's development finance institution.

BII will play a central role in the UK government's offer to help developing and emerging countries meet their significant financing needs for infrastructure and enterprise.

The foreign ministers also discussed the resumption of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action talks in Vienna, and underlined that this is the last

opportunity to restore the JCPOA as Iran's continued nuclear escalation is permanently eroding the benefits of the deal and undermining regional and international security.

They urged Iran to seize the current diplomatic opportunity to restore the JCPOA now to avoid bringing the region and international community to a crisis point.

Foreign Ministers also noted that a restored JCPOA is the best avenue towards inclusive, and more lasting diplomatic efforts to ensure regional security in a Gulf region permanently free of nuclear weapons.



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UAE's trade surplus with GCC rises more than three-fold on higher exports
Saudi, UK foreign ministers discuss security ties and regional issues

International community needs to strengthen Lebanon support, says UN chief

Author:

Mon, 2021-12-20 23:25

BEIRUT: The international community needs to strengthen its support to Lebanon to overcome the country's current "very difficult circumstances," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in Beirut on Monday.

Guterres also said Lebanon needed proper accountability for last year's port explosion and that elections due to be held next year could usher in political stability in the country.

His comments followed a meeting with Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and a visit to the port, where he laid a wreath at a memorial for the hundreds who died when chemicals stored at the facility for nearly seven years exploded.

Guterres was keen to record his observations on the second day of his official visit to Lebanon.

He said that only the Lebanese could solve Lebanese problems, and he renewed his call for political leaders "to come together" to overcome divisions.

He inspected the blast site for the first time, reviewing the damage to the port and its surroundings, despite the stormy and rainy weather.

A minute's silence was observed in front of a plaque honoring victims of the explosion.

In notes distributed by his media office, the secretary-general said he visited the port to pay tribute to the victims who had lost their lives and to express his solidarity to the wounded and their families.

"I know the suffering and I know the will of the people to know the truth. The will of the people is to have proper accountability and I want to express my very deep solidarity to all the victims of that tragedy."

His day included an extensive meeting with representatives of international bodies and organizations, chaired by Guterres and Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati.

Arab News learned that the importance of the meeting stemmed from its conclusion that the efforts of UN agencies "must coordinate with each other on the ground in order to produce more effective work."

Guterres said that Mikati confirmed "the government's commitment to conduct

negotiations with the IMF and its commitment to carry out a number of necessary administrative and financial reforms” to promote economic recovery.

FASTFACT

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterre says Lebanon needs proper accountability for last year’s port explosion and that elections due to be held next year could usher in political stability in the country.

Mikati stressed Lebanon’s “adherence to the role of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon in the south, respecting international resolutions.”

He highlighted Lebanon’s “commitment to the policy of disassociation from any dispute between Arab countries, as was its decision in 2011” and that Lebanon would not “in any case, be anything but a unifying factor among the Arab brothers, and is keen on the best relations with all its friends.”

He said Lebanon needed urgent aid in many areas, with a focus on delivering aid to the poorest and middle-class groups, in addition to marginalized segments.

He stressed the need to give special importance to expanding the social protection network, and said the government was “determined” to hold parliamentary elections on time without delay. “We look forward to the unwavering support of the UN,” he added.

The UN chief took part in an important meeting with religious authorities and listened to the positions of Lebanese sects on the developments in Lebanon.

Their speeches reflected the political divergence in Lebanon.

They affirmed their “commitment to the values of openness, tolerance and coexistence, as they are the essence of Lebanon’s identity and stability” in a joint statement, and encouraged “the adoption of dialogue as a means of resolving differences in the spirit of consensus and teamwork.”

The UN chief also visited the northern city of Tripoli, where he inspected centers and schools that provide services to residents and refugees. He met women leaders and activists.

His talks with Berri focused on the presence of UNIFIL forces in southern Lebanon and “the need to end all violations of the ceasefire.”

Guterres said the speaker had drawn his attention to the “violations of the airspace of Lebanon, and also the need for total implementation of the resolutions of the UN Security Council.”

“We discussed the importance of the cooperation between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces that the international community needs also to support much more strongly. In the scope of our activities, we will also be doing

everything we can in order to facilitate the negotiations that hopefully will lead to a rapid solution for the delimitation of the maritime border.”

During a joint press conference, Berri said: “If there is a disturbance in a place, the responsibility lies with Israel, which occupies our land, and not with us. Every day, there is an Israeli violation of the Lebanese airspace, and they even use our airspace to strike Syria.”

His words came against the backdrop of a UN demand for Lebanon to facilitate the mission of UNIFIL forces during their work on the ground.

Hezbollah often obstructs the work of these patrols on the pretext that they are entering private property.



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UN secretary-general in Beirut to ‘stand by and support Lebanon’ Lebanon may reach initial pact with IMF between Jan-Feb – deputy PM

EU diplomat visits threatened Sheikh Jarrah home

Mon, 2021-12-20 22:53

AMMAN: The head of the EU Mission to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Sven Kuhn von Burgsorff, visited the home of the Salem family, that is currently facing eviction, on Dec. 28.

The EU official made a strong public appeal, calling on Israel to call off the eviction, asking: "How on Earth is it possible that a family is evicted on Christmas in the middle of the winter?"

The EU delegation ran a photo on Twitter, adding: "Members of Nassar family continue gathering on their land in the neighborhood of #SheikhJarrah in the occupied #Jerusalem after Israeli settlers placed barbed wires around the land in an attempt to seize it. #SaveSheikhJarrah."

Israel has been waging a concerted campaign to take over as many homes as possible in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of occupied East Jerusalem to turn it into a Jewish area.

Fatmeh Salem, 69, who was born in the family home and has lived there all her life, said she had paid rent to the Jordanian government for the house since the 1950s.

The Israeli-controlled administration of absentee properties is a major enabler of Jewish settler groups, while Palestinians who lost homes in West Jerusalem and live now in East Jerusalem are not even allowed to have their homes back.

FASTFACT

The last evictions in Sheikh Jarrah took place in 2017.

On Dec. 19, the opposition Israeli website Plus972 gave details of what occurred while their reporter visited the Salem family in Sheikh Jarrah early this month.

"Fatmeh was home when she heard banging on her front door last week," it reported. "She opened it and saw Jerusalem Deputy Mayor Aryeh King, holding a telephone and filming her.

"Next to him stood Yosef – from the municipality and King's No. 2 official – claiming he had purchased the rights to the land from a Jewish family that lived in the home before 1948.

"'This is my home,' the official said and handed her an eviction notice.

“‘Seriously?’ she asked.

“‘Yes, this is our house and we will get it back,’ Yosef replied.”

Plus972’s reporter continued: “Our conversation is cut off by noise coming from outside. Young, English-speaking Jews have arrived with metal fence posts. Fatma (Fatmeh) storms out to confront them: ‘What are you doing?’ she asks, as they begin to fence in a plot of the land adjacent to Fatma’s home, which is currently used as a parking space for two residents of the neighborhood, as well as a settler who moved to Sheikh Jarrah two years ago.

“Palestinians arrived, and a verbal altercation broke out. ‘How can I get into my home? Why are you doing this?’ Fatma yelled at them.

“The man who took charge of the fencing was Haim Silberstein, one of Aryeh King’s associates, who was wearing a suit and demanded we not film him.

“The police arrived ... and upon seeing legal papers showing the settlers had no right to build the fence, ordered the construction be stopped.”

Fatmeh then told the Plus972 reporter: “This is the beginning of our expulsion.”

An hour later, the reporter continued, King himself arrived at the home.

“He stood before the family and said: ‘Soon there will be a neighborhood for Jews here, thank God,’ before reciting the names of the various Palestinian neighborhoods in Jerusalem that he has already helped Judaize,” the reporter added.

The last expulsion in Sheikh Jarrah took place in 2017 against members of the Shamaneh family.

Back then, Aryeh King was reportedly directly involved through his organization, the Israel Land Fund, which assisted in taking over the Shamaneh’s home.



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UN urges Israel to stop demolitions and evacuations in Sheikh Jarrah in West Bank
Illinois congresswoman slams Iron Dome funding and 'theft' of Sheikh Jarrah homes

[Arab coalition launches strikes on military targets at Sanaa airport](#)

Mon, 2021-12-20 21:30

RIYADH: The Arab coalition said it is launching "precise and limited" air strikes on legitimate military targets at Sanaa airport on Monday.

The strikes are a response to Houthi threats and the militia's use of airport facilities to launch cross-border attacks, the coalition said.

The military targets at Sanaa airport included six sites that were being used to organize drone attacks.

The coalition added that it had lifted protection off specific sites at Sanaa airport in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Earlier, the coalition asked civilians to immediately evacuate the airport.

It called on the workers of international and humanitarian organisations in the airport to immediately evacuate as it has taken “legal measures to deal with the threat operationally.”

Spokesman Brig. Gen. Turki Al-Maliki told Al Arabiya TV that the coalition had informed the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of its intention to strike an hour before the airport was hit.

He added that the coalition makes sure that there is no collateral damage to civilians during strikes and that it has a consistent policy and defense strategy in Yemen.

The coalition will respond firmly to the militia’s futile targeting of civilian objects, Al-Maliki said.



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Yemen: 100 Houthis killed, vehicles destroyed in coalition air raids in Marib
Iran must end its ‘lethal’ support to Houthis, US envoy tells UN

[Animal group finds loving homes overseas for Syria's stray cats, dogs](#)

Mon, 2021-12-20 19:34

DUBAI: Syria might not be the first place people think of when looking to adopt a stray dog or cat, but Dutch student Celine de Jong recently did just that and she could not be more pleased.

It all started with an internet search that led De Jong, who volunteers at an animal ambulance service, to the Facebook page of the Syrian Team for Animal Rescue.

Established five years ago, the nonprofit organization provides shelter for nearly 2,000 cats and dogs in southern Syria. Its Facebook page has more than 100,000 followers.

"They're having a hard time in Syria, also the animals," De Jong told Arab News from Assendelft, about 15 km northwest of Amsterdam.



Dutch student Celine de Jong with her two-legged cats Zaina and Holly.
(@syrianteamanimalrescue)

“Star has a lot of cats and dogs that have been hit by cars or shot at. Many have missing legs. We have disabled cats in Holland, but not stray animals. I

wanted to adopt a stray cat.”

De Jong contacted the Star team and this month her new pets – two-legged cats Zaina and Holly – arrived at their new home in the Netherlands.

Although the adoption process took almost six months to complete, as the animals had to have a rabies shot and a blood test, which then had to be approved by a laboratory in Europe, De Jong said it was worth the wait.

“You’re really saving their lives,” she said, adding that she hopes one day Zaina and Holly will be able to be fitted with prosthetic legs.

De Jong and her mother Petra traveled to Beirut to collect the animals, where they were taken after leaving Syria.

The pair also met representatives from Star and donated food, medicine and toys to help other sick animals.

The De Jongs are not the only foreign family to come to Star’s aid. Its founder Hanadi Al-Mouhtaseb said other animals once cared for by Star are now living in Belgium, Germany and the US. “They’re very cooperative, there’s great humanity,” she told Arab News of the foreign adopters.

Al-Mouhtaseb began looking after injured animals at her home before setting up an open-air shelter in the Sahnaya area outside Damascus. Today, Star is run by volunteers and funded by public donations, but it is not easy.

The shelter struggles to get the veterinary equipment and medication it needs to treat its animals, many of which have serious injuries when they arrive.

While the war and political unrest in Syria has made it difficult to get support for Star, Al-Mouhtaseb said she was also trying to educate people, especially children, about the need to care about animals and not abuse them.

“If you walk up to a child and tell them what they’re doing is bad, they say, ‘Does an animal feel anything anyway?’” she said. “But if there wasn’t all this harm, we wouldn’t need an association.”















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Six killed by Daesh in Syria's Al-Hol camp this month
Western coalition in Syria shoots down menacing drone