

UN agency for Palestinian refugees has urgent budget crisis

Author:

Sat, 2021-10-02 23:58

NEW YORK: The UN agency helping Palestinian refugees is facing an “existential” budget crisis and appealing for urgent funding of \$120 million to keep essential education, health care and other services running, the agency’s chief said.

“We keep struggling, running after cash,” Philippe Lazzarini said.

“The financial situation is a real existential threat on the organization, and we should not underestimate this because it might force the organization to decrease services,” he added, and if that happens “we risk to collapse very quickly.”

At stake is the agency’s ability to keep 550,000 children in school, provide healthcare for thousands, and pay the salaries for its 28,000 staffers in November and December, Lazzarini explained.

The UN Relief and Works Agency known as UNRWA was established to provide education, healthcare, food and other services to the 700,000 Palestinians who fled or were forced from their homes during the war surrounding Israel’s establishment in 1948.

Lazzarini added that it wasn’t clear for agency officials “if yes or no we will be able to keep our activities in November and December.”

He emphasized the importance of the US returning as a major donor to UNRWA this year after former president Donald Trump stopped all funding in 2018. President Joe Biden’s administration announced in April it would provide a total of \$235 million to projects in the West Bank and Gaza as well as to UNRWA.

But Lazzarini said the US funding has been offset by decreased funding from other donors as a result of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and no information from potential donors in the Middle East.

He pointed to the UK’s decrease in its overseas aid budget from 0.7 percent to 0.5 percent of GDP, and the decline in Arab support to UNRWA from \$200 million in 2018 to about \$89 million in 2019 and \$37 million in 2020.

He said UNRWA’s uncertain funding has generated anxiety among Palestinian refugees that the “lifeline” provided by the agency could be weakened, and a feeling of being abandoned by the international community.

In an effort to reverse this trend, Lazzarini said Sweden and Jordan will be co-hosting a conference in mid-November in Brussels whose main aim is to ensure more predictable multi-year funding for the agency.

He said UNRWA is seeking \$800 million a year for three years for its “core” activities – education, healthcare, and social protection and safety nets.

UNRWA also has a separate emergency budget which provides humanitarian aid to Gaza and Syria, he said. This year that budget was around \$500 million, and he said it will probably be similar in 2022.

There are now 5.7 million Palestinian refugees, including their children and grandchildren, but Lazzarini said UNRWA only helps the 550,000 in school and 2.8 million who have health benefits.



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[US-China rivalry forcing Arab Gulf](#)

states to make impossible choices, UAE's Anwar Gargash tells World Policy Conference

Sat, 2021-10-02 23:32

ABU DHABI: Economic and strategic competition between the US and China is putting immense pressure on the Arab Gulf states, a top Emirati official told delegates on the second day of the 14th World Policy Conference in Abu Dhabi.

Anwar Gargash, the UAE's presidential diplomatic adviser and former minister of state for foreign affairs, said the geopolitical rivalry is forcing countries in the region to make impossible choices concerning their strategic and business partnerships.

Gargash urged the international community to speak up against such pressure and not to become pawns in a new Cold War. "I think if this message comes across to the Chinese, to the Americans and to others, I think this will, in itself, create, I would call, a moral collective," he said on Saturday.

"We're all worried, very much, by a looming Cold War. That is bad news for all of us because the idea of choosing is problematic in the international system, and I think this is not going to be an easy ride."

The UAE and other Arab Gulf countries have long been close US allies. However, China has since emerged as a powerful economic player in the region and its thirst for crude oil has made it the Gulf's biggest buyer, presenting nations like the UAE with a dilemma.

"This is going to be a big challenge for all of us," Gargash said. "For us here in the UAE, the United States is our predominant strategic partner but China is our number one or two – with India – economic partner."



Although the Chinese offer lucrative opportunities for trade and business partnerships, Gargash hinted the UAE considers the Americans a more transparent strategic ally.

“China will continue to be extremely important,” Gargash said. “While America’s direction is something you can glean from various readings and conferences and discussions, understanding China’s direction, I think, is more opaque.”

What began as a trade war over China’s economic policies has since evolved into a clash between differing ideologies, leading to mounting tensions in the South China Sea and schisms between the US and its traditional European allies.

US-China bilateral relations nosedived in 2018 when then-President Donald Trump imposed punitive tariffs on China. This was followed by restrictions on China’s access to US tech products and foreign investments involving security concerns and by allegations of unfair Chinese commercial practices.

President Joe Biden has since amplified his predecessor’s policies by strengthening anti-China alliances and implementing additional sanctions. Borrowing from the Cold War playbook, Biden has characterized the US-China conflict as “a battle between the utility of democracies in the 21st century and autocracies.”



Analysts believe US-China tensions are driven less by economic realities and more by great power rivalries – exacerbated by mutual mistrust over each other’s strategic aims.

Gargash highlighted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international affairs, arguing it demonstrated the need for greater cooperation rather than confrontation.

“We are really seeing several dimensions to the changes in the international system,” he said. “I think, on the one hand, the pandemic makes it very very clear that our geostrategic priorities need not only be political ... but it can be about other issues.

“It will need, actually, from all of us, an understanding ... that confrontation is not the way forward, and communication is the way forward.

“It doesn’t mean that we will be able to change Iran’s perception of its role in the region, or Turkey’s perception of its role in the region, or how we see the Arab world and how it should come back to a more lively regional system. But at the same time I think we need to also understand that it is extremely important that we avoid confrontations.”



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Biden calls Xi as US-China relationship grows more fraught

[France's Macron discussed Tunisia situation with President Saied](#)

Sat, 2021-10-02 22:21

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron discussed the political situation in Tunisia with President Kais Saied, and Saied told Macron that a new government would be formed in the coming days, Macron's Elysee department said on Saturday.

On Friday, Tunisia's parliament speaker Rached Ghannouchi declared the assembly in session and urged lawmakers to resume work, defying Saied's suspension of the assembly in a new escalation of the country's political crisis.

Saied has been under domestic and international pressure to name a government after his intervention in July, when he dismissed the prime minister, suspended parliament and assumed executive authority.



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[Algeria recalls ambassador to France as tensions rise](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sat, 2021-10-02 15:55

ALGIERS: Algeria decided Saturday to recall its ambassador to France for

consultations, as diplomatic tensions mount with Paris.

The move comes after France's President Emmanuel Macron made critical remarks about Algeria published in French daily Le Monde in which he said the former French colony was ruled by a "political-military system".

"Algeria recalls its ambassador (Mohamed Antar-Daoud) from Paris for consultations," state television said, quoting a statement from the presidency.

It said a longer statement would follow to explain the move.

Le Monde on Saturday quoted Macron as saying Algeria has an "official history" which has been "totally re-written".

He said this history was "not based on truths" but "on a discourse of hatred towards France", according to Le Monde.

The remarks, widely picked up by Algerian media, came in a meeting earlier this week between Macron and relatives of figures from Algeria's war of independence.

It is the second time that Algeria recalls an ambassador from France.

Algiers also recalled its ambassador in May 2020 after French media broadcast a documentary about Algeria's pro-democracy Hirak protest movement.

Saturday's move comes amid tense ties following a decision by Paris to reduce the number of visas granted to citizens from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.

The Algerian foreign ministry summoned the French ambassador on Wednesday to protest the visa ruling.

France on Tuesday said it would sharply reduce the number of visas granted to people from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, accusing the former French colonies of not doing enough to allow illegal immigrants to return.

Algeria's foreign ministry handed "a formal protest" to French ambassador Francois Gouyette.

It called the visa reduction an "unfortunate act" that caused "confusion and ambiguity as to its motivation and its scope".

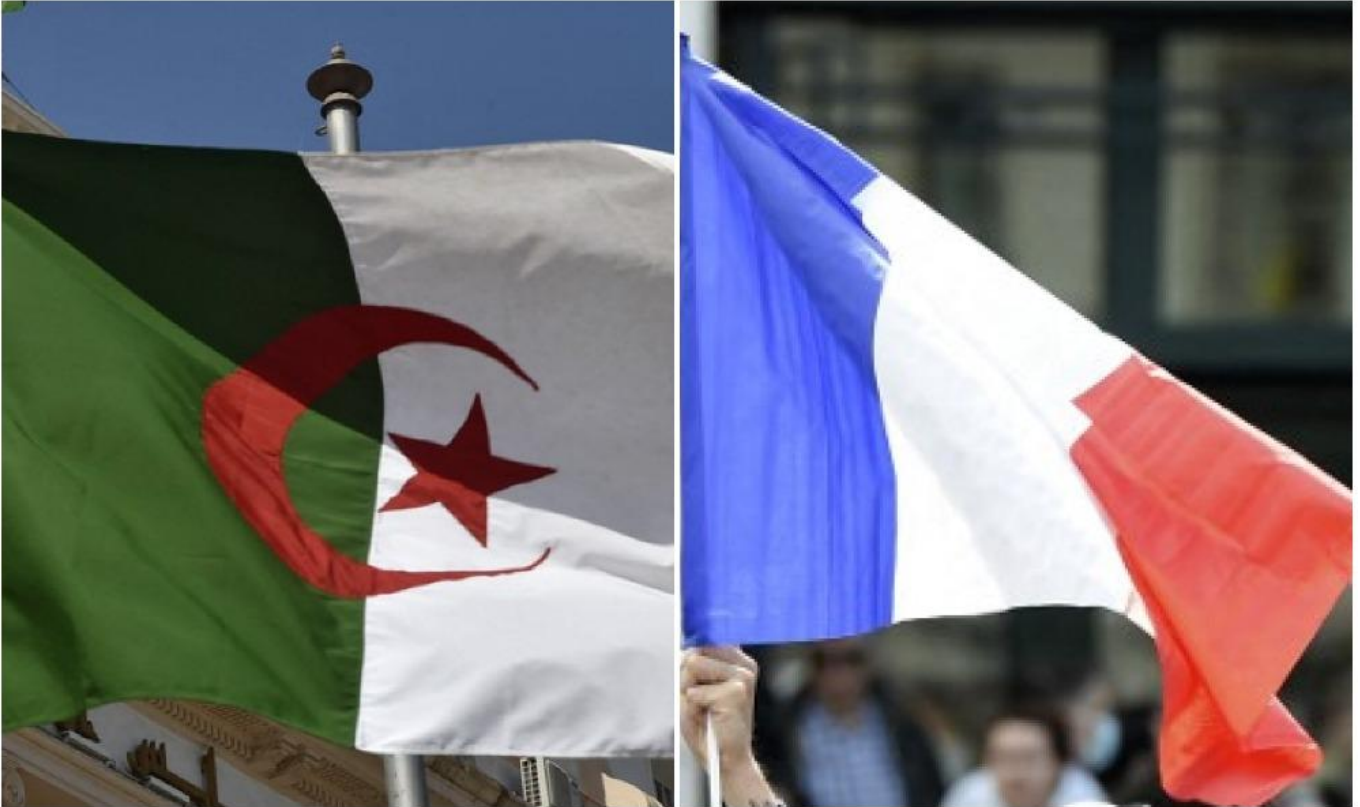
Morocco's Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita has described the French move as "unjustified".

There has not been yet an official reaction from Tunisia.

French government spokesman Gabriel Attal told Europe 1 radio on Tuesday that the visa reduction decision was "unprecedented".

Paris made that choice, he said, because Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia "are refusing to take back nationals who we do not want or cannot keep in France".

The radio said Macron took the decision a month ago after failed diplomatic efforts with the three North African countries.



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[Efforts ongoing to resume the Renaissance Dam negotiations, says Egyptian minister](#)

Sat, 2021-10-02 16:06

CAIRO: Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said there was currently communication between the Democratic Republic of Congo and the three countries involved in negotiations about the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

Ethiopia says the dam on its Blue Nile is crucial to its economic development and providing power to its population.

Egypt views the dam as a grave threat to its Nile water supplies, on which it is almost entirely dependent. Sudan, another downstream country, has

expressed concern about the safety of the dam and the impact on its own dams and water stations.

Shoukry said his country was “always ready to engage in negotiations,” but stressed the importance of having a legal and binding agreement on filling and operating the dam’s reservoir based on the outcome of a UN Security Council session.

He described the council’s statement on the dam as a “great achievement” that came after a lot of hard work to reach a consensus between the body’s 14 member states, including its permanent members.

He said a DRC delegation had visited Egypt and expressed a number of ideas, and that there were currently high-level communications under the auspices of Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi.

“The goal is to reach a binding legal agreement on filling and operating the dam within a short, pre-announced period, and that there be an enhanced framework of observers assisting the African Union to provide solutions and proposals,” Shoukry said.

He also responded to statements from Ethiopian officials saying they would refuse to sign any binding agreement: “It is propaganda for Ethiopian consumption and a challenge to the international community. It proves that Egypt has flexibility as a responsible country and it casts shadows on the actions of the Ethiopian government. Egypt does not set pre-conditions for engaging in negotiations.”

The minister explained that his country involved Ethiopia in “good faith,” but, after a long period of negotiations, both Egypt and Sudan felt these negotiations were “endless.”

“We place our trust in Tshisekedi that negotiations will resume in accordance with what was approved by the African Union office, as well as the outcomes of the presidential statement issued by the Security Council. If the Ethiopian side has the desire to reach an agreement, we are fully prepared.

“If this intransigence continues, this does not indicate a comfortable situation and I predict more tension at the regional level. I have emphasised many times that the matter is related to preserving Egypt’s water needs, and we have seen even after the first and the second filling that Egypt is taking measures that secure its needs and can continue to provide the required protection in different ways.”

The dam negotiations between Sudan, Ethiopia and Egypt have been suspended since the failure of the last round held in Kinshasa.

Over the course of previous rounds, Cairo and Khartoum insisted on reaching a binding agreement before the second filling, which Addis Ababa has already implemented.



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