

Biden, Bennett agree Iran should never acquire nuclear weapons in White House talks

Fri, 2021-08-27 22:13

WASHINGTON D.C.: US President Joe Biden told Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett in White House talks on Friday that he was putting "diplomacy first" to try to rein in Iran's nuclear program but if negotiations fail he would be prepared to turn to other unspecified options.

In brief remarks before reporters were ushered out of the Oval Office, both leaders touched on Iran, one of the thorniest issues between the Biden administration and Israel, but mostly papered over disagreements.

Biden said he and Bennett discussed "the threat from Iran and our commitment to ensure Iran never develops a nuclear weapon."

"We're putting diplomacy first and we'll see where that takes us. But if diplomacy fails, we're ready to turn to other options," Biden added, without offering specifics.

After a one-day delay due to a deadly suicide bombing in Kabul during the chaotic US evacuation from Afghanistan, Biden and Bennett held their first meeting seeking to reset US-Israeli relations and narrow differences over how to deal with Iran's nuclear developments.

But the meeting, the first since Biden and Bennett took office this year, was eclipsed by Thursday's attack outside Kabul airport that killed at least 92 people, including 13 US service members, confronting Biden with the worst crisis of his young presidency.

"The mission there ... is dangerous and now it's come with a significant loss of American personnel, but it's a worthy mission," Biden told reporters after his one-on-one talks with Bennett.

US forces helping to evacuate Afghans desperate to flee new Taliban rule were on alert for more attacks.

Bennett, a far-right politician who ended Benjamin Netanyahu's 12-year run as prime minister in June, was expected to press Biden to harden his approach to Iran and back out of negotiations aimed at reviving an international nuclear deal with Tehran that Trump abandoned.

US-Iran negotiations have stalled as Washington awaits the next move by Iran's new hardline president.

"I was happy to hear your clear words that Iran will never be able to acquire a nuclear weapon," Bennett told Biden. "You emphasized that you'll try the diplomatic route but there's other options if that doesn't work out," he

added, also stopping short of identifying the possibilities.

Bennett has been just as adamant as Netanyahu was in pledging to do whatever is necessary to prevent Iran from building a nuclear weapon. Iran consistently denies it is seeking a bomb.

Bennett told reporters at the White House that Israel has developed a “comprehensive strategy” to keep Iran away from nuclear breakout and stop its “regional aggression.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Middle East](#)

[Israel](#)

[US](#)

[Iran](#)

Israel's Bennett calls election of new Iranian president a “final wake-up call” Biden vows to finish Kabul evacuation, avenge US deaths

Lebanon's Hezbollah agrees to third shipment of Iranian fuel

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1630091752064427600

Fri, 2021-08-27 22:18

BEIRUT: The leader of Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah group, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, said on Friday a third vessel of Iranian fuel was agreed to ease crippling shortages in the country.

"We have agreed to start loading a third vessel," Nasrallah said in a televised speech.

"The coming days will prove those doubtful about the shipments arriving with fuel wrong ... and our words will be clear when the first vessel reaches Lebanon."

On Sunday Nasrallah had said the first vessel carrying Iranian fuel for Lebanon had already departed.

Hezbollah's foes in Lebanon have warned of dire consequences from the purchase, saying it risked sanctions being imposed on a country whose economy has been in meltdown for nearly two years.

Prime Minister-designate Najib Mikati said earlier on Friday in an interview with Saudi-owned Al Hadath television he was against anything that would harm Lebanon's interests but also asked critics of the Iranian fuel deals to provide help so that the country would not have to resort to them.

Nasrallah blamed the country's economic crisis on what he called an economic siege by the United States adding that so-called Caesar sanctions imposed by Washington on Syria had harmed Lebanon.

"Go ahead and give Lebanon an exemption for Iranian gasoline and diesel ... go ahead and give Lebanon an exemption from Caesar," Nasrallah said, addressing the United States in his speech.

Lebanon's worsening fuel shortages reached a crunch point this month threatening to bring daily life to a halt.

Nasrallah also urged top politicians to stop debating names for the new Cabinet and urgently form a government.

"It is high time this debate now ends," he said.

Lebanon has been run by the caretaker government of Prime Minister Hassan Diab, who resigned with his Cabinet after a massive Beirut port blast ripped through the capital a year ago.

Mikati is the third prime minister-designate since then to attempt to form a government with President Michel Aoun, a Hezbollah ally.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[Hezbollah](#)

[Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah](#)

[Iran](#)

US offers \$5 mln reward for information leading to the capture of 'key' aide to Lebanese Hezbollah Hariri warns of sanctions risk as Hezbollah orders Iranian oil for Lebanon

[Lebanon's Mikati says he still faces big hurdles to forming cabinet](#)

Fri, 2021-08-27 20:52

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Prime Minister-designate Najib Mikati said on Friday he still had to overcome major hurdles to forming a new government, amid a deep economic and political crisis that has left the country with a caretaker administration for a year.

Mikati, the third person picked to try to form a government since last year, told television network Al Hadath that the situation in Lebanon remained

grave.

Forming a government is a necessary first step to secure international support to help pull Lebanon out of its deepest crisis since its 1975-1990 civil war. The currency has collapsed, while medicines and fuel are running out.

Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, a heavily armed Shi'ite movement back by Iran and under US sanctions, has said Iranian fuel shipments were on their way to help ease shortages.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

Asked about Nasrallah's comments, Mikati said he was against anything that would harm Lebanon's interests.

"We will not let anyone lead us to new sanctions," he said. "But I tell the critics and the Arab League give us a candle, we can't say no to the shipment without having an alternative."

The prime minister's post is held by a Sunni according to Lebanon's sectarian power-sharing system.

Lebanon has been run by the caretaker government of Prime Minister Hassan Diab, who resigned with his cabinet after a massive Beirut port blast ripped through the capital a year ago.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Middle East](#)

[Lebanon](#)

[Najib Mikati](#)

UN chief calls on Lebanon leaders to form effective government
Starved of electricity, Lebanon picks Dubai's ENOC to swap Iraqi fuel

[Lebanese parliament tells judge he can't subpoena PM Diab](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1630069437002404500

Fri, 2021-08-27 12:23

BEIRUT: The Lebanese parliament on Friday told the judge who is investigating last year's Beirut port explosion that he had exceeded his powers by issuing a subpoena for caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab after he failed to show up for questioning.

Judge Tarek Bitar, leading the inquiry into the huge explosion, issued requests in July to question Diab and other top officials, including former ministers, who were charged by his predecessor with negligence over the blast.

All have denied any wrongdoing.

In a letter to the prosecutor, the secretary general of parliament said the subpoena fell outside Bitar's jurisdiction.

The explosion on Aug. 4, 2020 was caused by a massive quantity of ammonium nitrate left unsafely at the port for years. It killed more than 200 people, injured thousands and devastated swathes of capital.

Many people in Lebanon are furious that no senior officials have been brought to account.

The inquiry has repeatedly stalled, with the first lead judge removed in February after a court granted the request of two of the former ministers he had charged with negligence for the disaster.

Influential factions have accused Bitar of bias. The powerful Shiite group Hezbollah this month accused him of playing politics.

Sunni politicians, including former Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri, have objected to the investigator's moves against Diab, saying the post of prime minister – reserved for a Sunni in the Lebanese sectarian system – has been singled out.

In a statement late on Thursday, former prime ministers including Hariri said President Michel Aoun, the Maronite Christian head of state, had known about

the chemicals at the port and said he had done nothing effective to avoid the blast.

They said immunity should be lifted from Aoun, saying the investigation was being directed from the presidential palace.

Aoun responded on Friday saying the accusations in the statement were unfortunate, especially given that he had already said in July he was willing to testify.

Bitar has not commented on accusations that he is pursuing a political agenda.

After the blast, Aoun said he had been informed about the chemicals and directed the Supreme Defense Council, an umbrella group of security and military agencies chaired by the president, to "do what is necessary." He has denied responsibility.

Some MPs have been pressing for the probe into senior officials to be referred to a special council that hears cases against former presidents and ministers. Critics fear this will effectively derail the judicial inquiry.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Lebanon](#)

[Hassan Diab](#)

[Tarek Bitar](#)

Beirut blast judge issues subpoena for PM Diab after no-show Lebanon's PM Diab warns country is a few days away from social explosion

Erdogan weighing risks of Kabul airport deployment amid Turkey-Taliban talks

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1630051707041019900

Fri, 2021-08-27 07:47

ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday that Ankara had not made a final decision on a Taliban request for support to run Kabul airport after foreign forces withdraw, citing security concerns and uncertainty in Afghanistan.

However, he added that talks were still underway with the militant group.

“We have held our first talks with the Taliban, which lasted for three and a half hours. If necessary, we will hold similar talks again.

“The Taliban have made a request regarding the operation of Kabul airport. They say, ‘we’ll ensure security and you can operate it.’ But we have not made a decision yet because there is always a possibility of death and such things there,” Erdogan told a news conference in Istanbul before leaving for Bosnia.

The president said that “calm should be restored in Kabul” before a decision was made on the airport.

He added that there was a risk of getting “sucked in” to security flare-ups and subsequent conflict.

The talks were reportedly held at the military zone of the airport where the Turkish embassy is temporarily based.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

Erdogan’s comments came as US forces helping to evacuate Afghans braced for more attacks while racing to complete their mission before the Aug. 31 deadline set by US President Joe Biden.

At least 13 US military personnel and more than 60 Afghans died in Daesh

attacks around Kabul airport on Thursday.

The civilian section of the airport has been on the US agenda as well.

“A functioning state, a functioning economy, a government that has some semblance of a relationship with the rest of the world, needs a functioning commercial airport,” State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

Hande Firat, a pro-government journalist, said that a private Turkish company or Turkish Airlines, Turkey’s national flag carrier, might operate the Kabul airport if the necessary security precautions are taken.

Firat added that Turkey requested the establishment of a special security system backed by a private security company, rather than rely solely on armed Taliban members.

Many analysts said that if Turkey assumes the responsibility of running the airport, it could present a unique opportunity for Ankara to build leverage over the Western community as a fellow NATO ally.

“Thursday’s attacks, as well as the uncertainty looming over the Taliban’s consolidation of power, show that Turkey might enter a risky and highly volatile security environment,” Magdalena Kirchner, director of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation office in Kabul, told Arab News.

According to Kirchner, without Turkish or allied troops on the ground – or a fully operating embassy – Ankara would have to rely on Taliban forces for the protection of Turkish citizens and private companies.

“With key state institutions like the police and other security forces undergoing major changes, Turkey might find it hard to rely on Afghan intelligence agencies or security. Beyond arrangements with the Taliban, Ankara might also resort to private military contractors,” she told Arab News.

Turkey has about 600 troops in Afghanistan. Last month, the Taliban issued a warning that it would consider all Turkish forces as “occupiers.”

Marc Pierini, an analyst at Carnegie Europe, said that the devastating bombings on Thursday proved that providing security near the airport is “extremely difficult,” despite assurances by the Taliban.

“If Turkey was to take charge of security inside the airport, it would be entirely dependent on the Taliban’s security policy and performance outside the airport’s perimeter. And it would operate without other NATO forces around. At this point in time, such an operation looks like a very risky proposition,” he told Arab News.

The deployment of troops at Kabul airport has been the subject of intense talks between Ankara and Washington over recent months, with some financial, logistical and diplomatic conditions attached.

Kirchner said that cooperation at Kabul airport could serve as a test for

“normalizing” relations between Western states and the Taliban.

“The airport continues to be the major hub for any humanitarian, diplomatic or development efforts by the Taliban to overcome sanctions and their international isolation. It also helps the international community assist Afghan communities in need, provide consular support to citizens in the country and, if possible, support Afghanistan’s social and economic development,” she said.

Aydin Sezer, an Ankara-based expert on Middle East politics, said: “The negotiations between Erdogan and his US counterpart Joe Biden concentrated on running the military section of the airport, through which humanitarian assistance would be channeled to the country,” he told Arab News.

He added that running the civilian part of the airport would be a “simple commercial operation.”

Sezer said: “The Taliban are reportedly conducting talks with Russia for the same mission. So, it is unclear for now who will assume this responsibility. One thing is for sure: These talks will be used for domestic popularity purposes.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Turkey](#)

[Taliban](#)

[Recep Tayyip Erdogan](#)

[Afghanistan](#)

Erdogan says Turkey can run Kabul airport if US meets conditions
Daesh attack on Kabul airport kills 60 Afghans, 12 US troops