

# External aid critical to avoiding greater Syria catastrophe: US official

Fri, 2021-06-25 21:45

LONDON: Senior US state department officials have backed calls for an extension of a UN measure allowing cross-border aid into Syria, saying that it is “critical to avoiding a greater humanitarian catastrophe.”

In a press briefing attended by Arab News on Friday, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Joey Hood outlined the US perspective on humanitarian and political developments on the ground in Syria. He also discussed the continued importance of confronting Daesh remnants both militarily and ideologically.

“The US supports all forms of assistance for the Syrian people, including cross-line assistance from Damascus,” Hood said.

Cross-line assistance is named as such to reflect that it involves aid traveling across the front lines of the conflict, from government-held to rebel-held territory.

“The truth is, cross-line assistance alone cannot meet the current needs in Syria,” Hood said. “Cross-border assistance is critical to avoiding a greater humanitarian catastrophe there.”

For this reason, Hood said, the US fully supports efforts to renew a UN Security Council-approved cross-border aid operation into Syria for another year.

The future of this aid lifeline into Syria was thrown into doubt this past week, when Russian President Vladimir Putin, who holds veto power in the security council, questioned the importance of the cross-border aid operation, arguing that aid can be delivered to northern Syria from the capital Damascus. Russia is a long-time ally of Syrian President Bashar Assad and has supported his government militarily and politically throughout the war.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned on Friday that “a failure to extend the council’s authorization would have devastating consequences.”

During the briefing, Hood also said that the US supports a nationwide ceasefire to ensure the safe delivery of aid and to “alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.”

He added that the US is committed to keeping a “limited military presence in the northeast (of Syria) for the sole purpose of defeating ISIS (Daesh), in partnership with the Syria Democratic Forces, and to stabilize areas liberated by that group.

“Stability in Syria and the greater region can only be achieved through a

political process that represents the will of all Syrians,” Hood said. “We are committed to working with allies, partners, and the UN to ensure that a durable political solution remains within reach.”

He added: “The international community must renew its shared goal to ensure the protection, dignity, and human rights of the Syrian people. There can be no sustainable end to the conflict without progress in this area.”

Patrick Worman, acting director of the Office of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, warned that despite Daesh’s territorial defeat, it “remains a determined enemy. There is still much work to be done in Iraq and Syria.”

He said that the Joe Biden administration is committed to finishing the fight against Daesh and that this extends to countering their growing influence in other countries, notably in West Africa and the Sahel, where Daesh-affiliated groups have been gaining strength.

The US, he said, would continue to provide support to Iraq in its counter-insurgency operation against Daesh, and that community outreach work would be necessary to counter the group’s “depraved ideology.”

“In addition to security, we must also address remaining humanitarian stabilization and early-recovery gaps to help victims of ISIS’ atrocities and others impacted by the conflict recover, and thus minimize ISIS’ recruitment and resurgence ability,” Worman said.

“As part of this civilian effort, ensuring ISIS members are held accountable for their crimes and promoting community-based reconciliation will be critical for countering ISIS messaging and combating ISIS’ depraved ideology.”



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UN chief warns no Syria cross-border aid would be 'devastating' Courage at forefront of World Refugee Day mural by Syrian artist

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## [Tunisian PM Hichem Mechichi contracts COVID-19](#)

Fri, 2021-06-25 19:37

TUNIS: Tunisia's Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi has been infected with the coronavirus, the government said on Friday.

Mechichi received a COVID-19 vaccine last month.

The prime minister will cancel his meetings and continue to work remotely, the government statement added.

Tunisia is seeing a significant increase in COVID-19 cases, with intensive care wards almost full, health authorities said adding that the situation is catastrophic.

After successfully containing the virus in the first wave last year, Tunisia is grappling with a rise in infections. The positive cases rate now is 36%. In total, Tunisia has recorded 395,000 coronavirus cases and about 14,406 deaths.



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## [EU chief warns Erdogan over north Cyprus visit](#)

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Fri, 2021-06-25 17:54

BRUSSELS: EU chief Ursula von der Leyen on Friday warned Turkey's leader not to jeopardize a push for better ties with the bloc by inflaming tensions on an upcoming trip to Cyprus.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said he will travel to Turkish-controlled northern Cyprus on July 20 for the anniversary of Ankara's 1974 invasion that led to the division of the island.

The controversial visit comes as the EU – of which Cyprus is a member – is looking to improve ties with its strategic eastern neighbor after tensions spiked in the eastern Mediterranean last year.

"This is a very sensitive topic for us. And we are very clear that we will of course observe how this visit will go and that we will never, ever accept as a European Union a two-state solution," von der Leyen told a press conference after an EU summit in Brussels.

"These clear messages have been sent. I said it personally to the president. So it's up to him now to set a positive signal."

Cyprus remains one of the major bones of contention between the EU and Ankara, after a push for two states from Turkish-Cypriot leaders backed by Erdogan helped torpedo efforts in April to restart peace talks.

Cyprus has been split since 1974, when Turkey occupied the northern third in response to a coup by an Athens-backed junta seeking to annex Cyprus to Greece.

The island is divided between areas controlled by EU member the Republic of Cyprus and the breakaway Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, recognized only by Ankara.

Erdogan sparked anger from the Greek-speaking south last year with a visit to the beachfront area of Varosha, a one-time luxury resort turned ghost town along a UN buffer zone.

The EU in March held out a string of incentives to convince Erdogan to make good on pledges to mend fraught relations with the bloc.

But EU leaders meeting Thursday left Ankara disappointed, issuing a critical statement on rights in Turkey and failing to make clear progress on a customs treaty or commitment on aid.

Brussels is readying a plan to provide Turkey with 3.5 billion euros (\$4.2 billion) in extra funding from 2021 to 2024 to help it host millions of refugees from Syria.

The leaders told the European Commission executive body to present a formal proposal "without delay."

The Turkish foreign ministry said the statement "came well short of what was expected or necessary."



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Turkey disappointed at EU summit outcome  
North Cyprus head stands firm in row over Turkey criticism

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## [IAEA wants 'immediate response' from Iran on extending monitoring deal](#)

Fri, 2021-06-25 17:45

VIENNA: Iran has not responded to the UN atomic watchdog on extending their monitoring agreement that expired overnight, the agency said on Friday, calling for an "immediate" answer on the issue that threatens to derail wider talks on the Iran nuclear deal.

The agreement continues the International Atomic Energy Agency's collection of data on some of Tehran's activities, cushioning the blow of Iran's

decision in February to reduce cooperation with the agency.

“An immediate response from Iran is needed in this regard,” the IAEA said in a statement summarising a report by its chief Rafael Grossi to its 35-nation Board of Governors that was also seen by Reuters.

The agreement stipulates the IAEA cannot access the data collected until a later date, provided the agreement holds. Grossi wrote to Iran last week “to understand Iran’s position regarding the possible continued collection, recording and retention of data,” the report said.

As of Friday, Iran had not replied or indicated whether it intends to maintain the current arrangement, it said.

“The Director General stresses the vital importance of continuing the Agency’s necessary verification and monitoring activities in Iran, including the uninterrupted collection and storage of data by its monitoring and surveillance equipment,” it added.

Iran and the United States have been holding indirect talks on reviving the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and major powers that imposed restrictions on Tehran’s nuclear program in exchange for a lifting of international sanctions.



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# [Iraqi border authority seizes dangerous chemicals in Basra](#)

Fri, 2021-06-25 15:36

DUBAI: Iraq's Border Ports Authority seized a hoard of dangerous chemicals in Umm Qasr port in Basra on Friday, state news agency INA reported.

The authority said the chemicals were flammable.

"With the help and cooperation of the National Intelligence Service, we have seized two containers, the first one contains dangerous flammable chemicals which have been left for a long time at the port," INA quoted the statement. The second container has prohibited second-hand motorcycles which were being prepared for smuggling, the report added.

"Two reports have been organized with what was seized and were referred to the judicial authorities to take necessary legal measures," INA quoted the statement.



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