

Turkey reopens consulate in northern Iraq

Fri, 2021-05-07 18:53

ANKARA: Turkey has reopened its consulate in Mosul, in northern Iraq. The consulate has been closed for the past seven years, since Daesh seized control of the city.

At that time, Daesh held 49 consulate staff – including then-Consul General Ozturk Yilmaz – hostage for over three months.

Ankara has announced several times in recent years that it intended to reopen its consulate in Mosul, a city that was once part of the Ottoman Empire.

Turkey recently appointed a new ambassador to Iraq as part of its efforts to boost its relations with its neighbor, and Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu recently announced plans to set up a military base in Iraq's northern Dohuk region, in addition to a number of military outposts that Turkey has held in the Kurdistan Region since the mid-Nineties.

The aim of the new base is to restrict the movement of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Dohuk lies on a strategic route to the Qandil Mountains, where the militants' hideouts are based.

On April 14, a missile hit a Turkish military base in Bashiga, near Mosul, killing a Turkish soldier. On the same day, Erbil International Airport, which hosts US coalition forces, was hit by an explosives-laden drone.

In late April, the Turkish army launched a new offensive against PKK bases in northern Iraq, and Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar visited a military base in the Kurdistan Region.

However, that operation and Akar's visit – which took place "without coordination or prior approval from authorities" – sparked anger from Baghdad. The Iraqi government sent a formal letter of protest to Turkey's ambassador on May 3.

Nicholas A. Heras, senior analyst at the Newlines Institute in Washington, said Turkish military operations in areas south of the Kurdistan Region are problematic because Baghdad is strongly opposed to a larger and more active Turkish military footprint in Iraq.

"Baghdad might be open to intelligence cooperation with Ankara for counter-Daesh operations in areas around Mosul, but that cooperation would likely need to be on terms dictated by Baghdad," Heras told Arab News.

To what extent Turkey's expanded military presence in northern Iraq will enable it to launch its long-rumored operation against the PKK in Sinjar is still a matter of concern, considering the geopolitical dynamics of the region.

For Heras, any Turkish move against Sinjar would be a non-starter for Baghdad because there is a large People's Mobilization Forces (PMF) presence in that area.

"Many PMF groups are powerful in Baghdad and are resolutely opposed to any moves by Turkey to expand its military reach in Iraq," he said.

The PMF, an Iranian-backed Iraqi militia umbrella group which employs local PKK militias in its cadres, is active in northern Iraq and has claimed responsibility for numerous attacks in recent times.

Ankara has repeatedly announced that it will not allow Sinjar to become a second Qandil – a stronghold for the PKK.

Turkey's February 10 military operation against the PKK on Gare Mountain in Iraqi Kurdistan raised concerns that it was planning an operation in Sinjar, threatening the existence of Iran-backed groups in the area.

It is no secret that Iran strongly opposes Turkey's military presence in Iraq and sees Turkey's potential operation in Sinjar as opposing its own geopolitical interests.

Iran-backed militias are concerned by the growing rapprochement between Ankara and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) that controls the Sinjar area. Both parties have urged the PKK and Iran-backed militias to leave the region.

"The Iranians view Turkey, especially (Turkish President Recep Tayyip) Erdogan, as a rival for influence in the Levant. There's expanding Turkish influence in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria that the Iranians want to limit," Heras said. "Whenever and wherever possible, the Iranians will try to position local forces, such as those in Sinjar, to box Ankara out of more influence in the Levant."



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[Houthis passed up major opportunity by refusing to meet UN envoy: State Department](#)

Fri, 2021-05-07 18:51

WASHINGTON: The US State Department said on Friday the Iran-backed Houthi group had passed up a “major opportunity” to demonstrate a commitment to peace by refusing to meet with UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths in Muscat.

In a statement, the department also charged that the militia were worsening the humanitarian situation in Yemen by continuing to attack Marib.

“Contradictory to their pronouncements regarding the humanitarian situation in Yemen, the Houthis worsen it by continuing to attack Marib and exacerbating dire conditions for already vulnerable, internally displaced

Yemenis,” Friday’s statement read.

“There is a fair deal on the table that will bring immediate relief to Yemeni people. The Houthis passed up a major opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to peace and to make progress on this proposal by refusing to meet with UN Special Envoy Griffiths in Muscat—especially given the Republic of Yemen Government’s stated readiness to reach an agreement to end the conflict,” it added.

Lenderking recently met with officials from Saudi Arabia, Yemen and permanent members of the UN Security Council in the region to discuss the crisis.

Griffiths also said earlier this week that “we are not where we would like to be in reaching a deal.”

* *With Reuters*



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Arab Parliament denounces Houthis’ banning of Tarawih prayers in areas under their control
Yemen model’s lawyer intimidated as Houthis dismiss ‘soft’

German report reveals how Iran uses proliferation to smuggle illegal goods

Author:

Fri, 2021-05-07 14:30

DUBAI: An intelligence report from Germany revealed on Friday details of how the Islamic Republic uses proliferation techniques to smuggle illicit technology for deadly weapons.

"Proliferation-relevant countries such as Iran, North Korea and Syria, but also Pakistan, try to circumvent safety precautions and legal export regulations and to disguise illegal procurement activities. To do this, they turn to mostly conspiratorial means and methods," wrote the intelligence agency in northernmost state of Schleswig-Holstein," the report explains. "Proliferation is still one of the central tasks of counter-espionage in Schleswig-Holstein," the report adds.

According to the agency, proliferation is the "spread of weapons of mass destruction (ABC weapons) and the necessary know-how, as well as the products used for their manufacture and associated carrier technologies."

ABC commonly refers to atomic, biological and chemical weapons.

The report states that Iran creates state-controlled "neutral" companies to hide the true nature of the purchase from buyers and establishes "illegal procurement networks which belong to the front companies and middlemen."

Iran also uses "detour deliveries over 'third states' in order not to identify the final buyer" and "the use and misuse of inexperienced freight deliverers and transporters," the report added.

Iran also breaks down the deliveries of illegal deliveries into several "individual non-suspicious deliveries to avoid exposing the entire business."

The report also said that Iran "conceals the end user" and the "individual, company or institution with which the goods ultimately remain."

The report cited Iran 19 times in the 218-page report, covering security threats to the state's democracy.

It also said that states such as Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Syria and Russia strive to acquire dual-use goods, items which have both civil and military use.

"Proliferation is a serious threat to security in many regions of the world, including the Federal Republic of Germany and thus for the state of Schleswig-Holstein. The Federal Republic of Germany is one of the most important export nations in the world. The export of military as well as civilian goods are subject therefore to special control," the report added.



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[French foreign minister delivers warning to Lebanese MPs in Beirut](#)

Thu, 2021-05-06 21:30

BEIRUT: French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian stressed during his meetings with Lebanese officials on Thursday that “the French initiative to solve the crisis in forming the Lebanese government is still in force and the responsibility for implementing it rests with the Lebanese.”

Arab News has learned that Le Drian also hinted that sanctions might be imposed against those who obstruct the formation of the new government.

On the eve of his arrival in Beirut, Le Drian tweeted that he would deliver "a strongly worded message to political officials and a message expressing our full solidarity with the Lebanese people. We will deal firmly with those who obstruct the formation of the government, and we have taken national measures, and this is only the beginning."

He also said that his visit to Lebanon "confirms France's solidarity in the field of education, medicine, and archeology as well as its support for the Lebanese who are doing their best for their country."

Following the Beirut port blast in August, French President Emmanuel Macron announced an initiative to help form a government of specialists to help lift Lebanon out of its economic crisis.

However, Macron's initiative has not yet been implemented, so people in Lebanon followed Le Drian's meetings with interest.

Before Le Drian's visit there was speculation that he did not intend to meet with Prime Minister-designate, Saad Hariri, but might meet with the leader of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), Gebran Bassil.

Some had predicted that Hariri would give up his post as PM-designate due to his ongoing disagreement with President Michel Aoun and his political team over the formation of the new government, with Aoun reportedly demanding a 'blocking third' for his allies.

However, after meeting with Aoun, Le Drian also met with Speaker of the Parliament Nabih Berri as well as Hariri.

Aoun's media office reported that, during his meeting with Le Drian, the president said, "Achieving reforms, foremost of which is the financial audit, which constitutes the first item in the French initiative announced on Sept. 1, 2020, is essential for the advancement of Lebanon and restoring the confidence of the Lebanese and the international community. Forming a new government that will enjoy the confidence of parliament is the top priority."

Aoun pledged to "continue exerting efforts to reach practical results in this issue, despite the internal and external obstacles and the lack of response of those concerned, by following the constitutional principles and methodology adopted in forming governments."

He also laid out "the constitutional responsibilities entrusted to the president ... and his responsibility to maintain political and sectarian balance during the formation of the government to ensure that it gains the confidence of parliament" and spoke about the "cost of wasted time to complete the formation process."

The meeting between Aoun and Le Drian lasted for half an hour, after which Le Drian left without making a statement.

Le Drian held meetings at the Senoub Palace with a number of opposition and partisan figures, including leaders of groups protesting against the corruption of the ruling authority. These groups presented their views on the

current reality in Lebanon and their vision of ways in which France could provide assistance to Lebanon to ensure a peaceful transfer of power, stage parliamentary elections, and address financial cases.

However, several groups declined the invitation, including the "Li Haqqi" (I Have My Right) group. Nizar Hassan, a researcher in social movements from that group, told Arab News: "A lengthy discussion took place within the group about the feasibility of attending the meeting with the French minister, and we decided not to attend because there was no great benefit (in doing so)."

He said there were several reasons for this, including "the rejection of France's attempt to bring the political class in Lebanon to the surface to restore it to power again."

Future Movement MP Mohamad Hajjar described the speculation that Le Drian would not meet with Hariri as "illogical."

He said Hariri is committed to "forming a government of specialists to help the country, while another party insists on putting the country on the brink and is dealing with everyone on the basis that either MP Gebran Bassil be the next president or the country will fall into chaos. And Hezbollah is watching."

Lebanon's economic crisis reached a new peak on Thursday when Electricité du Liban (EDL) announcement that it no longer had enough money to buy fuel and that it would "be forced to reduce its production, which would negatively impact the feeding hours in all regions, including the administrative areas of Beirut."

This came hours after the financial prosecutor, Judge Ali Ibrahim, issued a decision to stop the payment of sums owed to the Turkish energy company Karadeniz and its Karpowership branch in Lebanon for power ships chartered to produce electricity.

The judge's decision was based on "preliminary investigations conducted by the Financial Prosecutor's Office into the possibility of brokers, commission, or corruption in the dealership of ships producing electricity" and is intended to "oblige the two aforementioned companies to return \$25 million to the Lebanese state, and to circulate a search and inquiry order against the owners of the two companies."

On Wednesday, the Constitutional Council suspended a law that parliament had approved granting and advance from the treasury to EDL after MPs from the Lebanese Forces Party filed an appeal "because the advance will use the money of the people and depositors remaining in the reserves of the Banque du Liban to finance electricity, and this was described by the MPs as burning people's money."

The Constitutional Council stressed, "If the law violates the constitution, it will be annulled, and if it is not in violation, we will reject the appeal."



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French foreign minister says punitive measures 'only the beginning' ahead of Lebanon visit
France's Le Drian to head to Lebanon May 5-6 for crisis talks

[Blinken reveals uncertainty clouding US-Iran nuclear talks](#)

Thu, 2021-05-06 19:30

LONDON: Negotiators in talks with Iran over curbs to its nuclear program do not yet know if Tehran is willing to make a deal, according to the White House's top diplomat.

"We've been engaged now in Vienna for some weeks with our European partners, with Russia, China, and indirectly ... with Iran," Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the BBC on Thursday.

"We've demonstrated our very seriousness of purpose in terms of wanting to get back into the so-called JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action)," he added.

"What we don't yet know is whether Iran is prepared to make the same decision and move forward."

Blinken warned that, having progressively walked back on nuclear curbs hammered out as part of the 2015 deal agreed with world powers, Tehran could acquire nuclear weapons within months.

Under the original deal, from which former US President Donald Trump withdrew in 2018, Iran received billions of dollars' worth of sanctions relief in exchange for strict curbs and heavy monitoring of its nuclear program.

"Right now, unfortunately, Iran has itself lifted many of the constraints imposed on it by the agreement because we pulled out," Blinken said.

"And it's now getting closer and closer again to that point where its breakout time is going to be down to a few months and eventually even less."



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