



Page 2 | NATIONAL
Why Afghan government is pushing more Taliban-style policies

Rightsizing the Afghanistan mission

After President Trump's tirades and tweets on the subject helped persuade Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis to resign two years ...

Page 3 | ECONOMY

Afghanistan calls for Iran's contribution to its mining projects



Kabul
35 / 21



Herat
37 / 24



Nangarhar
39 / 28



Balkh
40 / 27



Heart of Asia

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10 afs



Afghan envoy hails Afghan immigrants' livelihood in Iran

Describing Kerman as an important province for Afghanistan in terms of hosting the largest number of immigrants, the Afghan Ambassador to Tehran hailed the working and living conditions of Afghans immigrants in Kerman.

In his visit to Kerman Province of Iran, Abdul Ghafoor Liwal, the Ambassador of Afghanistan to Tehran described this province as a beautiful and interesting place and hailed the hospitality of Kerman in his last year's visit to Sirjan, Rafsanjan, copper mines, and pistachio orchards.

Stating that Kerman province is important for Afghanistan in terms of its largest number of Afghan immigrants, the envoy announced that all Afghan immigrants are satisfied with ... **P2**



Majority of asylum seekers in July from Afghanistan and Syria

More than half of asylum seekers registered in July hail from Afghanistan and Syria, with 26 requests apiece.

The pandemic has had a marked effect on the number of asylum seekers. Up until 31 July 2020, just 537 requests for international protection had been made in Luxembourg - the same period in 2019 saw twice as many people seeking asylum.

In April, during lockdown, the number of asylum seekers fell to just 10.

To date, the majority of asylum seekers in 2020 come from Syria, Eritrea and Afghanistan.

880 decisions have been made to date in 2020, with 441 people granted refugee status. A quarter of applications have been refused, for being either inadmissible or transferred to another service by the Directorate of Immigration. 56 transfers have taken place under the Dublin Regulation, most of them to Germany, Spain and France. As part of this procedure, 33 people have been transferred to Luxembourg.

This year, the Grand Duchy has processed 45 returns. 29 of these were done on a voluntary basis, while 11 were enforced.

Pakistan sanctions Afghan Taliban to avoid FATF blacklisting



Pakistan has issued sweeping financial sanctions against Afghanistan's Taliban, just as the insurgent group is in the midst of the US-led peace process in the neighbouring country.

The orders, which were made public late on Friday, identified dozens of individuals, including the Taliban's chief peace negotiator Abdul Ghani Baradar and several members of the Haqqani family, including Sirajuddin, the current head of the Haqqani network and deputy head of the Taliban.

The list of sanctioned groups included others besides the Taliban and were

in keeping with a five-year-old United Nations resolution sanctioning the Afghan group and freezing their assets.

Pakistan trying to get off grey list The orders were issued as part of Pakistan's efforts to avoid being blacklisted by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which monitors money laundering and tracks terrorist groups' activities, according to security officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to the media.

Last year the Paris-based group put Islamabad on a grey list.

Until now only Iran and North Korea are blacklisted, which severely restricts a country's international borrowing capabilities.

Pakistan is trying to get off the grey list, said the officials.

There was no immediate response from the Afghan Taliban, but many of the group's leaders are known to own businesses and property in Pakistan. Pakistan-Taliban ties

Many Taliban leaders, including those heading Haqqani network, have lived in Pakistan since the 1980s when they were part of the Afghan mujahedeen and allies of the United States to end the 10-year invasion of Afghanistan

by the former Soviet Union. It ended in February 1989.

Pakistan has denied giving sanctuary to the Taliban following their ouster in 2001 by the US-led coalition but both Washington and Kabul routinely accused Islamabad of giving them a safe haven.

Still, it was Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban that Washington eventually sought to exploit to move its peace negotiations with the insurgent movement forward.

America signed a peace deal with the Taliban on February 29. The deal is intended to end Washington's nearly 20 years of military engagement in Afghanistan and has been touted as Afghanistan's best hope for peace after more than four decades of war. But even as Washington has already begun withdrawing its soldiers, efforts to get talks started between Kabul's political leadership and the Taliban have been stymied by delays in a prisoner release programme.

The two sides are to release prisoners, 5,000 by the government and 1,000 by the Taliban, as a good will gesture ahead of talks. Both sides blame the other for the delays.

The timing of Pakistan's decision to issue the orders could also be seen as a move to pressure the Taliban into a quick start to the intra-Afghan negotiations.

Rashid Becomes Youngest, Fastest Bowler to Complete 300 Wickets

Afghanistan's cricket sensation Rashid Khan on Thursday became the youngest and the fastest bowler to complete 300 wickets in T20 cricket when he dismissed former Afghan captain Mohammad Nabi who plays for the St Lucia Zouks in Caribbean Premier League (CPL).

Despite the loss for Barbados Trident, it was a special match for Khan, who has amazed cricket lovers all over the world with his variation. ... **P3**



Dialogue and negotiation only way out for Afghanistan issue: Wang Yi

Dialogue and negotiation are the only way out for Afghanistan issue, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Friday.

Wang made the remarks to reporters after meeting with Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi in southern China's Hainan Province.

He noted that China hopes relevant parties will uphold the fundamental direction of achieving a political settlement.

It's important to adhere to the basic principle of Afghan-led peace progress and support the idea of "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned" with regard to the issue, and no one should take advantage of the situation for personal gain, Wang said.

The Chinese foreign minister urged all negotiating parties to strive for a



broad and inclusive framework and to include all factions and ethnic groups equally.

At the same time, Afghanistan should unswervingly combat terrorism and pursue a foreign policy of peace and friendship, he added.

Noting that the country is still suffering from challenges such as

poverty, refugees and drug issues in addition to the chaos caused by war, Wang said Afghanistan should stick to the path of solving both symptoms and root causes.

The international community and regional countries should also uphold justice and push the negotiation to achieve peace, he also said. ... **P2**

Afghan envoy...

the working and living conditions in this province and they express satisfaction with the good cooperation of the Bureau for Foreign Immigrants Affairs in Kerman Province in their contacts with the Afghanistan embassy.

Also, Mohammad Javad Fadaei the Governor of Kerman Province, for his part, referred to Iran and Afghanistan similarities in terms of religion, language and common borders, adding, "We have good relations with Afghanistan and I hope that with the opening of the Joint Chamber of the Kerman-Afghanistan, more cooperations will be facilitated and as a result, our trades and investments will be developed."

The governor of Kerman described the residence of Afghans in Iran as a bilateral issue, explaining that Kerman province is also ready to make investments in this neighboring country in order to meet some parts of its needs.

Dialogue and...

Foreign military forces should withdraw in a responsible and orderly manner to prevent terrorist forces from taking the opportunity to cause tumult so as to ensure a smooth transition in Afghanistan, Wang stressed.

As a close neighbor and sincere friend of Afghanistan, China is probably more keen than any other country to see peace and stability in Afghanistan, Wang said, adding that China will continue to be a mediator and facilitator for the Afghan peace and reconciliation process on the basis of respecting the will of all the parties in Afghanistan.

By Scott Peterson

Why Afghan government is pushing more Taliban-style policies

When, to kick-start long-delayed intra-Afghan peace talks, thousands of Afghan delegates gathered to consider a final release of hardened Taliban prisoners, Belquis Roshan held up a sign of protest.

The words on the female lawmaker's banner were clear: "Redeeming" the Taliban amounted to "national treason."

At the podium was President Ashraf Ghani, who had already released 4,600 Taliban prisoners in accord with a U.S.-Taliban agreement signed Feb. 29. He had convened the loya jirga, or traditional council, this month to gain popular approval to free 400 remaining prisoners – from a Taliban list that included men convicted of murder and of conducting high-profile attacks that killed Afghans and foreigners alike.

Ms. Roshan's message was short-lived: She was tackled and thrown to the ground by a female security guard, silenced in an act civil society activists condemn as revealing the fragility of both freedom of speech and women's rights in Afghanistan.

The intra-Afghan peace talks now hang in the balance – they were meant to begin Thursday, after a five-month delay, but have now been postponed indefinitely over the continued prisoner dispute.

Yet at the same time, analysts say, the government has sought in recent months to quietly roll back nearly two decades of increased freedoms by pushing conservative changes to laws governing the family, media, and nongovernmental organizations, moves that, in fact, aren't too far from agenda items of the archconservative Taliban.

The analysts' theories as to why range from Mr. Ghani's past inclinations to centralize government power to a practical need to shore up conservative support ahead of negotiations. But his moves are colliding with the expectations of Afghans who have grown accustomed to expanding freedoms. Many also fear that bringing the Taliban into government – or Taliban battlefield victories – will inevitably lead to a new, less free era. "Jirga is the place to raise voices without limitations; everyone has a right to raise their voice," said Asila Wardak, a women's rights activist and diplomat at Afghanistan's United Nations mission, complaining from the stage about the treatment of Ms. Roshan the day after the incident. "A jirga is not a place to disrespect; it is not a place for beating women."

Ms. Wardak's speech was disrupted by the abusive shouts of several male lawmakers in the hall, including



one man from the conservative southern city of Kandahar – where support for the Taliban remains strong – who stormed the stage and accused the women on it of being "too Western."

"Convergence ... we don't want" "This shows that, at the jirga that is supposed to decide about peace, women had their voices curtailed significantly," says a Kabul-based Western official who asked not to be identified.

"If they can't even get their voices heard at the loya jirga ... how are [women] going to preserve their rights of the last 18 years?" she asks. "We've seen the government portray itself as very progressive, but when it comes to it ... the government barely did anything to sanction those people who tried to shut them up."

The attempted changes to family law, the NGO law, and media law – the last, only made public and sparking an outcry over censorship and free speech concerns after it was quietly approved by the Cabinet and sent to parliament in June – illustrate the challenge ahead for Afghan civil society trying to solidify gains as the talks with the Taliban approach.

"This coincidence of the government – ahead of the peace process – getting more conservative ... these are exactly the things the Taliban would be doing as well," says the Western official. "So ahead of intra-Afghan negotiations, we see convergence on issues we don't

want them to converge on."

Writing in The Washington Post this week, Mr. Ghani demanded that the Taliban acknowledge the "changed reality of today's Afghanistan" and work to "preserve and expand the gains the Afghan people have made" since U.S. forces toppled the Taliban in 2001.

But analysts and civil society activists say fresh government efforts to change some rules amount to an unexpected bid to impose increasingly conservative restrictions.

Proposed changes to the family law, for example, include immediate forfeiture of maintenance by a husband for his wife if she refuses intercourse – for reasons beyond those permissible under sharia (Islamic) law – or even goes out without his permission. Underage marriage would become possible through a loophole that would require consent of a male relative and court approval.

One reason may be campaign commitments made by Mr. Ghani to conservative elements during his reelection campaign last September, before Afghanistan's presidential vote.

Broader support

Another may be a bid to broaden the appeal of a government that is accused by the Taliban of being a pro-Western U.S. puppet and is perceived to have ushered too many liberal changes into a ... **P3**

By: Michael E. O'Hanlon

Rightsizing the Afghanistan mission

After President Trump's tirades and tweets on the subject helped persuade Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis to resign two years ago, such an outcome is as welcome as it is surprising. But next steps, by President Trump or a President Biden, need to be much more cautious and gradual.

Secretary of Defense Mark Esper recently announced that U.S. forces in Afghanistan will number fewer than 5,000 by the end of November. Unless big things happen on the Afghan political front, that is a good place to leave things for the foreseeable future. The next U.S. administration might even adopt a mantra of "5,000 troops for 5 years" in order to convey its commitment to an acceptable outcome of this frustrating, but far from lost, mission – and to avoid having the American president and Congress consume too much time on perpetual Afghanistan policy reviews.

Deploying 5,000 troops in Afghanistan will be a substantial reduction from the current level of more than 7,000 American troops, or the roughly 10,000 that Trump inherited from President Obama. It will be far

less than the 100,000 U.S. troops during the Afghanistan surge under General David Petraeus and General John Allen back in 2011-12. It is a reasonable and sustainable figure, not unlike the number the United States deploys in several other regional footholds like Iraq, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Djibouti today. Many will lament that the "forever wars" would continue under such a policy. But a mission focused on training Afghans and conducting counterterrorism operations, costing perhaps \$10 to \$15 billion and entailing 10 to 20 American fatalities a year (if the recent past is a guide), is a far cry from the clear, hold, and build operations conducted largely by U.S. ground forces a decade ago – with American fatalities reaching as high as 500 a year and costs exceeding \$100 billion annually. Compared to the alternative of an American homeland again possibly at risk from extremist attack hatched in the land of the Hindu Kush, it is likely the least bad choice.

Peace talks between the Taliban and the government of President Ashraf Ghani, representing a broader Afghan polity and civil society, may

someday reach a conclusion that ends the conflict and allows the United States to leave in full. That is a worthy goal, and there have just been small steps towards that objective. A traditional Afghan "loya jirga" meeting provided Ghani cover to release the final batch of Taliban prisoners who were promised to be freed under this year's February 29 accord between the United States and the Taliban. Real peace talks may now begin. But we are a long ways from any deal in which the two Afghan parties to the talks, both of which believe they have legitimacy and time on their side, figure out how to merge their security forces and how to share power with their dramatically different views about the future of the country. It would be a mistake by Washington to reward possible Taliban intransigence in the peace talks with a continued, steady American march for the exits. Doing so would also encourage Pakistan to continue to hedge its bets, viewing the Taliban as its safest backup plan in case the Ghani government or a successor someday falls.

Some will say that terrorism in and near Afghanistan can be ... **P3**

UN nuclear chief...

two nuclear sites, maintaining that the IAEA had no legal basis to inspect them since the activities at the sites are from early 2000s. Earlier, Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif had criticized the European countries for adopting a draft resolution to push for inspection of the two nuclear sites in question.

Iran's envoy to the IAEA Kazem Gharibabadi said "no country will open its territory to the inspections" based on allegations of its "enemies".

Gharibabadi on Saturday confirmed the upcoming visit of the IAEA chief, saying it comes upon an invitation from the Iranian government.

The visit coincides with the looming uncertainty over the 2015 Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA), following the US push to reinstate all international sanctions on Tehran by triggering the snapback mechanism under the agreement.

There is a speculation that Iran will exit the deal and end cooperation with the IAEA, including leaving the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT), if the pre-2015 sanctions are reinstated.

According to officials in Tehran, the issue is likely to figure prominently in the discussions between the IAEA chief and Iranian government officials.

Thirteen of 15-member...

joined Washington in voting yes.

Dominican Republic has not yet written to the council to state its position on the sanctions snapback push.

Under the process Washington says it has triggered, it appears all U.N. sanctions should be reimposed at midnight GMT (8 p.m. New York time) on Sept. 19 - just days before Trump is due to address world leaders at the U.N. General Assembly, the annual meeting that will be largely virtual because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Afghanistan calls for Iran's contribution to its mining projects

Afghanistan's Commercial Attaché in Tehran has called for Iranian mining companies' investment in his country's mining sector, IRIB reported.

Speaking in a meeting with the representatives of the Iranian private sector at the place of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA), Ahmad Saeed pointed to his country's mines as a unique opportunity for Iranian companies active in the mining industry, saying the bases are prepared for the activity of Iranian companies in Afghanistan. Noting that based on the Afghanistan government's plans, all provinces of the country will be equipped with fiber optics by 2023, Saeed underlined the telecommunications sector as another opportunity for Iranian companies in the Afghan market.

The official further pointed to the lack of sufficient knowledge and information as one of the problems in the way of developing



economic relations between the two countries and said: "The Commerce Department of the Afghan Embassy is ready to interact and cooperate with the Tehran Chamber [of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture] to pave the way for the two countries' private sectors to know each other better."

In the meeting, which was attended by managers of several Iranian companies active in the

mining and mineral industries, telecommunications equipment, power plants, construction, as well as fruits and vegetables, the TCCIMA Deputy Head for International Affairs Hessamedin Hallaj referred to the holding of several joint meetings between TCCIMA and the Commerce Department of the Afghan Embassy for drawing a roadmap for trade cooperation between the two countries' private sectors and said

that several proposals have been made by the two sides in this regard. "Several proposals were made by the Commerce Department of the Afghan Embassy, including the establishment of Iranian factories in Afghanistan or joint border areas, as well as the development of cooperation in energy, minerals, medical equipment, and food industry, to strengthen the trade ties," Hallaj said.

Rightsizing the...

checked without a peace deal and without an American military presence on the ground — even if our departure leads to all-out civil war and/or a victory by the Taliban. Perhaps any future al-Qaida or ISIS presence on Afghan soil could be handled with long-range strikes or occasional commando raids that emanate from ships in the Indian Ocean. Or perhaps we could be confident that such groups have no substantial future interest in basing themselves in Afghanistan.

But that latter argument ignores history, as well as the geographic suppleness of global extremist movements in general. Few saw the ISIS caliphate coming in Iraq and Syria before 2014, but then, all of a sudden, it was there. And the former argument shows a poor appreciation of how counterterrorism intelligence is developed — usually by cooperation with partners on the ground — as well as an unrealistic appreciation for the geographic remoteness and ruggedness of the Hindu Kush. Stand-off counterterrorism is generally an oxymoron.

With 5,000 American troops (and some additional civilians and contractors) in Afghanistan, the United States could maintain two or three major airfields and hubs of operations for intelligence, airpower, and special forces/commandos — at Bagram near Kabul in the nation's center, near Kandahar in the south, and perhaps around either Khost or Jalalabad in the east. It also could maintain a modest military advisory and training presence in Kabul to help the Afghan army and police carry out the bulk of the fighting against extremists. For all its frustrations, and high costs, the Afghanistan mission has not been an abject failure. The Afghan government continues to hold all major and mid-sized cities as of this writing. Even more to the point, the United States has not again been attacked by a group that plotted or organized its aggression from within Afghan borders. These are accomplishments worth preserving if they can be done at modest cost in American treasure, lives, and political bandwidth.

Why Afghan...

traditional society.

"I imagine it is a signal to actors on the pro-government side, but that are quite socially conservative, 'Look, you don't need to go over to the Taliban to get some of what you want,'" says Andrew Watkins, senior Afghanistan analyst for the International Crisis Group.

"The palace is worried about various factions of Afghan politics and society splintering off if they believe that the Taliban is going to end up winning this thing," says Mr. Watkins, referring to years of steady insurgent battlefield advances, and the Taliban yielding few compromises in negotiations with the United States.

Yet he notes that, contrary to the all-conservative appearance of the law changes, the government in recent weeks also issued a decree to create the post of second deputy governor for each of the country's 34 provinces — and to reserve those posts for women.

"The government is also trying to simultaneously keep international audiences and more progressive parts of its civil society happy as well," says Mr. Watkins. "You have the government trying to send out whatever will stick, to keep different constituencies happy." Still, the proposed changes to the family law appear far-reaching. "The provisions, on the surface, appear to be congruent with sharia law and proper family law, but there have been slight

tweaks made that actually disadvantage women severely," says the Western official.

Yet even as the family law is debated, Mr. Ghani a week ago announced the establishment of a High Council on Women — a step meant to officially incorporate women's views in the peace process and empower them. Criticism has come quickly, though, from women's activists complaining that the move was only symbolic, because similar bodies designed to empower women exist already.

Media law on hold

Similar confusion also reigns over the how and why of proposed changes to the media and NGO laws, both of which would have imposed stricter government controls. They have been put on hold after public criticism.

Afghan journalists reacted noisily when the changes to the media law became public in mid-June, for example, as they accused the government of trying to impose censorship, block freedom of speech, and force journalists to reveal sources to intelligence and government agencies.

"Undoubtedly there are certain circles within the government who want to suffocate press freedom through the proposed amendments, [and] this indicates censorship of media in the country," Mohammad Elham, the head of Rah-e-Farda TV, told TOLONews, Afghanistan's largest television channel.

"There are many forces in Afghanistan and outside who wish to curb free media and

access to information in our country, but we certainly did not expect the government to be a front-runner in this league," Lotfullah Najafzada, the head of TOLONews, told The Guardian.

The government responded that it was "strongly committed to our free media and will remain so," and withdrew the proposal.

Likewise, the draft NGO law that emerged in June was an updated version of the one approved by the Cabinet in December 2019, which requires registration and sharing detailed financial information with authorities.

Amnesty International panned it as a "serious threat to the existence of civil society" groups in Afghanistan, which "imposes unnecessary and disproportionate restrictions ... and would exert undue influence and control over NGOs."

In the late 1990s, when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan, the hard-line Islamists imposed a range of restrictions on Afghan society. Recently, Taliban members have noted to Western officials and analysts that both the media law and NGO law, as well as some of the family law changes, are "something we would have done."

The loya jirga, meanwhile, endorsed the release of the Taliban prisoners. But after freeing 80 of the men earlier this week, the government stopped the process, saying the Taliban had yet to release all 1,000 captured Afghan security forces it was meant to — a claim denied by the insurgents.

Rashid Becomes...

Ahead of the start of the CPL 2020, former Australian fast bowler Brett Lee had said that Rashid Khan would be the player to watch out in this tournament, according to a report by India Today.

With the dismissal of all-rounder Mohammad Nabi on Thursday, at 21 years and 335

days, Rashid Khan became the youngest to complete 300 wickets in T20 cricket, India Today reports. Rashid has also managed to become the fastest bowler to do this, in 213 matches.

Rashid Khan, who is member of Afghanistan's National Cricket Team, also plays for the Sunrisers Hyderabad in the

Indian Premier League (IPL) and will be joining his franchise in the UAE when the tournament begins on September 19.

He has become a key player of Sunrisers Hyderabad with his all-round performance in the previous IPL editions. Rashid Khan has also played for Adelaide Strikers in the Big Bash League in Australia.

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UN nuclear chief to visit Iran amid standoff

The chief of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Rafael Mariano Grossi, will visit Tehran on Monday, his first visit to the country since taking office in December.

Grossi will hold talks with high-level government officials in Tehran on cooperation between the two sides and granting IAEA inspectors access to nuclear sites, according to a statement issued by the nuclear watchdog on Saturday.

"I have decided to come personally to Tehran so that I can reinforce the importance of cooperation and the full implementation of all safeguards commitments and obligations with the IAEA," Grossi said.

The objective of the visit, he underlined, was to make "progress" in addressing the "outstanding questions" that the IAEA has with Iran, particularly the issue of "access" to nuclear sites.

The IAEA chief has in recent months issued strong statements, calling on Tehran to allow IAEA inspectors access to two nuclear sites in Iran. The statements have not gone down well with Tehran. In his first address to the IAEA's board of governors in March, Grossi had called on Iran to "cooperate immediately and fully" with the nuclear agency and provide access to inspectors.

In June, he told reporters in Vienna that Iran has "not engaged in substantive discussions to clarify our questions related to possible undeclared nuclear material and nuclear-related activities". Last month, Grossi warned that "things will be bad" for Iran if the IAEA inspectors were denied access to the nuclear sites, and said it was "absolute necessity for us to resolve the issue very soon".

Iran has so far refused access to the ... **P2**



A look at the world

Final volume of US report on Russian alleged election meddling lacks facts - diplomat

It repeats the well-known allegations made earlier in the Mueller report and other US documents, Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said. The fifth and final volume of the US Senate's Select Intelligence Committee's report on alleged Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election neither contains any real facts nor evidence, Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said in her commentary on Saturday.



"Like earlier released volumes of the report, the final volume does not contain any real facts or evidence. In fact, it repeats the well-known allegations made earlier in the Mueller report and other US documents, including about the hacking of the Democratic party's servers allegedly upon the Russian leadership's order, the contacts between representatives of Donald Trump's campaign headquarters and Russian citizens and Russia's desire to undermine democracy in America and etc.," Zakharova said.

"Now we can confidently say that the document, which the legislators had drawn up for three years and which they called the most detailed description of Russia's undermining activity at the moment, added nothing new to mudslinging about our country, which has been long circulating in the US," she said.

UAE Minister Gargash Defends Country's Request for F-35 Fighters



The United Arab Emirates has "legitimate requests" for Lockheed Martin Corp.'s F-35 fighter jet, a top official said Thursday, a day after President Donald Trump said the purchase may be approved.

"We ought to get them," Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash said during an event with the Washington-based Atlantic Council. He rejected the idea that the weapon would be a reward for the UAE's historic understanding this month to make peace with Israel.

The F-35 "has always been a target" to meet the UAE's defense needs and has been requested for six years, Gargash said. He said the UAE also is seeking to upgrade its Lockheed F-16 aircraft.

Trump said on Wednesday that an F-35 sale is "under review" after the UAE made "a great advance in peace of the Middle East." He said "they've definitely got the money to pay for it." The sale of the U.S. military's costliest and most advanced aircraft would be controversial because U.S. policy has long promised that Israel would maintain a "qualitative military advantage" in equipment over potential Arab adversaries. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said he opposes the sale of F-35s to any country in the Middle East, including within the framework of a peace agreement.

The UAE's foreign ministry said in a statement that with the U.S.-crafted accord with Israel "and the added assurances it provides, we expect closer security cooperation among all three countries including on air defense and systems."

Ties between Israel and Gulf Arab states have warmed in recent years, in large part due to a shared distrust of the nuclear and regional ambitions of Iran, which denounced the Israel-UAE accord.

"This deal is not targeted against Iran," Gargash said. "It's not because of Iran. Iran perhaps contributed to the general climate in the Arab world that made a deal with Israel more and more possible because of its own regional policies."

Thirteen of 15-member U.N. Security Council oppose U.S. push for Iran sanctions

United States was further isolated on Friday over its bid to reimpose international sanctions on Iran with 13 countries on the 15-member U.N. Security Council expressing their opposition, arguing that Washington's move is void given it is using a process agreed under a nuclear deal that it quit two years ago.

In the 24 hours since U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said he triggered a 30-day countdown to a return of U.N. sanctions on Iran, including an arms embargo, long-time allies Britain, France, Germany and Belgium



as well as China, Russia, Vietnam, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Indonesia, Estonia and Tunisia have already written letters in opposition, seen by Reuters.

The United States has accused Iran of breaching a 2015 deal with world powers that aimed to stop Tehran developing nuclear weapons in return for sanctions relief. But President Donald Trump described it as the "worst deal ever" and quit in 2018.

Diplomats said Russia, China and many other countries are unlikely to reimpose the sanctions on Iran. Pompeo again warned Russia and China against that on Friday, threatening U.S. action if they refuse to reimpose the U.N. measures on Iran.

The United States acted on Thursday after the Security Council resoundingly rejected its bid last week to extend an arms embargo on Iran beyond its expiration in October. Only the Dominican Republic ... **P2**



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