

Ynet-News, June 25, 2020 – Thursday

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189 House Democrats signed a letter to Israel opposing the annexation plan

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All members of Blue & White met on final decision basis for the annexation

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189 House Democrats signed a letter to Israel opposing the annexation plan

White House punts on Israel annexation; more talks planned

Decision could affect Trump's standing with evangelical Christians whose support he needs to win reelection while House Democrats release letter signed by 189 members expressing concern over plan.

Associated Press| Published: 06.25.20 , 22:23

President Donald Trump's top national security aides have been unable to reach a decision on whether to support an Israeli plan to annex significant parts of the land the Palestinians claim for a future state, an impasse that could affect the timing of any action by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The White House said Thursday that **consultations** with Israeli officials **will continue** as they try to formulate a proposal that would support Trump's plan for an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal.

The Trump administration's decision on annexation could alter America's position in the Middle East and **affect** Trump's **election-year support** with evangelical Christians, an important part of his political base. The international community largely opposes annexation, but **many of Trump's domestic supporters enthusiastically back it**. The **announcement of a delay** came a day after inconclusive talks about backing Netanyahu's intention to extend Israel's civilian administration to large portions of the West Bank.

A senior administration official said U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman and the administration's special envoy for Mideast peace Avi Berkowitz would travel to Israel Thursday for further discussions.

The official said the White House **meetings had been "productive"** but added that "there is yet no final decision on the next steps for implementing the Trump plan." The official was **not authorized to discuss** the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. Trump could side entirely with Netanyahu, who has cited July 1 as a hoped-for date for a decision, or endorse a less comprehensive takeover or oppose it outright, which is the most unlikely scenario. That date wasn't set in stone and the **uncertainty** of the Trump administration's position could make that date less likely.

But Netanyahu is **expected to act before the fall**, given uncertainty over Trump's prospects for a second term and **presumptive** Democratic nominee Joe **Biden's opposition to annexation**.

The partisan divide over annexation was highlighted **Thursday** with the **release of a letter to the Israeli government signed by 189 House Democrats** expressing **concern about the annexation** plan.

"Our fear is that unilateral actions, taken by either side, will push the parties further from negotiations and the possibility of a final, negotiated agreement," the lawmakers said. At stake for the Trump administration is its credibility with Arab partners cultivated by Trump and with European nations that he has antagonized on numerous fronts, from climate change to trade to the Iran nuclear deal.

Potentially more persuasive politically for Trump and his team is that his decision will affect his standing with evangelical Christians whose support he needs to win reelection. Although his campaign believes evangelical Christians will overwhelmingly vote for Trump, the campaign is concerned about a drop-off in enthusiasm and potential participation among an essential group of voters.

Among those **favoring Netanyahu's plan** are **Trump** advisers such as Secretary of State Mike **Pompeo**, as well as **Friedman**, the U.S. ambassador, and a number of Republicans in Congress. They say **annexation**, in addition to pleasing Trump's base, **would make a peace deal easier** because that step would blunt what they believe are unrealistic Palestinian expectations for a future state, according to officials familiar with the matter. They were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

But others in the administration and in Congress want to see no, or limited, White House recognition of potential annexation. They include Pentagon officials and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and the architect of the Mideast peace plan, which has been roundly rejected by the Palestinians.

People on this side of the debate worry that a robust public endorsement would alienate U.S. allies in the Middle East and beyond at a particularly sensitive time in dealing with the coronavirus pandemic and threats posed by Iran.

Jordan, one of only two Arab nations with a peace deal with Israel, and the United Arab Emirates, a key U.S. partner in the Mideast, have come out against annexation and warned of severe consequences for the region if Netanyahu goes ahead. The European Union has voiced strong opposition and U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said he hopes Israel will not proceed.

Trump's reelection campaign has seen a weakening of intensity across many important voting groups, including evangelicals, during the pandemic, the economic recession and protests against racial injustice.

Trump has tried in recent weeks to find ways to restore that intensity, in large part because his campaign hinges more on maximizing the turnout of his base than winning over a dwindling pool of undecided voters in the cent

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All members of Blue & White met on final decision basis for the annexation

Report: Mossad chief met with Jordan king on West Bank annexation

Yossi Cohen said to have delivered a message from Netanyahu to Abdullah, who has warned that bilateral relations will suffer if Israel goes ahead with plan to claim sovereignty over its settlements and Jordan Valley

i24NEWS| Published: 06.25.20 , 19:04

The head of the Mossad intelligence agency Yossi Cohen made a trip to Jordan in recent days to meet with King Abdullah II to discuss Israel's plan to annex parts of the West Bank, Channel 13 TV reported on Thursday.

Cohen is said to have made the trip in order to deliver a message from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The exact nature of the message was unclear.

Jordan has expressed strong opposition to Israel's plan to claim sovereignty over its West Bank settlements and the Jordan Valley, which it intends to begin in July, in accordance with the coalition agreement between Netanyahu's Likud and partner Blue & White.

Jordan, which has had full diplomatic relations with Israel since the two countries signed a peace treaty in 1994, has threatened to suspend the agreement if Israel goes through with its annexation plan.

"If Israel annexes parts of the West Bank... it would lead to a major conflict with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan," Abdullah recently said, according to Jordanian media sources.

The head of Blue & White, Defense Minister Benny Gantz, was to hold a closed-door meeting with his party on Friday on the issue of annexation, public broadcaster Kan said. The discussion was expected to last three hours, the report said, adding that all members of Blue & White were told they must participate. Meanwhile, U.S. officials said Thursday that three days of White House meetings by aides to President Donald Trump on whether to give Israel a green light on annexation ended without any final decision.

The comments came despite senior Trump aide Kellyanne Conway saying Wednesday that Trump was set to make a "big announcement" on the issue.

"There is as yet no final decision on the next steps for implementing the Trump plan," one of the officials said, referring to the president's Israeli-Palestinian peace blueprint that could provide a basis for the annexation.

06.25.20 – Th - - -

Hamas considers annex declaring war, but may deal on release of prisoners

Hamas: Annexation of West Bank lands is a declaration of war
Spokesman of terror group's armed wing sends belligerent message on anniversary of Israeli soldier's abduction, says no prisoner exchange without release of senior prisoners, prisoners with 'blood on their hands'
Elior Levy | Published: 06.25.20, 15:12

Hamas said on Thursday that it views Israel's intentions to extend its sovereignty over parts of the West Bank as a declaration of war.

"This wretched decision and plan, we'll not talk at length, but say it shortly and clearly – the resistance considers the decision as a declaration of war on the Palestinian people. The resistance is ready to protect its people and its holy places," said Abu Ubaida, the spokesman of the Izz el-Deen al-Qassam Brigade, the armed wing of the Hamas movement.

Abu Ubaida gave the statement to mark the anniversary of the capture of Israeli soldier Giald Shialit by Hamas militants in a cross-border raid via tunnels near the Israeli border. Hamas held him captive for over five years, until his release on 18 October 2011 as part of a prisoner exchange deal. The spokesman also mentioned the possibility of holding a prisoner exchange deal with Israel, saying it was a priority for the terrorist group.

"We remind the Zionist enemy that there will be **no deal without the release of senior prisoners** and prisoners with blood on their hands," Abu Ubaida said.

Reports emerged in April that the terror faction showed willingness to negotiate a prisoner exchange deal with Israel due to the coronavirus outbreak, but later announced that little progress had been made in that regard.

The terror group reportedly refuses to call the potential exchange a "deal", but rather a "humanitarian initiative" that would see Israeli civilians Avera Mengistu and Hisham al-Sayed - held captive by Hamas - be freed in exchange for Palestinian elderly prisoners currently in Israel's jails.

Hamas also holds the bodies of two fallen soldiers, Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul.

06.25.20 – Th - - -

Arab League warned UN meeting that annexation could unleash Mideast violence

UN envoy: Israeli annexation could unleash Mideast violence

Warning comes a day after UN Secretary General and the head of the Arab League voice similar grim cautions against the initiative during a **high-level UN meeting**

Associated Press| Published: **06.25.20** , 16:59

The UN envoy for the Middle East warned Israel on Thursday that carrying out its plans to **annex** parts of the West Bank **could set off a spasm of violence** that would **upend** Israeli-Palestinian **relations** and reverberate across the region.

Speaking to a group of foreign correspondents in Jerusalem, Nickolay Mladenov, the UN special coordinator for the region, said **any Israeli unilateral action** will **"will have** economic and security **repercussions** on the ground that will affect the lives of both Israelis and Palestinians."

"Surely any such **moves will be met by counter moves** by the Palestinian Authority and they have already started," he told members of the Foreign Press Association, noting how the Palestinians have absolved themselves from abiding by past agreements with Israel. "For now we have the clear commitment by the Palestinian leadership that they will do everything in their power to contain law and order in the areas they control," he said. "But as the money runs out and as the political prospects become more grim, I feel that will become more difficult or impossible in the future."

His stern warning comes amid a flurry of international pressure on Israel to recant on its plans.

On **Wednesday**, the head of the **Arab League** **warned** a high-level UN meeting that any **annexation would inflame tensions** and endanger peace in the Middle East, and could ignite "a religious war in and beyond our region." **More than a thousand European lawmakers** also signed a joint letter protesting Israel's plan, saying such a move would "be **fatal**" to **hopes for a peace**ful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Emboldened by the Trump administration's favorable Mideast plan, and eager to establish its permanent eastern border, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has promised to begin annexing parts of the West Bank that have Israeli settlements, perhaps as early as next week.

Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast war and in the decades since has built dozens of settlements that are now home to roughly 400,000 Israelis. Most of the international community considers the settlements illegal. The Palestinians seek the territory as part of a future independent state and have preemptively rejected the Trump plan.

Netanyahu's government has yet to publish details of the proposed annexation but the prime minister has called for roughly 30% of the territory — including the strategically important Jordan Valley — to be annexed by Israel.

Even British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, a close Netanyahu ally, said last week that he strongly opposed annexation of parts of the West Bank, which would "amount to a breach of international law."

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged Israel on Tuesday to hear the global calls and not to carry on with its plans. He told The Associated Press that annexation would not only violate international law, but "would be a major factor to destabilize the region." Mladenov took a more philosophical approach, saying annexation would do more than just extinguish the prospect of a two-state solution to solve the conflict.

"If we remove entirely the notion that through negotiations, through compromises, through discussions, through dialogue, this goal can be achieved, I fear that we really take the spirit out of the peace process and put everyone in a very difficult position," he said. "Unilateral action will become the theme of the day."

06.25.20 – Th - - -

Trump views Arab world backlash as scare tactics on West Bank annexation

Trump to make 'big announcement' on West Bank annexation, aide says

Senior advisor Kellyanne Conway says 'conversations' held by administration officials on issue, dismisses prospect of a backlash against the move from Palestinians and Arab world as a 'scare tactics'

i24NEWS | Published: 06.25.20 , 12:48

Senior White House advisor Kellyanne Conway said Wednesday that U.S. President Donald Trump was about to make a "big announcement" regarding Israel's plans to apply sovereignty to parts of West Bank.

She said "conversations" had been held, apparently referring to the deliberations on whether the U.S. should give the move its blessing.

Conway said she was "very happy" that the matter was being discussed. She also dismissed the prospect of a **backlash** against the move, whether from Palestinians and the larger **Arab world**, as a "**scare tactics**."

Senior officials in the Trump administration **began Tuesday to discuss** whether Washington should approve Israel's annexation plan.

A nod from the U.S. is crucial for the plan to advance under the coalition deal that created the current government.

But the U.S. **has sent mixed signals** in recent months as to whether the approval would be forthcoming, with presidential aide Jared **Kushner** and other American officials **telling** Prime Minister Benjamin **Netanyahu to slow down plans to annex** the Jordan Valley and settlements in the West Bank.

Washington reportedly **wants** to see Defense Minister Benny **Gantz** and Foreign Minister Gabi **Ashkenazi** **on board with the move** - and Gantz has recently signaled his willingness to go for a unilateral annexation.

Ashkenazi, however, **has** reportedly **been trying to scupper the plans**, saying telling former associates that Jerusalem will not extend annexation over the Jordan Valley.

According to public broadcaster Kan News, Ashkenazi was quoted as saying: "I assume there won't be annexation in the Jordan Valley. Everyone understands that."

Ashkenazi's office said the Foreign Ministry is fully committed to the Trump peace plan, but any move to extend Israel's sovereignty into the West Bank must be coordinated with Washington and countries in the region.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike **Pompeo** said Wednesday that **the final decision on annexation was up to Israel to make.**

06.24.20 – We - - -

Trump's pro-Israel credentials give his strong favor an ultimate decision on annexation

Trump faces critical decision on Israel's bid for annexation

In-depth: While some in Trump's administration say annexation would **make a peace deal easier** by blunting unrealistic Palestinian expectations, others, including Jared Kushner, believe U.S. support would alienate U.S. allies in the Middle East

Associated Press| Published: **06.24.20** , 21:38

President Donald Trump is facing a critical decision on Israel that could alter America's position in the Middle East and **may affect his election-year support** with a **central** part of his **political base.**

In the coming days, Trump must decide whether to support Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's plans to annex significant parts of land that the Palestinians claim for a

future state in the West Bank. Trump's national security aides were meeting on Wednesday at the White House to discuss the matter, which is approaching a boil after simmering for months.

Trump could side entirely with Netanyahu, who has cited July 1 as a hope-for date for a decision, or endorse a less comprehensive takeover or oppose it outright, which is the most unlikely scenario. Even if that date isn't set in stone, **Netanyahu is expected to act before the fall**, given **uncertainty over Trump's** prospects for a **second term** and presumptive Democratic nominee Joe Biden's opposition to annexation.

At stake for the United States is its credibility with Arab partners cultivated by Trump and with European nations that he has antagonized on numerous fronts, from climate change to trade to the Iran nuclear deal.

Potentially more persuasive politically for Trump and his team is that his decision will affect his standing with evangelical Christians whose support **he needs to win reelection**. Virtually the entire international community opposes annexation, but **Trump's domestic supporters enthusiastically back it**.

The White House meeting comes as **Trump faces plunging polls** and persistent questions about his handling of foreign policy.

Among those **favoring** Netanyahu's plan are Trump advisers such as Secretary of State Mike **Pompeo**, as well as David **Friedman**, the U.S. ambassador to Israel, and a number of **Republicans in Congress**. They say annexation, in addition to pleasing Trump's base, would make a peace deal easier because that step would blunt what they believe are unrealistic Palestinian expectations for a future state, according to officials familiar with the matter. They were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

In a letter sent late Tuesday to Trump, seven GOP senators pointed to the president's own peace plan, rolled out in January, which calls for recognizing Israel's extension of sovereignty into Palestinian-claimed areas as simple reality.

"Mr. President, there is no other alternative to this fact-based approach, and as long as opponents of Israel and the U.S.-Israel relationship believe otherwise, peace will not be achievable," wrote the senators, led by pro-Israel stalwarts Ted Cruz of Texas and Tom Cotton of Arkansas.

Others in the administration want to see no, or limited, White House recognition of potential annexation. They include Pentagon officials and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and the architect of the Mideast peace plan, which has been roundly rejected by the Palestinians. People on this side of the debate worry that a robust public endorsement would alienate U.S. allies in the Middle East and beyond at a particularly sensitive time in dealing with the coronavirus pandemic and threats posed by Iran.

Jordan, one of only two Arab nations with a peace deal with Israel, and the United Arab Emirates, a key U.S. partner in the Mideast, have come out against annexation and warned of severe consequences for the region if Netanyahu goes ahead. The European Union has voiced strong opposition and U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said he hopes Israel will not proceed.

Apart from the foreign policy considerations, though, Trump must contend with domestic election concerns.

Although his campaign believes evangelical Christians will overwhelmingly side with the incumbent over Biden, the campaign is concerned about a drop-off in enthusiasm and potential participation among a group of voters essential to Trump's 2016 victory. The campaign has seen a weakening of intensity across many important voting groups, including evangelicals, during the pandemic, the economic recession and protests against racial injustice.

Trump has tried in recent weeks to find ways to restore that intensity, in large part because his campaign hinges more on maximizing the turnout of his base than winning over a dwindling pool of undecided voters in the center.

Yet it remains unclear how many votes might be swayed by a decision on annexation.

“Ultimately, the American position will be determined by the president himself, and he will certainly view this issue, like all others, through the lens of his reelection campaign. But it is hard to see how Trump can gain much electoral advantage at this stage,” said Jake Wallis, a former U.S. diplomat who once served as consul general in Jerusalem. “While annexation should be popular with Christian evangelicals and the right wing in the American Jewish community, most of those voters are already in his pocket. It seems unlikely that the president's position would change any votes in the United States,” he said. “In such a situation, with many other problems on his desk, he may prefer a more limited annexation ... or perhaps even a deferral of the entire issue.”

Joel Rosenberg, a U.S.-Israeli evangelical author, said the issue “would have great resonance with most evangelicals in the U.S.” under different circumstances, but given other issues dominating the national dialogue, he sees little if any “interest or attention being paid” to annexation “by American evangelicals at the grassroots level.” Annexation “could actually backfire among the evangelicals that are sort of struggling with Trump right now” if it sparks new tensions in the region, Rosenberg said.

Texas megachurch pastor and longtime Trump ally Robert Jeffress said that annexation on its own is “too in the weeds for most evangelicals” to be following closely. But he said the president's strong pro-Israel credentials overall gives his administration “wide latitude with evangelicals” in terms of its ultimate decision on the matter.

06.24.20 – We - - -

UN sanctioned producing propellants, Iran argues can be used in non-nuclear rockets

Inside Iran's secret project to produce aluminum powder for missiles

A special investigation reveals a secret production complex in the Iranian highlands where the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps are producing a key ingredient in solid-fuel propellants used to launch missiles

Reuters| Published: 06.24.20 , 18:43

At the edge of the desert in North Khorasan province in northeast Iran, near the country's largest deposit of bauxite, sits an aluminum production complex that the government has publicly hailed as a key part of its efforts to boost output of the metal.

But the site near the city of Jajarm is also home to a secret facility set up by Iran's elite security force, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, that has been producing aluminum powder for use in its missile program, according to a former Iranian government official and documents relating to the facility he shared with Reuters. Aluminum powder, derived from bauxite, is a key ingredient in solid-fuel propellants used to launch missiles.

Iran started producing the powder for military use more than five years ago, according to the former official, who from 2013 until 2018 was head of public relations and also parliamentary affairs envoy in the office of the vice president for executive affairs, which at the time oversaw some economic policies. The ex-official, Amir Moghadam, said he visited the little-known facility twice and that production was continuing when he left Iran in 2018.

Iran's production of aluminum powder for use in missiles, which hasn't previously been reported, was developed amid international sanctions designed to block the country's efforts to acquire advanced weapons technology. The United States and allies view Iran's missile capabilities as a threat to the region and the world.

Reuters reviewed more than a dozen documents relating to the aluminum powder project and people involved, dating from 2011 to 2018. One is a letter addressed to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei from a Revolutionary Guards commander whose brother has been described by the Iranian state as the father of Iran's missile program.

In the letter, Mohammad Tehrani Moghadam described the Jajarm facility as a "project to produce missile fuel from metal powder" and said it played a significant role in "improving the country's self-sufficiency in production of solid fuel for missiles." The letter is undated but appears to be from 2017, based on references to events.

In response to questions from Reuters, Alireza Miryousefi, spokesman for the Iranian mission to the United Nations in New York, said: "We have no information on these claims and on the authenticity of documents."

"We should reiterate that Iran has never had any intention to produce any nuclear warheads or missiles," Miryousefi said. Iran has long said its missile program is solely defensive.

The Revolutionary Guards oversee Iran's missile program. Its public relations office didn't respond to questions when contacted by phone for this article. Mohammad Tehrani Moghadam did not respond to requests for comment. (He is unrelated to Amir Moghadam, the former official who detailed the program to Reuters.) The offices of Supreme Leader Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani also did not respond to inquiries.

Amir Moghadam's disclosures about the aluminum powder program could intensify scrutiny in Washington of Iran's missile efforts. The former Iranian official, who now lives in France, says he left Iran in 2018 after being accused of stirring unrest following public comments he made alleging the corruption of some government officials. He said he wanted to expose the program because he believed Iran's missile ambitions were not in the interests of Iranian people.

The United States has broad **sanctions** in place, including **targeting Iran's metals sector** and **ballistic missile program**. Those include restrictions on operations in, and transactions related to, Iran's **aluminum sector**. The sanctions also target the Revolutionary Guards and third parties that provide material support to or conduct certain transactions with the Guards. The U.S. Treasury has a primary role in administering sanctions.

Asked whether Reuters' new findings about the production of aluminum powder for military purposes indicated a sanctions violation, a U.S. Treasury spokesman said: "Treasury takes any reports of potentially **sanctionable conduct** seriously, and while we do not comment on possible investigations, we are committed to targeting those persons who support the Iranian regime and their malign activities around the world within our authorities."

The United Nations has placed restrictions on Iran's activity related to ballistic missile activity capable of delivering nuclear weapons. A spokesman said it wasn't clear whether the aluminum powder activities revealed by Reuters would breach those restrictions. Jose Luis Diaz, spokesman for the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, said "the Security Council has not clarified whether the ability of Iran to produce aluminum powder for use as a missile propellant is inconsistent with the restrictive measures."

Explosive qualities

Producing its own aluminum powder for use in **missile propellants** would **give Iran** greater **control of the supply chain and quality**, said Michael Elleman, Washington, DC-based director of the non-proliferation and nuclear policy program at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, a security think tank.

According to the documents related to the aluminum powder program reviewed by Reuters, the Jajarm facility is run by Iran Alumina Company. IAC is a subsidiary of state-owned mines and metal holding company Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organisation (IMIDRO). IAC and IMIDRO did not reply to requests for comment.

IAC's website says the company operates a bauxite mine and an aluminum production facility at a complex located about 10 kilometers to the northeast of Jajarm. Bauxite is processed into alumina, which is used to produce aluminum metal. Aluminum powder is made from the metal.

Aluminum powder is used in products ranging from paints and electronics to solar panels and fireworks.

Due to its explosive qualities, aluminum powder is also a key ingredient in solid-fuel propellants used to launch rockets and missiles. **When mixed with material containing oxygen, a vast amount of energy is released.**

In 2010, the British government added IAC to a list of Iranian entities it believed could use goods purchased for military purposes or for weapons of mass destruction. The list was intended to alert traders hoping to sell to those entities that they may need to apply for an export license. The list was withdrawn in 2017 following the lifting of a wide range of UN and European Union sanctions on Iran.

Asked by Reuters about Iran's production of aluminum powder for military use, the British government said in a statement: "We have significant and longstanding concerns about Iran's ballistic missile program, which is destabilizing for the region and poses a threat to regional security." The statement added that development by Iran of nuclear-capable ballistic missiles and related technologies "is inconsistent" with UN Security Council resolution 2231, which has been in place since 2015 and calls for Iran to refrain from activity related to ballistic missiles designed to deliver nuclear weapons.

Intercepted shipment

The United Nations has long targeted Iran's missile activities as part of efforts to curb the country's suspected nuclear program. In June 2010, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1929. That measure restricted Tehran's production of ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons and prohibited other states supplying Iran with related technology or technical assistance.

In September 2010, Singaporean authorities intercepted a shipment of 302 drums of aluminum powder en route to Iran and originating from China, according to a UN panel monitoring compliance with the resolution. A ballistic missiles expert told the panel that the high aluminum content of the powder was "an indication that the most likely end-use is solid propellant for missiles," the panel said in a 2011 report.

By 2011, the Jajarm facility was being developed, according to Amir Moghadam and two of the documents he shared with Reuters.

One document is an October 2011 letter to Major General Hassan Tehrani Moghadam, then head of the Revolutionary Guards missile program, from Majid Ghasemi Feizabadi, IAC's managing director at the time. Ghasemi wrote that following the major general's orders, they had found a location for the project close to an "abandoned airport" near the city of Jajarm. Ghasemi also asked for \$18 million of funding from the country's sovereign wealth fund to build the plant.

Reuters was unable to establish if the fund, called the National Development Fund of Iran, contributed. It could not be reached for comment via phone and did not respond to a request sent via the Iranian embassy in London.

Some of the documents reviewed by Reuters relate to interventions made to judicial authorities by Revolutionary Guards members and Iranian officials on behalf of Ghasemi explaining the secret project and his role in it. He was detained in Iran in 2015 on corruption allegations in relation to financial transactions tied to IAC, according to the documents. Ghasemi was later released without charge, Amir Moghadam said.

Ghasemi did not respond to requests for comment. Hassan Tehrani Moghadam, the deceased former head of the Revolutionary Guards missile program, is not related to Amir Moghadam. The late general's brother, Revolutionary Guards commander Mohammad Tehrani Moghadam, could not be reached for comment.

Sourcing equipment

IAC also held talks with a Chinese company about obtaining equipment, according to the letters Reuters reviewed. The company identified in the documents is state-backed China Nonferrous Metal Industry's Foreign Engineering and Construction Co, Ltd (000758.SZ), also known as NFC.

In the October 2011 letter to the head of the Revolutionary Guards missile program, IAC's Ghasemi wrote: "following your instructions, we have reached agreement with Mr. Li Xiaofeng ... to provide part of the required machinery and equipment via the Chinese NFC firm" from a German company and a Japanese company. The letter's subject line was: "atomization aluminum powder."

Li Xiaofeng was NFC's assistant president and chief law officer, according to a letter Li sent to Ghasemi two months later.

It is not clear from the documents where IAC eventually purchased the equipment it used. Reuters was unable to identify the German and Japanese companies referred to in the letter. Li could not be reached for comment.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, responding to questions about NFC and IAC, said it does "not have a grasp of the situation you are describing." It said China has strictly complied "with the international non-proliferation obligations including decisions made by the UN Security Council."

NFC told Reuters it "has neither exported nor assisted anyone to get any technology, equipment or services related to the production of aluminum powder for any purposes." The company said its business was limited to "areas of civilian use." It said it observes laws and regulations in China and host countries and complies with the relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council.

NFC's website identifies Iran as one of its markets and lists a 2005 news release identifying the Jajarm alumina plant as a "technical modification project undertaken by NFC." The Chinese company didn't respond to questions about whether it offered IAC equipment, technology and services in relation to aluminum powder production.

'Survive the sanctions'

Moghadam, the former official now in France, told Reuters he visited the Jajarm facility twice in 2015 and attended several meetings in Tehran between government officials and IAC managers. The managers were "asking for access to foreign currencies, saying their military project needed government support to survive the sanctions," he said. The office of the vice president for executive affairs didn't respond to requests for comment.

Following the Iran nuclear deal with world powers in 2015, the UN Security Council's previous provisions on ballistic missile activity were lifted and a new resolution took effect. Resolution 2231 "called upon" Tehran to refrain from activity related to ballistic missiles designed with the capability of delivering nuclear weapons.

Iran and some of its allies argue the language does not make compliance obligatory.

The UN spokesman said the Security Council has not established whether the production of aluminum powder falls under the resolution because the material can also be used in propellants of missiles or rockets that aren't designed to deliver nuclear weapons. He added that the U.N. Secretariat wasn't in a position to ascertain if production of the powder for military use would have been covered by the earlier resolution 1929.

06.24.20 – We - - -

US seeks to re-impose UN sanctions & extend the arms embargo on Tehran

U.S. says if no arms embargo on Iran it will seek UN sanctions

Pompeo speaks ahead of briefing to Security Council members, warns Iran will be able to purchase advanced weapons systems, become global arms dealer of choice for terrorists and rogue regimes

Associated Press | Published: 06.25.20 , 10:35

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Wednesday threatened to seek to reimpose U.N. sanctions on Iran if the UN Security Council does not approve a resolution that would indefinitely extend the arms embargo on Tehran, which is set to expire in October.

Pompeo told a news conference at the State Department in Washington that without extending the arms embargo, "Iran will be able to purchase advanced weapons systems and become an arms dealer of choice for terrorists and rogue regimes all throughout the world. This is unacceptable."

He spoke ahead of a closed video briefing to Security Council members Wednesday afternoon on the U.S. draft resolution to maintain the arms embargo by U.S. Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook and U.S. Ambassador Kelly Craft.

Tensions between Iran and the U.S. have escalated since the Trump administration withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and six major powers in 2018 and reimposed crippling U.S. sanctions.

A year ago, the U.S. sent thousands of additional troops, long-range bombers, and an aircraft carrier to the Middle East in response to what it called a growing threat of Iranian attacks on U.S. interests in the region.

The five other powers that signed the nuclear deal - Russia, China, UK, France, and Germany - remain committed to it, saying the agreement is key to continuing inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and preventing Iran from pursuing nuclear weapons.

Lifting the arms embargo is part of the 2015 Security Council resolution endorsing the nuclear agreement. The Security Council is scheduled to discuss the resolution's implementation on June 30.

Calling Iran "the leading state sponsor of terror," Pompeo said the U.S. focus is to work with the Security Council to pass the resolution.

"But, in the event that doesn't happen, I would remind the world that the Obama administration's officials said very clearly that the United States has the unilateral ability to snap back sanctions into place," he said.

The 2015 nuclear deal includes a "snap back" provision which would restore all UN sanctions against Iran that had been lifted or eased if the nuclear deal is violated.

The State Department said that in his briefing, Hook pointed to Iranian arms transfers and "the full range of Iran's malign activity, including its September 2019 direct attack on Saudi Arabia," which violate current restrictions. Drone strikes hit two Saudi oil installations on Sept. 14, which the U.S. blamed on Iran. Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia has made clear Moscow's opposition to a new arms embargo on Iran and has dismissed as "ridiculous" the possibility of the Trump administration trying to use the "snap back" provision. Nebenzia said the U.S. pulled out of the agreement and "they have no right" to use any of its provisions. But Pompeo and Craft insist the resolution makes clear the U.S. retains the right to use the "snap back" provision.

Diplomats said that at Wednesday's closed briefing there was an exchange of views with the U.S. on one side and Russia on the other. Some Western governments privately fear that maintaining an arms embargo will lead Iran to oust IAEA inspectors and move ahead on developing nuclear weapons. The latest report by IAEA said Iran has continued to increase its stockpiles of low-enriched uranium in violation of the 2015 nuclear deal. The nuclear agreement promised Iran economic incentives in return for curbs on its nuclear program, which Tehran said it hasn't received, especially since the U.S. withdrawal in 2018. Iran has since slowly and openly violated the nuclear restrictions to try and pressure the remaining nations in the agreement to increase incentives to offset the economy-crippling U.S. sanctions.

The draft U.S. resolution, obtained by The Associated Press, would ban Iran from supplying, selling or transferring any arms or related material from its territory after the embargo expires on Oct. 18.

It would also ban the other 192 UN member states from buying Iranian weapons or allowing their nationals to train, provide financial resources or assistance related "to the supply, sale, transfer, manufacture, maintenance, or use of arms and related materiel" to Iran unless they get Security Council approval at least 30 days in advance.

The draft would authorize all UN member states to inspect cargo entering or transiting through their territory at airports, seaports, and free trade zones from Iran or heading there if the member state "has reasonable grounds to believe the cargo" contains banned items.

It would also condemn the September 2019 attack against Saudi Arabia "carried out by Iran" and condemn December 2019 attacks against an Iraqi military base in Kirkuk and the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. And it would deplore "Iran's transfers of arms to militias and other armed groups in the region" and demand that Iran stops such transfers immediately.