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10.22.20 – Fr - - - News Placed in Oct 25 spot – Sunday

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Israel, U.S. sign joint declaration reaffirming military edge promise

Gantz and U.S. counterpart Esper sign agreement to ensure Israel's military superiority as more arms deal with Arab states take shape; defense ministry official hints at imminent peace talks with Saudi Arabia

Yoav Zitun| Published: 10.22.20 , 23:22

Defense Minister Benny Gantz met U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper at the Pentagon on Thursday where they signed a joint declaration confirming Washington's strategic commitment to maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge in the Middle East.

"In recent weeks, we have held important discussions that ensure the United States' commitment to maintaining Israel's military superiority," Gantz said.

"We are now entering an era of normalization in the Middle East, which can help against Iranian aggression across the region. Together with the United States and allies, old and new, we will ensure fruitful cooperation. I would like to thank the American administration and in particular, my friend, Secretary of Defense Esper, who promoted the issue with me."

Gantz's visit mainly revolved around advancing Israel's bid to purchase advanced U.S.-made aircrafts such as F-15 and F-35 fighter jets, transport helicopters, and probably also a V-22 helicopter.

For this purpose, cabinet ministers will convene this coming Sunday to approve a part of the procurement, which is expected to be funded by U.S. aid funds. However, the Ministry of Finance is expected to oppose the motion and promote a different outline formulated by the defense establishment.

As part of the outline, one of the U.S. arms manufacturers supplying the weapons will take out a loan to immediately supply Israel with the new fighter jets.

"The experience of the Treasury is unnecessary, and we are now operating according to an accepted and recognized economic concept in the world in these situations." Explained the cause. "I suggest that politics does not soil this area."

Israel's demands intensified after reports claimed the U.S. and UAE are expected to sign an arms deal on the sale of F-35 fighter jets by December, with silent agreement from Israel.

After the signing of the agreement, a senior defense official showed great satisfaction and added that Saudi Arabia may soon join the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan in peace talks with the Jewish state.

"This commitment is permanent and with the things we hear about in the Middle East with the UAE, Bahrain and soon Sudan; Saudi Arabia will also step out of the closet soon," the officials said. "

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Hariri named as Lebanon's new prime minister

Nine months after his resignation, Lebanon's President Aoun taps Sunni Muslim politician once more to form a new government to tackle the country's worst crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war

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A year after Lebanon was rocked by huge protests against its entrenched ruling elite, politicians have picked the same prime minister who was pushed out then to lead it out of crisis now.

Saad al-Hariri, a three-time prime minister and heir to a wealthy dynasty, has been Lebanon's leading Sunni Muslim politician since the killing of his father in 2005. He stood down last year when hundreds of thousands took to the streets to rally against a political class that they accuse of milking the state for decades.

At the time, Hariri said his efforts to seal an agreement on badly needed reforms had hit a dead end, blocked by sectarian divisions and vested interests, and only the "big shock" of his resignation as prime minister could break the deadlock.

Nationwide protests persisted, demanding the overthrow of a political class that demonstrators blame for pillaging the state and pushing it into crisis. "All of them means all of them," they chanted.

In the months that followed, a former academic and a diplomat both struggled to lead or even form technocrat governments to steer the country in a new direction.

Almost exactly a year later, after escalating catastrophes including a banking crisis and currency crash, a dramatic rise in poverty and a huge explosion at Beirut's port, Hariri says he is the "natural candidate" to lead Lebanon.

On Thursday, he pledged to form a government of specialists "with a mission to enact economic and financial reforms" - reforms that President Emmanuel Macron of France, Lebanon's former colonial power, set out for unlocking foreign aid. But rifts that obstructed change during his last term in office look set to plague his efforts to form his fourth government.

The two main Christian political blocs, the Free Patriotic Movement led by the president's son-in-law Gebran Bassil, and its rival the Lebanese Forces, refused to back his nomination.

The heavily armed Shi'ite Hezbollah group did not name anyone but said it would work "positively" towards forming a government. Iran-backed Hezbollah and its political allies, including the Shi'ite Amal party and the FPM, won a majority of MPs in 2018's elections.

Hariri's career was built on the patronage of Gulf Arab states, the deployment of his family fortune - spending large amounts of it in Lebanon to finance a political network - and respect among many Lebanese for his father, Rafik al-Hariri.

The early years of his political career were defined by his close alliance with Saudi Arabia and confrontations with the Lebanese allies of Syria and Iran, chief among them Hezbollah.

A U.N.-backed court in August convicted a Hezbollah member in absentia of conspiring to kill his father Rafik, a former premier who was close to the West and Sunni Gulf allies and had been seen as a threat to Iranian and Syrian sway in Lebanon.

Hezbollah denies any role in the 2005 bombing, and Saad al-Hariri has said he was seeking justice, not revenge for the killing.

Hariri formed his first coalition government in 2009 after the anti-Syria and anti-Hezbollah coalition he led at the time won a parliamentary majority with Saudi backing. That "March 14" alliance gradually disintegrated in the years that followed.

His cabinet was toppled in early 2011 when Hezbollah and its allies quit over tensions linked to the Rafik al-Hariri tribunal. In the ensuing few years, Saad remained mostly outside Lebanon on security grounds.

As the war in neighboring Syria escalated, Lebanon became gripped by tensions linked to the conflict.

He remained an opponent of Hezbollah but his focus was largely on Lebanon's economic troubles.

Hariri's ties with Saudi Arabia, furious at Hezbollah's expanding role in Lebanon, suffered. They hit a nadir in November 2017 when it was widely acknowledged that Riyadh had forced him to resign and held him in the kingdom.

Saudi Arabia and Hariri publicly deny this, though Macron confirmed that Hariri was being held in Saudi Arabia.