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Lebanon at UN seeks Israel border to start 7km farther south to reach gas-rich area

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Lebanon sets starting point for sea border negotiations with Israel

Last month sources said the two sides presented contrasting maps for proposed sea boundary said the Lebanese proposal extended farther south than the border Lebanon had years before presented to the United Nations

Reuters| Updated: 11.19.20 , 21:28

President Michel Aoun on Thursday specified Lebanon's starting point for demarcating its sea border with Israel under U.S.-mediated talks, in the first public confirmation of a stance sources say actually increases the size of the disputed area.

Israel and Lebanon launched the negotiations last month with delegations from the long-time foes convening at a U.N. base to try to agree on the unresolved border that has held up hydrocarbon exploration in the potentially gas-rich area.

A Presidency statement said Aoun instructed the Lebanese team that the demarcation line should start from the land point of Ras Naqoura as defined under a 1923 agreement and

extend seaward in a trajectory that a security source said **extends** the disputed area to some **2,300 square km from around 860 square km**. There was **no** immediate **Israeli comment**.

Last month sources said the two sides presented contrasting maps for proposed borders. They said the Lebanese proposal extended farther south than the border Lebanon had years before presented to the United Nations and that of the **Israeli team pushing the boundary farther north** than Israel's original position.

The talks, the culmination of three years of diplomacy by Washington, are due to resume in December.

**Israel already pumps gas** from huge **offshore fields but Lebanon**, which has yet to find commercial gas reserves in its own waters, **is desperate for cash** from foreign donors as it faces the worst economic crisis since its 1975-1990 civil war.

**11.18.20**

**Timeline of 11 of Trump's major pro-Israel decisions**

**February 15, 2017** Trump welcomes Netanyahu to Washington

**March** ambassador to UN Nikki Haley says "days of Israel-bashing at UN are over".

**May 2017** Trump visits Israel and Bethlehem, first acting US leader to pray at West Wall

**December 6, 2017** recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

**May 14, 2018** US says it is moving its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem

**August 2018** cut \$200 million aid to Palestine.& will no longer fund UNRWA (UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees)

**September 10, 2018** shut Palestinian mission in Washington, their de facto embassy

**March 25, 2019** Trump & Netanyahu at White House sign decree to annex Golan Heights

**November 18** US no longer regards Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank illegal

**September 15, 2020** UAE & Bahrain normalize with Israel at White House

**October 23, 2020** Trump announces Sudan is also normalizing relations with Israel

11.18.20

### Timeline of Trump's major pro-Israel decisions

In-depth: Pompeo's upcoming visit to the Israeli-run Psagot winery in the West Bank on Thursday would be another dramatic break by the Trump administration with the international community just as the president's tenure is about to end  
AFP| Published: 11.18.20 , 23:40

Mike Pompeo is expected to become the first U.S. Secretary of State ever to visit land used by settlers in the West Bank on Thursday.

The expected visit to the Psagot winery would be another dramatic break by the Trump administration with the international community - which sees such settlement enterprises as illegal - and the traditional U.S. line on the Middle East conflict.

Coming in the dying weeks of Donald Trump's presidency, some would say Pompeo's move serves as further proof of his administration's pro-Israel stance.

Alleged occupation

Weeks after entering the White House, Trump says the U.S. no longer supports a two-state solution as he welcomes Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Washington on February 15, 2017 for the first of many visits.

In March his ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, says "the days of Israel-bashing at the UN are over".

Two months later Trump visits Israel and Bethlehem in the Palestinian Authority, becoming the first acting U.S. leader to pray before the Western Wall in the Old City. In September, the U.S. ambassador to Israel causes an outcry by referring to the "alleged occupation" of the Palestinian territories.

Jerusalem 'Israel's capital'

Trump sets off a diplomatic earthquake on December 6 by unilaterally recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

The move is roundly condemned by the international community. The Palestinians have long hoped to make east Jerusalem - occupied by Israel since the 1967 Six-Day War - the capital of their independent state.

On May 14, 2018 the U.S. says it is moving its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem

The same day at least 60 Palestinians are killed in clashes with the Israeli army during protests in Gaza, organized by Hamas that rules the coastal enclave, the bloodiest day there since the 2014 war.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas says the Washington is no longer "fit" to be a honest broker in the Middle East.

The U.S. says it will no longer fund the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) on August 31, a week after cutting \$200 million (170 million euros) in aid to the Palestinians.

Ten days later it shuts the Palestinian mission in Washington, their de facto embassy. Golan Heights

Trump recognizes the Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights, which it captured from Syria in 1967. He signs the decree alongside Netanyahu at the White House on March 25, 2019.

The move is condemned by the international community, which does not recognize the land grab, while Syria calls it a "blatant attack" on its sovereignty.

Settlements 'not illegal'

On November 18 the U.S. says it no longer regards Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank illegal.

It allows the Jewish state to potentially annex key parts of the West Bank, with Jerusalem remaining as Israel's "undivided" capital.

Arab states recognize Israel

The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain normalize diplomatic relations with Israel amid great fanfare at the White House on September 15.

Abu Dhabi says the agreement would suspend the annexation of the West Bank but Netanyahu insists any suspension would be only temporary.

The Palestinians say they have been "stabbed in the back" by their old Arab states allies.

On October 23 Trump announces Sudan is also normalizing relations with Israel.

11.19.20

Iran launched 150-meter (492-ft) aircraft carrier capable of all type ocean missions

11.19.20

Iran's Guards launch aircraft carrier-scale warship amid tensions with U.S. -TV

The Revolutionary Guards' navy commander tells state TV that the warship would provide security for 'maritime transportation lines, oil tankers, commercial and fishing fleets on the high seas'

Reuters| Published: 11.19.20 , 22:45

Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards have added a warship capable of carrying aircraft, missile launchers and drones to its naval fleet, state media said on Thursday, at a time of high tension between Tehran and Washington.

Antagonism between longtime foes Tehran and Washington has risen since 2018, when President Donald Trump withdrew the United States from world powers' 2015 nuclear deal with Iran and reimposed sanctions that have crippled the Iranian economy.

A U.S. official told Reuters on Monday that Trump, with two months left in office, had asked for options on attacking Iran's main nuclear site at Natanz, but ultimately decided against taking the dramatic step.

The Islamic Republic reiterated that any attack on it by the United States would face a "crushing" response.

State television said on Thursday a "heavy, multi-purpose, and long-range warship capable of carrying all types of aircrafts, drones, missiles and radar systems" had been added to the Revolutionary Guards' fleet.

Iran's newest warship named after slain Naval commander Abdollah Roudaki, sailing through the waters in the Gulf during its inauguration

"Iran's Shahid Rudaki warship is a mobile naval city capable of carrying ocean missions," state TV added.

Guards navy commander Ali Reza Tangsiri told state TV that the warship would provide security for "maritime transportation lines, oil tankers, commercial and fishing fleets on the high seas".

A statement published on the Guards' Sepah news website quoted the elite force's supreme commander Hossein Salami as saying the 150-meter-long warship "creates wider horizons for our navy to move across the seas".

The U.S. Navys Bahrain-based Fifth Fleet declined to comment about Iran's reported move when contacted by Reuters.

Iran's clerical rulers consider the U.S. military presence in the Middle East a threat to the Islamic Republic's security.

11.11.20

US Democrats have 218 seats of a 435-member chamber - a two seat majority

11.11.20

Dems clinch U.S. House control, but majority likely to shrink

The party on Tuesday nailed down at least 218 seats, significantly lower than their current 232-seat majority, failing to defeat a single GOP incumbent or capture open GOP-held seats

Associated Press| Published: 11.11.20 , 09:06

Democrats clinched two more years of controlling the House but with a potentially razor-thin majority, a bittersweet finale to last week's elections that has left them divided and with scant margin for error for advancing their agenda.

The party on Tuesday nailed down at least 218 seats, according to The Associated Press, and could win a few others when more votes are counted. While that assures command of the 435-member chamber, blindsided Democrats were all but certain to see their current 232-seat majority shrink after an unforeseen surge of Republican voters transformed expected gains of perhaps 15 seats into losses potentially approaching that amount.

"We have the gavel, **we have the gavel**," said House Speaker Nancy **Pelosi**, D-Calif., who seems all but certain to continue in that role. While she bemoaned Democrats' losses in districts where GOP votes proved "almost insurmountable," she told reporters last week, "We've lost some battles but we've won the war."

By retaining the House, Democrats will control the chamber for four consecutive years for only the second time since 1995, when Republicans ended 40 years of Democratic dominance.

Yet though Joe **Biden** won the presidential **election**, there was a strong chance Republicans would keep Senate control. That would **force Democrats to scale back** their dreams of sweeping **health care**, infrastructure and other initiatives, instead needing compromises with the GOP.

As the bad news sunk in, Rep. Cheri **Bustos**, D-Ill., who **led House Democrats' campaign committee**, announced Monday she **wouldn't seek another term leading that organization**. Democrats said privately **she would have lost had she** again **sought the post**, for which the party's lawmakers vote.

**Republicans** have been heartened by the House results, which many believe position them for a strong run for the majority in the 2022 elections. They also **bolstered** their distressingly low number of **women representatives from 13 to at least 26**, a record for the GOP, according to the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University, and were adding new ethnic minority lawmakers as well.

"The Republican coalition is bigger, more diverse, more energetic than ever before," House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., said the day after the election. **Democrats went into Election Day with a 232-197 House advantage**, plus an independent and five open seats. With some races remaining undecided, it was possible that in the new Congress that convenes in January they'll have the smallest majority since Republicans had just 221 seats two decades ago.

Democrats secured the majority after The Associated Press declared three winners late Tuesday: incumbents Kim Schrier in Washington, Tom O'Halleran in Arizona and Jimmy Gomez in California.

A tight majority could cause headaches for Pelosi, empowering any determined group of lawmakers to pressure her on what bills should be considered or look like. But sometimes, a slender margin can help unify a party because its members know they must stick together to achieve anything.

Democratic **moderates and progressives clash periodically**, and while the moderates are more numerous, the progressives' ranks include influential social media stars like Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y.

Underscoring that tension, House Democrats vented during a three-hour conference call last week in which both factions blamed the other for rhetoric and policies they said proved costly in the campaign.

"We should be honest that this was **not a good outcome**," Rep. Tom Malinowski, D-N.J., a moderate freshman, said in an interview. He said terms like **"defunding the police"** **hurt Democrats** by making it **sound like they oppose law enforcement**, and said they shouldn't speak "as if we were talking to woke progressives in neighborhoods where 90% of the votes are for Democrats."

Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., a progressive leader, said in an interview that Democrats need to discuss "how we talk about some of these issues that are critical to different parts of our base." But with moderates complaining that the **GOP hurt Democrats by repeatedly accusing them of pushing socialism**, Jayapal said such accusations "will be used against us no matter what we say."

Democrats believed they'd pick up seats, especially in suburbs, because of a decisive fundraising edge, U.S. President Donald Trump's unpopularity and exasperation over the pandemic. Many Republicans and independent polls supported that expectation. But with some races still uncalled, Democrats haven't defeated a single GOP incumbent and failed to capture open GOP-held seats in Texas, Missouri and Indiana they thought they'd win.

Instead, they've lost at least seven incumbents: six freshmen from states including Florida, Oklahoma and South Carolina plus 30-year veteran Rep. Collin Peterson from rural Minnesota. And while they successfully defended most of their 29 districts that Trump carried in his 2016 victory, they saw stronger than expected performances by GOP candidates all around the country.

"With President Trump on the ballot, it just drove enormous turnout that was almost impossible to surmount," said Rep. Elissa Slotkin, D-Mich., a reelected freshman.

"The **country has become more polarized and divided**," said Rep. Gerald Connolly, D-Va. "If you're running in alien territory, you're always at risk of failure."

So far, **Democrats' only pickups were three open seats from which Republicans retired. Two were in North Carolina**, where court-ordered remapping made the districts strongly Democratic, and **one was outside Atlanta**.

Going into the election, Democrats envisioned strengthening their moderate wing, since most districts they seemed likely to capture were closely divided between GOP and Democratic voters. But they ended up suffering losses in those same type of districts, meaning it was mostly moderates who lost.

"In electoral politics, moderates are the beachfront property," said Jim Kessler, an official with Third Way, a centrist Democratic group. "And if there's flooding, they're the ones that get washed away."

Illustrating that, the Blue Dog Coalition of the most conservative House Democrats, whose membership has dwindled in recent years, lost at least six of its roughly two dozen members.

On the other hand, a handful of hard-left progressive freshmen will be coming to Congress, including Democrats Jamaal Bowman and Mondaire Jones of New York and Cori Bush of Missouri, who each won seats in overwhelmingly blue districts.

On the **Republican** side, the conservative House Freedom Caucus was hoping to grow from its roughly 30 members.

The group has tried **pushing GOP leaders to the right** over the years and was a consistent source of trouble for the past two Republican speakers, John Boehner of Ohio and Paul Ryan of Wisconsin.

11.19.20

Dems may win Senate in January Georgia runoff & oppose sales to UAE

11.19.20

U.S. senators seek to stop Trump's \$23 billion in arms sales to UAE

Lawmakers say Trump administration circumvented the normal review process, worry deal seen as linked to Abu Dhabi's normalization pact with Israel could start dangerous arms race in the region

Reuters| Published: 11.19.20 , 09:12

Three U.S. senators said on Wednesday they would introduce legislation seeking to halt the Trump administration's effort to sell more than \$23 billion of drones and other weapons systems to the United Arab Emirates, setting up a showdown with the president just weeks before he is due to leave office.

Democrat Senators Bob Menendez and Chris Murphy and Republican Senator Rand Paul will introduce four separate resolutions of disapproval of President Donald Trump's plan to sell more than \$23 billion worth of Reaper drones, F-35 fighter aircraft and air-to-air missiles and other munitions to the UAE.

The huge sale could alter the balance of power in the Middle East, and members of Congress have chafed at the administration's attempt to rush it through, having sent a formal notice to Congress only last week.

Many lawmakers also worry about whether the UAE would use the weapons in attacks that would harm civilians in Yemen, whose civil war is considered one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters.

When the deal was announced, Amnesty International warned that the weapons would be used for "attacks that violate international humanitarian law and kill, as well as injure, thousands of Yemeni civilians."

The sale includes products from privately held General Atomics, Lockheed Martin Corp F-35s and missiles made by Raytheon.

Sales' fate uncertain

While the resolutions bring attention to lawmakers' questions about the massive sales, and could delay them, they are unlikely to stop them.

U.S. law covering major arms deals lets senators force votes on resolutions of disapproval. However, to go into effect the resolutions must pass the Republican-led Senate, which rarely breaks from Trump. They also must pass the Democrat-led House of Representatives and survive Trump vetoes.

But incoming President Joe Biden could ultimately stop them for reasons of national security, making a prediction on the final outcome difficult.

The senators said the Trump administration, seeking to rush the sale as it brokered a peace deal between the UAE and Israel, circumvented the normal review process. They said State and the Pentagon failed to respond to their inquiries.

Weaponry involved includes the world's most advanced fighter jet, more than 14,000 bombs and munitions and the second-largest sale of U.S. drones to a single country.



The Senate Foreign Relations and House of Representatives Foreign Affairs committees **have the right to** review and attempt to **block weapons sales**.

Past measures to block arms sales over concerns about Yemeni casualties passed the House and Senate with bipartisan support, but failed to get enough Republican backing to override Trump's vetoes.

Lawmakers have also expressed **concern** about **whether** the **UAE sales** would violate a longstanding **agreement with Israel** that any U.S. weapons sold in the Middle East would not impair its "quantitative military edge" over neighboring states.

**Menendez is the ranking Democrat** on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and in line to become chairman next year **if Democrats take control of the Senate in Georgia runoff elections in January**.

Paul and Murphy are also members of the committee.

**11.19.20**

**Dehghan, a former Guard top commander is candidate for the Iranian presidency**

**11.19.20**

**Iran candidate tells AP: US attack risks 'full-fledged war'**

Dehghan, a **candidate for the Iranian presidency** says his country **not interested in war** but **equally uninterested in negotiations** for negotiations' sake and must never include Iran's missile program which he calls a deterrent to the Islamic Republic's adversaries  
Associated Press| Updated: **11.19.20** , 19:07

An adviser to **Iran's** supreme leader who is a **possible 2021 presidential candidate** is **warning** that any **American attack on the Islamic** Republic could set off a "full-fledged war" **in the Mideast** in the waning days of the Trump administration.

Speaking to The Associated Press, Hossein Dehghan struck a hardline tone familiar to those in Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, a force he long served in before becoming a defense minister under President Hassan Rouhani.

A soldier has yet to serve as Iran's top civilian leader since its 1979 Islamic Revolution, in part over the initial suspicion that its conventional military forces remained loyal to the toppled shah. But hard-liners in recent years openly have suggested Iran move toward a military dictatorship given its economic problems and threats from abroad, particularly after President Donald Trump pulled America out of Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

"We don't welcome a crisis. We don't welcome war. We are not after starting a war," Dehghan said Wednesday. "But we are not after negotiations for the sake of negotiations either."

Dehghan, 63, described himself as a "nationalist" with "no conventional political tendency" during an interview in his wood-paneled office in downtown Tehran. He's one of many likely to register to run in the June 18 election as Rouhani is term-limited from running again. Others likely include a young technocrat with ties to Iranian intelligence and former hardline President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Dehghan's military service came under presidencies representative of the groups that largely compose Iran's tightly controlled political arena -- reformists who seek to slowly change Iran's theocracy from within, hard-liners who want to strengthen the theocracy and the relative moderates between. Those calling for radical change are barred from running for office by Iran's powerful constitutional watchdog known as the Guardian Council, which serves under Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

While discussing the world Iran finds itself in, Dehghan's points mirrored many of Khamenei's. The former head of the Guard's air force who achieved the rank of brigadier general said any negotiations with the West could not include Iran's ballistic missiles, which he described as a "deterrent" to Tehran's adversaries.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard warship named after slain Guard naval commander

Propaganda involving Iran's missile program has surged in recent weeks. The front page of the English-language Tehran Times on Wednesday showed a map of Iran's missile ranges with red stars marking American bases across the region under the words "Back off!" printed in big, bold letters. A headline above warned Iran would respond to "any melancholy adventure by Trump."

"The Islamic Republic of Iran will not negotiate its defensive power ... with anybody under any circumstances," Dehghan said. "Missiles are a symbol of the massive potential that is in our experts, young people and industrial centers."

Dehghan warned against any American military escalation in Trump's final weeks in office.

"A limited, tactical conflict can turn into a full-fledged war," he said. "Definitely, the United States, the region and the world cannot stand such a comprehensive crisis."

President-elect Joe Biden has said he's willing to return to the nuclear deal, which saw sanctions on Iran lifted in exchange for Tehran limiting its uranium enrichment, if Iran first complies with its limits. Since Trump's withdrawal, Iran has gone beyond all the deal's restrictions while still allowing United Nations nuclear inspectors to work in the country. Dehghan said those U.N. checks should continue so long as an inspector is not a "spy."

In the time since, an advanced centrifuge assembly plant at Iran's Natanz nuclear site exploded and caught fire in July. Dehghan said that reconstruction at Natanz was ongoing after satellite photos showed new construction at the site. He described the incident as "industrial sabotage."

"Those who were in charge of installing some devices possibly made some changes there that led to the explosion," Dehghan said, without elaborating.

A Dehghan presidency likely would be looked upon with suspicion in Washington and Paris. As a young commander in the Guard, Dehghan oversaw its operations in Lebanon and Syria between 1982 and 1984, according to an official biography given to Iran's

parliament in 2013. Israel, Iran's archenemy in the Mideast, had just invaded Lebanon amid that country's civil war.

In 1983, a suicide bomber in a truck loaded with military-grade explosives attacked a U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, killing 241 American troops and 58 French soldiers. While Iran long has denied being involved, a U.S. District Court judge found Tehran responsible in 2003. That ruling said Iran's ambassador to Syria at the time called "a member of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and instructed him to instigate the Marine barracks bombing."

Dehghan vehemently denied he was involved in the bombing, though he was the Guard's top commander there at the time.

"The U.S. tries to link anything happening in the world to someone in Iran," he said. "Do they really have evidence? Why do they link it to me?"

While stressing he wanted to avoid conflict, Dehghan warned Israel's expanding presence in the Mideast could turn into a "strategic mistake." Israel just reached normalization deals with Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.

"It is opening an extensive front," he said. "Just imagine every Israeli in any military base can be a target for groups who are opposed to Israel."

Dehghan also said Iran continues to seek the expulsion of all American forces from the region as revenge for the U.S. drone strike in Baghdad that killed Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the head of its expeditionary Quds Force in January. That strike saw Iran launch a retaliatory ballistic missile strike on U.S. troops in Iraq that injured dozens and nearly sparked a war.

Iran's retaliatory strikes were a mere "initial slap," Dehghan said. And there would be no easy return to negotiations with the U.S. in part due to that, he added.

"We do not seek a situation in which (the other party) buys time to weaken our nation," he said.