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Iran shifts position for EU, Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia & US negotiation

02.03.21

Israel reports weeks of target strikes on Iranian Hezbollah in Syria & Lebanon

02.03.21

Report: Israel strikes Hezbollah targets in Syria

Syrian state TV says country's air defenses responded to 'Israeli aggression' south of the city of Quneitra, hours after Lebanon's terror group said they had downed an IDF drone in its territory

Ynet| Published: 02.03.21 , 23:22

Syrian state television said Wednesday evening the country's air defenses responded to "Israeli aggression" in what appears to be an attack on Hezbollah targets in the area.

The alleged attack came hours after Lebanon's terror group said it had fired an anti-aircraft missile at an IDF drone in Lebanese territory. Israeli military confirmed the missile fire but said the drone was not hit and continued its operation in the country.

The Syrian news agency Sana said the attack took place in Quneitra province in southern Syria close to the Golan Heights, with echoes of explosions heard in the area.

Earlier on Wednesday, two Iranian cargo planes affiliated with the Iranian Air Force and the Revolutionary Guard, landed in Damascus and a few hours later returned to Tehran. In addition, a Syrian Air Force cargo plane made its way from Tehran to Latakia.

About two and a half weeks ago, Syria reported that Israel carried out an attack near the city of Hama in the west of the country.

According to reports, a barrage of missiles was fired from the direction of the city of Tripoli in Lebanon and explosions were heard in the area near the city.

A Syrian military source claimed that most of the missiles were intercepted, but parents and their two children were killed in the attack, while four others were wounded.

02.03.21

Israel razes Palestinian Bedouin village on a military firing range a second time

02.03.21

Israel razes Palestinian Bedouin village for second time

Israeli authorities said the village of Khirbet Humsah in the Jordan Valley, which housed 74 Palestinians including 41 minors, had been constructed illegally on a military firing range and locals rejected their offer to move nearby

Reuters| Published: 02.03.21 , 22:52

Israel has begun demolishing a Bedouin village in the West Bank for the second time in three months, in what a rights group called an attempt to displace an entire Palestinian community from the area.

Israeli authorities said the village of Khirbet Humsah, in the northern West Bank's Jordan Valley, had been constructed illegally on a military firing range, and that residents had rejected their offer to move to a nearby area.

Khirbet Humsah's 130 inhabitants have vowed to stay, with some sleeping on mattresses and plastic tarps strewn on the rocky soil. Tented homes and animal shelters in the village were last razed in November, though residents returned soon after.

"We will not move from here, we will stay here. If they demolish, we will rebuild," said one of the residents, Ibrahim Abu Awad. He and other Bedouin in the village said they feared Israeli settlers would seize the vacated land.

The Israeli rights group B'Tselem said the demolition at Khirbet Humsah was "unusually broad", accusing Israel of seeking "to forcibly transfer Palestinian communities in order to take over their land".

Some 440,000 Israeli settlers live among more than 3 million Palestinians in the West Bank, territory captured by Israel in a 1967 war and which Palestinians want as part of a future state.

Israeli forces began dismantling tents and livestock pens in Khirbet Humsah on Monday, residents and B'Tselem said. On Wednesday, Israeli troops accompanied by bulldozers also knocked down several steel and wooden structures in the village, Reuters TV footage showed.

The dismantled tents had housed 74 Palestinians, including 41 minors, B'Tselem said in a statement.

COGAT, Israel's military liaison to the Palestinians, said it had explained to residents "the dangers involved in staying within the firing range" and offered them space outside of it.

"Despite the offer, the residents refused to independently move the tent areas that had been set up illegally and without the required permits and approvals," COGAT said. Palestinians and rights group say such permits are nearly impossible to obtain from Israel.

02.03.21

Franko appointed czar to counter Arab violence, stirs MKs seeking a revolution

02.03.21

PM appoints ex-prison chief as czar to counter violence in Arab sector

Appointment of Aharon Franko causes a stir among Arab MKs due to remarks made in 2009, when he called the Arab community 'ungrateful'; PM says criminality in the sector should be treated as 'terrorism'

Hassan Shaalan | Published: 02.03.21 , 22:42

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday appointed the former head of the Israel Prison Service as a czar to counter violence in the Arab sector.

Violence has been ravaging the Arab communities in recent month, with local residents and some lawmakers accusing the government of not doing enough to prevent it. A shootout in the Arab town of Tamra on Monday night ended with a medical student accidentally killed, having been caught in the cross fire.

The appointment of Aharon Franco, however, caused a stir among some Arab officials due to remarks he made in 2009 while serving as Commander of the Jerusalem District Police, when he called the Arab community "ungrateful".

"I got to work with him and be impressed by his seriousness, his professionalism and his fairness. He has very rich professional experience and has relations with the Arab leaders," Netanyahu said during a press conference.

The prime minister added he will set up a special ministerial committee, which he will head, to combat the violence in the sector.

— Ahmad Tibi (@Ahmad_tibi) February 3, 2021

"I am personally committed to carrying out these plans, which provide an opportunity for a revolution," Netanyahu said. "The immediate plan includes collecting weapons, building police stations and setting up welfare institutions." He also labeled criminality in the Arab sector as "terrorism", adding that it should be fought accordingly.

MK Ahmad Tibi, from the predominantly-Arab Joint list, said Franco should undergo a course "in democracy and equality values."

Head of the Higher Arab Monitoring Committee Muhammad Zidan said it's "incomprehensible that a police chief would say such a thing," referring to the 2009 comments.

02.03.21

Netanyahu campaign chief Aaron Klein wrote books challenging Obama strategy

02.03.21

Netanyahu hires ex-Breitbart journalist as campaign chief

Aaron Klein, who has served as PM's political strategist since last year, confirms his appointment; Klein served as Breitbart executive chairman and wrote a number of books about Barack Obama

Associated Press| Published: 02.03.21 , 21:08

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has named a former journalist with the right-wing Breitbart news site, who authored books challenging Barack Obama's fitness for president, as his campaign chief for March 23 national elections.

Aaron Klein, who has served as a political strategist to Netanyahu since last year, confirmed his appointment on Wednesday.

Klein is a former U.S. radio show host and ex-Jerusalem bureau chief for Breitbart News. He was appointed by the site's executive chairman at the time, Steven Bannon, who would later become a key strategist to Donald Trump.

Klein is the author of a number of books about Obama. They include: "The Manchurian President: Barack Obama's Ties to Communists, Socialists and Other Anti-American Extremists"; "Fool Me Twice: Obama's Shocking Plans for the Next Four Years Exposed"; and "Impeachable Offenses: The Case for Removing Barack Obama from Office."

Netanyahu, who is fighting a tough reelection battle, has a long history of using American campaign advisers. One of his main challengers, Gideon Saar, recently hired several founders of "The Lincoln Project," an anti-Trump Republican organization, as advisers.

Netanyahu and Obama clashed repeatedly during his time in office over Israel's policies toward the Palestinians and the nuclear agreement Obama's administration negotiated with Iran. President Joe Biden is expected to restore many of these policies.

Netanyahu made no secret of his close friendship with Trump, who showered Israel with unprecedented support for its claims to territories it captured in the 1967 war that the Palestinians want for their future state.

02.03.21

6,000 Gazans sell 1,000 tons of scrap metal per week where unemployment is 49%.

02.03.21

Gaza's car graveyards turn to profit

Palestinian merchants estimate that some 200,000 tons of metal waste - from used truck parts to empty soda cans - have accumulated along the coastal enclave's frontier since Israel began its blockade after Hamas seized power in 2007

Reuters| Published: 02.03.21 , 16:18

The rusting hulks of thousands of old cars brought into Gaza from Israel decades ago have long been piled up in Mad Max-style wastelands of decaying metal that scar the northern part of the Palestinian enclave.

That bleak scene is about to change.

Although the route up the coast to the Israeli cities of Jaffa, Haifa has been blocked to Palestinian vehicles and drivers by Israeli walls and checkpoints for years, a shift in Israeli policy means that thousands of the old cars and other pieces of scrap metal are now finally leaving Gaza.

Palestinian merchants estimate that some 200,000 tons of metal waste - from used truck parts to empty soda cans - have accumulated along Gaza's frontier since Israel began its blockade in 2007 after the Hamas terror group seized power there.

But Israeli authorities in October cleared the metal for export to crushing plants inside Israel, creating a welcome source of revenue in impoverished Gaza.

Gazans sell the scrap metal for around 750 shekels (\$228.16) per ton. Israel allows 1,000 tons to be exported per week, a pace that would clear the backlog in four years.

Merchants say the exports have secured work for around 6,000 Palestinian laborers in Gaza, where unemployment is 49%.

"There is almost no work in town," said Emad Aqail, 39, who sorts metal into pressing machines ready for export. "Working in metals is exhausting, but it gives me the income I want."

Many Gazans would prefer to crush and recycle the metal for use inside the enclave, which is home to more than two million Palestinians.

But Israel and Egypt restrict the entry of machinery into the Gaza Strip, citing the security threat posed by its Islamist rulers, Hamas. Among the equipment prohibited is anything that could be used by militant groups to manufacture weapons - including new metal pressing machines.

Israel said the new scheme has so far earned around 3 million dollars for Gazans. Lieutenant Colonel Abdallah Halabi, of Israel's Coordination and Liaison Administration for Gaza, said the aim was "to improve the Gaza Strip's economy, because the quality of life and economic development in the Gaza Strip can't be separated from the stability of the region's security."

Bahaa Al-Agha, of Gaza's Environment Quality Authority welcomed the clearout of a polluting hazard to Gaza's soil and water.

But the economic benefit would have been greater, he said, "if Israel allowed the establishment of factories to recycle these materials in the Gaza Strip."

02.02.21

Israel provided PA Health Minister & medical workers first vaccines

02.02.21

Palestinians give first COVID-19 vaccines after Israel shares supply

Palestinian Health Ministry launches vaccination campaign in statement, with health minister receiving 1st dose along with several front-line medical workers; statement didn't mention Israel provided shots

Reuters| Published: 02.02.21 , 22:29

The Palestinian Authority administered its first known coronavirus vaccinations on Tuesday after receiving thousands of doses from Israel, which has already inoculated more than a third of its population.

The Palestinian Health Ministry announced the start of the campaign in a statement, saying Health Minister Mai al-Kaila received the first dose along with several front-line medical workers. The statement did not acknowledge that Israel provided the vaccines.

Israel, which launched its own vaccination campaign in December, began transferring 5,000 doses of the Moderna vaccine to the Palestinians this week, and the first doses will go to medical workers. The Palestinians hope to acquire tens of thousands more doses in the coming weeks through a World Health Organization program.

Even if those deliveries materialize, however, it could take several months to administer enough vaccines to bring the outbreak under control in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which are home to more than 4.5 million Palestinians. Israel is on track to vaccinate its entire adult population by the end of March.

The WHO has expressed concern about the inequity between Israel, which is leading one of the world's most successful vaccination campaigns, and the Palestinian territories. Israel captured East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza from Jordan and Egypt in the 1967 Six-Day War, lands the Palestinians seek for a future state.

Rights groups say Israel has the obligation as an occupying power to vaccinate Palestinians. Israel denies having such a responsibility and says its priority is its own citizens. Israel is actively providing vaccinations to its Arab citizens and Palestinians living in east Jerusalem.

Israel secured millions of doses through agreements with drug makers Moderna and Pfizer, and has given the first of two doses to more than 3 million people out of its population of more than 9 million. It remains under lockdown, however, as the virus continues to spread at a high rate.

The Palestinians have not publicly requested vaccines from Israel and say they are securing their own supplies through the WHO and contracts with pharmaceutical companies. The PA acknowledged the receipt of 2,000 doses on Monday -- the first batch of vaccines sent by Israel -- but did not say where they came from.

Under the Oslo accords signed in the 1990s, the PA is responsible for providing health care in the territories it administers. But the interim peace agreements say both sides should cooperate in combatting epidemics.

The WHO said Monday that the PA would receive 37,440 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine from mid-February "subject to approvals of supply agreements with manufacturers." It said the PA would receive another 240,000 to 405,600 doses of AstraZeneca's vaccine from mid-to-late February subject to WHO emergency use approval.

The PA says it will also buy thousands of doses of Russia's Sputnik V vaccine, which a new study indicates is safe and effective.

The Pfizer-BioNTech and AstraZeneca vaccines are being provided through COVAX, a WHO program designed to help poor countries acquire vaccines.

Even if the Palestinians receive the upper limit of those deliveries, they would only be able to vaccinate up to 5% of the population of the West Bank and Gaza.

02.01.21

Two Palestine groups block & vandalize Israeli-owned high-tech factory in England

02.01.21

Activists chain gates at Israeli arms company's UK factory
Palestine Action and Extinction Rebellion protesters block entrance to Israeli-owned Elbit Ferranti factory in Greater Manchester; groups say will 'continue to take direct action until we shut Elbit down and end all complicity in systematic injustice'
Associated Press| Published: 02.01.21 , 20:12

Protesters have blocked the entrance of an Israeli-owned factory in England where they claim deadly weapons are made.

Activists from Palestine Action and Extinction Rebellion chained the gates of the Elbit Ferranti factory in Greater Manchester early Monday. Two protesters climbed onto a ledge in front of the building, daubing red paint over the windows and spraying the words "Shut Elbit Down."

The two groups said their joint action was meant to show Elbit, Israel's largest arms firm, that they will "continue to take direct action until we shut Elbit down and end all complicity in systematic injustice."

Greater Manchester Police said officers were sent to the scene. Elbit Systems UK, which has 10 sites across the country, declined to comment.

Elbit recently won a contract with Britain's Ministry of Defense to provide technology enabling frontline soldiers to detect and engage enemy targets in seconds.

Protesters block the entrance to Israeli-owned Elbit Ferranti

Palestine Action and Extinction Rebellion protesters on ledge in front of Israeli-owned Elbit Ferranti factory in Greater Manchester, daubing red paint over the windows and spraying words 'Shut Elbit Down'

After the deal was announced last month, defense procurement minister Jeremy Quin said: "This contract with Elbit Systems UK not only delivers the very latest in battle field technology to our frontline soldiers, but also invests in the British defense industry, sustaining more than 500 jobs across the UK."

The company employs over 500 people in the U.K. in high-tech and specialist manufacturing, and it also supplies a fleet of 38 aircraft to the U.K. military flying training school.

02.01.21

Police selective enforcement fining people in Tel Aviv while lax in Jerusalem

02.01.21

Police say enforcing lockdown in Jerusalem 'different' from Tel Aviv
Chief Superintendent Assi Aharoni tells Ynet police did not intervene in mass funerals in order to prevent 'bloodshed' as officers face backlash over needlessly fining people on park benches in Tel Aviv but keeping the rules lax in Haredi areas

Itay Blumenthal, Eli Senyor, Alexandra Lukash | Published: 02.01.21 , 13:22

A senior police official said Monday that enforcement of coronavirus rules in Jerusalem is "different" to Tel Aviv, as Israel Police faced a backlash for allowing thousands to gather for two Haredi funerals in the capital.

The police presence in Tel Aviv, however, on Monday appeared to be larger than usual with dozens of officers patrolling the city's Dizengoff Center in the morning hours, issuing tickers to 20 people drinking coffee and reading paper on benches, meters from one another.

"If the police had dispersed them by force, hundreds would have been trampled," Chief Superintendent Assi Aharoni told Ynet TV, referring to the funerals in Jerusalem. "We managed to prevent about 60 buses from reaching the area [of the funerals] from other places in the country. About 15,000 residents attended the funeral, including thousands of children. On a normal day, 100,000 would have arrived."

Some Israelis have accused the police of selective enforcement after officers were seen asking homeless people in Tel Aviv to remove their makeshift tents and leave, citing health restrictions.

"Every incident has a commander in the field and he conducts a local situation assessment, examines all the circumstances and makes the decision. It is not right to compare the residents of Dizengoff to the ultra-Orthodox sector, to compare between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv," he said.

Aharoni said that everyone, "ultra-Orthodox, secular, Jews, Arabs," should "wake up" and follow the health guidelines.

"We are less preoccupied with a lone person sitting outside and wearing a mask, we are focusing our efforts on mass gatherings," he said. "Dizengoff Square was crowded and because of our actions today it is now empty. We are working to prevent and inform instead of enforce, it is also our responsibility."

People who were in the square this morning rejected the official's statements, saying the officers were reprimanding people sitting quietly on their own.

"A crowd is defined as over 10 people in the open air and it is not clear why they are harassing the Dizengoff Square," Mira Bauer, who was reprimanded by the police, told Ynet. "They say the square is crowded, but if I'm sitting in an open area alone, why does it bother anyone? I'm near the house and I'm alone. Where is the logic?" she said.

"I saw the pictures in Jerusalem. We want an explanation, why here in the open air people can not sit at a safe distance from one another?"

The mass funeral of Rabbi Yitzchak Aryeh Shiner, who died Sunday afternoon from coronavirus aged 98, took place just hours after over 10,000 people attended the procession for Rabbi Meshulam Dovid Soloveitchik, who also passed away from COVID aged 99, in the capital.

Haredi communities in other countries were also criticized for ignoring government-mandated health regulations. In the UK, Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis last month issued a

strong condemnation of an ultra-Orthodox wedding in London attended by hundreds that was broken up by police.

02.01.21

Channel 12 Poll has Likud clear election frontrunner as right-wing parties slide

02.01.21

Poll predicts Likud as clear election frontrunner

Channel 12 survey puts PM's party on 30 seats, followed by Yesh Atid on 17, while Gantz' Blue & White plummets to just 4 Knesset seats; poll also shows slide for Saar and Bennett's right-wing parties

i24NEWS| Published: 02.01.21 , 08:29

If elections were held in Israel today, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud would remain the largest party in the Knesset with 30 seats, a new poll published Sunday by broadcaster Channel 12 found.

Yesh Atid headed by Opposition Leader Yair Lapid would come in second with 17 seats, albeit with a significantly lower number than the Likud.

The poll showed a decline for two right-wing parties who were previously making a strong showing.

Former Likud minister Gideon Saar's New Hope would secure 14 seats while former education and defense minister Naftali Bennett's Yamina would win 13 seats in the next Knesset.

The Joint List alliance of predominantly Arab parties, which currently has 15 Knesset seats, would shrink to 10 seats as it continues its downward trend in recent surveys.

Ultra-Orthodox parties Shas and United Torah Judaism were each predicted to win eight Knesset seats.

Yisrael Beiteinu, headed by Avigdor Liberman, would receive seven seats, the poll showed, followed by the Labor Party with five, left-wing Meretz with four and Defense Minister Benny Gantz's centrist Blue & White party plummeting to four from its current 14.

Tel Aviv Mayor Ron Huldai's newly-formed The Israelis party would not pass the electoral threshold, along with former IDF chief Moshe Ya'alon's Telem party and Knesset Member Orly Levy's Geshet party.

The political factions have until February 4 to register their slates for the Knesset to the Central Elections Committee, ahead of the March 23 elections that will be Israel's fourth in two years. Reprinted courtesy of i24NEWS

01.31.21

Qatar pledges \$360 million during the coming year in aid to Hamas-Gaza

01.31.21

Qatar pledges \$360 million in aid to Hamas-ruled Gaza

Gulf country has been providing \$20 million to Gaza each month since 2018 to help cover electricity, salaries of Hamas's civil servants and monthly \$100 stipends to scores of impoverished families

Associated Press| Published: 01.31.21 , 18:54

The Qatari government on Sunday said it would provide \$360 million in assistance for the Gaza Strip during the coming year, renewing a program that has helped reduce fighting between Israel and the territory's militant Hamas rulers.

Qatar, an energy-rich Gulf country, has been providing \$20 million to Gaza each month since 2018. The payments have paid for much-needed electricity, helped Hamas cover the salaries of its civil servants and provided monthly \$100 stipends to scores of impoverished families.

Israel and Hamas are bitter enemies that have fought three wars since the Islamic militant group took control of Gaza in 2007. The fighting, combined with an Israeli blockade and continued infighting with the rival Palestinian Authority, have ravaged Gaza's economy.

The Qatari aid, delivered with Israeli agreement, has provided some relief to the local economy and is seen as a factor in preventing lingering tensions between Israel and Hamas from spilling over into renewed fighting.

The Qatari announcement comes as Hamas and the Palestinian Authority are trying to hold new elections in the Palestinian territories. The vote is meant as a key step toward reconciliation.

02.01.21

East Asia Myanmar military seizes power in response to election fraud

02.01.21

Myanmar military seizes power, detains elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi

Claiming fraud after Aung San Suu Kyi party's landslide victory in November, military disrupts phone and internet access as tanks deployed to some streets in capital aimed at preventing new parliament from convening; Biden White House issues condemnation

Reuters| Published: 02.01.21 , 06:54

Myanmar's military seized power on Monday in a coup against the democratically elected government of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who was detained along with other leaders of her National League for Democracy (NLD) party in early morning raids.

The **army** said it had carried out the detentions **in response to "election fraud"**, handing power to military chief Min Aung Hlaing and imposing a state of emergency for one year, according to a statement on a military-owned television station. A military spokesman did not answer phone calls seeking further comment.

Phone lines to the capital Naypyitaw and the main commercial center of Yangon were not reachable, and state TV went off air hours before parliament had been due to sit for the first time since the NLD's landslide election win in November, viewed as a referendum on Suu Kyi's fledgling democratic government.

Soldiers took up positions at city hall in Yangon and mobile internet data and phone services in the NLD stronghold were disrupted, residents said. Internet connectivity also had fallen dramatically, monitoring service NetBlocks said.

Suu Kyi, Myanmar President Win Myint and other NLD leaders had been "taken" in the early hours of the morning, NLD spokesman Myo Nyunt told Reuters by phone.

"I want to tell our people not to respond rashly and I want them to act according to the law," he said, adding that he expected to be arrested himself. Reuters was subsequently unable to contact him.

The detentions came after days of **escalating tension** between the civilian government and the **military that stirred fears of a coup in the aftermath of the election.**

The White House said President Joe Biden had been briefed on the arrest of Suu Kyi.

"The United States opposes any attempt to alter the outcome of recent elections or impede Myanmar's democratic transition, and will take action against those responsible if these steps are not reversed," spokeswoman Jen Psaki said in a statement.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres strongly condemned the detention of Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi and other political leaders and "urges the military leadership to respect the will of the people of Myanmar," a U.N. spokesman said on Sunday.

The Australian government said it was "deeply concerned at reports the **Myanmar military is once again seeking to seize control of Myanmar**" and called for the immediate release of the unlawfully detained leaders.

Japan said it was watching the situation and currently had no plans to repatriate Japanese nationals from Myanmar.

Nobel Peace Prize winner Suu Kyi, 75, came to power after a 2015 election win that followed decades of house arrest in a struggle for democracy with Myanmar's junta that turned her into an international icon.

Her international standing was damaged after hundreds of thousands of Rohingya fled army operations into refuge from Myanmar's western Rakhine state in 2017, but she remains hugely popular at home.

Political tensions soared last week when a military spokesman declined to rule out a coup ahead of the new parliament convening on Monday, and military chief Min Aung Hlaing raised the prospect of repealing the constitution.

But the military appeared to backtrack on the weekend, issuing a statement on social media on Sunday saying it would "do everything possible to adhere to the democratic norms of free and fair elections".

Tanks were deployed in some streets last week and pro-military demonstrations have taken place in some cities ahead of the first gathering of parliament.

Myanmar's election commission has rejected the military's allegations of vote fraud. The constitution published in 2008 after decades of military rule reserves 25% of seats in parliament for the military and control of three key ministries in Suu Kyi's administration.

Daniel Russel, the top U.S. diplomat for East Asia under President Barack Obama, who fostered close ties with Suu Kyi, said another military takeover in Myanmar would be a severe blow to democracy in the region.

"If true, this is a huge setback - not only for democracy in Myanmar, but for U.S. interests. It's yet another reminder that the extended absence of credible and steady U.S. engagement in the region has emboldened anti-democratic forces," he said.

Murray Hiebert, a Southeast Asia expert at Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank, said the situation was a challenge for the new U.S. administration.

"The U.S. as recently as Friday had joined other nations in urging the military not to move forward on its coup threats. China will stand by Myanmar like it did when the military kicked out the Rohingya," he said.

John Sifton, Asia advocacy director for Human Rights Watch, said Myanmar's military had never submitted to civilian rule and called on the United States and other countries to impose "strict and directed economic sanctions" on the military leadership and its economic interests.

02.01.21

China delayed January WHO probe of virus, saying origin was in another country

The WHO-led probe in Wuhan has been plagued by delays, concern over access and bickering between China and the United States, which accused China of hiding the extent of the initial outbreak and criticized the terms of the visit, under which Chinese experts conducted the first phase of research.

The origins of the virus have become highly politicized, and some Chinese diplomats and state media have thrown support behind theories that the virus potentially originated in another country.

The team had been set to arrive in Wuhan earlier in January, and China's delay of their visit drew rare public criticism from the head of the WHO, which then-U.S. President Donald Trump accused of being "China-centric".

02.02.21

Iran shifts position for EU, Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia & US negotiation

02.02.21

Iran's Zarif hints at way to bridge nuclear deal impasse

Speaking to CNN, Islamic Republic's top diplomat says that joint commission, created in 2015 and headed by EU foreign policy chief Borrell, could 'choreograph' actions between Tehran and Washington

Reuters| Published: 02.02.21 , 13:50

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif suggested a way on Monday to overcome the U.S.-Iranian impasse over who goes first in returning to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, saying a top EU official could "synchronize" or "choreograph" the moves.

Zarif's stance was a shift from his position, expressed in a Jan. 22 article in which he said the United States should remove U.S. sanctions before Iran returned to the deal.

"There can be a mechanism to basically either synchronize it or coordinate what can be done," Zarif told CNN when asked how to bridge the gap.

Each government wants the other to resume compliance first with the agreement, which former U.S. President Donald Trump abandoned in 2018 but which President Joe Biden said he will rejoin if Iran resumed "strict" compliance.

Under the accord, Iran agreed to limit its nuclear program to make it harder for it to develop nuclear weapons in return for relief from U.S. and other economic sanctions. Zarif noted the pact created a Joint Commission coordinated by the European Union foreign policy chief, now Josep Borrell. Borrell "can ... sort of choreograph the actions" needed from both sides, Zarif told CNN.

The commission includes the EU and the seven parties to the deal: Iran, Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States.

After abandoning the deal, Trump reimposed U.S. sanctions and imposed new U.S. economic penalties on Iran.

Analysts said Zarif's stance might lay the ground for talks on reviving the deal despite Iran's prior insistence that the United States lift sanctions first.

"It is entirely unsurprising to me that we are hearing, amid a largely uncompromising position from the Iranians, occasional breadcrumbs that will enable them" to enter into a negotiation, said Suzanne Maloney of the Brookings Institution.

Earlier on Tuesday, Energy Minister Dr. Yuval Steinitz said it would now take Iran about six months to produce enough fissile material for one nuclear weapon, a timeline almost twice as long as that anticipated by a senior Biden administration official.

Iran denies any intent to weaponize enrichment. The nuclear deal sets a limit of 3.67% enrichment purity, suitable for producing civilian nuclear energy and far below the 90% that is weapons-grade.