

Newsletter Friday November 2, 2018

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Egypt, 5 other Arab nations gear up for joint military drill

Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain and Jordan to participate in "Arab Shield" war games in Egypt from Nov. 3-16 • Exercise may be a sign that alliance proposed by U.S. could be gaining traction • Lebanon, Morocco to join drill as observers.

Associated Press and Israel Hayom Staff

Egyptian soldiers stand guard in North Sinai | Illustration: Reuters

Ground, air and naval units from five Arab nations are arriving in Cairo to join their Egyptian counterparts for war games, according to the Egyptian military, in the first sign that a military alliance proposed by Washington for its Middle East partners may be gaining traction.

The Egyptian military issued a statement saying forces from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain and Jordan will take part in the exercise, codenamed "Arab Shield," being held Nov. 3-16 in western Egypt. Lebanon and Morocco are taking part as observers.

The announcement came a little more than a month after U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met in New York with the foreign ministers from the six nations, plus those from Oman and Qatar, to advance the idea of creating a Sunni alliance uniting the U.S.'s Middle East partners against Shiite and non-Arab Iran.

However, the Egyptian military statement did not link the war games with the proposed alliance, which Egypt may be approaching with caution given its sectarian undertones.

Egypt has become heavily dependent on financial assistance and investments from Persian Gulf heavyweights Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and this may influence its decision on whether to join the proposed alliance.

A prominent Egyptian analyst on Thursday warned against such an alliance, framing its creation as part of an ongoing process to replace Israel with Iran as the Arabs' chief enemy and emphasizing that differences between the Arabs and Iran can be politically settled.

"Israel is not a friend and this is a fact despite all attempts to ignore it," Abdullah el-Sinnawy wrote in the independent al-Shorouk newspaper.

"The most dangerous thing here is to create an Arab NATO that includes countries bound by diplomatic relations with Israel, like Egypt and Jordan, and Gulf region nations like Saudi Arabia."

The U.S. proposed alliance, dubbed "Arab NATO," follows the derailment three years ago of efforts to create a joint Arab force agreed on at a 2015 Arab summit held in Egypt. That force was supposed to be led by an Egyptian general and headquartered in Saudi Arabia. But a meeting of military chiefs of staff that was to iron out details of the force was canceled at the last minute and another one was never scheduled.

Saudi Arabia then unilaterally announced the creation of an Islamic alliance that grouped its Gulf Arab allies along with Muslim majority countries in Africa and Asia. That also came to nothing.

Egypt is a member of a Saudi-led, U.S.-backed coalition that has been fighting Shiite rebels in Yemen since 2015, but its role in the conflict is known to be limited to reconnaissance and the deployment of warships off Yemen's Red Sea coastline to secure shipping lanes.

Newsletter Tuesday October 9, 2018

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US rejects Iran's legal claim to recover \$2 billion in frozen assets

Tehran appeals to World Court in an attempt to get its hands on frozen assets the U.S.

Supreme Court awarded to victims of terrorist attacks in which Iran was implicated •

State Department: Case is based on malicious conduct by Iran, should be dismissed.

News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff

Judges at the International Court of Justice in The Hague | Illustration: AP

The U.S. on Monday urged the United Nations' highest court to toss out a case filed by Iran that seeks to recover around \$2 billion worth of frozen assets the U.S. Supreme Court awarded to victims of a 1983 bombing in Lebanon and other attacks linked to Iran.

The case at the International Court of Justice is based on a bilateral treaty that the Trump administration terminated last week. Despite that, the United States sent a large legal delegation to the court's headquarters in The Hague to present their objections to the case, which Tehran filed in 2016.

The ICJ, also known as the World Court, is the principal judicial body of the United Nations. It settles legal disputes between member states and its rulings are binding.

U.S. State Department lawyer Richard Visek told the 15-judge panel that U.S. objections to the court's jurisdiction and admissibility "provide a clear basis for ruling that this case should not proceed to the merits."

Visek said the case is based on "malicious conduct" by Iran, a country Washington has long classified as a state sponsor of terrorism around the world. Iran denies that charge.

"At the outset, we should be clear as to what this case is about," Visek said. "The actions at the root of this case center on Iran's support for international terrorism and its complaints about the U.S. legal framework that allows victims of that terrorism to hold Iran accountable to judicial proceedings and receive compensation for their tragic losses."

The attack at the heart of the case was a suicide truck bombing of a U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in October 1983 that killed 241 military personnel and wounded 75. A U.S. court ruled that the attack was carried out by an Iranian agent supported by the Hezbollah terrorist group – the Islamic republic's Lebanon-based proxy.

In 2016, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered some \$2 billion in assets of Iran's state bank that had been frozen in the United States to be paid as compensation to relatives of victims of attacks including the Beirut bombing.

"Iran's effort to secure relief from the court in this case – to in effect deny terrorism victims justice – is wholly unfounded and its application should be rejected in its entirety as inadmissible," Visek told judges, saying that the dispute did not fall into the 1955 Treaty of Amity cited by Tehran as the basis for the court's jurisdiction.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo withdrew the United States from the treaty last week, saying the decision was long overdue.

The little-known treaty regulating commerce between the U.S. and Iran was among numerous ones signed in the wake of World War II as the Truman and Eisenhower administrations tried to assemble a coalition of nations to counter the Soviet Union.

In court Monday, another State Department lawyer, Lisa Grosh, said Iran now uses a clause of the treaty as an "empty vessel into which it can pour any grievance" in order to bring it before the world court.

Iran is due to present its arguments later this week. If the case goes ahead, it will likely take years to reach a conclusion.

It will take a year for a withdrawal from the Amity Treaty to take effect, and Iran's case against the asset seizure, which was filed in 2016, will continue regardless. The hearings in The Hague will run until Friday and focus on U.S. objections to the U.N.'s highest court's jurisdiction. No date for a ruling has been set.