

PARIS (AP) — Yellow vest activists are urging French citizens to empty their bank accounts and spark a massive run on French banks in their long-standing fight with the government. Ahead of a ninth straight weekend of planned protests in Paris and across France, yellow vests are issuing calls on social media for massive cash withdrawals from banks. Protesters hope the move will force the government to listen to their demands, notably their call for more direct democracy through the implementation of popular votes that allow citizens to propose new laws.

ANKARA (Dispatches) -- Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Wednesday called for joint control with Russia and Iran of U.S. troops' withdrawal from Syria, saying Washington is facing "certain difficulties" with the planned exit. "The United States has been facing certain difficulties with the process of the troops' withdrawal from Syria. We want to coordinate this process with Russia and Iran, with which we had arranged work in the framework of the Astana process," Cavusoglu said.

Viewpoint
Iran, India All Set to Break New Ground in Bilateral, Regional Ties

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Syrian Gov't 'Activates' Contacts With Kurds

Iran to Reciprocate EU Sanctions

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Iran said Wednesday that it would reciprocate after the European Union added two Iranian individuals and an Iranian intelligence unit to the bloc's terrorist list.

EU ministers agreed Tuesday to add the names to the list and freeze their assets, effective from Wednesday, as the Netherlands accused Iran of two killings on its soil and joined France and Denmark in alleging Tehran plotted other attacks in Europe.

The move although in part symbolic since one of the men is in prison in Belgium, marked the first time the EU has enacted sanctions on Iran since lifting a host of curbs on it three years ago following its 2015 nuclear pact with world powers.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qasemi called the EU's actions "illogical" and "surprising".

"Iran will adopt the necessary measures in response to this move and within the framework of reciprocity," Qasemi said in a statement published on the ministry's official website.

Iran has denied any involvement in the alleged plots, saying the accusations were intended to damage EU-Iran relations.

"These listings have been adopted by the Council as part of its response to recent foiled attacks on the European soil," the European Council claimed in a statement Wednesday.

Qasemi, in his statement, hit out at the EU for supporting "terrorist groups" such as the Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MKO), a group that has a dark history of terrorist bombings and assassinations in which more than 12,000 Iranians have been martyred and aiding the former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

"Instead of blacklisting such terrorist and criminal groups as the Monafeqin (MKO) and Al-Ahwaziya, the European Union has allowed them freedom to carry out their inhuman and terrorist activities and even provides them protection, while it levels accusations against Iran, which is the flag-bearer in the fight against terror in the region and to which Europe owes its security," Qasemi said.

Al-Ahwaziya was behind a terrorist attack in Iran's Ahwaz last September, during which more than two dozen Iranians were killed after gunmen opened fire at spectators and participants during a military parade.

The EU's sanctions are additionally frustrating because the bloc has so far defaulted on two deadlines which it had pledged to implement a special purpose vehicle aimed at bypassing U.S. sanctions on Iran.

The U.S. and the occupying regime of Israel were quick to welcome the anti-Iran sanctions.

"The U.S. strongly supports the new sanctions and stands with our European allies as we counter this common threat," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeted.

"This is an important first step by the EU, combating Iranian aggression," a statement by the Zionist foreign ministry said.

Iran is a victim of terrorism and atrocities perpetrated by Western-backed groups, notably the MKO whose members roam freely in Europe and the United States.

Iranian Foreign Minister Muhammad Javad Zarif tweeted that the sanctions would "not absolve Europe of responsibility for harboring terrorists."

"Europeans, including Denmark, Holland and France, harbor MEK—who killed 12000 Iranians and abetted Saddam's crimes against Iraqi Kurds—as well as other terrorists staging murder of innocent Iranians from Europe. Accusing Iran won't absolve Europe of responsibility for harboring terrorists," he wrote.

FM Zarif: Aerospace Program to Continue

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) -- Iran will continue with its aerospace program despite U.S. warnings, Foreign Minister Muhammad Javad Zarif said on Wednesday, adding there is no international law prohibiting such a program.

Zarif, who was in New Delhi on a bilateral visit, also told Reuters that leaving a 2015 nuclear deal agreed with world powers is an option available with Tehran but is not the only option on the table.

The United States earlier this month issued a pre-emptive warning to Iran against pursuing three planned space rocket launches that it claimed would violate a UN Security Council resolution because they use ballistic missile technology.

Under the UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which enshrined the nuclear deal in 2015, Iran is "called upon" to refrain from work on ballistic missiles designed to deliver nuclear weapons for up to eight years.

Iran has ruled out negotiations with Washington over its military capabilities, particularly the missile program. It says the program is purely defensive and de-



American Officials 'First-Class Idiots' Leader: Stand Up to U.S., European Threats



Ayatollah Khamenei addresses a group of visitors from the holy city of Qom on Jan. 9, 2019.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on Wednesday urged resistance in the face of U.S. and European threats, saying neither their threats, nor their promises and signatures are credible.

Addressing a group of people from the holy city of Qom, the Leader called U.S. officials "first-class idiots" as he recounted a story about a U.S. official who once predicted he would celebrate Christmas in Iran.

The Leader did not name the official. However, U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton told a meeting of MKO terrorists last

March that "before 2019, we here ... will celebrate in Iran."

"This is how the U.S. estimates the situations. U.S. politicians brag about their calculations and foresight. Here also some individuals who are under the influence of the West boast about the power of the U.S."

"However, just recently in a gathering of terrorists and thugs, one U.S. official said that he hoped he would celebrate this Christmas in Tehran. Christmas was some days ago. Just like Saddam said he would defeat Tehran in a few days, or the MKO terrorists who said they would move on to Teh-

ran in three days.

"Some U.S. officials pretend that they are mad. Of course I don't agree with that, but they are first-class idiots," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

The Americans, the Leader said, speak gleefully of "strongest sanctions in history" against Iran, "but the Iranian nation will, God willing, make them suffer an unprecedented defeat in history."

"The nation and authorities should attentively work to turn the American sanctions into an unprecedented defeat for the Great Satan as was done during the era of Sacred Defense (the Iraq-im-

posed war of the 1980s)," said the Leader.

U.S. President Donald Trump last year pulled out of an international pact on Iran's nuclear program and re-imposed sanctions intended to scupper Tehran's oil exports, curb its missile program and clip its regional influence.

"The sanctions do put pressure on the country and the people," Ayatollah Khamenei said, describing U.S. animosity with the Iranian nation as typical.

"The animosity of the arrogant system of the West and the U.S. against the newly emerged phenomenon of the Islamic Revolution is typical.

"It has been 40 years now that this young revolution has been continuing to grow and becoming powerful. So with the emergence of this new and vigorous spiritual power, the power of the front of arrogance has cracked and the crack is deepening," the Leader said.

Ayatollah Khamenei said the reason behind this animosity is that the Islamic Revolution is preparing the grounds for an Islamic civilization, which will "by the grace of God put an end to the arrogance, oppression, and colonization feeding on the blood of other nations."

"The nations across the world—even the Western nations—bear no hostility toward the message and the ideal of the Islamic Revolution. They might try to create Iranophobia and Islamophobia, but they won't succeed," he added.

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Pompeo on Surprise Visit to Iraq After Trump's Sneak Trip

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) -- U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with senior Iraqi officials, including President Barhem Saleh, Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi and parliamentary speaker Muhammad al-Halbousi, during an unannounced visit to Baghdad on Wednesday.

Pompeo's visit to Baghdad, on the second leg of an eight-day Middle East tour, comes less than two weeks after U.S. President Donald Trump drew criticism for failing to meet a single Iraqi official during a brief Christmas visit to U.S. troops based in the country.

The top U.S. diplomat's tour also comes amid confusion over U.S. policy in Syria, from where Trump last month announced that all U.S. troops would be withdrawn, and with Pompeo vowing to confront Iran.

Following his stopovers in Amman and Baghdad, Pompeo is also due to visit Cairo, Manama, Abu Dhabi, Doha, Riyadh, Muscat and Kuwait City on his longest trip since taking office last year.

Trump's visit to Iraq last month prompted criticism, particularly from Iraqi lawmakers, after a planned meeting with Mahdi was can-

celled and replaced with a phone call.

Since then, Trump appears to have rowed back, vowing the withdrawal would be done in a "prudent" way, and members of his administration have gone further, saying that the timeline of the pullout remains dependent on events on the ground.

The U.S. and its regional allies have also been keen to pressure Iran, but the Baghdad government has been reluctant to comply with U.S. sanctions reimposed on the Islamic Republic in November.

Trade between the two neighboring countries is thought to amount to around \$12bn, while Iran provides around 40 percent of Iraq's electricity needs.

Last week, Iraq's foreign minister said that his country was "not obliged" to abide by the sanctions and would be pursuing options to continue trade.

"These sanctions, the siege, or what is called the embargo, these are unilateral, not international. We are not obliged to follow them," Muhammad Ali al-Hakim told a gathering of journalists.

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