

Afghan Female Politician:

Taliban Talks Only Hope for Future

KABUL (Dispatches) – Afghan women have no choice but to hope the Taliban respect their rights for the sake of peace, said Fauzia Kofi, the first woman to lead a political party in Afghanistan.

During their rule from 1996 to 2001, the Taliban imposed a medieval rule on Afghanistan, the question now is how much have they changed.

Banned from involvement in politics or speaking publicly, from working, school and leaving their homes without a male relative, women disappeared behind the all-enveloping burqa and the walls of their homes during those five years.

But with momentum building behind talks to end decades of conflict, Kofi, whose mission is to ensure women take their rightful place in her country's democracy, is part of the healing process.

This year, she took part in the first two rounds of so-called intra-Afghan talks - aimed at bringing together Taliban representatives and Afghans from the government and civil society - to find a way to end decades of war.

"There is no other option. Like many other women I have my concerns, especially when it comes to the Taliban perception of women's rights," Kofi told Reuters in an interview.

"But given that my people have suffered more than four decades of war, I think the desire of all is a dignified peace, so I have no choice but to be cautiously optimistic."

Kofi, 44, the first woman deputy of the lower house of parliament, is likely to attend the third round of intra-Afghan talks, expected in China soon. The earlier rounds were in Moscow and Qatar.



In this file photo taken on June 16, 2018, Taliban militants ride a motorbike in the outskirts of Jalalabad, Afghanistan.

The Afghan talks have been running parallel to efforts by the United States and the Taliban to negotiate a deal on the withdrawal of U.S. troops in exchange for Taliban security guarantees. The U.S.-Taliban talks have been suspended but are expected to get going again soon.

The Taliban have refused to talk to the government, branding it a U.S. puppet, so the intra-Afghan talks, attended by government officials but in a private capacity, are the main avenue for Afghans to explore power-sharing and discuss how they think their country should be run.

"Change is a very broad term," Kofi said when asked if she thought the Taliban had altered their hardline positions.

"Their views on some social issues are probably different from the time they were ruling. However, they ought to practice and enforce measures publicly, to show they won't be a burden on Afghanistan's progress."

Whatever happens, women cannot be let down by the "peace process", she said.

U.S. Withholds

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and tribes," the cleric said during weekly Friday prayers.

The remarks echoed statements made by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei earlier this week.

The Leader warned that the U.S. and Western spy services, with the financial help of the reactionary Arab regimes, are seeking to instigate "dangerous hostilities" in Iraq and Lebanon despite their people's "legitimate demands".

Ayatollah Movahedi Kermani highlighted how foreign influence and corruption has led to major grievances in the two countries.

"The United States has been looting one million barrels of Iraqi oil on a daily basis on the pretext of receiving compensation for war," he said, adding Washington is apparently openly encouraging violence.

The cleric said Iraq's troubles are rooted in U.S. interference in the country. The "virtuous people of Iraq know how and are able to achieve true reforms under the framework of the legitimate government, law and the guidance of their religious sources to follow," he added.

Touching on protests in Lebanon, Ayatollah Movahedi Kermani said ignoring the people's economic needs was one of the main roots of the country's woes.

The cleric said the government of Prime Minister Hariri has significantly raised Lebanon's debt by accepting foreign loans despite failing to make positive changes in the lives of the Lebanese.

"Managing the economic needs of the Lebanese people requires 15 billion dollars annually, this is while different governments have raised Lebanon's debt to 120 billion dollars due to their incompetence," he said.

"The annual interest that has to be paid now exceeds the government's yearly earning," Ayatollah Movahedi Kermani added.

The protests in Lebanon are an opportunity for the government to push with reforms, the Iranian cleric said.

"The resignation of Hariri, however, showed that certain political factions have preferred the interests of the United States, Israel and some Arab governments over the interests of the people," he said.

According to Ayatollah Movahedi Kermani, hostile elements seek to weaken Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement by sowing domestic strife.

U.S. Economic...

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pulled out of the 2015 nuclear deal and reimposed sanctions lifted under the agreement last year.

The U.S. has imposed a number of additional embargoes since.

Earlier this week, a Riyadh-based group composed of the US and its Arab allies introduced sanctions against 25 economic entities on the pretext of allegedly supporting the IRGC and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Humanitarian Implications
Washington's sanctions against Iran have had widespread negative effects on the lives of ordinary Iranians, pushing up commodity prices and denying Iranians essential imported goods such as certain medical drugs.

The new sanctions announced Thursday are set to make it further difficult for average Iranian households to attain affordable housing after Washington's coercive measures destabilized Iran's real estate market last year.

They come a week after the U.S. Treasury announced "a new humanitarian mechanism" to allow "permissible trade" to support the Iranian people while maintaining its "maximum pressure" policy against the Iranian government.

The announcement was received with much skepticism in Iran which dismissed the purported humanitarian channel as "a farce" and a trap to target more Iranian companies and entities.
The new method, disguised as the

humanitarian channel, asks foreign governments and banks to report on a monthly basis to Washington any link they have with Iranian financial institutions.

Many experts have said that the regulations will only enable the U.S. to pursue sanctions against the country with more efficiency, further imperiling "permissible trade" with the country.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin was the first U.S. official to ride roughshod on the purported humanitarian channel on Monday when he pledged to increase sanctions on Iran after meeting Zionist PM Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem Al-Quds.

Netanyahu called on Washington to impose additional sanctions on Iranians, instead of facilitating humanitarian trade, in order to "make the availability of cash more difficult for them."

At a joint news conference, Mnuchin said then the U.S. administration "will continue to ramp up more, more, more," adding, "We are not doing this to hurt the people of Iran."

Last November, however, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said it was in Iran's best interests to toe the line and listen to Washington or else its people would pay the price.

Pompeo told BBC Persian that Iranian officials had to "make a decision that they want their people to eat."

The Treasury said on Wednesday the U.S. and six Persian Gulf countries - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE - had agreed to jointly impose sanctions on 25 corporations, banks and individuals allegedly linked to Iran's IRGC and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Syria ...

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The Kurds would not be asked to immediately hand over their weapons when the Syrian army enters their areas in a final deal with them that brings back state control to the large swathe of territory they now control, Assad said in the interview.

"There are armed groups that we cannot expect they would hand over weapons immediately but the final goal is to return to the previous situation, which is the complete control of the state," he said.

Syria had a right to defend its territorial integrity against separatist Kurds who aspired to create a Kurdish state and rule over Arabs and other ethnic groups, Assad said.

Resentment against Kurdish-dominated rule in eastern Syria has grown among the predominately Arab population, residents say.

On Friday, Turkey began joint patrols with Russia in northern Syria after Kurdish militants met a 150-hour deadline to leave border areas near Turkey as part of a deal struck between Ankara and Moscow in Sochi late last month.

Moscow has already confirmed to Ankara that the Kurdish withdrawal process was complete.

The Russian army said that the patrols — consisting of nine vehicles and an armored personnel carrier — would cover more than 110 kilometers.

Russia's Sputnik news agency reported that an additional 300 Russian soldiers and 20 armored vehicles had been deployed in northern Syria to take part in future patrols in the region.

Netanyahu...

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has mostly shied from confrontation with the Islamic Republic.

After Iran downed a U.S. drone for intruding into its airspace, Trump boasted that he called back an airstrike after planes were already in the air.

The White House's decision to pull troops out of northern Syria and abandon Kurdish allies there has further disheartened the occupying regime of Israel and left it feeling isolated.

Trump ran on a campaign of "America First" policy and has sought to end U.S. military operations abroad to a large degree, announcing troop pullouts from Afghanistan and Syria.

Qatar Takes Step Toward First Shura Council Election

DUBAI (Dispatches) – Qatar's ruling emir has ordered that a committee be established to organize the first ever elections to the Shura Council that advises the government of the Persian Gulf state, state news agency QNA reported.

The committee will be chaired by the country's prime minister, QNA said.

The decision by Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani marks a revival of plans for a partial election to the Shura Council, the top advisory body to the government, that have been delayed for several years.

Under the plans, 30 members would be elected while another 15 will be appointed by the emir.

Doha looked again at the voting plan after its neighbors Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain launched a diplomatic and trade boycott against it in 2017, accusing it of supporting terrorism. Doha denies the charges.

Qatar and Saudi Arabia already have some form of local elections but all members of their Shura councils — which remain without real legislative

power — are appointed by the rulers. Kuwait and Bahrain's parliaments are elected and enjoy relatively more influence.

Qatar's Sheikh Tamim took power in 2013 after his father Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani abdicated, taking the rare step for a Persian Gulf Arab ruler of voluntarily ceding power to try to ensure a smooth succession.

played a leading role in supporting the education of the minor girls held there, organizing classes on human rights and in review for mandatory high school examinations when the prison authority denied the girls a teacher.

Jarrar was last arrested in July 2017, when a large number of Zionist troops raided her home. Her husband, Ghassan, said the Zionist troops also seized her computers during the raid.

The occupying regime's internal spy agency, Shin Bet, later announced in a statement that Jarrar was arrested along with a Palestinian activist for "promoting terror activities," without providing any further information.

Jarrar is one of the most outspoken critics of the Israeli occupation and has repeatedly slammed the Tel Aviv regime's atrocities against Palestinians.

The Israeli regime has been denying the lawmaker the right to travel outside the occupied Palestinian territories since 1988. She campaigned for months in 2010 before receiving the permission to travel to Jordan for medical treatment.

In August 2014, Jarrar received a "special supervision order" from the regime's military, which ordered her to leave Ramallah to live in the West Bank city of Ariha.

Zionist Regime Re-Arrests Prominent Palestinian Legislator

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – Zionist troops have re-arrested a prominent Palestinian legislator and senior member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in an overnight raid into her home.

Khalida Jarrar, a 56-year-old member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, was arrested at 3 am local time (00:00 GMT) at her home in the central occupied West Bank city of Ramallah, located 10 kilometers north of Jerusalem al-Quds, and taken to an unknown area, local media reported on Thursday.

Her daughter Yara Jarrar said in a post on Twitter that the house was surrounded by more than 70 Zionist troops who arrived in 12 military vehicles.

"Mom and sister were asleep when they approached," Yara said.

The Palestinian lawmaker has been jailed multiple times. She was released last February after spending 20 months in "administrative detention" -- an illegal practice under which an individual is held without a trial.

Jarrar, a staunch advocate of Palestinian prisoners' rights, said after her release that she would continue to campaign for the release of all Palestinian prisoners held in the regime's prisons and detention centers.

According to Samidoun, a Palestinian prisoner solidarity network, she

Turkey Summons French Ambassador

ANKARA (Dispatches) – Turkish Foreign Ministry has summoned French ambassador to Turkey over decisions by the two houses of the French parliament on Turkey's military operation in northern Syria.

French Ambassador to Turkey Charles Fries was summoned to the ministry over the resolution adopted by the French Parliament on the Turkish so-called Operation Peace Spring, a Turkish Foreign Ministry

official told Xinhua.

Turkish Foreign Ministry also condemned the resolution in a written statement.

"We strongly condemn and reject the decisions by the French Senate and National Assembly about Operation Peace Spring," the statement said.

French parliament and government once again showed that "they side with the

Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG)," it added.

Ankara sees the YPG as the Syrian offshoots of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) listed as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the U.S. and the European Union.

The French parliament on Wednesday approved unanimously a resolution condemning Turkey's operation into Syria.