

# Groups Urge Biden to Halt \$735mn Weapons Sale to Zionist Regime

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – Peace advocates and pro-Palestinian groups in the United States are calling on President Joe Biden to halt a \$735m sale of precision-guided bombs to the Zionist regime that the Biden administration has fast-tracked.

“We are knowingly transferring weapons to a regime that is not only engaged in aggression but also a massive violation of human rights,” said Huwaida Arraf, co-chair of the Palestine subcommittee of the National Lawyers Guild and organizer for Palestinian rights in the U.S.

“Our government is enabling Israel, not just with the billions of dollars that we send to Israel, but by shielding Israel from any kind of accountability,” Arraf told Al Jazeera.

A coalition of more than 100 groups, including Churches for Middle East Peace, Jewish Voice for Peace, the Friends Committee on National Legislation and Democratic-leaning political groups Justice Democrats, MoveOn, Indivisible, and the Sunrise Movement, signed an open letter to Biden.

“The planned arms sales to Israel would send a signal of support for Israel’s recent conduct in occupied Gaza and East Jerusalem (al-Quds), which includes likely violations of international



*Palestinians inspect damaged houses hit by Zionist air strikes in Gaza City.*

humanitarian law,” the groups said in the letter.

“We believe moving ahead with these sales would undermine U.S. moral values, national security interests, and support likely violations of international humanitarian law by sending a green light for Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights,” the groups said.

The Biden administration formally notified Congress of the planned \$735m weapons sale on May 5, giving legislators 15 days to raise objections. The State Department issued a license on May 21 to manufacturer Boeing Comp to proceed with the sale.

Representative Alexandria Oc-

asio-Cortez and Senator Bernie Sanders filed resolutions in Congress to block the sale under the U.S. arms control law.

Those failed on procedural grounds disappointing opponents of the sale who had hoped to at least to try to force a debate and a vote in Congress, advocates said.

“These weapons sales, they are often rubber-stamped, and there is a real lack of transparency in the way that they work,” said Beth Miller, senior government affairs manager for Jewish Voice for Peace.

“We all just saw, over these last couple of weeks, exactly how the Israelis use these weapons,”

Miller told Al Jazeera.

“They used them on residential apartment buildings, hospitals, to damage COVID centers and to wipe out Palestinian families.”

Over 11 days in May, the Zionist regime’s bombing of Gaza killed 253 Palestinians including 66 children and displaced more than 58,000 people from their homes.

## ‘Support for Zionist Regime in Europe Falls’

Meanwhile, a new poll has found that public support for the Zionist regime in Europe has hit a record low following the recent Gaza offensive.

According to the YouGov survey, net favorability for the occupying regime in Europe has fallen by at least 14 points since it was last tracked four months ago.

According to the poll, British people tend to have the most negative view of the Zionist regime, with favorability falling 27 points, from -14 in February to -41 in May - the lowest rating since the poll began in 2016.

In France, favorability also decreased significantly, by 23 points. A similar trend was noted in Denmark Sweden and Germany. Germans were the most favorable toward the occupying regime, falling from -10 to -24.

# Syria Repels Zionist Missile Strike Over Damascus

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – Syrian air defenses have intercepted a missile strike by the Zionist regime over the capital Damascus, media reported.

Syrian media reported early Wednesday morning that air defense systems had engaged targets over the capital city of Damascus.

According to a reporter by the Syrian Arab News Agency, the targets came from Lebanese airspace, a typical avenue of aggression by the Zionist regime.

“At exactly 11:36 p.m. this evening, the Israeli enemy car-

ried out an air attack from over the Lebanese territories, targeting some targets in the central and southern regions,” SANA quoted an unnamed military source as saying.

Photos and ate footage from the scene have been shared by SANA online.

Later, the Syrian army confirmed it shot down some missiles fired by the occupying regime, the state media reported.

“Our air defense systems repelled the aggressor’s missiles and shot down some of them,” SANA quoted a Defense Minis-

try statement.

The aggression would be the first in about a month after pre-dawn raids struck the western Syrian port city of Latakia on May 5.

SANA said the Zionist airstrike had hit a plastics factory in Latakia, leaving one civilian dead and six others, including a child and his mother, injured.

The occupying regime frequently targets military positions inside Syria, especially those of the resistance movement Hezbollah, which has played a key role in helping the

Syrian army in its fight against foreign-backed terrorists since 2011.

Damascus has repeatedly urged the United Nations to condemn and take action against Zionist violations of Syrian sovereignty.

Syria called on the UN Security Council in April to take “firm and immediate” action to end the occupying regime’s acts of aggression after a barrage of Zionist missiles were launched from the direction of the occupied Golan Height on some targets near Damascus.

# UAE Envoy to Italy Summoned Over Plane Overflight Ban

ROME (Dispatches) – Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio has summoned the UAE ambassador in Rome over a Boeing 767 overflight ban.

“On the instructions of Minister Luigi Di Maio, the Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry, Ambassador Ettore Sequi, has summoned today the Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates, Omar al-Shamsi, to the Foreign Ministry. The Secretary General has expressed to the Ambassador his surprise and great disappointment for an unexpected gesture that is hard to understand,” the ministry said in a statement.

The development came after the oil-rich state banned the overflight of Italian Air Force Boeing 767 jet carrying nearly 40 journalists en route to a military ceremony in the Afghan city of Herat, where Italy’s

Defense Minister Lorenzo Guerini had arrived earlier to take part in a flag-lowering ceremony at the country’s military base there.

According to the Italian foreign ministry statement, after Abu Dhabi’s refusal to allow the use of its airspace, its jetliner was forced to land in the Saudi Arabian city of Dammam, where it flew off for Herat “using a route further north” after a few hours.

Diplomatic ties between Rome and Abu Dhabi deteriorated after the Italian government’s decision to impose an arms embargo on the UAE due to its military aggression against Yemen – in partnership with the Saudi regime – and the massive bombardment of its civilian areas.

# Egyptian Ex-Diplomat Detained After Criticizing Gov’t

CAIRO (Middle East Eye) – Egyptian authorities have arrested a former Egyptian diplomat and government critic, Yehia Negm, after raiding his home in Cairo on 29 May, several rights groups said, citing his family.

According to an article published by Czech-based organization Egyptian Front for Human Rights (EFHR), Negm’s family said that he appeared at the Supreme State Security Prosecution on 2 June, after an enforced disappearance that lasted for three days.

Negm, the 52-year-old former second secretary at the Egyptian embassy in Caracas, Venezuela, has been charged with “joining a terrorist group, spreading false news, and misusing social media”. The prosecution

ordered his pre-trial detention for 15 days pending an investigation into the case.

His family said that as soon as the investigation zeroed in on Negm, he was transferred again to an unknown location. They have demanded authorities reveal his whereabouts and allow them to deliver medication to him “as his health condition is critical and needs continuous follow-up.”

The EFHR said that after Negm’s arrest, he was transferred to the National Security headquarters in Al-Salam area, where he was interrogated about his Facebook posts.

Negm, a former supporter of the Sisi government, has recently emerged as a critical voice against a number of agricultural policies, particularly the potential impacts of the

controversial Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the country’s water needs. He has accused the Sisi government of “mismanagement” of the dam crisis.

In a post on 23 May, he said that “the conflicting statements of Egyptian officials [on the dam crisis] indicate a state of internal delirium and schizophrenia, and make the country the laughing stock of the world.”

Ethiopia’s construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile has alarmed downstream countries Egypt and Sudan. Cairo fears the dam will imperil its supplies of Nile water, while Khartoum is concerned about its safety and waterflow through its own dams and water stations.

## Hundreds...

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president any deal must be approved by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

Iran’s top nuclear negotiator said last week that barriers to a revival of the deal are complicated but not insurmountable. “Differences have reached a point where everyone believes these differences are not insolvable,” Abbas Araqchi said.

However, none of the remaining sticking points lend themselves to rapid solutions, according to the diplomats, Iranian officials and analysts of Iranian nuclear matters.

“I doubt that the next round will be the final one... The parties are still far apart on core issues,” said Ali Vaez, senior Iran analyst at the International Crisis Group.

And when, or if, disagreements are solved, more talks would be needed on so-called sequencing - the delicate question of which side takes which action and when, in return for reciprocal steps by the other side, the diplomats said.

The negotiations have made considerable progress but are now at the hardest part with the key decisions still needed, said a European diplomat briefed on the talks, which began in April.

The talks have arrived at “the heart of the matter on the nuclear dimension”, a second European diplomat said.

A senior Western diplomat said that “of course” he hoped that the next round would result in a deal, but injected a note of caution, saying “until we are able to resolve the important issues that remain, we won’t know.”

An Iranian official said: “Everything depends on Washington. If the American side accepts to lift all sanctions, then Iran will return into full compliance with the deal.”

In addition to seeking the lifting of Trump-era sanctions, Tehran also wants Washington to remove Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) from a terrorism blacklist, which can be used to bar Iranian businesses from the international financial system. It wants Europe to guarantee foreign investors will return, and assurances that Washington will not renege on the deal again.

But from the standpoint of Washington and its European allies, it would no longer be sufficient to return to the nuclear restrictions in the original deal, Reuters said.

The Iranians have acquired knowledge and capabilities they did not have before, said the European diplomat briefed on the talks, citing Iran’s first ever production of uranium metal used in power generation.

Bob Einhorn, a former senior State Department official and nuclear negotiator with Iran, thought it highly unlikely that there would be an agreement before the presidential election.

## Economy...

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Elsewhere, Raisi said efforts should be made to allay the people’s concerns over high healthcare prices by increasing the administration’s share in paying the costs.

The people currently have to pay 43 percent of healthcare costs, an amount that should be lowered, he added.

To that effect, Raisi said, “green credit cards” should be devised to help the people cover their healthcare costs and resolve issues over admission to hospital and treatment.

“We have to give credibility to health insurance cards, and the next stage would be developing supplementary insurance to soothe the people’s concerns over healthcare costs,” Raisi added.

Presidential candidate Alireza Zakani, an outspoken critic of the 2015 nuclear deal, said he will continue negotiations with the five parties to the agreement, if he is elected, to get back the rights of the Iranian nation that were violated following the U.S.’s unilateral withdrawal over three years ago.

In a press conference, Zakani said regardless of the nature of the nuclear deal, which he has repeatedly criticized, “We have been pursuing a series of demands” as part of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

“Under the current circumstances, the United States and Europe have failed to fulfill their JCPOA commitments; therefore, it is necessary for us to continue negotiations with these countries to get back Iran’s rights,” said Zakani. “We will follow up on this case.”

“I do not rule out the principle of negotiation and favor anything that adds to our national interests,” Zakani said.

The United States, the lawmaker said, can rejoin the JCPOA only when it lifts its “brutal sanctions” against Iran, and when Tehran is given “legal guarantees that Iran’s interests under the JCPOA would be fulfilled.”

The Americans, however, “are willing to keep the infrastructure of the sanctions and bring up new issues in this area, both of which are our red lines,” Zakani added.