

U.S. Plan to Remove Zionist Group From 'Terror' List Draws Concern

WASHINGTON (Al Jazeera) – Palestinian rights advocates have raised the alarm over U.S. plans to remove a terrorist Zionist group from Washington's list of "foreign terrorist organizations" (FTO), warning that such a move may embolden Kahane Chai's supporters.

A United States official confirmed that the State Department has notified Congress of plans to delist the organization, originally known as "Kach", because it considers it defunct.

Yet while critics acknowledge that the group – founded by extremist, U.S.-born Zionist politician Meir Kahane – officially has been inactive, they say adherents who espouse its ideology are still operating both in the U.S. and the occupied territories.

Before establishing Kach in the occupied territories, Kahane founded the Jewish De-



A statue dedicated to Alex Odeh, a Palestinian American activist killed in a 1985 office bombing, is situated outside the Santa Ana Public Library.

fense League (JDL) in the U.S., a hardline pro-Zionist organization linked to several violent attacks on U.S. soil, including the assassination of Palestinian-American organizer Alex Odeh in California in 1985.

"Kach and Kahane Chai splintered into various groups and political parties that continue to espouse, inspire and carry out acts of violence against Palestinian civilians,"

said William Lafi Youmans, an associate professor at George Washington University who is working on a documentary about the assassination of Odeh.

"Rather than removing the designation, the State Department should have updated and expanded it. Simply dropping these groups from the list is going to be seen as the United States continuing its light ap-

proach towards right-wing violence against Palestinians," he told Al Jazeera.

Odeh, who served as a regional director of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), a civil rights group, was killed in a bombing as he opened his office in Santa Ana, a city in Orange County.

No one has been convicted for the attack, but ADC and Arab-American groups have long accused Kahane's JDL of being behind the assassination. Numerous media reports also have connected the group to the killing.

Kahane, who was elected to the occupying regime's Knesset in 1984 on a platform that openly advocated for Palestinians to be expelled from their homeland, was killed in New York in 1990. But long after his death, his followers continued to carry out violent attacks.

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and "deflect attention" from its alleged human rights violations.

In her Wednesday press conference, Douhan welcomed Iran's efforts to support Afghan refugees, displaced by the 20-year U.S. war, despite the burden of sanctions.

"I call on the sanctioning states, particularly the U.S., to abandon the unilateral sanctions," she stated.

She also referred to stalled negotiations in Vienna to bring the U.S. back to the nuclear deal, urging the JCPOA signatories and the U.S. to resume the negotiations.

Iran and the P4+1 group of countries – Britain, France, Germany, China, and Russia – have held several rounds of sanctions in the Austrian capital since April 2021 to revive the JCPOA.

Iran says its primary goal at the talks is to have the illegal U.S. sanctions removed.

Russia... (Continued From Page One)

would bring a close to a near three month siege of the once prosperous city of more than 400,000 people, where Ukraine says tens of thousands of civilians died under Russian bombardment.

Ukrainian officials have spoken of hopes to arrange a prisoner swap for Mariupol defenders they describe as national heroes. Moscow says no such deal was made for the fighters, many from a unit with far-right origins, which it calls Nazis.

The Kremlin says Putin has personally guaranteed the humane treatment of those who surrender. Other high-profile Russian politicians have publicly called for them never to be exchanged, or even for their execution.

The Swedish and Finnish ambassadors handed over their NATO membership application letters in a ceremony at the alliance's headquarters in Brussels.

"This is a historic moment which we must seize," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said.

Turkey has surprised its allies in recent days by saying it will block the Nordic members' accession unless they do more to crack down on Kurdish militants on their territory. Stoltenberg said he thought the issue could be overcome, and Washington has also said it expects it to be resolved.

New Generation of Laser Weapons

Russia said it was using a new generation of powerful laser weapons in Ukraine to burn up drones, deploying some of Moscow's secret weapons to counter a flood of Western arms supplied to its former Soviet neighbor.

Putin in 2018 unveiled an array of new weapons including a new intercontinental ballistic missile, underwater nuclear drones, a supersonic weapon and a new laser weapon.

Little is known about the specifics of the new laser weapons. Putin mentioned one called Peresvet, named after a medieval Orthodox warrior monk Alexander Peresvet who perished in mortal combat.

Yury Borisov, the deputy prime minister in charge of military development, told a conference in Moscow that Peresvet was already being widely deployed and it could blind satellites up to 1,500 km above Earth.

He said, though, that there were already more powerful Russian systems than Peresvet that could burn up drones and other equipment. Borisov cited a test on Tuesday which he said had burned up a drone 5 km away within five seconds.

"If Peresvet blinds, then the new generation of laser weapons lead to the physical destruction of the target - thermal destruction, they burn up," Borisov told Russian state television.

Asked if such weapons were being used in Ukraine, Borisov said: "Yes. The first prototypes are already being used there." He said the weapon was called "Zadira".

Almost nothing is publicly known about Zadira but in 2017 Russian media said Russia's state nuclear corporation, Rosatom, helped develop it as part of a program to create weapons-based new physical principles, known by the Russian acronym ONFP.

Using lasers to blind satellites - or even burn them up - was once a fantasy from the realm of science fiction, but major powers such as the United States, China and Russia have been working on variants of such weapons for years.

Besides the benefits in conventional warfare of burning up drones, blinding reconnaissance systems has a strategic

impact too as satellites are used to monitor intercontinental ballistic missiles which carry nuclear weapons.

Borisov said he had just returned from Sarov, a closed town in the Nizhny Novgorod region once known as Arzamas-16 because it was so secret, which is a centre of Russia's nuclear weapons research.

He said a new generation of laser weapons using a wide electromagnetic band would ultimately replace conventional weapons. "This is not some sort of exotic idea; it is the reality," Borisov said.

Watchdog... (Continued From Page One)

In a blunt assessment of the war, Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told Congress last fall that the result was years in the making.

"Outcomes in a war like this, an outcome that is a strategic failure — the enemy is in charge in Kabul, there's no way else to describe that — that is a cumulative effect of 20 years," Milley said, adding that lessons need to be learned, including whether the U.S. military made the Afghans overly dependent on American technology in a mistaken effort to make the Afghan army look like the American army.

Indeed, in the end, the new report said that the Afghans were still heavily dependent on U.S. air support for strikes and emergency evacuations, and also on U.S. contractors to maintain and repair aircraft and other systems.

But all agree that the Doha agreement was a lynchpin in the collapse.

"The signing of the Doha agreement had a really pernicious effect on the government of Afghanistan and on its military — psychological more than anything else, but we set a date-certain for when we were going to leave and when they could expect all assistance to end," Gen. Frank McKenzie told Congress last year.

McKenzie, who was then the top U.S. general in the Middle East and has since retired, argued to keep 2,500 U.S. troops there, as did Milley.

The Doha agreement, said the SIGAR report, led the Afghan population and its military to feel abandoned. And the Trump administration's decision to limit U.S. airstrikes against the Taliban stopped any progress the Afghans were making, and left them unable and eventually unwilling to hold territory, it said.

According to the report, a former U.S. commander in Afghanistan said the U.S. built the Afghan army to rely on contractor support. "Without it, it can't function. Game over," the commander told SIGAR. "When the contractors pulled out, it was like we pulled all the sticks out of the Jenga pile and expected it to stay up."

More broadly, the SIGAR report said that both the U.S. and Afghan governments "lacked the political will to dedicate the time and resources necessary to reconstruct an entire security sector in a war-torn and impoverished country."

Neither side, it said, "appeared to have the political commitment to doing what it would take to address the challenges." As a result, it said, the Afghan military couldn't operate independently and never really became a cohesive force.

Pompeo... (Continued From Page 2)

in order to use them as proxies against Iran.

Iranian officials have condemned the "shameless hypocrisy" of the U.S. and its European allies in supporting a terrorist cult that has Iranian blood on its hands. Out of the nearly 17,000 Iranians killed in terrorist attacks over the past four decades, about 12,000 have fallen victim to the group's acts of terror.

Meanwhile, during the Monday meeting, the head of the infamous group also claimed that the fight against the Islamic Republic will continue.

She called for the imposition of "comprehensive sanctions" against Iran to isolate the country, claiming the Islamic Republic should be placed under Article 41 of Chapter 7 of the UN Charter.

Both Pompeo and Rajavi claimed that they support recent protests sparked by price hikes in Iran.

Support for anti-Iran terrorist groups in the U.S. and Europe has remarkably grown in the Western countries, with many Western spy agencies actively involved in aiding and arming them.

The Islamic Republic has already warned Europeans that their support for the MKO will be "costly" for them. Tehran has condemned the hosting of the group by Albania and its delisting by the US and Europe.

Sandstorms Continue to Smother Middle East

DUBAI (AFP) – The world's tallest building disappeared behind a grey layer of dust on Wednesday as sandstorms that have swept the Middle East hit the United Arab Emirates, prompting weather and traffic warnings.

The 828-meter (2,716 ft, 6ins) Burj Khalifa, which towers over Dubai and is usually visible across the busy financial hub, retreated behind a curtain of airborne dirt that shrouded much of the country.

The UAE is just the latest country in the path of sand-

storms that have smothered Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iran and others in recent days, closing airports and schools and sending thousands to hospital with breathing problems.

Capital city Abu Dhabi's air quality index (AQI) soared into the "hazardous" zone overnight, according to waqi.info and the Plume pollution app.

The Middle East's sandstorms are becoming more frequent and intense, a trend associated with overgrazing and deforestation, overuse of river water and more dams.

Experts say the phenomenon could worsen as climate change warps regional weather patterns and drives desertification.

Emirati authorities issued a nationwide warning urging residents to remain vigilant.

"Abu Dhabi Police urges drivers to be cautious due to low visibility during high winds and dust," the police force tweeted, as residents took to social media to publish photos and videos.

"Please do not be distracted by taking any videos or using your phone," it added.

A National Center for Meteorology graphic showed nearly all the country covered by the storm, with the warning: "Be on the alert: hazardous weather events are expected."

In neighboring Saudi Arabia, badly hit on Tuesday, conditions eased in the capital Riyadh on Wednesday but continued to restrict visibility in the city centre.

Emergency rooms in Riyadh hospitals received some 1,285 people suffering from respiratory problems over 24 hours from the sandstorm, the state-run Al-Ekhabariya channel reported late on Tuesday.

Mubarak Sons Pictured in UAE After Years of Travel Ban

CAIRO (Middle East Eye) – The sons of Egypt's former president Hosni Mubarak were pictured in Abu Dhabi on Monday in a first foreign trip since the 2011 revolution that toppled their father.

Gamal Mubarak appeared in pictures shaking hands with the new president of the United Arab Emirates, Mohammed bin Zayed, as world leaders visited the Persian Gulf country to pay respects after the death of former president Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

The photos raised questions over how Mubarak was able to leave Egypt despite a longstanding travel ban against members of the family.

On Tuesday, the 58-year-old released a video statement declaring that his family has been cleared of corruption charges brought against them internationally in the wake of the 2011 pro-democracy uprising.

The video comes after Swiss federal prosecutors dropped an 11-year investigation into suspected money laundering by Egyptians close to Hosni Mubarak during the revolution, freeing up millions of dollars for the late strongman's family.

Mubarak died in 2020 at the age of 91.

The Swiss judgment followed a decision by the European Union's top court on 6 April to uphold a ruling deeming EU sanctions against Mubarak and his family unlawful and ordering the EU to pay legal costs incurred by the Mubaraks.

According to Transparency International, it is estimated that as president, Hosni Mubarak "stole nearly \$70bn in public funds that are now concealed in France, Germany and Spain." The international anti-corruption group said the EU court's decision "signals impunity for corrupt actors."

Hosni Mubarak was deposed in 2011 after the Egyptian revolution, when hundreds of thousands staged nationwide protests for 18 days demanding an end to his authoritarian 30-year rule.

In the aftermath of his ousting, the president, his two sons Alaa and Gamal, as well as senior members of his government, were charged with various crimes related to corruption and suppression of protests. Their assets in Switzerland were frozen immediately after Mubarak stepped down.

Pakistani Man Completes 50-day Motorbike Ride to Realize 'Dream,' Perform Umrah

ISLAMABAD (Arab News) – Pakistani biker and vlogger Abrar Hassan had already traveled to more than 80 countries, at least 12 of them on his motorcycle, by the time he decided this year it was time to pursue possibly his greatest dream — a bike ride to Saudi Arabia to perform the Umrah pilgrimage.

On Feb. 9, Hassan set out from his hometown of Nankana Sahib in Pakistan's Punjab province, embarking on a journey that entailed crossing three continents and riding for 50 days before he arrived in Madina on March 27. From there, he went to Makkah, Islam's holiest city, and performed Umrah.

"It was always my dream (to travel to Saudi Arabia on a motorbike) and it came true this year," Hassan, a mechanical engineer with a German automotive company, told Arab News in video messages from Madina.

"There are probably some feelings you can't describe in words ... So, everything has been surreal for me, and I absolutely loved every single moment of it."

Hassan, who has loved adventure and photography since he was a child, said it was an "amazing experience" to cross multiple borders and meet so many people along the way. But he pointed out that the special blessing

was to arrive in Madina just a few days before the beginning of the fasting month of Ramadan and keep the first fast of the year there.

And he thanked the people of Saudi Arabia for the "warm welcome" given to him and the love he had received. He noted that one memorable experience had taken place soon after he entered the Kingdom and involved a group of women selling tea.

"When they came to know that I was traveling on a motorcycle from Pakistan to perform Umrah, they didn't take any money from me and said, 'you are our guest,'" he said.