

TEHRAN — Iran on Friday criticized Azerbaijan's "harsh, emotional and non-constructive" decision to expel four Iranian diplomats, saying the Islamic Republic will reciprocate it. "We consider this behavior of the government of the Republic of Azerbaijan in conflict with the principles of neighborliness," Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said. "While the crisis and chaos have engulfed the occupied Palestinian territories and the Zionist regime is in the most unstable internal conditions, and at a time when the said regime attacks fasting Muslims and desecrates Al-Aqsa Mosque with the aim of" (Continued on Page 7)

Kayhan International

BEIRUT (Dispatches) — Saudi Arabia has reportedly informed the so-called Yemeni presidential leadership council of the decision to put an end to the devastating war in Yemen after eight years of aggression, Lebanon's Al Mayadeen TV network reported on Friday. Citing informed sources, it said Saudi officials had recently held a closed-door meeting with the chairman and members of the council, which was established last April after the resignation of ex-president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, to inform them about the peace plan.

VOL NO: LV 11949 TEHRAN / Est.1959

Saturday, April 8, 2023, Farvardin 19, 1402, Ramadhan 17, 1444, Price 200,000 Rials

Viewpoint

Implosion Ought to be Coupled With Explosion to End Israel

Leader: West Not in a Position to Talk About Rights



Iran Remains Asia's Second Ranked Team in FIFA World Ranking



Yemeni FM Berates Biden for Faking 'Concern'



U.S. Left Iran, Saudi Arabia 'Blindsided' Formally Restore Ties

BEIJING (Dispatches) — Iran and Saudi Arabia took another significant step toward reconciliation Thursday, formally restoring diplomatic ties after a seven-year rift, affirming the need for regional stability and agreeing to pursue economic cooperation.

The agreement was reached in Beijing during a meeting between the Iranian and Saudi foreign ministers, a month after China had brokered an initial reconciliation agreement between the two regional powerhouses.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hussein Amir-Abdollahian laid out details of Thursday's agreement in a tweet, after his talks with Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud.

The minister wrote that Thursday marked the beginning of "official diplomatic relations ... economic and commercial cooperation, the reopening of embassies and consulates general, and the emphasis on stability, stable security and development of the region." Amir-Abdollahian said that the issues are "agreed upon and on the common agenda."

IRNA said that in addition to reopening embassies in the two major cities — Mashhad in Iran and Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. The report said both sides also agreed to study the prospects of resuming flights and official and private visits between the two nations, in addition to how to facilitate the visa process for their people.

China's Foreign Ministry last month reported that both sides had agreed to reopen their embassies and missions within two months.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said the two foreign ministers signed a joint statement and expressed their determination to improve ties in line with their talks in Beijing last month.

The state-run Saudi Press Agency carried a brief news item on the meeting, saying "discussions were held on joint relations and ways to enhance cooperation in many fields," with both sides aiming to "enhance the security, stability, and prosperity of the two countries and peoples."

Thursday's talks in Beijing marked the first formal meeting of senior diplomats from the two nations since 2016, when the kingdom broke ties with Iran. Saudi Arabia had executed a prominent Shia cleric with 46 others days earlier, triggering demonstrations in the Islamic Republic.

The warming of ties shows that "regional countries have the will and ability to take the lead" in maintaining peace, Mao said at

the briefing.

She said China is ready to support both sides in fostering good relations, urging the international community to help the Middle Eastern countries resolve their differences.

"The colonial hegemonic tactics of stirring up contradictions, creating estrangement and division should be rejected by the people all over the world," she said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the restoration of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran is "a very important development" to increase stability in the region, spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Thursday.

Principal deputy State Department spokesman Vedant Patel said the United States has welcomed diplomatic progress between Saudi Arabia and Iran, but the Wall Street Journal reported that Washington had been left reeling.

CIA director Bill Burns told Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman that the U.S. feels "blindsided" by Riyadh's moves to restore ties with Iran and Syria as part of the kingdom's increasingly independent foreign policy streak, the paper said.

Burns travelled to Saudi Arabia at an undisclosed time this week to discuss intelligence cooperation with the Saudi Arabians. During the meeting, he expressed Washington's frustration at being left out of regional developments, according to the Journal.

Burns' comments challenge the U.S.'s official line that Saudi Arabia kept it informed of its talks with Iran to restore diplomatic relations.

"The Saudis did keep us informed about these talks that they were having, just as we keep them informed on our engagements," White House spokesman John Kirby said last month.

It is more difficult for the U.S. to position itself as a winner from Saudi Arabia's moves to reestablish ties with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who is backed by Russia and Iran. The U.S. says it is opposed to normalization and successive administrations have imposed crushing sanctions on Damascus.

But Riyadh appears to be moving full-steam ahead to bring Damascus in from the cold.

The kingdom plans to invite Assad to an Arab League summit it is hosting in May. The Saudi Arabia had executed a prominent Shia cleric with 46 others days earlier, triggering demonstrations in the Islamic Republic.

Burns has earned a reputation as the White House's "back-channel" (Continued on Page 7)

Strong Resistance Response Jolts Zionists



A fire caused by a rocket fired from Lebanon rages in the northern occupied town of Shlomi on Thursday.

OCCUPIED AL-QUDS — The occupying regime of Israel unleashed rare airstrikes on Lebanon and continued bombarding the Gaza Strip on Friday, an escalation that sparked fears of a broader conflict following days of Israeli violence over the most sensitive holy site in Al-Quds.

Midday prayers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Al-Quds passed peacefully. But a Palestinian shooting attack in the Israeli-occupied West Bank killed two

Zionists near an Israeli settlement just hours later in retaliation of the latest Israeli atrocities.

The early morning Israeli strikes followed an unusually large rocket barrage fired at Zionist targets from southern Lebanon — what analysts described as the most serious incident since the Zionist regime's 2006 war with Lebanon.

The escalation came after Israeli forces raided the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Al-Quds earlier this week, sparking unrest in the con-

tested capital and outrage across the Arab world.

The Israeli strikes seemed designed to avoid drawing in Lebanon's Hezbollah, which the occupying regime considers its most powerful enemy.

Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah met with Hamas head Ismail Haniyeh, Sheikh Saleh al-Arouri, deputy head of Hamas' political bureau, and top officials Khalil al-Hayya and Osama Hamdan.

Israeli minister of military affairs Yoav Gallant said earlier following a security meeting that the regime was ready on all fronts to wage a new war.

Nasrallah issued a warning on Thursday. "The resistance front has a high number of long-range missiles in its arsenal; but it is not using them at the moment," he said.

"One of the options that resistance fighters would take in case Zionists commit a folly would be the launch of a significant number of ballistic missiles at sensitive Israeli centers."

Al-Quds Brigades, the military wing of Islamic Jihad, said the attack on Al-Aqsa was a "red line" for all Palestinians.

Iraq's anti-terror group Kata'ib Hezbollah and Yemeni Ansarullah resistance group also expressed solidarity with the Palestinians.

"We express our full support for rocket barrages fired from southern Lebanon and the Gaza Strip at areas inside the Israeli-occupied territories in retaliation for the latest attack by Israel on the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the Old City of al-Quds," Kata'ib Hezbollah said in a statement.

Kata'ib Hezbollah called upon all Muslims to stand up against the Israeli incursions and defend Al-Aqsa Mosque through all available means.

(Continued on Page 7)

Police Stage Violent Crackdown: Two Million People Protest Across France

PARIS (AP) — Police fired clouds of tear gas against unruly protesters in Paris and other French cities Thursday as hundreds of thousands of people returned to streets across the country to vent anger against President Emmanuel Macron's contested pension reforms.

Macron's drive to raise the national retirement age from 62 to 64 has ignited a months-long firestorm of opposition. Talks between trade union leaders and Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne quickly collapsed Wednesday without a breakthrough, setting the stage for the fresh demonstrations that were largely peaceful but also punctured by violence.

Trade unions vowed to keep up their resistance and called for another round of protests in a week. But labor strikes that have caused significant disruptions since January lost some of their bite, with fewer workers taking part.

Strikers on Thursday again closed the Eiffel Tower, and the unions still managed to mobilize large crowds for protests across

the country. The Interior Ministry said 570,000 people took part; unions said the figure was closer to 2 million.

There were chaotic scenes at the Paris demonstration that wound through the capital's streets, leaving a trail of destruction. Police were pelted by projectiles when the march reached La Rotonde, a restaurant patronized by Macron during the 2017 presidential election that he went on to win.

A small fire scorched parts of the chic venue's outside awning and some of its windows were smashed. Demonstrators employing so-called black bloc tactics also targeted banks, ripping down a protective wooden screen erected around one branch and smashing the windows with hammers and rocks before police dispersed them.

Police fired repeated volleys of tear gas and hared after protesters who set fires.

The CGT union estimated that 400,000 people joined the Paris protest. The police estimate was far lower: 57,000. Officers de-

tained at least 31 people in the capital. The Paris police force also reported dozens of injuries in its ranks, including 13 officers who were treated in hospitals.

Paris marcher Khadija Philip vowed "we won't give up as long as they haven't taken the time to hear us and reconsider their decision." Union representative Sylvain Challan Belval said Macron's government was simply playing for time and hoping that the protest movement "will blow itself out."

Elsewhere in France, largely peaceful crowds marched behind union flags and banners in Marseille on the Mediterranean coast, Bordeaux in the southwest, Lyon in the southeast and other cities.

In the western city of Nantes, where rumbling tractors joined marchers, clouds of police tear gas were deployed. Tear gas was also reported in Rennes, in Brittany, and was used to disperse a crowd outside a Nespresso coffee store in Lyon that was being looted.

The Interior Ministry deployed

11,500 police officers nationwide, including 4,200 in Paris, to try to avert the clashes and moments of vandalism that also had marred previous protests.

The months-long protest movement has failed to get Macron to change course. Critics accuse the government of inflaming demonstrators by not listening to them.

It's "a deep anger, a cold anger," said Sophie Binet, the newly elected general secretary of the CGT union. She described Macron's government as "completely disconnected from the country and completely bunkerized in its ministries."

"We can't turn the page until the reform is withdrawn," she said.

In Paris, rat catchers hurled rodent cadavers at City Hall Wednesday in one of the more memorable illustrations of how Macron's plans to raise the national retirement age have stoked fury. Broadcaster BFMTV showed rooster corpses being tossed by workers in white protective suits.

(Continued on Page 7)