

Iran raps US veto of new UNSC resolution on Gaza cease-fire

Washington's move provokes int'l criticism

International Desk

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said a US decision to veto a UN Security Council resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza indicates Washington's responsibility for the continuation of Israeli war crimes against Palestinians.

Addressing a cabinet session on Wednesday, Raisi lashed out at the US for vetoing the UNSC resolution and blocking the demand for immediate cease-fire in the besieged strip, which Israel has been pounding for over four months.

Washington on Tuesday vetoed a UN Security Council resolution drafted by Algeria, which demanded an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in war-torn Gaza and the "unconditional" release of all prisoners abducted in the October 7 attacks. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Washington's ambassador to the UN, called the vote "wishful and irresponsible" as it could put negotiations to free hostages in Gaza "in jeopardy".

The Iranian president also slammed the US government as the main sponsor of the Israeli regime's crimes and genocidal atrocities in Gaza and the one that gets the blame for the continuation of crimes against Palestinians.

He called for the entire world to condemn the Israeli crimes and the United States' support for them. Washington also sent top White House official Brett McGurk

to Cairo for renewed talks involving mediators and Hamas.

Hamas said the US veto amounted to "a green light for the occupation to commit more massacres".

Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh was already in Cairo for talks, the resistance group said - days after mediators warned that prospects for a truce had dimmed despite repeated talks. Qatar and Egypt have proposed a plan to free prisoners in return for a pause in fighting and the release of Palestinian prisoners, but Israel and Hamas have so far failed to agree on a deal. McGurk will hold talks "to see if we can't get this hostage deal in place," Kirby told reporters.

'Even more dangerous'

Also, China warned Wednesday that the US decision to veto the resolution pushed the conflict into an "even more dangerous" situation.

The veto provoked criticism from countries including China, Russia, Saudi Arabia and even close US allies France and Slovenia.

"China voted in favor of the draft resolution," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a regular briefing on Wednesday.

"The United States has once again single-handedly vetoed it, pushing the situation in Gaza into an even more dangerous situation, in which all parties concerned... have expressed their strong disappointment and dissatisfaction," she added. "The humanitarian situation in

Gaza is becoming extremely serious, and regional peace and stability have been severely impacted," Mao said.

"The Security Council must take action as quickly as possible to bring a halt to hostilities. This is a moral obligation that cannot be put off," she said. "We will continue to work with all parties in the international community to push the Security Council to take further responsible and meaningful actions and make unremitting efforts to quell the war in Gaza at an early date," Mao added.

Hunger grips Gaza

Meanwhile, heavy fighting rocked besieged Gaza on Wednesday as aid agencies warned of looming famine.

Global concern has spiraled over the high civilian death toll and dire humanitarian crisis in the war.

Combat and chaos again stalled the sporadic aid deliveries for desperate civilians in Gaza, where the UN has warned the population of 2.3 million is on the brink of famine and could face an "explosion" of child deaths.

The UN World Food Programme said it was forced to halt aid deliveries in north Gaza because of "complete chaos and violence" after a truck convoy encountered gunfire and was ransacked by looters. More Israeli strikes pounded Gaza, leaving 103 people dead during the night, according to the Health Ministry in the



The UN Security Council meets to debate resolution to demand an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza, at UN headquarters in New York, US, on February 20, 2024.

REUTERS

Hamas-run territory, which put the overall death toll at 29,313. Particular concern has centered on Gaza's far-southern Rafah area, where 1.4 million people now live in crowded shelters and makeshift tents, fearing attack by nearby Israeli ground troops.

Aid groups warn a ground offensive could turn Rafah into a "graveyard" and the US has said the vast numbers of displaced civilians

must first be moved out of harm's way. US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said that "without properly accounting for the safety and security of those refugees, we continue to believe that an operation in Rafah would be a disaster".

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted the army will keep fighting until it has destroyed Hamas and freed the remaining 130 prisoners, around 30 of whom are feared dead.

War cabinet minister Benny Gantz has warned that unless Hamas releases the captives by the start of Ramadan, around March 12, the army will keep fighting during the Muslim holy month, including in

Rafah. The World Health Organization called the devastation "in-describable" around Nasser Hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis, where it said it managed to evacuate some 32 patients.

"The area was surrounded by burnt and destroyed buildings, heavy layers of debris, with no stretch of intact road," WHO said. The clinic has no power or running water, it added, and "medical waste and garbage are creating a breeding ground for disease".

Major powers have tried to navigate a way out of the crisis, so far without success.

president.ir, AFP, and REUTERS contributed to this report.

Iran invites IAEA chief to attend conference in May

Iran has invited the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi to visit the country in May, said the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI).

The head of the IAEA "has expressed his desire to go to Iran and this trip is on his agenda," Mohammad Eslami told reporters on Wednesday, IRNA reported.

"We have invited him to give

a speech at the international conference on nuclear energy," which will be held from May 6 to 8 in the central city of Isfahan, he added. Eslami said a visit next month was unlikely due to a "busy schedule".

Grossi said on Monday that Iran continues to enrich uranium well beyond the needs for commercial nuclear use despite UN pressure to stop it, adding that he wanted to visit Tehran next



Rafael Grossi

REUTERS

month for the first time in a year to end "drifting apart".

Speaking to Reuters after he briefed EU foreign ministers on the subject, Grossi said that while the pace of uranium en-

richment had slowed slightly since the end of last year, Iran was still enriching at an elevated rate of around 7kg of uranium per month, to 60 percent purity. Eslami told reporters on

Wednesday, "Iran's interactions with the IAEA continue as normal, and discussions are held to resolve ambiguities and develop cooperation".

He said that the IAEA sends a report on Iran's nuclear activities to the Board of Governors and the UN Security Council every three months and six months, respectively.

Iran and the IAEA are in a dispute triggered by the agency's Israeli-influenced accusations, which were leveled against Tehran's peaceful nuclear activities. The IAEA insisted on investigating what it claims to be "uranium traces" found at "undeclared nuclear sites" in Iran.

The row turned into a sticking point in the talks aimed at reviving the US-abandoned 2015 nuclear agreement, known as

the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Eslami asserted that Iran's nuclear measures are in line with the JCPOA's Articles 26 and 36 amid the non-compliance of other parties to their commitments under the deal.

The measures, he emphasized, also abide by the Strategic Action Plan to Counter Sanctions, which was adopted by the Iranian Parliament in December 2020. The law was approved to counter illegal sanctions imposed on Iran by the US and its Western allies.

Iran suspended its compliance with limits on its nuclear activities after then US president Donald Trump unilaterally pulled out of the agreement in 2018 and reimposed sweeping sanctions.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Israel behind Iran gas pipeline blast: Minister

Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji said on Wednesday that Israel was behind twin sabotage attacks against gas pipelines in southwestern Iran last week.

The February 14 explosions hit pipelines in the cities of Safashahr, in the southern province of Fars, and Borujen, in the southwestern province of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari. The sabotage attacks against pipelines in southwestern Iran caused a temporary disruption to gas supplies. "The explosion of the country's gas lines was the work of Israel," Owji told reporters, adding, the plot

was foiled because only a few pipelines were damaged.

"The enemy intended to disturb gas service in the provinces and put people's gas distribution at risk."

"The evil action and plot by the enemy was properly managed," IRNA quoted Owji as saying. Owji said the gas supply network is operating normally. The minister said the gas pipelines were immediately fixed and the plot could not affect the situation in the cities and villages. Israel has not acknowledged carrying out the attack, though it rarely

claims its espionage missions abroad. The office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a longtime foe of Iran, did not immediately respond to a request for comment, AP reported.



Flames leap into the air after a natural gas pipeline explodes outside the city of Borujen in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, Iran, on February 14, 2024.

REZA KAMALI DEHKORDI/FARS

