

Regional states back Syria after militants resurgence

Arab League stresses need to respect Syria's territorial integrity

International Desk

Many countries in the region threw their support behind the Syrian government and its territorial integrity amid a surprise offensive by foreign-backed militants.

Jordan's King Abdullah II on Sunday in a phone call with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani said Jordan "stands by the brothers in Syria and its territorial integrity, sovereignty and stability."

Iraqi prime minister also told Syrian President Bashar al-Assad that his country's security was key to the stability of the whole region.

"Shia al-Sudani emphasized that Syria's security and stability are closely linked to Iraq's national security and play a crucial role in regional security and efforts to establish stability in the Middle East," his office said.

Meanwhile, the Arab League in a statement stressed the need to respect the unity, sovereignty

and territorial integrity of Syria. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian also reacted to the developments in Syria, calling on the Muslim countries to intervene in the Syrian crisis and not allow the US and Israel to exploit the internal conflict in the Islamic Arab country.

Stressing that the aggression by militants is supported by the United States and European countries, Pezeshkian said, "These actions are being carried out with American and European weapons."

Araghchi in Damascus

Meanwhile, Iran's top diplomat Abbas Araghchi reiterated Iran's firm support for Syria's government and its armed forces before leaving Tehran for Damascus to meet Syrian officials. Araghchi called the surprise attack a plot by the US and Israel. "The Syrian army will once again win over these terrorist groups as in the past," the foreign minister added.

Foreign-backed insurgents

broke through government defense lines in Syria's second largest city Aleppo on Friday and entered the city's western neighborhood. The insurgents launched their shock offensive in Aleppo and Idlib countryside on Wednesday and wrested control of dozens of villages and towns along the way, including a strategic town south of Aleppo.

Nearly 1K militants killed in northwestern Syria

According to Syrian media outlets, nearly a thousand militants have been killed in Syria's northwestern provinces of Aleppo and Idlib in the past days, as Syrian forces are pressing ahead with their counteroffensive operations.

The terrorists have reportedly been killed by Syrian troops with Russian air support.

Syrian president in a phone call with an official from the breakaway Georgian republic of Abkhazia said, "Terrorism only understands the language of force,



Militants are seen outside a mosque in Maaret al-Numan in Syria's northwestern Idlib Province on November 30, 2024.
● ABDULAZIZ KETAZ/AFP

and that is the language which we will break it and eliminate it with, whoever its supporters and sponsors are."

In a separate phone call with his Emirati counterpart, the Syrian president said his country could defeat "all terrorists and their backers."

"Syria continues to defend its

stability and territorial integrity in the face of all terrorists and their backers, and it is capable, with the help of its allies and friends, of defeating and eliminating them, no matter how intense their terrorist attacks are," his office quoted him as saying during a call with the President of the United Arab

Emirates Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

In recent years, Syria has been breathing a sigh of relief after years of confronting a foreign-backed insurgency which began in 2011 after demonstrations against Syrian government turned into a full-scale war in the country.

Putin signs off record Russian defense spending

Russian President Vladimir Putin approved budget plans, raising 2025 military spending to record levels as Moscow seeks to prevail in the war in Ukraine.

Around 32.5% of the budget posted on a government website Sunday has been allocated for national defense, amounting to 13.5 trillion rubles (over

\$145 billion), up from a reported 28.3% this year, AP reported.

Lawmakers in both houses of the Russian parliament, the State Duma and Federation Council, had already approved the plans in the past 10 days.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine since February 2022 is Eu-

rope's biggest conflict since World War II and has drained the resources of both sides. Kiev has been getting billions of dollars in help from its Western allies, but Russia's forces are bigger and better equipped, and in recent months the Russian army has gradually been pushing Ukrainian troops backward in eastern areas.

Europeans seeking either...

However, this is contingent on the Europeans not resorting to excuses and genuinely seeking to resolve the challenges. The European approach is currently not constructive, but the talks must continue. After all, all agreements have started from this path of dialogue. At present, the resumption of talks can be a promising development.

What do you think the main challenge will be between the two sides? Is the nuclear issue still the central point of contention and disagreement?

Currently, Europe's top priority is the Ukraine war, which has also been a major factor in driving a wedge between Europe and Iran. The Europeans have taken a tough stance against Tehran, accusing it of providing military aid to Russia, and have even imposed sanctions on Iran. Nevertheless, it appears that the nuclear issue remains the top priority for Europe regarding Iran.

What has kept the nuclear issue at the top of the agenda is the approaching deadline for the expiration of the nuclear deal, or the "sunset" of the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) in October 2025. The Europeans are worried that if they fail to reach an agreement with Tehran on the nuclear issue by then, they will lose their leverage, namely the "snapback" mechanism, which could reinstate all sanctions and UN Security Council

resolutions against Iran. Of course, they will also raise their positions and demands on the Ukraine issue during the talks, but their overall strategy is to coordinate with the new US president, Donald Trump, to either trigger the snapback or extend the nuclear deal. This round of negotiations has been in the "brainstorming" phase and is still far from formal negotiations to reach agreements.

You mentioned that Europeans are looking to reinstate sanctions or extend the nuclear deal. Is there a possibility of exploring a new agreement? Do you think Europe and the US under Trump's presidency will be on the same page regarding Iran?

It's possible that they will put a new agreement on the table that covers various topics of interest to them, including nuclear, defense, and regional policies of Iran. However, Iran's position on non-nuclear issues, namely defense and regional policies, is clear, just as the negotiations leading to the JCPOA only focused on nuclear issues and did not directly address other topics. More time needs to pass to see in which direction the talks will go. I think neither Trump is the same as the previous Trump, nor is Europe, nor even Iran. The differences between Europe and Trump's America on issues like NATO and Ukraine are serious, but it's possible that they may see the Iran issue as a common ground to prevent their differences from deepening.



How likely do you think it is that the US will join the talks between Iran and Europe?

I highly doubt that the US will join the talks for now, as the new administration has not yet taken office. What's happening in the US right now is that other countries are lobbying with Trump or candidates for various positions.

Is it possible that Iran might also begin lobbying with the new US administration before it officially takes office?

It depends on whether Iran's national interests dictate it and whether decision-makers have made an assessment to that effect. If national interests call for it, officials won't hesitate, whether through direct or indirect lobbying, in secret or in public. In fact, fundamental differences are no barrier to holding talks to resolve disputes or reduce tensions. Therefore, it depends on Iranian decision-makers whether they engage in such lobbying efforts now or wait for the US administration to start work and see what policy they adopt towards Iran.

Japan allocates finances to promote Iran's wetland management

International Desk

Japan has provided the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Iran with financial aid to enhance wetland management and strengthen climate resilience in Iranian wetlands.

Japan and UNDP on Sunday signed an exchange of notes to implement the "the Project for Developing Conservation System of Wetlands in Lake Urmia and Other Wetlands including their Surrounding Communities."

The project will develop irrigation systems that respond appropriately to climate change and install water management systems. It would also create sustainable industries such as ecotourism for environmental protection and economic development in the areas surrounding these wetlands.

The UNDP in a statement said it is pleased to announce a generous contribution of JPY 690,000,000 from the government of Japan to enhance wetland management and strengthen climate resilience in Lake Urmia, Shadegan, Parishan and Anzali wetlands.

"Over the past ten years, the unwavering support from the people and the government of Japan has positively impacted agricultural productivity and



Japanese Ambassador to Tehran Tsukada Tamaki (R) and UNDP Iran Deputy Resident Representative Gulbahar Nematova sign an exchange of notes at Japan's Embassy in Tehran, Iran, on December 1, 2024.
● undp.org

enhanced livelihoods in target communities. In the next four years, we will continue promoting innovative, water-efficient agricultural practices, while emphasizing scaling up for a better future for all," said Gulbahar Nematova, UNDP Iran Deputy Resident Representative.

Speaking at the ceremony, Japanese Ambassador to Tehran Tsukada Tamaki said that Iran has 26 valuable wetlands listed under the Ramsar Convention, including Lake Urmia, adding that these wetlands, which are home to diverse species and migratory birds, must be conserved in cooperation with the international community.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

