

The Washington Post

Middle East

UAE stops issuing new visas for North Korean laborers

By Jon Gambrell | AP October 12 at 12:54 PM

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The United Arab Emirates said Thursday it would stop issuing new visas to North Korean workers, becoming the latest Gulf country to limit Pyongyang's ability to evade sanctions and raise money abroad amid tensions with the U.S.

A statement by the UAE Foreign Ministry did not address the hundreds of North Korean laborers already working in the Emirates. A call to the UAE's Embassy in Washington was not immediately returned.

The statement said the UAE would pull its non-resident ambassador to North Korea as well as stop North Koreans from opening new businesses in the Emirates, a federation of seven sheikhdoms on the Arabian Peninsula that is a staunch U.S. ally.

The UAE "looks forward to a unified global front against North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile program," the statement read.

It's not clear what prompted the decision, though American officials have been pressuring their allies in the Gulf Arab states to cut back on economic ties to North Korea. The U.S. Embassy in Abu Dhabi did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Last month, Kuwait announced it would expel North Korea's ambassador to the oil-rich country and four other diplomats, as well as limit visas. North Korea's Embassy in Kuwait City serves as its only diplomatic outpost in the Gulf. Qatar has said "less than 1,000" North Koreans are in the country and their visas will not be renewed. North Korean laborers also are in Oman.

The U.S. and Asian nations have increased pressure on their allies to cut ties as Pyongyang has tested a nuclear weapon and launched ballistic missiles over Japan.

While a small market compared to China and Russia, the amount of money North Korean laborers in the Gulf kick back to the government helps Pyongyang evade international sanctions, authorities say. A 2015 U.N. report suggested that the more than 50,000 North Koreans working overseas earned Pyongyang between \$1.2 billion and \$2.3 billion a year. Other estimates put earnings in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Thousands of North Koreans work across the Gulf. Kuwait told The Associated Press in August that 6,064 North Korean laborers worked there. The UAE has as many as 1,500 North Korean workers, said two officials with knowledge of Pyongyang's tactics, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss confidential intelligence reports.

North Koreans working in the Gulf earn around \$1,000 a month, with about half being kept by the North Korean government and another \$300 going toward construction company managers, the officials said. That leaves workers with \$200 for working straight through an entire month, they said.

Even \$200 a month can go a long way in North Korea, where the per-capita income is estimated at just \$1,700 a year.

North Korea also operates three Korean restaurants in the UAE — two in Dubai and one in Abu Dhabi — out of an estimated 130 it runs around the world, the officials said.

The officials said North Korean workers took part in a recent expansion of the UAE's Al-Dhafra Air Base, a major Emirati military installation outside Abu Dhabi and home to some of the 5,000 American troops stationed in the country. From that base, drones and fighter jets fly missions over Iraq and Syria targeting the Islamic State group. U.S. Central Command told the AP in July it was unaware that North Koreans helped expand the base.

Dubai once purchased Scud missiles from North Korea, according to a 1991 CIA analysis. In 1999, the Emirati military also purchased some 30 Scud missiles from Pyongyang, according to a 2008 U.S. diplomatic cable published by WikiLeaks.

U.S. officials also warned the UAE about efforts by a Dubai-based company to buy almost \$100 million in machine guns, rifles and rockets from North Korea, according to a copy of an undated U.S. diplomatic message to the UAE obtained by the AP. In a response to questions from the U.N., Emirati officials said in January 2016 the sale never went through.

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UAE announces full support to US new strategy on Iran

Fri 13-10-2017 23:29 PM



United Arab Emirates

ABU DHABI, 13th October 2017 (WAM) - The United Arab Emirates strongly supports President Trump's new strategy to address the full range of Iran's destructive actions.

In a statement released today, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation said: For too long, the Iranian regime has spread destruction and chaos throughout the region and beyond. The nuclear deal – the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – offered Iran an opportunity to engage responsibly with the international community. Instead, it only emboldened Iran to intensify its provocative and destabilizing behavior.

Importantly, the new US strategy takes necessary steps to confront Iran's malign behavior in all its forms – including its growing ballistic missile program, support for terrorist organisations like Hezbollah and the Houthis, cyber attacks, interference in its neighbors' domestic affairs, and threats to the freedom of navigation.

The Treasury Department's designation of the International Revolutionary Guard Corps is a strong measure that will help limit Iran's dangerous activities as the world's leading state-sponsor of terrorism.

The Ministry concluded its statement by saying: The UAE welcomes and endorses the new US strategy. We reaffirm our commitment to working with the US and our allies to counter the full range of Iran's destabilizing activities and its support for extremists.

