

'Popular Forces to Make Iraq Graveyard for Saudis'

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – The spokesman for Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units has warned Saudi Arabia against any ground aggression into the Arab country.

We will turn Iraq into a "graveyard" for Saudi forces if they dare attack the country, Ahmad al-Assadi said on Saturday.

The warning came after some media reports said that Saudi Arabia and its allies are planning to conduct a joint military maneuver in the kingdom's north, close to Iraqi border.

Saudi media said earlier this week that some 350,000 forces from the Persian Gulf Arab states and a number of other countries, including Egypt, Sudan and Pakistan, would take part in the Saudi-led military exercise dubbed "North Thunder" in the area of Hafer al-Batin.

Some 2,540 warplanes, 20,000 tanks and 460 helicopters are scheduled to participate in the exercise.

Assadi stressed volunteer forces will confront Saudi Arabia and other countries participating in the military drills should they dare come closer to Iraq's western borders.

Media reports claim the maneuver will be the largest throughout the history of the region.

The Saudi maneuver is believed to be preparation for a possible ground incursion into Syria.

Apart from the Saudi regime, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain have expressed willingness to send troops to Syria to join the US-led campaign allegedly fighting Daesh Takfiri group.

Damascus has issued warnings against any such move with Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem saying that any "ground intervention on Syrian territory without government authorization would amount to an aggression that must be resisted."

He has also warned that potential aggressors would return home in a "wooden coffin."

On February 10, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi also warned against the deployment of ground troops to Syria, describing the envisioned move as a "dangerous escalation."

Riyadh has been among the staunch supporters of the Takfiri



Iraqi fighters from the Popular Mobilization Units hold a position on the Tharthar front line on the edge of Anbar Province, 120 kilometers northwest of the capital, Baghdad.

terrorists operating to overthrow the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad since early 2011.

The Syrian troops, backed by Russian air raids, have been making gains against foreign-backed terrorists.

On Friday, the Syrian president said the government forces will retake the whole country from ter-

rorists.

Assad warned that the involvement of regional countries in the conflict meant that the process to liberate Syria would take a long time.

He said it would be possible to end the war "in less than a year" if terrorist supply routes from neighboring countries were cut.

Saudi...

(Continued From Page One)

Raqqah. In general, the Raqqah front is open ... starting in the direction of the Tabqa area," the source said. Tabqa is the location of an air base captured by Islamic State in 2014.

The army had moved to within 35 km (20 miles) of the base.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the war, earlier reported the army's had advanced to the provincial borders of Raqqah.

U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter said on Friday he expected Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to send commandos to help recapture Raqqah.

Kurdish militia are also fighting Daesh in Raqqah province, advancing into the province from the northeast last year.

Up to...

(Continued From Page One)

region to "start redefining problems" and "set aside" their past differences instead of remaining "prisoner of the past."

The Iranian foreign minister further pointed to Riyadh's decision to break relations with Tehran, saying the two countries must not follow a policy of mutual exclusion; however, Saudi Arabia has been seeking to eliminate Iran from political equations, including in the international negotiations on Syria.

"Iran and Saudi Arabia cannot exclude each other from the region," he said.

Zarif added that Tehran is prepared to cooperate with Riyadh to resolve regional issues.

"We are prepared to work with Saudi Arabia ... I believe Iran and Saudi Arabia can have shared interests in Syria," he said, adding, "We need to work together."

Saudi Arabia severed diplomatic relations with Iran on January 3 following demonstrations held in front of the Saudi embassy in Tehran and its consulate in the northeastern city of Mashhad by angry protesters censuring the Al Saud family for the execution of prominent cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr.

Some people mounted the walls of the consulate in Mashhad while incendiary devices were hurled at the embassy in Tehran. Some 100 people were detained over the acts of transgression. Iranian officials have strongly condemned the attacks. The international community has voiced outrage against the execution of the spiritual leader, who used to be a vocal critic of the kingdom's policies.

On the sidelines of the Munich conference, the Iranian foreign minister also held a meeting with the U.S. secretary of state, during which they discussed ways to implement a nuclear agreement reached between Iran and the P5+1 group of countries last July.

Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council – the United States, France, Britain, China and Russia – plus Germany started to implement the agreement, dubbed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), on January 16.

After JCPOA went into effect, all nuclear-related sanctions imposed on Iran by the European Union, the Security Council and the U.S. were lifted. Iran, in return, has put some limitations on its nuclear activities.

The nuclear agreement was signed on July 14, 2015 following two and a half years of intensive talks.

FM Zarif...

(Continued From Page 2)

bilateral cooperation and exchanged views on a number of issues of international and regional policy," Russian Foreign Ministry said.

"The mutual disposition to further strengthening of Russian-Iranian cooperation in the interests of ensuring stability and security in the Middle East region was reaffirmed," the ministry added.

In a separate meeting, Zarif and China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi discussed the latest situation in Syria and ways to improve Tehran-Beijing relations.

The Chinese minister said that all parties should "abandon military methods in order to settle the Syrian issue by political means," RIA Novosti reported.

"I hope that Iran will play an active and constructive role here," he added.

Wang also called on Iran and China to deepen cooperation.

The Iranian foreign minister held separate meetings with Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Yukiya Amano and a number of senior officials on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference (MSC) on Friday.

Zarif sat down with Slovenian President Borut Pahor, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, foreign ministers of Netherlands Bert Koenders, Ukraine Pavlo Klimkin and Georgia Georgy Kvirikashvili as well as former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan.

He also met with Pakistani Defense Minister Khawaja Asif and Deputy UN Secretary General Jan Eliasson.

Paralyzing Zionist Siege Hardens Palestinian Villagers



A relative stands inside the burned home of Sa'ad Dawabsheh, whose house was firebombed by Israeli extremists on July 31, 2015 in the West Bank village of Duma, and who lost his son, and later his wife as well as his own life as a result of the attack.

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Palestinians under a paralyzing Zionist siege in a village north of the West Bank say they are undeterred and will stay true to the Palestinian cause of resisting the occupation.

Saturday marked the ninth day Qabatiya was experiencing the blockade, forced upon it by Israeli troops.

The siege came after the Israeli military claimed that three men from the village had attacked Israeli security forces outside the Old City of al-Quds a day earlier, killing an officer and injuring another before being shot dead.

"Here we have resisted every occupation," Mayor Mahmoud Kamel told AFP, describing the uncompromising attitude vis-à-vis Tel Aviv's suppressive push.

The blockade is to hold for an undisclosed period of time, during which the 25,000-strong Palestinians are prevented from working elsewhere across the occupied territories.

"Nobody told us if this was temporary or whether our permits are cancelled altogether," said Mohammed Nazzal, who is the breadwinner of an eight-member family.

The chamber of commerce in Jenin,

the nearest large town, says the siege affects at least 300 businessmen and traders, 200 farmers, and 500 other workers.

Israeli forces, meanwhile, plan to demolish a residence that they say belongs to one of the participants in the alleged attack.

The unflinching mother of the household reacted to the prospect by saying, "The more they destroy, the more we shall rebuild... All the neighbors and all the villagers are in solidarity with us."

The occupied Palestinian territories have been the scene of heightened tensions since the Israeli imposition in August 2015 of restrictions on the entry of Palestinian worshipers into the al-Aqsa Mosque compound. The al-Aqsa Mosque is the third holiest site in Islam.

The restrictions have enraged

Palestinians who say the Tel Aviv regime seeks to change the demographic status of the compound.

Further fueling Palestinian anger has been the incessant violations of the compound by Israeli settlers, backed by Israeli forces, and the settlers' recurrent attacks against Palestinian residences.

In July last year, settlers carried out an arson attack against two Palestinian houses in the town of Duma, located 25 kilometers (15 miles) southeast of Nablus in the West Bank, killing Palestinian baby boy Ali Dawabsheh. His parents, who had been injured in the attack, also died later.

At least 171 Palestinians, including children and women, have lost their lives at the hands of Israeli forces since last October amid the escalation.

'Ex-Yemen President Hires Out Socotra Isle to UAE'

SANAA (Press TV) – Yemen's fugitive former president is making arrangements to rent out the island of Socotra to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for 99 years, a report says.

Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi has offered the Indian Ocean isle to the UAE in an attempt to get Abu Dhabi's support amid the ongoing conflict in Yemen, the Lebanese al-Mayadeen satellite television channel reported.

The report, however, did not elaborate on details of the development.

Other reports have suggested that Socotra may come under the US control.

The Yemeni island will reportedly be hired for the investments of touristic, economic and navigation fields.

Socotra, a small archipelago of four Indian Ocean islands, measures 132 kilometers (82 miles) in length and 49.7 kilometers (30.9 miles) in width.

It lies about 240 kilometers (150 miles) east of the Horn of Africa and 380 kilometers (240 miles) south of the Arabian Peninsula.

The island, which was recognized by UNESCO in 2008 as a world natural heritage site, is very isolated and has a unique endemic flora.

According to botanical field surveys by the Centre for Middle Eastern Plants, 307 out of the 825 plant species on Socotra (37 percent) are found nowhere else on the earth.

The UAE is among the countries that have dispatched military forces in support of the pro-Hadi Saudi offensive against Yemen.

Yemen has been under military attacks by Saudi Arabia since last March in a bid to bring Hadi back to power and undermine the Houthi Ansarullah movement.

Hadi, a staunch ally of Riyadh, fled to Saudi Arabia in the face of Houthi's increasing advances. Ansarullah said Hadi lost his legitimacy as president of Yemen after he stepped down and fled the country.

Nearly 8,300 people, among them 2,236 children, have reportedly been killed and over 16,000 others injured. The strikes have also taken a heavy toll on the impoverished country's infrastructure.

6 Afghan Security Personnel Killed in Taliban Attacks

KABUL (AFP) – At least six Afghan security personnel were killed on Saturday in two separate attacks carried out by Taliban militants in southern Afghanistan.

According to officials, the double attacks targeted a checkpoint outside a checkpoint in the southern province of Helmand. Four policemen were killed and seven others were injured.

General Abdul Rahman Sarjang, the provincial police chief in Helmand, said security forces shot dead five militants equipped with explosives.

An army spokesman in Helmand said one soldier lost his life in the attack.

Another bomb attack in Uruzgan Province, also in the south, killed a policeman and wounded four others as their vehicle hit a roadside bomb, local officials said.

The Taliban militants claimed the attacks in the two provinces. The militants have stepped up assaults on Afghan security forces over the past year.