

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – Lebanese intelligence arrested a man on Wednesday they believe was a financial official for Daesh terrorist group in Syria, a security source said. The Syrian, arrested in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli, was responsible for collecting money for the terrorist group in Albu Kamal, a city in eastern Syria, before the group was expelled from the area, the source said. In November, the Syrian army and its allies recaptured Albu Kamal, Daesh's last significant town in Syria. Most Daesh terrorists withdrew from the town during the battle.

He who is deserted by friends and relatives will often find help and sympathy from strangers.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

‘West Complicit in Terrorist Crimes Against Civilians in Syria’



Terrorists from the Jaish al-Fatah prepare mortar shells before firing towards western government-controlled districts at an entrance to Syria's Aleppo, in the neighborhood of Dahiyet al-Assad, on October 30, 2016.

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – In a letter of complaint to the United Nations, Syria has drawn attention to a sharp rise in deadly terror attacks against civilians in Damascus and its suburbs, calling on the world body to take proper measures against countries that support and fund the armed groups.

The Syrian Foreign and Expatriates Ministry sent the letter to the UN chief and the Security Council chairman, hours

after terrorist groups stationed in the Eastern Ghouta region targeted the capital and its countryside with lethal shells, killing and injuring dozens of people, the official SANA news agency reported.

The letter condemned the attack as “a continuation of the crimes committed on daily basis by these terrorists against the citizens in Damascus,” saying they have fired more than 1,500 shells in the past seven weeks and left hundreds dead and

wounded.

The ministry further accused some Western officials of directly supporting the terrorists and encouraging them to carry out attacks without fear of being held accountable.

“These officials are complicit in the terrorists’ crimes against innocent civilians in Damascus and its countryside, as they are denying the Syrian state’s right to defend its citizens, fight terrorism,

and confront those who fund and arm terrorists.”

The terrorists have been slaughtering civilians over the past seven years “upon instructions from their masters” in the capitals of Western and Persian Gulf states, the letter read.

The Syrian capital has seen a spike in attacks in recent weeks from nearby regions held by terrorist groups.

Meanwhile, government forces have intensified their counterterrorism campaign to liberate those areas.

Elsewhere in its letter, the Foreign Ministry gave assurances that the attacks would not dissuade the government from fighting the terrorists and working to restore security to the country.

It also demanded “an immediate and stern condemnation” of the attacks by the UN, urging the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility and take action against the regimes that support and fund terrorism.

Terrorists and their supporters keep up using citizens in Eastern Ghouta and other regions as human shields, it added.

Separately, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres voiced alarm at the situation in Eastern Ghouta and called on all sides to the conflict to uphold the basic principles of humanitarian law.

“The secretary-general is deeply alarmed by the escalating situation in Eastern Ghouta and its devastating impact on civilians,” said UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric.

Turkey: Those Helping Syria Kurds ‘Legitimate Target’



This photo taken on February 20, 2018, shows a convoy of pro-Syrian government fighters arriving in Syria's northern region of Afrin.

ANKARA (Dispatches) – Turkey has repeated its warnings about an escalation of tension in Syria's northern region of Afrin, where it has been attacking the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), saying any group coming to the help of the Kurds in the region would be considered a “legitimate target” for the Turkish military.

Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said Wednesday that any force in Afrin, including the Syrian government, would be targeted by Turkish troops if they assist the YPG, the main Kurdish militant group in the region.

“Every step taken in support for the YPG terror organization would mean (any forces intervening on the Kurdish militants’ side) are on the same level as terror organizations. And for us, that would make them legitimate targets,” said Kalin, adding, “It doesn't matter who makes such an attempt, there will be serious consequences.”

The remarks by the Turkish spokesman came a day after Syrian pro-government forces entered Afrin with the aim of repelling the Turkish military intervention.

Syria's official news agency, SANA, said Monday the forces intended to enter Afrin to “join the resistance against the Turkish

aggression.”

The Turkish army on Tuesday attacked pro-Syrian government forces that had arrived in Afrin.

Kalin said the fire targeting the Syrian forces was “warning shots,” warning that Ankara would continue to attack Syrian forces if they again support the Kurds.

“Today, tomorrow could they attempt this again? It's possible. But the relevant measures have been taken,” he said.

The official added, however, that Turkish and Syrian intelligence forces could get in touch through “direct or indirect” methods to minimize the escalation of violence in northern Syria.

For more than a month, Turkey has been launching attacks on the YPG in Afrin. The campaign, designated as illegal by the Syrian government, has met growing criticism even among Turkey's allies, including the United States, which backs the YPG and other anti-government forces in northern Syria. Ankara justifies its aggression as a form of self-defense. Turkey views the YPG as an arm of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militant group, which has been seeking an autonomous Kurdish region since 1984.

Gaza Declares State of Emergency Due to Sharp Aid Cuts

GAZASTRIP (Dispatches) – The Gaza municipality on Wednesday declared a state of emergency, citing reduced services caused by resource shortages and foreign aid cuts.

“Much of financial aid has been cut, which has halted basic services linked

to fuel and sanitation,” Mayor of Gaza Nizar Hejazi said at a press conference.

The entire coast will be closed and untreated wastewater will be pumped into the sea because of power failures, Hejazi noted.

The economic deterioration in Gaza

has made residents unable to pay the bills, which, in turn, has impacted the Municipality's ability to pay workers' salaries, he added.

Meanwhile, the UN's Middle East envoy Nickolay Mladenov voiced worries over the humanitarian, economic and ecological situation in Gaza, stressing that it is unsustainable.

“Continuing power cuts of up to 20 hours per day severely undermine the provision of basic services. Without additional immediate fuel deliveries, the

situation could deteriorate with dramatic consequences,” he added.

The Gaza Strip has been under siege by the Zionist regime since June 2007. The blockade has caused a decline in the standards of living as well as unprecedented levels of unemployment and unrelenting poverty.

The Zionist regime denies about 1.8 million people in Gaza their basic rights, such as freedom of movement, jobs with proper wages as well as adequate healthcare and education.

Daesh Terrorists Kill 20 Truck Drivers Near Iraq Border

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – Daesh terrorists have reportedly executed nearly two dozen truck drivers on the border with Iraq's western province of Anbar as Syrian government forces, supported by allied fighters from popular defense groups, are fighting to drive foreign-sponsored terrorists out of the war-ravaged Arab country.

An Iraqi security source, requesting not to be named, told Arabic-language al-Sumaria television network on Wednesday that Daesh terrorists staged an ambush on the Syrian side of the border, killing 20 people.

The source added that the truck drivers were waiting to cross into Iraq, and that the terrorists have fled the area with the ill-fated drivers' trucks.

Syria has been gripped by foreign-backed terrorism since March 2011. The Syrian government says the Israeli regime and its Western and regional allies are aiding Takfiri terrorist groups that are wreaking havoc in the country.

On December 9, 2017, Iraq's Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared the

end of military operations against the Daesh terrorist group in the Arab country.

Meanwhile, a senior commander of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) has said now that Daesh has been defeated in the country there is no need for the presence of U.S. troops.

During a Tuesday interview with Press TV, Hadi al-Ameri called on the Iraqi government to announce the actual number of U.S. troops present in the country.

“We are told that the presence of U.S. forces in Iraq is on the request of the government in Baghdad. We are yet to get a clear statement from the government regarding the number of US troops which is said to be a large number,” he added.

Ameri stressed that the PMU will not permit foreign interference in the country's affairs.

“Therefore, our hope is that the government announces the number of American troops which it demands to be in Iraq and the others be asked to leave,” he noted.

Bahrain Sentences Nabeel Rajab to 5 Years Behind Bars

MANAMA (Dispatches) – Bahrain has sentenced prominent human rights activist Nabeel Rajab to five years in prison over tweets deemed critical of the Manama regime and the deadly Saudi-led war against Yemen.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a judicial source told AFP on Wednesday that Rajab was found guilty of spreading false rumors and insulting a neighboring state -- a veiled reference to Saudi Arabia.

The charges leveled against the activist cited laws which bar “insulting a neighboring country” and “insulting national institutions,” Reuters reported.

The Bahrain Center for Human Rights and the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD), two leading rights groups, confirmed the sentence handed down to Rajab.

The campaigner's Twitter account posted a photo showing

him smiling and flashing the victory sign after the verdict was announced.

Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, an activist with BIRD, accused courts of “curtailing freedom of expression by deterring Bahraini citizens from criticizing its authorities.”

“Instead of rewarding Nabeel Rajab for his brave and commendable exposure of human rights abuses and advocacy for peace, the authorities have chosen to punish the messenger,” he added.

In another development, Bahrain's Council of Representatives has approved a new legislation, preventing members of dissolved political parties from taking part in the country's parliamentary and municipal elections later this year.

The lower house of the Bahraini National Assembly took the decision during a session on Tuesday. It will effectively affect



Bahraini human rights activist Nabeel Rajab flashes the victory sign during trial on February 21, 2018.

over 70,000 Bahrainis from contesting in the polls, Arabic-language Lualua television network reported.

Bahraini officials have dissolved opposition parties al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, leftist National Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad) and the Islamic

Action Society, commonly referred to as Amal Party), over allegations of “supporting terrorism”.

Thousands of anti-regime protesters have held demonstrations in Bahrain on an almost daily basis ever since a popular uprising began in the country in mid-February 2011.