

BAGHDAD (Press TV) – Iraqi forces have liberated the ancient city of Hatra in Nineveh province from the control of the Daesh terrorist group. According to al-Sumaria news website, Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), also known as Hashd al-Sha'abi, said in a statement on Wednesday that its fighters took control of the city, which lies to the south of Mosul, after fierce clashes with the Daesh terrorists. Iraqi forces launched an operation to liberate the city and its surrounding areas on Tuesday.

If you understand Allah's Majesty, then you will not attach any importance to the creatures.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

Turkey Censured Over Air Raid in Northern Iraq



A medical helicopter flies over the site of Turkish airstrikes near northeastern Kurdish town of Derik on April 25, 2017.

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – The Iraqi government has condemned a deadly air raid by Turkish warplanes in northern Iraq, which killed at least six Peshmerga Kurdish fighters.

Government spokesman Saad al-Hadithi, in a statement, slammed Ankara for violating Iraq's sovereignty.

"The Iraqi government condemns and rejects the strikes carried out by Turkish aircraft on Iraqi territory," the statement read.

Regional authorities in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region have already denounced Turkey's

airstrike in Sinjar Mountains area late on Monday, which left five Peshmerga soldiers and one police officer dead.

The Turkish army earlier said it had conducted a strike against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militants in an alleged bid to prevent the Kurdish forces from sending weapons to Turkey.

Turkey frequently launches airstrikes in the mountainous regions of northern Iraq without coordination with Baghdad. Ankara has also deployed troops into Iraq, sparking a bitter rift with Baghdad.

Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdis-

tan region also denounced as "unacceptable" Turkey's airstrike in northern Iraq.

"The death of the Peshmerga is regrettable and the strike on the Peshmerga by Turkish warplanes is unacceptable," the region's armed force, Peshmerga, said in a statement.

Since July 2015, the Turkish air force has been carrying out operations against PKK positions in the country's southeastern border region as well as in northern Iraq and neighboring Syria.

A shaky ceasefire between Ankara and the PKK that had stood since

2013 was declared null and void by the militants following Turkish strikes against the group.

Turkish officials say the United States and Russia were informed in advance of a recent airstrike carried out on the positions of suspected Kurdish militants in Syria and Iraq.

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Wednesday that the Turkish military had informed Washington and Moscow on the attack a day earlier that targeted Kurdish-dominated areas in Syria and neighboring Iraq.

"Two hours before this operation, we shared information with the U.S. and Russia that we would undertake an operation," Cavusoglu said, adding that Ankara had also told Washington in the "last few weeks" that such military operations would be carried out.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has vehemently defended Ankara's recent deadly airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, vowing that Turkey would continue its military operations in both Arab countries "until the last terrorist is eliminated."

The Turkish leader made the remarks in an interview with Reuters in the presidential palace in Ankara, adding that he would not allow Iraq's northwestern Sinjar Mountains area to become a "new Qandil" for the militants of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), referring to a PKK bastion in Iraq, near the borders with Turkey and Iran.

"We are obliged to take measures. We must take steps. We shared this with the U.S. and Russia and we are sharing it with Iraq as well," Erdogan further said.

German FM: I Don't Want to Be Israel's Political 'Plaything'



German Minister of Foreign Affairs Sigmar Gabriel (R) meets with Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah at the Palestinian Authority headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah on April 25, 2017.

BERLIN (Dispatches) – Germany's foreign minister says he does not want to be "a plaything" for the Zionist regime's politicking after the regime's prime minister refused to receive him over the senior diplomat's meeting with pro-Palestine advocacy groups.

"I'll say it openly, we cannot become a political football for Israeli domestic politics," Sigmar Gabriel said.

Gabriel had reached the Tel Aviv-occupied Palestinian territories on Monday. He had in advance made it clear that he sought to meet with the Breaking the Silence and B'Tselem groups, which oppose Tel Aviv's occupation of Palestinian territories.

Zionist Premier Benjamin Netanyahu gave the top German diplomat an ultimatum over his planned meetings, saying he would not meet him if Gabriel refused to drop the plans.

Netanyahu said the organizations "slander" the Zionist regime's troops "and seek to put our soldiers on trial as war criminals," and that Tel Aviv would routinely shelve meetings with the officials who would hold talks with the rights bodies.

Gabriel, however, proceeded to attend the meetings in spite of the warning. He later addressed the in-

cident, saying, "I regret it greatly. I was surprised by the cancellation of the visit, apparently because we were planning to do something which is quite usual on such visits, namely to speak also with representatives of the civil society."

"You can't get a proper and comprehensive picture in any country on Earth if you only meet in government offices," added Gabriel.

He also signaled that future visits by German officials could likewise feature similar sessions with rights organizations. "I can't imagine that we would not do such things in the future just to get government appointments," Gabriel said.

Israeli opposition leader Isaac Herzog blasted Netanyahu for issuing the ultimatum and accused him of harming Berlin-Tel Aviv ties.

"Netanyahu's ultimatum to the German foreign minister is a serious blow to Israel's foreign relations with the biggest economy in Europe," he said.

Back in February, Berlin canceled an annual meeting of German and Zionist leaders scheduled for May amid rising frustration with settlement activities in the occupied West Bank.

Turkey Arrests More Than 1,000 Over Failed Coup

ANKARA (Dispatches) – Turkish authorities detained over 1,000 people suspected of links to US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen on Wednesday, in one of the largest operations in months against the network which Turkey blames for a failed coup in July last year.

They said the crackdown targeted the network's structure in the police force. Detention orders had been issued for 1,000 people, who were arrested in operations carried out across all 81 of Turkey's provinces.

After the abortive coup in July 2016, authorities arrested 40,000 people and sacked or suspended 120,000 others from a wide range of professions, including soldiers, police, teachers, and public servants, over alleged links with terrorist groups.

The latest arrests come 10 days after a tightly contested referendum approved the expansion of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's powers, according to preliminary results.

The referendum bitterly divid-

ed Turkey. Erdogan argues that strengthening the presidency will avert instability associated with coalition governments, at a time when Turkey also faces security threats from extremist militants.

But Erdogan's critics fear a further drift into authoritarianism, with a leader they see as bent on eroding modern Turkey's democracy.

Mass detentions immediately after the attempted coup were supported by many Turks, who agreed with Erdogan when he blamed Gulen for orchestrating the abortive putsch, which killed 240 people, mostly civilians. But criticism mounted as the arrests widened.

A leading European human rights body has put Turkey on a watchlist over the Ankara government's heavy-handed crackdown on opposition figures and political dissidents.

On Tuesday, the 47-member Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) voted 113 in favor of the procedure against Turkey versus 45



People, mainly Turkish soldiers, accused of trying to assassinate the Turkish president during a July 2016 coup attempt, are escorted by security forces toward a courthouse, in Mugla, western Turkey, February 20, 2017.

against. The assembly called on Turkey to promptly lift the state of emergency, and free jailed lawmakers and journalists.

The vote at the Strasbourg-based assembly is set to further sour relations between Turkey and the European Union.

EU lawmakers are scheduled to debate relations with Ankara on Wednesday, and the bloc's foreign ministers will discuss the situation on Friday. EU leaders are expected to exchange

viewpoints on the issue when they meet over United Kingdom's planned withdrawal from the union, commonly known as Brexit, on Saturday.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry has reacted angrily to the vote, strongly condemning it as an "unjust decision." The ministry argued that PACE's move to put it on its monitoring watchlist has left Ankara with no choice but to reconsider its relations with the body.

Kremlin: Russia's Stance on Syria's Assad Unchanged

MOSCOW (Dispatches) – The Kremlin says Russia's position on Syrian President Bashar Assad remains unchanged and his fate is only up to the Syrian people to decide.

"With regard to Assad's support, Russia's and President [Vladimir] Putin's position did not change, it is consistent and well-known," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Wednesday.

The remarks came a day after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in an interview with Reuters that Putin had told him, "I'm not an advocate of Assad, I'm not his lawyer."

Peskov said that the Russian president's assertion was not something new and he had made similar comments.

Putin is "a lawyer... and defender of international law," and advocates a policy that rules out the inference of third parties in decisions about the future of any country.

"He (Putin) believes that the future of Syria and the Syrian leader may be neither decided in Ankara, nor in Washington, Paris, Berlin nor Moscow. Syria's self-determination is a matter of the Syrian people," the

Kremlin spokesman added. The Kremlin spokesman's comments came on the same day as visiting Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said there was no political future for the Syrian president.

Jubeir made the remarks after a meeting on the Syrian crisis with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov in Moscow. Since March 2011, Syria has been gripped by deadly terrorism it blames on some Western states and their regional allies, including Saudi Arabia, which have long pushed for the ouster of the Damascus government.

Peskov also reacted to comments by French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault, who alleged that the analysis of samples taken from a suspected chemical attack in Syria "bears the signature" of Assad's government.

Ayrault claimed that there was "no doubt about the responsibility" of the Syrian government in the April 4 attack during which sarin gas was used. Peskov said that Ayrault's claims could not change Moscow's insistence on an impartial international probe into the incident as "the only way to find out the truth."