

BAGHDAD (Xinhua) – Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has pledged to liberate "every inch" of Iraq's land from the Daesh terrorist group, confirming that Iraqi troops are preparing for a new offensive. "We will not leave a single inch of the land of Iraq in the hands of Daesh terrorists," Abadi said at a press conference after his weekly cabinet meeting. Abadi, who is also the commander-in-chief of Iraqi forces, attributed the delay of liberation operations to the preparation work by the security forces.

No knowledge is superior to deep thinking and prudence; no worship or prayers are more sacred than fulfillment of obligations and duties, no religious faith is loftier than feeling ashamed of doing wrong and bearing calamities patiently.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

'Saudi-Led Siege Can't Bring Qatar to Its Knees'

DOHA (Dispatches) – An adviser to Qatar's foreign minister says the Saudi-led quartet of boycotters have failed to bring his country to its knees, adding that Riyadh's anti-Doha "smear campaign" is only reminiscent of the kingdom's own ideological support for the Daesh Takfiri terror group.

Mutlaq Majed al-Qahtani, the Qatari foreign minister's special envoy for counterterrorism and mediation, made the comments in an opinion piece titled "Qatar Will Not Be Intimidated," which was recently published in The Wall Street Journal.

Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) cut their diplomatic ties with Qatar on June 5, accusing it of sponsoring terrorism and destabilizing the region. The Saudi-led bloc has also imposed sanctions against the country, including restrictions on Qatari aircraft using their airspace. Doha rejects the claims, saying the boycotters are attacking its sovereignty.

The opinion piece mainly pointed fingers at Saudi Arabia and the UAE, blaming the two for "hypocrisy."



Bahraini Foreign Minister Khalid bin Ahmed al-Khalifa (L), Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir (2nd-L), UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan (2nd-R), and Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry (R) meet in Cairo on July 5, 2017.

"If Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates -- the countries driving the confrontation, despite the appearance of a unified bloc -- hoped to bring Qatar to its knees, they have failed. If they hoped to damage Qatar's reputation and improve their own, they have failed. If they hoped to enhance their relationship with the US at Qatar's expense, again, they have failed," he wrote.

"Instead, the anti-Qatar smear campaign has put a spotlight on the shameful history and unsavory practices of the Saudis and Emiratis themselves. Saudi Arabia justifies the blockade by alleging that Qa-

tari authorities support extremists and terrorist organizations. But the accusation only reminds observers that the Saudis have consistently failed to prevent the radicalization of their citizens," it stated. Qahtani also said 15 out of the 19 hijackers that conducted the 9/11 attacks were Saudis, and that "thousands of Saudi citizens have taken up arms to join" Daesh and other radical outfits.

He went on to say that "Saudi textbooks are used in ISIS (Daesh) schools," noting that "Saudi citizens also finance a large number of the 50 groups designated by the US Department of State as terrorist organizations."

Abu Dhabi was towing no better a track record than that of Riyadh, the article asserted, saying that two Emiratis had participated in the September 11, 2001 hijackings, and that staff report to the US-formed 9/11 Commission had revealed that much of the funding for the attacks had flowed through the Emirates.

Qahtani further called for dialog in the absence of pressure tactics and ultimatums to resolve the unprecedented diplomatic crisis facing the Persian Gulf region.

Since May, Riyadh has imposed a deadly crackdown on Awamiyah -- the hometown of late prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, whose execution by the Al Saud regime sparked condemnation and protests throughout the Middle East. Saudi authorities call the clampdown a "security campaign" against the gunmen there, and used it as a pretext to launch almost daily attacks against the town, destroying residential areas, setting fire to buildings, and reportedly threatening the residents to either leave or face potentially deadly swoops.

Last week, foreign journalists witnessed the destruction wrought by Saudi forces on the town after they were permitted entry for the first time. Since July 26, they said, Saudi authorities have prevented emergency services from reaching the wounded and failed to provide humanitarian assistance to trapped

'Shia Neighborhood in Saudi Arabia's Awamiyah Totally Destroyed'



Remains of buildings are seen following the Saudi demolition of Awamiyah in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia on August 9, 2017.

Awamiyah citizens. The residents also noted that an order had never been issued for people to leave Awamiyah while their only chance out of the town had been short periods coordinated with local volunteers and activists.

Awamiyah, situated in Eastern Province, has long been a flash-point between the Al Saud family and the inhabitants complaining of discrimination. Stephane Dujarric, the spokesman for UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, recently said that the world body could not independently verify the reports coming out of Awamiyah, but all Riyadh's actions should be in line with its commitments to human rights.

This is while multiple human rights groups have voiced concerns over the situation in Awamiyah, and criticized Western countries for keeping mum on Saudi Arabia's atrocities there. Last month, Ottawa expressed "deep concerns" over the Saudis' apparent use of Canadian military equipment in their growing crackdown against the minority Shia citizens in the restive Eastern Province.

Prominent human rights groups have on numerous occasions called on Saudi Arabia's major arms suppliers, including the US and the UK, to stop selling Riyadh military equipment.

MANAMA (Dispatches) – U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has called on the Bahraini regime to stop discriminating against Shias residing in the Persian Gulf country. "In Bahrain, the government continue to question, detain and arrest Shia clerics, community members and opposition politicians," said the top diplomat Tuesday. Thousands of anti-regime protesters have held demonstrations in Bahrain on an almost daily basis ever since a popular uprising began in the tiny kingdom in mid-February 2011. They are demanding that the Al Khalifah dynasty relinquish power and allow a just system representing all Bahrainis to be established. "Members of the Shia community there continue to report ongoing discrimination in government employment, education, and the jus-

Awamiyah citizens. The residents also noted that an order had never been issued for people to leave Awamiyah while their only chance out of the town had been short periods coordinated with local volunteers and activists.

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More Civilians Killed in Fresh U.S. Airstrike in Syria



An injured Syrian man receives treatment at hospital following a terrorist mortar attack against al-Akramiya neighborhood of Aleppo, northern Syria, on August 15, 2017.

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – At least six people have been killed and several others injured, when the U.S.-led coalition purportedly fighting the Daesh terrorist group carried out aerial attacks in Syria's terrorist-held northern province of Raqqah, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says.

The Britain-based monitoring group said 579 civilians, includ-

ing at least 133 minors, have lost their lives in U.S.-led aerial attacks against the city of Raqqah between June 5 and August 15.

Additionally, another 16 civilians, including 3 children, were killed in raids on the village of Zour Shamar and another area on the eastern outskirts of Raqqah.

The U.S.-led airstrikes have also injured hundreds of citizens, of

whom some have sustained amputations and permanent disabilities. Dozens of residential buildings and public properties have been destroyed as well.

The U.S.-led coalition has been conducting airstrikes against what are said to be Daesh targets inside Syria since September 2014 without any authorization from the Damascus government or a UN mandate.

The military alliance has repeatedly been accused of targeting and killing civilians. It has also been largely incapable of fulfilling its declared aim of destroying Daesh.

The city of Raqqah, which lies on the northern bank of the Euphrates River, was overrun by Daesh terrorists in March 2013, and was proclaimed the center for most of the Takfiris' administrative and control tasks the following year.

It is estimated that a population of 300,000 civilians is trapped inside Raqqah, including 80,000 displaced from other parts of Syria. Thousands have fled in recent months, and the

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs believes about 160,000 people remain in the city.

On June 6, the US-backed militiamen from the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) said they had launched an operation aimed at pushing Daesh out of Raqqah.

Separately, at least four civilians have lost their lives and more than a dozen others sustained injuries, when foreign-backed militants positioned on the western outskirts of Aleppo launched a mortar attack on the city.

A medical source, requesting anonymity, told Syria's official news agency SANA that militants fired three mortar shells at al-Akramiya neighborhood of the city, located some 355 kilometers north of the capital Damascus, on Tuesday, leaving four people dead and 17 others injured.

The source added that the body of a little girl was among the victims of attack.

Jordan Holds Local Elections in Step to Devolve Powers

AMMAN (Reuters) – Jordan has held local elections in a move officials say will help devolve some powers to larger cities and underdeveloped rural regions but which critics say falls short of promised wider political reform.

The countrywide municipal vote - the first since 2013 - is a stated bid by the government to bring wider grassroots democracy that King Abdullah has said would provide marginalized communities with a bigger voice in state decisions.

Over 1.3 million people - or 31 percent of those eligible - voted on Tuesday, the head of the government run electoral commission Khaled Kalaldeh said. Over 30,000 police were deployed to secure more than 5,000 polling stations nationwide.

Over 6,000 candidates competed for 1,833 seats on 100 city and town councils and 12 new governorate

(provincial) councils that will have the decisive say on investments in infrastructure and other projects of regional concern.

"Decisions on major developmental projects are now in their (governorate) hands and they are the ones who will set the priorities, not the ministries in the capital," a senior government official told Reuters.

Last year parliament approved a decentralization law that established the governorate councils, with a 10 percent quota for women to encourage their participation.

"The Jordanian state continues to encourage elections and dialogue through the ballot boxes, at a time when we are surrounded by bloodshed and violence," government spokesman Mohammad al Momani said.

But critics said the election turnout pointed to widespread voter apathy, particularly in the capital Am-

man and the provincial industrial city of Zarqa where many voiced doubt the government would delivering on pledges of democratic reform.

"Elections are a chance for change and shaping the future in democratic countries but, in the presence of authoritarianism, elections just reproduce past woes and existing suffering," said Zaki Bani Rusheid, a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Brotherhood is Jordan's largest opposition party but its activities are restricted by state authorities in the kingdom.

Wider reforms, among them steps to curb gerrymandering that favors pro-government deputies, have stalled after a brief period in which the authorities allowed large peaceful protests and freer media expression to forestall an uprising of the sort that shattered other Arab countries starting in 2011.