

CAIRO (Reuters) – Saudi Arabia has summoned its ambassador in Germany home for consultations over comments by German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel about the political crisis in Lebanon. The Saudi foreign ministry said the government also handed Germany's representative in Riyadh a protest note over what it said were "shameful" comments Gabriel made after a meeting with his Lebanese counterpart.

The idolaters have no right to visit the mosques of Allah while bearing witness to unbelief against themselves, these it is whose doings are null, and in the fire shall they abide.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

Palestine Threatens to Freeze Ties With U.S.

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – Palestinian officials have threatened to cut all communications with the U.S., if the Trump administration continues with plans to shut down their diplomatic mission in Washington.

"We will put on hold all our communications with this American administration," said Senior Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat.

He added that the decision was "very unfortunate and unacceptable," and accused Washington of giving in to pressure from the Zionist regime.

He further noted that "we are trying to cooperate to achieve the ultimate deal."

The announcement came after the U.S. State Department threatened to close the Palestinians' diplomatic office in Washington unless they enter into direct, meaningful negotiations with the Tel Aviv regime.

The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump has 90 days to determine if the Palestinians are in "direct and meaningful negotiations with Israel." If so, the mission will



The Palestinian Liberation Organization's office in Washington, DC

be reopened.

Hanan Ashrawi, from the executive committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), said that the U.S. was "disqualifying itself as a peace broker in the region" with its refusal to extend the law.

"Conditioning the renewal of the waiver on the Palestinians' sticking to 'direct and meaningful negotiations with Israel' is actually

superfluous since negotiations are nonexistent, and the current U.S. administration has yet to present any kind of peace initiative," she said.

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Malki also said that the Palestinian leadership "will not accept any extortion or pressure."

According to a State Department official, Palestinian President Mah-

moud Abbas crossed the line in September after he called for an ICC to investigate and prosecute the Zionists.

During his United Nations General Assembly speech in September, Abbas called for the ICC to "open an investigation and to prosecute Israeli officials for their involvement in settlement activities and aggressions against our people."

Less than a month before U.S. President Donald Trump took office, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2334, calling on the Zionist regime to "immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem (al-Quds)."

About 600,000 Zionists live in over 230 illegal settlements built since the 1967 Zionist regime occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East al-Quds.

Palestinians want the West Bank as part of a future independent Palestinian state, with East al-Quds as its capital.

15 Palestinian Minors Killed by Zionist Troops This Year

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) says fifteen Palestinian minors have lost their lives during skirmishes between Palestinian protesters and Zionist troops in the occupied West Bank and besieged Gaza Strip since the beginning of the current year.

The official statistical institution of Palestine said in a statement on Sunday that three of the victims were between 13 and 15 years old, while the rest were 16 or 17 years old.

The statement added that the occupying regime is holding some 300 minors in prisons and detention facilities across the occupied territories.

The PCBS further noted that it has documented around 4,000

cases of child arrests since October 2015, and that most of the detainees have been released.

The Ramallah-based organization added that the Zionist regime's authorities demolished 418 homes and 646 sheds last year, leaving around 848 children homeless.

The PCBS made the announcement on the eve of United Nations Universal Children's Day on November 20.

Earlier this year, Defense for Children International (DCI), a Geneva-based NGO focusing on children's rights, reported that 2016 saw the highest number of Palestinian children killed by Zionist troops over the past decade, warning that Tel Aviv is not being held accountable for its lethal at-

tacks.

The report by DCI, a Geneva-based NGO focusing on children's rights, noted that 35 children were killed and 83 others injured by Zionist troops last year.

It warned that the regime's troops are not being held accountable for using firearms against the Palestinian protesters and stone-throwers.

Thirty-two of them were killed in the occupied West Bank, out of whom 19 children were between the ages of 16 and 17 and 13 others were between 13 and 15 years old, the report said.

The occupied Palestinian territories have witnessed new tension ever since Zionist troops introduced restrictions on the entry of Palestinian worshippers into the al-

Aqsa Mosque compound in East al-Quds in August 2015.

More than 300 Palestinians have lost their lives at the hands of Zionist troops since the beginning of October 2015.

The Tel Aviv regime has tried to change the demographic makeup of al-Quds over the past decades by constructing settlements, destroying historical sites and expelling the local Palestinian population. Palestinians say the Israeli measures are aimed at paving the way for the Judaization of the city.

The al-Aqsa Mosque compound is a flash point Islamic site, which is also holy to Jews. The mosque is Islam's third holiest site after Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia.

Afghan Forces Free 30 People From Taliban Captivity

KABUL (Dispatches) – Afghan government forces have rescued at least 30 people from captivity at the hands of the Taliban militant group in Afghanistan's southern province of Helmand, officials say.

Afghan and foreign special forces launched the rescue operation on Sunday, raiding a Taliban-run "prison" in Helmand's Nawzad district.

Police officials said 20 of those rescued had been taken captive by the Taliban militant group because of helping the government or had been family members of Afghan army and security forces.

Among the rescued captives were also four children aged under 12 and two policemen.

The Taliban claimed in a statement that those rescued had been awaiting "trial" over accusations of robbery, kidnapping, personal disputes, and other crimes.

During the Sunday operation, one Taliban militant was killed and two others were wounded, police said.

Afghanistan is engulfed by violence and many parts of the country remain plagued by militan-

cy despite the presence of foreign troops. The United States and its NATO allies invaded and occupied the country as part of Washington's so-called war on terror in 2001, which toppled a Taliban regime.

Over the past 16 years, the Taliban have been carrying out militancy across Afghanistan, killing and displacing government officials, security forces, and civilians.

In another development, the European Union compound in the Afghan capital of Kabul is under investigation for having a role in an alcohol-smuggling ring in the Muslim country, where possession and consumption of alcohol is illegal.

Leaked Facebook and WhatsApp messages forwarded to EU investigators appear to show that beer, wine and spirits purchased for the exclusive consumption of European officials in Afghanistan were instead sold on to local businessmen in the Asian country, The Guardian wrote on Friday.

According to the daily, EU investigators are probing reports that the bloc's headquarters in Kabul is at the center of the illicit alcohol-

smuggling ring across Afghanistan, using unused fridges and adapted gas canisters "to sneak bottles of alcohol brands" out of the official EU-designated area.

The report further notes that despite illegality of alcohol in the predominantly Muslim nation, "a thriving black market exists" in the Afghan capital, where "special dispensation to import alcohol has been given to foreign powers, including the EU."

This is while an internal investigating unit of the EU is examining the claims, said a spokesman as cited in the report. The allegations, it adds, "could cause major embarrassment for the European External Action Service [EEAS], which acts as the EU diplomatic corps and oversees the mission in the Afghan capital."

The focus of the allegations is on the EU's compound located in the Shahr-e-Naw neighborhood of north-west Kabul where, according to a former staff member, "up to 40 European expats and 70 locals have worked in the three-story office building and adjoining restaurant, Tawoos."

Lebanon Warns Zionist Regime Against War



Lebanon's Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – Lebanon's Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil has cautioned the Zionist regime against waging a war on his country, citing Beirut's confidence to secure victory in the battle.

In an interview with Russia's international television network RT, Bassil said Lebanon is capable to counter "any threat," but at the same time wants peace and stability in the region. "We should not be provoking Israel into a war simply because it is likely to lose it. We should restrain Israel from starting a war exactly because Lebanon is sure to win it," he said.

The occupying regime launched two wars on Lebanon in 2000 and 2006, in both of which the Hezbollah resistance movement inflicted heavy losses on the regime's military. Over the past months, Zionist officials have threatened another war on Lebanon.

Elsewhere in his interview, Bassil touched on Saad Hariri's abrupt resignation as Lebanon's prime minister two weeks ago while in Saudi Arabia. Lebanese President Michel Aoun has said Saudi Arabia had "kidnapped" the premier.

The top Lebanese diplomat said Hariri's resignation was a "good example [showing that] virtually anyone can start a war against us."

Bassil also noted that Lebanon has always adopted "constructive and sound policies" towards the Arab world though such strategies have not prevented "hostile actions" against Beirut.

"We are ready to act in case of such developments, but we are trying to do everything we can to prevent this from happening and to maintain a good relationship with Saudi Arabia," he said. Bassil said Lebanon would "stick to" its peaceful approach "unless forced to defend ourselves."

In a separate interview with Russia's Interfax news agency, the Lebanese foreign minister warned of an anti-Lebanon campaign in the Middle East aimed at "intimidating" the country.

"Some countries are trying to use certain forces to remove the head of

Lebanon," Bassil said without elaborating further.

"The same forces that unleashed the war in Syria and those who are feeding into terrorists are now trying to damage Lebanon," he pointed out.

Riyadh Warned

Meanwhile, former UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw says Saudi Arabia's foreign policy pursued by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman "could end up as a threat in Lebanon unless wiser council prevails."

Speaking at a conference hosted by London-based media monitoring group Middle East Monitor on Saturday, Straw described the Saudi policies extremely risky for the region and warned against a military intervention in Lebanon.

Lebanon is embroiled in a political crisis with Saudi Arabia over Prime Minister Saad Hariri's surprise resignation in Riyadh and his failure to return to Beirut amid speculation that the premier and his family are being held hostage by Saudi authorities.

Saudi Arabia has called on its citizens to leave Lebanon and described Hezbollah's presence in government as an "act of war". The Lebanese resistance movement, for its part, has accused Riyadh of having "declared war" on Beirut.

Straw said there has to be an acceptance of Hezbollah's role in Lebanon's politics. "Hezbollah as a political force is a reality in the Lebanon," the Middle East Eye quoted him as saying.

The former top diplomat said that it was important to push for negotiations when dealing with international crises citing the boycott of Hamas by foreign governments as a failure in this respect.

"I am unhappy about our boycotting of Hamas. I talked off the record to some journalists in Riyadh in early 2006 and said we ought to be talking to Hamas," he said, adding "some people say I was removed from the post of foreign secretary" because of these comments.

Erdogan Snubs NATO Apology Over 'Impudence' During Drill

ANKARA (Press TV) – Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has rejected a NATO apology over what he referred to as "impudence" during one of the Western military alliance's drills in Norway.

On Friday, Ankara withdrew dozens of Turkish soldiers from a drill in Norway after a number of Turkey's former and current leaders were depicted as the "enemies."

In response, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg apologized for the incident, adding that it was the result of an individual's action and did not reflect the NATO policies.

Erdogan said, "You have witnessed the impudence at NATO exercises in Norway. There are some mistakes that cannot be committed by fools but only by vile people."

He noted that the incident is "a reflection of a distorted point of view that we have observed in NATO for a while." "This matter cannot be covered over with a simple apology."

Over the past few months, NATO has been experiencing internal conflicts among its allies. Ankara's deal with Russia on the purchase of S-400 anti-aircraft missiles has caused concern among members of the military bloc, including the U.S.

Turkey, being a NATO member state with the second-largest army in the military alliance, drew an outpouring of criticism from the US and other members of the bloc, which criticized Ankara for drifting toward Moscow.

The deal has also raised concern because the weapons cannot be integrated into the NATO defense.