

RAMALLAH (Xinhua) — Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Foreign Relations Advisor Nabil Shaath slammed on Wednesday the U.S. House of Representatives' vote to reduce annual aid to the Palestinian Authority. The bill is "a criminal act that is rejected on all Palestinian levels," Shaath told Xinhua. "The U.S. has been threatening for a while to stop its aid to pressure the Palestinian Authority to stop the salaries of detainees and martyrs," he added. The advisor described the step as "absolute bias toward Israeli side," saying it "completely ends any role of Washington as an honest broker of the peace process."

Whoever wants to be a leader should educate himself before educating others. Before preaching to others he should first practice himself. Whoever educates himself and improves his own morals is superior to the man who tries to teach and train others.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

Saudi Regime Intensifies Airstrikes Against Yemen

SANAA (Dispatches) — The Saudi-led coalition has intensified its airstrikes against the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, and other areas following the killing of the former Yemeni president, Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The coalition's warplanes conducted dozens of airstrikes on positions of the Houthi Ansarullah movement in Sana'a and other northern provinces early Wednesday despite calls for a humanitarian ceasefire in the country, Yemen's al-Masirah television reported.

The coalition also bombed the presidential palace, Saleh's residence and houses of his family members.

Local residents said loud explosions were heard in downtown Sana'a.

The airstrikes also targeted other Yemeni provinces, including Ta'izz, Hajjah and Sa'dah.

The assaults on Hajjah left a woman and a girl dead and injured 10 others in Mabyan District. The Saudi warplanes also fired more than 150 rockets and mortar shells at Razih and Shada'a districts in Sa'dah Province.



Members of Yemen's Ansarullah movement inspect the damage after a Saudi airstrike targeted the presidential palace in the Yemeni capital Sana'a on December 5, 2017.

Elsewhere in the southwestern province of Ta'izz, four people were wounded following the bombardment of a fuel station in Mukha District.

Yemeni forces, on the other hand, targeted the positions of the Saudi-led mercenaries in Nihm District in Sana'a Province and Maton district in the northern province of Jawf.

Yemeni sources have also indicated

that the top commander of forces loyal to the slain president has died of injuries he suffered during clashes this week with fighters of Houthi Ansarullah movement in the capital Sana'a.

Yemen's General People's Congress party announced Tuesday that Tarek Saleh died of wounds suffered during clashes over control of Sana'a.

A statement from the party said the commander had sustained wounds to his liver and died in a hospital. It did not give more details.

The UN has stressed that despite calls for a humanitarian ceasefire in Yemen, Saudi Arabia continues to bomb the capital Sana'a.

"Airstrikes have continued while ground fighting and shelling have been reduced," said UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric.

Dujarric added that UN food supplies in Yemen were running out, and that seven vessels carrying food requirements are blocked by Saudi-led coalition from entering Hudaydah and Salif ports.

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council also stressed that humanitarian situation in the country was "dire," and that the country "stands at the brink of catastrophic famine."

More than 12,000 people have been killed since the onset of Saudi Arabia's deadly campaign against Yemen in March 2015. Much of the Arabian Peninsula country's infrastructure, including hospitals, schools and factories, has been reduced to rubble due to the war.

Iraqi FM Rejects Calls to Disband Popular Forces

BAGHDAD (Press TV) — The Iraqi foreign ministry has strongly rejected French President Emmanuel Macron's call for dismantling the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), also known by their Arabic name as Hashd al-Sha'abi, which have played a significant role in crushing the Daesh terrorist group in the Arab country.

Ahmad Mahjoub, the spokesman for Iraq's foreign ministry, made the remarks in an exclusive interview with Press TV, describing Macron's call as a blatant intervention in Iraq's domestic affairs.

He said Baghdad highly appreciates its relations with Paris; however, "the issue of PMU is an Iraqi internal affair... therefore any statements regarding the PMU or calls to dismantle it is an intervention in Iraq's domestic affairs, which we reject."

Mahjoub also stressed that the PMU has made great sacrifices in the fight against Daesh and has been an effective force on the ground.

On Saturday, French President Emmanuel Macron visited Iraq, calling for "a gradual demilitarization" of the forces and for all militias in Iraq to be "dismantled."

Reacting to Macron's call, Iraq's

vice president and former prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, said in a Facebook posting that "Macron interfered unexpectedly in Iraq's internal affairs by calling for the dismantling of a legal institution, Hashd al-Sha'abi."

A day after Macron's controversial request, Ahmad al-Assadi, one of the PMU's leaders, said that "any such discussion is rejected and we do not accept interference in Iraqi affairs."

In October, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi strongly defended the Hashd al-Sha'abi after comments by US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson that militias in Iraq should "go home."

Hashd al-Sha'abi is a combination of some 40 groups of mostly Shia fighters that was formed shortly after the emergence of Daesh in Iraq in mid-2014. In the early days of the Daesh's reign of terror, the then volunteer fighters played a major role in reinforcing the Iraqi army, which had suffered heavy setbacks in the face of lightning advances by the terrorists.

The organization is considered to be part of the country's security forces and reports to the Iraqi premier, who is the commander in chief of armed forces.

Pentagon Declares 'Conditions-Based' Presence in Syria



Demonstrators protest U.S. airstrikes against Syria in Los Angeles on April 7, 2017.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) — The U.S. military forces are poised to stay in war-ravaged Syria for "as long as we need to," says a Pentagon official.

"We are going to maintain our commitment on the ground as long as we need to, to support our partners and prevent the return of terrorist groups," Pentagon spokesman Eric Pahon told AFP.

The Department of Defense spokesman on Iraq and Syria also

repeated Washington's stance that the U.S. and its allies are fighting the Daesh group there.

Pahon further announced that there would be no timeline to determine if and when they may leave as their presence is "conditions-based."

"To ensure an enduring defeat of ISIS (Daesh), the coalition must ensure it cannot regenerate, reclaim lost ground, or plot external attacks," he said. "This is essential

to the protection of our homeland as well as to defend our allies and partners.... The United States will sustain a conditions-based military presence in Syria to combat the threat of a terrorist-led insurgency, prevent the resurgence of ISIS, and to stabilize liberated areas."

The U.S.-led coalition of 68 nations 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. Such air raids began in Iraq in August of the same year.

The military alliance has repeatedly been accused of targeting and killing civilians.

Fewer Than 3,000 Daesh Terrorists in Iraq, Syria

The development comes as the United States-led international coalition fighting Daesh estimates that fewer than 3,000 terrorists belonging to the group remain in Iraq and Syria, its spokesman said.

Daesh's self-proclaimed caliphate has crumbled this year in Syria

and Iraq, with the group losing the cities of Mosul, Raqqa and swathes of other territory.

"Current estimates are that there are less than 3,000 #Daesh fighters left - they still remain a threat, but we will continue to support our partner forces to defeat them," U.S. Army Colonel Ryan Dillon tweeted, using an Arabic acronym for Daesh.

Dillon's tweet was part of his responses to an online question and answer session in which he also said the coalition had trained 125,000 members of Iraqi security forces, 22,000 of which were Kurdish Peshmerga fighters.

When asked if the United States planned to build permanent military bases in Iraq or Syria the defeat of Daesh, Dillon said it would not. "No - the Government of #Iraq knows where and how many from Coalition are here to support operation to defeat #Daesh; all bases are #Iraqi led," he tweeted.

The coalition will begin a transition from focusing on retaking territory to consolidating gains, it later said in a statement following a meeting of its leaders with Iraqi military commanders.

Eight Killed in Bomb Blast in Syria's Homs

BEIRUT (Reuters) — A bomb blast has killed eight people and injured 16 others on a bus in Syria's Homs, state media said, citing the city's health authority.

Daesh claimed the attack, saying the blast killed 11 members of the Syrian army, its official news agency AMAQ said.

Many of the passengers were university students, Homs Governor Talal Barazi told state-run Ikhbariya TV. The blast in the government-held city hit the Akrama district, near al-Baath University.

Footage showed people crowding around the burned shell of a vehicle in the middle of a street. State television said "a bomb that terrorists planted in a passenger bus exploded".

Daesh terrorists had claimed responsibility for a similar attack in Homs in May, when a car bomb killed four people and injured 32 others.

A string of bombings have struck cities under government control in Syria this year, including the capital Damascus. The Tahrir al-Sham alliance -- led by fighters

formerly linked to al-Qaeda -- has also claimed some of the deadly attacks.

"Security agencies are constantly chasing sleeper cells," the Homs police chief said on Ikhbariya. "Today, it could be a sleeper cell or it could be an infiltration."

Barazi, the governor, said the state's enemies were trying to target stability as "the stage of victory" drew near.

The city of Homs returned to full government control in May for the first time since the onset of Syria's conflict more than six years ago.

With the help of Russian jets and Iran military advisors, the Damascus government has pushed back terrorist factions in western Syria, shoring up its rule over the main urban centers. The army and allied forces then marched eastwards against Daesh terrorists this year.

The jets struck crowded residential areas in the besieged terrorist enclave near Damascus on Sunday, killing at least 27 people, aid workers and a war monitor said.

Riyadh:

Most of Detainees in 'Anti-Corruption Sweep' Settled

RIYADH (Dispatches) — Saudi Arabia's public prosecutor says most of the people detained in a sweeping anti-corruption campaign launched last month have agreed to settlements to avoid prosecution while the rest could be held for months.

In a statement, the public prosecutor said a total of 320 people had been subpoenaed to provide information about alleged graft while 159 remain in detention and

"a number" of them have been referred for judicial action.

Sheikh Saud al-Mojeb said in a statement "the necessary arrangements are being finalized to conclude such agreements."

He also said the bank accounts of 376 individuals detained over corruption allegations have been frozen.

Mojeb had previously estimated that at least \$100 billion had been

misused by the suspects through systematic graft and embezzlement over several decades.

Last week, Saudi Prince Miteb bin Abdullah, a son of the former Saudi king, was freed after reaching a \$1-billion "acceptable settlement agreement" with the kingdom's authorities.

On November 4, dozens of Saudi princes, ministers, and former ministers were detained on the orders

of Saudi Arabia's so-called Anti-Corruption Committee headed by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Former spy chief Prince Bandar bin Sultan as well as billionaire Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal are among the notable businessmen and royals incarcerated in the biggest purge of the country's elite in the kingdom's modern history.

The kingdom also blocked the as-

sets of the crown prince's cousin, Mohammed bin Nayef, who reportedly continues to be under house arrest.

Nayef was the crown prince until June when he was ousted by King Salman and replaced by his son.

The detained individuals are facing allegations of money laundering, bribery, extorting officials, and misappropriation of public funds for personal benefits.

The crackdown is believed to be a self-promotion campaign launched by the crown prince aimed at consolidating his power.

On November 22, DailyMail.com cited a Saudi source as saying that Saudi Arabia was using U.S. mercenaries to torture the detained Saudi elites. The source noted that Mohammed Bin Salman himself conducted some of the interrogations.