

Iraqi PM:

# Armed Forces to Stay Out of Political Differences

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has called for impartiality and the removal of armed forces from political differences and conflicts in his country.

Abadi's speech came during a meeting with military and security leaders at the joint operations command headquarters on Sunday.

The prime minister, who is also the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, congratulated the first Eid al-Fitr celebration following the defeat of the Daesh in Iraq, and praised the role of the Iraqi forces in battling the terrorist group.

He emphasized on restricting arms to the state during his meeting with security and military commanders, according to his press office.

Many groups in the country have been battling Daesh alongside the Iraqi security forces.

Those groups remain a security threat to the post-Daesh situation as they have been heavily armed and follow orders from different commanders, analysts predict.

Abadi also discussed the necessity to combat corruption in the government institutions across the country.

"The security institution must be removed from any manifestations of corruption and remain impartial and above suspicion," he continued. "The investigation is being conducted based on any suspicions."

In another development, at least six Daesh terrorists were killed Sunday in an airstrike on Daesh hideout in Iraq's central province of Salahudin, a paramilitary Hashd Shaabi source said.

The incident took place early in the morning when the Iraqi aircraft bombarded a Daesh hideout in Farhatiyah area near the town of Balad, some 80 km



Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi (C) stresses removal of armed forces from political differences in his country.

north of the Iraqi capital Baghdad, destroying the hideout and killing six Daesh terrorist inside, Sheikh Safaa al-Timimi, a leader of a brigade in Saraya al-Salam militant group, told Xinhua.

The airstrike was based on intelligence reports by Saraya al-Salam, or Peace Companies, af-

iliated with the prominent Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, Timimi said.

Sadr's militia is a reformation of the previous militia Mahdi Army, which he led during the U.S. occupation of Iraq and the subsequent sectarian strife in the years after 2003.

## 'U.S. Efforts to Resolve Zionist-Palestinian Conflict Destined to Fail'



Palestinian protesters take cover from tear gas canisters shot by Zionist troops in Gaza.

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Palestinian Authority says the so-called peace plan, which has been promoted by the United States to end the Zionist-Palestinian conflict, is "meaningless" as it lacks the support of Palestinians.

Palestinian Authority spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh said on Saturday that purported U.S. efforts to resolve the decades-long dispute in the region are doomed

to failure.

He also referred to a Friday meeting between UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley, White House special adviser Jared Kushner and U.S. Middle East envoy Jason Greenblatt in New York, where they discussed Washington's so-called peace efforts and the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

"The round of meetings that began in New York, whose purpose is to bring a meaningless plan, won't achieve anything," Abu Rudeineh said.

Kushner and Greenblatt are set to visit the occupied territories, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Qatar next week to hold talks with regional leaders on U.S. President Donald Trump's initiative for the Middle East and the Gaza situation.

"Without the agreement of the Palestinian people, the fate of the series of meetings will be a total failure," the Palestinian official said.

"It is a waste of time and destined to fail, as long as the attempt to circumvent the legitimate Palestinian institutions continues," he added.

Earlier this week, Abu Rudeineh told Palestine's official Wafa news agency that any plan that does not recognize East al-Quds as the Palestinian capital or address the problem of refugees will be unsuccessful.

The U.S.-Palestine ties deteriorated last December, when Washington recognized al-Quds as the "capital" of the Zionist regime and announced plans to transfer the embassy from Tel Aviv to al-Quds.

The contentious move led President Mahmoud Abbas to formally declare that Palestinians would no longer accept the U.S. as a mediator to resolve the conflict because Washington was "completely biased" towards Tel Aviv.

The U.S. embassy relocation took place on May 14, the eve of the 70th anniversary of the Nakba Day (the Day of Catastrophe), sparking deadly clashes in Gaza. The Zionist regime lays claim to the whole al-Quds, but the international community views the city's eastern sector as an occupied territory and Palestinians consider it as the capital of their future state.

The last round of Zionist-Palestinian talks collapsed in 2014. Among the major sticking points in those negotiations was Israel's continued settlement expansion on Palestinian territories.

## Syrian Army Sends More Troops to Southern Battlefield

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – The Syrian Army dispatched more fresh forces and military equipment to Daraa province on Sunday to reinvigorate combat forces for a large-scale assault on terrorists in the Southern part of the war-hit country.

The army deployed a large number of forces and equipment to northwestern Daraa to launch an imminent massive attack against Daesh terrorists in Daraa and Quneitra provinces.

In the meantime, local sources said that the army has sent more soldiers and military hardware to the Death Triangle region, including Dayr al-Adas

in Western Daraa.

The sources further said that the army plans to kick off the assault after its elite forces arrive in Daraa.

The army had given a 48-hour-long ultimatum to the terrorists in Daraa and Quneitra to join a peace plan in the region and surrender to the government forces.

Local sources reported that commanders of terrorist groups did not accept the Russian Reconciliation Centers' call for peace talks, adding that a wave of disunity and defection started in the terrorist front over the peace agreement.

## Zionist Troops Target 'Leading Figure' Behind Gaza Kites

GAZA STRIP (Dispatches) – The Zionist regime says its aircraft on Sunday targeted a leading figure behind the launching of balloons and kites into the occupied territories from the besieged Gaza Strip.

The Times of Israel daily said the strike was an attempt to warn off Gazans launching balloons and kites into the territories, which has raised fears of attacks by balloon-borne explosives in the occupied territories.

In a statement, the regime said the airstrike targeted the vehicle of the leader of a cell making explosive kites and balloons. It did not name the person targeted or say if anyone had been hit in the airstrike.

The Palestinian Shehab news agency, however, reported that the airstrike had hit an empty vehicle outside a mosque in the Gaza suburb of Shujai'yya early Sunday morning.

The Israeli daily said the strike was likely meant as a warning that Tel Aviv may begin carrying out assassinations from the air, including against figures not actively preparing balloons or kites for launching.

In recent days, the regime's aircraft have fired at protesters near a fence separating the besieged Gaza from the occupied territories in an apparent change of tactic.

So far, Zionist snipers and special troops

have shot down nearly 130 peaceful Palestinian protesters, sparking international outcry over the disproportionate use of force.

Zionist regime officials have tried to put a criminal spin on the protests, claiming that kites and balloons launched by Palestinians had burned thousands of acres of farmland, forests and nature reserves in the regions around the Gaza Strip.

On Saturday, the Israeli military carried out a drone strike near residents of the Gaza Strip who were allegedly launching incendiary balloons into Israel. Two people were wounded in the strike, according to the Health Ministry in Gaza.

Syrian... (Continued From Page One)

stone with writing in Arabic, Hebrew and Latin. The man, who goes by the name of Hassan al-Dimashqi, said that for months after rebels seized the neighborhood in 2013, the synagogue was protected by the main local force in Jobar, known at the time as the Haroun al-Rashid Brigade. Later that year local officials formed a committee that decided to empty the building and hide its contents, he added.

Some local officials say the man who disappeared in 2014 reached Europe and the artifacts he took ended up in Occupied Palestine, according to al-Dimashqi, although his ultimate fate and that of the antiquities remain unknown.

The whereabouts of the items entrusted with Failaq al-Rahman have not been verified, although al-Dimashqi and the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a war monitor, say some of the pieces, including carpets, chandeliers and historical scripts, have surfaced in Turkey.

Turkish state media reported in May that authorities had detained five people in the country's northwest who were trying to sell two old Torahs for 8 million Turkish lira (\$1.7 million). It said the manuscripts were written on gazelle leather.

Maamoun Abdul-Karim, who until recently was Syria's director-general of antiquities and museums, has publicly urged the Turks to verify the manuscripts' authenticity. In the 1990s, rumors circulated in Damascus that the originals had been stolen, switched with copies, and smuggled to Occupied Palestine, he added.

Syria has accused the occupying regime of Israel, with whom it has been in a state of war for 70 years, of stealing the artifacts with the help of Turkey, a more recent enemy. Syria's ambassador to the United Nations, Bashar al-Ja'afari, publicized the accusation with a letter in March, saying Turkish and Zionist intelligence services worked with the terrorists to smuggle them to Istanbul, where experts confirmed them as "extremely valuable," then New York.

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was hailed by citizens and some of the country's nearly 2 million foreign residents.

"There's really no shortage in daily life at all," said Gerd Nonneman, a resident of Qatar and professor of International Relations and Persian Gulf Studies at the Qatar branch of Georgetown University.

He's felt an impact, though, professionally. For one, institutions in the blockading countries can no longer engage with those based in Qatar. Also, Nonneman said many of his old friends and colleagues in those countries no longer speak with him due to the political pressures.

"The main effect seems to be that colleagues and friends in these countries seem to feel it's not right, or not safe — not advisable, let's put it that way — to engage with us," he said.

Otherwise, daily life in Qatar continues mostly uninterrupted.

Construction supplies were also rerouted, allowing Qatar to continue pace with building new roads, hotels and mega-stadiums as it prepares to host the World Cup in 2022.

Still, lower oil prices and the diplomatic rift weighed on the economy. By the end of last year, real estate prices had fallen by about 11%. Resident private sector deposits and foreign financing, like nonresident deposits, dropped by \$40 billion.

Qatar's non-oil economic growth slowed down from 5.6% in 2016 to about 4% in 2017.

The country, however, comfortably adjusted by drawing from its ample reserves and assets to pump money into the economy and local banks.

Qatar's Central Bank reserves took a hit, declining from \$31 billion in 2016 to \$15 billion last year. Reserves climbed up to \$18 billion by the end of January.

Even so, only a fraction of Qatar's wealth is parked in its central bank. The country's sovereign wealth fund, the Qatar Investment Authority, which sold off some of its overseas stakes last year, has assets of around \$318 billion, according to the IMF. That gives Qatar considerable wealth to maneuver.

With a tiny population of just over 300,000 citizens, and ownership in the world's largest gas field off its Persian Gulf coast, Qatar boasts the highest per capita income of any country in the world.

"They were always well-placed in terms of their external vulnerabilities," said Yasemin Engin, an economist at Capital Economics. "Overall, their banks are well-positioned to deal with any shocks."

The Persian Gulf state's national oil and gas company, Qatar Petroleum, is the world's largest producer of liquefied natural gas. That makes Qatar extremely important to countries like China, Japan, India and Britain, which rely on its gas to fuel their economies.

Even the UAE's electrical grid is fueled by Qatari gas. Despite ties being severed, Qatar still sends about two billion cubic feet (56 million cubic meters) of natural gas a day into the UAE, supplying it with about a third of its daily need. About 200 million cubic feet (5.66 million cubic meters) of that goes on to Oman.

The blockade might be most felt by Qatar's national airline, which used to fly to 18 cities in the blockading nations, and whose CEO says the company expects large financial losses as a result.

Tourism rates have also fallen. Prior to the blockade, tourists from neighboring Persian Gulf Arab countries made up just over half of all tourist arrivals into Qatar. They now make up around 10%, according to Capital Economics. Tourist arrivals from other countries fell by 8.6% from the previous year.

With little signs the standoff will end anytime soon, Qatar is trying to lure investors with legislation that will allow 100% foreign ownership of local businesses. The UAE is considering a similar law.

It appears that with time too, President Donald Trump's administration has shifted its position on the Qatar crisis and is now less supportive of Saudi and Emirati concerns, according to Ayham Kamel of Eurasia Group.

Qatar is home to the forward headquarters of the U.S. military's Central Command and hosts around 10,000 American soldiers.

"Growing up, we were always told about the importance of (Persian) Gulf unity and always raised being taught by our parents and grandparents that we are one community, we are linked with shared ethnic roots and shared cultural and religious values," said Haya Alwaleed Al-Thani, a college senior who is also related to the large ruling Al-Thani family. The blockade by three members of the six-nation Persian Gulf Cooperation Council left Qataris feeling "deceived and betrayed," she said. The reaction among Qataris has been an upswell of nationalism and support for Qatar's young ruler, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani.

"I think our leadership's ability to react quickly and ensure the same high quality of life is maintained regardless of the political circumstances has made me feel very proud," she said. "As a Qatari citizen, I've never felt so proud."