

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – Syrian state media said late on Thursday that air defenses had destroyed a "hostile target" west of the capital Damascus. "Our air defenses confronted a hostile target and destroyed it west of Damascus," the state news agency SANA said, quoting a military source. Forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad have recovered the bulk of the country from terrorists after more than seven years of war, helped by Russian air power and Iran's military advice. No further details about the incident were immediately available, but Israel has carried out similar attacks over the past months.

*O son of Adam, when you see that your Lord, the Glorified, bestows His Favors on you while you disobey Him, you should fear Him.*

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

# Need for 'Final Blow' to Terrorists in Idlib



Syrians wave the national flag in the town of Quneitra in the Syrian Golan Heights on July 27, 2018.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) – Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov says the counter-terrorism fight in Syria is not over yet and it is necessary to eliminate terrorists in the country's northwestern Idlib Province.

"The work [in Syria] is in full swing, a lot is yet to be done. At the same time, it is necessary to deal a final blow to terrorists near Idlib, which still remain there," Lavrov said while speaking on the sidelines of the 51st Association of

Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) ministerial meeting in Singapore.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Russian minister said only the Syrian people were entitled to determine the fate of their country, not external players, whose meddling in the war-torn state's affairs was "counterproductive."

Lavrov said that based on the UN Security Council Resolution 2254 only the Syrians should decide the future of their homeland and that Syria's unity and independence

should be preserved.

The top Russian diplomat also criticized attempts by external players to determine Syria's future and form of government.

"There are some external players who would prefer to decide everything for the Syrians but it is the Syrian people who should rule the country, determine its form of government and write a constitution. We do not support such attempts as we consider them to be counterproductive," he said.

Meanwhile, Turkey is reportedly working to stave off an imminent Syrian army offensive to dislodge terrorists from Idlib which is the last major territory still in terrorist hands.

According to a Turkish diplomatic source, cited by the Middle East Eye news portal, "Ankara is working with other opposition groups in Idlib to eliminate the militants" in order to fend off a Syrian operation.

The source said the Turkish military was working to the same effect with other groups in the city most of which is controlled by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), formerly al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, the MEE reported.

The development came just days after Syrian President Bashar al-Assad told Russian media that Damascus' next priority would be the retaking of Idlib.

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip raised the issue of Idlib with Russian President Vladimir Putin in a telephone conversation in mid-July, saying that Syrian military action in the Idlib region might endanger the Astana peace accords.

Turkey has several of observation posts in the city in accordance to a deal reached last year with Russia and Iran in the Kazakh capital Astana aimed at reducing clashes in de-escalation zones, including those in Idlib.

## After Relations Dive U.S., Turkey Agree to Try to Resolve Disputes



American Pastor Andrew Craig Brunson (C), who was charged with spying for the PKK terror group and the Fethullah Terrorist Organization, arrives at a site in Izmir, Turkey where he was put under house arrest due to his health problems on July 25, 2018.

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) – U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu agreed on Friday to try to resolve a series of disputes, after relations between the NATO allies sank to their lowest point in decades.

Their meeting in Singapore followed Washington's imposition on Wednesday of sanctions on two Turkish ministers over the case of Andrew Brunson, a U.S. pastor on trial in Turkey for backing terrorism.

State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert described their conversation on the sidelines of a regional ministers' meeting as constructive. "They agreed to continue to try to resolve the issues between our two countries," she said.

Cavusoglu said he had repeated Turkey's message that "the threatening language and sanctions does not achieve anything", but added that he and Pompeo would take steps to resolve their differences when they returned home.

"Of course you can't expect all issues to be resolved in a single meeting," he told Turkish television channels. "But we have agreed to work together, closely cooperate and keep the dialogue in the coming period," he added, also describing the talks as very constructive.

Turkey had previously vowed to retaliate against a recent U.S. move to sanction two ministers of the cabinet of Erdogan.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu was quoted by media Friday as saying that Ankara was preparing to

respond to Washington in equal measures. "U.S. attempts to impose sanctions on our two ministers will not go unanswered," Cavusoglu was quoted to have tweeted.

"We have said from the start that the other side's threatening language and sanctions will not get any result. We repeated this today," he said after a meeting with the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Singapore.

On Wednesday, the White House announced that it was imposing sanctions on Turkish Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gul and Interior Minister Suleyman Soyulu.

The sanctions involve freezing any property or assets on the US soil held by the two ministers. The sanctions also prevent American citizens from doing any business with the two ministers.

Late last month, U.S. President Donald Trump wrote on Twitter that his country "will impose large sanctions on Turkey for their long time detainment of Pastor Andrew Brunson."

Fifty-year-old Brunson faces up to 35 years in jail if convicted of carrying out activities on behalf of two groups, which Turkey considers to be terror organizations.

One is led by U.S.-based Turkish preacher Fethullah Gulen, whom Ankara blames for masterminding the failed 2016 coup against the Turkish government. Gulen denies the claim.

The other is the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has been fighting a hugely-deadly separatist war against Turkey for decades.

## Druze Arabs Push for Changes After Zionist Regime's 'Jewish State Law'

AL-QUDS (Dispatches) – The Zionist regime's new "nation-state" law has provoked anger among members of its most integrated minority, the Druze, prompting Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to seek corrective legislation.

Netanyahu has defended the law, which declares that only Jews have the right of self-determination in the country, from fierce criticism at "home" and abroad.

But his conservative government appears to have been blindsided by the response from the Druze community, even though parliament passed the law on July 19 after years of heated debate in

the Knesset.

In a further effort to calm tensions, Netanyahu convened a meeting with Druze community leaders in Tel Aviv late on Thursday but it was cut short because one of the participants, a retired senior military officer, had harshly criticized the legislation, Israeli media reported.

At a separate event in northern parts of the occupied territories, a Druze man had to be forcibly removed by police after he confronted and heckled one of the law's main proponents, lawmaker Avi Dichter of Netanyahu's Likud party who had started giving a speech.

Opposition to the newly-adopted apartheid law has grown to include Arab and Druze minority groups as well as the Christian community in the occupied territories.

The Catholic Church in the occupied city of al-Quds condemned the "nation-state" law that cleared the Israeli parliament on July 19, The Times of Israel reported.

The Latin Patriarchate, which represents the Roman Catholic Church, said in a statement, "The law fails to provide any constitutional guarantees for the rights of the indigenous and other minorities living in the country."

The legislation also violated

international laws, the church said, calling on Christians to rise in protest against the legislation.

Arabs and Israelis have protested the law in the port city of Haifa. The protests have been joined by several lawmakers, who lashed out against the legislation, with outspoken Arab legislator Aida Touma-Sliman calling it "an Apartheid law."

The law prioritizes "Jewish" values over democratic ones, declares al-Quds the "capital" of the Zionist regime, and sets Hebrew as the official language, relegating Arabic from an official language to one with "special status."

## Bin Laden Son Urged to Stop Terrorist Activities

LONDON (Dispatches) – Usama bin Laden's brother has pleaded with the al-Qaeda founder's son Hamza not to follow in his infamous father's footsteps.

Hamza bin Laden, officially designated a terrorist by the U.S., surprised his family by going to Afghanistan where he has become an al-Qaeda leader under Usama's former deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, The Guardian reported Friday.

The paper reported that Usama's brothers, Ahmad and Hassan, shook their heads when asked about their nephew.

"We thought everyone was over this," Hassan told the Guardian. "Then the next thing I knew, Hamza was saying, 'I am going to avenge my father.' I don't want to go through that again."

Hassan added: "If Hamza was in front of me now, I would tell him, 'God guide you. Think twice

about what you are doing. Don't retake the steps of your father. You are entering horrible parts of your soul."

Bin Laden's mother, Alia Ghanem, told the paper that her son was a good man until he was "brainwashed" in college by radicals.

"He was a very good child until he met some people who pretty much brainwashed him in his early 20s. You can call it a cult," she

said.

Bin Laden was the mastermind of the 9/11 terror attacks in New York and Washington that killed nearly 3,000 people. He was killed in 2011 in his Abbottabad compound in Pakistan during a daring U.S. Navy SEAL raid.

In January it was reported that Hamza bin Laden's 12-year-old son was killed in an airstrike along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border sometime in 2017.

## Lebanon Hits Political Logjam After Election

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – Lebanon faces a political impasse three months after an election produced a parliament tilted in favor of the Shia resistance group Hezbollah, with no sign of compromises needed to form a unity government.

Negotiations have run into a knot of complications, notably how Prime Minister-designate Saad al-Hariri can form a government that reflects the result while satisfying Western and Persian Gulf Arab concerns over Hezbollah influence.

One senior politician said talks were in a state of "stagnation". A senior official from another party said there was no indication of compromises and forecast a period of "meaningless movement".

Hezbollah, with allied parties and independents, won more than 70 of parliament's 128 seats in the May 6 election, a reversal of Lebanon's 2009 vote when groups with Western and

Saudi support scored a majority.

Hezbollah called it a victory for the "choice of the resistance" - a reference to its armed resistance against conflicts with the Zionist regime and more recently in neighboring Syria's war.

Iranian Major-General Qassem Soleimani later put it more bluntly, saying Hezbollah had won.

The result has spawned new complications for Lebanon's tangled sectarian politics - long an arena for regional and international struggles played out through local allies.

Christians, Druze and Sunni Muslims are all jostling for ministries. Additionally, the Shia Muslim Hezbollah aims to move beyond its traditional backseat role in the next cabinet.

It wants three instead of two seats in this cabinet, and more influential ministries than it has previously held, to include public service providers.