

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – A senior Syrian Kurdish official is in Damascus this week for talks with Syrian government officials at the head of a delegation including members of the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, an official said, their first declared visit to the capital. The visit points to moves by the Kurdish-led authorities who control roughly one quarter of Syria to open channels to President Bashar al-Assad's administration as they seek to negotiate a political deal that preserves their autonomy. The delegation in Damascus is headed by Ilham Ahmed, executive head of the so-called Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), said Riad Darar, SDC co-chair, speaking by phone from Vienna.

Whoever keeps in order his affairs with Allah, Allah will also put his affairs with men in order. Whoever makes arrangement for his salvation, Allah will arrange his worldly affairs; whoever is a preacher for himself, Allah will also protect him.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

Iraq's Top Cleric Sistani Makes Urgent Call for New Gov't



Iraqi protesters shout slogans and wave national flags as they face security forces during clashes at a demonstration against unemployment and a lack of basic services in the capital Baghdad's Tahrir Square on July 20, 2018.

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – Iraq's top Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani has called for a government to be formed as soon as possible to tackle corruption and poor basic services.

In a Friday sermon delivered by a representative, Sistani

also encouraged the incumbent government of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to respond urgently to protesters' demands seeking better basic services and jobs.

"The current government must work hard urgently to imple-

ment citizens' demands to reduce their suffering and misery," Sistani's representative said in the holy city of Karbala.

Anger is mounting at a time when politicians are struggling to form a government after the May 12 election, which was

marred by allegations of fraud that prompted a recount.

Ayatollah Sistani is revered by millions of Muslims in Iraq and abroad.

The demonstrations in southern Iraq first erupted on July 8 in the city of Basra, an important hub for oil exports which account for over 95 percent of Iraq's government revenue.

Long neglected, Basra is one of the few cities in the Middle East without an effective water treatment system. Many of its waterways are stagnant cesspools, with state officials blaming it on a public funding crisis caused by years of low oil prices.

The timing of the demonstrations is critical due to the fact that political factions are trying to form a coalition government following the May 12 parliamentary elections.

Ayatollah Sistani said the next prime minister should work to fight governmental corruption.

"He (the new prime minister) must launch a relentless war against the corrupted and those who protect them," Ayatollah Sistani's representative said.

Daesh Wants to Drag Zionist Regime Into Syria War



Israeli troops in an abandoned military outpost overlooking the ceasefire line between the Zionist regime and Syria on Tal Hazika near Alonei Habshan in the Golan Heights

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – A Zionist general has claimed that it was the Daesh that fired two rockets into the occupied Palestinian territories on Wednesday, saying it was an attempt by the terrorist group to draw the Tel Aviv regime into the conflict in Syria.

"I actually think [Daesh] did want to harm us," said Amos Yadlin, a former Israeli army general, adding, "What [Daesh] wanted was apparently to cause some kind of confrontation between us and the Syrians, who are putting immense pressure on them..."

Yadlin added that Daesh was taking advantage of recent attacks by the Zionist regime against Syrian government positions and was trying to help escalate the situation between the regime and Syria. He said such an escalation could undermine Syria's advances against the terrorists and help Daesh remain longer in south and east of Syria.

The claims by the general come against the backdrop of reports showing that the regime has helped anti-government terrorists in Syria since the very beginning of the war in the Arab country in 2011. Daesh terrorists are generally believed to have been a main recipient of the regime's assistance as many members of the group have been transferred for

treatment from battle grounds in the Syrian part of the Golan Heights to the occupied territories.

In its most recent show of sympathy for the adversary groups fighting the Syrian government, the Zionist regime sent around 100 buses to southern Syria earlier this week to evacuate members of the so-called White Helmets, a group which Damascus has designated as a terrorist organization.

The regime also shot down a plane belonging to the Syrian army last week, claiming that it had entered the regime's airspace from Syria. The plane was in the midst of an anti-terrorist operation and many believe the Zionist regime downed it deliberately to help the terrorists escape from their hideouts.

Further in his remarks, Yadlin tried to calm down concerns about the failure of the Israeli air system to intercept the two rockets fired from Syria on Wednesday. He said the Zionist regime was not capable of stopping all missiles fired toward its position despite possessing some of the most modern missile systems in the world.

"Although Israel has a defense system for missiles and rockets among the best in the world, it cannot intercept anything in any place. This is an illusion," he said

UAE Wants 'Bigger Military Role' in Middle East

ABU DHABI (Press TV) – A United Arab Emirate minister has claimed that his country can take on a bigger military role in the region, saying it can no longer rely on Western allies like the United States and Britain for its security.

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash said Thursday that the UAE was ready to deploy more troops across the Middle East now that the U.S. and the European countries differed on their policies toward the security of the region.

"In this current international system, it is no longer 'write a cheque and someone is going to come and secure the stability in the region'. You have to do some of the burden-sharing," said Gargash in a speech in London.

The minister said his country was mainly worried about the

increasing differences between the U.S. and Europe on how to deal with Iran.

The UAE has spent billions on military equipment and weapons under the sheer pretext of countering Iran's regional influence. It has also joined Saudi Arabia and other allies in a devastating war against Yemen. The campaign has claimed the lives of around 15,000 people, mostly civilians. UAE forces have an active role in an ongoing operation to capture Yemen's only major port in Hudaydah, on the Red Sea.

Furthermore, the Emirates is trying to establish control over the strategic island of Socotra in the Arabian Sea, which Yemen's resigned president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi had rented out to the Persian Gulf kingdom for

nearly a century.

The UAE is also believed to be trying to establish its foothold in North Africa. It is seen as a main impediment to peace in Libya by providing financial support to the so-called Libyan National Army (LNA), led by General Khalifa Haftar, in defiance to the mandate of an internationally-recognized government in capital Tripoli. The UAE has also established bases and commercial ports in northern Somalia as well as a base in the Eritrean port of Assab, South of Eritrea, the UAE agreed with the authorities of Somalia's breakaway northern territory of Somaliland in February to open a naval base in the port town of Berbera.

In his Thursday speech, Gargash confirmed reports that several million dollars of UAE cash

had been stolen from a civilian plane in the Somalia capital of Mogadishu.

"We'd like to continue to do our work, but we have made it very clear that we have been wronged with regards to how we were treated with the shipment of nine-point-something million dollars," said Gargash, adding "There are attempts currently to mediate between us and Somalia."

The UAE is among the world's top five arms importers, according to a report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute in June. The report said that Abu Dhabi even outpaced China in buying arms in the past five years, adding that main suppliers of weapons to the country were the U.S., Britain and France.

In Response to 'Stabbing Attack'

Zionist Regime Says to Build 400 Units

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Zionist regime's war minister says Tel Aviv will build 400 settler units in the Adam settlement, also known as Geva Binyamin, in response to a recent alleged stabbing attack in the occupied West Bank.

"The best answer to terror is the momentum of settlement in Judea and Samaria," Avigdor Lieberman wrote on his Twitter account Friday morning, using the Zionist name for the West Bank.

He added, "That's why I left this morning to promote a plan to build 400 housing units in Adam and approve it in planning institutions in the coming week."

Israeli media reported that a 31-year-old settler, identified as Yotam Ovadia, was stabbed and killed in an attack in the Adam settlement on Thursday. Two more settlers were also wounded during the attack.

It came hours after Israeli tank and artillery fire in the southeast of the Gaza Strip killed and injured three Hamas fighters.

In a statement released, Hamas' military wing, Ezzeddin al-Qassam Brigades, said it had ordered its divisions "to raise alertness to the maximum degree."

"Israel will pay in blood for its latest crimes," the statement read.

Separately, al-Quds Brigades, the armed wing of the Islamic Jihad resistance movement, said in a statement that the latest Zionist crime in Gaza would not go unpunished, stressing that all options were being considered to respond to the violence.

On Friday, the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas released a statement in response to the latest developments in the occupied territories and

said, "...the heroic operation that was carried out in the settlement of Adam south of Ramallah was a natural response to the crimes of the occupation".

It added, "We affirm that the choices of our people and the armed as well as the peaceful resistance will remain open in the face of the Zionist occupation to stop its crimes".

Tensions have been running high near the Gaza fence since March 30, which marked the start of a series of protests, dubbed "The Great March of Return," demanding the right to return for those driven out of their homeland.

The Gaza clashes reached their peak on May 14, the eve of the 70th anniversary of the Nakba Day (the Day of Catastrophe), which coincided this year with the US embassy relocation from Tel Aviv to occupied al-Quds.

War of Words Between Ankara, Washington Intensifies

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) – Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu says his country will never tolerate threats from anybody after U.S. President Donald Trump warned of "large sanctions" unless Ankara freed an American pastor on trial in Turkey on terrorism charges.

"No one dictates Turkey. We will never tolerate threats from anybody. Rule of law is for everyone; no exception," Cavusoglu wrote on Twitter.

"Rule of law is for everyone; no exception," he said, insisting that the pastor had to face the legal consequences of his alleged involvement in terrorism.

U.S. President Donald Trump had earlier written on Twitter that his country "will impose large sanctions on Turkey for their long time detention of Pastor Andrew Brunson."

He called the prisoner "a great Christian, family man and wonderful human being."

Fifty-year-old Brunson faces up to 35 years in jail if convicted of car-

rying 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.

Brunson, who used to run a Protestant church in the city of Izmir in western Turkey, was recently moved to house arrest, but Washington said that was not enough.

Over the past years, the countries have also clashed over the US' support for anti-Ankara Kurdish militants, who are based in Iraq and Syria.

Most recently, the two locked horns after Turkey said it would not be affecting its business with Iran, just because the US wanted to enforce sanctions on the Islamic Republic.