

GAZA, Palestine (Dispatches) -- Zionist forces martyred three Palestinians and wounded at least 30 others taking part Friday in weekly protests near the fortified Gaza Strip fence, Palestinian medical officials said.

Some 12,000 Palestinians massed at several points near the fence. Friday's dead, one of them a boy whom medics said appeared to be around 14 years old, brought to 177 the number of Palestinians martyred since the protests were launched on March 30 to press several demands against the occupying regime of Israel.

MADRID (Reuters) -- Spain will go ahead with the sale of 400 laser-guided bombs to Saudi Arabia, Foreign Minister Josep Borrell said on Thursday, after the deal was halted amid concerns over the Saudi role in the war in Yemen. "The decision is that these bombs will be delivered to honor a contract that comes from 2015, and was made by the previous government," Borrell told Onda Cero radio. The halting of the deal had created concerns in Spain over the future of a more lucrative contract, signed in July, for state-owned shipbuilder Navantia to supply warships to the kingdom.

Viewpoint

Saudis, Khalifas Signing Own Death Verdict by Sacrilegious Muharram Symbols

Iranian Artist Denied Visa to Take Part in L'Aquila Reconstruction



Volleyballers Thrash Host Bulgaria at FIVB World Championship



Putin Concerned by Terrorist Moves in Syria's Idlib



'Armageddon' Blasts Gut Homes in Boston

LAWRENCE, Massachusetts (Dispatches) -- A series of gas explosions one official described as "Armageddon" left at least one dead and 12 others injured and ignited fires in at least 39 homes in three communities north of Boston Thursday.

The explosions forced entire suburbs to evacuate as crews scrambled to fight the flames and turn off gas and electric lines to prevent further damage.

Some 8,000 people were driven from their homes in the Boston suburbs by a series of gas explosions, and it was unclear on Friday when they could go back.

Massachusetts State Police urged all residents with homes serviced by Columbia Gas in Lawrence, Andover and North Andover to evacuate, snarling traffic and causing widespread confusion as residents and local officials struggled to understand what was happening.

"It looked like Armageddon, it really did," Andover Fire Chief Michael Mansfield told reporters.

"There were billows of smoke coming from Lawrence behind me. I could see pillars of smoke in front of me from the town of Andover."

Governor Charlie Baker said state and local authorities are investigating but that it could take days or weeks before they turn up answers.

State police put the tally of fires and explosions at 70, up from the 39 initially reported. State police received between 60 and 100 reports of fires and gas explosions in the Merrimack region.

The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency blamed the fires on gas lines that had become over-pressurized, but officials who responded to the area were still investigating the cause. State officials said Columbia Gas was working to ease pressure on gas lines following the fires.

Columbia had announced earlier on Thursday that it would be upgrading gas lines in neighborhoods across the state, including the area where the explosions happened. It was not clear whether work was happening there on Thursday, and a spokeswoman did not immediately return calls.

Reached by phone, some local officials described scenes of panic as residents rushed to evacuate, many wondering

if their homes would be next to erupt in flames. In North Andover, town selectman Phil Decologero said his entire neighborhood had gathered in the street, afraid to enter their homes. Just a few streets down, he said, homes were burning.

"It's definitely a scary situation at the moment," he said. "It's pretty severe."

Aerial footage of the area showed some homes that appeared to be torn apart by blasts.

Officials in Andover, a town of 35,000 residents had advised all residents and businesses to evacuate and to shut off their gas, if they know how to safely.

State Police said electricity was being shut off for all residents in Lawrence, North Andover and Andover, where some were still reporting an odor tied to natural gas.

The three communities house more than 146,000 residents about 40 kilometers north of Boston, near the New Hampshire border. Lawrence, the largest of them, is a majority Latino city with a population of about 80,000.

The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency said staff members were heading to Lawrence, Andover and North Andover, along with state fire investigators.

U.S. Troops, Terrorists Hold Joint Drill in Syria



The U.S. is using the Tanf base in Syria to expand its military presence in the Middle East.

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) -- U.S. marines have held eight days of unprecedented military exercises with terrorists in southern Syria in an attempt to send a "strong message" to Iran and Russia, a senior military official said Thursday.

U.S. military spokesman Colonel Sean Ryan described the drills as "a show of force," saying that the Pentagon had notified Russia through "deconfliction" channels to prevent "miscommunication or escalate tension."

"The exercise was conducted to reinforce our capabilities and ensure we are ready to respond to any threat to our forces within our

area of operations," he said.

Muhanad al-Talaa, commander of the Pentagon-backed Maghawir al-Thawra group, told Reuters the drills this week at the U.S. military outpost in Tanf were the first such exercises with live-fire air and ground assault involving hundreds of U.S. troops and terrorists.

The Tanf base is located near Syria's borders with Jordan and Iraq.

Russia and the Syrian government have repeatedly called on Washington to pull out its troops from the Tanf base, where it has declared a 55km-radius "deconfliction zone" off-limits to others.

Terrorists say hundreds of U.S. Marines arrived this month in Tanf to join special operations troops already based in the garrison and participate in the drills, amid heightened U.S.-Russian tensions in Syria and a naval buildup in the Mediterranean.

The U.S. says the "deconfliction zone" has become a safe haven for at least 50,000 "civilians" who live in the Rukban camp that lies within it. Russia's defense ministry in August said Washington has been harboring Daesh terrorists within the zone.

"We are staying whether the Russians or Iranians want or not,"

the terrorist commander added.

Tanf lies on the strategic Damascus-Baghdad highway and is surrounded by desert. U.S. warplanes have struck Syrian troops on several occasions to prevent them advancing, in what Washington has described as self-defense.

This makes the base part of a larger American campaign to expand its outreach in the Middle East.

Terrorists say the U.S. military's new policy to bolster Tanf's capabilities is a big shift.

U.S. President Donald Trump has repeatedly vowed to pull U.S. troops out of Syria in spite of apparent opposition from the Pentagon. Still, no major change has occurred in the U.S. military position in the war-torn country since he made that pledge earlier this year.

Meanwhile, Jordan and Syria held their first technical talks on opening a major border crossing in southern Syria that was recaptured from terrorists in July, a Jordanian official said on Thursday.

Damascus hopes to reopen the Nassib route, which is vital to its hopes of reviving Syria's shattered economy and rebuilding in territory now under its control.

Amman also hopes the opening of the border crossing will reactivate billions of dollars of annual transit trade between Europe and Persian Gulf markets across Syria.

The official told Reuters the meeting that was requested by Syria was held on Wednesday at the

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'U.S. to Lose Any War With Iran':

IRGC: Missile Attack Serves a Message to Enemies

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- The chief of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) said Thursday that Iran's missile attack on a terrorist base in northern Iraq last week was a warning to hostile powers.

The IRGC fired seven missiles at the headquarters of the PDKI terrorist group, killing at least 15 leaders and members at the base in Koysinjak.

"The attack against the terrorists in Iraq's Kurdistan conveys a message to the enemies, particularly those superpowers who think they can impose their evil plots on Iran and bully us," Maj. Gen. Muhammad Ali Jafari said.

"All those who have forces, bases and equipment within a 2,000 kilometers radius should know that our missiles are highly precise," he added.

Iran's armed forces chief of staff said Tuesday that Kurdish leaders in Iraq had given assurances in the past that they would rein in the PDKI and other anti-Iran militants.

"But since last year, provoked by America, they broke this pledge," Maj. Gen.

Mohammad Baqeri told Iran's ISNA news agency. Iran has called on Iraq to expel the terrorists.

"The victims have obviously left a big hole," said PDKI Secretary-General Mustafa Muludi, one of around 30 wounded in the strikes.

"We have suffered a great loss because (the dead leaders) had political experience and expertise," he said.

General Baqeri said the U.S. has been provoking Iraq's terrorists over the past year to launch assaults on Iranian soil despite an earlier promise not to do so.

IRGC's second-in-command Brigadier General Hussein Salami said on Friday a U.S. war against Iran is no longer a possibility because Washington lacks the political means and international support to launch a new military campaign.

Washington knows "it will be on the losing side if it ever starts a war with Iran and this will help further increase Iran's influence," he said.

"The U.S. military is incapable of engaging

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Secret Memo: Zionist Military Unprepared for War

TEL AVIV (Dispatches) -- The occupying regime of Israel's military ombudsman Maj. Gen. Yitzhak Brick has written a new report harshly criticizing the army's readiness for war, the daily Haaretz reported on Friday.

Brick's position completely contradicts a report issued at the beginning of September by Zionist military chief of staff Gadi Eisenkot, which stated that the Israeli forces were at a high level of readiness for war.

Brick sent his detailed dossier last week to war minister Avigdor Lieberman as well as to Eisenkot, to members of the military general staff and members of the Knesset foreign affairs and war committee. He also called for the appointment of an external commission of inquiry headed by a retired supreme court justice to examine the military's state of preparedness.

Brick went public with his criticism of the Zionist military's preparedness for war in June, when he presented the ombudsman's annual report at a press conference. The report did not include a direct reference to the state of readiness, but Brick hinted that his criticism related to training, to training ex-

ercises and the state of the weaponry used by the ground forces. Since then, he has issued two detailed letters to Lieberman, to the generals and to the Knesset committee, in which he focused mainly on the military's manpower policies, describing a serious crisis that he said could have implications relating to the capabilities of the entire military — particularly the ground forces — to fight a war. Brick's latest report is the third on the issue.

On two separate visits to the Knesset, Eisenkot has said that the military is ready for war. Ten days ago, he sent a detailed letter to the security cabinet and the Knesset in which — in a rare move — he committed that the military was in a high state of readiness and preparedness for war.

Eisenkot wrote in his letter that the military is at a high state of preparedness for war when it comes to any threat or scenario.

"As the person who is responsible for the readiness to go to war, I state that the IDF (Zionist military) is prepared and ready for every mission it is called upon to carry out,

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