

New Syrian Law Bans Muslim Clerics From Stoking Sectarian Rift

DAMASCUS (Press TV) – Syria has endorsed a legislation that forbids Muslim preachers from “stoking sectarian strife” as the Arab country’s fight against foreign-sponsored Takfiri terrorist groups is drawing to a close.

President Bashar al-Assad signed into law the new bill expanding the powers of the Ministry of Awqaf (Religious Endowments), which oversees Islamic affairs in Syria.

The legislation prohibits Muslim clerics from “taking advantage of religious platforms for political purposes,” but non-Muslim communities are not affected by the law.

Under the new measure, the Syrian Awqaf minister is tasked with appointing the Grand Mufti, whose term is renewable every three years. Previously, he was named by the president for an unlimited term.

Additionally, the law assigns the Awqaf minister to oversee religious schools, head the Council on Islamic Jurisprudence, and regulate religious programming on media outlets.

It further bans Muslim imams from traveling abroad or attending conferences even inside Syria without the Awqaf minister’s permission.

Syria’s Awqaf Minister Mohammad Abdul-Sattar al-Sayyed hailed the new rule as a “huge achievement.”

“This is the first time there’s a law that issues controls and standards for religious work and conditions for appointing imams and preachers,” he said.

The new legislation is meant to regulate religious discourse in a bid to confront Takfiri extremism, which is a trademark of many terror outfits wreaking havoc in



The handout picture released by Syria’s official SANA news agency on August 21, 2018 shows President Bashar al-Assad (2nd L) and Grand Mufti Ahmad Badreddin Hassoun (2nd R) at a mosque in the capital, Damascus.

Syria.

The concept is largely influenced by Wahhabism, the radical ideology dominating Saudi Arabia and freely preached by Saudi clerics.

Riyadh is widely believed to be a key sponsor of the Takfiri terrorists, who have been operating to topple the Syrian government since 2011.

Saudi...

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182 of its 186 listed stocks showing losses by early afternoon. The market pulled back some of the losses, later trading down 4%.

Business leaders as well as media companies including Bloomberg and CNN have pulled out of an investment conference next week in Riyadh, dubbed “Davos in the desert”.

There is no sign of contrition in the statement or clarification of the promise last week to conduct an inquiry into Khashoggi’s disappearance. Instead, Riyadh condemns a “campaign of false allegations and falsehoods”. In what is likely to be a reference to Turkey, and possibly its Persian Gulf rival Qatar, it claims some are “rushing and seeking to exploit rumors and accusations to achieve goals and agendas unrelated to the search for truth”.

Saudi Arabia’s vast oil reserves, said to be around 260bn barrels, give it clout in the global economy. The kingdom is the world’s largest oil exporter, pumping or shipping more than 7m barrels a day. This gives it significant power to drive up prices, which would hurt every major developed economy.

It also supports thousands of U.S. jobs via its massive program of arms purchases. Saudi is the world’s second largest arms importer after India and 61% of those imports come from the U.S. President Trump signed a \$110bn military agreement in Riyadh last year, a deal that stands to benefit U.S. employers such as Lockheed Martin, Boeing, General Electric and Exxon Mobil.

Turki Aldhakhil, the general manager of Al Arabiya, the official Saudi news channel, in an opinion piece claimed Saudi was ready to implement 30 measures “without flinching” the moment U.S. sanctions were imposed, including cuts to oil production that could lead to prices jumping to \$100 a barrel or even \$200. “The truth is that if Washington imposes sanctions on Riyadh, it will stab its own economy to death, even though it thinks that it is stabbing only Riyadh,” he wrote.

Ramping up the rhetoric even more, Aldhakhil warned the repercussions of U.S. sanctions could include a military alliance between Saudi Arabia and Russia and an end to intelligence sharing.

On Sunday, it was reported that Trump’s eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., had retweeted posts portraying Khashoggi as a terrorism sympathizer amid mounting criticism of Washington’s inaction on the fate of the missing Saudi dissident.

The disappearance of Khashoggi has put the spotlight on the close relationship which Trump’s family has nurtured with the Saudi kingdom.

With pressure mounting on Trump to take action over the suspected murder, he said Saturday that the United States would be “punishing itself” if it halted weapons sales to Saudi Arabia.

He brazenly said Thursday that he was not willing to throw away billions of dollars in military deals with Saudi Arabia.

Trump...

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“I have a great cabinet. I have some people I’m not happy with. I have some people I’m not thrilled with. And I have other people I’m beyond thrilled with,” he said.

Trump spoke personally with Sessions’ chief of staff Matthew Whitaker about replacing the attorney general in late September, according to a West Wing aide.

Sessions’ unsteady future has been the subject of news stories and chatter for months. Unfounded rumors two weeks ago about Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein’s departure fed discussions of a wholesale shakeup at the top of the DOJ.

Republican Senator Lindsey Graham has been mentioned as a possible replacement for both Mattis and Sessions. A favorite golfing buddy of the president’s, he got Trump’s gratitude for his impassioned defense of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh during his confirmation process.

Graham said last week he has “zero interest” in accepting a presidential cabinet nomination.

In March, NPR reported that in his 14 months on the job, Trump has had more Cabinet turnover than 16 of his predecessors had in their first two years.

Already gone: Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price; Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly, who became chief of staff; Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin; and EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt.

Despite the chess game moves and the recent publication of a New York Times’ op-ed from a “senior official in the Trump administration” about a deep state working against the president, Trump denied his White House is in chaos. “It’s wrong. It’s so false. It’s fake news,” he told ‘60 Minutes.’

Zionist Regime Approves Construction of New Settler Units



A picture taken on July 24, 2018 shows a view of ongoing construction work at Ramat Shlomo, a settlement in the mainly Palestinian eastern sector of al-Quds.

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Zionist regime has approved the construction of a residential quarter for illegal settlers in the city of al-Khalil, West Bank, Zionist war minister Avigdor Lieberman said on Sunday.

“The new Jewish quarter in Hebron (al-Khalil) will be constructed for the first time in 20 years. We will build a new neighbor-

hood instead of a military base. We will build 31 apartments, two kindergartens and a nursery instead of barracks for soldiers,” Lieberman said in a statement.

According to media reports, the construction of new housing units will require over \$6 million of government funding.

Al-Khalil is a city located in the West Bank about 18 miles south

of al-Quds.

Zionist regime officials reportedly approved plans for the construction of 14,864 new settler units in the occupied West Bank two weeks ago irrespective of international outcry against the regime’s land expropriation and settlement expansion policies in the Palestinian territories.

Mayor of the Gush Etzion Regional Council, Shlomo Ne’eman, said that the construction of the new units will triple the number of settler population in the area, which lies directly south of Jerusalem al-Quds and Bethlehem in the central West Bank.

He added that the project includes 1,100 settler units in Rosh Tzurim settlement, located about 20 kilometers south of al-Quds, 600 units in Migdal Oz settlement, some 1,107 in Gevaot settlement, and 1,200 units between Bat Ayin and Migdal Oz settlements.

The project is estimated to cost 18.9 million shekels (\$5,195,610).

About 600,000 Zionists live in over 230 illegal settlements built since the 1967 occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East al-Quds.

Palestinians want the West Bank as part of a future independent Palestinian state with East al-Quds as its capital.

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.

Trump backtracked on Washington’s support for a “two-state solution” earlier this year, saying he would support any solution favored by both sides.

“Looking at two-state or one-state, I like the one that both parties like. I’m very happy with the one both parties like. I can live with either one,” the U.S. president said during a joint press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Washington on February 15.

Taliban Confirm Talks With U.S. Special Envoy

KABUL (Dispatches) – The Taliban have confirmed that their leaders had held talks with the U.S. special envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad, in Qatar’s capital Doha on Friday, said a statement of the armed group posted on its website on Sunday.

The Taliban delegation, according to the statement includes chief of political office in Doha Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, deputy head Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi, office members Shahabuddin Delawar, Qari Deen Mohammad Hanif, Mohammad Zahid Ahmadzi and Mohammad Suhil Shaheen.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Majahid who posted the statement on the armed group’s website, asserted that the representatives the ousted Taliban regime in the meeting “described the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan as the main obstacle in achieving peace” and demanded the withdrawal of foreign forces from the country.

“Keeping that in mind, efforts must be made towards a true and intra-Afghan solution. At the end both sides agreed to continue holding meetings in the future,” the statement added.

The Afghan-born U.S. diplomat Khalilzad after touring Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and meeting Taliban leaders visited Kabul on Saturday and

held talks with leaders and politicians within and outside the government.

At the same time, a bomb attack at an election rally in northeastern Afghanistan claimed the lives of over a dozen people and left above 30 wounded.

Officials have put the number of fatalities at 13 but medics say the toll could rise even higher.

They said the explosion occurred when a motorbike - laden with explosives - went off near the gathering of supporters of a female election candidate in the northeastern province of Takhar. Among the victims were both civilians and security forces.

A senior member of the Taliban said Khalilzad had asked the Taliban leadership, based in the Qatari capital Doha, to declare a ceasefire in Afghanistan during upcoming parliamentary polls.

“Both sides discuss prospects of peace and the U.S presence in Afghanistan,” said another Taliban official, requesting anonymity.

In exchange, the Taliban wants the Afghan government to release its militants from jails across the country and the swift removal of foreign forces fighting alongside Afghan soldiers.

Political analysts in Kabul said both sides will have to make concessions for the talks to succeed.

Egypt Court Upholds Death Sentences for 3 Suspected Militants

CAIRO (Dispatches) – An Egyptian court on Sunday upheld death sentences for three people for establishing and running a militant group known as the so-called Ansar al-Sharia, two judicial sources and state news agency MENA said.

The charges included killing at least 10 police officers and attempting to kill more in a series of attacks between August 2013 and May 2014. The court upheld sentences is-

sued in August. The decision can be appealed within 60 days.

Four people were sentenced to life in prison while seven received 15-year prison terms, the sources said. Nine of the 23 defendants were acquitted.

Egypt has cracked down on suspected militants since President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi led the overthrow of former president Mohamed Mursi of the now banned Muslim Brother-

hood.

Authorities say a crackdown on dissent and freedoms is directed at terrorists and saboteurs trying to undermine the state.

Death sentences have been handed down to hundreds of militants, including Muslim Brotherhood supporters and members.

Last month, 75 were sentenced to death over a 2013 sit-in which ended with security forces killing hundreds of protesters.