

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – Iraqi media have released images of Steven Nabil, one of the main leaders of the recent unrests in Iraq, that show his close ties with U.S. officials. The Arabic-language Boratha news website released Nabil's photos with former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and former American Ambassador to Iraq John Dimitri Negroponte that had been taken in 2004 - a year after the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Nabil, himself, has also confirmed his meetings with different U.S. officials. Nabil has lately been accused of being a U.S. agent playing a notable role in orchestrating and leading the recent protests alongside a dozen more Iraqi youth who have all been under a U.S.-sponsored young leaders training program in recent years.

He who is greedy is disgraced; he who discloses his hardship will always be humiliated; he who has no control over his tongue will often have to face discomfort.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

Trump's Mideast Plan Sparks Zionist-Palestinian Tension



Palestinians are carrying the body of slain police officer Tareq Badwan in a funeral procession.

RAMALLAH (Dispatches) – U.S. President Donald Trump's Middle East so-called peace plan has sparked a growing tension between Zionists and Palestinians in the past few days. Palestinian political factions on Friday called on the Palestinians to hold rallies and demonstrations all over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to protest against the peace plan, dubbed "the Deal of the Century".

Meanwhile, the Zionist regime has deployed more troops in the West Bank after four Palestinians were killed and 15 Zionist troops injured in a new wave of clashes in the region. Two Palestinians were killed when a Zionist trooper stormed the West Bank city of Jenin to demolish the home of a Hamas member being held in an Israeli jail. One Palestinian gunman was killed

by Zionist troops in the old city of East al-Quds after he allegedly opened fire at the force and lightly wounded a police officer. Zionist troops arrested on Thursday a Palestinian young man living in East al-Quds, claiming he drove and ran over a group of Zionist troops on the road between al-Quds and Bethlehem, injuring 14 of them. Following the killing of a 17-year-

old Palestinian teenager in the southern West Bank city of al-Khalil during protests against the U.S. plan, Hamas in Gaza called for escalation against the Zionist regime. "We call for an escalation of confrontation against the assaults of the occupier (the Zionist regime) and its settlers on our land and holy sites in al-Quds and the West Bank", said Hazem Qassem, Hamas spokesman in Gaza. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' office condemned in an official press statement the killing of Palestinians on Wednesday and Thursday in the West Bank cities of Jenin and al-Khalil. "The Israeli escalation against our people in the West Bank is dangerous and this escalation is the outcome of the Deal of the Century," said Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesman of Palestinian president in the statement. "Any deal that doesn't meet the rights of our people and doesn't aim at making just and comprehensive peace will certainly lead to an escalation of violence which we witness at this time," he noted. Mahmoud Aloul, deputy chairman of Abbas' Fatah party, told reporters that Netanyahu's remarks are a clear signal that "Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories will be eternal."

Ayatollah Sistani to Iraqi Forces: Protect Peaceful Demonstrators, Identify Attackers



University students hold banners as they gather during ongoing protests in Baghdad, Iraq, on February 6, 2020.

BAGHDAD (Press TV) – Iraq's prominent Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani has called on security forces to protect peaceful demonstrators in protest squares across the country, and reveal the identities of aggressors and infiltrators. In a statement read out by his representative Ahmed al-Safi during a weekly sermon in the holy city of Karbala on Friday, Ayatollah Sistani condemned the death of protesters killed in clashes with rival groups this week as "painful and unfortunate," and said state security forces are "indispensable" to keeping the country from "falling into the abyss of chaos." "There is no justification for them to stop fulfilling their duties in this regard, or for anyone to stop them from doing so," he said. "They must bear responsibility for maintaining security and stability, protecting peaceful protesters and their gathering places, revealing the identities of aggressors and infiltrators, and protecting the interests of citizens from the attacks of saboteurs," the revered cleric pointed out. Ayatollah Sistani went on to call on Prime Minister-designate Mohammed Tawfik Allawi to pick a government

representative of the Iraqi people and fully trusted by them. "The new government that replaces the outgoing one should be worthy of people's confidence and is capable of alleviating situations and restoring the state prestige and to carry out necessary steps to hold early elections," Iraq's top Shia cleric highlighted. On Sunday, Iraq's Shia cleric Muqtada Sadr called for the return to normal life, and urged his supporters to ensure the reopening of schools, roads and government offices that had been shut by months of demonstrations. "I advise the security forces to stop anyone from cutting off roads and the ministry of education should punish those who obstruct regular working hours, be they students, teachers or others," Sadr wrote in a message published on his Twitter page. Since early October, Iraq has been roiled by mass protests over poor living conditions and corruption, which forced ex-premier Adel Abdul-Mahdi to resign. The demonstrations have often turned violent and over 600 people, including police forces, have been killed and 17,000 injured, according to an Iraqi human rights group.

Amnesty International: Saudi Secretive Court 'A Weapon of Repression'

DUBAI (AP) – Saudi Arabia has used a secretive court established to try terrorism cases as "a weapon of repression" to imprison peaceful critics, activists, journalists, clerics and minority Muslim Shias, including some who were sentenced to death and executed, Amnesty International says. The London-based rights organization examined court documents and spoke to activists and lawyers for its 53-page report, which sheds light on the secretive proceedings of the Specialized Criminal Court. The report found that trials before the court were "a mockery of justice" and its judges "will-

ing accomplices" in suppressing those who dare speak up. Established in 2008 to try terror-related crimes, the court started trying critics of the government in 2011 under broadly worded counterterrorism laws that criminalize acts such as insulting King Salman and the crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman. Amnesty said some of the common charges in proceedings included "disobeying the ruler" of Saudi Arabia, "questioning the integrity" of officials, "seeking to disrupt security and inciting disorder by calling for demonstrations" and "disseminating false

information to foreign groups" — crimes that can hinge on speaking to human rights groups or the use of social media. "Our research gives lie to the shiny new reformist image Saudi Arabia is trying to cultivate," said Heba Morayef, Amnesty's Mideast and North Africa regional director. She said the government has used the special court "to create a false aura of legality around its abuse of the counterterror law to silence its critics." Amnesty also said that the government's rhetoric about reforms under the crown prince stands in stark contrast to reality in the

kingdom where women's rights activists and dozens of perceived critics of the young prince remain imprisoned or face trial on vague charges related to national security. Some, like reformist cleric Salman al-Awda, face the death penalty in trials before the court. Prince Mohammed faced intense international scrutiny after the killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi inside the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul in 2018. A Saudi criminal court sentenced five to death for the killing but did not hold any high-ranking officials responsible.

Persian Gulf Arabs' Financial Wealth Could Be Over in 15 Years: IMF

DUBAI (Dispatches) – The International Monetary Fund (IMF) says Persian Gulf Arab states — some of the world's richest countries — could see their financial wealth depleted in the next 15 years amid lower hydrocarbon revenues if they don't step up fiscal reforms. The six-nation Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) - whose net financial wealth the IMF estimates at \$2 trillion - accounts for over one fifth of global oil supply, but economies in the region have been hit hard by a drop in oil prices in 2014 and 2015. While lower crude prices have put pressure on governments to generate non-oil revenues and fix their finances, "the effect of lower hydrocarbon revenue is yet to be fully offset," the IMF said in a report. "At the current fiscal stance, the region's existing financial wealth could be depleted in the next

15 years," it said. The Washington-based international crisis lender said global oil demand could peak by around 2040 or much sooner in case of a stronger regulatory push for environmental protection and energy efficiency. "All GCC countries have recognized the lasting nature of their challenge ... However, the expected speed and size of these consolidations in most countries may not be sufficient to stabilize their wealth." Persian Gulf Arabs have for decades used their energy wealth to provide millions of citizens with government jobs, part of a social contract by rulers that rewards political acquiescence and educational attainment with employment for life. But high-paying public sector jobs that demand little of workers have translated into low productivity and an entitlement culture, as well as rising

costs as populations grow. Budgets are stretched further by hefty state spending on subsidies, social services and generous state pensions. GCC governments have only gradually introduced austerity measures to avoid social discontent, such as the introduction of a value added tax (VAT) in some GCC countries. But most continue to struggle to balance fiscal consolidation and growth. Kuwait - which has one of the world's biggest sovereign funds - could need some \$180 billion in financing over the next six years in the absence of more drastic fiscal measures, the IMF said last month. Saudi Arabia, the Arab world's largest economy and the world's largest crude exporter, expects a deficit of \$50 billion this year, up from \$35 billion in 2019.

Lebanon Approves Financial Rescue Plan With 'Painful Steps'

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – Lebanon's government has approved a rescue plan to pull the country from its worst financial crisis in decades, including interest rate cuts, recapitalization of banks and other "painful steps". The 17-page plan - which also includes appeals for help from foreign donors - will be presented to parliament next week for a vote of confidence, the speaker's office said. Prime Minister Hassan Diab's new government is facing a liquidity crunch, shattered confidence in banks which have imposed informal controls, a weakened Lebanese pound and soaring inflation. The cabinet was formed last month. It took office nearly three months after Saad al-Hariri's government resigned under pressure from mass rallies. In its statement, Diab's government pledged to come up with an emergency plan by the end of February that addresses people's needs and the country's debt maturities. It said some "painful steps" would be necessary while vowing to curb the impact on those with limited income.

The policy plan - which had minor changes - said banks must use their reserves and sell their investments abroad to help restore the sector's stability. It envisaged foreign donors providing soft loans, though it did not name any institutions or say how much was required. Foreign donors say they stand ready to help only if Lebanon's government implements long-stalled reforms. Hezbollah's parliamentary bloc said on Thursday that decisions on the country's debt maturities in coming months would need national consensus. "Radical (moves)... require a national decision and popular understanding," it said in a televised statement. Cash-strapped authorities are struggling to decide whether to repay a \$1.2 billion Eurobond maturing in March, political and banking sources told Reuters this week. Diab urged European states to open a credit line and provide aid. "Lebanon needs urgent help today at various levels, power, food supplies, raw materials," he told a meeting of European ambassadors.