

First Passenger Plane in 8 Years Lands at Aleppo Int'l Airport

ALEPPO (Sputnik) – The first civilian plane flying from the Syrian capital of Damascus with 120 passengers aboard has landed at Aleppo International Airport after a nearly eight-year hiatus. The passengers included the Syrian transport and tourism ministers and a number of travelers and media workers. Earlier in the day, the airport's director, Mohammad al-Masri, said that all of the airport's departments were ready. The facility was shut down in 2012 due to terrorist attacks. According to al-Masri, the airport was severely affected by the crisis in the country. The opening comes as the Syrian government recently won back access to the M5 Damascus-Aleppo international highway from terrorists.

Unfortunate is he who cannot gain a few sincere friends during his life and more unfortunate is the one who has gained them and then lost them (through his deeds).

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

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Top Commander:

Yemen's Air Defense Will Change Battle Course in 2020



Soldiers stand on a tank of the Saudi-led coalition, deployed on the outskirts of the southern Yemeni port city of Aden, on August 3, 2015.

SANAA (Press TV) – A high-ranking Yemeni military official has praised the recent interception and targeting of a Tornado multirole combat aircraft of the Royal Saudi Air Force in the country's northern al-Jawf province, stressing that 2020 will be the year of Yemeni air defense systems that will change the course of battles against the Saudi-led coalition.

Spokesman for Yemen's Air Force, Major General Abdullah al-Jafri, told Arabic-language Mirat al-Jazeera

news website in an exclusive interview on Tuesday that the downing of the Tornado jet confirms beyond any doubt that 2020 will be the year of modern and advanced air defense systems that can either track, damage or shoot down enemy aircraft. He also echoed earlier remarks by the spokesman for Yemeni Armed Forces, Brigadier General Yahya Saree, that Yemen's missile units have managed to reach high levels of advanced military capability to down

hostile fighter jets.

"This is a qualitative and strategic development in the course of the battle, especially that Saree has underlined that 2020 will be the year of missile force and air defense systems under the motto 'Violating the Yemeni airspace will no more be a walk in the park'" Jafri added.

The top Yemeni military official noted that whenever the leader of Houthi Ansarullah movement Abdul-Malik al-Houthi talks about missile

defense systems, whether at the level of the air, ground or naval forces, he means that the armament will enter service and score glorious victories.

Jafri went on to say that the modern missile system that recently shot down the Saudi Tornado aircraft will be unveiled soon.

He then touched down upon Saudi claims that Yemeni forces bear full responsibility for the safety of the pilots who were on board the downed plane, emphasizing that the spokesman for Yemeni Armed Forces has not suggested anything about the detention of the aircraft crew members.

"If it is proven that the pilots are still alive, we will of course engage in negotiations [with Saudi Arabia] according to international principles stipulated in the Geneva Conventions," Jafri pointed out.

Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched a devastating campaign against Yemen in March 2015, with the goal of bringing the government of former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi back to power and crushing the Ansarullah movement.

The U.S.-based Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a nonprofit conflict-research organization, estimates that the war has claimed more than 100,000 lives over the past nearly five years.

The UN says over 24 million Yemenis are in dire need of humanitarian aid, including 10 million suffering from extreme levels of hunger.

U.S. Senator Sanders:

Saudi Rulers 'Murderous Thugs'

RIYADH (Dispatches) – U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders, the leading Democratic presidential candidate, condemned Saudi Arabia's regime during a town hall meeting, calling the regime's leaders "murderous thugs".

"For years, we have loved Saudi Arabia - our wonderful ally; the only problem is the people who run that country are murderous thugs," Sanders said, according to Middle East Eye.

The Vermont senator described Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman as a "billionaire dictator".

The senator also reiterated his stance that the U.S. should not ignore the needs of Palestinians and blasted the "right-wing racist government that currently exists in Israel".

He also pointed to the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. Sanders made similar remarks

during a presidential debate in December, when he called Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a "racist" and said U.S. foreign policy cannot be only pro-Zionist, but must be "pro-Palestinian" as well.

Sanders has also been a relentless critic of President Donald Trump, repeatedly calling him a liar and the "most dangerous president" in U.S. history.

The senator has jumped out

to a double-digit lead over his closest rivals in the Democratic presidential contest, while former U.S. Vice President and previous front-runner Joe Biden has seen his support drop by 11 points, according to a new NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll released Tuesday.

The survey also shows former New York Mayor Mike Bloomberg gaining ground in the Democratic race in the past month.

Turkey's Erdogan:

Main Opposition Should Be Probed for Gulen Links

ANKARA (Reuters) – Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan says that the main opposition party should be investigated for possible links to the U.S.-based cleric accused of orchestrating a 2016 coup attempt, amid a bout of finger-pointing between the two sides.

Ankara blames Fethullah Gulen, who has lived in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania since 1999, for masterminding the abortive putsch and has carried out a widespread crackdown on his alleged supporters. Thousands of people have been detained, arrested or sacked over links to Gulen's network.

Kemal Kilicdaroglu, leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), said last week Erdogan was the "political wing" of Gulen's network, accusing him of allowing thousands of Gulenists to enter state ranks.

His comments drew harsh backlash from Erdogan, who in turn accused Kilicdaroglu of being involved with Gulen's network, which Ankara calls FETO.

"Everyone may have had a role in growing, strengthening and expanding FETO in Turkey. However, it is myself and the AK Party that declared them a terrorist organization and waged a war on them," Erdogan told his AK Party (AKP) on Wednesday.

"We struggled to remove the FETO elements in institutions, and we think that we still haven't been able to fully eliminate this scheme," he added. "The state followed FETO everywhere, but it is clear that the CHP headquarters has not been examined enough."

Gulen and Erdogan, once allies, fell apart in 2013 during a corruption investigation that

briefly threatened to engulf the government, which Erdogan blames on Gulen's network. Erdogan's government also accuses Gulen of trying to establish a "parallel state" in Turkey.

Shortly after the 2016 coup attempt, Erdogan had said he had been "deceived" by Gulen and his network.

In another development in Turkey, a prominent businessman was re-arrested hours after being acquitted on Tuesday over his alleged role in landmark 2013 protests, which posed a major challenge to Erdogan.

Osman Kavala was among nine people acquitted of an alleged role in organizing the Gezi Park protests.

Commenting on Kavala's acquittal, Erdogan said "they set out to acquit him with a maneuver". He later told reporters the new arrest order must be respected.

Kata'ib Hezbollah:

U.S. Troops Surrounded in Iraq



File photo shows members of Kata'ib Hezbollah in Iraq.

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – Kata'ib Hezbollah group's spokesman says U.S. troops are surrounded by resistance groups in Iraq.

"Many people are not aware that now the Americans are fully surrounded in Iraq because they cannot traffic in Baghdad streets and they cannot go from one base to another but by helicopters," Jaafar al-Hosseini said in an interview with the Arabic-language al-Mayadeen news channel.

He added that the Americans have called for mediation of different figures and groups to prolong their presence in Iraq, but the resistance forces have rejected the demand.

"The U.S. merely understands the language of force," al-Hosseini said.

Iraq's parliament last month voted to have U.S. troops removed from the country, heeding a call from former prime minister Adil Abdul Mahdi to take urgent measures and end the foreign troops' presence as soon as possible.

The Iraqi parliament passed a resolution to work to end the foreign troop presence in the Arab

country in the wake of a U.S. targeted assassination of top Iranian anti-terror commander, General Qassem Soleimani, and a commander of Iraqi popular forces.

The resolution, which was passed anonymously, instructed the government to cancel a request for military assistance to the U.S.-led coalition, which was issued in response to the rise of the Daesh terror group.

"The government commits to revoking its request for assistance from the international coalition fighting the Daesh due to the end of military operations in Iraq and the achievement of victory," the resolution read, adding, "The Iraqi government must work to end the presence of any foreign troops on Iraqi soil and prohibit them from using its land, airspace or water for any reason."

The resolution stated that Iraqi military leadership has to report the number of foreign instructors that are necessary for Iraqi national security.

Earlier, Abdul Mahdi had requested that parliament order the withdrawal of foreign troops from the country.

Erekat: Zionist Regime Policies Aim to Destroy PA

RAMALLAH (Dispatches) – A Palestinian official has accused the Zionist regime of using policies to destroy the Palestinian Authority (PA).

Secretary General of the Palestine Liberation Organization Saeb Erekat said on Wednesday that the occupying regime's threats to deduct PA's tax revenues harm Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, and the settlement construction in the north of al-Quds is meant to undermine the PA.

"Israel's policies are discriminatory and aim at destroying the PA," Erekat told official Palestinian radio station, accusing Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. President Donald Trump of working together to turn the PA as a service provider for the Palestinian people under the occupying regime's sovereignty.

On Jan. 28, Trump announced the U.S. Middle East plan at the presence of Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, which was strongly rejected by the Palestinians.

After the U.S.-sponsored talks between the occupying regime

and the Palestinians stopped in 2014, the Palestinians have been calling for an international mechanism, instead of the U.S. to sponsor the talks.

Meanwhile, Zionist troops opened fire on Wednesday at Palestinian Islamic Jihad fighters in the Gaza Strip, Israeli military said.

No injuries were reported, while local media reported that one Islamic Jihad operative was injured.

The incident came a day after the Zionist regime said it would lift some restrictions on the Gaza Strip, including scaling back the allowed fishing zone from 10 nautical miles (about 18.52 km) to 15 nautical miles, and issuing an additional 2,000 travel permits to enter the occupied territories for business purposes.

The office of the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories said the restrictions were lifted following the quiet at the fence separating between the occupied territories and Gaza. Gaza has been under blockade by the Zionist regime since 2007.