

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – The Iraqi parliament on Thursday failed to meet to vote on a new cabinet proposed by Prime Minister-designate Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi due to a lack of quorum and political disputes.

The parliament media office said in a statement that the Council of Representatives (parliament) postponed its session to give confidence to the new government until Saturday, "because the quorum is not complete."

O son of Adam, when you see that your Lord, the Glorified, bestows His Favors on you while you disobey Him, you should fear Him (take warning that His Wrath may not turn those very blessings into misfortunes).

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

Fifty Former European Leaders:

Trump's Middle East Plan Akin to Apartheid

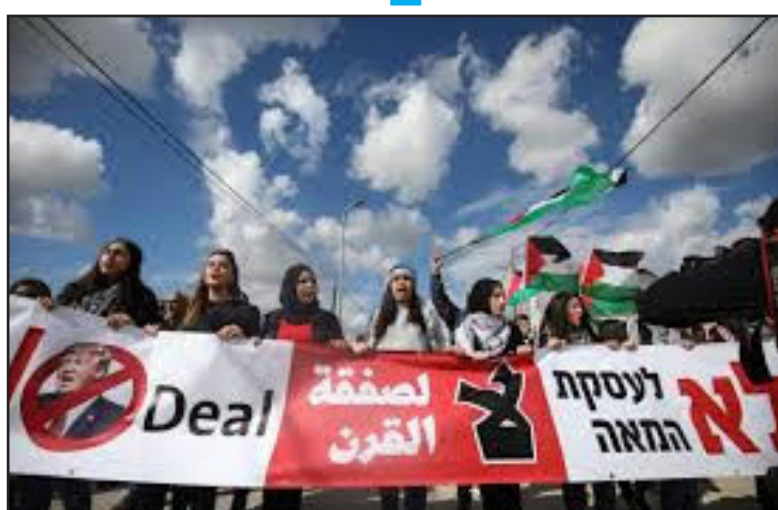
LONDON (Dispatches) – Fifty former European prime ministers and foreign ministers have condemned U.S. President Donald Trump's Middle East so-called "peace plan" in an open letter, saying it would create an apartheid-like situation in occupied Palestinian territory.

In the letter published by British newspaper The Guardian, the former ministers rejected Trump's plan for Zionists and Palestinians, which was announced in January and proposes a so-called "two-state" solution.

Trump's blueprint risks fuelling the conflict, by annexing large parts of occupied Palestine territory under permanent Zionist military control and is not a legitimate solution, they wrote.

"The plan contradicts internationally agreed parameters for the Middle East peace process, relevant UN resolutions, including Security Council resolution 2334, and the most fundamental principles of international law," the letter said, stressing that the details of the scheme was similar to "apartheid."

Trump infuriated Palestinians last month, when he unveiled his much-



Palestinians holding flags of Palestine, march to protest against U.S. President Donald Trump's so-called Middle East peace plan on 1 February 2020.

delayed "deal of the century" during an event at the White House alongside Zionist prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Palestinian groups have unanimously rejected Trump's one-sided plan, which largely meets the occupying regime's demands in the decades-old conflict with the Palestinians while envisioning a Palestinian state with limited control over its own security and borders.

The so-called "peace" plan en-

shrines al-Quds as "Israel's undivided capital" and allows the regime to annex settlements in the occupied West Bank and the Jordan Valley. The plan also denies the right of return for Palestinian refugees to their homeland, among other controversial terms.

"The map featured in the plan proposes Palestinian enclaves under permanent Israeli military control, which evoke chilling associations with South Africa's Bantu-

stans," the letter further stated.

In conclusion, the signatories urged Europe to reject the U.S. plan to pave the way for negotiations and take urgent and effective steps to eliminate the threat of annexation of Palestinian territories by the Zionist regime.

They also said that considering the urgency of the situation they called to action from "the international community, particularly the European Union", in a bid to "preserve the dignity and rights of the Palestinians."

Trump's plan has triggered waves of protest rallies both across the Palestinian occupied territories and around the globe.

The Palestinian Authority, led by President Mahmoud Abbas, wants the West Bank as part of a future independent Palestinian state, with East al-Quds as its capital. The continued expansion of Israeli settlements is one of the major obstacles to the establishment of peace in the Middle East.

Abbas has already severed ties between the Palestinian Authority and the Zionist regime as well as the U.S. in reaction to Trump's highly-provocative scheme.

U.S., Taliban Set to Sign Deal to End War in Afghanistan



This file photo taken on June 16, 2018, shows Afghan Taliban militants riding a motorbike in the outskirts of Jalalabad, Afghanistan.

KABUL (Dispatches) – A week after the truce deal announced by the U.S. and the Taliban armed group in Afghanistan, the two are set to sign a deal that could signal the end of the U.S.'s longest war.

The week-long truce has largely held as the two sides prepare to sign a deal on Saturday that comes after nearly two years of protracted negotiations in the Qatari capital Doha.

At least 19 security forces and four civilians have been killed during the period - a marked decrease compared with past weeks - that the Afghan government attributed to the Taliban.

The signing of the deal in Doha will unlock intra-Afghan talks between the Taliban and Afghan stakeholders, including the country's West-backed government, to decide the future course of the country.

Calling the deal a pre-agreement, analysts say the real challenge in establishing lasting peace is the intra-Afghan talks, whose details have yet to be spelled out.

"It is important to note that the agreement that will likely be signed on February 29 between the Taliban and the U.S. is not a peace deal," Andrew Watkins, senior analyst on Afghanistan at

the International Crisis Group, told Al Jazeera.

"Instead, this is the result of a precursor phase of the Afghan peace process, one that was necessary to bring the Taliban to the table with the Afghan government and political leadership for a substantive dialogue."

Watkins, also pointed out that the U.S. and Taliban were not meant to map out key questions on the future of Afghanistan. Instead, these decisions, Watkins pointed out, are meant to be made in the intra-Afghan negotiations.

"The U.S.-Taliban deal should be seen as having provided a window, or opportunity, for a political settlement and peaceful end to the conflict. But so much work towards that end remains to be done," he said.

Those talks, analysts and government officials say, could take months due to divisions between President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah over key issues.

Last week, Abdullah contested the results of the presidential elections after incumbent President Ghani was declared the winner. Any future political process in the country will be difficult unless the two rivals resolve their differences.

Zionist Regime Approves 1,800 Settler Units as Elections Near

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Zionist regime gives the green light for construction of close to 1,800 new settler units in the illegal settlements it has built across the occupied West Bank, in a move apparently aimed at securing votes for scandal-hit Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ahead of upcoming elections.

The High Planning Subcommittee of Israel's so-called Civil Administration issued the approval, acting on a proposal by the occupying regime's war minister, Naftali Bennett, The Jerusalem Post reported.

He swore he would "not give

one inch of land" to the Palestinians, saying, "We authorized many units in the settlements and we will continue to do so in the future."

Thursday's session came less than two months after the previous one, "marking an increase in the frequency of the committee's meetings," The Times of Israel wrote.

It cited Shabtay Bendet from the Peace Now settlement watchdog as saying it appeared that Netanyahu was trying to court voters in the run-up to the parliamentary polls that have been scheduled for Monday. The elections, the third one to

take place in a year, will see Israelis deciding whether the premier, who has been indicted in a corruption scandal, should remain in office for a fifth term.

The settler units include 620 ones in the central West Bank settlement of Eli, where the regime's supreme court would for long disallow serious development owing to repeated petitions lodged by the Palestinians. The court, however, officially sided with the settlers last week.

The Zionist regime has become more brazen in its efforts to trample upon Palestinians' rights since the 2016 election of

U.S. President Donald Trump, who has unprecedentedly intensified Washington's support for the regime.

Trump has recognized al-Quds as the occupying regime's "capital," relocating the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to the holy occupied city, and announcing a scheme that allows the regime to annex the land on which it has been building the illegal settlements.

More than 600,000 Zionists live in over 230 settlements built since the 1967 occupation of the West Bank. All Zionist settlements are illegal under international law.

UN Calls on Saudi Regime to Release Women Activists

RIYADH (Press TV) – The United Nations human rights chief has urged Saudi Arabia to release women activists and also uphold freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, as the Arab kingdom prepares to hold the 2020 G20 Riyadh Summit in November.

Delivering a speech at the UN Human Rights Council on Thursday, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet called on Riyadh to also review convictions of activists, religious leaders and journalists, urging Saudi leaders to release several women activists, who are behind bars for demanding "reforms of discriminatory policies."

The ultra-conservative regime of Saudi Arabia has frequently been criticized by the UN and international rights groups for violating the rights of people, particularly those of women and activists, the high number of executions, and a sweeping crackdown on political dissidents and pro-democracy cam-

paigners.

Riyadh came under fire in 2018 and beyond after Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi was killed and had his body dismembered after entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

Evidence has shown that the gruesome killing had been carried out by a hit squad with close links to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Turkish officials have accused Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of ordering the killing.

"I also call for full transparency in the ongoing judicial proceedings, and comprehensive accountability, regarding the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi," Bachelet added.

Over the past years, Riyadh has redefined its anti-terrorism laws to target activism.

In January 2016, Saudi authorities executed Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, who was an outspoken critic of Riyadh. Nimr had been arrested in Qatif, Eastern Province, in 2012.

Eastern Province has been the scene of

peaceful demonstrations since February 2011. Protesters have been demanding reforms, freedom of expression, release of political prisoners, and an end to economic and religious discrimination against the region.

The protests have been met with a heavy-handed crackdown by the regime, with government forces increasing security measures across the province.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the UN top official called on the international community to show solidarity with the people of ethnic Asian origin who are subject to discrimination amid an outbreak of a deadly coronavirus that commenced in China late last year.

"The coronavirus epidemic has set off a disturbing wave of prejudice against people of Chinese and East Asian ethnicity, and I call on member states to do their utmost to combat this and other forms of discrimination," Bachelet further told a session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland.

Houthis Exchange Prisoners With Former Regime

SANAA (Dispatches) – A prisoner swap between pro-former regime troops backed by the Saudi regime and Houthi Ansarullah fighters has taken place in the country's Red Sea port city of Hudaydah, a military official told Xinhua.

According to a source who asked to remain anonymous, "two pro-former regime troops were set free in exchange for the release of three Houthi fighters from the jail manned by the government forces in Hudaydah."

The prisoner swap occurred in Kilo16 area in the eastern part of Hudaydah under the direct supervision of a joint team representing the two warring sides, the source said.

Saudi Arabia and a number

of its allies launched a devastating campaign against Yemen in March 2015, with the goal of bringing the former regime of Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi back to power.

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 91,000 over the past four and a half years.

The war has also taken a heavy toll on the country's infrastructure, destroying hospitals, schools, and factories. The UN says over 24 million Yemenis are in dire need of humanitarian aid, including 10 million suffering from extreme levels of hunger.