

'West Bank Annexation Will Lead to Bloodbath'

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The former head of the Zionist regime's internal spy service, Shin Bet, has warned against the Tel Aviv regime's plans to annex the strategically sensitive Area C of the occupied West Bank, stating that such a move will lead to "an unnecessary bloodbath."

"Steps should be taken to reduce the occupation in the West Bank, improve transportation, improve work, and transfer areas from Area B to Area A, which is entirely under the control of the Palestinian Authority," Yoram Cohen told Army Radio.

He urged the occupying regime to adopt proper measures "to minimize the [impact] of the occupation in Judea and Samaria."

"The annexation of Judea and Samaria is the central topic that the Israeli public needs to discuss" so it can weigh the options it wants, he said.

Judea and Samaria presents a challenge to the regime that is a hundred times greater than the threat from Gaza. This is from security, strategic, economic and international relations perspectives, Cohen pointed out.

The remarks came as regime officials have recently approved the construction of 6,000 new settler homes in the West Bank's Area C, where the Israeli army has full control over the management of resources, planning and construction, and strictly limits Palestinian construction or development to less than one percent of the area.

Area C accounts for more than 60 percent of the occupied West Bank, and would form a sig-



This picture shows a general view of a construction site in the Israeli settlement of Givat Zeev in the occupied West Bank north of al-Quds on July 31, 2019.

nificant part of a future Palestine state under the so-called two-state solution.

On Wednesday, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said Palestinians do not need permission from the occupying regime to build homes on their own homeland.

Shtayyeh highlighted that the Israeli officials' approval for the construction of 700 new homes for Palestinians in Area C is nothing but an attempt by the Tel Aviv regime "to mislead the international community as it continues to

demolish and destroy Palestinian homes and livelihoods and to further expand its settlements."

"The terminology of "A, B, C" does no longer exist as Israel has in effect violated and terminated the Oslo interim agreement," he pointed out.

More than 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 by the Zionist regime.

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newspaper cited unidentified government sources as saying that Tokyo had decided not to deploy any warship to the Persian Gulf.

As its key Asian ally and a major regional naval power, Washington is keen for Japan to play a major role in its proposed maritime force.

Japan's government would likely face opposition at home to any military venture that could put its Self Defense Forces in harm's way or threaten the well being of Japanese living in Iran.

"The refusals have underscored the divergent policies toward Iran and are aggravating distrust and resentment on both sides," the New York Times said.

"The Trump administration has put us in a situation where everybody is talking of a risk of war, of creeping escalation," Volker Perthes, director of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin, said.

"We won't do anything that doesn't go in that direction. A coalition that would look like it was directed against Iran would not be likely to reduce tensions," said an adviser to the French defense minister.

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we'll probably have to release them."

This is not the first time that the U.S. president is demanding European leaders act more decisively and take back their nationals. Back in February, he posted a tweet calling on Europe to take them back or Washington would be "forced to release them."

European countries have shown mixed reactions to this, with some rejecting Trump's demand because they fear that those returning home will be a security challenge for years to come.

"We are talking about the most dangerous people in the world. We should not take them back," a spokesperson for Denmark's Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen said. He further described Trump's call as premature, claiming that the situation in Syria was far from stable.

Germany, however, said all German citizens, including those suspected of having fought for the terror group, "have the right to return".

France has said they would all be "put on trial and incarcerated" once repatriated.

Extremists from across Europe joined Daesh in droves in 2014, when the Takfiri terror group launched its campaign of death and destruction in Iraq and Syria.

Back then, many European leaders ignored repeated warnings that militants could return home one day and that they would be a serious security challenge across the continent.

They instead allowed their nationals to join the Takfiri terror outfit in the hope that they would help topple Syrian President Bashar Assad. To that aim, the United States also supported Daesh and intentionally paved the way for it to gain power in Syria.

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over a body believed to be of the commander," referring to pro-Hadi militants.

In a separate retaliatory attack on Thursday, Yemeni forces targeted a military base in the city of Dammam in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province with ballistic missiles.

There were no immediate reports about the possible casualties and damage from the attack.

Foreign mercenaries in Yemen are being funded and armed by Saudi Arabia and some of its regional allies.

The army and Ansarullah forces have intensified their retaliatory strikes to force Riyadh to stop its onslaught against its neighbor.

Separately, dozens of Saudi-sponsored militiamen loyal to Hadi were killed or injured when Yemeni army troops launched an attack in Saudi Arabia's southern border region of Jizan.

An unnamed Yemeni military source told Al-Masirah that Yemeni soldiers and their allies pounded the positions of Saudi mercenaries north of the mountainous Jabal al-Nar area of the region, located 967 kilometers southwest of the capital Riyadh, on Friday afternoon.

The source added that dozens of Saudi-paid militiamen were killed and injured in the process, whilst a number of fled to save their lives.

Over dozen UAE mercenaries killed in militant attack in S Yemen

More than a dozen militiamen backed by the United Arab Emirates were also killed in a surprise attack by members of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) terrorist group in Yemen's southern province of Abyan.

The extremists reportedly staged an ambush on the command center of UAE-paid Security Belt Forces, which forms the elite military wing of the so-called Southern Transitional Council, in the Al-Mahfad district of the province late on Thursday, killing 15 mercenaries and injuring several others in the process.

'U.S. Preparing to Withdraw Thousands of Troops From Afghanistan'

KABUL (Dispatches) – The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump is reportedly planning to withdraw thousands of troops from Afghanistan in a new deal negotiated with the Taliban.

The Washington Post reported that the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan would be reduced to between 8,000 and

9,000 from the current 14,000, citing U.S. officials.

In exchange, the Taliban would reportedly have to begin negotiating a deal with the Afghan government; the deal would also involve a cease-fire and a Taliban renunciation of al-Qaeda.

Officials reportedly said an agreement could be final before

Afghanistan's September elections but also stated that there are still challenges.

"I would say that they are 80 or 90 percent of the way there," one official told the newspaper, adding, "But there is still a long way to go on that last 10 or 20 percent."

Taliban Spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid declined the Washing-

ton Post's request for comment about a possible deal and noted that he didn't know when negotiations would continue.

"We are hopeful," he said, adding, "Things look promising that there will be a breakthrough. We hope there won't be any obstacle, but it also depends on the seriousness of the Americans."

Amnesty Urges Immediate Release of Anti-Regime Saudi Cleric

RIYADH (Press TV) – Amnesty International has called for the immediate and unconditional release of prominent Saudi dissident Muslim cleric Sheikh Salman al-Awdah, as a crackdown led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman against pro-democracy campaigners, Muslim preachers and intellectuals continues in the country.

"The hearing of Sheikh Salman al-Awdah has been adjourned again after a year of several postponements. We continue to demand Saudi authorities to release the Sheikh immediately and unconditionally, drop all charges against him, and respect international human rights standards in his trial," the London-based organization said in a post published on its Twitter page on Friday.

On July 28, Saudi Arabia's Specialized Criminal Court postponed a hearing in the case against Sheikh Awdah until December amid growing concerns he would be sentenced to death.

Last week, Amnesty International warned the Saudi regime against executing the dissident cleric, calling on Riyadh to drop the politically-motivated charges leveled against him.

"We are gravely concerned that Sheikh Salman al-Awdah could be sentenced to death and executed. Since his arrest almost two years ago, Sheikh al-Awdah has gone through a terrible ordeal, including prolonged pre-trial detention, months of solitary confinement, incommunicado detention, and

other ill-treatment – all flagrant violations to his right to a fair trial," Lynn Maalouf, the Middle East Research Director at Amnesty International, said on July 26.

The Arabic-language Saudi newspaper Okaz reported on September 4, 2018 that Saudi public prosecutors had leveled 37 counts against Awdah, and even demanded his execution.

Saudi authorities detained the prominent Muslim scholar on September 7 last year and have been holding him in solitary confinement without charge or trial ever since. Officials have imposed travel bans on members of his family as well.

A family member told Human Rights watch that the distinguished cleric was being held over his refusal to comply with an order by Saudi authorities to tweet a specific text to support the Saudi-led blockade of Qatar.

Awdah, instead, posted a tweet, saying, "May God harmonize between their hearts for the good of their people," - an apparent call for reconciliation between the Persian Gulf littoral states, the US-based rights group said in a statement.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt all cut off diplomatic ties with Qatar on June 5 last year, after officially accusing it of "sponsoring terrorism."

'Turkey Starts Filling Huge Tigris River Dam'

ISTANBUL (Reuters) – Turkey has started filling a huge hydroelectric dam on the Tigris river, a lawmaker and activists said, despite protests that it will displace thousands of people and risks creating water shortages downstream in Iraq.

Citing satellite images, they said that water was starting to build up behind the Ilisu dam, a project that has been decades in the making and which aims to generate 1,200 megawatts of electricity for southeast Turkey.

Turkish officials have not commented on work at the dam. Turkey's State Hydraulic Works (DSI), which oversees dam projects, referred questions to the Presidency, and the Agriculture and Forestry Ministry was not available to comment.

However, President Tayyip Erdogan said

earlier this year that Turkey would start filling the Ilisu dam in June, a year after it briefly held back water before backing down following complaints from Iraq about reduced water flows in mid-summer.

The dam, which first gained Turkish government approval in 1997, is a key part of Turkey's Southeastern Anatolia Project, designed to improve its poorest and least developed region.

Iraq says the dam will create water shortages by reducing flows in one of two rivers which the country depends on for much of its supplies. Around 70% of Iraq's water supplies flow from neighboring countries, especially via the Tigris and Euphrates rivers which run through Turkey.

Satellite images from the past two weeks show the dam has started holding water, said Necdet Ipekyuz, a lawmaker from Turkey's pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). He said a road in the area has already been submerged.

"They are taking steps slowly to decrease the reactions to water being held. That is why they are not informing the public," he said, adding that several HDP lawmakers tried to visit the dam in July but were prevented by police.

Environmental campaigners have unsuccessfully challenged the dam project at the European Court of Human Rights on the grounds it would damage the country's cultural heritage.

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of Russia to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said the measure will block the way for any dialogue. Polyanskiy described sanctions as against diplomacy, stressing that Moscow is against any type of bans, as they do not help find a solution.

Separately, France expressed concern over the U.S. sanctions, emphasizing that it disagrees with the decision along with Britain and Germany. "We consider that all diplomatic channels should stay open, particularly in a context of high tensions," the French Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

California Democratic senator Di- anne Feinstein criticized the move, saying it was a "mistake" to sanction Zarif, whom she described as a "capable" diplomat.

"President Trump says he pulled out of the Iran nuclear agreement to force Iran back to the negotiating table, but this move limits the opportunity to do exactly that. This doesn't move us closer to peace, it further escalates an already tense situation," she said.