

Over 500 Syrian Refugees Return to Homeland From Lebanon

BEIRUT (Xinhua) – More than 500 Syrian refugees have returned to their homeland from Lebanon, the National News Agency says. Syrian refugees from different areas in Lebanon, including Burj Hammoud, Tripoli, Bekaa, Nabatieh and other regions, returned to their homeland by bus under the supervision of the Lebanese general security. More than one million Syrian refugees are registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Lebanon, while the Lebanese government estimated the true number of Syrians in the country at 1.5 million. Lebanese President Michel Aoun has been working hard with the international community to secure the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland due to the impact of their stay in Lebanon on the national economy. The president has previously announced that around 390,000 Syrian refugees have so far returned to Syria.

Blessed is the man who always kept the life after death in his view, who remembered the Day of Judgment through all his deeds, who led a contented life and who was happy with the lot that Allah had destined for him.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

U.S. WMDs Caused Humanitarian Disasters: Syria

'U.S. Troop Reduction in Afghanistan Not Necessarily Tied to Taliban Deal'



Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani addresses U.S. troops during a surprise Thanksgiving Day visit by U.S. President Donald Trump, at Bagram Air Field, in Afghanistan, on November 28, 2019.

LONDON (Dispatches) – U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper says any future troop drawdown in Afghanistan is “not necessarily” linked to a deal with Taliban militants, suggesting some lowering of force levels may happen irrespective of the ongoing peace push.

The remarks by Esper in an interview with Reuters came on the heels of a Thanksgiving trip last week to Afghanistan by President Donald Trump, who spoke of potential troop reductions and said he believed the Taliban militancy would agree to a ceasefire in the 18-year-old war.

If honored by all sides, a ceasefire could lead to a significant reduction in violence.

Speaking as he flew to London for a NATO summit, Esper said the Trump administration had been discussing potential reductions in troop levels for some time, both internally and with NATO allies.

“I feel confident that we could reduce our numbers in Afghanistan

and still ensure that place doesn't become a safe haven for terrorists who could attack the United States,” Esper said, without offering a figure. “And our allies agree we can make reductions as well.”

Asked whether such reductions would necessarily be contingent on some sort of agreement with the Taliban insurgency, Esper said: “Not necessarily.”

He did not elaborate.

There are currently about 13,000 U.S. forces in Afghanistan as well as thousands of other NATO troops. U.S. officials have said U.S. forces could drop to 8,600 and still carry out an effective, core counter-terrorism mission as well as some limited advising for Afghan forces.

A draft accord agreed in September before talks collapsed would have withdrawn thousands of American troops in exchange for guarantees that Afghanistan would not be used as a base for militant attacks on the United States or its allies.

Turkey Sets Up Two New Military Bases in Northern Syria

ANKARA (Dispatches) – The Turkish Army has set up two new military headquarters in the surrounding areas of Ras al-Ein in northeastern Syria, the Arabic-language media outlets reported.

The Arabic-language al-Akbarieh news network reported that the Turkish Army has built two more military centers in the villages of al-Toulan and al-Kanhir in the countryside of Ras al-Ein in Hasaka province.

Ras al-Ein is located in northwestern Hasaka province and 85 kilometers from the city of Hasakah and near the border with Turkey.

In a relevant development in late October, clashes erupted between the Syrian Army units deployed in Ras al-Ein and Turkish occupation forces, which attacked the area during army's deployment.

The clashes erupted as the Syrian Army units advanced from the direction of Tal Tamr in the northern countryside of Hasaka towards the Turkish border, and deployed in the villages in the southeastern countryside of Ras al-Ein, reducing the distance to the Turkish border to few kilometers.

Meanwhile, the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) says Turkish-backed militants are plundering historical artifacts in Syria's northwestern province of Aleppo and smuggling them over the border to sell

in Turkey.

The Britain-based war monitor group, citing reliable sources requesting anonymity, reported on Tuesday that the militants have been systematically looting antiquities in the Afrin district, particularly in the city of al-Nabi Hori – also known as Korsh -- ever since Turkish military forces and their Syrian proxies launched an operation to push Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militants away from a “safe zone” along Syria's border with Turkey.

The SOHR highlighted that Turkish-affiliated militants, namely members of the so-called Soqoor al-Shamal terror group, have been carrying out indiscriminate excavations by heavy machinery in the area, seriously damaging cultural layers at numerous archaeological deposits.

The operations have also led to the destruction of fragile historical artifacts such as glassware, porcelain ware, pottery and mosaic paintings.

On November 6, 2019, a worker at an illegal excavation site posted on Facebook pictures of three mosaics and other artifacts.

“The publisher made no mention of the location of the paintings or the identity of people shown in the picture. The paintings, nevertheless, strongly indicated that they have been recovered from a mountainous site controlled by Turkish-backed militants.

reports on those alleged incidents.”

In April 2018, the U.S. and its Western allies accused the Syrian government of attacking Douma, near the capital Damascus, with chemical munitions.

Syria, which surrendered its entire chemical stockpile in 2013, rejected the allegation, but a week later, the U.S., Britain and France launched a coordinated missile strike against sites and research facilities near Damascus and Homs.

Back in March, the OPCW said in a report that chlorine, whose use by foreign-backed terrorists is a long-known fact, was likely used in a suspected gas attack in the Syrian city of Douma in April 2018.

Damascus says the foreign-backed militants with the Western-backed White Helmets have staged the chemical attack in an attempt to frame the Syrian government.

The Syrian government and its allies in the war saw the attack as a bid to prop up terrorists, faulting the invaders for ignoring Syria's repeated requests for an international probe into the incident.

Last month, WikiLeaks released an email sent by a member of the OPCW in which its author accused the watchdog of doctoring a report on the Douma attack.

In conclusion, the Syrian Foreign Ministry's statement called on Washington to pressure the Israeli regime to sign the convention of the prohibition of manufacturing and using chemical weapons.



This file photo taken on April 4, 2018 in The Hague shows the headquarters of Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

DAMASCUS (Press TV) – Syria says weapons of mass destruction used by the U.S. have led to humanitarian disasters across the world.

In a statement carried by Syria's official SANA news agency, an official source at Syria's Foreign Ministry made the comment on Monday, three days after the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) observed the annual Day of Remembrance for All Victims of Chemical Warfare.

The official said the annual occasion

should be a day to remember all the wars waged by Washington under the pretext of WMD, “devastating states and peoples and civilizations including Iraq, only to admit later that its information was wrong and that its wars were based on lies.”

This occasion brings to mind the atomic bombs the U.S. detonated on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II; and also all the incidents when Washington, as a pioneer, used WMD, whose devastating impact caused ir-

reversible humanitarian disasters that constitute a disgrace for a country “that claims to champion democracy, freedom, and the safety of peoples and demands that others refrain from using such weapons,” the statement added.

The Syrian Foreign Ministry official also noted that the U.S. and other Western states used “lies” to accuse Damascus of allegedly using chemical munitions against Syrian people, “claims which have been proven to be fake and fabricated, as evidenced by the recent revelations about the manipulation of

U.S. Charity's Offer With Gaza Hospital Project Irks Palestinians

GAZA STRIP (Dispatches) – A U.S. charity building a tent hospital in the Gaza Strip is causing Palestinian unease by offering foreign medical volunteers the opportunity of weekend tourism in the Israeli-occupied territories, just across the volatile Gaza fence.

The facility, to be operated by the U.S. evangelical Christian group FriendShips, had won rare joint support from the resistance movement Hamas and its enemy, the Zionist regime, which maintains a blockade on the enclave.

Now, however, eyebrows are being raised in Gaza over a Holy Land pilgrimage pitch on the Louisiana-based organization's website that is promoting an endeavor to improve health services strained by years of conflict.

The 50-bed encampment in northern Gaza across from the Erez crossing “will offer a wonderful opportunity to work in an important and productive project and, at the same time, to see and enjoy the Biblical sites of Israel”, the website said.

Volunteers at the facility would be expected to work and live on-site Monday through Thursday but they “will be free to go to Israel and tour” on their days off, it said.

Asked about the NGO's tourism perk to volunteers, Hamas official Basim Naeem said: “We are certainly against using our people's suffering to market Israel or attracting employees at our people's expense.”

There was no suggestion from Hamas that it was about to scrap

the project as a result of the sight-seeing offer.

A de facto truce brokered between the Zionist regime and Hamas by Qatar, Egypt and the United Nations after deadly fighting in May included the mediators' support for the field hospital.

Gaza's 13 hospitals often lack equipment for specialized treatments, while its two million residents need hard-to-obtain permits from the occupying regime's authorities to get medical care in the occupied territories.

Lebanon's President:

Coming Days to Bring Positive Developments

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – Lebanon's President Michel Aoun says the coming days will bring “positive developments”, Lebanese broadcaster Al Manara reported on Tuesday.

Lebanon has been witnessing protests against the ruling political class and their corrupt practices for the past 30 years.

Protests have so far succeeded in toppling the government while protesters vowed not to leave the streets until they see a formation of a new cabinet capable of dealing with their demands including the trial of corrupted politicians.

In another development, U.S. President Donald Trump's administration has lifted a mysterious “hold” on more than \$100 million in security aid

for Lebanon, congressional and State Department officials said, more than a month after lawmakers learned the funds were being blocked.

As first reported by Reuters, the U.S. State Department told Congress on Oct. 31 that the White House budget office (OMB) and National Security Council had decided to withhold \$105 million in foreign military assistance, without providing any explanation.

As lawmakers demanded answers from the administration about why the aid had been withheld, some compared it with a similar decision from the administration to withhold nearly \$400 million in security assistance to Ukraine that also had been approved by Congress.

That decision has been at the center of an impeachment inquiry into Trump.

Congressional aides said on Monday the administration had still provided no explanation for the decision to withhold the money, which had been approved by Congress and the State Department.

They said the OMB released the hold last Wednesday and the administration had begun to “obligate” it, or finalize contracts for how it should be spent.

A senior State Department official confirmed that the money had been released but declined to provide an explanation for why it was suspended or why it was released, beyond referring to recent comments by Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale.