

MANAMA (Dispatches) – U.S. State Department has been urged to pressure Bahrain to immediately and unconditionally release prominent human rights activist and pro-democracy campaigner Nabeel Rajab.
Rajab been kept behind bars over his criticism of the ruling Al Khalifah regime and the Wahhabi ideology.
Brian Dooley, a senior advisor at Human Rights First, said that the administration of former President Barack Obama had called for Rajab's release, but under President Donald Trump, "the State Department has stood obstinately silent."



Truce Comes Into Force in Southwestern Syria

Qatar to Seek Compensation for Saudi-Led Blockade



This photo shows a general view of damaged buildings in Dara'a, Syria, June 22, 2017.

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – A ceasefire recently brokered by Russia, the U.S. and Jordan has taken effect in southwestern Syria in a bid to curb violence in the Arab country.

The truce came into force at noon Damascus time (0900 GMT) on Sunday. The trilateral agreement on the cessation of hostilities was announced on Friday after a meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his American counterpart, Donald Trump, on the sidelines of the G20 summit in the German city of Hamburg. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who was also present at the

meeting, said Moscow, Washington and Amman had issued a joint memorandum on establishing a de-escalation zone in the Syrian provinces of Dara'a, Quneitra and Suwayda.

The accord includes "securing humanitarian access and setting up contacts between the opposition in the region and a monitoring center that is being established in Jordan's capital," he added.

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson also confirmed that the area covered by the ceasefire affects Jordan's security and is a "very complicated part of the Syrian battlefield."

'Important Step' in Fighting Terrorism

The ceasefire deal is an "important step" in fighting terrorism, says U.S. National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster.

"The United States remains committed to defeating ISIS (Daesh), helping to end the conflict in Syria, reducing suffering, and enabling people to return to their homes. This agreement is an important step toward these common goals," McMaster said in a statement before the ceasefire was set to take effect at noon

Damascus time.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed his optimism about the prospects of a solution to the years-long crisis in Syria, saying what is of utmost importance is the Arab country's "territorial integrity", which is to be ensured.

The Russian leader made the remarks during a press conference on the sidelines of the 12th summit of the Group of Twenty (G20), the world's biggest economies, held in Germany's northern city of Hamburg on Saturday, the second and final day of the conference.

"It's laborious, but extremely important work to ensure Syria's territorial integrity," Putin said, adding, however, that with due respect to U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, he is not a Syrian citizen to talk about the fate of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

"Mr. Tillerson is a much respected person. We love and respect him. But he's not a Syrian citizen, after all, and the future of Syria and the political future of President Assad should only be determined by the Syrian people", Putin said, in a reference to Tillerson's remark about Assad having "no role" in Syria.

The Russian president's comments came as the Kurdish fighters belonging to the U.S.-backed Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) are currently engaged in a fierce battle against Daesh terrorists in Raqqah, the terror group's de facto capital in the Arab country, in a bid to dislodge them from the embattled city, which was overrun by terrorists in March 2013.

KUWAIT CITY (Dispatches) – Qatar says it is establishing a committee to pursue compensation claims arising from an unprecedented blockade imposed against the Persian Gulf country by four Arab countries, dubbed as the siege states, led by Saudi Arabia.

Qatar's Attorney General Ali bin Fetais al-Marri announced the news during a press conference in capital Doha on Sunday, adding that the Compensation Claims Committee would be overseen by himself and senior officials from the ministries of foreign affairs and justice.

"This committee will receive all claims, whether from the public sector, private sector or individuals," he told journalists.

Marri added that potential plaintiffs such as Qatar Airways, banks or individuals, including Qatari students, who have been expelled from the countries where they were studying, would be able to file claims over the "siege" in Qatari courts or those abroad, including in Paris and London.

Military Escalation Ruled Out

Meanwhile, British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson has called on Saudi Arabia and its Persian Gulf allies to end their blockade and siege of Qatar as he continued his tour of the Persian Gulf.

"What people need to see is de-escalation and progress towards tackling the funding of terrorism in the region, and progress toward an end to this blockade," Johnson said in Kuwait City before heading to Qatar.

He further expressed UK's support for Kuwait's efforts to broker a solution to the row which is said to be the worst to hit the region since the formation of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in

1981. The top British diplomat further described the siege on Qatar as unwelcome but played down the possibility of a military escalation as "highly unlikely".

"Everybody I have talked to said the opposite. No possibility of a military confrontation," he said.

During his visit to Kuwait, Johnson sat down with Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al Khalid Al Sabah whose country has played a mediating role in the crisis.

Johnson earlier held meetings with officials from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates which have the most uncompromising stance in the dispute.

In Doha, Johnson met with Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and discussed the crisis as well as ways to enhance counter-terrorism cooperation, according to Qatar's state news agency.

Last month, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt imposed a trade and diplomatic embargo on Qatar, accusing Doha of supporting terrorism.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Ankara expected a peaceful solution to the Persian Gulf dispute.

"Turkey has brotherly relations with all (Persian) Gulf countries and has used all diplomatic tools to resolve the Qatar crisis," Erdogan said during a press conference in Hamburg where he was to attend the G20 summit.

He also emphasized that Turkey did not approve of sanctions against Doha, urging regional countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, to settle the row in a short period of time.

"As I mentioned before, there won't be any winners in the brothers' fight," Erdogan pointed out.

Female Activist:

Women in Saudi Arabia Treated Like Slaves

RIYADH (Dispatches) – A female activist jailed for driving in Saudi Arabia says women are "treated as slaves" in the kingdom.

"I come from a very private society where we live in closed windows, high walls and women are covered up. It's very difficult for girls and women in Saudi Arabia to do anything without the permission from a male guardian," Manal al-Sharif was quoted in an article published by the Independent.

In 2011, Sharif uploaded a video

on social media in which she could be seen driving. The clip was viewed over 700,000 times in a single day.

After that she started to receive death threats and was labeled mentally unstable. "I was called a w**** and people accused me of corrupting Muslims... They called me all kinds of names," she added.

She was subsequently jailed for nine days, during which she lost custody of her son and was fired from her job.

She has since then immigrated to Australia, where she was able to obtain her driver's license. "It was the best \$300 I spent. I was so happy. It's a liberating feeling," she said.

The ban on women's driving has been a thorny issue for Saudi Arabia as the kingdom keeps struggling with international criticism about its record in dealing with the rights of women and minorities. The ban is not officially endorsed in the Saudi legal system but activists say

tradition and custom have barred women from driving. Some women have even challenged the ban by posting online selfie images behind the wheel.

Under increasing international pressure, Saudi Arabia's former King Abdullah initiated a series of plans for engaging women in social and political activities. He appointed 30 female members to the Shura Council and allowed women to contest local council elections.

Turkish President:

We Won't Sit Back and Watch Arming of Kurds



A member of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) speaks on a walkie talkie in the Syrian city of Raqqah's eastern al-Sinaa district, on June 21, 2017.

are sent to Kurdish groups, Turkish president says.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan said, "We will definitely not remain silent and unresponsive to the support and arming of terror organizations next to our borders and the forming of terror islands in the region."

The U.S. has been sending arms to Kurdish YPG troops, who are engaged in operations aimed at recapturing the Syrian city of Raqqah from Daesh.

The city of Raqqah, which lies on the northern bank of the Euphrates River, was overrun by Daesh terrorists in March 2013.

Turkey considers the YPG to be associated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militants, who

have been leading a decades-long deadly war against Ankara in quest for an independent Kurdish state in southeastern Turkey.

The YPG is part of a larger coalition of fighters — the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) which the U.S. considers its main proxy force fighting on the ground in Syria.

"We will not hesitate to use our legitimate right to defense against formations that threaten our country's security," he added.

Turkey also fears that the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Syria may encourage separatism amongst its own Kurds.

Erdogan added that Ankara would "never allow" a Kurdish state in northern Syria.

South Africa Hailed for Downgrading Ties With Zionist Regime

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – Palestinians have hailed a recent decision by South Africa's ruling party to downgrade the country's embassy in the occupied territories to a liaison office in an attempt to reduce diplomatic relations with the Zionist regime.

At a national policy conference in the city of Johannesburg earlier this week, the African National Congress (ANC)'s international relations commission said the move was meant to show "unwavering and steadfast commitment for the struggle" of the Palestinians and denounce the Tel Aviv regime's illegal occupation as well as non-compliance with the international law.

"The commission called for the downgrading of the South African embassy in Israel to send a strong message about Israel's continued illegal occupation of Palestine and continued human

rights abuses against the people of Palestine," said commission chairperson Miriam Segabutla.

In a statement, Hamas spokesman Hazem Qasim praised the ANC for taking the measure and called for more pressure on the regime to recognize the Palestinian people's rights.

Palestinian Ambassador to South Africa Hashem Dajani also described the decision as an "advanced move to put pressure on the apartheid government of Israel in order to end occupation of the state of Palestine."

The decline in South Africa-Zionist regime ties would mark a recognition of the Palestinian right to self-determination and statehood, he added.

Most South Africans have historically supported the Palestinians due to similarities between the Zionist regime's occupation and South Africa's apartheid era.

ANKARA (Dispatches) – Turkey will never permit a Kurdish state to be established close to its borders and will not watch passively as arms