

Car Bomb Rocks Suburb of Syria's Capital

DAMASCUS (Al Jazeera) – A car bomb explosion has rocked Damascus, a rare incident in recent years as the Syrian capital has been largely spared the violence that happens in other parts of the country.

Sunday night's blast in the affluent suburb of Mezze caused no casualties, according to police sources quoted by the official Syrian news agency, SANA. Initial reports said loud explosions had been heard in Mezze and plumes of smoke were seen rising from the vicinity of the military airport there. According to police sources, an explosive device in a civilian vehicle was detonated, bursting into flames that spread to two vehicles parked nearby.

I wonder at the man who takes great pains to decorate and to make comfortable this mortal habitat and totally forgets his permanent abode.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

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Zionist Troops Kill Two More Palestinians

AL-QUDS (Dispatches) – Zionist troops killed two Palestinians in the occupied West Bank on Monday, Palestinian resistance factions and medics said.

Tensions have been running high as Muslims mark the Ramadan holy fast month during a surge in violence by the occupying regime.

The latest shootings happened during a raid by the Zionist military in the northern West Bank city of Nablus.

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported that confrontations broke out soon after Zionist troops stormed Nablus, located approximately 49 kilometers (30 miles) north of Al-Quds, in the early hours of Monday, with dozens of armored vehicles and special forces.

The Palestinian Ministry of Health later identified the martyrs as Muhammad Nasser Saeed and Muhammad Abu Bakr Junaidi.

The victims sustained serious gunshot wounds as Palestinian resistance fighters engaged in clashes with the regime troops during the raid. Witnesses de-



The father of Mohammed Abu Bakr, who was killed during the Zionist army raid, mourns outside the Rafidiya Hospital in the city of Nablus.

scribed the regime's troops opening fire indiscriminately.

Ahmed Jibril, director of ambulance and emergency services at the Palestine Red Crescent Society in Nablus, said the pair were transported to Rafidia Surgical Hospital and Nablus Speciality Hospital, where they were pronounced dead shortly afterward.

He added that Zionist troops raided Nablus Speciality Hospital with poisonous gas bombs.

Jibril noted that at least 55 Palestinians suffered breathing difficulties due to inhaling tear gas.

The Gaza-based Hamas resistance movement said, "There is no way to confront the occupying Israeli regime other than resistance and an increase in retaliatory measures."

"Monday morning's deaths, which bring the number of Palestinians killed since the start of the year to 95, clearly indicate the

rise in the criminal policy of the Israeli enemy and its widespread exercise of murder and assassination," Hamas said.

It also stressed that the surge in the Zionist regime's crimes and its utter disregard for Palestinian lives necessitate stronger retaliatory measures against Zionist troops and extremist settlers.

Meanwhile, Zionist troops removed Palestinian worshippers from Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied East Al-Quds as they observed the holy month of Ramadan on Sunday overnight.

Dozens of worshippers stayed at the Qibli prayer hall - the building with the silver dome - to practice Itikaf after tens of thousands attended the earlier Taraweeh night prayer.

Itikaf is a non-mandatory religious practice that is common in Ramadan whereby worshippers stay at mosques overnight to pray, reflect and recite the Qur'an.

Videos shared by worshippers showed Zionist troops entering the prayer hall just before 11 pm local time and escorting everyone out.

Saudi Arabia to Invite Syria's President Assad to Arab League Summit



Saudi Arabia is reportedly planning to invite Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to an Arab League summit hosted by Riyadh next month.

RIYADH (Dispatches) – Saudi Arabia is reportedly planning to invite Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to an Arab League summit hosted by Riyadh next month, as Arab states race to re-establish cordial relations with the government in Damascus after cutting diplomatic ties more than a decade ago.

Three sources familiar with the plan were cited by Reuters as making the revelation in a report, saying Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan will travel to Damascus in coming weeks to hand Assad a formal invitation to attend the Arab League summit on May 19.

One of the three sources, who were not named in the report, said discussions have been ongoing for more than a year over a list of demands from Saudi Arabia for the Syrian government to meet as a condition to mend ties, including close cooperation on border security.

Moreover, initial discussions — as one of the sources said — for a visit by Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan al-Saud to Damascus or by Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad to Riyadh were postponed due to February's earthquakes in Turkey and Syria.

The Saudi government and the foreign ministries of both countries have yet to confirm the report.

Last month, Riyadh and Damascus reached an agreement to reopen their embassies and resume consular services after the fasting holy month of Ramadan.

Contacts between Riyadh and Damascus gathered momentum following a landmark agreement earlier in March between Iran and Saudi Arabia on the restoration of bilateral relations after seven years.

Arab League heavyweight Egypt also resumed contacts with Damascus, with Mekdad meeting his Egyptian counterpart in the capital, Cairo, on Saturday to discuss strengthening of bilateral rela-

tions as well as the latest regional and international developments.

A former British ambassador to Syria said Saudi Arabia and Syria's attempt to mend fences is a "slap in the face" and a "big setback" for the United States, calling the rapprochement an important political achievement for Syria.

Peter Ford said Sunday that the re-establishment of Damascus-Riyadh diplomatic ties shows that Syria has survived and is "going from strength to strength regionally."

"Above all, [restoration of ties] puts pressure on the United States, which is going to interpret this as a slap in the face," Ford said. "This is a big setback for the U.S.' regional diplomacy."

In another development, a high-ranking Syrian delegation has arrived in the Russian capital to take part in quadrilateral talks aimed at normalizing relations between Damascus and Ankara.

The Syrian delegation, which arrived in Moscow on Sunday, is headed by deputy foreign minister, Ayman Sousan, Syria's official SANA news agency reported.

Sousan was quoted by SANA as saying that the Syrian delegation will first hold bilateral meetings with the Russian and Iranian sides on April 3, before participating in the quadripartite meeting on April 4.

The official said the Syrian delegates will focus specifically on ending Turkey's military presence in the Arab country, the fight against terrorism, and non-interference in Syria's internal affairs by other countries.

Upon its arrival in Moscow, the Syrian delegation was received by the country's ambassador to Russia, Bashar al-Jaafari.

Turkey severed its relations with Syria in March 2012, a year after the Arab country found itself in the grip of deadly violence waged by foreign-backed militants.

Now, after 11 years, the two neighboring countries are taking steps toward reconciliation.

Erdogan Says Wants to 'Teach U.S. Lesson' Over Meddlesome Policies

ANKARA (Middle East Eye) – Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says his supporters should teach the United States a lesson in the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections.

Erdogan has uncharacteristically avoided criticizing the West and the U.S. so far in this electoral campaign, but made an exception during a rally in Istanbul's Bagcilar district, where he officially opened a series of public buildings and investments. The elections will be held on 14 May.

The Turkish president cited the U.S. Ambassador Jeff Flake's visit to the opposition's joint pres-

idential candidate Kemal Kilicdaroglu last week as a reason for his anger at the U.S.

"We need to teach America a lesson in these elections," he said. "Joe Biden speaks from there, what is Biden's ambassador doing here? He goes to visit Mr Kemal. It's a shame, give your head some work. You are the ambassador. Your interlocutor here is the president."

Erdogan was addressing a small gathering of people at a local branch of the Turkish ultra-nationalist Idealist Hearths group, commonly known as the Grey Wolves.

Referring to Flake, Erdogan

said: "How are you going to ask for an appointment from the president from now on?"

"Our doors are now closed to him. You cannot see [me] anymore. Why? You will know your limit. You will know your duty as ambassador. You will learn how an ambassador works," he added.

The U.S. and Turkey, allies and strategic partners on paper, haven't had an easy relationship since 2014, when Washington decided to ally with Kurdish armed groups in Syria, which are viewed as terrorists by Ankara.

Since then, two more U.S. administrations have taken power

in Washington, yet tensions and occasional shouting matches over a set of issues from Turkey's purchase of Russian-made S-400 air defence systems to Ankara's decision to hold up Sweden's NATO bid have continued.

Last month, Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soyulu accused Flake of trying to overthrow the government by creating "strife" and told him to "take his dirty hands off of Turkey".

Erdogan plans to host an iftar dinner as part of the holy month of Ramadan on Tuesday. It isn't clear whether he would invite Flake.

UN Envoy: Yemen Truce 'Broadly Holding' But Fragile

SANA'A (Arab News/MEMO) – The UN-brokered truce between Yemen's warring factions is "broadly holding" but still in danger of collapsing amid intense fighting in Marib and Shabwa, the organization's envoy says.

On the first anniversary of the deal, Hans Grundberg said that the Sana'a-based government and Saudi-, and UAE-backed mercenaries in the south had mostly stuck to its terms. He warned however that the current rise in hostilities might lead to it unraveling.

"Even after its expiration, the truce is broadly holding and many of its elements continue to be implemented. But the truce's most significant promise is its potential to jumpstart an inclusive political process aimed at comprehensively and sustainably ending the conflict," Grundberg said.

The UN-brokered truce marks the longest pause of hostilities in Yemen's nine-year war. It has led to a considerable decline in civilian deaths and internal displacement.

Under the truce, the parties agreed to end hostilities, permit commercial flights from Sana'a airport, assist the arrival of fuel ships at Hudaydah port and work together to unblock highways in Taiz and other Yemeni towns.

Grundberg warned that the military, economic and verbal escalation posed a danger to the truce. He said that his office was working to transform it into a more inclusive and long-lasting political process.

"There is a need to protect the gains of the truce and to build on them towards more humanitarian relief, a nationwide ceasefire, and a sustainable political settlement that meets the aspirations of Yemeni

women and men," he said.

A military coalition led by Saudi Arabia started a war on Yemen in March 2015 in order to return the country's former Riyadh-friendly government to power. Although the coalition has failed to achieve any of its goal, the war has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Yemenis and turned the entire country into the scene of what the UN describes as the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Meanwhile, the U.S., which has been helping the Saudi-led coalition against Yemen, claims it supports all efforts aimed at a comprehensive solution to the Yemeni war.

U.S. President Joe Biden made the claim on Sunday in a statement published by the White House on the occasion of the first anniversary of the truce in Yemen.

Report: Two Britons Detained by Taliban Expected Home Within Days

LONDON (Arab News) – Two British men detained in Afghanistan by the Taliban are expected to return home within days following negotiations between the governments of both countries, The Times reported on Monday.

Charity worker Kevin Cornwell, 53, and an unnamed 52-year-old hotel manager were arrested following a January raid in Kabul after a firearm was discovered in the former's hotel room.

The families of the two men made contact with them for the first time in almost three months last week as hopes grew over their return.

Cornwell and the hotel manager have been denied legal and

consular aid following their arrests, which came after the raid on the Dayra Village hotel in January.

Led by Afghanistan's General Directorate of Intelligence, the raid is believed to be the result of a tipoff, with officers discovering a securely stored handgun in Cornwell's room.

He had been working in Afghanistan for almost a year with Iqarus, a UN-affiliated health company supporting humanitarian missions.

Scott Richards of the Presidium Network, a charity supporting the families of the two men, said Cornwell possessed a legitimate license to carry the weapon from Afghanistan's Interior Ministry.

The Presidium Network is try-

ing to obtain a copy of the license, which may have been lost as intelligence officials frantically searched the room, Richards added.

He said of the recent communication between the men and their families: "The men are in good health, good condition and spirits as reasonably strong as they can be given all considerations."

"It was clearly an important and emotional call and represents tremendous progress in the situation."

"The relief Kevin's family expressed after hearing his voice for the first time in three months, not knowing if he was well, brought a sense of peace and gave them hope that this situation will be resolved soon."