

Top Syrian, Tunisian Diplomats Discuss Restoration of Ties

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – Top diplomats of Syria and Tunisia have pledged to enhance the level of diplomatic representation amid a new wave of enhancement of ties between Syria and its Arab neighbors.

Syria's Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad held a phone conversation with his Tunisian counterpart Nabil Ammar, exchanging congratulations on the fasting holy month of Ramadan and discussing ways to boost bilateral relations, SANA reported.

Ammar noted that Tunis has decided to strengthen the representation of the Embassy of Tunisia in Damascus and appoint an ambassador to Syria.

For his part, Mekdad appreciated Syria's decision, noting that Syria will also re-open its embassy in Tunisia in the coming days with an ambassador as the head of the mission.

The conversation comes as Tunisian President Kais Saied tasked the foreign ministry to "initiate procedures for appointing an ambassador of Tunisia in Damascus," according to an official statement



Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad meets with his Egyptian counterpart (not pictured) at the ministry headquarters in Cairo, on April 1, 2023.

published on the presidency's Facebook page.

The statement highlighted the "necessity of adhering to the principles of the foreign policy of the Tunisian diplomacy" and said that the country's "positions abroad stem from the will of its people."

Back on March 10, Saied announced the decision to restore diplomatic ties with Syria which were cut off almost a decade ago.

"Nothing can justify the ab-

sence of a Tunisian ambassador in Damascus and an ambassador from Syria in Tunis," he said during a meeting with his country's foreign affairs minister, according to a video released by the presidential office.

Tunis cut diplomatic relations with Damascus following the start of the foreign-backed war on Syria in 2011.

Tunisia began limited diplomatic links with Syria in 2017, in part to help track more than

3,000 Tunisian militants reportedly fighting in Syria.

However, since Saied took the helm in 2021 and consolidated his power, Tunis has been sending Damascus signals that it is ready to resume full diplomatic ties with it.

Several other Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Oman and the United Arab Emirates, in the past months, have sent similar signals, indicating that they too are prepared to resume ambassador-level diplomatic ties with the Syrian government.

In February, a number of Arab parliament speakers and senior legislators visited Damascus as part of a concerted bid to restore Syria's membership in the Arab League, more than a decade after it was suspended from the 22-member bloc.

Riyadh is reportedly set to invite President Bashar al-Assad to attend the Arab League summit next month in what has been described by experts as a significant development in the resumption of ties between Damascus and other Arab states.

War Monitor to Challenge UK Defense Ministry Over Killing of Syrian Civilian

LONDON (Middle East Eye) – The UK-based war monitor, Airwars, is set to challenge the British Ministry of Defense (MoD) in a tribunal over the refusal to release basic information about a civilian killed in Syria in 2018.

Airwars, which tracked air strikes against the Daesh and other groups in Iraq, Syria and Libya since 2014, said that it would challenge the MoD and the Information Commissioner in court, with the appeal due to come to a head later this year.

The case involves an air strike

on 26 March 2018 allegedly on Daesh terrorist in which the UK government accepted the killing of a civilian "unintentionally," which Airwars said was "the only time the UK government has officially accepted harming civilians".

Former Defense Secretary Gavin Williamson told parliament in May 2018 that "during a strike to engage three Daesh fighters, a civilian motorbike crossed into the strike area at the last moment and it is assessed that one civilian was unintentionally killed."

Airwars had asked the MoD to release basic information about this civilian, but the ministry refused.

The group said that British aircraft dropped more than 4,300 munitions during the eight years of the UK's occupation of Iraq and Syria, and according to MoD figures, more than 4,000 Daesh terrorist were killed in the air raids. It says no other civilians were killed.

The British government logs of all RAF air strikes don't show a strike on the day of 26 March

2018, the group said.

Airwars also said that the civilian casualty unit, working within the U.S.-led coalition, "reviewed the details of the same strike".

Joe Dyke, head of investigations at Airwars, filed a Freedom of Information (FOI) request in 2021 following the MoD refusal to release more information about the March 2018 incident.

He asked for details about the location of the strike and documents outlining how the determination that the victim was a civilian was reached, Airwars said.

CIA's Burns Reaffirmed Intelligence Cooperation on Saudi Visit

WASHINGTON (Reuters) – CIA Director William Burns held talks in Saudi Arabia with his counterparts and national leaders to reaffirm intelligence cooperation, a U.S. official said, as the kingdom and its arch-rival Iran renew ties in a China-brokered deal.

China's role in arranging the deal was seen by some experts as signaling a decrease in U.S. influence with Saudi Arabia amid tensions between Washington and Riyadh over a number of issues, includ-

ing human rights and Saudi oil production cuts.

"Director Burns traveled to Saudi Arabia, where he met with intelligence counterparts and country leaders on issues of shared interests," the U.S. official said on condition of anonymity.

"The director reinforced our commitment to intelligence cooperation especially in areas of counterterrorism," the official added.

The U.S. official did not say when Burns' visit took place. The Washington Post, which first reported the visit, said the CIA chief was in Saudi Arabia earlier this week.

The United States and Saudi Arabia for decades have cooperated closely on counterterrorism and other intelligence matters.

Burns' visit was announced as the kingdom's foreign minister held talks with his Iranian counterpart in Beijing, the first time the regional rivals' top diplomats have met in more than seven years.

Strong...

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Ansarullah movement said it will extend all forms of support to Palestinian resistance groups and Hezbollah in case of a military confrontation with the Zionist regime.

A flock of sheep was also killed when the Israeli missiles struck an open field near the Palestinian refugee camp of Rashidiyeh. Other airstrikes hit a bridge and power transformer in the nearby town of Maaliya and damaged an irrigation system providing water to orchards in the area.

In the Gaza Strip, the Zionist regime's military pounded what it said were weapons production sites and underground tunnels belonging to Hamas, the resistance group ruling the Palestinian enclave. Residents inspected the damage left after Israeli strikes — including to a children's hospital in Gaza City, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry.

After the retaliatory strikes, Zionists

living along the fence separating Gaza from the occupied territories came out of bomb shelters. One of the missiles that managed to cross into the occupied territory landed in the nearby town of Sderot, sending shrapnel slicing into a building.

The Israeli military said everyone wanted avoid a full-blown conflict. "Quiet will be answered with quiet," said Lt. Col. Richard Hecht, a spokesman for the Zionist regime's military.

Al-Aqsa, a tinderbox for Israeli-Palestinian conflict, sits on a hilltop sacred to Muslims. In 2021, an escalation also triggered by clashes at the scared compound spilled over into an 11-day war between the Zionist regime and Palestinians.

Over 130,000 worshippers poured into the compound for midday prayers on Friday, which ended without incident. Before dawn prayers, chaos had erupted at one of the entrances to the esplanade as Israeli forces wielding batons descended on crowds of Palestinian worshippers, who chanted slogans praising Hamas as they tried to squeeze into the site. An hour later, according to videos, people

leaving the prayers staged a large scale protest on the limestone courtyard, with Palestinians raising their fists and shouting against Israel. Zionist troops forced their way into the compound, inflaming tensions during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.

The unrest comes at a delicate time for Al-Quds' Old City, which on Friday was teeming with pilgrims from around the world.

The current round of violence began Wednesday after Israeli forces twice raided the Al-Aqsa Mosque — in one case fiercely beating Palestinians, who responded by hurling rocks and firecrackers. That led Thursday to rocket fire from Gaza and the barrage from southern Lebanon.

Lebanon's Foreign Ministry said Friday it had instructed the country's mission to the United Nations in New York to submit a complaint to the UN Security Council against the "deliberate Israeli bombing and aggression" in the south, which it condemned as "a flagrant violation of Lebanon's sovereignty."

to repair frayed ties.

His visit also comes on the back of Saudi Arabia's surprise decision on Sunday to implement an oil production cut that sent crude prices skyrocketing. Saudi's support for a cut in October last year was slammed by the Biden administration as aligning with Russia amid the war in Ukraine.

But the kingdom is brushing off U.S. complaints. Saudi officials have gone on the offensive, slamming energy transition goals - mainly supported in the West - as unrealistic.

Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman has offered some of the sharpest criticism: "We keep hearing you 'are with us or against us'. Is there any room for 'we are with the people of Saudi Arabia?'" he said after the Opec+ production cut in October.

Two...

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Natacha Pomet, a leader of the public services branch of the CGT union, said the rat catchers wanted "to show the hard reality of their mission" and that opposition to Macron's pension reforms is morphing into a wider movement of worker grievances over salaries and other complaints.

"All this anger brings together all types of anger," she said in a phone interview.

At Paris' Charles de Gaulle airport on Thursday morning, about 100 demonstrators blocked a road leading to Terminal 1 and entered the building, the airport operator said. It said flights were unaffected, but travelers towing their luggage had to weave their way past flag-waving protesters.

A CGT representative at the airport, Loris Foreman, told BFMTV that the demonstrators wanted "to show the world and Europe that we don't want to work to 64 years old."

Iran ...

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concealing multi-layered crises in the occupied territories, the Islamic Republic of Iran considers focusing on the unity of the Islamic world and at the same time confronting the normalization of relations with the criminal and occupying regime of Israel as a necessity and a religious and conscientious obligation," he said.

"Emphasizing the observance of the principles and foundations of the neighborhood policy and paying attention to the sinister goals of the Zionist regime in creating differences and tension in the relations between Islamic countries, the Islamic Republic of Iran has also diplomatic reciprocity on its agenda," he added.

Leader...

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Ayatollah Khamenei cited Daesh which burned people alive or drowned them as a testimony to the falsity of the West's advocacy of human rights.

"We saw in their support of MKO terrorists and Saddam Hussein and their crimes against Gaza and the Palestinians" the falsehood of the Western countries' claims, the Leader said.

The West's support for the assassination and killing of religious youth in the streets of Tehran is another example of the falsity of their claim, he said, referring to the lynching of Basij members during recent riots.

Ayatollah Khamenei underlined the need to know the enemy and its goals, strategies and targets.

"Understanding the dimensions of the enemy's soft war is a requirement for everyone, but it is most essential for those who are active in the cultural and artistic fields so that they can prevent themselves from getting influenced by it, and to make others aware of the enemy's onslaught," the Leader said.

President...

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at the level of Permanent Representatives, on Saturday at the headquarters of the General Secretariat in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has said he was "shocked and appalled" by images of Zionist forces beating people at Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Stephane Dujarric said Guterres viewed images of the "violence and beating" within the holy site, and found it more distressing because it came "at a

time of a calendar which is holy to Jews, Christians and Muslims that should be a time for peace and nonviolence."

"Places of worship should only be used for peaceful religious observances," he said.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hussein Amir-Abdollahian condemned the desecration of Al-Aqsa Mosque, saying that the Zionists are confused by the wave of convergence in the Islamic world.

"The desecration of Al-Aqsa Mosque by Israeli forces and their night raid on worshippers of the holy site created painful scenes that are the result of the behavior of human rights advocates who turn a blind eye to Zionism's crimes," Amir-Abdollahian tweeted on Thursday.

"The Zionists are confused by the wave of convergence in the Muslim world and the prospect of internal collapse," he added.

The Arab League called on the UN Security Council to intervene to halt Israeli "crimes" at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound.

Envoy...

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He said Iran will not hesitate to take the necessary measures, in accordance with international law and the UN Charter, to "respond decisively to any threat or attack posed by the Israeli regime and to defend its security and national interests, as well as to protect its people."

The Iranian envoy noted that the Zionist regime's terrorist attacks on Damascus and its suburbs on March 31 led to the martyrdom of the two Iranian advisers and the tragic loss of innocent civilian lives as well as severe damage to the infrastructure of the Arab country.

He maintained that the heinous crime once again illustrated the Zionist regime's ongoing aggression and flagrant violation of international law on Syrian territory.

He slammed the inaction of the international community, particularly the UN Security Council, in dealing with Israel's constant acts of aggression against Syria, which has enabled the Tel Aviv regime to act with impunity.

"Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected, and actions that undermine them must not be tolerated," Iravani added.

Meanwhile, a high-ranking commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has warned the occupying regime of Israel of a "strong and decisive" response to its murder of two Iranian military advisors in Syria.

"Zionists know they have received and will receive a harsher blow compared to what they have dealt to us," Brigadier General Muhammad Reza Naqdi, IRGC's deputy commander for coordination, said at the burial ceremony of Milad Heidari in Qorveh, western Kordostan province.

"They should be ready for a strong and decisive response," he said.

Heidari and Meqdad Mehqani were martyred in aerial raids conducted by the Zionist regime on the suburbs of the Syrian capital.

Heidari, a 32-year-old father of two, was from a village near Qorveh.

"The blood of our martyrs is far more valuable than killing a Zionist. Although this will happen, the main revenge is the liberation of Al-Quds," the IRGC commander said. "We are seeing the collapse and elimination of Israel, and this is certain."

"The resistance movement will not stop resistance until the elimination of Israel and cleaning up the region from their evil presence," he added.

The burial ceremony in the martyred officer's hometown was attended by hundreds of people, officials, and military commanders.

Footage from the ceremony showed attendants chanting vociferous slogans against the Israeli regime and the U.S.

"The U.S. and the Zionists should know that the blood of martyrs Heidari and Mehqani will water the roots of resistance and make the ... Revolution stronger," Maryam Soleimani, Heidari's wife, told the event.

Kordestan governor Ismail Zarei-Koosha hailed the massive attendance at the burial ceremony as a manifestation of unity between Sunni and Shia Muslims in the province.

"All of us, Shia and Sunni, will sacrifice our lives for the Revolution," he said.

Mehqani, 31, was laid to rest in his hometown in northern Golestan province on Thursday.

On Tuesday, a mass funeral ceremony for the two young martyrs was held in Tehran with the attendance of tens of thousands of people.