

# Gaza's Omari Grand Mosque: A combination of civilizations

Tue, 2019-05-28 23:35

GAZA CITY: Previously a pagan temple and then a church, the Omari Grand Mosque in Gaza City was converted to a Muslim place of worship under Caliph Omar ibn Al-Khattab.

During Roman and Greek rule, the site was a temple to worship the god Marna, said Heyam Al-Bitar, head of the tourism and archaeology department at the Tourism Ministry in Gaza. It was built during the reign of Roman Emperor Hadrian.

The temple was converted to a church in 406 AD, and then into a mosque in 634 AD, said archaeologist Dr. Salim Al-Mubaid.

"It was the first mosque to perform Friday prayers in Gaza after the Islamic conquest," he added.

During the Crusades, it was turned into St. John's Cathedral in 1149 AD. It was converted back into a mosque in 1192 AD, but retained its Gothic architecture.

It was expanded by Mamluk Sultan Nasser Muhammad during Ottoman rule. Large parts of the mosque were destroyed during World War I, said Al-Mubaid. Historian Othman Mustafa Al-Tabbaa said it has 38 marble columns.

Al-Bitar said the mosque's minaret, a model of Mamluk architectural style, is one of its most famous features. Its lower half is square and its upper half is octagonal.

The mosque's library, built under Mamluk Sultan Al-Zaher Baybars, was a scientific beacon for scholars.

Having contained thousands of books and manuscripts on various sciences, the library was destroyed during the Crusades and World War I.

Today, it contains what books and manuscripts were not destroyed or looted. It is the oldest mosque library in the Gaza Strip.











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Huge crowds pray at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa for first Ramadan Friday  
Israel strikes Gaza mosque as death toll tops 120

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## Lebanon receives Israeli response to border demarcation

Tue, 2019-05-28 23:08

BEIRUT: David Satterfield, deputy US assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, conveyed Israel's response to Lebanon regarding negotiations on border demarcation.

Sources at the Lebanese prime minister's office said negotiations will focus on demarcating the maritime border, and will also tackle disputed points on the Blue Line, a border demarcation published by the UN in June 2000 to determine whether Israel had fully withdrawn from Lebanon. There are 13 disputed points on the Blue Line.

Lebanese Foreign Ministry sources said after Satterfield's meeting with Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil that the atmosphere was "positive."

They added that the final touches were being put on the form of negotiations and the role of concerned parties, including the UN, Lebanon, Israel and the US. Satterfield also met with Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri.

Lebanon's presidential media office said President Michel Aoun on Monday discussed with Jan Kubis, the UN special coordinator in Lebanon, the UN's role "in helping to demarcate the southern Lebanese border."

Lebanon delivered a proposal to Satterfield stressing its "determination to demarcate the maritime border through the tripartite commission originally formed in April 1996, as was done for the Blue Line after liberation in 2000, which is to be completed by a White Line in the sea."

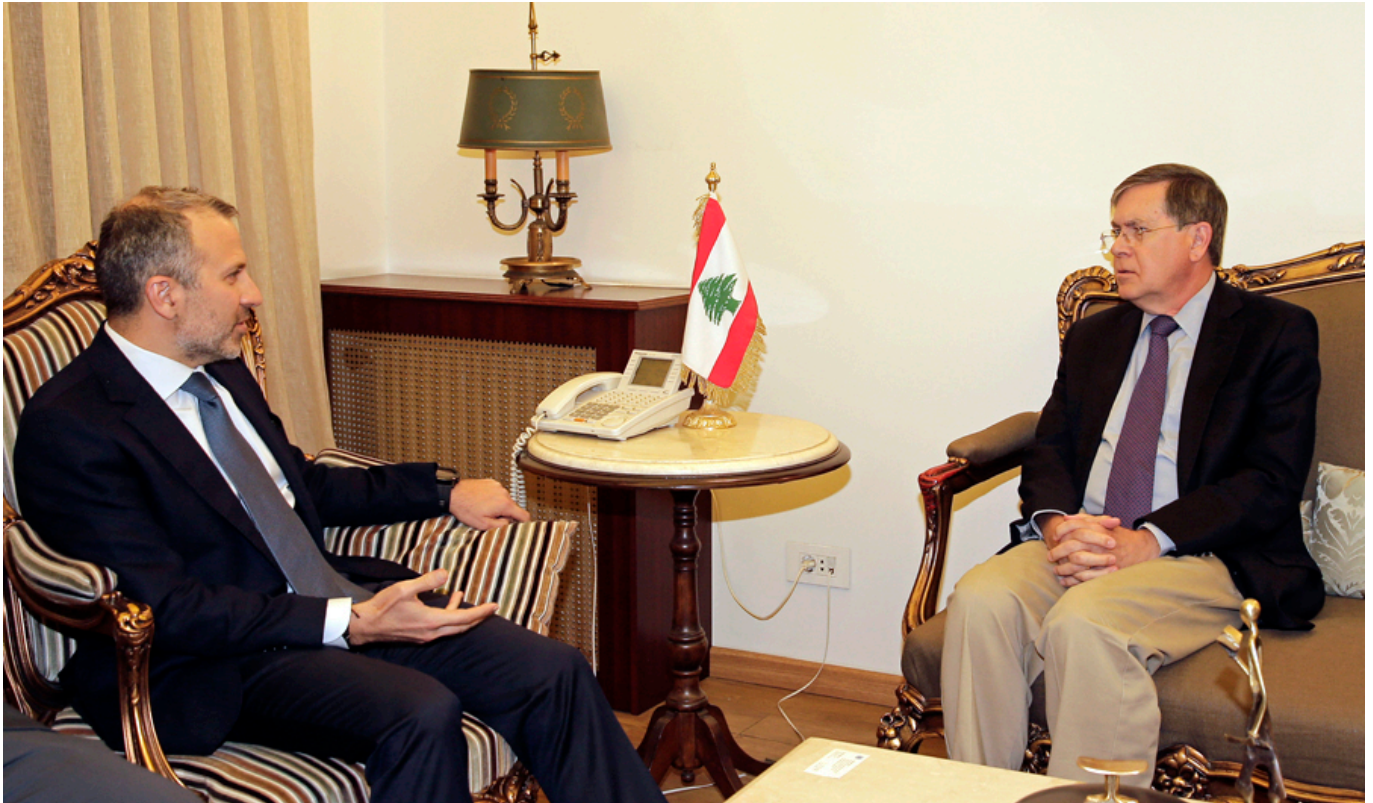
Beirut said it rejected "any direct Israeli-Lebanese negotiations," and "demanded negotiations involving officers from Lebanon, Israel and the United Nations, with the participation of topographic and oil experts. The function of the tripartite committee is to demarcate the maritime line. There is no objection to the participation of American diplomats in the tripartite demarcation, provided that they are neutral."

The head of the union of workers in the gas and exploration sector in Lebanon, Maroun Al-Khouli, said: "Solving this problem with Israel will establish a significant renaissance in Lebanon's investment in its oil resources in the maritime economic zone, especially as Lebanon is preparing



to begin drilling for oil and gas in blocks 4 and 9 in its territorial waters.”

He added: “This will also help large companies, including American companies, to enter the field of exploration in the second licensing cycle, which will be launched later.”



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Israel open to US-mediated talks with Lebanon on sea border  
Israel, Lebanon move to ease tensions after border skirmish

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## [US' Pompeo, Egypt FM urge calm in Libya amid Tripoli offensive](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

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Tue, 2019-05-28 17:32

WASHINGTON: The United States and Egypt, a key backer of Libyan militia leader Khalifa Haftar, on Tuesday called for calm as the strongman pressed ahead in his offensive on Tripoli.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo addressed the crisis in Libya during a phone call with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, the State Department said. The two discussed "the urgent need to achieve a political solution in Libya and prevent further escalation," State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said.

Haftar is pressing ahead against the internationally backed government in Tripoli in fighting that has left 510 dead and driven more than 75,000 people from their homes, according to World Health Organization figures.

Haftar on a visit last week to France rejected a cease-fire urged by President Emmanuel Macron.

In an interview with the Journal de Dimanche newspaper, Haftar said he would continue the operation until "private militias and extremist groups," who he alleged were gaining influence under Prime Minister Fayez Al-Sarraj laid down their weapons.



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Libya's Haftar says to fight until Tripoli 'militias' defeated  
Libya confirms it rescued 290 migrants in Mediterranean

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## US warns Syria, Russia against 'reckless escalation' as 21 civilians killed in air strikes

Author:

AFP

ID:

1559063844586006500

Tue, 2019-05-28 17:13

BEIRUT: At least 21 civilians were killed on Tuesday as Syria's regime intensified its bombardment of the last extremist stronghold in the country's northwest, a monitor said.

Nine children were among the 21 killed in government fire on several towns in Idlib province and the countryside of neighboring Aleppo, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

And the US continues to be alarmed by Syrian government and Russian air strikes in northern Syria, saying recent attacks have killed more than 200 civilians, the State Department said on Tuesday.

"Indiscriminate attacks on civilians and public infrastructure such as schools, markets and hospitals is a reckless escalation of the conflict and is unacceptable," said State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus.

Strikes on a busy street in the village of Kafr Halab, on the western edge of Aleppo province, killed at least nine civilians.

An AFP photographer said the bodies of the victims were torn apart and several stores lining the side of the road were destroyed. The street was crowded with people out and about before breaking the daytime fast observed by Muslims during the holy month of Ramadan. A hospital in the Idlib town of Kafranbel was also hit by artillery shells, said David Swanson, a spokesman for the UN humanitarian office.

"The facility is reportedly out of service due to severe structural damage," he told AFP.

The hospital's administrative director Majed Al-Akraa confirmed the attack. The hospital is completely out of service," he said.

"It was a strong attack. The generators and even my car caught fire," he told



AFP.

It follows two days of intensified regime bombardment on the region that killed a total of 31 civilians on Sunday and Monday, according to the Britain-based Observatory. Rescue volunteers and civilians were seen pulling dust-covered victims from the rubble of destroyed buildings in the wake of those strikes.

Idlib and parts of the neighboring provinces of Aleppo, Hama and Latakia are under the control of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, an extremist group led by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate.

The region is supposed to be protected from a massive government offensive by a September buffer zone deal, but the extremist bastion has come under increasing bombardment by the regime and its ally Russia since late April.

The Observatory says nearly 280 civilians have been killed in the spike in violence since then.

More than 200,000 civilians have already been displaced by the upsurge of violence, according to the United Nations.

The UN has warned an all-out offensive on the region would lead to a humanitarian catastrophe for its nearly three million residents.

At least 20 health facilities have been hit by the escalation – 19 of which remain out of service, the UN has said.

Also on Tuesday, France's top diplomat also said that the country had an "indication" that a chemical attack had been carried out in Syria's Idlib province this month, an attack alleged by Washington last week.

"We have an indication that chemical weapons were used in the Idlib region, but for now it has not been verified," Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told a parliamentary commission.

"We're being cautious because we consider that chemical weapons use has to be proven and be lethal, in which case we can react," he said.

President Emmanuel Macron has made use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government a "red line" that would trigger a military reprisal against the regime of President Bashar Assad.



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Satellite images show crops on fire in Syria rebel enclave  
Regime bombing kills 12 civilians in Syria's northwest

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## [Kushner in Morocco to build support for Mideast peace plan](#)

Tue, 2019-05-28 16:06

RABAT: President Donald Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner is in Morocco to seek King Mohammed VI's backing for economic elements of the Trump administration's still-secret peace plan for Israel and Palestine.

The Trump administration is stepping up efforts to build support for the plan, as the architects of the proposal began a Mideast tour this week aimed at winning over uneasy Arab nations.



A White House official said on Tuesday the trip “is part of our ongoing efforts to achieve peace between Israel and the Palestinians” but offered no specifics about the team’s agenda at its various stops.

## Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

The administration is keen to win support from members of the Arab League on whom the plan will rely heavily for both economic and political support.

Kushner, Trump’s special representative for international negotiations Jason Greenblatt and special US envoy for Iran, Brian Hook, will also travel to Jordan and Israel as part of the trip.

The Palestinians, who have cut off contact with the Trump administration and have rejected the peace plan, are urging fellow Arabs to steer clear of the Bahrain economic workshop to be held on June 25-26.

However, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar have all signaled they intend to participate.

Morocco and Jordan have yet to offer any public position on either the peace plan or the Bahrain meeting. Both have close ties with the Palestinian leadership.



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