

# Arab anger over 'theft of occupied Golan Heights'

Author:

Tue, 2019-03-26 02:13

JEDDAH: Arab states on Monday condemned US President Donald Trump's recognition of the occupied Golan Heights as Israeli territory.

The decision "does not change the area's status" as illegally occupied territory, Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit said.

Breaking decades of international consensus, Trump signed a proclamation at the White House on Monday recognizing Israeli sovereignty over the border area that Israel seized from Syria in 1967.

Syria said the decision was a blatant attack on its sovereignty.

"Trump does not have the right or the legal authority to legitimize the occupation," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

Opposition chief Nasr Al-Hariri said Trump's decision would "lead to more violence and instability, and it will have negative effects on efforts to engineer peace in the region."

Lebanon said the move "violates all the rules of international law" and "undermines any effort to reach a just peace."

"The Golan Heights are Syrian Arab land, no decision can change this, and no country can revisit history by transferring ownership of land from one country to another," the Foreign Ministry said.



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President Donald Trump officially recognizes Israeli sovereignty of Golan HeightsGCC 'regrets' Trump's call to recognize Israeli sovereignty over Golan Heights

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# US approves \$3.8 billion F-16 sale to Morocco

Author:

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Tue, 2019-03-26 00:47

WASHINGTON: The United States on Monday approved the sale of 25 F-16 fighter aircraft to Morocco for \$3.8 billion, the State Department announced.

Besides the new Block 70/72 F-16s, equipped with state of the art electronic systems and weaponry, Washington also approved the modernization of 23 F-16s already in the Moroccan air force fleet, for \$983 million.

The State Department said the sale would not affect the balance of forces in the region.

It can still be blocked by the US Congress, which has 30 days to raise any objections.

More than 4,500 of the Lockheed Martin-built F-16s have been delivered since 1978.

It is gradually being replaced by the stealth F-35 fighters but more than 3,000 of F-16s are still in use in 25 countries, thanks to constant upgrades.

The Moroccan military ordered 24 F-16s in 2008. It lost one aircraft in action in 2015 during Saudi-led air operations in Yemen.



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# Palestinian journalist wins appeal over Gaza graft report

Author:

Mon, 2019-03-25 23:38

GAZA CITY: A Palestinian journalist was acquitted on appeal over an investigative report about corruption in the Gaza Strip Monday, according to Amnesty International and a campaign group.

In a 2016 report for Al-Araby TV, Hajar Harb alleged that doctors were writing false medical reports to let people leave Gaza for treatment, one of the few reasons Israel allows Palestinians out of the blockaded strip run by Hamas.

In October that year, two doctors launched legal proceedings accusing her of defamation and "publishing false information," according to Amnesty International.

The 34-year-old had been sentenced to six months in prison and fined, but the appeals court overruled the decision, said Fathi Sabah, head of a group supporting Harb.

The appeals court in Gaza "acquitted journalist Hajjar Harb of all charges and closed her file," he said.

"This represents not just a victory for Hajjar but for freedom of the press," he added.

Amnesty said Harb had been questioned by police at least four times following her report, but welcomed the decision of the court.

"It is really good news that Hajjar Harb was acquitted today, she was standing a trial that should not have taken place to begin with," said Saleh Higazi, Amnesty's deputy director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"We hope that the Gaza authorities take this opportunity to signal that they are serious about freedom of expression and the press."

In 2018, the Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms recorded 77 violations of press freedom in the Palestinian Authority-run West Bank and 37 such cases in Gaza.

Hamas have controlled Gaza for more than a decade and have recently cracked down violently on street protests.



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Palestinian journalists want curbs on Israel media  
Palestinian journalists targeted by all sides

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## [Syria's Kurds hand three Russian orphans to Moscow](#)

Author:

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Mon, 2019-03-25 16:58

QAMISHLI: The Kurdish administration in northeast Syria said Monday it handed over three Russian orphans to a delegation from Moscow who will transfer them back home.

Kurdish foreign affairs official Abdel Karim Omar said the children, aged

five to seven, are being sent back at the request of Russia. He told AFP their parents had been affiliated with the Daesh group, although it was not immediately clear how or when they arrived in Syria.

A member of the Russian government delegation said the siblings are from the country's North Caucasus region. The majority-Muslim southern territory is home to most of the Russians that joined Daesh.

Nelly Kouskova said the children were orphaned nearly one year ago, without providing details.

Their aunt back in Russia had asked authorities to help bring them home, Kouskova told a press conference.

Since the death of their parents the children have been living in the Al-Hol camp, a Kurdish-run shelter designed to accommodate 20,000 people.

But due to the mass exodus of people fleeing the battle to oust Daesh from its final strip of territory – over which Kurdish-led forces claimed victory on Saturday – the numbers have swelled to 70,000.

More than 9,000 foreigners, including over 6,500 children, are being held in the overcrowded camp, the Kurdish administration said on Monday.

Syria's Kurds have repeatedly called for the repatriation of foreign Daesh suspects and their relatives.

But the home countries of suspected Daesh members are reluctant to take them back, due to potential security risks and the likely public backlash.

Russia, however, can be seen as a pioneer in systematically returning children of suspected jihadists home.

Last month, 27 children aged four to 13 were flown from Iraq to the Moscow region. That followed the repatriation from Iraq of 30 children in late December.

Russian President Vladimir Putin in late 2017 called the drive to return the children "a very honourable and correct deed" and promised to help.

Some other foreign governments have also taken steps to bring the children of militants home.

France has repatriated five orphaned children of French militants' from camps in northeast Syria, the government said on March 15, in the first such transfer.

Belgium has said it will help the repatriation of children younger than 10, as long as the link with one Belgian parent is proven.





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## [Erdogan: Istanbul's Hagia Sophia could be turned into mosque](#)

Author:

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1553535602988017400

Mon, 2019-03-25 14:45

ANKARA: Istanbul's Hagia Sophia – a Byzantine-era cathedral that now serves as a museum – could be reconverted into a mosque, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said.

Erdogan made the comments during a television interview late on Sunday ahead of Turkey's March 31 local elections.

The former Byzantine cathedral had previously been converted into a mosque after the Ottoman conquest of the city, then-known as Constantinople, in 1453. Turkey's secular founder turned the structure into a museum in 1935

that attracts millions of tourists each year.

There have however, been increasing calls for the government to convert the symbolic structure back into a mosque, especially following reports that the gunman who killed Muslim worshippers in New Zealand left a manifesto saying the Hagia Sophia would be “free of minarets.”

Erdogan himself recited prayers inside the Hagia Sophia last year.

The suggestion that Hagia Sophia could be turned into a mosque drew ire in Greece.

“It is not only a great temple of Christendom – the largest for many centuries – it also belongs to humanity. It has been recognized by UNESCO as part of our global cultural heritage,” Greek Foreign Minister George Katrougalos said. “So any questioning of this status is not just an insult to the sentiments of Christians, it is an insult to the international community and international law.”

“We want to hope that the correct statements of March 16 by the Turkish leadership will be valid and there will be no change of this status,” he added, in reference to a speech by Erdogan when he ruled out its conversion into a mosque.



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