

Jordan to open consulate in Western Sahara amid dispute

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1605818512183182400

Thu, 2020-11-19 20:29

RABAT: Jordan will open a consulate in Western Sahara, Morocco said on Thursday, in an apparent show of support for Rabat after the disputed territory's Polisario independence movement said it was returning to an armed struggle.

The consulate will be in Laayoune, the largest city in Western Sahara, and the decision to open it came after a phone call between King Mohammed VI and King Abdullah II.

Arab Gulf monarchies have expressed support for Morocco after its army intervened on Friday in a UN-monitored area to open a road that was blocked by Polisario supporters and armed fighters for three weeks.

The Jordanian monarch welcomed "the reopening of the passage to the safe movement of people and goods between the Kingdom of Morocco and Sub-Saharan Africa," the Royal palace said in a statement. Following the entry of the Moroccan army into the UN-monitored buffer strip, the Polisario independence front said it has quit the UN-brokered cease-fire and declared war.

Algeria, which backs the Polisario, was the only Arab state that has condemned Morocco's actions in the Western Sahara passage.

The Polisario front, which seeks independence for the territory, announced it has quit the UN-brokered cease-fire and declared war against Morocco.

The UAE and some 16 African states have already opened consulates in the disputed territory as Rabat reaps more support for its position over the Western Sahara conflict since it joined the African Union in 2017.

Morocco has held the vast desert region since Spain quit in 1975 and regards it as an integral part of its own land.

Rabat has said the most it can offer as a political solution to the dispute is autonomy. The Polisario and its ally Algeria reject this and say they want a referendum, with independence for Western Sahara as one of the options.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Jordan](#)

[Morocco](#)

[Consulate](#)

[Western Sahara](#)

Jordan, Bahrain and UAE discuss peace for Palestinians in Abu Dhabi summit
Jordanian king travels to Abu Dhabi for summit with crown prince, Bahrain King

[US general: Iraq government wants continuing US presence](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1605816614883082000

Thu, 2020-11-19 19:32

WASHINGTON: The US Middle East commander said Thursday that troops in Iraq will be cut to 2,500 on President Donald Trump's order, but that Baghdad

wants a continued US presence to fight the Daesh group. Central Command Commander General Kenneth McKenzie told a conference that the continuing US presence has successfully limited the activities of Iran and Daesh. Iran has recently curtailed attacks, McKenzie said, "based on the hope that we would be asked to leave Iraq through the government of Iraq's political processes." However, he said, "the government of Iraq has clearly indicated it wants to maintain its partnership with the United States and coalition forces as we continue to finish the fight against Daesh." Speaking to an online conference held by the National Council on US-Arab Relations, McKenzie cited estimates that Daesh still has a body of 10,000 supporters in the Iraq-Syria region and remains a real threat. "The progress of the Iraqi Security Forces has allowed has allowed the United States to reduce force posture in Iraq," he said. But US and coalition forces have to be there to help prevent Islamic State from reconstituting as a cohesive group able to plot major attacks, he said. "When you're running for your life up and down the Euphrates River Valley, listening to the noise of an armed MQ-9 drone overhead, it's hard to think about conducting attack planning against Detroit." McKenzie said the US presence and measured retaliations had also successfully deterred Iran from persisting in attacks on Gulf shipping, and limited its proxy attacks in Iraq. "Today I believe Iran has been largely deterred because the regime now understands we possess both the capability and the will to respond," he said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iraq](#)

[US](#)

Open for business: Saudi-Iraqi border crossing at Arar restored after 30 years
Pentagon to cut troop levels to 2,500 in Iraq, Afghanistan

[Meet Gaza's first woman taxi driver](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-11-19 01:24

GAZA: Palestinian mother-of-five Nayla Abu Jubbah launched a small revolution this week by becoming the first female taxi driver in the deeply conservative Gaza Strip.

In the impoverished Palestinian territory, women have the same legal rights as men to drive a vehicle, but in practice the trade of taxi driver has been exclusively male – until now.

“One day I was talking with a friend who works as a hairdresser and I said to her: ‘What would you say if we started a taxi service for women?’ She said it was a crazy idea,” the 39-year-old told AFP.

The Israeli-blockaded territory was suffering 50 percent unemployment even before the COVID-19 pandemic.

After drinking a steaming cup of tea in her home, the social work graduate in a headscarf puts on a face mask and marches to her car parked outside.

After slotting her smartphone into its holder and giving a toot on the horn for show, she starts the engine and is off on the roads of Gaza, where the Islamist Hamas movement has ruled for more than 13 years.

Abu Jubbah does not cruise the streets for fares, taking only advance bookings.

“I leave my home and I will pick up my clients, to bring them for example from the hairdressing salon to a wedding,” she says.

She bought the vehicle with her inheritance when her father died.

“I said to myself one day that I needed to take advantage of the car, to put it to work,” she said. “Hence the project of a taxi service entirely for women, to put them at ease.”

Today she is driving through the streets of Gaza City to pick up 27-year-old Aya Saleem for a shopping trip.

“We live in a conservative society. So when I saw that there was a taxi company especially for women ... I felt a kind of freedom,” says Saleem.

She wears a long brown tunic, beige headscarf and a pale blue mask and carries a stylish bag.

“When I’m with a woman, I feel comfortable ... I feel freer and then we can talk,” she says, adding that women’s taxi services are in line with sharia, the Islamic code which Hamas promotes in the Gaza Strip.

Saleem is delighted with the idea and hopes to see more female taxi drivers on Gaza’s roads soon.

Abu Jubbah says she wants to expand her business.

“A woman called me recently to tell me that she wanted to work as a taxi driver by my side,” she said.

“I told her that we would talk again but I already have the feeling that the project will gain momentum.”



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Gaza](#)

[Palestinian](#)

[Taxi driver](#)

‘Made-in-Gaza’ device fights coronavirus spread Gazans left stranded abroad by Israeli-Palestinian standoff

Crime boss threatens Turkey's opposition leader

Author:

Wed, 2020-11-18 23:16

ANKARA: Turkey's notorious mafia boss Alaattin Cakici, who was recently released from jail under an amnesty law pushed through by the government and its coalition partner MHP, has publicly threatened the country's opposition leader, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, telling him to "watch his step."

The threat has yet to be condemned by any government figure, while opposition counterparts, including Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, demand an end to the silence surrounding threats and insults.

"To threaten the head of the Republican People's Party (CHP) is to threaten millions, to threaten the republic. Everybody should know their limits," Ozgur Ozel, CHP group deputy chair, tweeted.

In June, a deputy from the MHP threw a punch at Ozel during a parliamentary session as tensions ran high over the removal of an opposition MP's parliamentary status.

Opposition district mayors and CHP Istanbul Provincial Chair Canan Kaftancioglu released a joint press statement on Nov. 18, saying: "We aren't afraid of you or of your shadow. We will follow this case which will show the sincerity of the government."

Cakici was convicted of instigating the killing of his ex-wife – the daughter of another well-known Turkish criminal – in 1995. He is politically affiliated with the nationalistic MHP.

On Tuesday, Cakici told Kilicdaroglu: "You and your party's executives are saying that there is no democracy in Turkey and talking against the president. If there had been a dictatorial regime in our country, you would have all been impaled."

The threat follows Kilicdaroglu's criticism of the government on Nov. 17 over its amnesty law.

"Will you stop releasing mafia leaders, drug traffickers and jailing thought criminals?" the opposition leader asked during his parliamentary speech.

Journalists and political prisoners were excluded from the controversial amnesty law adopted in April.

CHP lawmaker Alpay Antmen said the mafia boss' challenge to the head of the main opposition party shows "the rule of law has been destroyed in Turkey."

Antmen told Arab News: "Cakici doesn't proceed by himself; he gets the support from higher levels; he has some partners in crime who encourage him. He is only the spokesperson for a widespread gang."

More than 36,000 people have been investigated in the past year for "insulting" President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, according to official figures.

"I am wondering whether those who arrest people just because they criticized Erdogan will do the same for that mafia boss? Those who threatened Kilicdaroglu also threatened millions of the party's supporters," Antmen said.

Meanwhile, a court ruling in the southeastern province of Diyarbakir added to Turkey's already weak record on accountability.

A court acquitted a suspected police officer over the killing of Kemal Kurkut, a 23-year-old Kurdish man who was trying to attend Newroz celebrations in 2017.

Kurkut, who was shot by a police officer, was suspected of being a suicide bomber and carrying explosives. However, he was not wearing a shirt at the time.

Authorities opened a criminal complaint against 72 other police officers in the case, which remains unresolved after three years. However, a local journalist who recorded the moment of the killing faces up to 20 years in jail for "making terrorist propaganda."

Sidar Avsar, a lawyer at the Diyarbakir Bar Association who has followed the case, said the latest ruling showed excessive force against civilians could be carried out with impunity.

He warned that this case is unlikely to be the last.

"Similar cases involving citizens in Turkey are undermining public trust in the security forces and the state in general. It weakens people's perception of justice in the country," he said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Turkey](#)

[Alaattin Cakici](#)

[Kemal Kilicdaroglu](#)

Turkey says additional coronavirus measures will take effect from Nov. 20
Turkey to send soldiers for Karabakh 'peacekeeping center'

[Restoration of ties with Israel sparks anger in Palestine](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-11-18 23:07

GAZA CITY: The Palestinian Authority (PA) announced on Tuesday that it will restore coordination with Israel – a move that has been met with widespread

factional rejection in the country, with the PA accused of “undermining” internal reconciliation efforts.

Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas announced a halt to coordination with Israel – including security cooperation – in May, in response to Israeli plans to annex 30 percent of the West Bank.

Hussein Al-Sheikh, the PA’s civil affairs minister, announced late Tuesday on Twitter that the PA had decided to restore relations with Israel to “where they were before May 19, after confirming that Israel would abide by signed agreements.”

Al-Sheikh told Palestine’s official TV network that the PA recently sent an official letter to the Israelis inquiring about their commitment to the agreements signed with the Palestine Liberation Organization. On Tuesday, it received a written response declaring Israel’s commitment to those agreements.

Al-Sheikh said: “The recognition of the signed agreements means that (US President Donald Trump’s) ‘Deal of the Century’ is no longer on the table.” He described this as “a great victory and the fruit of the steadfastness of the Palestinians and their leadership.”

However, observers have questioned the timing of the PA’s unexpected announcement, which coincides with talks between Fatah and Hamas in Cairo as Palestine’s two main political factions attempt to negotiate a path forward. Hamas issued a statement describing the PA’s decision as “a stab in the back” for this process.

A political analyst close to Hamas, Ibrahim Al-Madhoun, told Arab News the PA’s announcement of the resumption of its relationship with Israel was expected, but that the way it was announced was “disregarding the Palestinian people.”

“After this decision, the path of reconciliation is at stake,” he said.

Others noted that the Israeli response to the PA was signed by the “coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories” Kamil Abu Rukun rather than Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Palestinian MP Hassan Khreisheh was one of those who played down the importance of the Israeli message, saying it fails to formalize any political commitment. He described the PA’s decision as part of “a struggle of wings and currents within the PA and Fatah to succeed President Abbas.”

Gal Berger, an analyst for Palestinian affairs at the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation, expressed similar sentiments in an article about the decision. “The circle surrounding Abbas, including Hussein Al-Sheikh and (General Intelligence chief) Majed Faraj, did not like the level of progress in the reconciliation efforts,” he wrote, explaining that they oppose the promotion of Fatah Central Committee Member Jibril Rajoub as a possible successor to Abbas.

He also suggested that the announcement coinciding with the Hamas-Fatah talks in Cairo was not “just a coincidence.”

“One of them could have wanted to embarrass Rajoub, who rushed towards reconciliation with Hamas at a time when Abbas and his close circle had another plan,” Berger said. “Reconciliation with Hamas was not an option for Abbas, but rather a message to Israel and the international community, and the opportunity came to retreat after (Joe) Biden’s victory (in the US presidential election).”

US-Palestinian relations had collapsed under Trump’s administration, but there are hopes the situation will improve once Biden takes office.

Israeli journalist Daniel Serotti suggested the PA is trying to “improve its image” and is sending “a message to the Biden administration that the Palestinian boycott of America will not continue during his term.”

Serotti also noted that a major driver behind the PA’s decision is the fact that it has stopped accepting the transfer of taxes Israel had collected on its behalf since May, meaning a deficit of hundreds of millions of shekels. The PA had been forced to cut civil servants’ salaries just at the time that the COVID-19 pandemic’s devastating effects on the Palestinian economy were becoming apparent.

Ismat Mansour, a writer specializing in Israeli affairs, told Arab News that Biden’s statements about a “two-state solution” to the Israel-Palestine issue had given the PA “an appropriate way out to receive tax revenues from Israel.”

That, at least, was news that some Palestinians celebrated, with many civil servants taking to social media to express their joy that some relief of their financial hardship may be in sight.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Israel](#)

[Palestine](#)

[Palestinian Authority](#)

[Mahmoud Abbas](#)

Palestinian Authority to resume coordination with Israel Palestine's Mahmoud Abbas asks UN for international peace conference next year