

# Israel to withhold \$43 million of Palestinian tax funds

Author:

Mon, 2019-12-30 00:03

JERUSALEM: The Israeli Security Cabinet on Sunday voted to withhold \$43 million of tax funds from the Palestinians, saying the money has been used to promote violence, Israeli media reported.

The sum represents funds that Israel says the Palestinians have used to pay the families of Palestinians who have been jailed or killed as a result of attacking Israel, according to various reports.

Israel says the so-called Martyrs' Fund rewards violence. The Palestinians say the payments are needed to help vulnerable families who have been affected by violence and Israeli occupation.

Under past agreements, Israel collects customs and other taxes on behalf of the Palestinians and transfers the money to the Palestinian Authority. These monthly transfers, about \$170 million, are a key source of funding for the budget of the authority, which administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Israel last year passed a law deducting parts of these transfers and Sunday's decision was a continuation of that policy.

In February, after Israel withheld \$140 million, the Palestinians said they would reject all transfers to protest the Israeli policy. But six months later, with the Palestinian Authority in a deep financial crisis, the sides worked out a deal to resume most of the transfers.

Palestinian official Hanan Ashrawi denounced the latest Israeli move, calling it a "blatant act of theft and political extortion."

"This is a clear violation of Palestinian rights and signed agreements as well as a criminal act of collective punishment exacted for cynical domestic Israeli political reasons," she said.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office declined comment.



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## [Iraq protesters lock down oil field](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-12-30 00:05

NASIRIYAH: Iraqi anti-government protesters blockaded an oil field and rallied in southern cities on Sunday while political factions remained paralyzed in their attempts to form a new government. Several hundred people demanding jobs shut off access to the Nassiriya field, 300 km south of Baghdad, which produces 82,000 barrels of oil per day, executives said. The two-day-old blockade is the first to disrupt operations in OPEC's second largest producer since the start of the popular revolt set to enter its

fourth month in early January.

The youth-led protests demand the ouster of the entire political class that has run the country in the aftermath of the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein.

Demonstrators have vented their fury at what they consider inept politicians who have mismanaged the economy, enriched themselves and are beholden to powerful neighbor Iran.

Sit-in protests have shut down state offices and schools across the Shiite-majority south for weeks, and demonstrators again declared a "general strike" in Diwaniya on Sunday, the first day of the working week.

Mass rallies and picket lines also paralyzed Kout, Al-Hilla, Amara and the city of Najaf, AFP correspondents said.

The protests have continued despite being met with batons, tear gas and, at times, live rounds in violence that has claimed nearly 460 lives and left some 25,000 people wounded.

The activists scored a partial success in November with the resignation of prime minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, who however remains in charge in a caretaker role.

Pro-Iranian and other political factions have since wrangled over finding a successor – so far without success.

And although Parliament has just voted for an electoral reform package, there has been no indication that the early polls many citizens are calling for will be held anytime soon.

Heightening the turmoil, President Barham Saleh last week threatened to resign rather than put forward the name of a pro-Iran candidate to form the next government.

## **HIGHLIGHT**

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Nassiriya student demonstrator Osama Ali praised the head of state, saying he had "foiled the attempts by parties and militiamen to kill off the revolution to protect their own interests."

"This gives us hope to continue our peaceful movement until we obtain all our demands," he told AFP.

Those demands include an end to a system that doles out state jobs according to ethnicity and religion, and a stop to the endemic corruption estimated to have swallowed up twice Iraq's GDP in 16 years.

The protesters also want justice for those activists who have been murdered, many shot dead in the streets or outside their homes.

Dozens have also reported being abducted to rural areas near Baghdad for several hours or days before being abandoned by the roadside.

The UN has accused "militias" of waging a sweeping campaign of threats, kidnappings and murders of demonstrators. The state-run Human Rights Commission says it has still not heard from 56 missing activists.



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Iraqi artists pay tribute to dead protesters with sculpturesUS strikes Kataib Hezbollah in Iraq and Syria after contractor killed

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## [Iraqi artists pay tribute to dead protesters with sculptures](#)

Sun, 2019-12-29 23:57

BAGHDAD: The sculptures carved by seven art trainees were lined up outside a makeshift workshop in Baghdad's Tahrir Square. With them were posters depicting protesters who have been killed in anti-government demonstrations in the past three months.

One sculpture showed a protester with a tear gas canister in his eye. Another showed a volunteer tuk tuk driver next to his three-wheeled vehicle who was killed while evacuating wounded protesters during clashes. A third illustrated a protester's hand flashing the victory sign and colored by the Iraqi flag.

For Iraqi artist Mahdi Qarnous, 53, the exhibition that was recently inaugurated in Baghdad's central Tahrir Square – the epicenter of Iraq's anti-government protest movement – is a personal contribution to the movement. It is aimed at immortalizing fellow protesters killed and kidnapped

during the demonstrations that have engulfed Iraq since Oct. 1. It is also a way, he says, to allow young, talented Iraqis to channel their talents away from violence.

Iraq has been roiled by protests that have left at least 490 people dead, the vast majority of them demonstrators killed by security forces firing tear gas and live ammunition. The mass uprisings prompted the resignation of former Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi late last month.

Qarnous said he recruited seven uneducated and unemployed young protesters from Tahrir Square, put them through an intensive six-week course that he personally funded and after three weeks they were able to start their own art projects.

We see this activity as part of the ongoing protests and a memorial monument for our martyrs and our abducted fellow protesters.

### **Mahdi Qarnous, Iraqi artist**

“We see this activity as part of the ongoing protests and a memorial monument for our martyrs and our abducted fellow protesters,” he said.

Tahrir Square has emerged as a focal point of the protests, with protesters camped out in tents. Dozens of people took part in the simple opening of the sculpture exhibition on a recent day. None of the art trainees who were presenting their work attended the event, however, and their names were withheld due to security concerns.

“The current regime produced a generation that is poor in producing and cherishing arts. ... You see here in this exhibition that our people have potential but lack the path,” said Qarnous.

Murtada Muthanna, 23, an artist and activist, said the exhibition is a message to the world.

“It says we are a people with inspirations for life not death. Our revolution is peaceful and we are seeking reform not destruction,” he said.



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## [Turkey-backed Syrian rebels being sent to join Libya fighting](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-12-28 23:47

ANKARA: Turkey-backed Syrian rebels will be dispatched to support Libya's government in its fight against veteran commander Khalifa Haftar, according to press reports.

The fighters have close ties to Turkey and will mainly be those who have fought alongside it in Syria.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said earlier this week that Parliament would vote in early January on a motion to send troops to Libya.

The parliamentary vote is a continuation of Ankara's recent commitments to

support the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) through a security and military cooperation deal, and an agreement to delimit maritime borders.

Sultan Murad Division, Suqour Al-Sham Brigades and Faylaq Al-Sham are reported to be among the armed groups destined for Libya, but the Syrian Interim Government has denied any possibility of sending troops who have fought government forces during the civil war.

But deploying fighters from such groups can be done immediately, without the need for a parliamentary green light.

The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Turkey-backed Syrian rebels had opened recruitment centers in Aleppo for dispatching young men to western Libya with a monthly salary of up to \$2,000, while Russian media said Turkey had already sent 7,000 fighters to the north African nation.

“If the war’s impact was nightmarish before, it’ll be even worse now if this is confirmed,” tweeted Emadeddin Badi, a Libya analyst with the Middle East Institute. “TFSA/Turkmen Syrian with Sultan Murad have been responsible for some horrendous war crimes against Kurds in Northern Syria (as part of Turkey’s offensive). Their deployment in Libya might halt Haftar’s offensive; but at what price? This was an entirely avoidable outcome.”

## **FASTFACTS**

- There are several risks for a Turkish presence in the region, and not only diplomatic ones.
- It is unclear how the process of moving Turkey’s Syria assets to Libya will develop in the coming days ahead of a Jan. 8 meeting between Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

There are several risks for a Turkish presence in the region, and not only diplomatic ones. Eastern Libyan forces last week intercepted a Turkish ship bound for the western Libyan port of Misrata.

Sinan Ulgen, a former Turkish diplomat who chairs the Istanbul-based Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies, said Turkey was moving to limit potential Turkish casualties.

“The government has declared that the objective of Turkish support will be in an advisory capacity and therefore Turkey does not want to have its troops to be involved directly in the fighting,” he told Arab News. “But given the situation on the ground in Libya, the Tripoli government is under pressure and therefore there is a need for more boots on the ground.

Ankara was calculating that support would be available for Tripoli in the form of some foreign fighters and Turkish personnel as advisers or deployed for targeted special operations, Ulgen added.

“The Turkish move will certainly lead to a new reprisal by the countries supporting Haftar, particularly Egypt. There is a risk that, in reaction to Turkey’s more overt military engagement, other countries will also increase their military support to the Haftar side, and it might be an escalation of the conflict.”

It is unclear how the process of moving Turkey’s Syria assets to Libya will develop in the coming days ahead of a Jan. 8 meeting between Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Russia is against any interference in Libya’s internal affairs by an outsider, the Russian president’s press secretary told reporters earlier this week, although it welcomed attempts to resolve the crisis there.

Ben Fishman, a senior fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said it would be a huge mistake to counter one mercenary force with another.

“If Turkey wants to assist the GNA it should do so first with diplomacy and, if necessary, with a contingent of Turkish forces that could serve as a deterrent,” he told Arab News.



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## [Libya's state oil firm may evacuate Zawiya refinery due to fighting nearby](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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TRIPOLI: Libyan state oil firm NOC is considering the closure of its western Zawiya port and evacuating staff from the refinery located there due to clashes nearby, a statement said on Saturday.

NOC might also shut down the El-Sharara oilfield, whose crude is exported via Zawiya port, the statement said.

Clashes between armed groups have broken out in recent days around Zawiya, during which a missile almost hit the oil complex. Forces allied to Libya's internationally recognized government on Friday accused eastern forces loyal to Khalifa Haftar of having tried to strike the oil port complex.

Haftar's forces have been trying to take the capital Tripoli, 40 km east of Zawiya, in a campaign since April.

Zawiya is Libya's biggest functioning refinery, serving the capital Tripoli located some 40km east as well as regions in the west and south of the country. Two workers at Zawiya port said the refinery was working on Saturday.

On Thursday an air strike blamed by local officials on Haftar's forces hit a pharmacy in Zawiya town, killing two people.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Thursday he would send troops to Libya at the request of Tripoli as soon as next month, putting the North African country's conflict at the center of wider regional frictions.



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