

US deploys THAAD missile defense in Israel for exercise

Author:

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JERUSALEM: The United States has deployed its advanced THAAD missile defense system temporarily to Israel for a joint military exercise, the first of its kind, officials said Monday.

The two countries confirmed the deployment, with Israel's military stressing it was "not related to any specific current event."

It is the first such exercise in Israel, although the two allies hold regular joint war games. No dates have been announced for the maneuvers.

Israel has its own missile defense system, but the exercise aims in part to examine how to incorporate THAAD so that "we are ready for any challenges in the future," military spokesman Jonathan Conricus said.

It will also allow the US military to practice the rapid deployment of THAAD across the globe, officials said.

"We see this as an opportunity to practice the integration of advanced American air defense systems into the Israeli air force air defense array," Conricus told journalists.

"The THAAD system is considered to be one of the most advanced of its kind in the world," the Israeli spokesman said.

The exercise with THAAD, or Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, involves more than 200 US military personnel and its components include radars and launching systems, Conricus said.

Components and personnel have come from the United States and Italy, Conricus said.

The THAAD will be deployed in southern Israel, but officials declined to say specifically where and for how long.

Israel's enemies in the region include Iran and Lebanon's Tehran-backed Hezbollah, both of which are supporting President Bashar Assad in neighboring Syria.

THAAD is capable of destroying short, medium and intermediate-range missiles. In 2017, the US government approved its sale to Saudi Arabia, providing Riyadh with state-of-the-art capabilities that could thwart an Iranian rocket attack.

It had already been supplied to Saudi Arabia's neighbors Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

Its deployment by the US military in South Korea as defense against North Korean drew protests from Beijing, which feared its sensors would be capable of penetrating Chinese air space and upset the balance of power.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu welcomed the joint exercise, calling it "additional testimony to the commitment of the US to the security of Israel."



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Israel slammed for banning top cleric from holy site
Palestinians seek prosecution of Israeli leaders for Gaza 'war crimes'

[Turkish court accepts indictment against 16 over Gezi protests -lawyer](#)

Author:
Reuters
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ISTANBUL: A Turkish court accepted an indictment seeking life sentences against businessman and rights activist Osman Kavala and 15 others over the 2013 Gezi protests, Kavala's lawyer said on Monday. Hundreds of thousands of people marched in Istanbul in 2013 to protest against a plan to build a replica of an Ottoman barracks on Gezi park in the city center. The protests turned into nationwide demonstrations against the government of then-prime minister Tayyip Erdogan. Authorities recently launched a new investigation into the protests. The indictment, seen by Reuters, seeks life sentences against Kavala, other rights activists and opposition figures involved in the protests. It said the defendants "at best wanted to force the government to resign or call early elections" and were making efforts "to prepare the grounds for a

civil war or coup” if that did not happen.

Opposition figures have said the renewed investigations are designed to polarize public opinion and rally support for Erdogan ahead of local elections at the end of March.

The Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB), of which some defendants are members, said the indictment was part of efforts “to defame and sully the honorable history of Gezi.”

“We see the bad intentions despite all its dirtiness and we reject it with all our clarity,” TMMOB said in a statement published earlier on Monday.

In November, police detained more than a dozen people as part of the investigation into the Gezi protests. Billionaire philanthropist George Soros’s Open Society Foundation said it had become a target of the investigation and would cease operations in Turkey.



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[Fleeing Daesh fighters using civilians as human shields forced to surrender in Baghouz](#)

Mon, 2019-03-04 16:45

BEIRUT: Around 150 Daesh fighters have surrendered to US-backed forces in

Baghouz, the group's last enclave in eastern Syria, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitoring group said on Monday.

The Daesh fighters were among 400 people to leave the area on Monday after the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces staged an assault in recent days, the Observatory said.

US-backed Syrian fighters said they were forced to slow their advance because the extremists were using civilians as human shields.

But despite this hindrance, spokesman for the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces Mustafa Bali tweeted that the battle to retake Baghouz, the last territory in Syria held by the Islamic State group, was "going to be over soon."

An SDF spokeswoman said the offensive had slowed down but pressure is being kept up away from the corridor to prevent fighters from infiltrating or sabotaging the area. She spoke on condition of anonymity because she was not authorized to speak to the press.

The US-backed forces resumed their offensive on Baghouz last Friday, after a two-week pause to allow for the evacuation of civilians.

Retaking the sliver of land would be a milestone in the devastating four-year campaign to end Daesh's self-proclaimed "caliphate" that once straddled a vast territory across both Syria and Iraq.

"We're slowing down the offensive" due to a small number of civilians held as human shields, Bali said. The previous night, an SDF statement said the Kurdish-led forces would continue their military campaign "to take control of the last ISIS-held pocket in Baghouz and to liberate the remaining civilians who are being used as human shields," using an alternative acronym for the extremist group.

"In order not to harm them, we are advancing slowly but we assert that the battle of Baghouz will end in a short period of time," it said.



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Germany to strip Daesh fighters of citizenship Daesh militants put up fierce resistance to defend last pocket

[Israel slammed for banning top cleric from holy site](#)

Author:

Sun, 2019-03-03 22:23

AMMAN: Jordan's waqf minister has slammed the Israeli government for barring a top cleric from entering Al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third-holiest site, for 40 days.

Jordanian Minister of Waqf Abdel Naser Abu Basel described the temporary ban on Sheikh Abdel Hafiz Salhab, head of the Jerusalem Waqf Council, as "unacceptable."

The Israelis have also ordered his deputy, Najeh Bkeirat, to stay away from Al-Aqsa Mosque for four months.

Other members of the newly established waqf council are to be quizzed too, with Israeli security wanting to question Mahdi Abdul Hadi, the head of the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA), and Hatem Abdel Qader, the former Palestinian legislature and senior Fatah activist.

In a strongly worded statement on the Israeli action, Basel said: "Restricting the head of the waqf who holds diplomatic status, and others, is aimed at ruining the work of the Jerusalem waqf.

"It is aimed at crippling the work of the Jerusalem waqf, terrorizing members of the waqf council which was established recently by the Jordanian Cabinet, and is a violation of the Hashemite custodianship of the Islamic and Christian holy places."

The Jordanian minister insisted that the Bab Al-Rahmeh prayer area will stay open to Muslim worshippers. A senior Jordanian Foreign Ministry official told Arab News that Salhab carried a diplomatic passport but did not have diplomatic status.

Khaleel Assali, a newly appointed member in the waqf council, said that during its occupation Israel had never acted in such a way against members of the Jordanian waqf. He told Arab News: "It is a clear escalation by Israel aimed at frightening the council."

Assali said the waqf council had taken decisions to repair the prayer hall at Bab Al-Rahmeh but denied it had received any order to close it. "We open it and close it according to our decisions. At present there is a lot of water and we want to repair the site before opening it for regular prayers."

Anis F. Kassim, editor of the Palestine Yearbook of International Law, told Arab News that holding a diplomatic passport did not make its holder part of the Jordanian diplomatic mission. "Sure, the restriction is a kind of a punishment, but it doesn't reach the level of a diplomatic crisis," he said.

"Normally host countries have the right to restrict the movement of diplomats accredited to it and in some cases can deport them by considering them persona non grata," Kassim added. He noted, however, that Salhab's case was different to most.

During a weekly Cabinet meeting on Sunday in Ramallah, Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah referred to the daily challenges being faced in Jerusalem. "Palestinians are standing up to the Israeli attempts to deny Jerusalem's Arab and Islamic character, trying to empty it of its original inhabitants and its leaders, to isolate the city and to close Bab Al-Rahmeh."

Ofer Zalberg, International Crisis Group's senior Middle East and North Africa analyst, called Israel's restraining orders on the waqf council "unprecedented." Zalberg said that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appeared to be trying to deflect accusations "about refraining from ordering

the police to physically close the building.”



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On Jerusalem's edge, a 'nowhere land' for Palestinians
Israeli police arrest 19 Palestinians at Jerusalem holy site

[Egypt approves new anti-terror laws](#)

Author:

Sun, 2019-03-03 22:06

CAIRO: The Egyptian government has approved tough new laws to fight terrorism in the wake of recent deadly attacks in the country.

One of the latest key changes to the legislation will see a tightening up of regulations surrounding the rental of property.

Under current rules, anyone leasing furnished real estate in Egypt does not have to be officially registered as living there. However, in the future property owners will be required to inform police of the identities of tenants, even for short-term rental periods, and will face criminal penalties for failure to do so.

Dr. Mohammed Khalifa, a member of the legislative committee of the Egyptian Council of Representatives, told Arab News that terrorists often took advantage of the old regulations to rent furnished apartments and stay under the radar of the authorities.

"The owner of a property will now have to notify the police department in the form of a copy of the contract between the two sides, so that Egyptian security will have sufficient information about the citizens who rent the furnished apartments, even if only for short periods," said Khalifa.

He said the amendment to the law was designed not to inconvenience the owners of rented apartments but to encourage them to interact with the police.

Other alterations to the government's anti-terror legislation include giving the Egyptian Public Prosecution Office powers to temporarily close any premises where weapons have been manufactured or designed for use in terrorist crimes.

In addition, the Egyptian Parliament's proposals and complaints committee has approved a law blocking organizations listed as terrorist groups from exercising their political rights.

MP Kamal Amer, head of the country's National Defense and Security Committee in the House of Representatives, said that the government was constantly reviewing and amending laws to combat terrorism and confiscate the funds of armed organizations.

He stressed that Egypt had made significant strides in its war on terror through its legislative and security efforts. At the same time, it was working hard to tackle the root causes of extremism.

In a recent speech at the first Middle East and North Africa Regional Conference titled "Strengthening International Cooperation in the Face of the Growing Threat of Terrorist Financing and Money Laundering Operations," Egyptian Attorney General Nabil Sadiq said that his country had been focused on fighting terrorism since the beginning of the last century.

Sadiq said its strategy was based on information technology to track and intercept the financing of terrorist groups, which rely on funding from organized crime.



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