

# Tunisia, Russia call for Arab League to readmit Syria

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TUNIS: Syria's "natural place" is within the Arab League, Tunisia's foreign minister said Saturday, ahead of the organization's annual summit in Tunis in March.

"Syria is an Arab state, and its natural place is within the Arab League," Khemaies Jhinaoui said during a news conference with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, who is on a tour of North African countries.

The Arab League suspended Syria's membership in November 2011 as the death toll in the country's civil war mounted.

"The question of Syria returning to the Arab League does not depend on Tunisia but on the Arab League," Jhinaoui said.

"The foreign ministers (of member states) will decide on this subject," he added. "What interests us is Syria's stability and security."

Persistent divisions between the Arab League's member states have worked against Syria's readmission.

Russia's intervention in Syria's war since 2015 in favor of President Bashar Assad has turned the tide of the conflict in the regime's favor.

The United Arab Emirates reopened its embassy in Damascus in December, the same month Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir made the first visit of any Arab leader to the Syrian capital since the start of the war.

But Qatar earlier this month rejected normalizing ties with Assad.

Lavrov backed overtures to readmit Syria.

"As we have discussed in Algeria and Morocco over the past few days, we would like Tunis to also support Syria's return to the Arab family, the Arab League," he said in Tunis.

Lavrov, who has also visited Morocco on his tour, said that Tunisia and Russia agreed to ramp up "anti-terror cooperation."

In reference to Franco-Italian differences on Libya, he said: "We must harmonize the efforts of outside mediators seeking a settlement to the Libyan conflict.

"This must be done under the sponsorship of the United Nations and taking into account the points of view of neighbors such as Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt."

Russia's foreign minister, winding up his North Africa visit, also met Tunisia's president and prime minister on Saturday.



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Arab states snub Syria over summit Iraq says it supports Syria's return to Arab League

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## [Protesters storm Turkish base in north Iraq, teenager killed](#)

Author:

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Sat, 2019-01-26 10:33

ERBIL/SULAYMANIYAH, Iraq: Angry protesters stormed a Turkish military base in northern Iraq on Saturday, burning Turkish military vehicles and leading to a confrontation that left one teenager killed and 10 injured, according to

officials in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region.

The protesters were demonstrating against a recent Turkish air raid that killed six civilians, the officials said.

A video obtained by The Associated Press showed a crowd of protesters who appeared to be mostly in their 20s inside the base in the town of Shaladze. Some tried to smash the door of what appeared to be a warehouse at the base with a rock while another tried to destroy a Turkish tank with a hammer. Fire and smoke could be seen rising from military vehicles.

A statement by the Kurdish Regional Government, or KRG, expressed regret for the loss of life and extended sympathy to the families of the victims. The statement said it will investigate the incident and punish those behind the chaos and sabotage.

Turkey's Defense Ministry said that a Turkish military base in northern Iraq came under attack by Kurdish militants and that some vehicles and equipment were damaged. In a tweet, the ministry blamed the attack on a "provocation" by the Kurdistan Workers' Party or PKK. The far-left group is considered a terror organization by Turkey and its NATO allies.

The PKK has waged an insurgency within Turkey since 1984 and is based in camps in northern Iraq near the Turkish border. Tens of thousands of people have died in the conflict, which resumed in 2015 after a fragile two-year cease-fire.

Eyewitnesses said Hassan Rekan Hussein, a 13-year-old from Shaladze, was killed in the incident Saturday, and 10 were injured. They were shot at by the Turkish soldiers at the beginning of as protesters broke into the base, the eyewitnesses said.

Vyan Sabri, a lawmaker who heads the bloc representing the Kurdistan Democratic Party, or PYD, in the Iraqi Parliament, blamed the PKK for "exploiting" Saturday's peaceful protest.

She called on the PKK to end its "illegitimate" presence in the region and on Turkey to cease its airstrikes.

A PKK politician, Kawa Sheikh Moussa, rejected the Turkish accusations.

"We do not have any office or representative in Shaladze," he said. He added that the demonstration was an angry reaction to the Turkish killing of civilians.

Turkish jets regularly bomb the camps and Turkey has a military presence in Iraq as part of a mandate that allows it to fight security threats in Iraq and Syria. The incident, the first of its kind, poses an embarrassment to Kurdistan's regional government, which is allied with Turkey.

Speaking in southeastern Gaziantep province Saturday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkish jets and armed drones flew into Iraq on Saturday. "Today they tried to do something wrong in Iraq again," he said, referring to Kurdish militants.

The PKK is believed to have fighters near villages inside the Kurdistan region, mainly in the mountainous areas near the Turkish border.

Also on Saturday, Turkey resumed flights to the Iraqi city of Sulaimaniyah for the first time after a 16-month boycott, the director-general of Iraq's Civil Aviation Authority said.

Ali Khalil Ibrahim said a Turkish Airlines flight landed at the airport Saturday morning, coming from Ankara. Turkey stopped flights to the Kurdish airport in September 2017 after the Iraqi region held a controversial independence referendum.

Earlier on Saturday, flights resumed between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurdish city of Sulaimaniyah, according to aviation authorities, after a 16-month air blockade imposed by Ankara over an independence referendum. Kurds in the administratively autonomous northern region overwhelmingly voted for independence in a non-binding referendum in September 2017 that infuriated Baghdad as well as Iraq's neighbors, Turkey and Iran. In retaliation, Baghdad and Ankara blocked international flights from the two main Iraqi Kurdish cities of Irbil and Sulaimaniyah.



The first Turkish Airlines aircraft landed early Saturday morning at Sulaimaniyah airport after a 16-month suspension of flights. (AFP)

Almost all those restrictions were lifted last year but Turkey – which fears its own Kurdish minority could be inspired to push for independence – had maintained its blockade on Sulaimaniyah until Saturday.

“Implementing the Turkish government’s decision to lift the air blockade on international flights from Sulaimaniyah, the first Turkish Airlines flight landed early this morning and returned to Turkey,” said Sulaimaniyah airport chief Taher Abdallah.

He said the blockade cost the airport more than \$5 million in 2018.

Iraqi Airways would resume flights between Sulaimaniyah and Istanbul in the coming days, civil air authorities said.

That brings air traffic to and from the Iraqi Kurdish region back to its status before the 2017 referendum.

At the time, the federal government rejected the poll as “illegal,” imposed economic penalties and seized the disputed Kirkuk oil fields, halting exports.

But ties have improved markedly in recent months.

Authorities announced the resumption of oil exports from Kirkuk in November and last week, parliamentarians passed a 2019 budget guaranteeing Baghdad would pay the salaries of the Kurdish region’s public workers and peshmerga armed forces.



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Turkey partially permits flights to Iraqi Kurd region  
Iraq extends air blockade of Kurdistan by 3 months

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## [Families flee bombardment and hunger in last Syria Daesh pocket](#)

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As US-backed forces advanced, 22-year-old Dima Qatran buried one of her twin babies, then picked up the other and fled the Daesh group's crumbling pocket in eastern Syria.

Clutching her remaining 11-month-old daughter, she joined hundreds escaping

the last shreds of the extremist group's "caliphate" near the Iraqi border. She fled through the cold desert on foot toward territory held by US-backed fighters, where she boarded a truck to take her to a camp for displaced Daesh families further north.

"I had twins," Qatran told AFP on Friday, tears streaming down her face, at a pit stop along the way.

"I buried one, and the second is dying. She has diarrhea and keeps vomiting. I can't bear it. My daughter died of cold and hunger."

The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces are fighting to expel the last Daesh fighters from a few hamlets in the eastern province of Deir Ezzor.

"We slept in the street for 11 days after my home was bombed" in Baghouz, a village on the front line, she said.

Qatran said she arrived in Baghouz with her husband's family a year ago after fleeing the town of Albukamal to the west, which was retaken from Daesh by Russia-backed regime forces in late 2017.

The young mother said all she wanted was to be reunited with her husband who works as a cook in Turkey, and claimed to have no affiliation with Daesh.

"I'm scared of them," she said.

### **Ravaged by Rashes**

Near the Omar oil field, women and children – some of whom had faces ravaged by rashes – descended from the back of a dozen small trucks, caked in dust and visibly exhausted as the SDF allowed a quick break.

A mother dashed down from a vehicle, rushing her two children out of sight to relieve their bladders, while others pleaded for food and drink, saying that with the bombardment and siege, they had not eaten for days.

Infants screamed while their mothers did their best to soothe them.

For days, hundreds have been fleeing what remains of the so-called "Hajjin pocket" east of the Euphrates River, SDF officials said.

According to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor more than 8,000 people have fled since Monday, including around 1,000 jihadists.

Since early December, some 29,000 people have escaped the fighting, the Observatory said.

Sara Al-Sahar, 32, paced around with her baby trying in vain to pacify him. He's "hungry and sick," said the mother of two.

"There's no food over there, just hunger," she said of areas under Daesh control.

"Nothing – not even nappies."

Sahar also insisted she had nothing to do with Daesh, a claim that AFP could not immediately verify.

"We walked for six hours" in the desert before reaching SDF-controlled territory, she said.

### **Suspicion**

Around 750 people reached SDF-held territory from Daesh-held territory on Friday, Mohammed Suleiman Othman, an official with the Syria Democratic Council said.

They included 600 civilians, mostly Iraqis related to Daesh fighters, he said.

But 150 men were detained on suspicion of belonging to Daesh, after screening near the frontline.

Fourteen women and their children of various nationalities including from Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Turkey were ferried off to a special center for questioning.

Inside that center, women sat with their children in a large room. One was changing her baby, with a nappy improvised from fabric and plastic bags.

In a corner, 20-year-old Mariam from Ukraine fed her baby before she wiped her face with her hands.

"I need to rest before I can remember what happened to me," she said, speaking in classical Arabic, reluctant to answer any questions.

Near the Omar oil field, women asked how much longer before they reach the Al-Hol camp in the northeastern province of Hasakah.

"Is it still far? We're so tired," one of them said.

Tayyeba, 54, said she escaped with her husband, but the SDF detained him for questioning.

"We fled as the frontlines started getting closer," she said, wrinkles visible under her black face veil.

Umm Baraa, 20, said: "The streets are full of people who can't find anywhere to sleep. We were running from one neighborhood to another."

She said her husband – an Daesh fighter – died recently in an air strike.

"We were all doing so well... If the frontline hadn't got closer, we wouldn't have left at all," she said of life under Daesh.

"Now we don't know what awaits us."



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Turkey 'will go it alone' with Syria security zone

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## [El-Sisi's order to paint Egypt's 'uncivilized' buildings puzzles residents](#)

Fri, 2019-01-25 20:40

CAIRO: A decree from Egypt's president to paint all the country's red brick buildings in an effort to make the country more beautiful has been criticised by residents.

President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has ordered buildings in cities must be painted "dusty colors," while coastal buildings will take on shades of blue, according to the decree.

Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly said the buildings will be colored based on a scheme reflective of the area.

"The plan is to have unified colors for the buildings instead of this uncivilized scene," Madbouly told a cabinet meeting last week.

Provincial leaders have been told how crucial it is to improve the appearance of urban and rural settlements.

According to Madbouly, each governorate will have a certain color scheme.

Governors will be given deadlines and those who don't comply with the decree will be fined.

The decree comes as a part of a move to improve and restore the overall appearance of Egypt's different governorates.

But many Egyptians have questioned whether cosmetic improvements to buildings should be a top priority for a government of a country facing a massive housing crisis.

"Enforcing monetary penalties on people to have more dusty-colored buildings sounds problematic to me," Ahmed Mostafa, a Cairo resident, told Arab News. "Painting buildings will not help solve Egypt's housing problem. There are millions of homeless people who can't even find a red brick building to live in."



The changes already have started in Khedival Cairo are, with painters and workers on-call to paint the buildings.

Red-brick building are common in the Egyptian capital, accommodating up to 11 million people – nearly two thirds of the vast city's population.

Urban planning expert David Sims, author of "Understanding Cairo: The Logic of a City Out of Control," said there are an estimated 10 red-brick buildings in Egypt.

last year, the Egyptian government vowed to eliminate slum neighborhoods from Egypt and to put an end to informal housing by the end of 2019. The slum areas house up to 40 percent of the Egyptian population. Approximately 14 billion Egyptian pounds (\$782 million) was allocated to complete the project.



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[Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi](#)

Cairo book fair gleaming new site opens far from historic market  
Bill Gates' daughter visits Cairo with Egyptian boyfriend

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# Israeli troops kill 2 Palestinians

Fri, 2019-01-25 20:05

GAZA: Israeli troops on Friday fatally shot a Palestinian and wounded another as they threw stones at Israeli motorists in the occupied West Bank, the army said.

Soldiers "responded by firing at the suspects, who received medical treatment. One of the suspects later died of his wounds and another was injured," a statement said.

Residents of the dead youth's village of Silwad, near Ramallah, named him as Ayman Hamed, 17.

Earlier, a Palestinian was shot dead by Israeli fire during fresh clashes along the Gaza border Friday, the health ministry said.

Ehab Abed, 25, was "killed by Israeli occupation fire east of Rafah," in southern Gaza, health ministry spokesman Ashraf Al-Qudra said in a statement. An AFP journalist at the hospital said he had been shot in the heart.

Thousands of people gathered at multiple sites along the border, with Israeli forces using tear gas and live fire to force protesters back from the border. Friday's protests were the first since the seeming breakdown of an informal truce agreement between Israel and Gaza's rulers Hamas.

That deal had seen Qatar provide \$15 million in funds monthly to Gaza via Israeli territory.

On Thursday Hamas said it would no longer accept the money, saying Israel was not respecting the agreement.





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Israeli fire wounds 14 as thousands of Palestinians protest at Gaza border  
Gaza teen dies of wounds from Israeli fire during protest