

Ex-Shin Bet head: Territorial expansion 'will be the end of Israel'

Tue, 2019-10-29 01:54

CHICAGO: A former head of Israel's Shin Bet secret service warned a gathering of American Jews on Saturday that his country's efforts to expand its borders and block the creation of a Palestinian state "will be the end of Israel."

Ami Ayalon, who headed Shin Bet from 1995 until 2000 and served as commander in chief of Israel's navy, opened the annual J Street convention in Washington on Saturday.

Saying Israel is in crisis, Ayalon warned: "The continuation of the occupation is the single greatest threat to Israel's safety and our existence as a democracy."

Ayalon, who is part of the opposition Blue and White political party, said expanding his country's borders "will isolate Israel even more and increase anti-Semitism around the world."

It "will be the end of Israel as the founding fathers of Zionism envisioned it," he added.

The continuation of the occupation is the single greatest threat to Israel's safety and our existence as a democracy.

Ami Ayalon, former head of Shin Bet secret service

Ayalon said Israel has succeeded in terms of Arab acceptance of it based on the 1967 borders.

He cited the 1979 peace deal with Egypt, Palestinian recognition of Israel's right to exist, the 1994 peace deal with Jordan, and the Arab League's decision in 2002 to recognize Israel in exchange for a full withdrawal from occupied Arab territories.

"We in Israel ... continue to fight ... a war in order to expand our border to the east, to build more settlements, and to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state next door," he said.

"That ... is not a just war. It denies the Palestinian right to self-determination, which was recognized by the international community," Ayalon added.

"Unless we choose a totally different approach, this war will continue for generations to come. It will lead to more violence and terror."

Ayalon said Israel is being torn apart by the debate over expansion, adding

that American Jews have a responsibility to advocate for the two-state solution and peace with the Palestinians.

“We in Israel ... are in too much pain to see clearly ... We need you by our side on this long and hard road. We need you to tell us the truth as you see it.”

The J Street conference featured leading activists, policymakers and political leaders discussing the future of the US-Israeli relationship, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and American policy in the Middle East.

Speakers included Democratic presidential candidates such as Michael Bennet, Pete Buttigieg, Julian Castro, Amy Klobuchar and Bernie Sanders.

Also scheduled to speak is Arab-Israeli Knesset member Ayman Odeh of the Joint List, which could play a critical role in blocking Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s return to power.



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Led by Sanders, Democrats vow to press Israel on Palestinian state
Gantz meets Netanyahu for Israeli coalition talks

Lebanese protesters vent anger at central bank, clash with security forces

Author:

Tue, 2019-10-29 01:43

BEIRUT: Protests in Lebanon entered their 12th day as security forces clashed with demonstrators blocking main roads in Beirut and routes connecting the capital to other regions.

There were flashpoints across the city as authorities attempted to reopen key highways shut off by protesters in a bid to maintain pressure for political change.

Groups of activists marched on the central bank and branches across Lebanon calling for the resignation of its governor, Riad Salameh, who they hold responsible for the country's financial woes.

The Lebanese banking association decided on Monday to stick with its decision to keep banks shut on Tuesday, marking the longest period of bank closures in the country's financial history.

However, following an exceptional meeting, the association stressed its commitment to "pay out salaries for public sector workers, including security forces," adding that the central bank was "working to secure necessary liquidity for this purpose."

A group of lawyers, sympathetic to the protesters, staged a sit-in outside the Justice Palace in Beirut. MPs from the parliamentary bloc loyal to President Michel Aoun announced lifting bank secrecy on their accounts.

Protesters have accused head of bloc and foreign minister, Gebran Bassil, of corruption and are demanding he stand down along with others.

Member of the Lebanese Parliament, Eddy Maalouf, said: "The decision to lift bank secrecy will include ministers and MPs and the two female deputies of the head of the Free Patriotic Movement, by signing documents at the notary's office, to lift bank secrecy on their accounts in Lebanon and abroad.

"This step marks the beginning of initiatives by the Free Patriotic Movement to reach the adoption of anti-corruption laws, to ensure the accountability of corrupt officials and unveil the truth before the people, instead of the prevailing wave of disinformation, slander and lies."

In an attempt by the authority to prove its seriousness in the implementation of the reform package it had announced earlier, Lebanon's Prime Minister Saad Hariri on Monday presided over a meeting of the ministerial council to study the draft general amnesty law.

Following a meeting with Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, a delegation from the Aounist parliamentary bloc reiterated “the need to adopt legislative proposals it had previously presented, related to anti-corruption, accountability and recovery of looted wealth.”

The bloc’s secretary-general, MP Ibrahim Kanaan, said that Berri would “activate the work and ask the parliamentary committees to start studying all proposals and the 2020 draft budget, without any delay.”

Afifa Al-Sayed, veteran activist from the civil society, told Arab News: “The young men and women in the streets are tired, especially as they have not received any prompt response to their demands and that their movement is not organized.

“Security bodies on Monday opened the roads by force, in Sidon in particular. Protesters in the streets are starting to feel that the situation is cooling down. If we give up and leave the streets, they will work on further breaking us.

“This is the revolution and the cause of the youth, and they cannot be told what to do. They are even refusing to be told what to do next. If things stay this way, they might lead to chaos and this might be advantageous since it will make the authority feel uncertain,” she added.

“Meanwhile, some groups are building strategies and ideas for the revolution and are trying to contact other groups protesting on the ground to suggest names that can be trusted to speak in their names. But until then, it is the revolution of the youth, and they decide what they want.”



Lebanese anti-government protesters practice yoga on a blocked avenue in the center of the capital Beirut. (AFP)

Another activist, Randa Al-Yaseer, told Arab News: “More meetings are being organized to find new ways to protest, especially that people are starting to feel tired, therefore, protests in the streets might be transformed to other activities.

“If I tell protesters something they do not like, they ask me to leave. They say even their parents cannot tell them what do. Some groups are communicating on social media outlets and refuse to reveal their identities. That is their right, since there are fears of getting arrested by the authority and security bodies, which can mean the end of the protests.

“Even the protest squares are being attacked. Some people come at night and steal the chairs and tables we bought with our own money. Some women have been offering water bottles and sandwiches to people in the streets, to discover later that some people were selling the bottles and sandwiches for one dollar,” added Al-Yaseer.

“We cannot say that the movement is failing. People are surprising us. They are showing motivation, but only in the afternoon and at night.”



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Lebanon's closed banks pledge to pay out salariesIMF stresses urgency of reforms in Lebanon to restore economic stability

After Baghdadi, Turkey copes with Daesh threat

Author:

Tue, 2019-10-29 01:35

ANAKARA: After Daesh leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi's death, the terror group still poses a security threat to regional countries, including Turkey.

Turkey's location on the transit route of foreign fighters on their way to join Daesh poses a serious security risk.

The compound where Al-Baghdadi was killed in a US operation was just a few miles from the Turkish border in a small village called Barisha.

Turkish counterterrorism police detained 20 foreign nationals in Ankara on Monday over suspicions of affiliation with Daesh, as the country fears possible revenge acts by the terror group after US President Donald Trump thanked Turkey for help in killing Al-Baghdadi.

The Daesh-linked suspects, allegedly from Syria, will be referred to the migration office for deportation.

At least 315 people have been killed so far in attacks claimed by Daesh in Turkey, where the terrorist group has targeted civilians, including Arab tourists, in suicide bombings and armed attacks. Some 1,338 others have been wounded in the attacks.

Many metropolitan municipalities, including Ankara – where Daesh carried out a bomb attack, claiming the lives of 107 people – heightened their security measures in public areas ahead of critical dates, such as Oct. 29 for Republic Day celebrations.

Nearly one-third of the 750 Daesh terrorists released by the YPG in Syria have surrendered to Turkey, Defense Minister Hulusi Akar announced on Monday.

For four years, Turkey conducted over 2,000 operations against Daesh and about 1,200 individuals were arrested and convicted over their connections to the terror group.

Michael Horowitz, a Middle East security analyst with the Le Beck consultancy, said Daesh will likely seek to carry out attacks to balance the death of its leader.

"The group did carry out such a wave of 'revenge attacks' following the collapse of its 'caliphate' in Iraq and Syria," he told Arab News.

However, Horowitz added that the group will mostly focus on conflict areas including Iraq, Syria, Libya and Afghanistan.

Halid Abdurrahman, a researcher and analyst on the Middle East and North

Africa, said that the elimination of Daesh leaders would motivate its fighters for new attacks.

“The fact that Al-Baghdadi was killed in a US operation where Turkey was involved may render Ankara a target and push security forces toward further operations,” he told Arab News.

According to Abdurrahman, Daesh would prefer easy, “soft” targets.

“The fact that Turkey is still present in Syria with its troops would make the country more accessible and a priority for revenge,” he added.

Oubai Shahbandar, a defense analyst, said that intelligence sharing played an important role in providing US special forces a full picture on Al-Baghdadi’s hideout.

“Covert cooperation between the US and regional allies helped make sure that the operation was a success. In particular, the capture of Ismael Al-Ethawi, a key aide and courier for Al-Baghdadi, by Turkish security forces earlier this year played an instrumental role in the operation’s success.

“Daesh terror attacks have afflicted all countries in the region. Continued intelligence sharing and cooperation against this common threat will continue to be crucial,” he added.



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Remains of Daesh leader Al-Baghdadi buried at sea Saudi Arabia hails US raid that killed Al-Baghdadi

[Morocco wants women, minors held in Iraq, Syria to come home](#)

Author:

Associated Press

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Mon, 2019-10-28 21:06

SALE: Morocco wants to bring home 671 Moroccan women and children linked with extremist groups who are held in Syria and Iraq, with a top investigative official saying they're harmless.

Abdelhak Khiame, director of the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations, said at a news conference Monday that the 280 women and 391 minors "are not terrorists" and can't be blamed "for anything."

Khiame said the North African kingdom also would "welcome" the return of male fighters, but in their case "will subject them to the law."

Morocco's top intelligence official, Boubker Sabik, said 1,659 Moroccans joined the Daesh group or other extremist organizations, and 742 of them died fighting.

Moroccan authorities dismantled a cell of Daesh loyalists on Friday who were allegedly preparing a plot to harm the economy.



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Morocco arrests six suspected Daesh members
Morocco reshuffles cabinet, keeps foreign and finance ministers

[Led by Sanders, Democrats vow to press Israel on Palestinian state](#)

Author:

AFP

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Mon, 2019-10-28 21:14

WASHINGTON: Democratic presidential contenders vowed Monday to switch gears sharply from Donald Trump's hawkish embrace of Israel, pledging they would press for a peace settlement that leads to a Palestinian state.

Half a year after Democratic candidates all shunned the annual conference of AIPAC, the historic pro-Israel lobby, five candidates came in person to deliver a peace message in the same Washington convention center before J Street, a left-leaning group which argues that it is more in tune with American Jews.

Senator Bernie Sanders, who rarely talks about his Jewish faith, explained how the murder of much of his father's family in the Holocaust shaped his progressive views.

"If there is any people on earth who understands the danger of racism and white nationalism, it is certainly the Jewish people," Sanders said to thunderous applause.

Rising from his seat on stage to give a campaign-style address, Sanders, who would be the first Jewish president, accused both Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of fomenting division.

"Let me underline this because it will be misunderstood – it is not anti-Semitism to say that the Netanyahu government has been racist. It is a fact," he said.

"We demand that the Israeli government sit down with the Palestinian people and negotiate an agreement that works for all parties," he said.

Sanders said his message to Israel would be, "if you want military aid, you are going to have to fundamentally change your relationship" with the Palestinians.

He called for some of the \$3.8 billion in annual military assistance to be turned into humanitarian aid for the Gaza Strip in a "radical intercession" for the packed, impoverished territory that has been under a blockade since it elected the Islamist movement Hamas in 2007.

"Who is going to deny that when youth unemployment is 60 percent, when people have no hope, when people cannot literally leave the region – who can think for a moment that you're not laying the groundwork for continued violence?" he said.

Trump, whose evangelical Christian base is staunchly pro-Israel, has taken a series of historic steps including recognizing bitterly divided Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

The Trump administration has signaled support as Netanyahu – whose political future is unclear after two inconclusive elections – flirts with annexing parts of the West Bank.

Democratic frontrunners Joe Biden and Elizabeth Warren, both appearing before J Street in video messages rather than in person, said they would oppose any action that closes the door on a Palestinian state.

"If Israel's government continues with steps to formally annex the West Bank, the US should make clear that none of our aid should be used to support annexation," Warren said.

Warren said that she would reverse two key measures of Trump – by resuming aid to the UN refugee agency for Palestinians and allowing the Palestine Liberation Organization to unshutter its Washington office.

While not reversing course on the US embassy, she said she would reopen the US mission in east Jerusalem which would become an embassy if a peace deal creates a Palestinian state.

Biden, who had uneasy relations with Netanyahu while vice president, said: "We can't be afraid to tell the truth to our closest friends."

"The two-state solution is the best, if not the only, way to secure a

peaceful future for a Jewish, democratic state of Israel,” Biden said. In a scene unimaginable at AIPAC, the mostly Jewish crowd gave a standing ovation to chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat as he stood on stage to the sounds of U2’s “Beautiful Day” and said of creating a Palestinian state, “Let’s not give up.”

With some 4,000 people in attendance, J Street still had less than a quarter of the turnout of AIPAC, which is itself non-partisan but this year drew a who’s who of Republicans.

J Street president Jeremy Ben-Ami said he believed his organization was more in line with the US Jewish community, which votes overwhelmingly Democratic. “If you go to the AIPAC conference and you’re standing and cheering for Trump and Netanyahu, that is one approach.

“This is a conference where you stand up and you fight against what Trump and Netanyahu are seeking to do,” he said.



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Bernie Sanders to run for US president in 2020 Sanders set for ‘vigorous’ campaign return after heart scare