

Israel has 'right' to annex West Bank land, says US ambassador

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JERUSALEM: The US ambassador has said Israel has the right to annex at least "some" of the occupied West Bank, in comments likely to deepen Palestinian opposition to a long-awaited US peace plan.

The Palestinians have rejected the plan before it has even been unveiled, citing a string of moves by US President Donald Trump that they say show his administration is irredeemably biased.

They are likely to see the latest comments by US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman as new nail in the coffin of a peace process that is already on life support.

In the interview published by the New York Times on Saturday, Friedman said that some degree of annexation of the West Bank would be legitimate. "Under certain circumstances, I think Israel has the right to retain some, but unlikely all, of the West Bank," he said.

Senior Palestinian official Saeb Erekat has said any such policy would be tantamount to "US complicity with Israeli colonial plans."

The establishment of a Palestinian state in territories, including the West Bank, that Israel occupied in the Six-Day War of 1967, has been the focus of all past Middle East peace plans.

No firm date has yet been set for the unveiling of the Trump administration's plan although a conference is to be held in Bahrain later this month on its economic aspects.

The public comments made by administration officials so far suggest the plan will lean heavily on substantial financial support for the Palestinian economy, much of it funded by the Gulf Arab states, in return for concessions on territory and statehood. "The absolute last thing the world needs is a failed Palestinian state between Israel and Jordan," Friedman said in the Times interview.

SPEEDREAD

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"We're relying upon the fact that the right plan, for the right time, will get the right reaction over time."

Friedman, a staunch supporter of the Israeli settlements, told the Times that the Trump plan was aimed at improving the quality of life for Palestinians

but would fall well short of a “permanent resolution to the conflict.”

He said he did not believe the plan would trigger Palestinian violence. But he said the United States would coordinate closely with Arab ally Jordan, which could face unrest among its large Palestinian population over a plan perceived as overly favorable to Israel.

Publication of the plan looks set to be further delayed after the Israeli parliament called a snap general election for September, the second this year.

The plan is regarded as too sensitive to release during the campaign. During campaigning for the first general election in April, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged to annex West Bank Jewish settlements, a move long supported by nearly all lawmakers in his alliance of right-wing and religious parties.

Earlier, in February, Netanyahu told lawmakers he had been discussing with Washington a plan that would effectively annex settlements.

In a rare public show of disunity between the close allies, the White House then flatly denied any such discussion.

Following persistent expansion of the settlements by successive Netanyahu governments, more than 600,000 Jewish settlers now live in the West Bank, including annexed east Jerusalem, among some three million Palestinians. The international community regards the settlements as illegal and the biggest obstacle to peace.



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Israeli strike hits air base in Syria's Homs: state media Israel eases Gaza

fishing restrictions

[Freed US scientist of Turkish origin vows to clear name](#)

Author:

Sun, 2019-06-09 02:04

ANTAKYA, Turkey: A former Turkish-American NASA scientist, detained in Turkey for nearly three years until his release last week, told AFP in an interview that he would do everything he could to clear his name.

The arrest of Serkan Golge – who took US citizenship in 2010 and has worked for NASA in Houston since 2013 – is just one of a number of incidents that have caused relations between Washington and Ankara to deteriorate sharply in recent years.

US Consulate staff, journalists and even an American pastor have all been detained, accused of having ties with Turkish preacher Fethullah Gulen, who is in exile in the US and whose extradition Ankara has requested over his alleged role in the failed July 2016 coup against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Pastor Andrew Brunson was released in October 2018.

Golge, 39, was initially sentenced to 7.5 years in prison in July 2016, but then saw it reduced to five years before finally being released on probation last week.

In an interview at his parents' home in Antakya, southern Turkey, he said people tended to believe there must be something to the charges if a NASA scientist is detained for so long.

But "I will give you an answer straight out: There was nothing," he insisted. Golge said he was arrested on an "anonymous tip," of which there were many in the months following the coup attempt.

Vowing to take his case to both Turkey's Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights, Golge pledged to "do whatever I have to do to fulfil my obligations" in the meantime. These included reporting to police four days a week and not leaving Antakya.

Nevertheless, the scientist is hoping that the restrictions will be lifted so that he can "go back to the US and get back to my work" as part of a team studying the impact of space radiation on astronauts.

Golge said his release on May 29 came shortly after a telephone conversation

between Erdogan and US President Donald Trump.

He learned about it at 6 p.m. or 7 p.m. and it all “happened in 15-to-20 minutes,” he said.

Golge said he was kept in isolation and only allowed out of his cell for an hour a day.

The ordeal left both him and his family scarred forever, not to mention the devastating impact it had on their financial situation.

Golge said his wife became so pale and thin during the first weeks after his arrest that he barely recognized her when she visited.

It also deeply affected his sons, now aged three and eight, who came to fear that their father would never be released, Golge said.

His youngest son was only three months old when Golge was arrested.

“He calls me ‘Dad’ but he doesn’t know me that well,” he said.

“They say time heals most of the things ... but I don’t believe that. I think it heals most of the things but some of the things we experienced will stay with us forever.”



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Turkey orders detention of 144 over Gulen links
Turkey orders 295 military personnel arrested over Gulen links

[Palestinian hailed a hero for foiling terror attempt](#)

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BEIRUT: A Palestinian shot in the head while trying to foil a deadly terror attack in Lebanon has been hailed a hero.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is to grant courageous 33-year-old Saber Murad a top bravery award after he tackled a gunman who opened fire during Eid celebrations in the Lebanese city of Tripoli on Monday.

And there have been calls for Murad, who is recovering in hospital from bullet wounds to his head and back, to be given Lebanese citizenship for his heroic actions.

Selfless dad Murad attempted to stop suicide bomber Abdulrahman Mabsout by positioning his car in the terrorist's path. The "lone wolf" shooter killed two soldiers and two security officers during his rampage.

The Palestine News and Information Agency (WAFA) said Abbas later described Murad as a "young Palestinian hero" and praised his courage in "preventing an explosion that could have killed many innocent people in the city."

Announcing that he would be granting Murad a medal of courage, the president also instructed Palestinian Ambassador to Lebanon Ashraf Dabbour to "take care of him, oversee his treatment and provide him with all that he and his family need in return for his courage and act of heroism."

Speaking from his hospital bed Murad, a Palestinian-Australian born to a Lebanese mother and who lives in Lebanon, said he did not remember much about the attack. He recalled seeing the terrorist firing shots and tried to stop him by moving toward him in his car. Seconds later Mabsout turned his gun on Murad.

Tripoli MP Faisal Karami has reportedly stepped forward to pay for Murad's hospital treatment. Like many Palestinians born to Lebanese mothers, Murad is denied Lebanese citizenship and the medical coverage that goes with it.

Former Lebanese President Michel Suleiman said Murad should be granted Lebanese nationality "for stopping the lone wolf terrorist attack in Tripoli and suffering severe injuries as a result."

The children of Lebanese women married to foreigners are deprived of Lebanese citizenship and all the rights associated with it and are treated like refugees with no right to own property or take certain jobs.

HIGHLIGHT

Murad's courage in tackling the terrorist has made him a hero. He tried to stop the terrorist, who was attacking the Lebanese security forces, and received his share of the bullets fired from Mabsout's machine gun. He was wounded in the head.

Murad's father said his son loved the Lebanese army and had its insignia glued to the front of his car.

Lebanese Interior Minister Raya Al-Hassan reviewed the Tripoli attack during an extraordinary meeting of the Central Security Council. A captain and a soldier in the Lebanese army, as well as a sergeant and gendarme from the internal security forces, were killed in the raid.

She also briefed the meeting on the results of preliminary investigations into the attack which had revealed that "the terrorist Mabsout, 27, left his house on a motorcycle carrying six grenades and a machine gun."

Mabsout left Lebanon for Turkey at the beginning of 2016 and then went to Idlib to continue his Shariah courses before returning to Turkey where he was arrested and deported to Lebanon. A military court sentenced him to a year in prison for criminal acts committed outside Lebanese territory.

Al-Hassan said Mabsout had shouted takfiri statements against the army and security forces during his attack.



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Hezbollah leader says 'it's our duty' to confront Trump's Israel-Palestine

[Egypt's clerics, intellectuals clash over wife-beating fatwa](#)

Sun, 2019-06-09 01:43

CAIRO: Egyptian society is witnessing an escalated battle of words between clerics and intellectuals because of the statement of the grand sheikh of Al-Azhar, Imam Ahmad Al-Tayeb, in which he authorized husbands to beat their wives.

The sheikh recently rolled back his fatwa and called out to criminalize such acts.

The sheikh of Al-Azhar explained the words "and hit them" in verse 34 of the chapter "The Women," in one of the television programs that were broadcast during the month of Ramadan. He confirmed that the interpretation of the verse indicates the possibility of hitting the wife (wrong-doer) gently.

A few days ago, he said in a statement issued by Alzhar institute: "The beating of the wife has become one of the things that causes her psychological harm and reflects negatively on the family. The intellectual of Makkah, Ibn Atta, was among the first who refused to hit (his wife) and did not consider it contrary to what was stated in the Holy Qur'an.

"We have no objection at Al-Azhar to opening the debate in this matter between scientists. I hope to live to see legislation in our Arab and Islamic world criminalize beatings."

Some thinkers believe the statement was a retreat from the sheikh's explanation in the televised episode.

"The great imam often supported the rights of women and called for normal and fair relations between men and women."

Ahmed Al-Sawy, editor-in-chief, Al-Azhar newspaper

Criticism was expressed by many researchers on the issue of beating women. One of these was Islam Bahiri, a researcher in the of Islamic heritage, who opposed the views of Sheikh Al-Azhar in a lengthy study titled "Islam does not know the beating of wives."

Islam Bahiri said in his study that there is nothing in Islam that allows the wife's beating for discipline and that the early researchers interpreted the

“nashuz” word in the Holy Qur’an without looking at the unity of the subject or the context or even the hadith of the Prophet (PBUH).

The Prophet stressed that “nashuz” is the opposite of “chastity,” not disobedience to the husband, as the interpreters thought.

Bahiri stressed that the problem lies in understanding the verse: “Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband’s) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance).”

He added that the verse is not related with the word “beating” and has nothing to do with the disobedience of the husband’s command.

Different opinions

The controversy heated up when researcher and Egyptian parliamentary MP Mohammed Abu Hamed said in a statement that “the opinion of Sheikh Al-Azhar on the permissibility of beating the husband is his main ideology and the speech is recorded in audio and video.”

Ahmed Al-Sawy, the editor-in-chief of Al-Azhar’s official newspaper Al-Azhar, said in a special statement that “the great imam often supported the rights of women and called for normal and fair relations between men and women.”

Dr. Saadiya Younis, a researcher at Al-Azhar, told Arab News that the beating that was permitted by the sheikh of Al-Azhar is only deterrence by the husband, not intimidation.

“The purpose is maintaining the guardianship of the man and making the woman conscious of her wrongdoing.”

She said that beating was a misinterpretation of the words that the Prophet (peace be upon him) hit with a “toothpick,” and that it is known that beating with “Sewak (tooth brush)” does not result in any physical pain or physical malformations.

She said that it has the role of keeping the family from collapsing and preventing family bonds from weakening, as would happen if the wife is allowed to disobey.

Fatwa House

The Egyptian Fatwa House addressed the issue in a special email that was seen by Arab News. Here is its response:

“The scholars unanimously agreed that beating is not intended to harm the wife or to insult her. Rather, it is permissible in some cases, and not obligatory, and in some situations where such behavior is not an insult to the wife or a harm to her, but simply to show the husband’s dissatisfaction and anger at her leaving her duties.”

A slight blow from the perspective of disappointment and not to leave an impact, and that is by “Sewak (toothpick) and toothbrush” and anything that is not a tool for hitting.”



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[Families of disappeared Syrians refuse](#)

to give up hope

Sun, 2019-06-09 00:17

DUBAI: It has been 2,168 days since Wafa Moustafa's father was snatched from his home in Damascus by suspected regime henchmen.

Despite a desperate hunt for answers, 57-year-old Ali Moustafa's whereabouts remain unknown.

Moustafa is one of the estimated 100,000 Syrian citizens missing since the start of the uprising against the regime of Bashar Al-Assad in 2011.

Seized off the streets or hauled from their homes, most have disappeared into a maze of secret prisons inside the country.

These Syrians – many of them ordinary people denied a chance to prove their innocence – are victims of enforced disappearance, the act of snatching someone away from their families against their will.

Moustafa's daughter Wafa, then a student, fled from the Syrian capital with her mother 10 days after her father went missing. "All I know is that he was arrested on July 2, 2013, in our family home in Damascus, " she told Arab News.

"We have not been told why he was arrested or where he is today.

"All we know is what our neighbors told my mother – that government forces raided our house, wrecked the furniture, tore up my father's clothes and documents and arrested him. Since then, we have had no information."



Ali Moustafa with his family in happier times before fighting broke out in Syria. He has been missing since being taken from his home in July, 2013.
(Supplied photo)

International human rights law lists disappearances at the hands of the state as “enforced” or “forced disappearances.” The Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court defines the practice as a crime against humanity.

The state refuses to acknowledge the fate of these individuals, who are either held in overcrowded prisons or killed. Meanwhile, their loved ones remain desperate for information, but are often too fearful to approach the regime.

Anwar Al-Bunni, head of the Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Research, said enforced disappearance is the “strongest weapon” in the hands of the Syrian regime.

“So far there are more than 100,000 detainees forcibly disappeared by the regime documented by name,” he told Arab News.

“The real figures suggest there are more than 150,000 detainees disappeared by the state, but we have indications that half have been killed in detention centers.”

Hannah Grigg, a program officer at Syria Justice and Accountability Center, said that while Syrians have been victims of abductions by different sides since 2011, the regime is responsible for most enforced disappearances.

Aside from the psychological toll, forced disappearances have a knock-on effect on entire families.

“Having a missing loved one is emotionally devastating,” she said. “But it can also be a serious financial challenge.”

IN NUMBERS

- 95,056 – Syrians missing since 2011
- 4,837 – Female victims of forced disappearance
- 1,546 – Child victims of forced disappearance
- 81,652 – Disappearances blamed on Syrian regime
- 8,349 – Disappearances blamed on Daesh
- 1,645 – Disappearances blamed on Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham
- 1,887 – Disappearances blamed on ‘armed opposition’ groups
- 1,523 – Disappearances blamed on Kurdish-led ‘self-management forces’

(Source: Syrian Network for Human Rights, 2018)

In Syria, most of the disappeared are men, many of whom are the family’s sole breadwinner, Grigg said. “Family members are not able to access their loved one’s financial assets, even when the person has been absent for many years.

“While some may be able to request their loved one’s status to be updated to “deceased,” or apply for a divorce, such decisions are difficult and not always socially acceptable,” she said.

During Argentina’s “Dirty War” between 1974 and 1983, when about 30,000 people disappeared, a new legal status, “absence due to enforced disappearance,” was established.

“A similar status in Syria would allow families to access the resources they need while still seeking out the truth about their loved ones,” Grigg said.

A report by the Syrian Network for Human Rights in 2018 said 95,056 people, including 1,546 children and 4,837 women, were victims of forced disappearance between March 2011 and August 2018. During the same period, 13,608 detainees died of torture, the report said.

In July last year, the Syrian government confirmed the deaths of at least 161 people whose whereabouts had been unknown since 2011.

“Seemingly in response to pressure on the issue, last summer the government began to update the civil registry records of many former detainees, recording them as dead of natural causes,” Grigg said.

“Such action is not an acceptable way to close the issue. Families have a right to know what happened to their loved ones.”

Grigg has urged the international community to intervene.

“The UN Special Envoy for Syria needs to prioritize the issue of missing persons in negotiations,” she said. “The release of political detainees, as well as access by international monitors to all detention facilities, must be included in any potential agreement.”

Many organizations have worked to document disappearances in Syria, but it is difficult to provide an accurate number of those missing, Grigg said.

“Issuing incorrect numbers or lists of names of those suspected of being detained could put people at risk, either by leaving out detained, at-risk victims or by undercutting the validity of the work through inflated numbers.”

Families for Freedom, a charity supporting relatives of the disappeared in Syria, said arriving at an accurate figure is almost impossible since many families, fearful of repercussions, have failed to register the names of their loved ones with human rights groups.

However, Wafa Moustafa, who is also a member of Families for Freedom, refuses to stay silent about her family’s situation.

“We have tried everything to get information. We have spent money on lawyers,” she told Arab News. “We have paid money to people who have connections with the regime. But these are merchants of war.”

Wafa recalls the family’s horror when her mother returned to their home in Damascus for the first time since leaving the city to find her husband still missing.

Acting on advice, they began to make plans to leave the country.

“In Syria, when the regime arrests a father or a husband, the next thing they do is arrest the wife or the children to pressure the detainee into making confessions.”

When they left for Turkey in 2013, Wafa and her family hoped that Ali Moustafa would be released and they would be able to return to Damascus

within days.

Six years later, based in Berlin, she refuses to give up hope.

“Our main goal is to find our loved ones and all detainees in Syria,” she said. “We will not give up until we have the answers.”



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Syria flare-up leaves 83 fighters dead 'No more joy in Eid' for Syrians displaced for the holiday once again