

# Israeli police arrest 19 Palestinians at Jerusalem holy site

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Associated Press

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JERUSALEM: Israeli police say they have arrested 19 Palestinians as clashes broke out at a contested Jerusalem holy site.

Police say dozens of Palestinians participated in a prayer protest Tuesday, attempting to breach a section of the compound that has been closed by Israeli court order for years.

Palestinian medics reported that several protesters were injured in the standoff.

The incident follows a similar scuffle on Monday in which Palestinians tried to break the gate that Israel placed on the closed area last week.

The compound, revered by Jews as the Temple Mount and by Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary, is considered the holiest place in Judaism and the third holiest in Islam.

Any trace of Israeli security interference in the shrine, home to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, can ignite violence.



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## [OIC foreign ministers to meet in Abu Dhabi](#)

Author:

Arab News

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JEDDAH: The foreign ministers of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states will meet in Abu Dhabi on March 1-2 to discuss the OIC's role in promoting development in member states.

Secretary-General Dr. Yousef bin Ahmad Al-Othaimen said reaching higher levels of development and prosperity for member states, and strengthening economic and trade relations between them, are among the most important pillars of the OIC's economic program.

"Economic cooperation between OIC member states is based on the established connection between development and peace, security and stability," he added. Al-Othaimen cited the number of member states (57), and the diversity of their natural sources, as positive factors in terms of economic cooperation. To improve economic and social cooperation between member states, he called for the implementation of joint programs to mobilize resources and maximize opportunities.

The foreign ministers will discuss the effectiveness and adoption of the OIC's various programs and measures.

They will also highlight their national priorities for economic development, and areas of convergence with the OIC's objectives, plans and programs.

The ministers will discuss activating different financing mechanisms, and the development and marketing of Islamic financial products and other innovative financing tools.

They will also explore the active participation of community-based organizations in developing the rural sector; promoting employment of the youth, women and vulnerable people; promoting economic best practices; improving the quality of human resources; and providing appropriate institutional frameworks for national economic development strategies.



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## [Daesh terrorists in Syria face two choices: Surrender or death](#)

Author:  
Tue, 2019-02-19 21:23

OMAR OIL FIELD, SYRIA: Militants defending their last dreg of territory in Syria will be “killed in battle” if they do not surrender, a Kurdish-led force said on Tuesday ahead of a final showdown.

The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) said they are trying to evacuate civilians trapped in the last half-a-square km of Daesh’s once-sprawling “caliphate” before storming the terrorist holdout.

“We are working on secluding and evacuating civilians and then we will attack. This could happen soon,” spokesman Mustafa Bali said, declining to provide more details on the operation.

Daesh militants “have only two options, either they surrender or they will be killed in battle,” he said. Daesh declared a “caliphate” across large swathes of Syria and neighboring Iraq in 2014.

A small hamlet of buildings in the village of Baghouz is all that is left of the proto-state, which at its height spanned an area the size of the UK.

The UN on Tuesday expressed concern over “the situation of some 200 families, including many women and children, who are reportedly trapped” in the Daesh holdout.

“Many of them are apparently being actively prevented from leaving by Daesh,” the UN said in a statement. The frontline in Baghouz was quiet on Monday afternoon. Tattered buildings and the twisted skeletons of cars dotted the side of the road.

At the entrance of the village, the SDF had turned an embattled building into a temporary base.

Thousands of people have streamed out of Daesh turf in recent weeks, but no civilians have made it out in the past three days.

Those that managed to escape have been ferried on trucks to Kurdish-held camps for the displaced to the north.

The International Rescue Committee said on Monday that 62 people, mostly children, had died on the way to the Al-Hol camp or shortly after arriving in past weeks.

Beyond Baghouz, Daesh still has thousands of fighters and sleeper cells scattered across several countries.

In Syria, it retains a presence in the vast Badia desert, and the terrorists have claimed deadly attacks in SDF-held territory.

An SDF official on Monday said that an announcement will be made this week.

“In a few days we will announce a great victory over the largest terrorist organization that waged war on the world and wreaked chaos and death everywhere,” Zeidan Al-Assi said in a statement.

Trucks entered Baghouz to evacuate remaining civilians on Tuesday, Reuters quoted an SDF source as saying. A Reuters witness in a location near Baghouz saw dozens of trucks moving along a road toward the village.



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Daesh defends final pocket of dying 'caliphate' in Syria  
Daesh 'caliphate' on brink of defeat in Syria as Trump urges Europe to do more

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## [No autonomy to Syrian Kurds, says Assad adviser](#)

Tue, 2019-02-19 21:15

MOSCOW: A senior adviser to Bashar Assad on Tuesday flatly rejected the idea of giving Syrian Kurds a measure of autonomy, saying such a move would open the door to the partition of the country.

The Kurdish-led authority that runs much of north and east Syria has presented a road map for a deal with Assad in recent meetings with his key ally Russia.

The Kurds want to safeguard their autonomous region inside a decentralized state when US troops currently backing them pull out. They also hope a deal

with Damascus would dissuade neighboring Turkey from attacking them.

But when asked on Tuesday if Damascus was willing to do a deal that would hand the Kurds some measure of autonomy, Bouthaina Shaaban, a senior adviser to Assad, flatly rejected the suggestion.

“Autonomy means the partition of Syria. We have no way to partition Syria,” she told Reuters on the sidelines of a Middle East conference in Moscow organized by the Valdai Discussion Club.

Her comments come after Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad expressed optimism last month over dialogue with Kurdish groups, and suggest the Kurds will face an uphill struggle to wring concessions from Damascus, which has said it wants to retake every inch of territory lost during eight years of war.

Shaaban praised Moscow for its Syria intervention, saying it had shown “amazing consistency in dealing with facts on the ground.”

She was scathing about Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his idea of carving out “a safe zone” in northeast Syria however.

Ankara wants the area near the Turkish border to be cleared of the US-backed Kurdish YPG militia and to move into territory there, some of which is currently controlled by US forces.

Shaaban said the idea smacked of an illegal land grab.

“Turkey has all the new ambition to occupy other people’s land and I think we are facing Erdogan who has dreams of reinvigorating and recreating the Ottoman Empire,” she said.

“But I don’t think he will be able to do that because our people are there to defend our land.”

Turkey backs the anti-Assad opposition that still has a foothold in northwestern Syria, and has troops in that area.



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Syria Kurds reject 'security zone' under Turkish control

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## [US voices concern over Hezbollah's role in Lebanese Cabinet](#)

Author:

Associated Press

ID:

1550599323306417200

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BEIRUT: The US ambassador to Lebanon expressed concerns Tuesday over the militant Hezbollah group's growing role in the new Cabinet, saying it does not contribute to stability.

Hezbollah, which also takes part in elections, has named a health minister and two other posts in Lebanon's Cabinet. US officials have called on Prime

Minister Saad Hariri's new government to ensure the group does not receive support from public resources.

At a meeting with Hariri on Tuesday, Ambassador Elizabeth Richard said the Iran-backed Hezbollah continues to violate Lebanon's policy of non-involvement in regional conflicts by fighting in "at least three countries." She was apparently referring to Syria, where the group fights alongside the government, and Iraq and Yemen, where Iran supports local armed groups. "I was also very frank with the prime minister about US concern over the growing role in the Cabinet of an organization that continues to maintain a militia that is not under the control of the government," Richard told reporters after the meeting.

She added that Hezbollah continues to make its own "national security decisions" that "endanger the rest of the country."

The US views Hezbollah as a terrorist group, but is a strong supporter of Lebanon's national army, supplying it with arms worth hundreds of millions of dollars in recent years. Last week, the American Embassy said the US had delivered laser-guided rockets valued at more than \$16 million to the Lebanese army.

Richard said last year alone, the United States provided more than \$825 million in assistance, an increase from the year before. She said the US has also supported education and development programs to help Lebanese communities "deal with the unprecedented demands placed on them when their Syrian neighbors fled."

Lebanon is home to about a million Syrian refugees – a quarter of the tiny Mediterranean country's population – putting pressure on its crumbling infrastructure.

Minister of State for Refugee Affairs Saleh Gharib briefed President Michel Aoun and Hariri on Tuesday about his visit to Syria the previous day, telling reporters that Syrian officials "were very positive and showed interest in facilitating" refugees' return.



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