

[Saudi Arabia condemns terrorist attacks in Libya, Afghanistan and Iraq](#)

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Thu, 2018-12-27 00:07

JEDDAH: Saudi Arabia condemned in the strongest terms on Wednesday the attack on the Libyan Foreign Ministry building in Tripoli, reported the state run SPA.

An official source at the Saudi Foreign Ministry also condemned the attack on the Afghan government building in Kabul and Tuesday's car bombing in Iraq's Tal Afar, which caused several casualties.

The source reiterated the Kingdom's rejection of terrorist attacks and their violation of all international laws.

The source offered condolences, on behalf of the Kingdom, to the families of the victims in all three countries, as well as to their governments and people.



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Israeli parliament approves early elections

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Wed, 2018-12-26 19:22

JERUSALEM: Israeli lawmakers on Wednesday voted overwhelmingly to dissolve parliament and hold snap elections on April 9.

Legislators backed the move 102 for and two against after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition agreed Monday on early polls.

The premier's coalition was left with a one-seat majority after defense minister Avigdor Lieberman stepped down in November over a controversial Gaza cease-fire deal.

Party leaders have failed to agree on a key bill regulating drafting ultra-Orthodox Jews to the army, and that was the immediate reason to move toward elections.

Analysts, however, say that Netanyahu wanted the polls before Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit announces his decision on whether to indict the premier in three different corruption cases.

While no official timeframe has been given, reports say such an announcement could come in mid-April.

With politicians now entering campaign mode, Netanyahu met in Jerusalem on Wednesday with leaders of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank and made his pitch for why they should stick with him.

Netanyahu's current coalition is seen as the most right-wing in Israel's history.

"We'll see an attempt by the left-wing to overthrow our rule with the help of the media and others," he said.

"They can't succeed, because if they do – that will pose a clear danger to the settlement movement."

Calling on their support in the elections, Netanyahu told the settler leaders they should not take the fate of their enterprise for granted.

"We had to work hard, with the current American administration as well, for the great achievements we brought the settlements," he said in remarks relayed by his office.

While Netanyahu portrays himself as the champion of the settlements, settler leaders say he has not done enough, with three prominent heads of West Bank settlements boycotting the Wednesday meeting in protest.

Key members of his coalition are however strong settlement backers and oppose a Palestinian state.



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[Benjamin Netanyahu](#)

Poll shows Israel's Netanyahu cruising toward re-election
Israel to hold early elections in April

[President Trump makes surprise visit to Iraq](#)

Wed, 2018-12-26 22:22

AL-ASAD AIRBASE, Iraq: President Donald Trump made an unannounced visit to Iraq on Wednesday, leaving behind a partially shuttered US government to greet American troops helping hold off extremists in a country where thousands of Americans died during the recent war.

It comes a week after Trump stunned his national security advisers by announcing that he would withdraw US troops from neighboring Syria where they have been fighting Daesh militants. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis abruptly resigned following the announcement, and Trump's decision rattled allies

around the world, including in Iraq.

Trump's trip was shrouded in secrecy. Air Force One flew overnight from Washington, landing at an airbase west of Baghdad under the cover of darkness Wednesday evening. It is his first visit with troops stationed in a troubled region.

Fifteen years after the 2003 invasion, the US still has more than 5,000 troops in Iraq supporting the government as it continues the fight against remaining pockets of resistance by Daesh. The group has lost a significant amount of territory in Iraq and Syria but is still seen as a threat.

Trump, who speaks often about his support for the US military, had faced criticism for not yet visiting US troops stationed in harm's way as he comes up on his two-year mark in office. He told The Associated Press in an interview in October that he "will do that at some point, but I don't think it's overly necessary." He later began to signal that such a troop visit was in the offing.

Trump had planned to spend Christmas at his private club in Florida, but stayed behind in Washington due to the shutdown. It's unclear whether his trip to Iraq was added after it became apparent that the government would be shut down indefinitely due to a stalemate between Trump and congressional Democrats over the president's demand for a wall along the US-Mexico border. Adding to the tumult, the stock market has been experiencing heavy losses over concerns about a slowing global economy, Trump's trade war with China and the president's public slamming of the Federal Reserve and its chairman over interest rate hikes by the independent agency.

Trump's visit comes at a time when his Middle East policy is in flux. He went against the views of his top national security advisers in announcing the Syria withdrawal, a decision that risks creating a vacuum for extremists to thrive.

There are dire implications in particular for neighboring Iraq. The Iraqi government now has control of all the country's cities, towns and villages after fighting its last urban battles against Daesh in December 2017. But its political, military and economic situation remains uncertain, and the country continues to experience sporadic bombings, kidnappings and assassinations, which most people attribute to Daesh.

Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi recently said Iraqi troops could deploy into Syria to protect Iraq from threats across its borders. Iraq keeps reinforcements along its frontier to guard against infiltration by Daesh militants, who hold a pocket of territory along the Euphrates River. Trump campaigned for office on a platform of ending US involvement in foreign trouble spots, such as Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. The Syria decision will ultimately affect all of the approximately 2,000 troops deployed in the war-torn country. The Pentagon is also said to be developing plans to withdraw up to half of the 14,000 American troops still serving in Afghanistan.

During the presidential campaign, Trump blamed Democrat Hillary Clinton for the rise of Daesh, due to the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq at the end of 2011 during her tenure as secretary of state.

President George W. Bush is the one who set the 2011 withdrawal date as part of an agreement with the Iraqi government to gradually shrink the US footprint and slowly hand off security responsibilities to the government and Iraqi security forces.

His successor, President Barack Obama, wanted to leave a residual force in

Iraq to help the government manage ongoing security challenges. But he ultimately went ahead with the scheduled pullout in 2011 after Iraqi's political leaders rejected terms the US sought for legal protections for the US troops that would have remained.

Two of Trump's recent predecessors visited Iraq early in their terms. Bush visited Iraq in November 2003, about eight months after that conflict began. Due to security concerns, Bush waited until 2006 to make his first visit to Afghanistan.

Obama visited Iraq in April 2009, the first year of his eight years in office, as part of an overseas tour. He visited Afghanistan in 2010.

Vice President Mike Pence visited Afghanistan in December 2017, not long after Trump outlined a strategy to break the stalemate in America's longest war. Pence met with Afghan leaders and visited with US troops stationed in the country. Trump has not visited Afghanistan.







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Two dead, 11 wounded in car bomb in northern Iraqi city Tal Afar
German industry views Brexit, Trump as biggest risks to economy

[Sudan Islamist party urges probe into killing of protesters](#)

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Wed, 2018-12-26 15:20

KHARTOUM: Sudan's top Islamist party, a member of President Omar Al-Bashir's government, called Wednesday for a probe into the killings of protesters in demonstrations that have rocked the economically troubled country. Angry crowds have taken to the streets in Khartoum and several other cities

since December 19 when the government tripled the price of bread
Sudanese authorities say eight protesters have been killed in clashes, but
Amnesty International has put the death toll at 37.

At a press conference in Khartoum, Popular Congress Party senior official
Idris Suleman said his party's own reports indicated that 17 people "were
martyred" and 88 wounded in the demonstrations.

Condemning the killings, the party, founded by late Islamist leader Hassan
Turabi, urged the authorities to find those responsible.

"We call on the government to launch an investigation into the killings,"
Suleman said.

"Those who committed these killings must be held accountable."

Popular Congress Party is part of Bashir's government and has two ministers
of state in the cabinet and seven lawmakers in parliament.

Turabi, who died in March 2016, was a leading force behind the 1989 coup that
brought Bashir to power, ushering in an Islamist regime that hosted Al-Qaeda
leader Osama bin Laden from 1992 to 1996 in Sudan.

Turabi founded Popular Congress Party after he was dismissed from Bashir's
National Congress Party amid a power struggle a decade after the coup.

Police and security officers remained deployed in several parts of the
Sudanese capital on Wednesday, but no new demonstration had been staged so
far.

Bashir has sought to tamp down the discontent by vowing to "take real
reforms" to solve Sudan's economic woes.

But his statements appear to have done little to appease protesters angered
by financial hardships.

Sudan is mired in economic difficulties including an acute foreign currency
shortage and soaring inflation.

The crisis has worsened despite the lifting of an economic embargo by the
United States in October 2017.

Inflation is running at close to 70 percent and the Sudanese pound has
plunged in value, while shortages in bread and fuel have been reported across
several cities including Khartoum.

Since the start of the protest movement, Sudanese authorities had arrested
several anti-government figures with liberal and communist backgrounds.

ab-jds/del



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[Morocco announces new arrests in Nordic tourists' killings](#)

Author:

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Wed, 2018-12-26 (All day)

RABAT: Moroccan authorities say a total of 19 people have been arrested in connection with the murders of two Nordic tourists in the Atlas Mountains. Boubker Sabik, a spokesman for Morocco's national security agency, says 10 new suspects were arrested over the last two days for their links with the alleged killers of 24-year-old Louisa Vesterager Jespersen from Denmark, and 28-year-old Maren Ueland from Norway.

Their bodies were found last week in their camping tent in a remote area in the Atlas Mountains. Authorities believe the hikers were killed by men affiliated with Daesh.

Sabik told national television 2M on Sunday that the suspects targeted the two girls randomly and that Daesh didn't coordinate the killings.



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Nine more arrested in Morocco over murder of Scandinavian tourists
Morocco arrests suspect after two Scandinavian tourists murdered