

President Erdoğan to call for joint global stance against terror at UN meet

Hurriyet Daily News, 19.09.2016



President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will call on world leaders to pursue a joint stance in the fight against terror without distinguishing between terror groups and to act in solidarity in addressing growing refugee problems during his meetings at the United Nations General Assembly.

“Our President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will attend the 71st U.N. General Assembly meetings to be held in New York between Sept. 19 and 22,” his office said in a written statement over the weekend. The Turkish delegation under Erdoğan’s leadership will depart to New York from Istanbul early Sept. 19.

The official kick-off of the U.N. General Assembly will take place on Sept. 20 as the main theme will be “The Sustainable Development Goals: A Universal Push to Transform our World.” Erdoğan will attend the meeting on the occasion of the first anniversary of the launch of the sustainable development goals and the approval of the Development Agenda for 2030.

He will later attend the opening of the General Assembly and will then address the world leaders from the U.N. podium. Erdoğan is expected to urge world leaders about the need to adopt a common stand against terrorism regardless of where they come from and to inform about the failed coup attempt on July 15. Ongoing turmoil in Syria and Turkey’s recent offensive into northern Syria to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) will also be on his agenda.

The president’s New York itinerary will include another very important meeting, according to the statement. Erdoğan will attend a special summit of leaders to be held under the leadership of United States President Barack Obama and co-hosted by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, as well as leaders from Canada, Germany, Sweden, Ethiopia, Mexico and Jordan, where participants will discuss the growing problem of refugees in the world.

Erdoğan is also expected to make a statement and inform world leaders about how Turkey has been coping with around 3 million refugees in its territories since the civil war broke in Syria. He will focus on Turkey’s active humanitarian diplomacy in responding to humanitarian crises in the world, read the statement. Erdoğan will also participate to a reception to be given by Obama while holding bilateral meetings with some world leaders attending the General Assembly. On this occasion, Erdoğan is also planned to come together with U.S. business and investment circles, prominent representatives of Turkish and Muslim communities in the U.S. and to hold interviews with the world media.

Turkey calls on Obama to veto '9/11 bill'

Hurriyet Daily News, 23.09.2016



The Turkish Foreign Ministry called for U.S. President Obama to prevent the “Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act” from becoming law, saying it contradicts international law and the principles of the U.N. Charter, particularly regarding the sovereignty and equality of states.

The bill is “not only incompliant with the law but is also the product of a distorted approach that could hamper international cooperation against terrorism,” read the statement. The controversial bill would allow U.S. courts to hold foreign governments responsible if they were found to have played a role in funding or assisting attacks.

The bill aims to narrow the scope of the legal doctrine of foreign sovereign immunity and passed the U.S. Senate with no opposition in May before unanimously passing the House of Representatives in September. While it does not mention the 9/11 attacks or the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the practical effect of the bill will be to allow a longstanding federal civil lawsuit against Saudi Arabia by the victims, families and other interests that were injured or damaged in the 9/11 attacks to proceed.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry stressed that Ankara continued to stand with the victims of terrorism and firmly argued that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations should be countered “without double standards and discrimination.”

“In this context, Turkey calls upon the president of the United States to prevent the bill from becoming law and invites all its allies and partners to take insightful and useful steps with a view to enhancing international cooperation and solidarity,” said the statement. In its capacity as the chair of the Summit of the Organization of Islamic States (OIC), the Foreign Ministry particularly drew attention to the OIC on this matter.

Approached by the Hürriyet Daily News, Foreign Ministry officials recalled an OIC statement which warned passing the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act would “disrupt international relations, threatens to plunge the world economy into a depression, weakens the necessary alliances that promote peace and security around the world and compromises the war on terrorism.”

“If the ‘9/11 bill’ was to become law, it would remove the benefits of centuries-old laws and international norms that promote the comity of nations and plunge the world, one nation or region at a time, into chaos as each nation could pass reciprocal laws in retaliation that would weaken the protections that sovereignty and presumption against extraterritoriality legally provides to all people, of all nations,” the OIC Secretary-General Iyad Ameen Madani earlier said in a written statement.

The Obama Administration objects against the bill saying, if passed, it could destroy their alliance with Saudi Arabia. The White House has said the bill could expose Americans overseas to legal risks.

Greek PM: Coup plotters not welcomed in Greece

Hurriyet Daily News, 22.09.2016



Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras has reportedly assured Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that anyone implicated in the July 15 failed coup attempt in Turkey was not welcome in his country, amid reports Athens has already rejected the asylum demands of a number of Turkish coup attempting soldiers who escaped to the neighboring country.

The two leaders came together on the sidelines of the United Nations Summit in New York, where Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan requested the extradition of eight Turkish soldiers who fled to Greece, Greek newspaper Kathimerini reported.

Tsipras reportedly responded that three of the soldiers' asylum applications had already been turned down by a Greek court, assuring Erdoğan about the implementation of international law.

Tsipras also told Erdoğan that "anyone implicated in a coup was not welcome in Greece" and reminded Erdoğan that Greece was among the first countries to publicly express their support to Turkey's elected government, a move that was also acknowledged, Kathimerini reported.

Another core issue between the neighboring countries was the EU-Turkey deal on Ankara's readmission of Syrian migrants who have fled to the other side of the Aegean Sea in exchange for visa-free travel for Turks. Erdoğan and Tsipras said "they were in favor of the continuation of the implementation of a deal regarding refugees signed between the European Union and Turkey," the newspaper said.

Tsipras also reportedly said Greece was in favor of Turkey receiving financial aid from Europe for taking back refugees and supported visa-free travel for Turkish citizens provided Turkey complied with the 72 conditions set by the EU. Ankara and Athens also reportedly agreed on the promotion of a railway project linking Thessaloniki and Istanbul as well as ferry services between Thessaloniki and the western Turkish city of İzmir.

Presidential spokesman: Turkey won't take part in Raqqa operation if Kurdish militants do

Hurriyet Daily News, 22.09.2016



Turkey will not take part in a U.S.-led coalition operation to liberate the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL) de facto capital of Raqqa if Syrian Kurdish fighters are also involved, Presidential Spokesperson brahim Kalin said.

Kalin ruled out the possibility of Turkey joining an operation by coalition forces against ISIL militants in Syria's Raqqa if the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) or its military wing, the YPG, which Turkey regards as terrorist organizations, also take part. "Negotiations are still ongoing, there is nothing certain yet. Our principled stance is the same as it was with Manbij and Jarablus.

It is out of the question for us to take part in an operation in which the PYD/YPG are present," Kalin said in an interview on state-run news channel TRT Haber. Turkey considers PYD and YPG as closely linked to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and deems all groups to be terrorist organizations.

"In principle, we support Raqqa and the other Syrian cities being cleansed from Daesh, but as we said before, we have principles and conditions on the issue," Kalin said, using an Arabic name for ISIL. While U.S.-backed Kurdish and Arabs fighters liberated Manbij in early August, Turkey-backed Syrian rebel forces and Turkish troops took control of Jarablus in late August.

US, Germany restart Syria no-fly zone debate

AFP, 22.09.2016



Debate over founding a no-fly zone in Syria, an idea Turkey has long been pushing for, has heated up with U.S. and German foreign ministers calling for Russia and the Syrian government to immediately halt flights over Syrian battle zones in order to salvage a collapsing cease-fire.

U.S. Secretary of State Kerry faced off with Russian FM Lavrov at the U.N. Security Council in New York, during a tense televised showdown, saying the bombing of an aid convoy in Syria raised “profound doubt whether Russia and the Assad regime can or will live up to” ceasefire obligations.

“To restore credibility to the process we must move forward to try to immediately ground all aircraft flying in those key areas in order to de-escalate the situation and give a chance for humanitarian assistance to flow unimpeded,” Kerry said. The key areas are places where humanitarian aid needs to be delivered and where Syrian government forces have been accused of targeting civilians.

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier has also called for a temporary ban of military flights in Syria of up to seven days. “The situation in Syria is now on a knife edge,” Steinmeier said according to a statement tweeted by the Foreign Ministry in Berlin.

“If the ceasefire is to stand any chance [of succeeding], the only path is a temporary, but complete ban of all military aircraft movement in Syria - for at least three days, better would be seven days,” Steinmeier said.

Turkey has long argued for the need for a “no-fly” or “safe zone” zone along its Syrian border, with the aim of clearing out the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) militants and stemming a wave of migration that has fuelled tensions in Europe.

But Western allies have so far balked at the idea, saying it would require a significant ground force and planes to patrol, marking a major commitment in such a crowded battlefield. Addressing the head of states at the United Nations General Assembly, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan renewed his request for a no-fly zone over the border area between Turkey and Syria.

Speaking before Kerry, Lavrov told the 15-member Security Council: “One needs to refrain from emotional instincts, from rushing to the microphone immediately to comment on something; a probe should be conducted [into the aid convoy attack.]” Listening to Lavrov made him feel like he was living in a “parallel universe,” Kerry said. The aim of the cease-fire deal between the United States and Russia, which took effect, is to facilitate aid access to besieged areas and allow the pair to jointly target jihadists.



U.N. Deputy Special Envoy for Syria Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy said it was possible that countries backing the Syria peace process would agree to salvage a collapsed cease-fire, and that it was still working to restart peace talks within weeks.

More than 300,000 people have been killed and half of Syria's 22 million people have been uprooted since a crackdown by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on pro-democracy protesters in 2011 sparked a civil war. ISIL militants used the chaos to seize territory.

Before a meeting of the International Syrian Support Group (ISSG) that was scheduled to take place late Sept. 22 in New York, and after the U.N. Security Council face-off, Kerry and Lavrov talked first by telephone "at the initiative of the Americans" and then met in person, accompanied by their delegations, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

Meanwhile, the Pentagon strongly denied Russia's claim that a U.S.-led coalition Predator drone was in the air over an aid convoy in Syria when it was attacked. "None of our aircraft - manned or unmanned, U.S. or coalition - were anywhere in the vicinity of Aleppo when the strike against the humanitarian convoy occurred," Pentagon spokesman Navy Captain Jeff Davis said.

Trucks carrying food and medical equipment from the United Nations and other agencies were unloading aid into a warehouse in Orum al-Kubra, a town in Aleppo province, when a deadly attack killed around 20 civilians.

The Pentagon remarks came after Russia had insinuated that the coalition drone may have been involved in the strike. Moscow released the aircraft's purported air speed and altitude as well as its location over Orum al-Kubra shortly before the strike.

U.S. officials told AFP that two Russian SU-24 warplanes were operating in the area where the aid convoy was struck, and one of them was directly above the convoy when it was hit. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said that Moscow was dispatching its flagship aircraft carrier, the Admiral Kuznetsov, to bolster its forces in the eastern Mediterranean off Syria.

Huge blazes erupted in Syria's Aleppo as the city was rocked by fighting and air strikes, ahead of last-ditch efforts by world powers to salvage a failed cease-fire. Heavy clashes gripped the outskirts of Aleppo, after air strikes triggered major fires across the city's devastated rebel-held districts. An AFP correspondent in the eastern Bustan al-Qasr neighborhood reported that his entire street was in flames following the pre-dawn strikes.

Volunteer firefighters battled throughout the night to contain the blazes, which local activists at the Aleppo Media Centre said were caused by "incendiary phosphorous bombs." More than 120 rebels and dozens of their relatives left the last rebel-held district of Syria's Homs city under a deal with the regime, the governor said. The group was the second wave of fighters to leave the Waer neighborhood under an agreement reached between opposition and government forces in December 2015.

The U.N. appealed to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and rebel groups to allow aid convoys to enter eastern Aleppo as U.N. relief operations in Syria resumed after a 48-hour suspension due to a deadly attack.

A U.N. convoy loaded with medical and other supplies was heading to the rebel-held besieged Damascus suburb of Mouadamiya. The U.N hopes to send others to besieged areas in Idlib and near the Lebanese border in coming days.

Migrants to receive EU funds via Turkey's Red Crescent

Hurriyet Daily News, 22.09.2016



The European Union is due to announce the “Kızılay Card” project, implemented in part by the Turkish Red Crescent, which will enable monthly cash transfers to debit cards for 1 million Syrian refugees in Turkey by the first quarter of 2017.

The ESSN project will provide cash transfers to debit cards to cover the everyday needs of the most vulnerable refugee families taking shelter outside of camps in Turkey. The ESSN is part of the 3 billion euros made available by the EU and its member states under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey to provide assistance to refugees and host communities in Turkey.

As of October, monthly cash transfers to electronic cards will be given to refugees in need across Turkey, EU officials told Hürriyet Daily News. Every family will hold one card which will provide a transfer of 100 Turkish Liras per person, per month. Refugees will be able to spend the money for their basic needs, such as food, shelter and transport, without any restrictions. It's planned to have a conditional cash transfer for education.

Families will apply to Turkish institutions for the card, as the database of the Turkish Family and Social Policy Ministry will serve to determine neglected and underserved out-of-camp refugees. The Turkish Red Crescent will implement the project in partnership with the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), the World Food Programme and the Family and Social Policy Ministry.

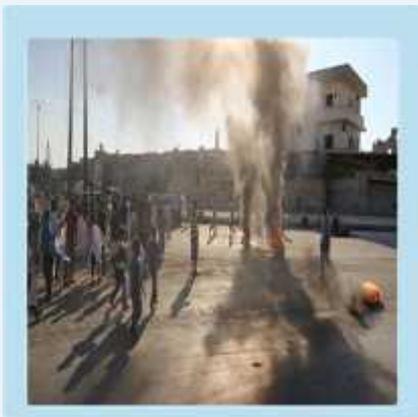
The project will build upon existing voucher schemes and the expertise of the Family and Social Policy Ministry under the coordination of the Turkish National Disaster Management Authority (AFAD). Turkey's Integrated Social Assistance Information System (ISAIS) will serve to integrate the ESSN with government systems.

Some 652 million euros has been contracted, out of which some 467 million euros has been disbursed, as part of the EU's commitment of 3 billion euros to provide assistance to refugees, according to EU officials. The total allocated for implementation under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey on humanitarian and non-humanitarian actions stands at 2.239 million euros, they said.

However, no Turkish civil society organizations have been able to make contract with the EU for those projects, as they were merely subcontractors, since Turkish NGOs are not registered with the bloc, EU officials said. Only IMPR Humanitarian has applied for registration so far, they noted.

US-led forces strike Syrian troops, prompting reaction

Reuters, 18.09.2016



U.S.-led coalition air strikes killed dozens of Syrian soldiers, endangering a U.S.-Russian brokered cease-fire and prompting an emergency U.N. Security Council meeting as tensions between Moscow and Washington escalated.

The United States military said the coalition stopped the attacks against what it had believed to be Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) positions in northeast Syria after Russia informed it Syrian military personnel and vehicles may have been hit, according to Reuters. The statement said coalition forces “would not intentionally strike a known Syrian military unit,” AFP reported.

The Russian Defense Ministry said that U.S. jets had killed more than 60 Syrian soldiers in the northeastern Syrian city of Deir Ezzor in four air strikes by two F-16s and two A-10s coming from the direction of Iraq. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitoring group with contacts across Syria, cited a military source at Deir Ezzor airport as saying at least 90 Syrian soldiers had been killed.

Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook said in an emailed statement that Russian officials did not voice concerns when informed that coalition aircraft would be operating in the strike area. The Russian Foreign Ministry said in a strongly-worded statement that the United States’ position on the incident was “unconstructive and inarticulate.”

“The actions of coalition pilots - if they, as we hope, were not taken on an order from Washington - are on the boundary between criminal negligence and connivance with Islamic State [ISIL] terrorists,” the ministry said.

“We strongly urge Washington to exert the needed pressure on the illegal armed groups under its patronage to implement the cease-fire plan unconditionally. Otherwise the implementation of the entire package of the U.S.-Russian accords reached in Geneva may be jeopardized.” Russia has repeatedly called on the United States to push units of moderate Syrian opposition to separate from ISIL and other “terrorist groups.” Australia, which said it was one of several coalition countries whose aircraft took part, offered its “condolences to the families of any Syrian personnel killed or wounded.”

Washington further unnerved Moscow when its envoy to the United Nations abruptly left her seat as the Russian representative took the floor to condemn the air strikes at an emergency U.S. Security Council meeting.

“We are reaching a really terrifying conclusion for the whole world: That the White House is defending Islamic State [ISIL]. Now there can be no doubts about that,” Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said in comments aired by state TV.

The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, said Zakharova should be embarrassed by that claim. Russia’s U.N. representative, Vitaly Churkin, said Russia had no “specific evidence” of the U.S. colluding with ISIL militants.

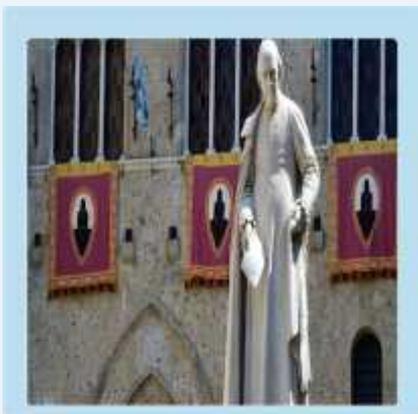
The diplomatic row is likely to further complicate the delivery of humanitarian aid to Syria, including its largest pre-war city of Aleppo, where the situation remains especially tense and the fragile truce that started has been repeatedly violated. The U.N. told Reuters that aid trucks which had been expected to move to Aleppo were once again being delayed.

“It’s a tough moment,” one top aid official in Geneva told Reuters. “The U.N. convoys are highly politicized.” The Syrian army, meanwhile, said the raid had allowed ISIL fighters to gain ground around the key eastern airbase of Deir Ezzor, but a military source said government forces were back on the offensive, AFP reported.

“The army has retaken most of its positions on Jabal Therdeh with Russian and Syrian air support,” the source said, referring to a hilltop overlooking the base. Retaking those positions was vital to prevent ISIL using them to fire on army aircraft taking off or landing at the base.

Israel declares war on Gaza’s NGOs

Foreign Policy, 20.09.2016



Jerusalem — Since the end of the 2014 Gaza war, top Israeli generals and politicians have stressed the need to boost Gaza’s economy and loosen the nine-year blockade on the strip. This summer, though, Israel quietly started doing the opposite — and many of the aid workers who help keep Gaza afloat fear another war is looming.

The dozens of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Gaza have come under close scrutiny since Aug. 4, when Israel accused World Vision, a U.S.-based Christian humanitarian organization, of funneling aid money to Hamas, the Islamist group that has controlled the strip since 2007.



The charges were sensational: Mohammad el-Halabi, the director of World Vision's Gaza office, was arrested on accusations of diverting up to \$50 million over the course of seven years. The Shin Bet, Israel's internal security service, claimed that the money was used to dig cross-border attack tunnels and build bases. The agency also claimed that food parcels meant for needy families, and even bags of toiletries, were diverted to Hamas militants.

Many aid workers express grave doubts about the charges against Halabi, who has been accused of embezzling more than double World Vision's entire Gaza budget. They see the case as part of a broader policy shift in Israel aimed at stifling humanitarian work and economic life in Gaza.

The new restrictions on NGOs are threatening Gaza's already fragile economy and raising the odds of a fourth round of conflict between Israel and Hamas. Travel permits for aid workers and ordinary Gazans have been revoked on vague security grounds, and Israeli banks are increasingly reluctant to transfer salaries to workers in Gaza, something they have willingly done for years.

"It's instilling a lot of fear among Gazans, and maybe that's the point," said one humanitarian official. "It's instilling a lot of fear among Gazans, and maybe that's the point," said one humanitarian official. "But I think what the Israeli authorities are missing is that fear can quickly turn into violence.... I don't think it's their interest to have another conflict right now, but this is a good way to get one going." Hamas is hardly above suspicion in the World Vision case. It has a well-documented history of diverting construction materials from civilian projects to build bunkers, tunnels, and other military installations.

During the last war, it allegedly hid rockets in United Nations schools. It has also become more hostile to foreigners: It banned at least one American journalist from entering Gaza in May, and a new "office of general security" at the border has started to haul in other visiting reporters for lengthy questioning.

Officials at World Vision, however, say they still have not received a full accounting of the evidence against Halabi. He was arraigned on Aug. 30, in a hearing that was closed to the public, and future sessions will be held under a similar veil of secrecy. Halabi's lawyer, Lea Tsemel, says even she will not be allowed to review all of the evidence.

Israel's first statement about the case, relayed to journalists and foreign diplomats, accused Halabi of diverting roughly \$7.2 million per year since he started working with World Vision in 2010 — close to \$50 million over all. Those figures appeared widely in press coverage of the charges. The Shin Bet said the sum represented 60 percent of World Vision's annual budget for Gaza.

That claim does not appear on the official charge sheet, however, and World Vision staffers have argued that it is mathematically impossible. The charity budgeted just \$22.5 million for Gaza over the past decade, less than half the amount Halabi allegedly stole. A large chunk of that money was already tied up in fixed costs like salaries, cars, and rent. "Someone would have noticed if all that money had gone missing," said a World Vision employee. "The employees wouldn't have been paid for years." The charity's accounting policies also would have flagged large discrepancies. Any contract over \$15,000, for example, required approval from the head office in Jerusalem.



And World Vision had already investigated Halabi in 2015, after one of its accountants, who had recently been fired, accused him of stealing money and working with Hamas. The charity brought in an outside investigator to review its books; the audit turned up nothing suspicious.

But even before Halabi was indicted, other NGOs said they were feeling unexpected pressure from Israeli authorities. Foreign Policy spoke with a dozen senior employees from NGOs and U.N. agencies for this article, most of whom were reluctant to talk on the record lest they cause more problems. Three-fourths of them said it had recently become more difficult to work in Gaza.

The director of one charity said that 30 to 40 percent of its Palestinian employees — from Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem — were now being refused travel permits. “These are people who have been getting permits regularly, as recently as last year,” the director said.

“It’s become very complex. [The Shin Bet] is even looking into social media of the people who are asking for permits, checking on their friends,” said another official, from a Scandinavian charity. But not all NGOs have been affected, either. “We’ve been operating in Gaza for a long time ... and we’re not having any new problems there,” said Mathilde Berthelot, a program manager at Médecins Sans Frontières, the medical charity also known as Doctors Without Borders.

The United Nations, however, is one of the international organizations that has found its work in Gaza increasingly challenged by Israeli restrictions. In 2015 and early 2016, only about 3 percent of U.N. employees were denied permits. Over the past few months, that number has increased to nearly 30 percent, a tenfold increase. At least eight staffers from the U.N. and foreign NGOs had their permits revoked at the border for unclear “security reasons” this year, something that happened only twice in all of 2015, according to U.N. statistics.

The Israeli army denies that it has imposed any new restrictions. “You’ll have to ask the Shin Bet about that. Our policy hasn’t changed,” said Hadar Horn, a spokeswoman for the unit that oversees the occupied territories. The Shin Bet, which rarely talks to the press, did not offer any comment.

Ordinary Palestinians, particularly the merchants who provide a vital lifeline for the strip, have also been affected by the shift. After the 2014 war, the Israeli army decided to drastically increase the number of travel permits issued to entrepreneurs, hoping to provide a boost to the local economy. By the summer of 2015, more than 10,000 merchants were traveling through the Erez crossing into Israel each month, a fivefold increase from the prewar average.

In June, though, the numbers took a sudden dive. Last month, 7,786 merchants were able to exit the strip, a 20 percent drop from the previous August. The figures in June and July were even lower, down 33 percent and 45 percent respectively from last year. Some of the businesspeople had already been approved for travel before their permits were revoked.

Dozens of merchants have been turned back at Erez in recent months, having been told that “security blocks” have suddenly been attached to their names. “These are individuals whose permit has already been scrutinized and approved and ostensibly have been cleared for travel,” said Shai Grunberg, a spokeswoman for Gisha, an Israeli group that monitors access to Gaza. “They arrive at Erez only to be asked to surrender their permit and return to Gaza.”



The World Bank's latest report on the Palestinian economy provided a window into the dire economic situation in Gaza. About 40 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, and roughly the same percentage of Gazans are unemployed. Among young people, the unemployment rate is 58 percent — providing militant groups like Hamas with a seemingly endless reservoir of recruits.

The Persian Gulf donors who promised large sums to rebuild the strip have not followed through. Qatar pledged \$1 billion, but only 19 percent of that has actually been dispersed. Three other Gulf countries collectively offered \$900 million, but only \$171 million of that has actually arrived. Norway has contributed more money at this point than Saudi Arabia. The United States, by contrast, has fulfilled its \$277 million pledge.

Maj. Gen. Herzl Halevi, the Israeli army intelligence chief, told the Knesset in February that economic development in Gaza would be the “most important restraining factor” that prevents a fourth war. His comments have been echoed across the political spectrum — not only from the left, but also from hawkish voices on the right. Education Minister Naftali Bennett, the head of the settler-backed Jewish Home party, said last year that it was “time to change the policy” in Gaza by striking a deal with Hamas to rebuild the strip. Transportation Minister Yisrael Katz has even tried to advance plans for an offshore Gaza seaport, showing journalists a mockup of the proposed complex.

The one notable exception to this consensus is Avigdor Lieberman, the nationalist lawmaker who became defense minister in May. Lieberman, who served as foreign minister in the previous Netanyahu government, was one of the most belligerent voices during the previous war, repeatedly calling for a ground offensive to topple the Hamas government.

He kept up the hawkish tone after Netanyahu's latest cabinet took office in 2015. At a cultural event this May, Lieberman offered a stern promise: If named defense minister, he would give Hamas 48 hours to return the bodies of two Israeli soldiers killed during the war, or he would assassinate its political chief in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh. One of his first acts upon entering the Defense Ministry was to ask his generals to draw up a plan for defeating Hamas.

Haniyeh, needless to say, is still walking around, and the war plan is gathering dust. Lieberman did take advantage of his one opportunity to hit Hamas: On Aug. 22, after a small militant group in Gaza fired a rocket at Israel, the air force carried out 50 airstrikes in Gaza, by far the heaviest barrage since the end of the 2014 war. In a press conference the next day, Lieberman argued that Hamas had become too comfortable and that Israel should only let reconstruction go forward if the Islamist movement relinquished its arms.

“My attitude is — reconstruction in exchange for demilitarization,” Lieberman told reporters. “That is the formula.” That formula, many aid workers fear, means that another war is not far off the horizon. “If the stream of humanitarian aid is blocked, or limited to a very few [NGOs], then I don't see how we're going to avoid another conflict,” said a U.N. official.

EU accepts Bosnia's membership application but long process ahead

Reuters, 23.09.2016



The European Union's 28 member states accepted Bosnia's membership application, taking a step forward in what is certain to be a long process that Sarajevo hopes will eventually give it a place in the bloc.

The EU said Bosnia, which applied to join in February, had made progress on necessary reforms, so it had accepted the application. It asked the European Commission, the EU's executive, for an assessment of Sarajevo's readiness. In doing so, Brussels will lay out for Sarajevo what conditions remain to be met before it is granted membership. There is no time limit for the process.

While it accepted the application, the EU states called on Bosnia to continue "socio-economic reforms (and) reforms in the area of rule of law and public administration." They asked the Commission to monitor the implementation of a 2009 European Court of Human Rights ruling that ordered Bosnia to allow ethnic minorities, such as Jews and Roma, to run for high office.

Bosnia has yet to implement that ruling. Only Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats can run for high office, and the issue continues to be an obstacle to Bosnia's EU plans. But the issue is complicated. A country of 3.5 million people, Bosnia is still split along ethnic lines, after a war in the 1990s that killed some 100,000 people during the breakup of Yugoslavia. The Dayton peace accords that ended the war in 1995 gave Bosnia three governments.

Two are autonomous entities, one representing Bosniaks and Croats, the second representing Bosnian Serbs. The third is a central government with a three-member presidency consisting of one Serb, one Bosniak and one Croat; hence the limit on who can run for office.

Bosnia has, however, made progress on two other key conditions: setting up a body to deal with the EU and adjusting a 2008 agreement with Croatia after the neighboring ex-Yugoslav republic became an EU member in 2013, the EU said.

"Today is really a historic moment for the European path and European future of Bosnia-Herzegovina," said Prime Minister Denis Zvizdic. "This is really some of the most positive news for Bosnia-Herzegovina ... especially for young people."

29 people injured in ‘intentional’ blast in New York

Hurriyet Daily News, 18.09.2016



An explosion rocked a crowded Manhattan neighborhood and injured 29 people, and a suspicious device discovered blocks away was safely removed. The city’s mayor, Bill de Blasio, ruled out any terror connections, but called the blast an “intentional act.”

“Tonight, New York City experienced a very bad incident,” de Blasio said. “We have no credible and specific threat at this moment.” De Blasio tried to calm any fears among nervous New Yorkers, saying the explosion had no terrorist connection and was not related to a pipe bomb explosion in New Jersey that forced the cancellation of a charity run.

“Now, I want to be clear whatever the cause, whatever the intention here, New Yorkers will not be intimidated,” the mayor said. “We are not going to let anyone change who we are or how we go about our lives.”

It was unclear who was behind the blast and what motivated it. “We believe it was intentional. As soon as we’re able to determine what specifically caused this explosion, we will report it,” de Blasio said.

A law enforcement official told The Associated Press that a second device that officers investigated four blocks from the scene appeared to be a pressure cooker attached to wiring and a cellphone. The source, speaking on condition of anonymity because the person was not authorized to speak about an ongoing investigation, said the device was found inside a plastic bag on West 27th Street. The device was removed with a robot and taken to a department firing range in the Bronx.

The law enforcement official also said that the explosion that rocked a bustling Chelsea neighborhood appeared to have come from a construction toolbox in front of a building. Photos from the scene show a twisted and crumpled black metal box.

The blast happened on West 23rd street, in front of a residence for the blind, near a major thoroughfare with many restaurants. Witnesses said the explosion at about 8:30 p.m. blew out the windows of businesses and scattered debris in the area. Officials said no evacuations were necessary.

Fire Department Commissioner Daniel Nigro said several people were taken to hospitals with injuries. One of the injured suffered a puncture wound that was considered serious. He said the other injuries were minor, described as scrapes and bruises. While police investigated the second site, spokesman J. Peter Donald tweeted a warning to some residents to stay away from windows facing 27th Street.



A number of New York City subway routes were affected by the explosion, which rattled some New Yorkers and visitors on the heels of the 15th anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks. Chris Gonzalez, visiting from Dallas, was having dinner with friends at a restaurant in the area. “We felt it, we heard it, the restaurant went real quiet, the 26-year-old Gonzalez said. “It wasn’t like jolting or anything, everyone just went quiet.”



Announcements & Reports

What Are The Prerequisites For A Euro-Area Fiscal Capacity?

Source : Bruegel
Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2016/09/what-are-the-prerequisites-for-a-euro-area-fiscal-capacity/>

Federal Research and Development Contract Trends and the Supporting Industrial Base, 2000–2015

Source : CSIS
Weblink : <https://www.csis.org/analysis/federal-research-and-development-contract-trends-and-supporting-industrial-base-2000-2015>

Moving Target: UK–GCC Relations and the Politics of ‘Extremism’

Source : Chatham House
Weblink : <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/moving-target-uk-gcc-relations-and-politics-extremism>

Upcoming Events

Congo’s Political Crisis: What is The Way Forward?

Date : 23 September 2016
Place : Washington DC, USA
Website : <https://www.brookings.edu/events/congos-political-crisis-what-is-the-way-forward/>

Competitive Gains in the Economic and Monetary Union

Date : 24 September 2016
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/534-competitive-gains-in-the-economic-and-monetary-union/>

The Future of Capitalist Democracy: UK-Japan Perspectives

Date : 24 September 2016
Place : London - UK
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/future-capitalist-democracy-uk-japan-perspectives>

13th Asia Europe Economic Forum (AEEF)

Date : 24 September 2016
Place : Beijing - China
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/13th-asia-europe-economic-forum/>



Emerging Markets and Europe: Time for Different Relationships?

Date : 25 September 2016
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/524-emerging-markets-and-europe-time-for-different-relationships/>

What future for Europe's Social Models?

Date : 25 September 2016
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/526-what-future-for-europes-social-models/>

Challenges for Growth in Europe

Date : 26 September 2016
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/521-challenges-for-growth-in-europe/>

Global Governance of Public Goods: Asian and European Perspectives

Date : 28 September 2016
Place : Paris - France
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/529-global-governance-of-public-goods-asian-and-european-perspectives/>

The Future of the Welfare State

Date : 30 September 2016
Place : Berlin - Germany
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/541-the-future-of-the-welfare-state/>

Vision Europe Summit 2016

Date : 21 – 22 November 2016
Place : Lisbon - Portugal
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/vision-europe-summit-2016/>