

The violent unrest in Kazakhstan that began with peaceful protests in early January has left 225 people dead, authorities said in a dramatic increase on previous tolls, Reuters reported.

Palestine blasts int'l silence on Israel's Judaization, settlement expansion plans



AFP
Israeli forces fire tear gas amid clashes with Palestinian protesters following a demonstration against settlements in the village of Beita in West Bank on January 7, 2022.

The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates condemned the international community's silence on Israel's attempts to Judaize the occupied city of Al-Quds and advance its settlement expansion policies across Palestinian territories.

The ministry, in a statement, said the Tel Aviv regime was racing against time to implement its colonial settlement plans in the occupied Palestinian lands as part of attempts to distort historical, legal and demographic realities in the West Bank, Press TV reported.

The statement said such bids were meant to serve Israel's

colonial interests in the occupied Palestinian territories and would actually close the door on the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state along the 1967 borders, with East al-Quds as its capital.

The Palestinian Foreign Ministry noted that Israeli settlement projects targeted large parts of Area C, which constitutes more than 60 percent of the West Bank, and were mainly concentrated in occupied East Al-Quds and its surroundings.

Such moves will separate Al-Quds from its Palestinian surroundings, will be sacrilegious to its sacred landmarks and will spoil the city's cultural identity, the statement also read.

The ministry then denounced Israel's settlements construction, home demolitions, ethnic cleansing, as well as repressive measures and restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities against Al-Quds residents.

It held the Tel Aviv regime fully and primarily responsible for ongoing violations and crimes in Al-Quds and its outskirts, saying that expansionist Israeli measures will eventually perpetuate occupation of Palestinian lands and displacement of Palestinian citizens, and will bolster an abominable apartheid regime in occupied Palestinian territories.

Nearly 700,000 Israelis live in illegal settlements built since the 1967 occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East Al-Quds.

The UN Security Council has in several resolutions condemned the Tel Aviv regime's settlement projects in the occupied Palestinian lands.

In addition to expanding its illegal settlements, Israel restricts freedom of movement for Palestinians not only in and out of Palestine, but also within it.

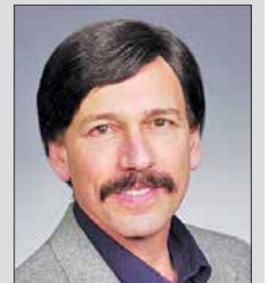
INTERVIEW

EXCLUSIVE

Trump was an embarrassment to human species

IRAN DAILY: Almost five years ago, at the very beginning of former US president Donald Trump's presidency, Peter Kuznick told in an interview that Trump, among other things, "is a rash, impulsive, unpredictable, and unstable human being." We asked him how he sees Trump's (hopefully only) term in the office: Did Trump live entirely up to his prediction?

PETER KUZNICK: Trump was indeed as bad as I predicted, but, fortunately, the worst-case-scenarios never happened. Domestically, Trump was a disaster. He used his position to fatten his own coffers. He behaved in ways that no other president would dare. He lied constantly. He spread misinformation. His behavior during the pandemic was disgraceful, leading to hundreds of thousands of avoidable deaths. His policies widened the gap between rich and poor. He appointed three reactionaries to the Supreme Court, who are already undermining rights that Americans have fought for and won over decades of struggle. He catered and appealed to the worst and most bigoted and hateful elements in American life. And then he tried to stage a coup to overthrow the results of the 2020 elections and has been lying that he won ever since.



Let's also look at his foreign policy, which weakened and isolated the United States and sent all the wrong messages to the world. Trump surrounded himself with generals and militarists, many of whom were warmongers. But they didn't start any new wars, which is rare for American presidents. They certainly came close though. First up was North Korea. Trump responded to troubling North Korean bomb and missile tests with threats and provocations of his own, that simply deepened the conflict and escalated the situation. As North Korea perfected and tested its ICBMs that could hit the US mainland and tested what appears to have been a hydrogen bomb 17 times as powerful as the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima, Trump issued sanctions, threats, and insults. Kim Jong-un responded in kind. The two militaries girded for battle. The prospects were terrifying. Some predicted a million could perish in the first day of a war. Nuclear war seemed imminent in late 2017. Richard Haass, the head of the Council on Foreign Relations, believed that there was a 50-50 chance of war. Trump and Kim exchanged further insults as their name-calling intensified.

Fortunately Moon Jae-in took his own initiative to defuse tensions and then Trump and Kim had a series of meetings. Although no progress was made toward denuclearizing the Korean peninsula, they were at least talking and sharing photo ops. Negotiators, however, were frustrated by the lack of progress. But Kim understood how to flatter the shallow, narcissistic Trump who talked about the beautiful love letters that Kim sent him. So, nothing was ultimately resolved and North Korea has resumed its shorter-range missile tests, including hypersonic missiles, but at least the war was averted and the world breathed a sigh of relief.

Trump threw down the gauntlet on North Korea's main ally - China. He declared and waged a destructive trade war and bitterly condemned China for its inflexibility in the South China Sea, crackdown in Hong Kong, and repression against the Uyghurs. He took Obama's Asia pivot containment policy toward China one big step further. In 2018, the Pentagon announced that the main threat to US national security was no longer international terrorism but Russia and China. Administration officials made clear that China was the principal threat and Russia the secondary one.

Trump spoke warmly of Vladimir Putin, but he acted aggressively toward Russia, increasing sanctions, sending lethal aid to Ukraine, and bombing Syria. My Russian colleagues soon agreed with my warnings that Trump would ultimately turn out not to be a friend toward Russia. Unfortunately, they had to learn the hard way. Trump withdrew the US from the Open Skies and Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaties. He failed to extend the New START Treaty, which was about to expire in February 2021, leaving the US and Russia without any agreement to limit deployment of nuclear arms.

Trump coddled dictators and fascist forces around the globe. He spurned America's traditional allies. He ignored human rights abuses. He gave legitimacy to some of the most anti-democratic forces in the world with his racist, hyper-nationalist, America First policies.

Trump was a disaster when it came to climate change. He pulled the US out of the Paris Climate Accords and did everything he could to increase dependence on fossil fuels.

He elevated the use of nuclear weapons and asked what was the use of having nuclear weapons if we couldn't use them. To most people that would mean we should get rid of them. To Trump that meant making them more useable, which he did.

The one area that all of Trump's advisors agreed upon was their aggression toward Iran. Even the ones who were considered "adults," like General Mattis, were hawks when it came to Iran. Mattis had actually been eased out by Obama because of his hawkish views toward Iran, but he was the voice of moderation in the Trump administration given the role of Bolton and the other extremists. Trump constantly sought an excuse to start a war with Iran. As he became more and more desperate in the final days of his administration, many of us feared that he would initiate hostilities. He withdrew from the JCPOA in 2018 in a move that was widely condemned by the other signatories.

All in all, I was clearly correct in my previous evaluation of him. Trump was not only an embarrassment to himself, to his family, to his party, and to his country. Trump was an embarrassment to the human species. We're just lucky that he didn't cause more damage than he did.

*Peter Kuznick is professor of history and director of the Nuclear Studies Institute at the American University.

Yemen's Ansarullah rejects UN call to free UAE-flagged ship, accuses it of siding with 'murderers'

Yemen's Ansarullah movement rejected a UN request to release an Emirati-flagged vessel they seized earlier this month, saying the ship was carrying military assets.

Houthi official Hussein al-Azzi said it was transporting military assets. "The Rwabee vessel was not carrying... toys for children but weapons for extremists," he told the Al-Masirah television, according to Al Jazeera.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has claimed that the Rwabee is a "civilian cargo vessel" that was leased by a Saudi company and had been in international waters carrying equipment to be used at a field hospital.

The UN Security Council on Friday demanded the "immediate release" of the Rwabee and its crew and stressed "the importance of freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea", a strategic route for international shipping.

In a statement drafted by the United Kingdom and adopted unanimously, the

15-member Security Council demanded "the immediate release of the vessel and its crew" and underscored "the necessity of ensuring the crew's safety and well-being".

It also called on "all parties to de-escalate the situation in Yemen", including by working with the UN's special envoy to return to the negotiating table.

Azzi responded by accusing the UN



almasirah.net.ye
This picture shows military vehicles and equipment aboard a UAE-flagged military cargo vessel seized by Yemeni naval forces on January 3, 2022.

of siding with "murderers who violate international laws".

The Rwabee "belongs to a country participating in the aggression against our people and at war with Yemen, and entered (Yemeni) territorial waters unlawfully", he said.

Houthis seized the Rwabee on January 3, off the Red Sea port of Hodeida, and then released a video showing military equipment on board, including military-style inflatable rafts, trucks and other vehicles and what appeared to be a collection of rifles.

Yahia Saree, a Yemeni military spokesman, said it was "completely obvious today that the information that this ship was carrying a civilian field hospital is not correct. This is clearly military equipment."

The UAE is part of the Saudi-led coalition which has launched a devastating war on Yemen in a bid to bring the government of former Yemeni president Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi back to power.

China filling US-created vacuum in Middle East: Washington-based daily

China has been filling the vacuum that the United States is creating in the Middle East, an American newspaper argues, after the Syrian government announced that the Arab country has joined China's Belt and Road Initiative.

In an article published on Friday, The Hill made a reference to Syria's announcement, saying it coincided with a joint statement by China and the Persian Gulf Arab states' council calling for a strategic partnership that would include an eventual free trade area, Press TV reported.

The article said Washington's primary concern in the Middle East appears to be a revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the 2015 Iran agreement, which was abandoned by the US in 2018 under former US president Donald Trump's administration.

"Beyond reaching a renewed nuclear arrangement with Iran, the Biden administration has made it clear that East Asia and Europe are its priority concerns. And both China and regional actors have not failed to take notice," it said.

The Hill further said the Persian Gulf Arab states are increasingly uneasy about America's reliability and will be

even more so if Washington reaches an agreement with Iran and the remaining parties to the JCPOA to rejoin the deal.

The Biden administration must cease to signal that the Middle East somehow has become a lower priority for the United States, the article said, insisting that China's increasing influence in the Middle East will have "serious repercussions" for America's national security.

On January 12, Syria officially joined the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), months after President Bashar al-Assad met with his Chinese counterpart in Beijing, where they discussed Syria's gaining membership in the BRI.

The deal will help Syria expand its cooperation with China and other countries and rebuild itself in the aftermath of a decade-long war that was coupled with US-led economic sanctions. It will also enable Damascus to circumvent the effects of harsh US sanctions on the country, particularly the so-called "Caesar Act" sanctions.

"China can play an important role in weakening the impact of the Caesar sanctions," Joshua Landis, head of the Middle East department at the University of Oklahoma, has said in an interview with The Cradle.

Hezbollah, Amal end boycott of Lebanon's cabinet

Powerful Lebanese groups Hezbollah and Amal said they would end a boycott of cabinet sessions, opening the way for ministers to meet after a three-month gap that has seen the economic crisis deepen and currency collapse further.

The groups, which back several ministers in a government made up of members from across the political and sectarian spectrum, said the decision was driven by a desire to approve the 2022 budget and to discuss an economic recovery, according to Reuters.

The failure to hold cabinet meetings has delayed talks on a recovery plan with the International Monetary Fund, seen as vital to unlocking international support to lift the country out of a crisis that has driven swathes of the nation into poverty.

Prime Minister Najib Mikati said in a statement he welcomed the decision to end the boycott and would call for a cabinet meeting as soon as he received a draft 2022 budget from the Finance Ministry.

A government source told Reuters there was not expected to be cabinet session in the coming week as budget preparations were still under way and figures for a financial recovery plan were being drawn up.

Mikati has said his government was seeking to sign a preliminary agreement for an IMF support programme in February.

An IMF spokesperson told Reuters that virtual talks would be held with Lebanese authorities in the last week of January.



AP