

## Israeli far-right minister's Aqsa visit sparks Arab outcry



Israel's Internal Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir (1st L) visits Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, in Al-Quds on May 21, 2023.

AFP

### International Desk

An extremist Israeli minister's visit to Al-Quds' holy site on Sunday drew condemnations from the Palestinians, Jordan, and Egypt with Palestinian presidential spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh calling it a "blatant attack" on Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Israel's Internal Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir visited a sensitive Al-Quds holy site on Sunday at a time of heightened tensions with

the Palestinians.

The spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said Ben-Gvir's "incursion at an early hour, like thieves, into the Al-Aqsa Mosque courtyards will not change the reality and will not impose Israeli sovereignty over it."

A Hamas spokesman said Israel would bear the consequences for Ben-Gvir's "savage assault" on the mosque and it called on Palestinians to step up their visits and "stand as a rampart in the face of all attempts to defile it and make it Jewish," Reuters reported.

Jordan's Foreign Ministry called it "a provocative step that is condemned, and a dangerous and unacceptable escalation."

Neighboring Egypt, which has a peace treaty with Israel, also issued a condemnation.

The far-right minister said during his visit, "I'm happy to ascend the Temple Mount, the most important place for the people of Israel".

The comments, during an early morning visit to the mosque, came days after groups of young settlers scuffled with Palestinians and chanted racist slogans during a march through the Old City.

Israel captured the Old City of Al-Quds, which includes Al-Aqsa and the adjacent Western Wall, during the 1967 Middle Eastern war.

Israel has since annexed East Al-Quds, in a move not recognized by the international community, and regards the entire city as its eternal and undivided capital. Palestinians want East Al-Quds as the capital of a future state.

In 2021, tensions around Al-Aqsa contributed to setting off a 10-day war with the Hamas movement. The movement has warned repeatedly that it would react to the incursions on the site.

## Zelensky appears to confirm Bakhmut loss, saying 'nothing left'

### International Desk

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky appeared on Sunday to confirm the loss of Bakhmut to the Russians, adding there was "nothing left" of the city.

Asked if Ukrainian forces were holding on or if Russia had captured the city, Zelensky was not entirely clear, but said "you have to understand there is nothing" there. "For today, Bakhmut is only in our hearts," AFP reported.

The Russian military announced on Saturday the capture of the city.

Its loss would be hugely symbolic for the Ukrainians, who held on for months there, ignoring US advice behind the scenes to put their focus elsewhere given the city's lack of strategic importance in the wider war.

Zelensky, sitting alongside US President Joe Biden at a meeting on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Hiroshima, Japan, reflected the difficulty of discussing Bakhmut with a lengthy, emotional answer.

Asked if Ukrainian forces were holding on or if Russia had captured the city, Zelensky was not entirely clear, answering: "I think no."

He then appeared to suggest Bakhmut was only a pyrrhic victory for the Russians, and that there was nothing left of the city for the Ukrainians to lose.

"There is nothing in this place... just ruins and a lot of dead Russians," he told reporters.

"But they came to us," he said of the Russians.

He said that Ukrainian soldiers did "strong work" and "we appreciate their great job".

The fog of war made it impossible to confirm the situation on the ground in the longest battle, and a series of comments from Ukrainian and Russian officials added confusion to the matter.

Zelensky's response in English to the question earlier at the summit about the status of Bakhmut suggested that he believed the city had fallen to Russian forces, and he offered solemn words about its fate. However, responding to another question about the status of the city, he said: "Bakhmut is not occupied by the Russian Federation as of today."

"We are not throwing people (away) to die," Zelensky said in Ukrainian through an interpreter. "People are the treasure. I clearly understand what is happening in Bakhmut. I cannot share with you the technical details of what is happening with our warriors."

At the meeting, Biden announced a new package of weapons for Ukraine, including "ammunition, artillery, armoured vehicles".



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky speaks during a news conference at the Group of Seven nations' summit in Hiroshima, Japan, on May 21, 2023.

LOUISE DELMOTTE/AP

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Conservatives lead Greek election



REUTERS - Greek conservatives were leading over the leftist Syriza in elections on Sunday, a joint exit poll by six polling agencies showed.

The exit poll gave the conservative New Democracy party between 36-40% of the vote versus 25-29% for the leftist Syriza party, which governed the country in 2015-2019, at the peak of Greece's financial crisis.

#### Cannes festival marred by pension protest



AP - Protests over pension reforms have roiled France in recent months, but demonstrations have been kept largely at bay at one of the country's glitziest events, the Cannes Film Festival.

On Sunday, dozens of protesters gathered in Cannes to oppose the raising of the reforms pushed through parliament by President Emmanuel Macron's government.

#### Moldovans rally for EU membership



AFP - Tens of thousands of Moldovans rallied on Sunday to demand European Union membership for their country.

The former Soviet republic of 2.6 million people applied last year to join the EU and in June 2022 became a candidate country, alongside Ukraine. More than 75,000 people participated in the demonstration in the centre of the capital, Chisinau, according to initial police estimates.

## Battles rage hours after Sudan rivals agree to ceasefire

Residents of Sudan's capital again awoke to heavy clashes Sunday morning just hours after rival generals agreed to an upcoming one-week ceasefire amid ongoing talks in Saudi Arabia. The ceasefire - the latest following many successive truces that have been systematically violated - is set to go into effect at 9:45 pm (19:45 GMT) on Monday, the US and Saudi Arabia said in a joint statement, AFP reported. The ceasefire "shall remain

in effect for seven days and may be extended with the agreement of both parties", the statement added after talks in Jeddah.

Multiple truces have been violated since fighting broke out five weeks ago, which the Saudi Foreign Ministry acknowledged in a statement published by the official Saudi Press Agency early Sunday.

"Unlike previous ceasefires, the agreement reached in Jeddah was signed by the parties and will be sup-

ported by a US-Saudi and international-supported ceasefire monitoring mechanism," it said.

But Khartoum residents - who for weeks have been sheltering from brutal urban warfare amid desperately low supplies of food and vital resources - were sceptical that this time would be any different.

The fighting pits the Sudanese army, led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, led

by Burhan's former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo.

Around 1,000 people have been killed and over a million displaced throughout the weeks of intense fighting, leaving millions more with sporadic access to water, electricity or medicine. Along with the capital, the war-scarred western region of Darfur has seen some of the worst of the fighting.

The region is still reeling from a conflict that erupted in 2003 when former leader Omar al-Bashir unleashed

the feared Janjaweed militia - which formed the basis for the RSF - to crush a rebellion by ethnic minority groups.

In Khartoum, doctors have repeatedly condemned bombardments on hospitals which have come under attack by both the air force's fighter jets and the RSF's artillery.

Residents of densely-populated neighbourhoods have accused RSF fighters of widespread break-ins and looting, with many families

returning to their homes only to find them occupied by paramilitary fighters.

Currently, 25 million people - more than half of the population - need humanitarian aid, the highest number the UN has ever recorded in the country.

A prolonged conflict - which analysts warn is likely - will cause millions more to become food insecure and push a million people to flee into neighbouring countries, according to the UN.

## UNSC has proven ...

The selection criteria for admitting new countries encompassed factors such as their international influence, robust economic capabilities, and due consideration for geographical representation. Consequently, nations including India, Japan, Germany, and Brazil were suggested as potential additions to the permanent membership, alongside the persistent demand of African nations for a perma-

nent representative on the top world body. Nevertheless, these proposals have languished without implementation thus far. Guterres has once again emphasized the pressing need for reforms, citing the backdrop of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Notably, a permanent member of the Security Council, equipped with the power of veto, has engaged in a war with another nation. The Ukraine conflict has profoundly hindered the efficacy of the Security Council, preventing it from fulfilling its primary responsibility of upholding international peace. Consequently, an additional predicament has compounded the existing flaws in the

structure of the Security Council. Hence, Guterres' remarks encapsulate the prevalent demands within the international arena, highlighting his perception of the current international system as both unjust and ineffective. A primary point of contention lies in the inherent unfairness of the Security Council, specifically concerning the veto power wielded by the five permanent members. While proponents of the veto right assert its legitimacy within the realm of international law, the root of the matter lies in the obvious elements of discrimination surrounding the composition of permanent members and the conflict of

their respective interests. At times, conflicts arise between the self-interests of these nations and their global responsibilities, further underscoring the inherent unfairness and ineffectiveness of the Security Council within its existing structure. An additional aspect contributing to this inefficiency traces back to the foundation of the post-World War II international system, which rests on the principles of political liberalism and being institution-oriented. Consequently, regardless of external variables, the very structure of the institution itself proves ineffective. This ineffectiveness extends beyond the confines of

the Security Council and encompasses other United Nations bodies, including the Human Rights Council and the International Court of Justice.

Hence, Guterres astutely highlights the prolonged failure of the United Nations to adapt to the contemporary realities of the world, necessitating comprehensive reforms. The primary focal points of criticism revolve around the perceived unfairness and inefficiency plaguing UN institutions, particularly the Security Council, along with its financial system known as "Bretton Woods" or the dollar's role as the foundation of global financial relations.