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Charges Filed Against 15 Israeli Officials



[Palestinian and international efforts continue to institute legal proceedings for the prosecution of Israeli officials in the commission of war crimes.](#)

International attorneys have filed war crime charges against 15 Israeli political and military officials including Ehud Olmert, Tzipi Livni and Ehud Barak.

Palestinian and international efforts continue to institute legal proceedings for the prosecution of Israeli officials in the commission of war crimes.

Although Israeli forces are involved in thousands of cases, local experts such as the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights believe that the recent major attacks on the Gaza Strip will be successfully prosecuted.

"They were well-documented, televised and the world was paying attention," a member of the Gaza City team commented.

After the very public detection of large-scale atrocities which included the use of white phosphorus bombs in enclosed civilian areas and the liquidation of children there is little defense, PNN reported.

Fifteen specific names are now pending for prosecution in The Hague's war crimes tribunal.

Those listed for prosecution include Israeli political and military officials, namely Ehud Olmert, Tzipi Livni and Ehud Barak.

Israelis are being warned internally against leaving its boundaries due to fears of arrest.

French lawyer Gilles Dovers is handling the complaint in Paris calling for the "open investigation into war crimes" committed by Israeli forces during three weeks in Gaza.

Dovers said today that 500 complaints are being submitted by Arab, European and Latin American officials. Bolivia is preparing its own case, as is Venezuela.

Argentine international prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, is deciding whether to go ahead with an investigation.

The French lawyer said there is some fear of interference from the United Nations Security Council under pressure from the United States to stop the proceedings and prevent the achievement of access to trial.

The founding texts of the International Criminal Court empower the Security Council to suspend its work.

Today's invitation to try at least 15 Israeli officials is being delivered by 30 international lawyers of several nationalities.

In parallel, the intention of a group of French lawyers to file a complaint

Iraqi FM in Ankara

Iraq's Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari will hold a series of talks with Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul in Ankara on Friday. Zebari is set to meet his Turkish counterpart Ali Babacan and President Abdullah Gul, according to a statement from the Iraqi Foreign Ministry.

In Focus

Saudi Prince Urges Obama On Israel Policy Shift

A member of Saudi Arabia's royal family warned US President Barack Obama on Friday that the Middle East peace process and US-Saudi ties were at risk unless Washington changed its position on Israeli occupation in Palestinian territories. Prince Turki Al-Faisal wrote in an article published on the Financial Times website.

"Unless the new US administration takes more forceful steps to prevent any further suffering and slaughter of Palestinians, the peace process, the US-Saudi relationship and the stability of the region are at risk," Turki, a former Saudi intelligence officer and former ambassador to the United Kingdom and Britain, told Reuters.

Israel killed more than 1,400 Palestinians, including a quarter of children and women, and wounded 5,500 others during the 22-day operation in Gaza which ended with a ceasefire on January 18. Former US President George W. Bush's administration had left a "sickening legacy" in the Middle East, Turki wrote, including the Iraq occupation.

The Bush administration had also contributed to the slaughter of innocent people in Gaza, said Turki, who currently holds an unofficial government position in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the world's top crude oil exporter.

"If the US wants to continue to play a leadership role in the Middle East, it must keep its strategic alliances intact, especially its 'special relationship' with Saudi Arabia -- it will have to drastically revise its policies vis-à-vis Israel and Palestine," Turki wrote.

Turki urged Obama to condemn the atrocities against the Palestinian people by the Human rights group Amnesty International said Israel had committed war crimes in Gaza on Monday over its use of white phosphorus munitions in densely populated areas. Israel denied that.



on behalf of French citizens of Palestinian origin to the French courts against Israeli officials is gaining attention in the cities of Paris and eastern France.

Coordination with other lawyers in Belgium and Spain is underway as similar complaints against the Israeli officials are being made in Brussels and Madrid. Belgium is among the countries who issued charges against Ariel Sharon in the past.

Moroccan lawyers also disclosed on Thursday practical steps toward filing a lawsuit against "the perpetrators of war crimes" in Gaza. Six lawyers are working with the Minister of Justice of Morocco.

As reported by PNN throughout the week, in Tel Aviv Israeli activists published 15 names:

Ehud Barak, Amir Peretz, Binyamin Ben Eliezer, Avi Dichter, Carmi Gilon, Dan Halutz, Doron Almog, Ehud Olmert, Eliezer Shkedy, Gabi Ashkenazi, Giora Eiland, Matan Vilani, Moshe Bogi Yaalon, Shaul Mofaz and Tzipi Livni.

Preparing Against Crimes

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has put the justice minister in charge of defending Israel against charges of war crimes during its 22-day Gaza assault, a government source said Friday.

Daniel Friedman will lead an inter-ministerial team to coordinate a legal defense for civilians and the military, the source said.

Ehud Barak, the Defense Minister and architect of the offensive, ordered the army to establish an incrimination team of intelligence and legal experts to examine any evidence that could be used against Israeli officials in law suits. That could possibly include Major-General Yoav Galant, the chief of Israel's southern command, as well as other senior officers.

According to human rights groups, Israel killed more than 1,400 Palestinians with a third being children and also wounded at least 5500. Israeli massive offensive also destroyed UN schools and the main aid headquarters where tons of food was stocked were bombed beside mosques, hospitals, government buildings.

Compelling Evidence

UN human rights expert and retired Princeton law professor Richard Falk said on Thursday that there is compelling evidence that Israel violated the laws of war by "conducting a large-scale military operation against an essentially defenseless population."

"There needs to be an investigation carried out under independent auspices as to whether these grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions should be treated as war crimes," the professor said, adding that he believes "that there is the prima facie case for reaching that conclusion."

"This is the first time I know of where a civilian population has been essentially locked into the war zone, not allowed to leave it despite the dense population and the obvious risks that were entailed," Falk pointed out, "the civilians in Gaza were denied the option of becoming a refugee."

Obama Calls Pak, Afghan Front Central

Calling Afghanistan and Pakistan as "the central front" in the fight against terrorism and extremism, President Barack Obama has named a special representative for the "perilous" region as part of a comprehensive strategy to combat the menace.

"My administration is committed to refocusing attention and resources on Afghanistan and Pakistan and to spending those resources wisely," he said Thursday in a visit to the State Department on his second day in office to set his foreign policy priorities, IANS reported

"And that's why we are pursuing a careful review of our policy," he said as his secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, announced the names of two special envoys - Richard Holbrooke for Afghanistan and Pakistan and George Mitchell for Middle East peace.

Former UN ambassador Holbrooke, "one of the most talented diplomats of his generation", will help lead US "effort to forge and implement a strategic and a sustainable approach to this critical region," Obama

He urged Obama to strongly pro 2002 Saudi peace initiative, which Israel's full withdrawal of lands o 1967 and accepts a solution for Palestinian refugees. È

Ex-Gitmo Detainee Joins Al-Q

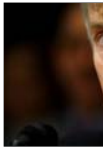
An Internet posting purportedly b Al-Qaeda in Yemen says the gro is a Saudi national who is a form Guantanamo detainee.

The Yemeni group, known as "A the Arabian Peninsula", posted t statement this week on a militant that regularly carries Al-Qaeda n It says the man returned to his h Saudi Arabia after his release fr prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cub. year ago and from there went to join the terror group, AP wrote.

The Internet statement identified as Said Ali Al-Shihri and says his number at Guantanamo was 372 The posting could not immediate verified, and Yemen and Saudi A authorities would not immediate! on it.

US Envoy Warns Over Iraq Pu

A hasty departure of US troops from Iraq would carry severe risks, including bolstering Al-Qaeda and threatening Iraqi



progress toward a functioning sc outgoing US ambassador said T Ambassador Ryan Crocker spok reporters a day after he and the commander in Iraq briefed Presic Barack Obama on the situation t Obama, who campaigned on a p end the war, asked the Pentagon whatever additional planning wa: necessary to "execute a respons military drawdown from Iraq," the House said Wednesday, accordi Crocker, who is retiring after a 3l diplomatic career, declined to sa and Gen. Ray Odierno told the p during the video hookup. But he the president was committed to a responsible pullout of the more tl 140,000-strong US force.

He said Al-Qaeda had been "mu weakened" due to setbacks on tl battlefield and a loss of support v Sunni Arab community. "But as l they can cling to some handhold are going to keep trying to literal their way back," Crocker said. "A perhaps most important it would chilling effect on Iraqis," he said US departure. "I think the spirit o compromise, of accommodation, on institutional development Ñ al would run the risk of getting set : Iraqi officials have said they hopi

said.

Like the Middle East “another urgent threat to global security is the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” Obama added. “This is the central front in our enduring struggle against terrorism and extremism.

“There, as in the Middle East, we must understand that we cannot deal with our problem in isolation. There is no answer in Afghanistan that does not confront the Al Qaeda and Taliban bases along the border,” he said.

“And there will be no lasting peace unless we expand spheres of opportunity for the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan,” he said describing as “truly an international challenge of the highest order.

“And while we have yet to see another attack on our soil since 9/11, Al Qaeda terrorists remain at large and remain plotting,” he said explaining why Holbrooke had been named special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

“The American people and the international community must understand that the situation is perilous and progress will take time,” said Obama noting, “Violence is up dramatically in Afghanistan. A deadly insurgency has taken deep root.”

In an appearance with Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton at the State Department, Holbrooke said he would be working on the Afghan problem with a range of military leaders, including Gen. David Petraeus, who is responsible for combat operations there, as well as Gen. David McKiernan, the on-the-ground commander in Afghanistan, and Adm. Mike Mullen, the Joint Chiefs chairman.

administration will stick by the tin down in the US-Iraq security agreement that took effect this month. The agreement provides for US combat troops to be pulled out of Iraq by the end of June, with all troops gone from the country by the end of the year. “We are prepared for the worst possibilities,” Defense Minister Abdul-Qader Al-Obeidi told reporters Thursday. “We cannot leave our country without whether these forces withdraw or not. We have plans for the worst possibility we mean it.”

The chairman of the parliamentary committee, Abbas al-Bayati, said Wednesday that Iraq has drawn contingency plans in case Obama speeds-up withdrawal.

Obama called during the campaign for the pullout of all US combat troops from Iraq within 16 months of taking office.

Although Crocker spoke of the risk of a “precipitous withdrawal,” he said it is clear that’s not the direction in which the administration is trending.

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