U.S. to ask Israel to include east Jerusalem, West Bank in settlement freeze

JERUSALEM, — The United States will ask Israel not to build Jewish homes in largely Arab East Jerusalem as well as in other mostly Jewish areas beyond territory Israel gained in the 1967 war, according to a U.S. official speaking on the ‘hot’ issue.

The request is reportedly part of U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s 90-day moratorium package offered to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during his recent visit to the states, Ha’aretz reported on Thursday.

The package includes a promise of $90-135 Joint Strike Fighter jets in a comprehensive agreement.

President is consistent that they will refuse to restart talks if Israel allows construction in Jerusalem. But the Shas Torah Guardians Party, and an extremist settler partnership of the Likud party, has said that is against the U.S. offer if freezing building in Jerusalem is part of the deal.

Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak, in a bid to gain Shas support, met with party leader and Interior Minister Eli Yishai overnight, in an effort to work out the issue, the local Ynet news site reported.

President Shimon Peres told Israeli Army radio on Thursday that in Netanyahu’s statement released by his office, Israel considers the entire city its “sovereign and eternal” capital, a long time position it has held steady despite international criticism.

BP ignores warning signs in Gulf oil well blowout: report

HOUSTON, — British oil giant BP and its contractors failed to learn from earlier errors and showed an “insufficient consideration of risk” in the massive oil well blowout in the Gulf of Mexico, a group of U.S. scientists has concluded.

In a report released late Tuesday night, a panel of experts convened by the U.S. National Academy of Engineering said that “numerous technical and operational breakdowns” in the Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion “suggest the lack of a suitable approach for managing the inherent risks, uncertainties, and dangers associated with deepwater drilling operations and a failure to learn from previous ‘near misses.’”

“The events also suggest insufficient checks and balances for critical decisions impacting the schedule for ‘abandoning’ the exploratory well — or sealing it in transition to production — and for considering well safety,” according to the report, which was commissioned by U.S. Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar.

“Important decisions made to proceed toward well abandonment despite several indications of potential hazard suggest an insufficient consideration of risks,” said Donald Winter, professor of engineering practice at the University of Michigan, and chair of the study committee.

“It is also important to note that these flawed decisions were not identified or corrected by BP and its service contractors, or by the oversight process employed by the U.S. Minerals Management Service,” he said.

In addition, several clear failures in monitoring of the well appear to have contributed to its blowout, making ignition ‘most likely,’ the report said, adding that the failure of the blowout prevention and several question-able decisions made about the cement process are also factors in the blowout.

A final report is due in the summer of 2011. (Xinhua)

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Clashes erupt at trial for deposed Kyrgyz president

ALMATY, — Relatives of those killed in April’s uprising in Kyrgyzstan clashed with police and defense counsels at a trial in Bishkek for deposed President Kurmanbek Bakiyev and 27 of his top allies, local media reported Wednesday. The relatives kept shouting slogans, calling to burn all defendants’ houses and charging them with life penalties. During the trial proceeding, they became angry about the present 18 defense counsels and some of them even broke through the police line, confronting physically with the counsels, who then quickly retired and left. The judge then announced the sentence would be made on Thursday.

Bakiyev was tried in his absence. He and his two sons and the other two allies were still abroad. Other 22 were charged with malfeasance and murder of civilians, the report said.

The trial was conducted in the Sports Palace of Bishkek to accommodate enough interested crowds, the report said. Riots broke out on April 7 in Bishkek and bloody conflicts occurred then between police and demonstrators which killed 37 and injured about 500 others.

The events initiated in the deposition of Bakiyev and his escape to Belarus. He announced resignation afterwards. (Xinhua)

Exxon Mobil: Abducted workers rescued unhurt in Nigeria

LAGOS, — Exxon Mobil on Thursday confirmed that eight personnel recently abducted in the oil-rich Niger Delta region were rescued unhurt.

The workers were among the 19 hostages rescued by Nigerian troops operating in the oil-rich Delta region on Wednesday.

The rescued hostages were kidnapped at different locations in the oil-rich region within two weeks.

“Mobil Producing Nigeria Unlimited (MPN), operator of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC)/MPN joint venture confirms that the eight personnel recently abducted from its Oso offshore platform have been freed unhurt by government security agencies in Nigeria,” the company said in a statement reaching here.

“We expect that the eight people will be handed over to the company later on Thursday Nov. 18, 2010,” it added.

“We would like to express our appreciation to the Federal Government, Akwa Ibom and Rivers State governments, as well as security agencies for their intervention and swift action during the incident,” it said.

“Mobil Producing Nigeria restates its commitment to ensuring the safety and security of its personnel and property,” the company added.

The Joint Task Force (JTF) had on Tuesday said in a statement that they are flushing out criminals in the region. “You will recall that in the last few weeks, criminal gangs masquerading as militants have been engaging in all atrocites,像kidnapping, sea robbery and illegal boarding of oil production platforms,” the statement said.

“The Joint Task Force is currently in an operation to rout the Niger Delta of these criminals, identifying and arresting elements in order for the region to experience the needed peace and security which are imperatives for sustainable development,” it added.

“All law abiding indigines of the communities hosting these criminals are advised to remain calm and promptly report suspicious characters to relevant military authorities,” the statement quoted regional military spokesperson Timothy Antigha as saying.

Nigeria’s main militant group, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), has claimed responsibility for the attacks on the Exxon Mobil Ibeno oil facilities in the London-based oil exploration firm Afren offshore oil rig. The militant group re-emphasized that it will launch a major operation to rid the Niger Delta of these criminals, thereby ensuring the safety and security of oil facilities across the Niger Delta in the coming weeks.

The group is known for a series of attacks on international oil companies in the Niger Delta, engaging in actions including sabotage, theft, property destruction, guerilla warfare and kidnapping.

The Niger Delta is an unstable region where inter-ethnic clashes are commonplace. Access to oil revenue is the trigger for the violence.

Over 300 foreigners have been seized in the Niger Delta since 2006. Almost all have been released unhurt after paying a ransom. (Xinhua)

Service and other regulatory agencies,” he said.

The report cited numerous decisions that apparently contributed to the accident, beginning with continuing abandonment operations at the Macondo site despite several indications that cement put in place after the installation of a long-string production casing was not an effective barrier to prevent gases from entering the well. “The well pressure test and cement test results as satisfactory without review by adequately trained shore-based engineering or management personnel suggest a hasty discipline and clearly defined responsibilities,” it said.

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