

Turkey's new military deployment in Idlib puts spotlight on Syria

Author:

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Despite claims that the South Caucasus is the new flashpoint for Turkey and Russia, the recent military reinforcements in Syria hint that the balance in the province is still fragile and could provoke a regional crisis.

On Friday, a Turkish military convoy, with more than 25 armored vehicles and trucks carrying logistical materials, entered northwestern Idlib province to reinforce Turkish military points in the area.

How Turkey's new military build-up will be considered by Moscow or whether it will lead to new concessions between the two countries, which back opposing sides in the Syrian civil war, are still a source of concern.

Navvar Saban, a military analyst at the Omran Center for Strategic Studies in Istanbul, thinks that this military reinforcement is likely to disturb Russia because the Kremlin expects Turkey to reduce its military presence in Syria, mainly in the area south of the M4 highway, which runs parallel to the Turkish-Syrian border.

"Russia began allowing the regime to mobilize some of its forces in the area south of the M4. There will not be a huge military confrontation, but there may be some artillery attacks from the regime on where Turkish forces are located," he told Arab News.

The number of Turkish military vehicles in the area is estimated to have exceeded 9,750 in the past seven months.

Russia refused to conduct new joint patrols as long as there is instability in the area.

The latest joint military drill of Turkish and Russian troops recently was held in Idlib on Sept. 21.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced on Sept. 22 that the two countries will resume joint patrols in northern Syria when the situation stabilizes after the attacks by Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) targeting the Russian Hmeimim airbase.

Kyle Orton, a UK-based researcher on Syria, said Turkey's military build-up in Idlib is intended as a message that Ankara will not surrender the remaining parts of the province.

"Turkey gave up more territory than expected and certainly more than many of its Syrian proxies were hoping. But the Turkish government does have a real red line: it needs a buffer area to keep the terrorists and refugees out of Turkey," he said.

He sees this as a response from Turkey to recent signals from Damascus and Iran that another offensive is coming in Idlib, indicating that Ankara will resist any such action.

“The Russians are unlikely to be too alarmed by Turkey’s actions; Moscow is content to leave Turkey with Idlib, but Moscow cannot control the Assad and Iranian system, which has as its ultimate goal the reconquest of every inch of Syria,” he said.

In the meantime, the Turkish Presidency submitted a motion to parliament on Oct. 1 to extend its authority to launch cross-border military operations in northern Iraq and Syria for another year until Oct. 30, 2021. The motion underlines Turkey’s continued “security responsibilities” in northern Syria, east of the Euphrates River and in the Idlib province.

According to Ruwan Al-Rejoleh, an independent analyst in Washington, DC, there has always been talk about a “new operation” in Idlib, the last rebel bastion.

“All players have been anticipating it, preparing for it and promoting it every once in a while but the pandemic conditions postponed it. Russia has an interest in controlling all the M4 highway,” Al-Rejoleh said.

The regime forces and Russian fighter jets have recently increased their attacks on HTS and other terror groups in Idlib province with heavy bombardments.

The March agreement that was brokered between Russia and Turkey required the establishment of a security corridor around M4 highway, cleansing the area from radical elements as well as conducting joint patrols to serve a buffer between regime forces and rebels.

During a video conference on Saturday, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that “Turkey will wipe out terror zones in Syria if others fail to keep their promise.”

According to Al-Rejoleh, the problem remains in the defining who are the terrorist groups between Turkey and Russia.

“While Turkey sees the existence of armed separate entities operating in northeastern Syria, such as People’s Protection Units (YPG) which are connected to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), as the immediate threat to its borders, Russia’s priority is to get rid of HTS, an internationally designated terrorist group, and other Syrian opposition armed groups that have connections to Turkey either through direct support or through Turkish intelligence channels,” she said.

On the Syrian front, Al-Rejoleh added, Turkey and Russia are likely to come to an agreement about possible concessions, where Turkey will “again” give up control of certain parts of Idlib in return for pressure-relief in other conflict zones or potentially the elimination of certain figures affiliated with PKK and a guarantee to prevent any new wave of refugees.



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[Gift of bread: Egypt air bridge helps flood-hit Sudan](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-10-03 22:29

CAIRO: A third Egyptian plane has transported bread-making facilities to Sudan as part of a relief air bridge following recent devastating floods in the country.

"Under the directives of President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, Egypt has sent a third flight of field bread production lines to the brothers in Sudan," an Egyptian military spokesman said via his official Facebook account.

The three flights landed in Khartoum on Tuesday and Thursday carrying 10 automatic bakeries.

Egyptian military attache Brig. Harb Ahmed Al-Shazali and Egyptian Embassy staff welcomed the planes.

Last Tuesday, the Ministry of Industry and Trade received the first batch of bread production units provided by the Egyptian army, which will be installed in southern areas of the capital.

The 10 bakeries will produce more than 1.5 million loaves of bread per day.

The production lines will ease the effects of flooding and the resulting shortage of bread in many areas of Sudan.

Field bakeries will be located in areas severely affected by the recent floods.

Since the beginning of the crisis, Egypt has sent several aid planes to support the Sudanese people.

"This matter comes within the framework of the cooperation and support that Egypt has been providing to address some of the challenges facing the transitional government in his country," Sudan's Trade Minister, Madani Abbas Madani, said after the first bakeries arrived.

He said that this support was desperately needed amid a mounting bread crisis.

"There are many strategic efforts to address this issue in its various aspects, whether it is related to the provision of wheat or the development of the bread industry, especially since more than 80 percent of the bakeries in the country are traditional and not mechanized," Madani said.

Egypt's Ambassador to Sudan, Hossam Issa, said that the air bridge is part of the Egyptian efforts to support the Sudanese people during the transitional phase in the country.

The Egyptian government is helping Sudan move toward a new phase of development, stability, prosperity and security, he said.

Egypt has sent 14 aircraft carrying medicines and medical equipment to help Sudan deal with the flood crisis.



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[Jordan's King Abdullah accepts resignation of Prime Minister Omar Al-Razzaz](#)

Sat, 2020-10-03 22:31

AMMAN: Jordan's King Abdullah on Saturday accepted the resignation of Prime Minister Omar al Razzaz but asked him to stay on as a caretaker premier until he designates a successor to oversee parliamentary elections on Nov. 10, state media said.

The monarch dissolved parliament last Sunday at the end of its four-year term in a move that under constitutional rules meant the government had to resign within a week.

A new government will pave the way for the November vote, as the country grapples with the rapid spread of COVID-19 infections over the last month that the last government had been widely criticised for.

King Abdullah appointed Prime Minister Omar al Razzaz in the summer of 2018 to defuse the biggest protests in years over tax increases sought by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to reduce Jordan's large public debt.

The monarch hopes a wider shake-up and a new assembly could ease popular disenchantment over economic hardships worsened by the blow of COVID-19 and limits on civil and political freedoms under emergency laws.

Jordan's economy is expected to shrink by 6% this year as it tackles its worst economic crisis in many years, with unemployment and poverty aggravated by the pandemic.



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Hundreds of schools in Jordan return to online classes as COVID-19 cases rise

Beirut reconstruction making little progress

Author:

Zaynab Khojji

ID:

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BEIRUT: Reconstruction is progressing slowly in the area of Beirut devastated by the Aug. 4 explosion in the Lebanese capital's port.

"The first obstacle hindering restoration work is financial. All private and official international bodies have no confidence in the Lebanese government so they've refrained from giving aid," Jad Thabet, head of the Engineers Syndicate, told Arab News.

"Any plan assumes the existence of a government, and the international campaign we saw when the explosion happened has withdrawn due to the political situation in Lebanon. Unfortunately there's total chaos," he said, adding that winter will make matters worse.

"There are people who'll be displaced and buildings that will collapse. The rain will wash away stones and soil, and block roads and sewers. There will be subsequent disasters for the people."

The explosion of some 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate that had been stored in Beirut's port since 2013 killed 195 people, injured about 6,500, displaced 300,000 and caused billions of dollars' worth of damage.

Thabet said he intends to travel to Paris in an attempt to urge UNESCO to provide assistance to Lebanon, but he does not expect much in light of his country's political situation.

Many residents in Beirut are complaining about the lack of repairs to their damaged homes, and have no faith in the government.

There is also a lack of progress on the judicial front, with Judge Fadi Sawan saying he "hasn't yet received any report from any security service that was carrying out investigations in the explosion site."

Among the teams that helped with the investigations were a French one and an American one.

An FBI spokesman said earlier this week that it has not been concluded that the explosion was a deliberate crime. The FBI is helping with the investigations at the Lebanese government's request, he added.

Sawan issued two arrest warrants last Thursday against the Russian captain and the owner of the ship that transported the ammonium nitrate to Beirut. The state prosecutor has asked Interpol to arrest them.

Ali Hinnawi, head of the Public Safety Committee at the Engineers Syndicate, said: "People need to return to their homes, livelihoods, work and interests. Is there anyone who listens and is aware of the importance of this?"

He added: "Social conditions are getting more difficult and winter is approaching. People are kept away from their homes due to negligence and mismanagement."



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Author:

Zaynab Khojji

ID:

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Sat, 2020-10-03 22:01

BEIRUT: The first session of US-mediated Lebanese-Israeli talks under UN auspices will kick off on Oct. 14 in the Lebanese border town of Naqoura. The negotiations aim to demarcate the disputed maritime border and, later, the land border. Lebanon is hoping that successful talks will provide an

appropriate security environment for oil and gas companies to do exploration work off its coast.

The first session will have low-level representation, with military and Energy Ministry officials representing Lebanon.

The UN-demarcated land border between Lebanon and Israel – the Blue Line – includes several points that are disputed by the two sides.

Lebanon signed in 2018 its first offshore oil and gas exploration and production contracts with three companies – France’s Total, Italy’s Eni and Russia’s Novatek – to explore Block 4 and Block 9 in the Mediterranean. The latter block is disputed by Israel.

Successful exploration would provide a lifeline for Lebanon’s ailing economy. The contracts signed between Lebanon and the consortium obligates the drilling of an exploration well before the end of 2020.

These companies have two options: Either proceed with the drilling despite the Israeli-Lebanese dispute, or negotiate with Beirut to postpone the exploration.

“Negotiating with Israel has important political and security results as it will lead to reducing current tensions,” said Muhannad Al-Hajj Ali, a researcher at the Carnegie Middle East Center.

He added that demarcating borders would remove the justification of the Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah for possessing weapons.

“Lebanon is entering a new phase. It’s possible to negotiate a final solution to the Lebanese-Israeli conflict, and then weapons will be included in Lebanon’s internal formula and, through a gradual phase, in a military strategy,” he said.

“The Lebanese Army, therefore, becomes the umbrella, and Hezbollah’s cadres may be integrated into the army or be a stand-alone wing under the army’s command, in return for a political gain that doesn’t violate the balance and parity. There’s talk of making the army’s command Shiite.”



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