

# Turkey 'may stall NATO defense plan over Syria dispute'

Fri, 2019-11-29 02:01

ANKARA: Ankara is reportedly blocking the approval of a NATO defense plan for the alliance's eastern flank until it gets the green light over its security concerns in Syria.

Ahead of NATO's 70th anniversary summit in London next week, Turkey has allegedly asked for more political support in its fight against the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia in northern Syria in return for backing NATO's latest defense plan for the Baltics and Poland, according to a Reuters report.

Turkey's NATO envoy has reportedly been instructed to stall the plan until the alliance formally recognizes the YPG as terrorists. Ankara considers YPG an offshoot of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) – listed by the US, EU and Turkey as a terror group.

The military plan, aimed at defending Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland against aggression from Russia, can only be approved unanimously by all 29 member states. Turkey's strategic location on the eastern flank of the alliance makes its approval even more critical because of its proximity to the Middle East and Russia.

According to NATO's founding treaty, an attack against one ally is considered an attack against all, and will trigger the alliance's military strategies for collective defense.

Karol Wasilewski, an analyst at the Warsaw-based Polish Institute of International Affairs, said that the move is unlikely to make Central European countries sympathetic toward Turkey.

"Secondly, this may be interpreted as another sign that Turkey is unwilling to contribute to the deterrence policy against Russia and it wants to remain neutral, yet the stakes are located in a different sphere – Turkey wants to get help when it comes to the safe zone in Syria," he told Arab News.

"Turkey will be less and less trusted in NATO and might be seen as Russia's Trojan horse within the alliance," Wasilewski said.

The latest move is seen as a tactic by the Turkish side to break its international isolation on its cross-border military operation into Syria. But it is unclear whether this will pay off or whether this is a new sign of division within NATO if no compromise is reached.

## **FASTFACT**

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international isolation on its cross-border military operation into Syria.

The alliance is going through a difficult period. NATO has been the focal point of criticism by US President Donald Trump due to the allies' spending on defense, while French President Emmanuel Macron recently argued that the alliance was experiencing "brain death."

According to Wasilewski, the matter is highly problematic in Poland since up till now Polish decision-makers could argue that Turkey had done nothing that ran counter to Polish interests. The two countries have diplomatic relations dating back more than 600 years.

"And now it wouldn't stick anymore," he said, adding that in Europe this will most probably be seen as Turkey's endeavor to transfer domestic problems to NATO.

For Madalina Sisu Vicari, an expert on geopolitics and Turkey, if the report is true then by holding up the upgraded plan of defense for Poland and the Baltic states, Turkey is attempting to build leverage that could enable it to achieve two objectives. The first is noninterference in its Syrian military operation from other NATO members, especially from those who have criticized it (France, Germany); the second is legitimization of the operation as Ankara seeks to obtain NATO's acknowledgement of the YPG as "terrorists."

"Whether Ankara will achieve both objectives, and to what extent, is hard to say now, but nevertheless it may get minimization of the public criticism expressed so far by some NATO members, especially European ones, who are mostly concerned and affected by the Syrian operation," she told Arab News.

Macron, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson are expected to meet on the sidelines of the NATO summit next week to discuss the latest developments in Syria.



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Is NATO's 'collective defense' still solid? Macron's words raise doubts  
NATO allies clash after Macron says alliance experiencing 'brain death'

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## [France warns Turkey over Syria military action ahead of talks with European leaders](#)

Author:

Fri, 2019-11-29 01:57

MENEKSE TOKYAY ANKARA: French President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday issued a stern warning to Turkey over its military action in Syria ahead of a crunch meeting on the issue with European leaders next week.

Speaking prior to talks between Turkey, Germany, France and the UK, due to take place on the sidelines of the Dec. 3-4 NATO summit, Macron said: "Turkey cannot expect solidarity from NATO allies and at the same time launch an offensive in Syria."

Macron's comment came during a press conference with NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg in Paris and follows his claim earlier this month that the alliance was experiencing "brain death" over its ability to ensure collective defense.

It also comes in the wake of Turkey's reported willingness to offer its support for NATO's defense plan for the Baltics and Poland on condition of the organization's formal recognition of the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia as a terror group.

At a time of high tensions in the NATO alliance over Turkey's offensive in Syria last month, the four-way meeting in London will bring Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Macron around the table.

Turkey's military incursion into northeastern Syria, the return of Syrian refugees, the establishment of a planned 30-km-deep safe zone and the subsequent political process, are subjects expected to rank high on the agenda for discussion.

Marc Pierini, the EU's former ambassador to Syria and Turkey and currently a visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe, said that Ankara's recent initiatives in Syria and its stated position over rebels and refugees had run counter to European stances and interests.

## **HIGHLIGHT**

At a time of high tensions in the NATO alliance, the four-way meeting in London will bring leaders from Turkey, Germany, France and the UK around the table.

"The meeting in London will be one opportunity to clarify positions. But the issue is bigger than just three EU countries," he told Arab News.

During an interview with the French magazine Paris Match on Thursday, Syrian President Bashar Assad said that the presence of French forces in Syria was an occupation, and he called on the French government to respect international law.

"The support provided to terrorists is still continued by Turkey, the US, Britain and France," Assad said.

Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, the Ankara office director of think tank the German Marshall Fund of the US, said that despite stark differences on certain issues, Turkey and Europe still needed to work together on key matters such as migration and the return of foreign fighters.

"The quadripartite platform will be an opportunity to voice mutual concerns but also renew their commitment to cooperate on these issues. As a general rule, talking is better than not talking, particularly for allies with mutual

interests but diverging views,” he added.

Last month, Erdogan accused Western governments, especially NATO and the EU, of “siding with terrorists” over their NATO ally.

Although the Turkish incursion into Syria was paused with two separate cease-fires with Moscow and Washington, Ankara has warned it would resume its operation if the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia did not entirely withdraw from the agreed zone along Turkish border.

In the meantime, Turkey will deport 11 Daesh suspects to France in early December as part of a 2014 agreement between the two countries. Accordingly, French nationals who are arrested by Turkish authorities are deported back to France in coordination with French authorities.



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# Iraq PM announces resignation after call from top Shiite cleric, Friday's death toll rises

Fri, 2019-11-29 15:53

BAGHDAD: Iraq's embattled premier announced Friday he would resign in keeping with the wishes of the country's top cleric, as renewed violence added to a soaring death toll in two months of anti-government protests.

Adel Abdel Mahdi's written statement was greeted with cheers and blaring music across Baghdad's iconic Tahrir Square, where demonstrators have massed since early October against a ruling class deemed corrupt and in hock to foreign powers.

"I will submit to the esteemed parliament a formal letter requesting my resignation from the premiership," Abdel Mahdi wrote, just hours after Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani used his weekly sermon to urge parliament to replace the cabinet.

Abdel Mahdi would be the first prime minister to step down since Iraq became a parliamentary system following the US-led ouster of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

"It's our first victory, and we're hoping for many more," shouted one demonstrator in Tahrir, as patriotic tunes blasted from the motorised rickshaws used to ferry casualties from the square.

Nearby, protesters occupying a gutted 18-storey building that has become a symbol of the uprising could be seen dancing and pumping their fists in the air. But despite their joy, many said the premier's resignation did not go far enough.

"We won't leave the square until every last one of those corrupt people resigns," said another demonstrator in a black shirt.

"Weed them all out. Every single one."

The grassroots movement is the largest Iraq has seen in decades, but also the deadliest, with more than 400 people dead and 15,000 wounded in Baghdad and the Shiite-majority south, according to an AFP tally.

The toll continued to rise on Friday, with 15 protesters shot dead in the flashpoint city of Nasiriyah and another killed in the Shiite shrine city of Najaf.

The UN's top official in Iraq, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, said the deaths "cannot be tolerated".

The previous day had been one of the bloodiest yet, with 44 demonstrators killed and nearly 1,000 wounded in Baghdad and across the south.

That came after protesters stormed the Iranian consulate in Najaf late Wednesday, accusing the neighbouring country of propping up Iraq's government. Tehran demanded Iraq take decisive action against the protesters, saying it was "disgusted" by developments.

In response, Abdel Mahdi ordered military chiefs to deploy in several provinces to "impose security and restore order" – but the result was the opposite. Men in civilian clothes opened fire at demonstrators, tribal fighters deployed in the streets and military commanders.

As the death toll surged, governors and police chiefs resigned and Abdel Mahdi sacked a senior military commander. On Friday, demonstrators encircled a Nasiriyah police station and torched five police cars.

And in Najaf, where 16 people died the previous day, new clashes erupted between protesters and armed men dressed in civilian clothes. As in Baghdad, demonstrators in the south did not appear satisfied with Abdel Mahdi's resignation.

"Our problem isn't the prime minister – we want all the parties to go!" one man told AFP in Diwaniyah.

Since October 1, Baghdad and the south have been rocked by the most widespread street unrest in decades, demanding an overhaul of the ruling elite and reforms to root out corruption, end unemployment and improve infrastructure. The demonstrations initially shook Abdel Mahdi, who came to power last October after a strained alliance between the two largest parliamentary blocs, Saeroon and Fatah.

The protests divided them, with Fatah backing the premier while Saeroon leader and firebrand cleric Moqtada Sadr called for him to resign. But they closed ranks around the cabinet following a deal brokered by top Iranian commander Qasem Soleimani.

The tide turned again this week, culminating with Sistani's dramatic intervention. For weeks, the 89-year-old cleric had called for restraint and urged parties to get "serious" about reform. But he ramped up his demands on Friday.

"The parliament, from which this current government is drawn, is asked to reconsider its choice in this regard," he said in his weekly sermon. Within minutes, Saeroon as well as MP and former premier Haider al-Abadi had called for a vote of no-confidence.

The Fatah bloc called for "the necessary changes in the interests of Iraq".

Parliament is set to meet on Sunday and if it drops its support for the government, the cabinet would remain in place as caretakers until the president names a new premier. Iraq's constitution, drafted in 2005, does not include a provision for the resignation of the premier, so his intention to submit a letter to parliament would trigger a no-confidence vote.

The country is OPEC's second-largest crude producer but one in five Iraqis

Lives in poverty and youth unemployment stands at 25 percent, according to the World Bank.





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Iraq death toll passes 400 in weeks of mass protests

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## [Breakaway former Turkish PM to form new party within weeks](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Fri, 2019-11-29 11:12

ANKARA: Former Turkish prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who was once President Tayyip Erdogan's closest ally but who broke away from the ruling AK Party in September, will form a new party within weeks, a source close to the matter said on Friday.

Davutoglu, 60, served as prime minister between 2014 and 2016 before falling out with Erdogan. This year, he slammed the president and the AK Party's (AKP) economic management, and accused them of curbing basic liberties and free speech.

"The new party which Davutoglu is forming is expected to file its application to the interior ministry and be officially established within a few weeks," the source, who was involved in the party's foundation, told Reuters.

"The final touches are being made to the new party. It will not be delayed into 2020. Buildings have been rented, a headquarters in Ankara and a provincial center in Istanbul," the source added.

On Sept. 13, Davutoglu announced his resignation from the Islamist-rooted AKP, which has ruled Turkey since 2002. He said at the time it was no longer able to solve the country's problems and no longer allowed internal debate. The source said some former political figures and some senior public sector officials would take up roles in Davutoglu's party.

Separately, former deputy prime minister Ali Babacan, who resigned from the AKP in July citing "deep differences," said this week he hoped to have formed a new political party by the end of the year to challenge the ruling party. Babacan was a founding member of AKP and served as economy and then foreign minister before becoming deputy prime minister, a role he held from 2009 to 2015.

But the source played down any prospects of Davutoglu and Babacan working together.

“The scope for acting together within Babacan’s party has narrowed because the two sides are taking their own line,” the source said, adding: “Of course there would have been many benefits in forming a joint party, but the will for this did not emerge.”



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## [Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman visits Expo 2020 with Dubai’s Sheikh Hamdan](#)

Author:

Fri, 2019-11-29 10:36

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman visited the Expo 2020 site in Dubai on Thursday with Crown Prince of Dubai Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed Al-Maktoum.

The Saudi crown prince was briefed on the iconic Al-Wasl Dome where all the main events will take place, and listened to an explanation of the upcoming world expo's design.

Mohammed bin Salman and Sheikh Hamdan also visited the Saudi pavilion and were given an explanation about its various sections.

The pavilion is built on an area of more than 13 thousand square meters, which will include a showroom with approximately 50 seats and an exploration center.

The Dubai Expo will take place for six months, starting in October 2020.







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