

Donald Trump says Erdogan told him he wants northern Syria cease-fire to work

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Fri, 2019-10-18 16:13

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump said Friday that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had assured him that he wants the "cease-fire" with Kurdish militants in northern Syria to work.

Trump, in a series of tweets, said he had spoken to Erdogan and "he very much wants the cease-fire, or pause, to work.

"Likewise, the Kurds want it, and the ultimate solution, to happen," the US president said.

"There is good will on both sides & a really good chance for success," he said. "The US has secured the Oil, & the Daesh Fighters are double secured by Kurds & Turkey."

Trump also said that "some" European countries, which he did not name, "are now willing, for the first time, to take the (Daesh group) Fighters that came from their nations."

"This is good news, but should have been done after WE captured them," he said. "Anyway, big progress being made!!!!"

Trump also tweeted "DEFEAT TERRORISM!" in all capital letters in response to a tweet by Erdogan saying "Mr. President, many more lives will be saved when we defeat terrorism, which is humanity's arch enemy."

Earlier Friday, Erdogan warned that Ankara would resume military operations against Kurdish forces in Syria if they did not withdraw from a "safe zone" along the Turkey-Syria border.

Turkey has agreed to suspend its offensive for five days in northern Syria while Kurdish fighters withdraw from the area, after high-stake talks with US Vice President Mike Pence in Ankara.



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[Ceasefire](#)

Amnesty accuses Turkey of 'war crimes' in Syria'Don't be a fool' Trump tells Erdogan in letter: World reacts

[Saudi Arabia, other Middle East countries warn citizens after protests erupt in Lebanon](#)

Author:

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Fri, 2019-10-18 11:32

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's embassy in Beirut on Friday warned its citizens not to travel to Lebanon, and called on Saudi nationals already in the country to avoid protest areas.

The Kingdom's embassy in Beirut advised its nationals to be extremely cautious and to "stay away from places of protest," Al-Ekhbariya news channel reported.

It also announced that the Lancaster Plaza Beirut hotel in the capital's Raouche neighborhood is a gathering point from which Saudi nationals can be transported to Beirut airport.

Egypt's embassy in the Lebanese capital Beirut also called on its nationals in the country to avoid protest areas, Egyptian state news agency MENA said.

"The embassy calls on all Egyptian citizens in Lebanon to avoid the areas of gatherings and protests, to be careful in their movements and to abide by the instructions of the Lebanese authorities in this regard," MENA said.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's embassy in Lebanon asked citizens wishing to travel to Lebanon to wait because of the current protests and unrest.

"The embassy also calls on citizens currently in Lebanon to take utmost care and stay away from crowds and demonstrations," the embassy said in its tweet.

Bahrain warned against travel to Lebanon and called on its citizens in the country to leave immediately.

Protesters across Lebanon blocked roads with burning tires on Friday and thousands marched in Beirut, calling on the government to resign over an economic crisis.



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Protests sweep Lebanon for a second dayThousands take to the streets in

Sudan rebel faction holds 1st round of peace talks with govt

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Fri, 2019-10-18 10:46

CAIRO: Sudan's largest rebel group is holding its first round of peace talks with the country's transitional government.

Friday's talks were taking place despite misgivings after a recent military crackdown on the Sudan Liberation Movement-North faction led by Abdel-Aziz Al-Hilu.

Over a dozen SLMN members were arrested earlier this week, and the group called off talks. But they returned to the table after the government declared a nationwide cease-fire.

Achieving peace with Sudan's numerous rebel groups is crucial for the transitional government. It's looking to slash military spending in order to revive the battered economy.

The transitional authorities have set a six-month deadline for making peace with the rebel groups.

The talks are taking place in Juba, the capital of South Sudan, which itself gained independence from the north in 2011.



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[Protests in Lebanon after move to tax calls on messaging apps](#)

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Thu, 2019-10-17 19:52

BEIRUT: Hundreds of people took to the streets across Lebanon on Thursday to protest dire economic conditions after a government decision to tax calls made on messaging applications sparked widespread outrage.

Demonstrations erupted in the capital Beirut, in its southern suburbs, in the southern city of Sidon, in the northern city of Tripoli and in the Bekaa Valley, the state-run National News Agency reported.

Across the country, demonstrators chanted the popular refrain of the 2011 Arab Spring protests: "The people demand the fall of the regime."

Protesters in the capital blocked the road to the airport with burning tires, while others massed near the interior ministry in central Beirut, NNA said.

"We elected them and we will remove them from power," one protester told a local TV station.

Public anger has simmered since parliament passed an austerity budget in July, with the aim of trimming the country's ballooning deficit. The situation worsened last month after banks and money exchange houses rationed dollar sales, sparking fears of a currency devaluation. The government is assessing a series of further belt-tightening measures it hopes will rescue the country's ailing economy and secure \$11 billion in aid pledged by international donors last year. And it is expected to announce a series of additional tax hikes in the coming months as part of next year's budget.

On Wednesday, the government approved tax hikes on tobacco products. Earlier on Thursday, Information Minister Jamal Jarrah announced a 20 cent daily fee for messaging app users who made calls on platforms such as WhatsApp and Viber – a move meant to boost the cash-strapped state's revenues.

The decision approved by cabinet on Wednesday will go into effect on January 1, 2020, he told reporters after a cabinet session, adding that the move will bring \$200 million annually into the government's coffers.

Lebanese digital rights group SMEX said the country's main mobile operators are already planning to introduce new technology that will allow them to detect whether users are trying to make Internet calls using their networks. "Lebanon already has some of the highest mobile prices in the region," SMEX said on Twitter.

The latest policy "will force users to pay for Internet services twice," it added.

TechGeek365, another digital rights group, said it contacted WhatsApp and Facebook regarding the matter.

"A spokesperson mentioned that if the decision is taken, it would be a direct violation of their ToS (terms of service)," it said.

"Profiting from any specific functionality within WhatsApp is illegal," it added on Twitter.

But SMEX said that the 20 cent fee would be "a condition of data plans" offered by mobile operators.

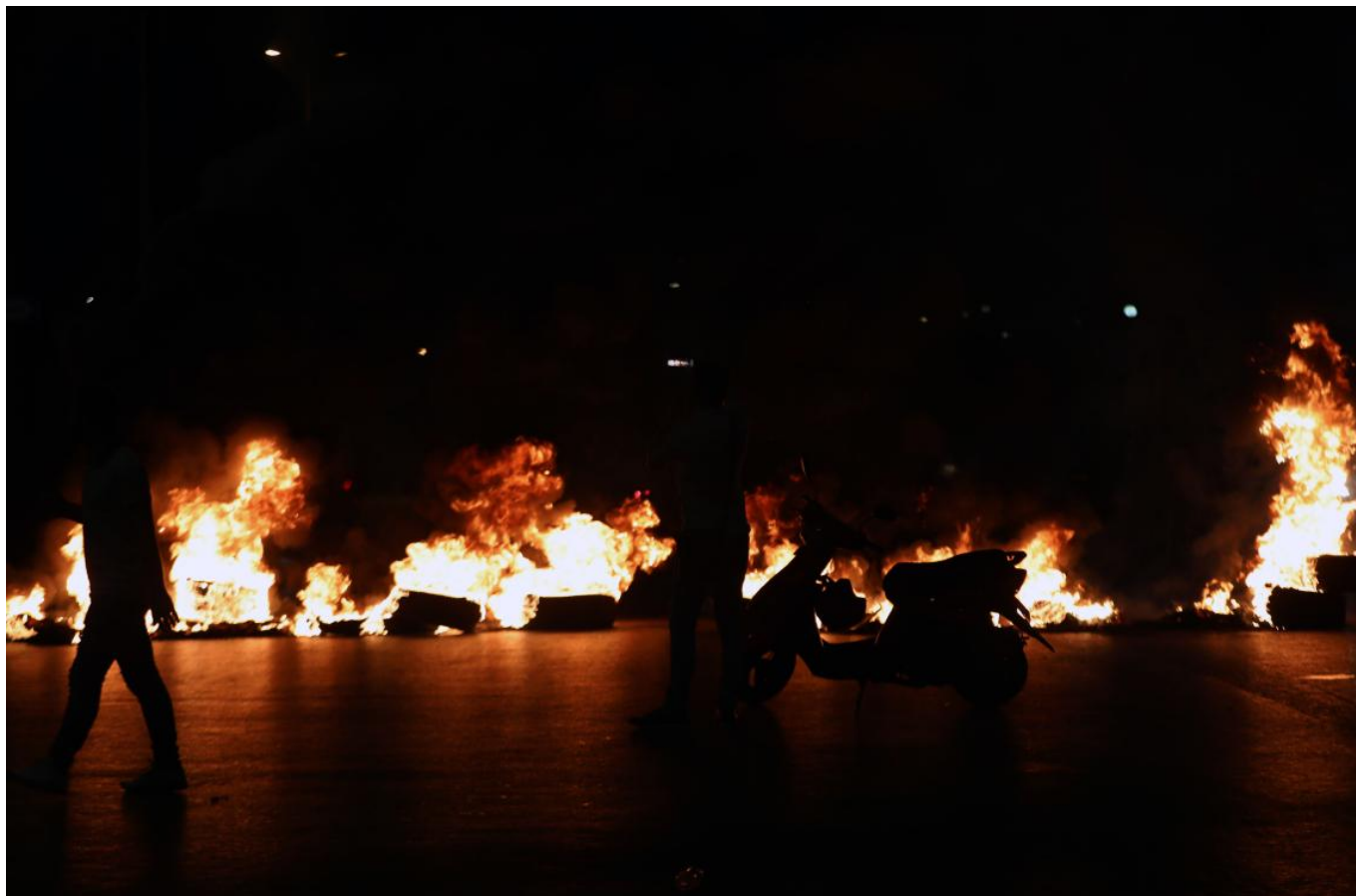
"Also, Facebook previously complied with a social media tax in Uganda, which is effectively the same thing," it said on Twitter.

Growth in Lebanon has plummeted in the wake of repeated political deadlocks in recent years, compounded by the impact of eight years of war in neighboring Syria.

Lebanon's public debt stands at around \$86 billion – higher than 150 percent of GDP – according to the finance ministry.

Eighty percent of that figure is owed to Lebanon's central bank and local banks.





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Lebanon plans to charge for WhatsApp calls -minister
Lebanon's Nejmeh signs cooperation agreement with Arsenal

[US reaches ceasefire deal with Turkey in northern Syria](#)

Thu, 2019-10-17 20:39

ANKARA: Turkey agreed on Thursday to pause its offensive in Syria for five days to let Kurdish forces withdraw from a "safe zone" Ankara had sought to capture, in a deal hailed by Washington but which Turkish leaders cast as a complete victory.

The truce was announced by US Vice President Mike Pence after talks in Ankara with Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan, and was swiftly hailed by President Donald Trump, who said it would save "millions of lives."

.@VP: Today, the United States and Turkey have agreed to a ceasefire in Syria. pic.twitter.com/SXAsYq8Xnm

– Department of State (@StateDept) [October 17, 2019](#)

But if implemented it would achieve all the main objectives Turkey announced when it launched the assault eight days ago: control of a strip of Syria more than 30 kilometers deep, with the Kurdish YPG militia, formerly close US allies, obliged to pull out.

“The safe zone will be primarily enforced by the Turkish Armed Forces,” a joint US-Turkish statement released after the talks said.

A Turkish official told Reuters Ankara got “exactly what we wanted” from the talks with the United States. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu described it as a pause, solely to allow the Kurdish fighters to withdraw.

This is a great day for civilization. I am proud of the United States for sticking by me in following a necessary, but somewhat unconventional, path. People have been trying to make this “Deal” for many years. Millions of lives will be saved. Congratulations to ALL!

– Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) [October 17, 2019](#)

Kurdish fighters would be forced to give up their heavy weapons and their positions would be destroyed, Cavusoglu said. He declined to call the agreement a “cease-fire,” saying cease-fires could be agreed only by legitimate sides, and not by the Kurds that Turkey considers terrorists. Pence said Washington had already been in contact with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which had agreed to withdraw and were already pulling out.

Trump tweeted: “Great news out of Turkey.”

“Thank you to Erdogan,” Trump said. “Millions of lives will be saved!”

“Today the United States and Turkey have agreed to a cease-fire in Syria,” Pence told a news conference after more than four hours of talks at the presidential palace in Ankara.

“The Turkish side will pause Operation Peace Spring in order to allow for the withdrawal of YPG forces from the safe zone for 120 hours,” Pence said. “All military operations under Operation Peace Spring will be paused, and Operation Peace Spring will be halted entirely on completion of the withdrawal.”

The deal struck with Erdogan also provided for Turkey not to engage in military operations in the flashpoint Syrian border town of Kobani, Pence said. Cavusoglu said Turkey had given no commitments about Kobani.

Pence added that he had spoken to Trump after the talks and that Trump had expressed his gratitude for the cease-fire accord. Washington's main goal had been to halt the violence, and it had succeeded, Pence said.

The Turkish assault has created a new humanitarian crisis in Syria with 200,000 civilians taking flight, a security alert over thousands of Daesh fighters abandoned in Kurdish jails, and a political maelstrom at home for Trump.

Trump has been accused of abandoning Kurdish-led fighters, Washington's main partners in the battle to dismantle Islamic State's self-declared caliphate in Syria, by withdrawing troops from the border as Ankara launched its offensive on Oct. 9.

Trump had defended his move on Wednesday as "strategically brilliant." He said he thought Pence and Erdogan would have a successful meeting, but warned of sanctions and tariffs that "will be devastating to Turkey's economy" otherwise.



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Pence meets Erdogan to urge halt to Turkey's Syria offensive 'Don't be a fool!' Trump tells Erdogan as criticism grows for Syria withdrawal