

Pentagon plans to send more troops to Middle East amid Iran threat

Thu, 2019-05-23 01:21

WASHINGTON: The United States is considering deploying more troops to the Middle East as it looks for ways to enhance the protection of its forces in the turbulent region, acting US Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan said Thursday.

Shanahan denied news reports that plans call for the deployment of as many as 10,000 more troops to the region, where tensions between the US and Iran are on the rise.

"What we're looking at, are there things that we can do to enhance force protection in the Middle East?" he said, speaking to reporters at the Pentagon. "It may involve sending additional troops."

Earlier, two US officials told Reuters that the US Department of Defense is considering a US military request to send about 5,000 additional troops to the Middle East amid increasing tensions with Iran.

Tehran and Washington have this month been escalating rhetoric against each other, following US President Donald Trump's decision to try to cut Iran's oil exports to zero and beef up the US military presence in the Gulf in response to what he said were Iranian threats.

The officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the request had been made by US Central Command, but added that it was not clear whether the Pentagon would approve the request.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

The Pentagon regularly receives – and declines – requests for additional resources from US combatant commands throughout the world.

One of the officials said the requested troops would be defensive in nature. This appeared to be the latest request for additional resources in the face of what US officials have said are credible threats from Iran against US forces and American interests in the Middle East.

The Pentagon declined to comment on future plans.

"As a matter of longstanding policy, we are not going to discuss or speculate on potential future plans and requests for forces," Commander Rebecca Rebarich, a Pentagon spokeswoman, said on Wednesday.

Shanahan said on Tuesday that while threats from Iran in the Middle East remained high, deterrence measures taken by the Pentagon had "put on hold"

the potential for attacks on Americans.

The US military deployed a carrier strike group, bombers and Patriot missiles to the Middle East earlier this month in response to what Washington said were troubling indications of possible preparations for an attack by Iran. Trump had warned on Monday that Iran would be met with “great force” if it attacked US interests in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, President Hassan Rouhani said Thursday, that Iran will not surrender to US pressure and will not abandon its goals even if it is bombed. Earlier in the day, Iran’s top military chief said the standoff between Tehran and Washington was a “clash of wills”, warning that any enemy “adventurism” would meet a crushing response, the semi-official Fars news agency reported.



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IRGC commander warns US battleships in Strait of Hormuz under ‘complete Iranian control’
Pompeo says ‘quite possible’ Iran behind Gulf attacks

Two killed in Iraq after vehicle explodes in car wash

Author:

Thu, 2019-05-23 21:45

FALLUJAH: A parked vehicle exploded in Iraq's western province of Anbar, killing two people and wounding two others, a district mayor said on Thursday, the latest attack inside what was once Daesh's last stronghold in the country.

The explosion occurred in Anbar's Qaim district, 300 kilometers west of Baghdad. Iraqi forces retook the area, which lies on the border with Syria, in December 2017, after which they declared final victory over the group. The vehicle was parked inside a car wash, said Qaim Mayor Ahmed Mahallawi. The attack targeted members of the Popular Mobilisation Forces, a group of Iran-backed Shi'ite armed factions who helped defeat the Sunni militants, and successfully killed one, wounding two others. A car wash worker was also killed.



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Northwest Syria fighting damages schools, health facilities

Thu, 2019-05-23 20:39

BEIRUT: Bombings by Syrian government forces damaged two schools and a health facility in the rebels' last stronghold in the northwest, activists said Thursday, after insurgents successfully hit a power station in a government-held town.

Fighting has raged in the last 48 hours in the region, where insurgents launched a counteroffensive earlier this month, trying to regain territory lost to government forces. The area is among the last controlled by anti-government rebels in Syria's eight-year civil war.

Activists and rescue workers said the government retaliated with an intense air bombing campaign. First responders said dozens of air raids and barrel bombs were dropped on villages and towns south of Idlib, killing at least eight civilians.

Syrian insurgents had recaptured Kfar Nabudah from government forces on Wednesday, two weeks after troops entered it at the start of a ground offensive against the rebels' stronghold.

Naji Al-Mustafa, a spokesman for the rebel fighters, said the government is carrying out a "revenge campaign for its defeat" in Kfar Nabudah.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said ground clashes have subsided but government warplanes carried out more than 60 raids on various parts of southern Idlib, part of the rebel stronghold that spans the province and nearby Hama.

One of the raids knocked out a health facility in Kfar Oweid village, the Observatory said.

Rights groups say that since the offensive was launched in late April, government strikes have hit at least 18 health facilities, including five identified to the government through the United Nations. Some of the facilities were targeted twice.

The White Helmets, a team of first responders, said the raids also targeted two schools in Kfar Nubul and burned crops on several farms.

Syrian Electricity Minister Mohammad Zuhair Kharboutly said Thursday that Al-Zara power station in Hama province was back online and linked up to the national grid.

Station manager Mostafa Shantout said a drone operated by insurgents dropped a number of bombs late Wednesday on the station, causing huge damage. He didn't elaborate. The comments by both officials were carried by the official state news agency SANA.

Al-Mustafa denied the fighters targeted the power station. He said the rebels have shelled Hama military airport because it is used to attack their

stronghold.



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France calls for Syria chemical attack reports to be investigated Turkey to keep military posts in Idlib after Syrian government attacks

[Iran, US tension is a 'clash of wills': Guards commander](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2019-05-23 10:52

GENEVA: The standoff between Iran and the United States is a "clash of wills," a senior commander of Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guards said on Thursday, suggesting any enemy "adventurism" would meet a crushing response,

Fars news agency reported.

Tensions have spiked between the two countries after Washington sent more military forces to the Middle East in a show of force against what US officials say are Iranian threats to its troops and interests in the region. "The confrontation and face-off of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the malicious government of America is the arena for a clash of wills," Iran's armed forces chief of staff Major General Mohammad Baqeri said.

He pointed to a battle during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war where Iran was victorious and said the outcome could be a message that Iran will have a "hard, crushing and obliterating response" for any enemy "adventurism."

On Sunday, US President Donald Trump tweeted: "If Iran wants to fight, that will be the official end of Iran. Never threaten the United States again!" Trump restored US sanctions on Iran last year and tightened them this month, ordering all countries to halt imports of Iranian oil or face sanctions of their own.

Trump wants Iran to come to the negotiating table to reach a new deal with more curbs on its nuclear and missile programs.

Reiterating Iran's stance, the spokesman for its Supreme National Security Council said on Thursday that "There will not be any negotiations between Iran and America."

Keyvan Khosravi was also quoted as saying by the state broadcaster that some officials from several countries have visited Iran recently, "mostly representing the United States."

He did not elaborate, but the foreign minister of Oman, which in the past helped pave the way for negotiations between Iran and the United States, visited Tehran on Monday.

"Without exception, the message of the power and resistance of the Iranian nation was conveyed to them," he said.

In Berlin, a German diplomatic source told Reuters that Jens Ploetner, a political director in Germany's Foreign Ministry, was in Tehran on Thursday for meetings with Iranian officials to try to preserve the 2015 Iran nuclear deal and cool tensions in the region.



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[Israel cuts Gaza fishing limit after fire balloons](#)

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Thu, 2019-05-23 06:12

JERUSALEM: Israel reduced the offshore fishing limits it imposes for vessels operating out of Gaza from Thursday after Palestinians floated balloons fitted with incendiaries over the border, officials said.

The cut came just two days after Israel restored the limits to those set in April ahead of an Israeli general election.

"A decision was taken this Wednesday evening to reduce the fishing zone off the Gaza Strip to 10 nautical miles until further notice," said COGAT, the defense ministry unit that oversees such regulations.

"The decision was taken after the launch of incendiary balloons from Gaza toward Israel," it added.

Palestinians in Gaza have frequently floated balloons fitted with firebombs over the border to damage Israeli property and have in the past succeeded in setting fire to large areas of farmland.

Israel banned fishing completely when two days of deadly violence erupted earlier this month, but lifted the ban with a restriction of up to 12 nautical miles following a truce.

The 15-nautical-mile limit that had been restored on Tuesday was the largest allowed in years by Israel, which has fought three wars with Palestinian militants in the enclave and has blockaded it for more than a decade.

But human rights activists note that it still falls short of the 20 nautical miles agreed under the Oslo accords of the 1990s.

Israeli authorities have not said whether the 15-mile limit was one of the understandings reached as part of the May 6 cease-fire in Gaza but Israel media reported on Monday that it was.

The additional nautical miles are important to Gaza fishermen as they bring more valuable, deeper water species within reach.

Four Israeli civilians and 25 Palestinians, including at least nine militants, were killed in this month's exchanges across the border.



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Israel eases Gaza fishing restrictions after truce