

Trump giving 'new life' to Daesh, former envoy says

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Fri, 2019-01-18 17:10

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump's decision to pull US troops from Syria was made without deliberation, left allies "bewildered" and has rejuvenated Daesh, the official formerly in charge of fighting the militants said Friday. Brett McGurk, who quit as America's envoy to the anti-Daesh coalition after Trump declared victory over the group last month, warned a US withdrawal would shore up President Bashar Assad and lessen America's leverage with Russia and Iran.

And "the Islamic State and other extremist groups will fill the void opened by our departure, regenerating their capacity to threaten our friends in Europe – as they did throughout 2016 – and ultimately our own homeland," McGurk wrote in an opinion piece in The Washington Post, referring to another name for Daesh.

McGurk, a Barack Obama-era appointee whom Trump kept on, said he was in the US embassy in Baghdad on December 17 when he got an urgent call from Secretary of State Mike Pompeo informing him of Trump's decision.

Two days later, Trump tweeted, "We have defeated Daesh in Syria," referring to another acronym for Daesh.

"But that was not true, and we have continued to conduct airstrikes against the Islamic State," McGurk said.

The decision came just days after National Security Adviser John Bolton had suggested an indefinite US troop presence in Syria, and as McGurk and then defense secretary Jim Mattis met coalition partners to confirm commitments for at least the next year.

"My counterparts in coalition capitals were bewildered," McGurk said.

"The president's decision to leave Syria was made without deliberation, consultation with allies or Congress, assessment of risk, or appreciation of facts."

Mattis quit after Trump's decision.

McGurk said Trump had made his decision after a phone call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who had said Istanbul would lead the fight against Daesh remnants in Syria.

But Turkey has also vowed to take action against US-backed Syrian Kurds who have conducted the fight against Daesh and lost thousands of troops as they slowly wrested territory from the militants.

"The irony is that defeating the Islamic State is what the president said from the beginning was his goal," McGurk said.

"His recent choices, unfortunately, are already giving the Islamic State – and other American adversaries – new life."

Just one month after Trump declared victory over Daesh, the militants claimed responsibility for a brutal attack in Syria this week.

Four Americans, including two services personnel, were among those killed when a suicide bomber hit a restaurant in the key city of Manbij in Syria's north – the deadliest attack against US forces since they first deployed in the war-torn nation four years ago.

The Pentagon on Friday identified three of those killed.

Among them was Navy Chief Cryptologic Technician Shannon Kent of New York. Her death marked the first time a female US service member was killed in Syria.

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US names Americans killed in Manbij, Syria 'Daesh attack'
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[French military to continue fight against Daesh in Levant: Macron](#)

Thu, 2019-01-17 20:09

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron said on Thursday the death of four Americans in Syria this week showed that the battle against Daesh militants would continue and he vowed that France would keep its troops in the region this year.

“The announced withdrawal of our American ally should not deflect us from our strategic objective to eradicate Daesh”, Macron said in a speech in Toulouse to the armed forces.

Citing the death of 16 people, including four Americans, in a suicide bombing in Manbij, Syria, near the border with Turkey, Macron said the next few months would be decisive.

“We will remain militarily engaged in the Levant in the international coalition (...) over the coming year,” he said.



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Daesh Syria attack kills at least 16, including US soldiers
Pakistan security forces kill 2 Daesh men linked to abduction of American

Man detained in Lebanon on suspicion of entering from Israel

Author:

By BASSEM MROUE | AP

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Thu, 2019-01-17 (All day)

BEIRUT: Lebanon's army intelligence have detained a man on suspicion that he crossed into Lebanon from Israel, a military official said Thursday. The country's state news agency said the detainee is a US citizen.

Lebanon and Israel are in a state of war and each bans its citizens from visiting the other country. There are no border crossings at the tightly-controlled frontier.

The official, who spoke Thursday on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, gave no further details saying the man is being questioned and once they have information the army will release a statement.

State-run National News Agency said the man who was detained is a US citizen adding that he was detained in the southern port-city of Tyre where he had been staying since Tuesday. It added that the man is being questioned under the supervision of judicial authorities.

There was no immediate comment from the US embassy in Lebanon.

Suspicion about someone crossing the tightly guarded border known as the Blue Line began to surface on Tuesday.

The Israeli military said: "Israeli army troops identified a break in the fence and signs that point to the suspicion of a person crossing the border from Israel into Lebanon. The incident is under investigation."



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[Gaza authorities: 6 Egyptian fishermen rescued, 1 missing](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2019-01-17 (All day)

GAZA CITY: Gaza's Hamas authorities say they have rescued six Egyptian fishermen in the stormy Mediterranean Sea but that one is still believed to be missing.

The Hamas media office says the rough sea washed the wreckage of their boat

ashore on the Nusseirat beach in central Gaza Strip

The fishermen were taken to a Gaza hospital. Local media reports say a 48-year-old Egyptian was missing at sea.

The boat apparently was sailing off the coast of northern Sinai when it got caught up in the bad weather and heavy winter winds sweeping the region.



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[Hamas unveils Iran-funded homes for former Israel prisoners](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2019-01-17 12:31

GAZA CITY: Hamas said Thursday it had allocated new homes funded by Iran in Gaza to former Palestinian prisoners who had been held in Israeli jails. The prisoners ministry said 26 apartments in a new building in southern Gaza

had been given out in a lottery between 125 former Palestinian prisoners. Officials from Hamas, the Islamist movement that rules the Gaza Strip, said the program was the first of its kind funded by Iran. A second building will be constructed in northern Gaza, the ministry said, adding the project aimed to “reduce the suffering of our freed prisoners.” Iran has long been a strong backer of Hamas and its ally Islamic Jihad, providing them with funds, weapons and training. Hamas has fought three wars with Israel since 2008. Israel regards Iran as its main enemy, accusing of seeking the destruction of the Jewish state though its support for militant groups such as Hamas and Lebanon’s Hezbollah.



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