

Turkey bolsters military on Syrian border as US readies pull out -media

Author:

Reuters

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ISTANBUL, QAMISHLI: Turkey is sending reinforcements to its border with Syria, Demiroren News Agency (DHA) reported on Sunday, adding that some 100 vehicles including mounted pickup trucks and weaponry had made their way to the area.

The heightened military activity comes days after President Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey would postpone a planned military operation on Kurdish YPG militia east of the Euphrates river in northern Syria following the United States' decision to withdraw from Syria.

DHA said the Turkish convoy, headed toward the southern border province of Kilis from another border province, Hatay, included tanks, howitzers, machine guns and buses carrying commandos.

Part of the military equipment and personnel are to be positioned in posts along the border while some had crossed into Syria via the district of Elbeyli, DHA said.

Elbeyli is situated 45 kilometers (27.96 miles) northwest of the northern Syrian town of Manbij, which has been a major flashpoint between Ankara and Washington.

In June, the NATO allies reached an agreement that would see the YPG ousted from Manbij but Turkey has complained the roadmap has been delayed.

Footage from broadcaster TRT World showed parts of the convoy entering Syria via the Turkish border town of Karkamis in the southeastern province of Gaziantep, 35 kilometers north of Manbij.

The convoys are crossing into area controlled by the Free Syrian Army (FSA), a Turkish ally, and are heading to the frontlines of Manbij, TRT World said.

A senior Kurdish official on Saturday urged the US to stop Turkey launching an offensive against Kurdish areas in northern Syria.

Aldar Khalil, who played a key role in establishing Syria's semi-autonomous Kurdish region in 2013, said the US and its partners "must honor their commitments" while operating in the country.

"And even if they leave, they can at least work toward an international resolution," he told AFP.

“It’s their duty to prevent any attack and to put an end to Turkish threats.”

Turkey, with support from the FSA, carried out two cross-border operations in northern Syria, dubbed “Euphrates Shield” and “Olive Branch,” against the YPG and Daesh.

The military offensives were focused on areas to the west of the Euphrates and Turkey has not gone east of the river, partly to avoid direct confrontation with US forces. The operations carved out de facto buffer zones, which are currently under the control of Turkey and the FSA.

Erdogan said on Friday that Turkey will take over the fight against Daesh militants in Syria as the United States withdraws its troops, adding that the planned operation would also target the YPG.

Ankara considers the US-backed YPG militia a terrorist organization and an extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has waged an insurgency in Turkey since the 1980s.



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Netanyahu seeks to calm Israeli concerns over Trump's Syria pullout
In areas backed by Turkey, Syrians welcome US withdrawal

[Egypt appoints new military intelligence chief](#)

Author:

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Sun, 2018-12-23 11:35

CAIRO: Egypt has appointed Major General Khaled Megawer to serve as the head of the country's military intelligence service, replacing Mohamed Al-Shahat, two security sources told Reuters on Sunday.

Egypt's military and intelligence services play a leading role in top level decision making, taking a more public role since current president Abdel Fattah El-Sisi led the 2013 military overthrow of Egypt's first freely-elected president, Mohamed Mursi of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The sources did not give a reason for Al-Shahat's dismissal, but El-Sisi has replaced several high-ranking security officials in the military, interior ministry and the general intelligence service over the last couple of years. El-Sisi appointed close ally Major General Abbas Kamel to serve as chief of the country's General Intelligence Service in June , two weeks after replacing the defense and interior ministers.

Megawer previously served as deputy head of the military intelligence body, Commander of the Second Field Army and Defense Attaché at the Egyptian embassy in Washington.



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After delays, Egypt's new mega-museum set to open in 2020
In Egypt, weddings get costlier as economic hardships deepen

[Netanyahu seeks to calm Israeli concerns over Trump's Syria pullout](#)

Author:

AFP

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Sun, 2018-12-23 11:01

JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sought on Sunday to calm domestic concerns over US President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from Syria, saying his country will still act against Iran there.

Trump last week said the Daesh group had been defeated and he was withdrawing the United States' 2,000 troops from Syria.

Israel has seen the US presence in neighboring Syria as a bulwark against its main enemy Iran and a counterweight to Russia.

Both Russia and Iran support Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime in the country's civil war.

"The decision to remove the 2,000 US soldiers from Syria won't change our consistent policy," Netanyahu said at the start of a cabinet meeting.

"We will continue to act against Iran's attempt to establish a military presence in Syria, and if the need arises, we will even expand our activities there."

He added that he wanted to "calm those concerned."

"Our cooperation with the United States continues full-force, and takes place in many fields – the operational field, the intelligence field, and many other security fields."

Trump's decision to withdraw from Syria – as well as reduce forces in Afghanistan – led US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to quit in disagreement. The US special envoy to the coalition fighting the Islamic State, Brett McGurk, has also resigned.

The withdrawal abruptly ends American influence in the war-ravaged country and gives Turkey an opening to attack US-backed Kurds in Syria.

But Israel is particularly concerned about the presence of Iran there as well as Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shiite group backed by Tehran.

Israel has carried out hundreds of air strikes in Syria against what it says are Iranian military targets and advanced weapons deliveries to Hezbollah.

A friendly fire incident in September that led to a Russian plane being downed by Syrian air defenses during an Israeli strike has however complicated Israeli operations there.

Russia subsequently upgraded Syrian air defenses with the delivery of the advanced S-300 system, which Damascus had said would make Israel "think carefully" before carrying out further air raids.



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[Benjamin Netanyahu](#)

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Israeli military still silent over journalist shooting
Palestinian shot by Israeli forces dies: Gaza ministry

[Palestinian president to dissolve parliament, Hamas irate](#)

Author:

AP

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Sat, 2018-12-22 (All day)

RAMALLAH: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas pledged on Saturday to implement a court ruling and dissolve the parliament controlled by his rival Hamas movement, triggering warnings of chaos from the group.

Abbas' announcement is the latest in a series of bitter splits and rivalries between his Fatah party and Hamas, which began in 2007 when Hamas routed his forces and took over Gaza, keeping his rule limited to parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Since then, the Palestinian Legislative Council, where Hamas holds a majority after a 2006 landslide victory against Fatah, has been largely disabled. If done, breaking up the legislature would remain symbolic, maintaining the already entrenched political divide between Gaza and the West Bank. "We resorted to the Constitutional Court and the court decided to dissolve the PLC and called for parliamentary elections in six months and we have to execute this (decision) immediately," Abbas told a Palestinian Liberation Organization meeting in Ramallah.

He accused Hamas of blocking Egyptian efforts to restore Palestinian unity, a charge Hamas vehemently denies. Abbas says the dissolution of the parliament aims to pressure Hamas into accepting proposals for national reconciliation. Egypt has brokered numerous deals to end the Palestinian split, but none has been fully implemented, with Hamas and Fatah trading blame over their failure.

In Gaza, Hamas lawmakers meet at the PLC, but most of independent members and other parliamentary blocs like Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine boycott the sessions to protest the disunity. The laws issued by Hamas legislators are limited to Gaza.

Yehiha Moussa, a Hamas lawmaker, warned that ending the PLC "destroys the political system and opens the door to chaos in the Palestinian arena."

"This is a ready-made recipe for chaos," he told The Associated Press by phone.

Hamas is likely to ignore the court order, insisting that the PLC expires automatically when a new one is formed following general elections.



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[Formation of new Lebanese government delayed](#)

Sat, 2018-12-22 22:05

BEIRUT: The six Sunni deputies allied with Hezbollah have opposed the candidate Jawad Adra, whom they had agreed earlier as their representative in the next Lebanese government, which has hampered the formation of the government.

According to the initiative put forward by President Michel Aoun, Adra would have entered the government as a member of the president's bloc after the prime minister-designate, Saad Hariri, refused to have the minister in his bloc. Adra did not attend the meeting called on Friday by the six deputies to inform him of the need to abide by their position, which is that although he would be part of the president's bloc, he would represent the position of the six deputies rather than that of the President in the government.

The Lebanese media reported that the six deputies were "deceived," while the pro-Hezbollah media accused Gebran Bassil, minister of foreign affairs, of

“trying to have Adra join the Strong Lebanon bloc, which may set back the formation of a government.”

“President Aoun’s candidate has to be committed to the president,” said Yacoub Sarraf, defense minister in the caretaker government and a loyal supporter of the president.

The pro-Hezbollah “Al-Akhbar” daily reported that: “The choice of the name of Adra, among the many names put forward by the six deputies, came out of Hezbollah’s and the Amal movement’s wish to satisfy Aoun, who made the offer of a ministerial seat, by proposing someone with a good relationship with him (the president) and Bassi, instead of choosing a member of the March 8 Alliance.”

It is worth noting that Adra was proposed by one of the six deputies, Qasim Hashim, who is a member of the parliamentary bloc of Speaker Nabih Berri.

Parliamentary sources told Arab News that the main problem is “the question of who gets the ‘blocking third’ in the government, that is, who is the decision-maker. It is a secret conflict between Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement, who are supposed to be political allies according to a previous agreement.”

President Aoun, Minister Gebran Bassil and General Director of Public Security Major General Abbas Ibrahim met on Sunday in the presidential palace.

Major General Ibrahim was commissioned by Aoun a few days ago to publicize his initiative to resolve the Sunni problem inside the government.

Ibrahim was able to convince the six deputies to name an external figure to represent them in the government because of Prime Minister Hariri’s refusal to accept one of them.

Speaker Nabih Berri also met Prime Minister Hariri in private.

At the end of these meetings, Maj. Gen. Ibrahim said he had completed his mission “and the ball is now in the court of political forces.”

The name of Ali Hamad has emerged as a substitute for Adra. Hamad is the director of presidential affairs in the Lebanese Parliament, and his name had been proposed by MP Qasim Hashim as an alternative to Adra to represent the six deputies.

The parliamentary sources pointed to a second problem that may face the process of forming the government. This “concerns the distribution of ministerial portfolios and the desire of certain parties to replace some portfolios with others. The problem revolves around the of the Media, Environment, Culture, Industry, Agriculture and Works ministries.”

Walid Jumblatt, leader of the Progressive Socialist Party, tweeted that “It seems that the national unity government is no longer recognized locally. After consultation, there seems to be a need for further consultation.”



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Israeli army says destroys Hezbollah tunnel from Lebanon
Lebanon's Hariri hopes government will be finalised on Friday