

Turkish foreign minister slams US, Western sanctions threat over military links with Russia

Tue, 2020-12-29 21:10

ANKARA: Turkey's foreign minister on Tuesday slammed the threat of further US and Western sanctions on Ankara over its military cooperation with Russia as going "against our sovereign rights."

And Mevlut Cavusoglu was joined by his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, in vowing to press ahead with strengthening links between the two countries.

The comments came as the two ministers met in the Russian resort city of Sochi to discuss regional and international issues ahead of a planned meeting of presidents Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan under the high-level Russian-Turkish Cooperation Council.

Among bilateral issues, such as the construction of a nuclear power station and further development of the TurkStream gas pipeline, military cooperation with Ankara was praised by Moscow – despite US sanctions under Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), a 2017 law targeting Russian defense industry exports.

Lavrov branded American sanctions over Turkey's purchase and activation of the Russian S-400 air defense system as an "attempt to promote the interests of the US industry with help of unfair methods," and claimed that Turkey and Russia faced Western sanctions for simply pursuing independent policies.

"It (sanctions against Turkish defense industries) is against our sovereign rights. We will not give up on our intentions," said Cavusoglu.

Increased military ties between Turkey and Russia in defiance of NATO pleas, risk causing an unprecedented rift with the alliance. However, Cavusoglu pointed out that the partnership between Turkey and Russia would not interfere with the NATO alliance.

Both Washington and NATO are concerned that Turkey's activation of the Russian defense system could give the Kremlin an insider look at the alliance's defense capabilities in the region.

Over the past year, Erdogan and Putin have talked about 15 times, and according to Oxford University Middle East analyst Samuel Ramani, NATO will be displeased about the Russia-Turkey meeting, especially as both sides had pledged to expand their military cooperation.

"On Syria and Libya, it is impossible to know what was discussed, but there is nothing to suggest that Russia would green-light a Turkish expansion in either country," he told Arab News.

Lavrov was on Wednesday expected to meet Mohammed Syala, foreign minister of the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA), to discuss regional and Libya-related issues.

On the Libyan conflict, Lavrov said both sides would “continue to facilitate normalization of the situation in Libya in every possible way via a comprehensive intra-Libyan dialogue.”

Ramani said that defiance of Western sanctions was a core tenet of Russian foreign policy which Moscow saw as a means of subverting the independent foreign policy of states opposed to the US interests.

“Russia and Turkey share this view of US sanctions policy more broadly. They extend this logic to US sanctions on Iran and Venezuela, which both Russia and Turkey see as punishments for Tehran and Caracas’ anti-American actions,” he added.

However, recently developed avenues of cooperation between Russia and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are likely to draw the ire of Ankara.

On the day of the meeting between the two foreign ministers, an SDF official confirmed more observation points would be built around the Syrian town of Ain Al-Issa by the Russian military. The move falls under an agreement between Russia and the SDF to decrease attacks from Turkish-controlled areas nearby.

But Turkey expects Syrian Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) to withdraw from the city completely. Turkey also blocks the Syrian regime’s efforts to retake the rebel bastion of Idlib despite Russian support to Syrian President Bashar Assad’s forces.

Rauf Mammadov, resident scholar at the Middle East Institute, told Arab News that NATO would most probably continue to monitor the complex web of relations between Moscow and Turkey, covering the geography that now stretches from Libya to the South Caucasus.

“Ankara’s nascent assertive and independent foreign policy has certainly raised eyebrows in the transatlantic community. Still, it has failed to yield any concrete actions mainly due to the disunity among the pact members.

“This, in return, emanates from the conflicting interests of some NATO members concerning Turkey’s actions in Libya and other places,” he said.

In stark contrast to Syria, where Russia has unequivocally backed the Assad regime, Mammadov noted that Moscow had shown latent support to Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar, commander of the Tobruk-based Libyan National Army, by oscillating between Tobruk and Tripoli.

“It was Ankara’s active engagement in Libya that drove the Kremlin’s opposition against the GNA. Thus, Moscow is expected to continue to counteract Turkey’s expansion in Libya, especially given the significance of oil and gas-rich southern regions,” he added.

Some experts pointed out that recent US sanctions approved by outgoing President Donald Trump's administration put Erdogan to the test for identifying his allies and acting accordingly in 2021.

Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, Ankara office director of The German Marshall Fund of the US, said it was not surprising that Russia would like to use US sanctions against Turkey as an opportunity to further draw a wedge between the Turks and NATO.

"At this point, Turkey will need to decide whether to escalate the tension with the US in reaction to the recent imposition of CAATSA sanctions or de-escalate with the goal of finding a solution," he added.



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plant

Author:

Tue, 2020-12-29 20:53

CAIRO: The historic development of Egypt's first nuclear power plant has been discussed in a Cairo meeting between Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and Director-General of ROSATOM Alexey Likhachev.

ROSATOM, the Russian state's nuclear energy agency, is working with Cairo to construct the El Dabaa Nuclear Power Plant.

Spokesman for the Egyptian Presidency Bassam Rady said El-Sisi received Likhachev to discuss developments in the construction of the plant.

El-Sisi said Egypt is "looking forward" to the "new edifice" that will add to the achievements of joint Egyptian-Russian cooperation throughout history.

He added that the Egyptian people will cherish the plant as a symbol of Egyptian-Russian friendship.

The Egyptian leader expressed his confidence in Russia's nuclear energy experience. He said Russian expertise will be reflected in the "highest technical standards" of the plant.

Likhachev said he was keen to strengthen Egyptian-Russian relations at various levels. He also praised the economic conditions and investment climate in Egypt for development projects.

He said that the availability of common political will is one of the most important factors in the success of the El Dabaa project, and is a priority for Russia.

Likhachev also highlighted the role of Egyptian construction companies that are taking part in the construction of the plant.

Head of the Nuclear Power Plants Authority Amjad Al-Wakeel said a permit is expected to be issued in 2021 to establish a site in El Dabaa that will allow construction on the nuclear reactor to begin.

"An approval for construction permission was issued in January 2019 to start the construction of the nuclear plant at El Dabaa with a capacity of 4,800MW," Al-Wakeel said.

He added that the Nuclear and Radiation Control Authority will issue construction approval to begin laying concrete bases for the first 1200MW reactor of the plant.

Al-Wakeel said that the work of contractors at the El Dabaa site "has nothing to do with reactor construction" and is instead focused on administrative building.

“The authority is waiting to obtain permission to start building nuclear reactors to generate electricity in cooperation with the Russian ROSATOM company that is responsible for construction of the plant,” he added.

Al-Wakeel also said that a maritime berth and global information center in the El Dabaa area will also feature alongside the nuclear plant.



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[Sudan to deploy troops in Darfur](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-12-29 03:32

KHARTOUM: Sudan is to send troop reinforcements to the south of its Darfur region after 15 people were killed in tribal clashes, the official news agency SUNA said.

The governor of South Darfur state, Musa Mahdi, announced “the deployment of

a large number of military forces in order to arrest those involved in the clashes and to collect the arms," it reported on Sunday.

"The era of reconciliation conferences is over and the era of implementing the law has started," Mahdi said, referring to talks in recent months, as quoted by SUNA.

A local official, also cited by the agency, said a dispute between the Massalit and Fallata tribes in the Gereida area had led to armed clashes in which two members of the Fallata were killed.

The Fallata mounted reprisal attacks that left 13 dead and 34 wounded among the Massalit, SUNA said, without specifying when the violence broke out. Gereida has been the frequent scene of deadly clashes between the rival tribes over the past two years, but this was the first since a reconciliation meeting held in October.

It comes less than a week after the UN Security Council agreed to end the UN and African Union's long-running peacekeeping mission in Darfur, UNAMID, when its mandate expires on Dec. 31.

Conflict in the vast Darfur region of western Sudan has largely eased in recent years apart from confrontations, mostly over land and water resources, between nomadic tribes and farmers.

The withdrawal of UNAMID – deployed since 2007 and which had 16,000 peacekeepers at its peak – will begin Jan. 1 and is expected to be completed by June 30.

The termination was requested by the Sudanese government and backed by China, Russia and African members of the Security Council.

Sudan's "transitional government is committed to providing security and stability for all citizens of the Darfur states," the Foreign Ministry said Wednesday.

"It will continue its efforts to address the roots of the problem and consolidate the foundations of tribal reconciliation and lay the foundations for transitional justice and the rule of law," it said.

Darfur was the scene of a bitter conflict that broke out in 2003 between African minority rebels, complaining of marginalization, and forces backed by the government of now ousted president Omar Al-Bashir.

The UN estimates the fighting killed 300,000 people, mostly in the first years of the conflict, and displaced 2.5 million others.



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[Yemen fights cholera outbreak with vaccination drive](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-12-29 02:14

HAJJAR: Yemen is fighting a cholera outbreak in the southeastern province of Hadramout, with local and international health bodies carrying out an emergency vaccination campaign.

Outbreaks in the remote Hajjar district usually last from April to September and cases vanish in the following months. But this year the district's main hospital reported receiving new cases of cholera in October, November and December for the first time in decades.

UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and health authorities in Yemen, alarmed by the increase in cases, joined forces to carry out an emergency cholera vaccination campaign in Hajjar from Dec. 20-25.

"The continuing arrival of new cases to the hospital is a source of concern to us and it is an indication that cholera is endemic in Hajjar," Abdullah Awadh Bahendi, the director of Hajjar's main hospital and the director of the

Health Ministry's district office, told Arab News.

The campaign targeted 40,000 people in the district's rural and urban regions.

Hundreds of posters and leaflets were distributed and trucks roamed around broadcasting messages about the campaign's significance.

Health worker Nashwa Mubarak said awareness activities that took place before or during the campaign had yielded fruit as most Hajjar residents took the vaccine with little objection.

"As a woman, I target women who would not accept male visitors and I also convince hesitant women," she told Arab News.

Health officials said they had registered at least 250 confirmed cases of cholera and one related death in Hajjar since April, compared to 520 cases and six deaths in 2019.

The WHO said that health facilities had recorded 167,278 suspected cases with 48 associated deaths from Jan. 1 to Aug. 2 this year. The highest numbers of cases were reported in the western province of Hodeidah, 26,936, followed by Sanaa with 24,593.

FASTFACT

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Health officials in Hajjar attribute the regular resurgence of cholera to crumbling sewage and drinking water systems, in addition to seasonal gatherings of people during the harvest of date palm trees.

Houses discharge sewage in the open or to small holes close by. Flash floods and heavy rains have largely destroyed sewage and water systems in urban areas, prompting people to use polluted water.

"The rains and floods have devastated water pipelines," Bahendi said. "The cholera reemerges when people turn to unclean water."

He added that the latest humanitarian interventions from the Health Ministry and international organizations had helped to reduce the number of cholera cases.

"Reasons behind cholera outbreaks have nothing to do with the war. We demand building sewage and water systems for Hajjar which would help ending cholera."

Floods isolate villages due to their rough geography, making it difficult for health workers to reach the sick.

Bahendi suggested building several health centers in remote villages along with rehydration corners for dealing with mild cases of cholera and equipping health centers with staff and ambulances.

Residents in Hajjar said fixing water and sanitation systems should be a priority and that they had no choice but to drink unclean water because they could not afford to buy processed bottled water.

Suleiman Ahmed, who is 48, said he contracted the disease after drinking unclean water or eating contaminated food.

"I cannot afford to buy clean water," he told Arab News from his hospital bed in Hajjar. He added that the hospital's directors had advised him to boil

water before drinking it or cooking with it if he could not afford to buy bottled water.

Khaled Al-Kaledi, the head of the health department at the Hadramout office of the Health Ministry, said the office had classified Hajjar as a high-risk district due to the high number of cholera cases compared to other areas in the province.

He added that officials, including him, had taken the vaccine to convince the public it was safe.

“People’s reactions with the campaign are amazing,” he told Arab News.



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[Turkey facing delayed China vaccine amid controversial extradition deal](#)

Tue, 2020-12-29 00:27

JEDDAH: China’s parliament ratified on Sunday an extradition agreement with Turkey to boost its alleged counterterrorism efforts abroad.

However, critics warn that the agreement will be used in tandem with economic and diplomatic pressure on foreign governments to deport Uighurs, a Turkic-speaking ethnic minority.

The deal was signed in 2017 by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan during a visit to Beijing, but it has yet to be ratified by Turkey's parliament.

Media have speculated that the extradition deal might be used by Beijing as a bargaining chip to boost its investments in Turkey and increase sales of its coronavirus vaccine in the country.

China has already delayed delivery of the first shipment of the Sinovac vaccine to Turkey for several days after a "customs-related problem" arose.

Beijing is also expected to adjust its trade and business ties with Turkey, which is in dire need of foreign capital, depending on the willingness of Ankara to ratify the extradition deal in the near future.

China is still among Turkey's largest import partners.

The first train carrying goods from Turkey to China reached its destination on Saturday, having covered a distance of 8,693 km

However, despite the battered Turkish economy facing a depletion of foreign exchange reserves, an expert said Turkey "would not ratify the agreement anytime soon."

Turkey's domestic situation means the ruling party risks losing its nationalistic coalition partner over accusations that the agreement will harm Uighur minorities, the expert said.

"The government is likely to receive a huge blow from the opposition parties and its coalition partner if it proceeds with ratifying the bill in parliament amid the fragile political circumstances," the expert told Arab News.

If the agreement is passed by the Turkish parliament, Uighur refugees in Turkey will face extradition to China if they are accused of committing terror or political crimes.

However, if Uighurs are granted Turkish citizenship, extradition requests could be denied by Turkish authorities.

Turkey's government already faced heavy criticism earlier this year following reports that some exiled Uighurs were deported to China through third countries, mostly Tajikistan.

Critics have said that the long-term residency applications of some Uighurs were also rejected by Turkey, but Ankara has denied the claims.

A motion brought forward by Turkey's main opposition party to establish a parliamentary committee to investigate China's treatment of Uighurs was vetoed by the ruling party earlier this year.

Last month, Yusufjrang Aimaitijiang, an Uighur man who claimed to have been forced by Chinese authorities to provide information about fellow Uighurs in Turkey, was shot twice in Istanbul.

There are also mounting allegations about Uighur refugees being interrogated by Turkish police over terror-related claims.

About 50,000 Uighur refugees are believed to live in Turkey. Many have fled the crackdown in northwest China, and see Turkey as a safe haven.

Several districts on the European side of Istanbul have already become popular among Uighurs, and they are welcomed with solidarity by Turkish locals.

China has faced widespread criticism regarding its policies targeting Uighurs and its use of forced labor in mass internment camps.

Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi recently held a phone conversation with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu.

During the call on Dec. 14, Wang said that “both sides should stand against terrorism,” while Cavusoglu said Turkey “will not allow China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity to be undermined,” according to a statement by the Chinese foreign ministry.

Turkey was absent from a group of 22 countries that urged the UN Human Rights Council in July to investigate systemic human rights abuse in China.





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