

Bahrain praises US partnership as 'cornerstone' of Gulf security

Tue, 2020-12-01 15:28

Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Al-Zayani praised on Tuesday his country's partnership with the US as the "cornerstone" of Gulf security.

The Bahraini minister spoke during the virtual opening of the first US-Bahrain Strategic Dialogue that focused on defense cooperation, regional security and economic development and trade.

US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo - who was hosting the dialogue - said that Washington was looking to cooperate with Bahrain to fight terrorism.

Pleased to launch the first U.S.-Bahrain Strategic Dialogue today with Foreign Minister Al Zayani. Bahrain is a vital U.S. partner in the Gulf. Bahrain's partnership in the Abraham Accords embodies our spirit of unity to deter regional threats and build prosperity.

pic.twitter.com/8A9MwbDLV2

- Secretary Pompeo (@SecPompeo) [December 1, 2020](#)

Sanctions had deprived Iran of financing terrorist groups, Pompeo said.

During the virtual dialogue, Zayani called on the international community to continue pressure on Iran as he viewed Tehran as a security challenge for countries in the region.

Iran has malicious intentions towards regional states, the Bahraini minister

said.



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[Turkey, Russia seal deal for Karabakh 'peacekeeping center'](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1606814134172105800

Tue, 2020-12-01 08:45

ANKARA: Turkey and Russia have agreed to monitor a truce over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region from a joint peacekeeping center, Ankara's defense ministry said on Tuesday.

The deal comes after days of talks between Turkish and Russian officials about how the two regional powers would jointly implement a Moscow-brokered cease-fire signed this month between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Technical details for setting up the joint center were concluded and an agreement was signed, the defense ministry said in a statement, adding that it would begin work “as soon as possible.”

Turkey is a staunch ally of Azerbaijan and has fervently defended its right to take back the Nagorno-Karabakh lands Baku lost to ethnic Armenian separatists in a 1988-94 war.

The truce deal ended more than six weeks of fighting that claimed more than 1,400 lives and saw ethnic Armenians agree to withdraw from large parts of the contested region of Azerbaijan.

The Turkish parliament voted this month to deploy a mission to “establish a joint center with Russia and to carry out the center’s activities.”

The deployment is set to last a year and its size will be determined by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Russia has said repeatedly that Turkey will have no troops on the ground under the truce deal’s terms.



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Turkey, Russia discuss involving other countries in Nagorno-Karabakh cease-fire efforts
Armenia appoints new defense minister after Nagorno-Karabakh cease-fire

Turkish opposition politician investigated for criticizing Qatar military deal

Tue, 2020-12-01 01:33

ISTANBUL: A Turkish opposition politician who is being investigated for criticizing a military deal with Qatar has defended his remarks.

MP Ali Mahir Basarir, from the Republican People's Party (CHP), said the Turkish army had been sold to the Qataris under a series of deals that were signed between the two governments on Nov. 26.

"We have reached a point where the state's army is sold to Qatar in a first for the country's history," he said during a TV interview.

He criticized a contract that was signed last year with military vehicle producer BMC, a Turkish-Qatari joint venture, for the mass manufacture of the Altay tank, Turkey's first new generation main battle tank.

The Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office on Nov. 29 launched a probe into the opposition politician for "humiliating the Turkish government and the army."

But Basarir denied his remarks were critical of the army. "I stand behind my words," he tweeted on Sunday. "Selling a military factory of our army to another country is treachery. It is betrayal."

There have been strongly worded statements from government officials, and even accusations of him of being "a lover" of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

"This deputy is not worthy of representing our sacred nation," Mahir Unal, deputy leader of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), tweeted. "He should quickly apologize."

AKP spokesman Omer Celik blamed Basarir for "using poisonous language devoid of morals about the heroic Turkish army."

The Turkish Defense Ministry is expected to file a complaint about the MP for "insulting the army and Turkish soldiers," while Turkey's media watchdog will investigate the broadcast.

Turkey's top tank factory was transferred to a Turkish-Qatari private venture in 2019 to produce armored vehicles.

The Turkish partner of BMC, Ethem Sancak, is known to be a close confidant of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The plant was leased by BMC, which will operate the national tank factory for 25 years, but the lease price has never been made public.

The deal was criticized by opposition figures at the time, and they emphasized the strategic importance of such a factory for Turkey's defense capabilities.

Qatar also signed a billion-dollar contract last year to buy about 100 tanks from Turkey.

But Germany is reluctant to share its engine expertise technology – which is critical for making these tanks – with Turkey due to political concerns.

“This government likes Qataris more than Turkish people,” CHP lawmaker Alpay Antmen tweeted. “It is totally ‘emotional.’”



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Egypt reveals NAC progress with 'smart government' on horizon

Author:

Tue, 2020-12-01 01:26

Egypt has trained 23 percent of New Administrative Capital (NAC) employees, Saleh El-Sheikh, head of the Central Agency for Organization and Administration, has said.

El-Sheikh said that 119 parties are moving to the New Administrative Capital, whether through complete, partial or leadership transfers. Egyptian Cabinet heads and 31 ministries will be transferred to the capital, too.

He added that 45 bodies affiliated with ministries will be transferred completely, while four bodies associated with ministries will be partially transferred.

El-Sheikh said that 17 agencies that will transfer their leadership positions only.

As part of the project, 13 fully independent bodies will be transferred, three independent parties will be partially transferred, while one independent party will transfer leadership.

The news came during a meeting chaired by Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly to review the positions of ministry authorities that will be transferred to the New Administrative Capital. The talks reviewed training programs and efforts to structure a number of ministries and affiliated bodies as part of the efforts to prepare for the move.

Madbouly said the government is aiming to provide the best training programs for employees moving to the NAC to enable them to perform their jobs efficiently.

Egyptian Minister of Planning and Economic Development Hala Al-Saeed said that the transfer of employees and ministries to the New Administrative Capital will happen in phases, starting from the middle of next year.

Al-Saeed said that by the end of 2021, the entire government will have moved to the capital in its new form as a "smart government."

She pointed to the provision of housing units and sums of money that employees receive as a form of motivation to encourage them to move.

The NAC is located on an area of about 170,000 feddans. Its first phase is about 40,000 feddans, and is set to accommodate more than 6 million people, providing job opportunities for more than 2 million people.



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Egypt to trial New Administrative Capital next year
First government headquarters launched in Egypt's new administrative capital

[Turkish research ship returns to port after Mediterranean survey](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-12-01 01:22

ANKARA: A Turkish seismic survey vessel returned to port from its gas exploration activities in the disputed waters of eastern Mediterranean on Monday morning, in a last-minute "goodwill gesture" to open room for negotiation with Greece and Cyprus in the coming days.

The presence of the Oruc Reis in the area since Aug. 10, where it has explored for potential natural gas reserves, has been at the heart of a dispute between Ankara, the EU and US.

EU leaders will decide during a Dec. 10-11 summit potential sanctions over Ankara's activities, which Greece has called a "direct threat to peace." The vessel was spotted sailing just seven miles off the coast of the Greek island of Kastellorizo on Thursday.

However, Ankara still maintains that it has rights in the region due to its long Mediterranean coastline. Tensions escalated back in August when Turkey sent the vessel into waters also claimed by Greece, which has so far rejected any talks with Turkey over its maritime claims as long as the Oruc Reis remained in the area.

The Turkish Energy Ministry also announced that the ship had collected "2D seismic data of 10.955 kilometers" (7,000 miles) during its excursion. Gallia Lindenstrauss, senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies, said the Oruc Reis's return to port was likely linked to the coming meeting of the European Council as an attempt to alleviate the situation and avoid sanctions, rather than a sign of genuine desire for negotiations.

"The decision whether or not to impose sanctions on Turkey depends very much on the position of Germany. As there are strong economic ties between Turkey and Germany and also a very large Turkish diaspora in Germany, Berlin has tried to mediate between Ankara and Athens," she told Arab News.

Lindenstrauss added, though, that two incidents may have shattered some of the goodwill toward Ankara in Berlin.

"The first was the re-sending in October of the Oruc Reis to what Greece sees as its economic waters, while German mediation efforts were in play. The second, at the end of November, was the strong negative reaction of Ankara to what happened when a German navy crew searched a Turkish cargo ship on suspicion that it violated the arms embargo on Libya, as Berlin thought the search was completely legal under the mandate of the Irini operation," she said.

Last week, the European Parliament called for sanctions against Turkey over President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to Northern Cyprus, and Turkey's continuing operations in the Eastern Mediterranean, which Brussels says are illegal.

FASTFACT

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During his daily press conference on Monday, Peter Stano, the lead spokesperson for the external affairs of the EU, said Brussels could not take steps based on a single statement or move, and added that the manners and statements given throughout this period would be taken into account w during the summit.

"It is a cat and mouse game," said Fiona Mullen, director of Cyprus-based Sapienta Economics.

"We can assume that the EU expected Oruc Reis to return to port before the summit. But there has been no change on Varosha or the Cyprus Exclusive Economic Zone, so the EU will have to word the conclusions carefully to make sure any threat of sanctions remains credible," she told Arab News.

According to Charles Ellinas, a senior fellow and energy expert at the Atlantic Council, given what happened in September when Oruc Reis was pulled back, only to return mid-October after the special European Council meeting on Oct. 1, it is difficult to take this new development at face value. “Based on the previous experience, it looks as if Oruc Reis’ return to base may be linked to the forthcoming European Council meeting on Dec. 10, which will consider EU sanctions on Turkey. This time round, though, the EU may not take the bait. Sanctions are still likely,” he told Arab News. Sanctions that specifically target hydrocarbon-related areas of Turkey’s economy are likely to be taken during the summit, experts note. “The EU will also demand firmer commitments from Turkey – to stop activities in the disputed areas to enable resumption of discussions with Greece,” Ellinas said. However, the withdrawal of Oruc Reis may also be linked to the change of presidency in the US. “Erdogan has already started making conciliatory remarks towards the US and the EU – such as ‘Turkey is part of Europe’ and ‘Turkey-US relations are of a strategic nature,’ following Joe Biden’s election,” Ellinas said. But, the energy expert added, remarks alone may not be enough. “There will be a need for a reset and a willingness by Turkey to cease aggression and return to diplomacy and negotiations, without the threat of intimidation,” he said.



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