

Germany voices 'cautious optimism' Libya conflict can be resolved

Mon, 2020-10-05 19:29

Germany on Monday voiced "cautious optimism" that the conflict in Libya could be resolved, after international talks aimed at seeking long elusive peace for the wartorn country.

"We believe that there is now a window in which much has become possible that was not possible before. I think we must seize that," said Foreign Minister Heiko Maas after co-chairing with the United Nations talks that involved the warring Libyan sides.

"There is reason for cautious optimism – we see increasingly signs of a switch from a militaristic to a political logic," the minister said.



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Turkey hits Kurds in northern Syria with a cruel weapon: water

Sun, 2020-10-04 22:34

DUBAI: Near the town of Ras Al-Ain in Hasakah, in northeastern Syria, empty jerry cans were piled high on the roadside, where women and their restless children waited in the blistering heat for trucks to bring water to their parched community. Just a few days earlier, Turkish occupation forces had once again cut off the water supply from the Alouk pumping station, five kilometers away.

This critical facility normally supplies drinking water to nearly 1 million people in Hasakah. Without it, the province goes thirsty.

“We had no water for a month,” recalled Ahmed Zubair, 22, who works at a local phone shop. “Without water, we can’t protect ourselves against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). This is a reason for the spread of disease, because there’s not enough water for cleaning, only for drinking. This is a danger for children and for society in general.”

Xelil Osman, a local delivery driver, said: “We were delivering water to the people with trucks. The water situation is really bad, and we always worry it won’t be enough for the people. If there is water, we deliver it. But if there is none, we have nothing to deliver.”



Very young children have not been spared from queueing for water in the town of Ras Al-Ain in Hasakah, northeastern Syria, after Turkish occupation forces cut off the water supply. (Photo courtesy of Jamal Photography)

It was no accident of fate that water had to be delivered by road to tens of

thousands of Kurdish residents in Ras Al-Ain and surrounding areas in Hasakah for nearly four weeks since Aug. 13.

In October last year, Turkey and its Syrian rebel proxies launched their self-proclaimed Operation Peace Spring, targeting the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in northeastern Syria. The SDF is mostly made up of members of the People's Protection Units, which Turkey considers a terror group because of its ideological connection to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, whose armed struggle since 1984 for greater Kurdish rights evolved into an insurgency over time.

The SDF had spearheaded the US-backed coalition campaign against Daesh in northern Syria, destroying the militants' last holdouts in Deir ez-Zor in March 2019. However, in a "betrayal" that stunned coalition partners and shocked the US foreign-policy establishment, Washington did nothing when Ankara launched a massive assault on the SDF in October 2019, forcing it to withdraw from its positions along the Turkey-Syria border.

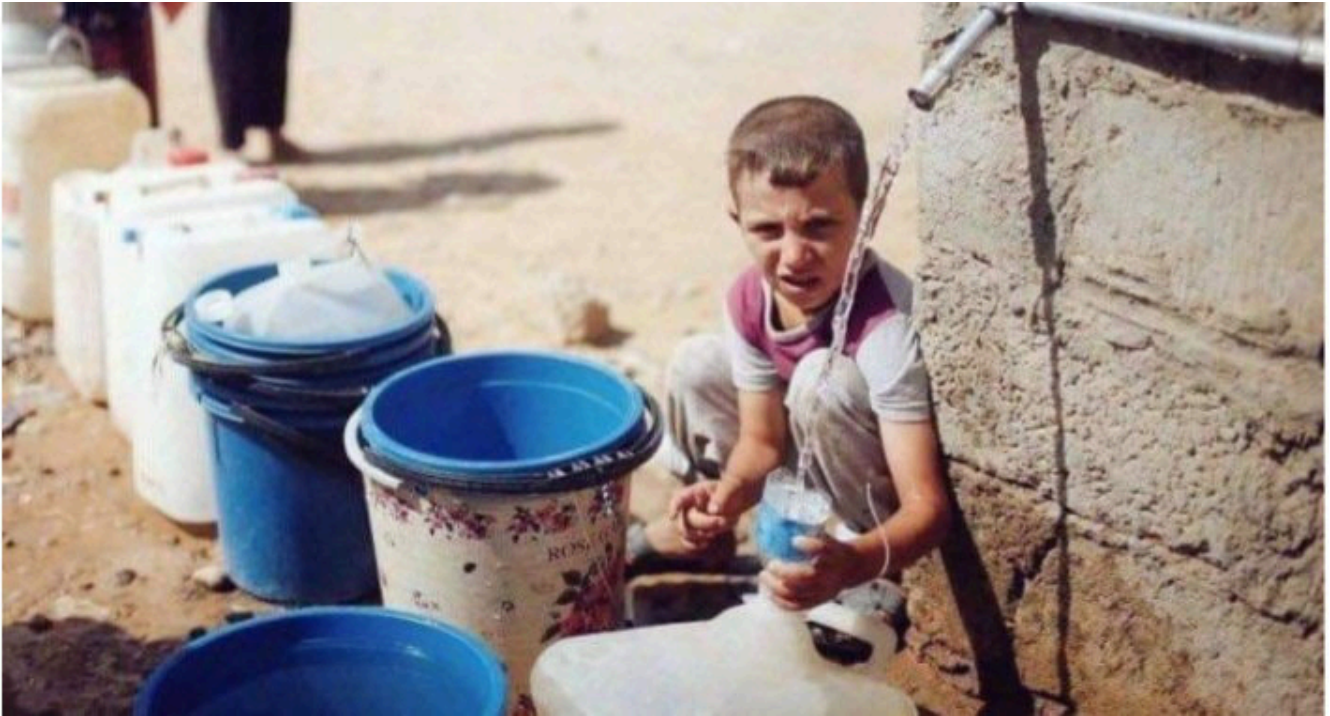
TURKISH-CONTROLLED AREAS INSIDE SYRIA

Kurdish forces were pushed back from the border when Turkey and its Syrian proxies launched Operation Peace Spring in October 2019



Just a few hours into Turkey's cross-border offensive, artillery shells hit the Alouk pumping station, immediately putting it out of service. Although the facility has since been repaired with international oversight, it remains under Turkish control.

Under the circumstances, the area's limited water reserves can be exploited at will, regardless of what international humanitarian laws guarding civilian infrastructure say. This puts additional pressure on the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (NES), which currently administers the area also known as Rojava.



A Kurdish boy takes his turn to get his share of water delivered by trucks near the town of Ras Al-Ain in Hasakah, northeastern Syria. (Photo courtesy of Jamal Photography)

“The NES has dug a few water wells as an alternative, but this does not provide enough water,” Wladimir van Wilgenburg, a political analyst and journalist who covers Kurdish affairs, told Arab News. “The only solution is for the international community to put pressure on the Turkish government to stop cutting off water to parts of northern Syria.”

When the taps ran dry in August, the international community began applying pressure on Ankara, but with little success. James Jeffrey, the US special envoy for Syria, reportedly urged the Turkish leadership to resume water supplies, while Russian military engineers in the area set to work on a pipeline to help quench Ras Al-Ain’s thirst.

Russia backs Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, whose regime is locked in a low-intensity war with Turkish forces in the northwestern province of Idlib and in a three-way contest with the Turks and the SDF over control of northeast Syria.

Russia is keen to win favor with the Kurds to help promote a diplomatic solution to the civil conflict in Syria. Moscow believes the Kurds must be included in constitutional talks with the regime, otherwise a mutually accepted government and a unified country will not be possible.

The stated aim of Ankara’s Operation Peace Spring was to force the SDF back from the Turkish border by creating a self-declared safe zone reaching some 30 kilometers into Syrian territory.

Almost a year on, and with the US now bolstering its Syria deployments with Sentinel radars, additional fighter patrols, and Bradley Fighting Vehicles in its escalating rivalry with Russia, the area remains anything but safe.



A Turkish military battle tank is seen along the M4 highway, which links the northern Syrian provinces of Aleppo and Latakia, in this March 15, 2020 file photo. (AFP)

“I am from Ras Al-Ain. After Turkey occupied my town and cut off the water from the Alouk pumping station, people in Hasakah, who have already been living in difficult conditions, did not have any water for drinking or washing, and this was all in the middle of the COVID-19 crisis,” Muhammed Baqi, of the Hevy Organization for Relief and Development, told Arab News.

“The Kurdish administration tried to drill a water well called Al-Himme Water Station, but it did not work because the water they drilled was not drinkable – it was only good for washing,” he said. “The amount of water from this well was also not enough. Alouk continues to be the main source for water in Hasakah.”

Disputes over the supply of electricity to the Alouk pumping station appear to have inflamed an already tense situation.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based watchdog, the Turkish side cut off Hasakah’s water supply to pressure the NES to supply more electricity from its Mabrouka power plant to areas controlled by Turkey’s Syrian proxies. But Turkey’s Ministry of National Defense insisted in early August that Alouka was under maintenance and that Hasakah was continuing to receive water.

“Though the Alouk pumping station has been fixed under international mediation, Turkey regularly cuts the water flow to NES areas and prevents repairs from taking place,” said Thomas McClure, a researcher at the Rojava Information Center.

"Turkey has cut off the water supply from Hasakah 13 times this year, according to the UN, in order to exert political pressure on the NES.

"Most recently, the whole Hasakah region spent two weeks in the sweltering August heat totally without water, and some neighborhoods spent over two months without a drop of water being delivered."

As COVID-19 cases rise and temperatures remain high, all efforts to reopen the Alouk pumping station have failed. Meanwhile, the Kurdish Red Crescent and other aid agencies have struggled to find alternative water sources for the region.

The Al-Himme Water Station offers a partial solution for now. "However, it doesn't cover more than 25 percent of the people's needs," said Bassam Al-Ahmad, director of Syrians for Truth and Justice, a nongovernmental organization working on documenting human rights violations in Syria.

"The long-term solution is for Turkey to withdraw from northern Syria. It is Syrian land. At the moment we need a strong international position against Turkish assaults."

Pressing for justice, local aid agencies say Turkey has not only broken international humanitarian law by denying Hasakah access to running water but has actually committed a war crime. They say that since the water-pumping stations and dams of northeastern Syria are located near the front lines, their protection is vital for the well-being of the local population.

"According to international humanitarian law and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, to cut the water supply to a civilian population is a crime against humanity and a war crime," Sara Montinaro, a lawyer and project manager for the Kurdish Red Crescent, told Arab News.



Residents queue for water near the town of Ras Al-Ain in Hasakah, northeastern Syria, after Turkish occupation forces cut off the water supply for their community. (Photo courtesy of Jamal Photography)

According to the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, military operations must be conducted in accordance with international humanitarian law and avoid the destruction of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, including water and sanitation.

“With the current COVID-19 situation, the situation on the ground is even worse than before, yet Turkey does not seem to be changing its behavior towards the Syrian Kurds,” Montinaro said.

“There are now several statements from the UN asking Turkey to stop cutting off water from the people, but until now they haven’t done anything. What is happening is a violation of international humanitarian law.”

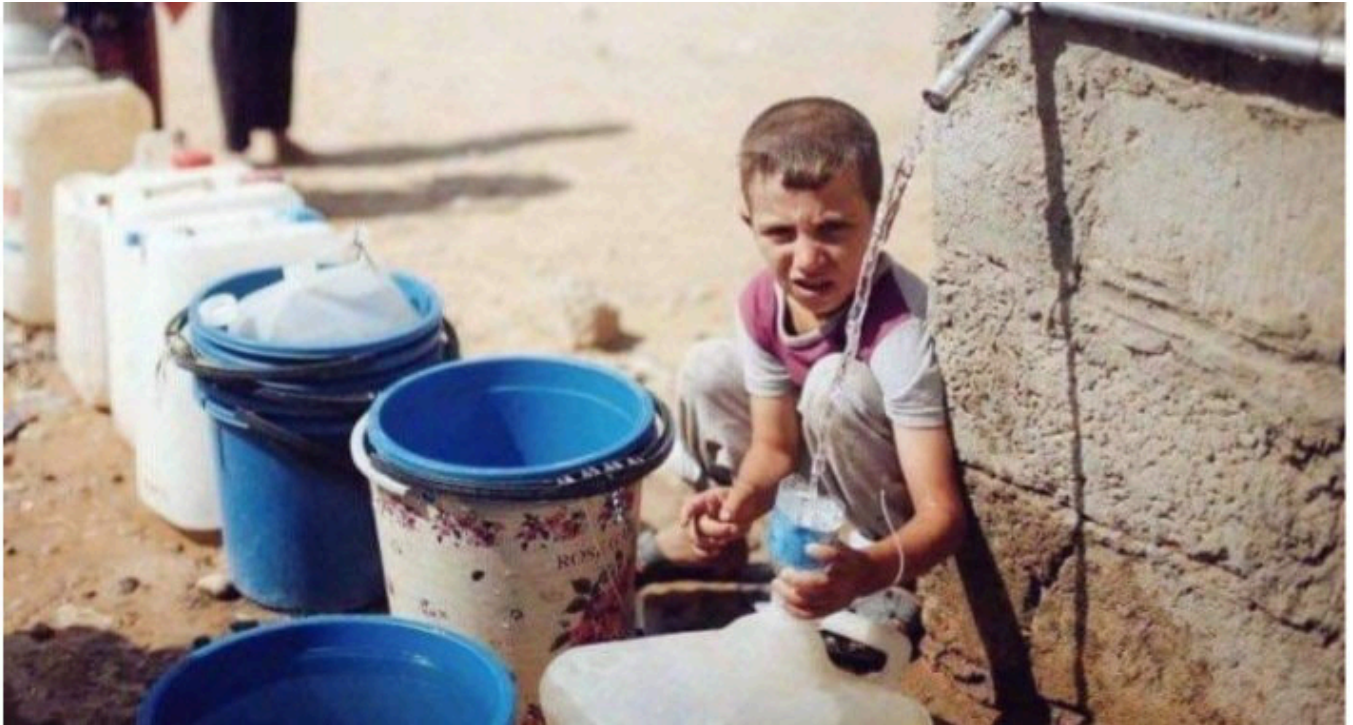
For now, the women on the roadside near Ras Al-Ain must continue intermittently to rely on water trucked in by road until a more sustainable source can be found and secured – or Turkey lifts its boot off the hose.

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Arab League chief: Turkish tensions 'will not end well'

Author:

Sun, 2020-10-04 21:42

CAIRO: The Arab League head has warned Turkey over its role in increased regional tension in the Caucasus and Mediterranean regions, saying that "it will not end well" for the regional power.

Secretary-General of the Arab League Ahmed Aboul Gheit said in a televised statement: "Turkey is facing a group of differences with regional and superpower parties to a degree that will not end well for it or its leadership.

"Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is interfering in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Libya militarily," he added.

"Erdogan also interfered in the Caucasus between Azerbaijan and Armenia, collided with Greece and Cyprus, and attacked the eastern Mediterranean in the gas areas, which made a large and influential country like France send fighters and an aircraft carrier to Cyprus.

"Even Italy, which was understanding of many of the Turkish positions, went to France. Everyone is telling Erdogan now that he will face consequences for his actions.

"It annoys me that the Syrians use mercenaries to fight with Azerbaijan against Armenia ... It is very sad that Syrian mercenaries are being used by Erdogan in cases that are unrelated to Turkey," Aboul Gheit said.

He claimed that former US president Barack Obama caused destruction in Arab countries by supporting the Arab Spring in 2011.

Gheit said the US administration has a very fixed view on the Palestinian issue, and that if US President Donald Trump's presidential term is renewed, he will continue his stance.

"All of Trump and his administration's ideas are loyal to the Israeli side," he said.

However, Gheit added that an election defeat for Trump could hold the key to change in the right direction.

The Arab League chief also said that the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was the beginning of a decline in the Arab world.

"The invasion of Kuwait was a stupid act, the price of which was paid by Arabs, Iraqis and the Kuwaiti people. What is happening in Iraq, Syria and

Yemen affects us Arabs and makes matters tense,” he said.

He also denounced statements made by Trump where he claimed that the US would seize Iraqi oil.

Gheit said there has been extensive foreign interference in Libya and that tension still remains after former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein created instability between regional powers.

“Egypt made a move in the interest of the Libyan people by announcing the Cairo Declaration and determined the Sirte-Jufra line, which led to more stability. Egypt pushed the political solution in Libya, dealt with the UN and Morocco in a political process, and calmed down the clash between the Libyan parties,” he added.



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Egypt's population increases by 1 million in 8 months to reach 101 million
Kurdish politicians arrested in Turkey

Kurdish politicians arrested in Turkey

Author:

Sun, 2020-10-04 21:28

ANKARA: Turkish authorities have arrested 17 Kurdish politicians, including the co-mayor of Kars province, Ayhan Bilgen, who has been replaced by a government-appointed trustee.

Ankara has justified the crackdown by accusing the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) of links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a claim denied by the HDP.

In local elections in March 2019, the HDP won 65 municipalities nationwide, but 48 mayors affiliated with the party were replaced by trustees, while some were not given mandates.

Bilgen told his lawyers that he and other Kurdish politicians had been poisoned while in custody and were not taken to hospital.

"The government's various moves to prevent the HDP from functioning and remove key figures like Ayhan Bilgen from political office are all about preventing opposition politics," Emma Sinclair-Webb, senior Turkey researcher at Human Rights Watch (HRW), told Arab News.

The arrests were ordered by a court in Ankara as part of an investigation into the HDP's alleged involvement in violent protests in October 2014 against Daesh's siege of the Syrian town of Kobane.

At least 37 people were killed during the protests, and the government held the HDP responsible.

An application has been made to lift the parliamentary immunity of seven HDP lawmakers to include them in the investigation.

HRW said this is "another worrying sign of the erosion of rights and the rule of law in Turkey," and "part of the Turkish government's policy to criminalize political opposition."

The HDP is the third-largest party in Parliament, having gained 12 percent of the votes during the June 2018 parliamentary elections.

Sinclair-Webb said the crackdown is a major violation of the right to association and an attack on the principle of the right to free elections, especially as seven MPs are at risk of losing their immunity and being prosecuted.

"What the government is doing against the HDP is a threat to all opposition parties and an attack on the democratic process," she added.

Meanwhile, an investigation has rejected the interior minister's claim that the iconic football club of the predominantly Kurdish Diyarbakir province

acts on the PKK's orders.



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[Saad Hariri could lead Lebanese government again](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-10-04 21:24

BEIRUT: Saad Hariri could lead Lebanon's government again amid proposals to bring him back, almost a year after he resigned as prime minister in response to mass protests about the country's dire economic and financial situation.

Mustapha Adib quit as prime minister-designate a week ago after failing to form a government of specialists independent from the parties in power.

Lebanon desperately needs an international bailout and France, in particular, is urging politicians to begin much-needed reforms to deal with the grave problems facing the country.

Last week French President Emmanuel Macron gave leaders more time to form a government of specialists as part of an initiative to rescue the country.

But key players are overriding some of the conditions set, notably Hezbollah and the Amal Movement who insist on keeping the finance portfolio and naming the Shiite ministers in the government.

Two opinions prevail in Lebanon. One is that the government will not be formed before the US presidential elections in November. The other is that President Michel Aoun will soon set a date for parliamentary consultations, and the possibility of facilitating Hariri's return to head the government is being proposed based on positive signs.

Mustafa Alloush, a leading figure in the Future Movement, said that Hariri was committed to the French initiative and that his convictions remained unchanged. "The movement that is taking place and the proposals have not reached a result," Alloush told Arab News. "An independent government is required for Hariri to head it."

In terms of Aoun setting a date for parliamentary consultations, Alloush said that the president would undergo a 14-day quarantine in light of a coronavirus case among those close to Baabda Palace and that the US elections would be approaching by then.

Regarding an initiative from former Prime Minister Najib Mikati to form a techno-political government headed by Hariri, Alloush said: "This is one of the ideas discussed, but Hariri stipulated in his response the implementation of the French initiative."

MP Nicolas Nahas, who is from the Mikati parliamentary bloc, said: "Lebanon missed a golden opportunity by wasting the French initiative for illogical reasons in light of the accumulated crises we are suffering from."

He added that Lebanon was in the middle of a complete collapse and what was required was to form a government as soon as possible, including politicians and specialists. "Prime Minister Mikati's proposal aimed to help solve the problem of the government issue after it became clear that separating politics from the economy is difficult and led to the failure of the former Prime Minister-designate Mustapha Adib's mission."

The lack of progress led to clergy renewing their criticism of politicians.

On Sunday the Maronite Patriarch Bechara Al-Rai said: "The enormity of the situation and the possibility of developments of a diverse nature necessitates the acceleration of the formation of a government that embodies the aspirations of the citizens, to organize the constitutional and charter

work, so that no one allows himself to exploit the state of constitutional coma, the presence of a caretaker government, the coronavirus pandemic, or what is worse than that, to create a fait accompli.”

He also warned of a possible brain-drain, saying that Lebanese youth had a tendency to leave the country in search of “work, security and a decent life.”

The Metropolitan of Beirut and its Territory for the Greek Orthodox Church Archbishop Elias Odeh used his Sunday sermon to attack “the lack of mercy” among the country’s leaders for their refusal to hear people’s grievances and for turning a blind eye to their despair.

He said: “Honest officials do not sleep if a citizen in their country is in pain. How can they sleep when the country is dying, the economy has collapsed, the pound has lost its value, emigration has multiplied, and misery is common?”

He warned: “What we are going through in Lebanon now is a harbinger of worse to come.”



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