

US in talks with NATO allies to give Turkey military aid

Author:

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PARIS: The US is discussing with its NATO allies what they can offer Turkey in terms of military assistance in Idlib and discussing measures that may be taken if Russia and the Syrian regime break a cease-fire, officials said on Tuesday.

"We are looking at what NATO can do," James Jeffrey, the US' special envoy for Syria, said in a conference call from Brussels where he was holding talks with allies. "Everything is on table."

Jeffrey, who was speaking alongside the US ambassador to Turkey, David Satterfield, ruled out the use of ground troops should the cease-fire be broken and repeated that Ankara needed to clarify its stance on purchase of the Russian S-400 Air Defense System.

In a separate development, a Turkish prosecutor said a US Consulate employee should be acquitted on charges of espionage and trying to overthrow the government, but should face jail on a lesser charge of belonging to a terrorist organization.

HIGHLIGHT

James Jeffrey, the US' special envoy for Syria, ruled out the use of ground troops should the cease-fire be broken and repeated that Ankara needed to clarify its stance on purchase of the S400 Air Defense System.

The prosecutor told an Istanbul court that the evidence did not back up the original charges against Metin Topuz, who has been in jail for nearly 2-1/2 years while facing trial.

Topuz's trial has been one of many sources of strain between NATO allies Turkey and the US, who have also been at odds in recent years over policy differences in Syria and Turkey's purchase of Russian missile defense systems.

Topuz is accused of links to officials who led a 2013 corruption investigation and were later found to be members of a network blamed for a failed 2016 military coup.

The investigation implicated officials in the government of then-prime minister, now President Tayyip Erdogan.

The prosecutor said the frequent contact Topuz had with members of Fethullah Gulen's network taking part in the investigation showed he was a member of the group, which is considered a terrorist organization by Ankara.



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EU 'must stop stringing Turkey along on migrant agreement' US in process of bringing air defense systems into Iraq: general

[EU 'must stop stringing Turkey along on migrant agreement'](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-03-11 01:17

ANKARA: The EU should stop “stringing Turkey along” over helping out with the millions of migrants on its territory, the country’s foreign minister said on Tuesday, a day after the two sides agreed to review a four-year-old deal aimed at stemming refugee flows to Europe.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said the EU must take “sincere” steps to help Turkey manage the flow of migrants, including finding ways to ensure Syrian refugees can return home.

The minister spoke a day after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan held a meeting with top EU officials in Brussels. The two sides agreed to review their 2016

deal on migrants.

The meeting was called after thousands of migrants massed on Turkey's border with Greece, following the Turkish government's decision to open its borders to migrants wanting to cross into Europe. Greece has deployed riot police and border guards to prevent the crossings, sparking clashes between migrants and Greek security forces.

Erdogan has demanded that Europe shoulder more of the burden of caring for Syrian refugees on Turkish territory – thought to number more than 3.5 million. Turkey is accusing the EU of not meeting its obligations under the 2016 agreement, including failing to pay money promised to Turkey to stem the flow of migrants to Europe.

Following the talks in Brussels late on Monday, European Council President Charles Michel said teams headed by Cavusoglu and the EU's foreign policy chief, Josep Borell, would work "in the next days to clarify the implementation of the deal between Turkey and the EU to be certain that we are on the same page."

"We are ready for a constructive study ... We expect sincerity from the EU. The era of stringing Turkey along is over," Cavusoglu said.

Cavusoglu said the sides would work toward "updating" the Turkey-EU deal in line with recent developments, including the situation in Syria's northwestern Idlib province, where a Syrian regime offensive has driven thousands of Syrians toward the border with Turkey.

The 2016 agreement is not "about the EU giving money to Turkey to keep the refugees," Cavusoglu said. "It comprises several issues from visa-free travel to ensuring the voluntary return of refugees."

The minister said the sides would try to draft a "road map" in time for a EU summit on March 26.

"If we reach an agreement by March 26 when there will be an EU leaders' summit, this issue will come on to the agenda of this meeting," Cavusoglu said. "We are ready for constructive work," he added.

"If we are to come up with a roadmap with the EU, we expect them to be sincere," Cavusoglu said. "It is not only about keeping migrants in return for more money," he added.

Cavusoglu confirmed that Turkey had requested Patriot missile defenses from NATO. The issue has been complicated by Turkey's controversial decision to buy Russian S-400 missile defences.

Erdogan, meanwhile, told a group of journalists on his return to Turkey that he is set to meet with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Istanbul on March 17, state-run Anadolu Agency reported. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson may also attend.

SPEEDREAD

Erdogan said EU leaders acknowledged that Turkey had fulfilled its obligations under the 2016 agreement and the EU had 'moved slowly' to meet its responsibilities.

Erdogan also said that during his talks in Brussels, EU leaders acknowledged that Turkey had fulfilled its obligations under the 2016 agreement and the EU

had “moved slowly” to meet its responsibilities.

“We could begin a new process with the EU,” Anadolu quoted Erdogan as saying. Under the 2016 agreement, the EU offered Turkey up to 6 billion euros (\$6.7 billion) in aid for the Syrian refugees it hosts, fast-tracked EU membership and other incentives to stop Europe-bound migrants. The number arriving in Greece from Turkey dropped dramatically after the deal took effect.

The EU insists it is disbursing the funds. It has also accusing Erdogan of “blackmail” for waving migrants through to Europe late last month after dozens of Turkish soldiers were killed in fighting in northern Syria. Private Turkish broadcaster NTV aired footage on Tuesday of Greek soldiers reinforcing a barbed wire fence along a stretch of a river that marks the land border between Turkey and Greece.

Many migrants who attempted to cross the border have reported mistreatment by Greek authorities. Greece has denied the accusations.

Erdogan alleged that several migrants have died and vowed to make Greece account for actions he said amount to “murder.”



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Yemeni activist who endured and challenged Houthi repression
Erdogan: US softening stance on Turkish acquisition of Patriot defense systems

Yemeni activist who endured and challenged Houthi repression

Wed, 2020-03-11 01:08

AL-MUKALLA: Shortly before slipping out of Sanaa early this year, Ibetisam Abualdonia, parked her daughter's car outside her home and moved to another house. "The aim was to assure Houthi eyes I was inside the house," Ibetisam said in an exclusive interview with Arab News.

Ibetisam, 48, was among a few Yemeni activists who had stayed inside the city for years where they paid a heavy price for challenging Houthi repression and demanding salaries.

Several days before fleeing Sanaa, as many as 14 Houthi men stormed her house where they beat and verbally abused her. The Houthis sought to punish Ibetisam for being filmed strongly criticizing their leader and the movement and demanding salaries.

"They got angry when I criticized Abdul Malik Al-Houthi. They think he is a holy man," she said, referring to Houthi movement leader. Before raiding her house, Ibetisam said the Houthis harassed her online to stop her activism.

"They subjected me to different methods of psychological pressure such as sending death threats through text messages and attacking me on social media," she said.

After Houthi reprisal attacks, she thought that the Houthis had put her on their radar and would keep abusing her if she continued criticizing them. At the same time, the widowed mother of three had to keep demanding Houthis to pay her husband's pension in order to survive. "They have not paid the pension for the last three years. We survive on my daughter's salary."

She and her children fled Sanaa under the cover of darkness. "We hired a car that drove us to Aden."

To escape Houthi checkpoints, she covered her body in a black abaya and told the children to say they were taking their sick mother to Aden. The Houthis allowed them to move unchecked.

When she arrived in Aden, she kept a low profile and moved from one hotel to another fearing hidden Houthi eyes. "I did not tell anyone that I fled Sanaa. I kept moving hotels."

After hearing about her ordeal, officials at the internationally recognized government helped her travel to Cairo and then to Riyadh, where she recounted to Arab News her harsh days under Houthi rule.

After hearing about her disappearance, Houthis began harassing her relatives. "They blew up my uncle's car and burnt another car of a relative of mine. They phoned my mother, sister and other members of family, vowing to punish me," she said.

Ibetisam said life inside Houthi-controlled Yemen has exacerbated since late 2016, when the Houthis stopping paying public sector salaries in response to a government decision to relocate the headquarters of the central bank from Sanaa to Aden.

The relocation was aimed at stopping rebels from plundering the bank's

reserves from hard currencies. But instead of paying all government employees in their territories, Houthis used salaries as a leverage to force people into joining the battlefields. Many extremely poor families bowed to the pressure and dispatched children to fight along with the Houthis. One of Ibetisam's relatives was forced to provide a child for the fighting.

Like thousands of poor fighters, the Houthis gave Ibetisam's relative 30,000 Yemeni riyals (SR176) every month for fighting their opponents.

Confirming media reports about Houthi mishandling of humanitarian aid, Ibetisam said that Houthis give out aid to loyalists or those families who agreed to send children to take part in fighting.

"Those who do not have combatant relatives have no choice but to beg to survive. People cannot speak out because if they criticize Houthi misbehavior, they will beat or abduct them," Ibetisam said, adding that people in Sanaa struggle to get basic services such as cooking gas, electricity or water.

Despite Houthi repression, several Yemeni women have remained in Sanaa, where they criticize Houthi political and economic policies. The number of protesters has dwindled since late 2017, when Houthis killed former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, prompting hundreds of his followers into fleeing to government controlled areas or seeking exile. Ibetisam predicted that female activists who challenge Houthis from Sanaa would share her fate sooner or later.

Some of the minor female activists have been abducted for speaking out. "They will be either killed or forcibly disappeared. Before leaving Sanaa, I found out that they forcibly disappeared 10 women," she said.

Since taking power in late 2014, the Houthi movement has established local police regiments known as Zaynabiat to handle protests by women. In Yemen, women usually have cultural impunity from attacks.

The Zaynabiat are infamous for suppressing rare protests in the capital and other provinces in northern Yemen. The biggest anti-Houthi protest was in October 2017, when dozens of women went out to protest against hunger and poverty inside Houthi-controlled areas.

As women were getting together in Sanaa, armed Zaynabiat in black abayas beat and detained the protesters. Ibetisam said the Houthi policewomen have no offices and are under the command of Houthi observers.

In addition to suppressing dissidents, the Zaynabiat's other roles include espionage and recruiting female members. "They exercise physical violence and kidnapping," she said.

As a Yemeni activist who was harassed by Houthis and witnessed the signing of several peace agreements between the militia and the internationally recognized government since late 2014, Ibetisam said that only military pressure would end the conflict. "I am inclined toward the military option. Houthism is a radical movement. It is not a political group that you can get concessions from," she concluded.



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Al-Qaeda suffers heavy losses in Yemen conflicts
Yemeni army vows imminent offensive on Houthis

Deadly virus delays Egyptians' travel plans

Tue, 2020-03-10 02:48

CAIRO: The global spread of the deadly coronavirus has delayed travel plans for thousands of Egyptians.

Long, and at times unruly, queues have formed outside the public health laboratories in Cairo for tests for the virus.

Among those waiting to see if they are free of COVID-19 infection was 30-year-old Mahmoud, who needs to get to Saudi Arabia where he is due to start a new job as an electronics programmer.

He had spent 1,000 Egyptian pounds (\$64) to undergo the test, which Saudi Arabia has demanded visitors to the Kingdom take to ensure they are not carrying the killer virus.

Egypt has so far recorded 55 cases of the coronavirus with one reported death, a German male aged 60 who died on Sunday.

Mahmoud, who is from the Egyptian capital, will have to wait four days to find out the results of his test which was taken following the Saudi decision to suspend flights between Egypt and the Kingdom.

"I don't know what to do. The job I landed is my dream position so that I can ensure a future, a home, a wife and children. I don't know how long the Saudi decision will last and I don't know what to do with this virus that dashed my dreams," Mahmoud said.

FASTFACT

Egypt has stepped up action to contain the coronavirus in the popular tourist destination of Luxor following an outbreak of the disease on a River Nile cruise ship.

Another person waiting for a test in Cairo was 40-year-old Ehab, who was on a two-week vacation as the coronavirus outbreak gained momentum in Egypt and the Kingdom.

Saudi Arabia on Sunday announced it was shutting down all classes in schools and universities as part of measures to contain the spread of the virus.

"I think the Saudi procedures will end after the disease is brought under control, but the question is whether it is so difficult for the Egyptian Ministry of Health, even once, to start recording travelers' data electronically instead of the present situation in which health awareness is nonexistent," Ehab said.

Magdy El-Adawy, who is in his late 20s, said the outbreak had temporarily scuppered his plans to join his friends working in Kuwait.

"I have a law degree and have worked in several law firms in Egypt, but I have always dreamt of traveling. My friends succeeded in going to Kuwait, and

I communicate with them daily through popular chatting apps. They came close to finding me a work contract there, but God curse the coronavirus, it ruined my plans,” he added.



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Egyptian engineer gets 15 years over deadly locomotive crash
Egypt reports death of German national, its first from coronavirus

[Lebanese parliament shut due to coronavirus fears](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-03-10 02:39

BEIRUT: Lebanon's parliament has decided to close MPs' offices and postpone parliamentary meetings for one week amid the spread of coronavirus in the country, said Health Minister Hamad Hassan, with 41 confirmed cases.

A Health Ministry source said: "The new cases in Lebanon, including three children, were the result of contact with those who were already infected in

the country.”

Dr. Abdul Rahman Bizri, a specialist in infectious diseases and a member of the emergency committee on coronavirus, told Arab News: “Coronavirus is still in the early stages of spreading in the country. We’re still able to follow up on the people who’ve been infected, where they came from, and those to whom they might have transmitted the virus.”

He said: “The situation in Lebanon is still reassuring to some extent, compared to other countries around the world.”

He added: “The first case, who came from (the Iranian city of) Qom, has recovered but is still in hospital because she’s a carrier and we don’t know when she’ll be virus-free. Other people have also recovered, including children, who are able to heal from the virus unlike the elderly.”

Meetings are being held with “university hospitals across Lebanon to start conducting coronavirus tests and using their laboratories,” Bizri said.

Former Hezbollah MP Mahmoud Qamati denied rumors that he has coronavirus, and his media office said he “would not hide any news related to his health.”

Lebanon’s Middle East Airlines announced on Monday the suspension of its flights from and to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar until further notice, “in light of the decisions taken by some countries regarding travel bans to avoid the spread of the new coronavirus.” The airline waived all penalties and restrictions related to its tickets.

As no coronavirus cases have yet been reported in Turkey, Arab News has learned that many travelers coming from countries that have suspended flights to Lebanon are flying to Turkey to secure their arrival to Lebanon.

The situation in Lebanon is still reassuring to some extent, compared to other countries around the world.

Dr. Abdul Rahman Bizri, Specialist in infectious diseases

Saudi Ambassador to Lebanon Walid Bukhari retweeted the decision to include Lebanon in the list of countries that the Kingdom has suspended travel from and to, not including evacuations and trade trips.

While cleaning and disinfection operations continue in Lebanese official and private institutions, people have been going out less as Tourism Minister Ramzi Al-Musharafieh ordered the closure of bars and nightclubs until March 15.

He has also banned concerts and music shows in restaurants and cafes, and urged “restaurants to commit to preventive measures and safety instructions to limit the spread of coronavirus.” Nurseries, schools, universities, cinemas and gyms across the country remain closed.

Meanwhile, a Lebanese citizen holding Canadian nationality who escaped the coronavirus emergency section at Rafik Hariri Hospital in Beirut was arrested at the airport as he tried to flee to Canada.

He had refused to get tested after showing symptoms, but was returned to the hospital for testing.

Meanwhile, Dr. Ahmed Al-Samadi, director of Saida Governmental Hospital, confirmed a new case of coronavirus at the hospital on Sunday night.

He said a patient from the Mieh Mieh Palestinian refugee camp had arrived at the hospital with a high fever.

The patient was placed in quarantine and was then taken to Rafik Hariri Hospital for testing.

Hospitals receiving suspicious cases are implementing strict sterilization procedures to reassure other patients in light of rumors about cases being secretly treated.

Some hospitals have even decided to ban patient visits.

Hospital workers have also been receiving training to deal with suspicious cases.



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Coronavirus outbreak hits Turkish business sectors hard
Saudi health ministry announces five new coronavirus cases