

Turkey uses air base as a leverage against Washington

Author:

Wed, 2019-12-11 23:09

ANKARA: Turkey may re-evaluate the status of the Incirlik Air Base and Kurecik Radar Station if the US imposes sanctions, said Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu in an interview to pro-government channel A-Haber.

This bombshell statement has come on Wednesday amid widespread claims that the US' long-awaited Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) may be on their way toward Turkey before the end of the year.

Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, Ankara office director of the German Marshall Fund of the US, said one of the core principles of Turkish foreign policy is reciprocity and Turkey will definitely seek ways to retaliate if the US imposes the CAATSA sanctions.

The Incirlik issue has long been a focal point between the nations. It is regularly used as a bargaining chip at times of tension because the air base symbolizes Turkey's anchorage to the West.

But despite all the previous threats over Incirlik's use, it has always remained open, even at times of heightened tension.

"Turkey is not the place to host US nuclear arms," Steven Pifer, from the American Brookings Institution research group, recently wrote in a report following US President Donald Trump's public confirmation of the weapons' presence on Turkish soil.

The critical military air base, which is located in the southern province of Adana close to the Syrian border, was used regularly for anti-Daesh airstrikes in Syria and Iraq.

Two years ago, Ankara allegedly warned US officials that it could close its airspace to American jets and deny the US' decades-long access to Incirlik if the Syrian Kurdish YPG participated in the Raqqa operation against Daesh.

In June, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan reportedly played the Incirlik card as a leverage in his meeting with Trump on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Osaka, Japan.

However, for Unluhisarcikli, Incirlik is currently one of the few cards Turkey is holding and perhaps the only consequential one.

"The US has alternatives to Incirlik, but they are more costly and less efficient," he told Arab News.

Section 13 of the Countering Turkish Aggression Act of 2019, a bill which was introduced on Oct. 16, requires "the president within 30 days of enactment to

submit an interagency report assessing viable alternative military installations or other locations to host US forces personnel or assets currently stationed at Incirlik Air Base in Turkey.”

The bill, which was sponsored by Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, has not been enacted.

In the meantime, Italy has begun withdrawing its SAMP/T anti-missile battery and 130 soldiers it has deployed in Turkey’s southeastern province of Kahramanmaraş for 30 months as part of a NATO operation.

Unluhisarcikli said that closing down the Kurecik Radar Station, a key NATO base in the eastern Malatya province, may not be an appropriate response as it serves NATO’s missile defense system, not the US’.

“If Turkey shuts down Kurecik, it will face a strong reaction from European allies who have nothing to do with the sanctions the US will likely impose on Turkey,” he said.

Ankara is considering Russian warplanes as an alternative to the US-made F-35 jets if Washington does not deliver them over the concern that the operation of the S-400s missile systems could expose some of the jet’s classified features to Russian intelligence gathering.

Turkey and Britain have also agreed to accelerate their joint project on building fighter jets.

Joe Macaron, a fellow at the Arab Center in Washington, said the immediate repercussions of closing Incirlik and Kurecik is moving beyond rhetoric and taking tangible steps to disentangle the core of the strategic partnership between Washington and Ankara.

“The US priority should be having contingency plans to secure withdrawing the US nuclear weapons storage in the Incirlik air base, if such a plan is not executed yet,” he told Arab News.

As a back-up plan, the US recently invested heavily in the Jordanian Muwaffaq Salti Airbase, although experts underline that no single base can substitute the strategic location of Incirlik.

“The operation to kill Daesh leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi took off from Iraq and there have been Turkish restrictions on US operations in Syria launching from Incirlik base,” Macaron said.

But, for Macaron, it is unlikely that Ankara will close the Incirlik base for US operations.

“The Turkish government is once again exploiting the divide between the White House and Congress over US sanctions on Turkey, hence hoping that Trump would veto the congressional bill on Turkey. If Ankara gives Incirlik to Moscow, which is not anticipated in the foreseeable future, Turkey will have gone too far in its alliance with Russia and that will have far-reaching implications on regional and global politics,” he said.



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Germany decides to quit Turkey's Incirlik base Turkey maintains ban on German visits to Incirlik base

[Egyptian civilian triggers discovery of ancient temple](#)

Wed, 2019-12-11 23:04

CAIRO: Nobody in the Egyptian Ministry of Culture could believe that an illegal attempt by a civilian to prospect for monuments underneath his own home would lead to a grand discovery.

But that is just what happened when this week the ministry began archaeological excavations in the Mit Rahinah area, neighboring the pyramids of Giza.

The illegal digging by the 60-year-old resident alerted the authorities who arrested him in the first week of this month. The tourism authorities then went in and were surprised by the discovery.

The archaeological mission discovered an entire temple underneath the village

of Mit Rahinah.

According to a statement issued by the ministry, 19 chunks of pink granite and limestone bearing inscriptions depicting Ptah, the god of creation and of the ancient city Manf, were also discovered.

Among the finds were also an artifact traceable to the reign of Ramesses II and inscriptions showing the king practicing a religious ritual.

Egyptian researcher Abdel-Magid Abdul Aziz said Ptah was idolized in Manf. In one image, the god is depicted as a human wrapped in a tight-fitting cloth.

The deity was also in charge of memorial holidays and responsible for several inventions, holding the title Master of all Makers.



“There’s a statue of the god Ptah in the Egyptian Museum, in its traditional form as a mummy,” Abdul Aziz said.

“His hands come out from the folds of his robe ... as depicted in art pieces. Ptah appears as a bearded, buried man,” he added.

“Often he wears a hat, with his hands clutching Ankh (the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic symbol for the key of life).”

Ayman Ashmawy, head of ancient Egyptian artifacts at the Ministry of Antiquities, said: “The artifacts are in the process of being restored, and

have been moved to the museum's open garden in Mit Rahinah." He added that work was being done to discover and restore the rest of the temple.

As for the illegal prospecting of the area by its people, Ashmawy said the residents of Mit Rahinah were seeking to exploit the monuments.

He added that the law forbids prospecting for archaeological monuments, and that doing so could lead to a long prison sentence and a major fine, up to hundreds of thousands of Egyptian pounds.

Mit Rahinah contains a large number of monuments, which have been discovered by chance. The area is home to an open museum, 20 km south of Cairo.

"What we see from current discoveries in Mit Rahinah are just snapshots of an ancient city that was once vibrant," Ilham Ahmed, chief inspector of the archaeological mission, told Arab News.



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Archaeologist Zahi Hawass: 'There isn't a country that doesn't love Egyptian archaeology'
Archaeologists discover ancient workshop in Egypt's Sinai

UN experts: Libya is new focus of Daesh extremists

Author:

Wed, 2019-12-11 22:45

UNITED NATIONS: UN experts say the interference of Chadian and Sudanese fighters in Libya is “a direct threat” to the security and stability of the war-torn country, which a leader of the Daesh extremist group has declared “one of the main axes” of its future operations.

The panel of experts said in a 376-page report to the UN Security Council released Tuesday that the presence of the Chadians and Sudanese “has become more marked” in 2019 as a result of the intensification of the conflict in Libya. It said their continued presence as organized groups or as mercenaries “may lead to further instability.”

Libya has been in turmoil since a civil war in 2011 toppled Muammar Qaddafi, who was later killed. In the chaos that followed, the country was divided, with a weak UN-supported administration in Tripoli overseeing the country’s west and a rival government in the east aligned with the Libyan National Army led by Gen. Khalifa Haftar, each supported by an array of militias and foreign governments.

Haftar launched a surprise military offensive April 4 aimed at capturing Tripoli despite commitments to attend a national conference weeks later aimed at forming a united government and moving toward elections. Fighting for Tripoli has stalled in recent months, with both sides dug in and shelling one another along the city’s southern reaches with increasingly sophisticated weapons.

While the LNA and the eastern government enjoy the support of France, Russia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and other key Arab countries, the Tripoli-based government is backed by Italy, Turkey and Qatar.

“Jordan, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates routinely and sometimes blatantly supplied weapons, with little effort to disguise the source” in violation of a UN arms embargo, the report said.

The experts identified multiple cases of non-compliance with the arms embargo, the majority of transfers to Haftar’s LNA from Jordan or the United Arab Emirates and the majority to the Tripoli government from Turkey. But, the panel said, “Neither side has the military capability to effectively decide the outcome to their advantage.”

The experts said counter-terrorism operations in Libya against Daesh and Al-Qaeda extremists by the government and Haftar’s forces, and an increase in activity by the United States Africa Command, continue to disrupt the structure of both groups and temporarily reduce their capacity to conduct operations.

But the panel also reported the new focus on Libya by Daesh, also known as ISIL, quoting a video in July by a Daesh leader in Libya, Mahmud Massud Al-Baraassi, also known as Abu Musab Allibi. In the video, the report said, “he highlighted that Libya was now one of the main axes of future ISIL operations, which are designed to compensate for the loss of ground” in Syria.

“ISIL in Libya finances its activities through robbery, kidnap for ransom, extortion of Libyan citizens and the cross-border smuggling of artifacts and other commodities,” the panel said. “Taxation of human trafficking networks continues to be a source of funding for ISIL in Libya.”

As for foreign fighters, the experts named five Sudanese armed groups operating in Libya – four in support of Haftar’s LNA and one backing the government’s forces. They named four Chadian armed groups – one supporting the LNA, two supporting the government, and one with 100 fighters whose factions support both side.

In one example, the panel estimated 1,000 Sudanese troops from Sudan’s Rapid Support Forces were deployed to Libya on July 25 by Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, initially to guard critical infrastructure so Haftar’s troops could carry out offensive operations.

The panel said Sudan and Dagalo, who has command responsibility, both violated UN sanctions.

The Associated Press reported last week that Libyan government officials plan to confront Moscow over the alleged deployment of Russian mercenaries fighting alongside Haftar’s LNA. US officials also accuse Russia of deploying fighters through a private security contractor to key battleground areas in Libya in the past months.

The UN panel of experts, who monitor sanctions against Libya, made no mention of Russian mercenaries in the report. Several diplomats said they expect the Russian mercenary issue to be raised in the Security Council.



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to clarify ambiguous Daesh stance

Israeli lawmakers submit bill to dissolve parliament

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Tue, 2019-12-10 19:01

JERUSALEM: Israeli legislators submitted a bill Tuesday that would dissolve parliament and trigger unprecedented third national elections in less than a year.

Israel has been mired in political deadlock for months.

With the two largest parties, Likud and Blue and White, unable to form a power-sharing agreement ahead of a Wednesday deadline, lawmakers from the rival sides together tabled the bill.

It is expected to go to a vote in parliament on Wednesday, setting the date for the next election on March 2.

“Under the exceptional circumstances that have emerged, and after two adjacent election campaigns in which no government was formed, the dissolution of the 22nd Knesset is being proposed,” the bill reads.

Neither Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu nor his main rival Benny Gantz have been able to form a coalition government after two inconclusive elections.

Polls have predicted the third vote is unlikely to produce dramatically different results.

The legislation is something of a formality. The allotted period for forming a government following September’s election expires at midnight on Wednesday. Without a coalition deal, elections would have been automatically triggered later in March.

Each of this year’s elections, and their subsequent coalition jockeying, have largely been a referendum on Netanyahu, who was recently indicted for bribery, breach of trust and fraud in three corruption affairs.

Blue and White’s Gantz has refused to sit in a Netanyahu-led coalition, citing the long-serving leader’s legal troubles. Netanyahu has refused to step down, still overwhelmingly backed by his Likud party and his adoring base.



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Israel says defense officials caught in major bribery case

[Protests, explosions hit Iraq's south as demos maintain strength](#)

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Tue, 2019-12-10 17:19

BAGHDAD: Iraq's south saw further protests and explosions, as demonstrations against the government and its Iranian sponsor that erupted on October 1 persist unabated, according to security sources.

The southern city of Amara was rocked overnight by four near-simultaneous explosions targeting premises of two pro-Iran armed factions, according to police.

"Three sound grenades targeted two premises and the house of an Assaib Ahl Al-Haq leader and an improvised explosive device targeted the house of an Ansar Allah commander," police said.

Asaib Ahl Al-Haq is one of the most powerful groups in Iraq's Hashed Al-Shaabi security force, a network of armed groups integrated into the state, of which Ansar Allah is also a component.

Medical sources reported three wounded by the blasts.

Founded in 2014 to fight IS jihadists who had seized swathes of northern Iraq and neighboring Syria, the Hashed is made up of mostly Shiite factions, many of which have been backed by Iran.

According to security sources, the attacks were committed against the groups due to their loyalty to neighboring Iran, whose influence continues to grow in Iraq, in particular via armed groups that it has long trained and financed.

These attacks come shortly after the recent bloodshed in several Iraqi cities, the latest seeing 24 people killed, including four police officers, on Friday evening in central Baghdad.

Both the state and the demonstrators accuse armed men of perpetrating the violence, the former claiming that it is not possible to identify those responsible, while the latter point to pro-Iran entities.

Since October 1, Iraq's capital and its Shiite-majority south have been gripped by rallies against corruption, poor public services, a lack of jobs and Iran's perceived political interference.

More than 450 people have been killed and more than 20,000 wounded during the unprecedented protest movement demanding an overhaul of the political system. In the holy Shiite city of Karbala, protesters rallied at the police station to demand information within 24 hours on the death of Fahem Al-Tai, a 53-year-old prominent civil society activist gunned down in a drive-by shooting on Sunday evening while returning home from protests.

Others blocked access to the courthouse to demand proceedings be launched against local leaders for corruption – a key priority of the protest movement in a country ranked the 12th most corrupt country in the world by Transparency International.

In Diwaniya, also in the south, protesters blocked the road to the Shanafiya oil refinery, according to police, demanding employment.

Despite Iraq being OPEC's second-largest crude producer, one in five of its people live in poverty and youth unemployment stands at one quarter of the population, the World Bank says.

Protesters from several cities in the south on Tuesday joined thousands of demonstrators gathered for more than two months in Baghdad's Tahrir Square, which is the epicenter of the demonstrations in the capital.

"We came to support our brothers in Baghdad," said an activist in the movement from Nassiriya, Haydar Kazem.



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