

US to step aside for Turkish assault on Kurds in Syria

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WASHINGTON: The White House said Sunday that US forces in northeast Syria will move aside and clear the way for an expected Turkish assault, essentially abandoning Kurdish fighters who fought alongside American forces in the yearslong battle to defeat Daesh militants.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has threatened for months to launch the military operation across the border. He views the Kurdish forces as a threat to his country. Republicans and Democrats have warned that allowing the Turkish attack could lead to a massacre of the Kurds and send a troubling message to American allies across the globe.

US troops "will not support or be involved in the operation" and "will no longer be in the immediate area," in northern Syria, White House press secretary Stephanie Grisham said in an unusual late-Sunday statement that was silent on the fate of the Kurds. There are about 1,000 US troops in northern Syria, and a senior US official said they will pull back from the area – and potentially depart the country entirely should widespread fighting break out between Turkish and Kurdish forces.

The announcement followed a call between President Donald Trump and Erdogan, the White House said.

The decision is a stark illustration of Trump's focus on ending American overseas entanglements – one of his key campaign promises. But his goal of swift withdrawals in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan have been stymied by concerns from US officials and American allies about the dangerous voids that would remain. As he faces an impeachment inquiry at home, Trump has appeared more focused on making good on his political pledges, even at the risk of sending a troubling signal to American allies abroad.

Key Republican leaders in Congress appeared taken aback by the move.

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., said Monday in an appearance on "Fox & Friends" that he had not spoken with Trump about the decision and had concerns.

"I want to make sure we keep our word for those who fight with us and help us," he said, adding that, "If you make a commitment and somebody is fighting with you. America should keep their word."

One of the show's hosts, Brian Kilmeade, asked McCarthy to try to intervene and "call the president before it's too late."

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., one of Trump's most vocal backers, also weighed in via tweet, saying that, "If press reports are accurate this is a disaster in the making."

Trump, meanwhile, tweeted a lengthy defense Monday morning, writing in all-caps that, "WE WILL FIGHT WHERE IT IS TO OUR BENEFIT, AND ONLY FIGHT TO WIN." In December, Trump announced he was withdrawing American troops from Syria

but was met with widespread condemnation for abandoning Kurdish allies to the Turkish assault. The announcement prompted the resignation in protest of then-Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, and a coordinated effort by then-national security adviser John Bolton to try to protect the Kurds.

Since January, US officials have tried to broker the creation of a "safe zone" in northern Syria to provide a security buffer between the Turkish military and Kurdish forces, but Turkey has repeatedly objected to its slow implementation.

The White House announcement Sunday came a day after Erdogan offered the strongest warning yet of a unilateral military operation into northeastern Syria, as the Turkish military has been dispatching units and defense equipment to its border with the area.

"We have given all kinds of warning regarding the (area) east of the Euphrates to the relevant parties. We have acted with enough patience," Erdogan said.

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces threatened to respond forcefully to any Turkish incursion.

"We will not hesitate to turn any unprovoked attack by Turkey into an all-out war on the entire border to DEFEND ourselves and our people," SDF spokesman Mustafa Bali tweeted Saturday.

A Kurdish official speaking on condition of anonymity because he's not authorized to brief reporters said Monday they expect a limited Turkish operation and are still working to ascertain what will happen with American forces in the region. The official said the view is that Kurdish-led forces have a legitimate right to self-defense.

Turkey considers the People's Protection Units, or YPG, an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which has waged an insurgency against Turkey for 35 years.

A senior US official said Sunday that American troops will pull back from the security zone in northeastern Syria, where they have been working with Turkish troops, to an unspecified out-of-the-way location. There have been US troops around Manbij.

The official added that if Turkey goes ahead with the incursion into Syria, it is expected to trigger a large combat response from the SDF, and US troops will almost certainly withdraw completely from Syria. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

US defense leaders have long known that America would not get into an all-out war with Turkey, a NATO ally. But that has been stalled until now by aggressive negotiations by the US, urging Turkey against invading. The official said senior leaders never believed that the US would go to war to save the Kurds, but just hoped to put off that scenario.

The official said US leaders have spoken with the SDF and that the group, which has long fought alongside the US against Daesh, is disappointed and angry.

Mattis and other Pentagon leaders had worried that withdrawal would lead to a resurgence of Daesh in the country, particularly if the SDF abandon the prisons holding the fighters to battle Turkey.

The White House statement Sunday said Turkey will take custody of foreign fighters captured in the US-led campaign against the Daesh group who have been held by the Kurdish forces supported by the US

Ambassador James Jeffrey, the State Department envoy to the international

coalition fighting the Daesh group, and Trump have said the Kurds have custody of thousands of captured Daesh militants. They include about 2,500 highly dangerous foreign fighters from Europe and elsewhere whose native countries have been reluctant to take them back and another 10,000 or so captured fighters from Syria and Iraq.

Trump has repeatedly demanded that European countries, particularly France and Germany, take back their citizens who joined the militant organization. Kurdish officials have expressed concerns of a possible breakout by Daesh prisoners in case of fighting in the area. In a recently released audio recording, Daesh leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi called on members of the extremist group to do all they can to free Daesh prisoners and women held in jails and camps.

Daesh was defeated in Iraq in 2017. In Syria it lost its last territory in March, marking the end of the extremists' self-declared caliphate. Despite these battlefield defeats, Daesh sleeper cells have continued to launch attacks in both Iraq and Syria.



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US troops start pullout from along Turkey's border in Syria
US conducts new joint patrol with Turkey in northeast Syria

Turkish ship to begin drilling south of Cyprus by Tuesday: energy minister

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ISTANBUL: The Turkish drillship Yavuz will begin drilling for oil and gas southwest of Cyprus on Monday or Tuesday, Energy Minister Fatih Donmez said, in a move which has intensified tensions between the two countries.

Ankara said on Thursday it had sent the ship to the area where Greek Cypriot authorities have already awarded hydrocarbon exploration rights to Italian and French companies.

Cyprus has accused Turkey of a "severe escalation" of violations of its sovereign rights.

"All preparations have been completed, and it (Yavuz) will start its first drilling in the area either today or tomorrow," Donmez told an energy conference on Monday.

Turkey has already drilled wells in waters to the east and west of the island, triggering strong protests from Nicosia and the European Union in recent months, including EU sanctions.

Turkey and Greece are allies in NATO but have long been at loggerheads over Cyprus, which has been ethnically split between Greek and Turkish Cypriots since 1974.

The internationally recognized Greek Cypriot government represents Cyprus in the European Union, while a breakaway Turkish Cypriot state in the north is only recognized by Ankara.

The latest development is the first time the two sides have targeted the same area. The United States has warned Turkey not to engage in "illegal" drilling activity in the area.

On Monday, Yavuz was located about 50 nautical miles (90 km) southwest of Cyprus, Refinitiv Eikon shipping data showed.



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Turkish drill ship violates our rights: CyprusEgypt says offshore gas discoveries bolster ties with Cyprus

[Dozens killed on sixth day of Baghdad protests, military admits use of 'excessive force'](#)

Mon, 2019-10-07 11:27

DUBAI: The Iraqi military admitted on Monday that “excessive force” was used in a district of the capital overnight where a mass protest led to clashes that killed dozens.

The number of those killed has not yet been verified, however some sources

claim 13 were killed, while others reported 15.

The reports of the deaths come as the military made an announcement admitted using "excessive force outside the rules of engagement."

"We have begun to hold accountable those commanding officers who carried out these wrong acts," the military said in a statement.

However, Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi had called on all forces to abide by the "rules of engagement" in dealing with rallies.

In his only address to the protesters last week, Mahdi had insisted security forces were acting "within international standards" in dealing with demonstrations.

Sadr City Clashes

Hundreds had gathered overnight in Sadr City, a densely populated district in eastern Baghdad where state security forces are rarely seen.

Videos distributed on social media of the late-night rally showed protesters ducking in streets littered with burning tires as heavy gunfire was heard.

In a statement distributed to journalists on Monday morning, the Iraqi military said the prime minister had ordered "all army units to withdraw from Sadr City to be replaced with federal police units."

Baghdad has been at the center of anti-government protests that have quickly spread to the country's south. The protesters have been demanding jobs and an end to corruption and now include calls for justice for those killed in the protests.

The death toll after six days of unrest has been estimated to have passed 100 and more than 6,000 have been wounded.

This has been the most serious challenge facing Iraq two years after the victory against Daesh militants. The chaos also comes at a critical time for the government, which has been caught in the middle of increasing US-Iran tensions in the region. Iraq is allied with both countries and hosts thousands of US troops, as well as powerful paramilitary forces allied with Iran.

US relations

On Monday, Mahdi discussed the protests in a phone call with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

"The Prime Minister reviewed developments in the security situation and the return to normal life after the curfew was lifted, and confirmed that security forces had resumed control and stability had been restored," a statement said from his office said.

The statement said the government has put forward a package of reforms and

will continue to provide more to meet the demands of the protesters.

Meanwhile, the UN envoy for Iraq appealed for an end to the violence and holding to account those responsible for it. "This must stop. I call on all parties to pause and reflect," Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert tweeted Saturday night.

Attacks on media

In new developments amid the unrest, masked gunmen in black cars and wearing black clothes stormed the offices of Al-Arabiya, a Saudi-owned pan-Arab news channel, beat up some of the employees and smashed equipment before they fled. The attack came after the station had received threats for several days.

Gunmen also attacked other news channels that have been covering the daily protests.



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Iraqi protesters vow to continue regardless of government offers Eight injured in second day of Baghdad protests

'Enemies seek to sow discord' between Iran and Iraq: Khamenei

Author:

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TEHRAN: Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said "enemies" were trying to drive a wedge between Tehran and Baghdad in a tweet on Monday following deadly unrest in neighboring Iraq.

"#Iran and #Iraq are two nations whose hearts & souls are tied together ... Enemies seek to sow discord but they've failed & their conspiracy won't be effective," Khamenei was quoted as saying on his office's Twitter account. State news agency IRNA said the supreme leader was reacting to recent violence in Iraq.

More than 100 people have been killed in Iraq since clashes erupted last week between protesters and security forces, the majority of them demonstrators struck by bullets.

The Iraqi authorities have accused "saboteurs" and unidentified snipers of targeting the protesters.

Iran has urged its citizens planning to take part in a major Shiite pilgrimage in Iraq to delay their travel into the country over the violence. Tehran has close but complicated ties with Baghdad, with significant influence among its Shiite political groups.

The two countries fought a bloody war from 1980 to 1988 and Iran's influence in the country grew after the US-led invasion of Iraq toppled veteran dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003.



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UAE says Khamenei meeting proves Houthis are Iran's proxyIran to consider talks with US only if sanctions lifted and Khamenei permits: minister

[Qatar's Al-Ghufran tribe fights for justice – and right to citizenship](#)

Sun, 2019-10-06 22:29

JEDDAH: In June, 1995, Qatar's then Crown Prince Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani deposed his father, Sheikh Khalifa Al-Thani, the ruling emir, in a bloodless coup.

Sheikh Khalifa was outside the country when the overthrow took place, and the crown prince quickly gained the allegiance of other Al-Thani family leaders and key tribes in order to secure his position.

However, in February the following year, supporters of the emir joined a counter-coup in a bid to reinstall the deposed leader. It failed because the emir was unable to return to Doha airport in the agreed time.

Immediately afterward, the government arrested scores of Qataris, who were held in isolation before being stripped of their citizenship and deported.

That is also what happened with 6,000 members of the Al-Ghufran tribe, who have been forced from their homeland, and accused of masterminding the coup and attempting to assassinate Sheikh Hamad.

The Al-Ghufran tribe is a branch of the semi-nomadic Al-Murra group, one of the largest tribes in Qatar with more than 10,000 members, according to unofficial estimates. Most live in Qatar, and in the east and south of Saudi Arabia. It consists of several branches, including Al-Buhaih, Al-Fuhaidah, Al-Jaber and Al-Zaidan.

According to several members of the Al-Ghufran, the Qatari authorities' persecution of the tribe dates back to June 25, 1995, when Sheikh Hamad deposed his father in a bloodless coup. The Qatari people were shocked at TV news of the overthrow, which took place when Sheikh Khalifa was on a trip abroad.

TIMELINE

Qatar Chronology:

- June 27, 1995 – Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani deposes his father
- Feb. 14, 1996 – Sheikh Khalifa stages counter-coup. Members of more than 17 Qatari tribes join the failed coup; more than 300 suspects arrested
- 1997 – Trial of 121 accused, including 21 members of the Al-Ghufran tribe, begins
- 2001 – Trial ends
- 2004 – Withdrawal of Al-Ghufran citizenship begins
- 2010 – Saudi King Abdullah intervenes to free 21 of those involved in the coup

After less than seven months, Qatari authorities announced they had foiled a counter-coup against Sheikh Hamad led by his father who had tried to return to Qatar. An arrest warrant was subsequently issued against Sheikh Khalifa through Interpol.

Rashed Al-Amrah, an Al-Ghufran tribe member and former Qatari police officer, was stripped of his citizenship by the Qatari government after the failed 1996 counter-coup.

“Some of us did not believe what happened, especially that the son perpetrated the coup against father since the father has great stature in the

Islamic religion and, specifically, in Gulf communities,” he told Arab News.

“We have seen a number of citizens and a number of the Al-Thani family members pledge allegiance to the new sheikh as emir of Qatar.

“There was hearsay and statements made by Sheikh Khalifa that he will return to Qatar and reinstall the deposed emir. People were confused: Do they support Sheikh Hamad or stand with their former legitimate ruler? Many Qataris protested against the coup, asserting that Sheikh Khalifa is the rightful ruler of Qatar.”

Jaber Al-Kahla, an Al-Ghufran tribe member, was serving in the Emiri Guard on the night of the counter-coup. “I was 23 when my citizenship was revoked and working as a special agent of the guard of Crown Prince Sheikh Hamad,” he told Arab News.



Al-Ghufran members appeal to the UN in Geneva. (WAM photo)

“The night of the so-called coup, I was summoned to the service to carry out my military and national duty. A few days later, the commander of the tank, unit, Hazzaa bin Khalil, who is now the guard commander, summoned me and asked me: ‘Are you member of the Al-Ghufran tribe?’ I said yes. He listed some names of the same unit, who were my relatives and asked me if they also belonged to the tribe? I told him yes. He then said that we were suspended from work until further notice.”

It was a confusing time for many, as Al-Amrah recalls. “The Qatari people lived under the rule of the new emir, Sheikh Hamad, and I was an officer in

the Qatari police," he told Arab News.

"On Feb. 14, 1996, Sheikh Khalifa had told a number of his close relatives and supporters at home that he decided to return to Qatar via Doha military airport on the 27th of Ramadan, asking his supporters to receive him at the military airport.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

"Everyone was ready for the return of the legitimate ruler, but the Qataris, including a number of the sons of Sheikh Khalifa, such as Sheikh Jassem bin Khalifa, the-then chief of staff Sheikh Mubarak bin Abdulrahman, and a number of Qatari tribes, including Al-Ghufran, did not know how Sheikh Hamad would react.

"In the event, Sheikh Khalifa could not return because his aircraft was prevented from taking off in France," he said.

"Sheikh Khalifa then went to the UAE, specifically to Abu Dhabi, in the hospitality of Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan.

"At the time, I had traveled to Saudi Arabia for the Eid holidays and to visit relatives," Al-Amrah said.

"After the failed coup, the Qatari authorities began to investigate and search for those who were supporting Sheikh Khalifa, a large number of whom were Qatari tribesmen and dignitaries belonging to the Al-Ghufran, Al-Kaabi, Al-Suwaidi, Bani Hajjar, Al-Abdullah, Al-Mouhannadi, Al-Kuwari and Al-Thani clans.



Leaders of the Al-Ghufran clan talk with the media to explain their plight.
(WAM photo)□□□□

“Many members of the Al-Ghufran tribe who were in the security or armed forces were arrested and imprisoned, including Brig. Bakhit Marzooq Al-Abdullah, who was alleged to be the leader of the so-called coup,” he said.

“After Eid, we knew that there were orders to arrest and imprison all members of the Al-Ghufran clan attempting to return to Qatar. I was afraid for myself and my family, so I decided not to return until things were cleared up.

“We also knew that any Qatari outside Qatar who could not return to his country for fear of what would happen could go to Sheikh Khalifa in Abu Dhabi where he would be welcomed.

“Indeed, I headed to Abu Dhabi, where we were housed at the InterContinental Hotel and received a salary from Sheikh Khalifa. I stayed in Abu Dhabi for four years,” Al-Amrah said.

Qatari authorities charged a total of 121 people over the failed counter-coup. Trials (some in absentia) were held between November 1997 and May 2001.

Charges issued by the prosecutor general’s office included “attempting to depose Qatar’s emir by force,” “holding arms against the state of Qatar,” “disclosing military secrets” and “cooperating and conspiring with foreign countries.”

Hamad bin Jassem bin Jaber Al-Thani, then Qatar’s foreign minister, and Abdullah bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the prime minister, attended the trials as witnesses. At the end of the hearings, 19 alleged perpetrators were sentenced to death and 20 to life in prison, while 28 were acquitted.

None of those sentenced to death was executed.

Saleh Jaber Al-Humran, an Al-Ghufran tribe member, said: “I worked as a guard with Sheikh Khalifa’s guard unit. Before the events, I was absent from work for two consecutive months, so I was put in detention for a whole month.

“Once my detention ended, I wanted to visit my sick mother. On the same day I got out, the so-called coup took place and I was accused of taking part in it. My name was put on checkpoints without any guilt by my part, as I did not know what was going on outside my workplace.”



Al-Ghufran clan members attend a press conference to explain their plight.
(WAM photo)

“This is what confuses us the most,” said Al-Kahla, who served in the Emiri Guard. “The Qatari government is still refusing to tell us the reasons behind revoking our citizenship, although it is its duty to justify such a decision.

“From 1996 and until 2019, the government failed to state the true reasons behind revoking our citizenship. The only answer we were given was that Al-Ghufran clan members have dual nationality.

“When I took part in the Human Rights Council in Geneva a few months ago, a media report broadcast about me said that my father took part in the coup. However, the government did not declare this,” Al-Kahla said.

“This is the real reason: We are accused of participating in the coup. My conclusion is that the revocation of citizenship was a reaction to the participation of 21 members of Al-Ghufran tribe in the attempted coup which was perpetrated by as many as 121 individuals, representing 17 Qatari tribes.

“There is nothing surprising in this, even if the justice system was not

fair. Some of the accused were released several years later after announcing their innocence, but 6,000 innocent people were targeted without any accusation by the government,” Al-Kahla said.

In 2010, Saudi King Abdullah intervened to get 21 Al-Ghufran tribe members freed from prison, sending Prince Mutaib to secure their release.

Prince Mutaib flew the tribe members, who were still clad in prison outfits, to Jeddah, where they received new clothes and shoes before meeting the king.



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Al-Ghufran families 'arbitrarily stripped of Qatari citizenship': HRW report "The Unforgiven": Arab News investigates the plight of Qatar's Al-Ghufran tribe