

# Syrian opposition vows to back any Turkish operation into northeast

Author:

Sat, 2019-10-05 03:05

BEIRUT: Turkey-backed Syrian opposition fighters pledged on Friday to back a potential cross-border offensive that Ankara has threatened to mount against Kurdish fighters in northeast Syria. The US-led coalition and Turkey conducted on Friday their third joint patrol in northeastern Syria, they said, part of a plan designed to defuse tensions between Washington's two allies – Ankara and the Syrian Kurds.

The two countries have agreed to set up a zone in northeast Syria along the border with Turkey, which wants to expel the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia from the frontier.

The patrol followed a telephone call late on Thursday between Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar and US Defense Secretary Mark Esper in which Akar reiterated that Turkey would not accept a delay in the creation of what it calls "a safe zone" and would act alone if necessary to set it up.

Turkey has accused the US, which helped the YPG defeat Daesh militants, of moving too slowly to establish the zone.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Tuesday that given the lack of progress Turkey had no choice but to act alone – his most direct indication yet of a military incursion.

US support for YPG fighters has infuriated Ankara, which sees them as linked to the Kurdish PKK movement that has waged a decades-long insurgency inside Turkey.

"When it comes to the east of the Euphrates (river) ... it is our duty to fight," Salim Idris, an official of the Turkey-backed Syrian opposition, told a news conference in southeast Turkey. "We stand in full force in support of our Turkish brothers in fighting all forms of terrorism represented by the PKK gangs."

With ties between the NATO allies already under strain, diplomats and analysts say Erdogan would be unwilling to anger Washington with a full-scale incursion into northeast Syria, where US forces are stationed alongside the YPG.

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**Salim Idris, A Syrian opposition official**

But Turkey, which has twice launched military offensives with its insurgent allies in northern Syria in recent years, has been pressing for more efforts to set up the border zone.

US and Turkish troops have so far carried out half-a-dozen joint air missions over northeast Syria and three land patrols, including one on Friday, in what

Washington describes as “concrete steps” to address Ankara’s concerns. Turkey, which backs opposition fighters holding tracts of territory in northwest Syria near its border, also has about a dozen military posts in the nearby Idlib region.

The Turkey-backed Syrian opposition also announced on Friday that a number of Idlib opposition factions were merging with the National Army, the main opposition grouping that Turkey supports in the northwest.

The move may help widen Ankara’s influence in Idlib province, where militants formerly linked to Al-Qaeda are the dominant force.



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US conducts new joint patrol with Turkey in northeast Syria 173 civilians killed by land mines in Syria this year

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## [Iran not ‘drawing back’ militarily after Saudi attack: US admiral](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-10-05 03:00

WASHINGTON: Iran has not drawn back to a less threatening military posture in

the region following the Sept. 14 attack on Saudi Arabia, the top US admiral in the Middle East told Reuters, suggesting persistent concern despite a lull in violence.

"I don't believe that they're drawing back at all," Vice Admiral Jim Malloy, commander of the US Navy's Bahrain-based Fifth Fleet, said in an interview. The US, Saudi Arabia, Britain, France and Germany have publicly blamed the attack on Iran, which denies involvement in the strike on the world's biggest crude oil-processing facility. The Iran-aligned Houthi militant group in Yemen has claimed responsibility.

Malloy did not comment on any US intelligence guiding his assessment. But he acknowledged that he monitored Iranian activities closely, when asked if he had seen any concerning movements of Iranian missiles in recent weeks. Malloy said he regularly tracks Iranian cruise and ballistic missile movements – "whether they're moving to storage, away from storage." He also monitors whether Iran's minelaying capabilities head to distribution sites or away from them.

"I get a briefing of movements on a daily basis and then assessments as to what that could mean," he said.

Relations between the US and Iran have deteriorated sharply since President Donald Trump pulled out of the Iran nuclear accord last year and reimposed sanctions on its oil exports.

## **FASTFACT**

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For months, Iranian officials issued veiled threats, saying that if Tehran were blocked from exporting oil, other countries would not be able to do so either.

However, Iran has denied any role in a series of attacks that have followed, including against tankers in the Gulf using limpet mines earlier this year.

### **'Deny it if you can'**

Asked what the latest attack in Saudi Arabia showed him, Malloy said: "From my perspective, it is a land-based version of what they did with the mines ... quick, clandestine – deny it if you can."

"Send a signal and harass and provoke," he said.

His remarks came a week after the Pentagon announced it was sending four radar systems, a battery of Patriot missiles and about 200 support personnel to bolster Saudi defenses – the latest in a series of US deployments to the region this year amid escalating tensions.

Still, the latest deployment was more limited than had been initially under consideration.

Reuters has previously reported, for example, that the Pentagon eyed keeping an aircraft carrier in the Gulf region indefinitely, amid speculation that the USS Abraham Lincoln carrier strike group will soon need to wind up its deployment.



Malloy declined to speculate about future carrier deployments. But he acknowledged the tremendous value of aircraft carriers – as well as the ships in the strike groups that accompany an aircraft carrier. That includes the contribution of destroyers now accompanying the USS Abraham Lincoln to a US-led, multinational maritime effort known as Operation Sentinel.



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## [Algeria protesters demand army quit politics after cleric urges election](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-10-05 02:41

ALGIERS: Tens of thousands of Algerian protesters chanted slogans on Friday demanding the army quit politics, a purge of the ruling elite, an end to corruption, and the freeing of opposition leaders.

The demonstrations in the capital Algiers and several other cities follow a



ruling by a prominent independent cleric this week urging people to vote in a December election backed by the army but opposed by the protest movement. The fatwa, or Islamic legal ruling, and another two weeks ago, represent the first significant comment on the months-long political crisis by major independent clerics, and may influence conservative Algerians.

The army, which has emerged as the most powerful player in Algerian politics, sees December's presidential election as the only way to quell the protests and end the constitutional limbo that has prevailed since President Abdelaziz Bouteflika stood down in April.

Demonstrators have rejected the election, however, saying it could not be free or fair while Bouteflika's allies and military leaders maintain senior positions in the government.

Sheikh Lakhdar Zaoui, a well-known conservative cleric, published a fatwa, or Islamic legal ruling, on Wednesday, saying a Muslim country could not be leaderless.

Another cleric, Sheikh Chemseddine Bouroubi, who has a daily television show "Please Advise Me" that answers people's questions about religion, said last month it was forbidden for Algeria to have no president.

Algeria plunged into crisis in February when massive protests erupted to stop the old, sick Bouteflika running for a fifth term in an election that was scheduled for July.

He resigned on April 2, and the election was postponed. The authorities have meanwhile tried a carrot-and-stick approach to end the demonstrations, arresting Bouteflika allies on corruption charges but also increasing policing at protests.

The leaderless protesters have said the arrests so far are not enough, demanding that the rest of the ruling elite be removed including interim president Abdelkader Bensalah and Prime Minister Nouredine Bedoui.



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Algeria army chief says Bouteflika brother's jail term 'just punishment' Algeria court sentences Bouteflika brother to 15 years

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## Tunisia polls not likely to yield a clear winner

Author:

Sat, 2019-10-05 00:07

TUNIS: Dissatisfaction with established parties in Tunisian politics means Sunday's parliamentary elections may not yield a clear winner, complicating the process of coalition building at a pivotal moment for the economy.

Reflecting the uncertain atmosphere, two leading parties have sworn not to join governments containing the other, a stance that bodes ill for the give-and-take vital to forming an administration.

Eight years after the revolution which triggered the "Arab Spring" uprisings, many Tunisians have grown disillusioned with an establishment that has failed to improve living standards.

"I won't vote because I'm convinced the new rulers will be worse than the previous ones," said Karim Abidi, a 29-year-old hairdresser in Tunis who said he wants to join the flow of migrants crossing the Mediterranean to work in Italy.

Though Tunisian politics has long involved secular and Islamist groups competing in elections then sharing power, an emerging populism threatens an end to compromise.

Three weeks ago, in a separate presidential election, voters turned on all the main players in government, rejecting prominent politicians to send a pair of political newcomers through to a second-round runoff.

On Oct. 13, Kais Saied, an independent with conservative social views, will face Nabil Karoui, a media mogul who has been in detention since August accused of money laundering and tax fraud, which he denies.





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Tunisia sets presidential election runoff for October 13  
Anti-party Aich Tounsi shakes up Tunisian election

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## [Protesters aim to 'raise global awareness of corruption in Iraq'](#)

Author:

Fri, 2019-10-04 00:45

BAGHDAD: The current demonstrations in Iraq seek to show the international community what is happening in the country, and force out corrupt officials and politicians, Mustafa Hameed, a senior organizer of the protests, told Arab News on Thursday.

They are an attempt to topple the government of Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi. The protesters do not want to damage the political system, he said.

There have been mass demonstrations in Baghdad and Shiite-dominated southern provinces since Tuesday, in protest against widespread corruption, high unemployment and the failure to consistently deliver basic services such as drinking water and electricity.

The protests are the worst since Abdul Mahdi took office in October last year. At least 28 people have been killed and hundreds wounded, including troops, after Iraqi forces used water cannons, tear gas and live ammunition in their attempts to disperse the crowds.

"We do not target the political process in our demonstrations and do not seek to topple the political system," said Hameed, who used a different name over fears for his safety.

"We also are not targeting the Abdul Mahdi government exclusively. We want to bring the corrupt to court. We will not include the corrupt from 2003 but will include at least the corrupt from (former Prime Minister Nouri) Al-Maliki's government. If Abdul Mahdi could make this decision (to bring the corrupt to justice) and provide the necessary guarantees for its implementation, we would withdraw from the streets within 24 hours."

Iraq ranks high in the list of the most corrupt countries. Most Iraqis consider Al-Maliki's second spell in government, which lasted from 2010 to 2014, to be the most corrupt administration. During its reign, three Sunni-dominated provinces in the western and northern parts of the country fell into the hands of Daesh militants, and thousands of innocent people were killed.

Iraqi officials said they cannot negotiate with the organizers of the demonstrations because their identities are unknown and their requests are not specific.

"Our demands are clear and our leaders are clear," said Hameed. "But we deliberately did not disclose them from the beginning, to draw the attention of the international community to what is happening in Iraq and not give the Iraqi government the opportunity to terminate us."

## **FASTFACTS**

- Demonstrations intend to target Abdul Mahdi government but do not want to damage the political system, says a leading organizer.
- Key demand is to cancel results of May 2018 parliamentary elections, dissolve Parliament and hold new vote.

"At first, we were just trying to send a message to the Iraqi political forces, the Americans and the Iranians that we were able to conduct demonstrations without the intervention of a political party or a cleric. But after the death of many of our young people, it became bigger than this and we demand the internationalization of the Iraqi issue."

Iraq has been the biggest battleground for the US and Iran since 2003. Both countries control dozens of armed factions, and political and security leaders who serve their agendas in the country and the wider region.



Most Iraqis believe that corrupt politicians and officials benefit from the protection of the US or Iran, escape punishment by obstructing the rule of law, and deliberately form weak governments so that they cannot be held accountable.

One of the most important demands by protesters, said Hameed, is that the results of the May 2018 national parliamentary elections be canceled, the Parliament dissolved and a new election held.

He added that preparations for the demonstrations began three months ago, in coordination with prominent tribal sheikhs in Baghdad, Najaf, Karbala and Dhi Qar provinces. The protesters and their leaders are Iraqis without Islamist backgrounds, he said, and have no links to the Baath Party, which was banned by the US-led coalition following the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Clashes between demonstrators and security forces continued into the early hours of Thursday, especially in the provinces of Najaf, Maysan and Dhi Qar. The Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights and Iraqi officials said that more than 22 government and party properties had been set on fire by demonstrators in the past two days.

Hameed said new directives were issued to demonstrators in the past few hours telling them not to attack public buildings, security forces or clergymen in Najaf, to raise only the Iraqi flag, to form committees to protect demonstrators and expel saboteurs, and to demonstrate in all parts of Iraq instead of insisting on access to Liberation Square (known locally as Tahrir Square) in central Baghdad.

Prime Minister Abdul Mahdi said he is in "continuous contact with representatives of peaceful demonstrators to consider the legitimate demands." Mohammed Al-Halbousi, the parliament's speaker, invited the leaders of the demonstrations to meet him on Saturday in his office to hear their demands.

However, Hameed said they had received no contact from the government and would not accept an invitation from Al-Halbousi.

"No one has contacted us and we will not sit with them now," he said. "They (the government) used to lie and trade the blood of Iraqis. We are waiting to see the reactions of the international community to decide our next step, so it is likely we will not meet with them (the government) until next week."



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Six people shot dead in southern Iraqi city as violent protests rage for third day