

US ambassador arrives in Turkey as Russian weapons system is delivered

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Sat, 2019-07-13 14:02

ANKARA: At a critical junction in bilateral relations, the new US ambassador to Turkey, David Satterfield, arrived in Ankara on Wednesday just as S-400 Russian air defense systems were delivered to Turkey.

The American diplomat will now look to bring US-Turkey relations back on track, defusing complicated bilateral issues in Syria and derailing Russian-Turkish military cooperation.

The 65 year old envoy served as acting assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs from 2017.

During George W. Bush's presidency, he was the coordinator for Iraq and senior adviser to the secretary of state between 2006-2009.

As a fluent Arabic speaker, Satterfield also held top positions at US missions in Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Lebanon.

The ambassadorial post has been vacant since October 2017, mainly due to a visa crisis between Washington and Ankara, as well as Turkey's imprisonment of American Pastor Andrew Brunson on charges of terror propaganda.

Ali Cinar, a US-based foreign policy expert, said that having a US Ambassador in Ankara again is a positive step in the US-Turkey relations.

"The process of nominating an ambassador in the US is long and complicated. During Trump's presidency, there have been a number of ambassador vacancies around the world, including Turkey. Despite the tension between two NATO allies, Ambassador Satterfield was able to be confirmed," Cinar said. According to Cinar, Ambassador Satterfield's posting comes at a critical time, but his diplomatic skills should help to reconcile the troubled relationship.

"Turkey now has a direct channel through Ambassador Satterfield. Syria and the eastern Mediterranean crisis are the two issues that US and Turkey are facing," he said.

Washington recently voiced concern over Ankara's gas exploration activities in the Mediterranean Sea and called on the Turkish government to stop offshore drilling operations.

Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, Ankara office director of German Marshall Fund of the United States, thinks that despite Satterfield's extensive experience, all he can be expected to do is to contain the potential damage that may be inflicted on the US-Turkey relationship in the near future and perhaps save it from total collapse.

The first batch of S-400 systems started to arrive at Mürted Air Base in Ankara on Friday. However, the US Department of Defense recently announced that it will remove Turkey from the F-35 joint strike fighter program – the most sensitive US aircraft – if Ankara accepts the Russian S-400s.

Acting US Defense Secretary Mark Esper recently met with his Turkish

counterpart, Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, during a meeting of NATO defense ministers. Esper emphasized that Turkey will not receive the F-35 if it moves ahead with its S-400 purchase plan.

If enacted, the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act is expected to have a devastating effect on the Turkish economy and defense sector. The act will deny visas for Turkish officials or executives, freeze their assets in the US and block money transfers.

Unluhisarcikli noted that there has not been any significant convergence between the two allies in north-east Syria.

"The conflict between Turkey and the Republic of Cyprus, which Turkey doesn't recognize, over the exploitation of the energy resources off the coast of Cyprus is a growing source of tension in the US-Turkey relationship," he said.

Turkey has significantly reduced oil imports from its neighbors after US waivers expired in early May.

"While Turkey is complying with the Iran sanctions, it would likely not cooperate with the US in case there is armed conflict, which could add to the frustration in Washington," Unluhisarcikli said.



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[David Satterfield](#)

Turkey begins second wave of operations against PKK in Iraq
Russia delivers more S-400 air defense equipment to Turkey

[Iraq's former prime minister Abadi hints at comeback](#)

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1563008505347425000

Sat, 2019-07-13 08:59

BAGHDAD: Iraqi ex-prime minister Haider Al-Abadi is eyeing a sequel to his turbulent single term, he hinted to AFP, warning a failure to tackle sectarianism and corruption risks seeing his country "fall apart."

As the government of incumbent Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi faces growing criticism over poor services, Abadi has been working in the wings to secure a second term, according to multiple sources.

"We have good intentions," he said coyly, when asked about his ambitions in a wide-ranging AFP interview at his home in Baghdad's "Green Zone."

The 67-year-old, who came to office in 2014 without an election as Iraq reeled from the Daesh group grabbing a third of the country, has sent out feelers to major political blocs who may help him win allies in parliament, a government source said.

"He may take advantage of a wave of summertime protests if they happen," said the source.

Soaring summer temperatures – paired with crippling electricity shortages, which restrict refrigeration and air conditioning – often provoke significant unrest in Iraq.

Abadi has even reached out to Iraq's powerful Shiite clerics, who can make or break a politician's career, said intermediaries close to the religious establishment.

The rumors of his return have gained so much traction that Abdel Mahdi has repeatedly had to deny allegations he was preparing to resign.

Abadi oversaw both the fight against the Daesh group and a tough response by Baghdad to an independence referendum by the country's Kurds, but his bloc fared poorly in national elections last year.

Abadi painted himself as an opposition figure who could help "guide" the current government.

The chief priority should be tackling corruption, he said, in a country ranked by Transparency International as the world's 12th most corrupt.

"There is a new kind of state corruption now – selling positions, which happened secretly in the past but now goes on in the open," Abadi told AFP. "Everything has a price."

Graft is endemic across Iraq, where parliament estimates that \$228 billion has vanished into the pockets of shady politicians and businessmen over the last 15 years.

Abadi himself was accused of failing to curb corruption during his term. The ex-premier said the government should also tackle the spectre of sectarian violence, which ravaged Iraq's diverse communities over a decade ago.

"In the past, sectarianism was used as a weapon in the conflict between factions to divide up the spoils of war," he said.

"If Daesh (IS) or another terrorist group returns, or if a cocktail of terrorists and politicians is formed, it'll be so dangerous that everything will completely fall apart."

Abadi himself declared IS defeated in December 2017 after a draining three-year military campaign, a moment that will likely define his legacy.

Several months earlier, he had ordered federal troops to retake disputed territories and adjacent oil fields from Kurdish forces after an independence referendum in the autonomous region that saw an overwhelming vote in favor of secession.

Abadi remains largely disliked by the autonomous Kurdish regional government (KRG), led by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which he indirectly criticized.

"I have no problems with Kurdish citizens," he said.

"But there is a problem with some of the parties which control the region, its wealth and its oil," Abadi said.

He accused the KRG of exporting nearly double the agreed amount from their northern pipeline without federal authorization, asking: "Where are the revenues?"

Abadi's poor ratings in the north notwithstanding, he is one of the rare figures in Iraq widely respected by both the country's Shiite majority – from which he hails – and its Sunni minority.

And in the regional tug-of-war between the US and Iran, both allies of Iraq, Abadi has been seen as closer to Washington's camp.

Tensions between the two countries have skyrocketed since the US reimposed tough sanctions on Iran last year, which Abadi had pledged to implement as prime minister.

That stance cost him his premiership, observers say, and parliament voted in Abdel Mahdi to replace him.

This month, Abdel Mahdi ordered the Hashed Al-Shaabi, a collection of mostly-Shiite, pro-Iran paramilitary units, to integrate into the state's security forces by July 31.

Abadi, who issued a similar decision in 2017, told AFP the decision was too little, too late.

"I believe we lost a year and a half," he said.



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Rival Iraqi factions make coalition deal and end Al-Abadi's prime minister hopes Al-Abadi rivals sabotage Iraq's power lines and fuel protests

[South Korea considers joining coalition to patrol waters off Iran](#)

Fri, 2019-07-12 22:22

SEOUL: The South Korean government is in discussions with the US over plans to join a multinational naval coalition to protect shipping in the Arabian Gulf in the face of alleged Iranian threats, Foreign Ministry officials revealed on Thursday.

The move came after Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated the US was holding talks with several nations to send ships to safeguard waters surrounding Iran and Yemen.

"The (South Korean) government is concerned about the escalation of tensions in the Middle East region," Foreign Ministry spokesman Kim In-chul said in a briefing.

"Our position is that freedom of navigation and commerce should not be put into jeopardy."

The spokesman said his ministry has yet to receive any formal request on the coalition matter.

"We'll keep discussing the issue with the US side," Kim said. "No details have been discussed yet about when, how and what we would do."

Washington is seeking to enlist its allies for a multinational coalition to operate in waters off Iran and Yemen to secure commercial shipping and prevent attacks that could harm the world's oil supply.



Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff. (AFP)

A fifth of the oil that is consumed globally passes through the Strait of Hormuz, connecting the Indian Ocean with the Gulf.

"We're engaging now with a number of countries to see if we can put together a coalition that would ensure freedom of navigation both in the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab Al-Mandeb," Dunford said on Tuesday.

"Probably over the next couple of weeks we'll identify which nations have the political will to support that initiative and then we'll work directly with the militaries to identify the special capabilities that will support that."

He said the US military would provide “command and control” ships, while other coalition members should send ships to patrol waters between the American naval vessels.

South Korea has participated in previous US-led coalition operations, as the country has long been dependent on US military forces for protection against North Korea, with the two Koreas technically still at war.

In 2004, South Korea sent a 3,600-strong contingent to Iraq for humanitarian and rehabilitation operations. About 200 engineers and medics were also dispatched to Afghanistan in support of the US war on terrorism.

The South Korean Navy is a member of anti-piracy operations in the Somali waters.

The unit, called “Cheonghae,” has escorted thousands of South Korean and international vessels in and around the Gulf of Aden since 2009.

As of February, the Cheonghae Unit escorted 21,895 vessels and conducted 21 operations to counter piracy on the seas, according to the service.

The total sailing distance of the unit amounted to 1.95 million km.

It also takes part in the Combined Maritime Force, a multinational naval force dedicated to maintaining maritime safety and combating piracy, and conducts joint military drills with the EU’s maritime security operations.



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US, allies planning naval escort for Gulf tankers Britain to deploy second warship to the Gulf amid tensions with Iran

[Egyptian mediators arrive in Gaza to call for calm](#)

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Fri, 2019-07-12 14:30

GAZA CITY: Palestinian officials say an Egyptian delegation has arrived in the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip to call for calm between Palestinian factions and Israel.

The Egyptian general intelligence officials crossed Friday from Israel through the Erez crossing and headed to meetings with Hamas officials. The Gaza-Israel frontier has remained largely quiet since May, after the militant Hamas group and Israel ended their worst round of conflict in years. But Hamas warns Israel is avoiding an unofficial truce calling for easing restrictions and improving conditions in the impoverished enclave. On Thursday, Hamas accused Israel of deliberately killing a member near the border fence. Israel said the incident was a misunderstanding. Meanwhile, Palestinians began gathering at the frontier as part of a protest campaign Hamas launched last year against the blockade that Israel and Egypt imposed since Hamas seized Gaza in 2007.



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Israeli restrictions on Gaza and West Bank stifling Palestinian football
Palestinian militant killed by Israeli fire near Gaza border: Hamas

[Kuwaiti authorities arrest militant cell linked to Muslim Brotherhood](#)

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1562943439781398700

Fri, 2019-07-12 14:50

CAIRO: Members of a militant cell linked to the banned Muslim Brotherhood group have been arrested in Kuwait, the interior ministry said on Friday.

The arrested people were wanted by Egyptian authorities, the ministry added in its statement.

Members of the cell had escaped and were evading Egyptian authorities, making Kuwait the center of their operations, a statement made by the Ministry of Interior on Friday said.

Special units of the ministry discovered the cell, and were able to identify the location of members and arrest them in different places after launching a special operation.

After initial investigations, the members of the cell admitted carrying out terrorist operations and breaching security in Egypt.

Investigations are still ongoing to find out who helped them evade the authorities and cooperated with them.



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Trump set to designate Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist group