

Israel demolishes home of Palestinian charged with killing

Author:

Fri, 2019-04-19 15:49

HEBRON, West Bank: The Israeli military has demolished the family home of a Palestinian charged with the killing of a 19-year-old Israeli woman.

Israeli forces bulldozed two apartments belonging to the father of Arafat Erfayieh in the West Bank city of Hebron on Friday.

Erfayieh was arrested and charged in February with the killing of Ori Ansbacher, whose slain body was found in a West Bank forest near Jerusalem. Her brutal killing drew widespread media coverage in Israel, sparking calls for revenge from hard-line Jewish settlers. The Shin Bet security agency determined the act was politically motivated.

Israel often demolishes homes of alleged Palestinian assailants or their families, saying it deters future attacks. Human rights groups have long condemned such demolitions as a form of collective punishment banned by international law.





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Palestinian teen killed by Israeli fire in border clashes: Gaza
ministry Israel arrests brother of Palestinian protest icon

Turkey says understands NATO concerns over Russian missile deal

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Fri, 2019-04-19 10:48

ISTANBUL: Turkey is "taking into account" NATO concerns over its Russian missile deal, the country's foreign minister said on Friday, in more conciliatory remarks over a purchase stoking tensions between Washington and Ankara.

The deal for Russian S-400 missiles riled Washington, prompting US officials to suspend Turkey's participation in the US-made F-35 jet program and warn of more sanctions against its NATO ally.

Washington says Turkey's adoption of Russian missile technology alongside US fighter jets would not be compatible within NATO defenses, citing security risks.

"We are taking into account NATO's concerns. It is not right to say Turkey is not considering them," Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told a press conference in Ankara.

His remarks followed a visit by Turkey's defense minister to Washington and a meeting between US President Donald Trump and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's son-in-law at the White House, where they discussed the S-400 deal, local media reported.

"We don't find credible the concerns that the S-400 system will allow access to the F-35 technology if they are deployed in Turkey," the minister said. He said Ankara was still waiting for a US response to Turkey's proposal to set up a working group between them to work out differences over the Russian deal.

The S-400 purchase is one dispute fueling tensions between the two nations, who are also at odds over US support for Syrian Kurdish militias who Ankara brands a terrorist group and Turkish backing for US foe Venezuela.

This month, after repeated warnings, the United States said Turkey's decision to buy the S-400 system was incompatible with it remaining part of the emblematic F-35 jet program.

Turkey had planned to buy 100 F-35A fighter jets, with pilots already training in the United States.

With Turkey in recession for the first time in a decade after a currency crisis last year, analysts say Ankara may look to avoid imposition of new US sanctions that would further damage the economy.

Last year, a trade dispute with the US prompted Washington to impose

sanctions and tariffs on some Turkish goods, knocking around 30 percent off the value of the local lira currency.

Local Turkish media have reported Turkey may be considering options to ease tensions, such as the non-activation of the S-400 after delivery to Turkey, or the transfer of Russian missiles to a third country.



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Turkish opposition candidate officially declared Istanbul's new mayor
Turkey freezes assets of senior Houthi militia leaders

[Algeria protesters keep up pressure on regime](#)

Author:

Associated Press

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Fri, 2019-04-19 09:51

ALGIERS: Hundreds of thousands of demonstrators returned to Algeria's streets on Friday to press demands for wholesale democratic change well beyond former president Abdelaziz Bouteflika's resignation, chanting "we do what we want," witnesses said.

Parliament named an interim president and a July 4 election date was set in a transition endorsed by Algeria's powerful military. But Bouteflika's April 2 exit failed to placate many Algerians who want to topple the entire elite that have dominated the country since independence from France in 1962.

Protesters gathered anew in city centers around Algeria demanding root-and-branch reforms – including political pluralism and crackdowns on corruption and cronyism, witnesses said. Numbers later surged after Friday prayers.

There was no official count but Reuters reporters at the scene estimated the number of demonstrators in the hundreds of thousands as on previous Fridays since the extraordinary mass dissent erupted on Feb. 22.

"We will not give up our demands," said Mourad Hamini, standing outside his coffee shop, where thousands of protesters were waving Algerian flags.

The crowd later chanted: "This is our country and we do what we want!"

Protesters also called for Abdelkader Bensalah, head of the upper house of parliament, to quit as caretaker president and for Nouredine Bedoui to stand down as interim prime minister.

"They must go. The B's must go," one banner read, referring to Bensalah, Bedoui and Moad Bouchareb, head of the ruling National Liberation Front (FLN) party.

Tayib Belaiz, chairman of Algeria's Constitutional Council and a fourth senior "B" official, resigned earlier this week.

A young man who was injured in protests in the Algerian capital last week died on Friday of injuries to the head, Ennahar TV said on Friday.

Ennahar said there were two accounts regarding the death of the 18-year-old. The first was that he was beaten during last Friday's protests and the second was that he fell from a truck on his way to the protests.

Police are investigating his death, Ennahar added.

On Tuesday, armed forces chief Lt. General Ahmed Gaed Salah said the military was considering all options to resolve the national political crisis and warned "time is running out."

It was a hint the military was losing patience with the popular upheaval shaking Algeria, a major oil and natural-gas exporter and a key security partner for the West against extremist militants in north and west Africa. Salah did not specify what measures the army could take but added: "We have no ambition but to protect our nation."

The army has so far patiently monitored the mostly peaceful protests that at times swelled to hundreds of thousands of people. It remains the most powerful institution in Algeria, having swayed politics from the shadows for decades.

Protesters want a clean break with "le pouvoir" (the power) – the secretive establishment comprised of veterans of the war of independence against France, senior FLN figures and associated oligarchs – and sweeping reforms. "The ninth Friday is a vote against the gang," read a banner held up by protesters on Saturday.

“The system will go sooner or later,” said Mohamed Dali, who was selling sweets to protesters.

Another banner read: “The country is ours and the army is ours.”



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Algeria protests loosen stranglehold on media
Algeria military chief 'looking at all solutions' to solve crisis

[Turkish opposition candidate officially declared Istanbul's new mayor](#)

Wed, 2019-04-17 10:02

ANKARA: Turkey's main opposition party candidate on Wednesday was finally declared as the new mayor of Istanbul.

Republican People's Party (CHP) prospect Ekrem Imamoglu's official mandate

from the city's election board came almost three weeks after votes were cast and despite a pending appeal from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) for a rerun of the poll.

The decision follows results showing Imamoglu marginally ahead in the disputed mayoral election in Turkey's biggest city.

The long-awaited news, which will see Imamoglu take office for five years, quickly started trending on social media with Twitter hashtags #MazbataGeldi (MandateHasCome) and #BaharGeldi (#SpringHasCome).

"I'm getting the mandate of 16 million residents of Istanbul," Imamoglu, the new rising star of Turkish politics tweeted on his way to the electoral board's offices where hundreds of supporters welcomed him.

Although a little-known district mayor of an Istanbul suburb, Imamoglu, the 48-year-old challenger to Erdogan and his party, energized and consolidated the opposition votes by using a conciliatory tone during his campaign.

A recount of all votes, including invalid ones, in several districts of Istanbul confirmed Imamoglu to be ahead by 13,729 votes.

The AKP's electoral defeat in Istanbul – Turkey's cultural, financial and commercial hub – as well as in the capital Ankara, has created political tension in the country, with the uncertainty hitting the value of the lira.

Losing Istanbul also marked a personal blow for Erdogan who began his rise up the political ladder as mayor of the city in 1994.

However, the country's Supreme Electoral Council (YSK) is yet to rule on whether the AKP's formal demand for a new election has any merit. If the YSK accepts the application, based on alleged widespread irregularities, Imamoglu's mandate could still be taken back.

An announcement from the YSK on whether to rerun the vote in early June is expected in the coming days.

"This is a big victory for the Turkish opposition in a competitive authoritarian regime, which showed a great resilience," Orcun Selcuk, an expert on comparative politics, told Arab News.

"Unlike previous elections, the Turkish opposition looked organized and caught the incumbent party by surprise. The AKP leaders failed to provide logical arguments to back up their claims of systematic manipulation," Selcuk said.

Imamoglu gave a rousing speech to supporters in front of the Istanbul metropolitan municipality building.

In an exclusive interview with Arab News, CHP parliamentarian Burhanettin Bulut said the decision to give Imamoglu his certificate of mandate had avoided throwing Turkey into chaos.

“Now it is time to restore our country, beginning in the cities, by taking into consideration social expectations. The political pressure of the new executive presidential system at the top can only be balanced by local governance at the grassroots,” he said.

Sezgin Tanrikulu, Istanbul CHP deputy and a well-known human rights lawyer, said he did not think the YSK would give the green light to an election rerun as the AKP’s application was legally flawed.

“This decision ended 25 years of control of Istanbul by the AKP and its Islamist predecessors. From now on, an egalitarian, transparent and democratic approach will prevail,” Tanrikulu told Arab News.

Nezih Onur Kuru, a doctoral researcher on political psychology from Koc University, in Istanbul, said Imamoglu had refrained from using polarizing language after the elections, and his popularity had increased as he organized rallies in every district of Istanbul where the CHP had won.

“Imamoglu kept his calm even though Erdogan and his nationalist ally MHP continuously targeted him with their statements. Imamoglu, however, stated that he would not discriminate against AKP supporters,” Kuru told Arab News.

According to Kuru, the new mayor, who comes from a conservative family, prevented the AKP and MHP voters from rallying behind his rival Binali Yildirim.



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Turkey freezes assets of senior Houthi militia leaders
Turkey's opposition takes office in Istanbul, appeal still pending

UN envoy sees troop withdrawal in Yemen's Hodeidah within weeks

Author:

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Thu, 2019-04-18 17:46

DUBAI: Yemen's warring parties could start withdrawing forces from the main port city of Hodeidah within weeks, a move needed to pave the way for political negotiations to end the four-year war, the UN special envoy said on Thursday.

Martin Griffiths said he had received on Sunday the formal acceptance of the legitimate government and the Iran-backed Houthi group to implement a first phase of troop redeployments, while discussions were still underway for the second phase.

The United Nations has struggled to implement a pact agreed at talks last December in Sweden, the first major breakthrough in peace efforts to end the war that has killed tens of thousands and pushed Yemen to the brink of famine.

"The two parties agreed formally to the concept of operations for phase one. What we are doing now is ... moving on as planned from there to agree on phase two," Griffiths told Reuters in a telephone interview without elaborating, adding that talks would "intensify" in coming days.

"So we don't have an exact date at the moment for the beginning of this physical redeployment," he said. "It's got to be weeks ... hopefully few weeks."

Sources have told Reuters the first phase would see the Houthis leave the city's ports and pro-government forces leave some areas on the city's outskirts. In the second phase, both sides would pull troops to 18 km from the city and heavy weapons 30 km away.

The Hodeidah deal was a trust building step aimed at averting a full-scale assault on Hodeidah by the Arab coalition trying to restore the legitimate government of Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, and paving the way for political talks to set up a transitional government.

Danish general Michael Lolloesgaard, head of the UN observer team in Hodeidah, chairs a Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) tasked with hammering out details not spelled out in the pact.

A cease-fire in Houthi-held Hodeidah has largely held but violence has escalated elsewhere in the country. The troop withdrawal was due to have been completed by Jan. 7 but stalled over disagreement on who would control the Red Sea port city.

Asked if that issue had been resolved, Griffiths said: “We have ideas on how to bridge the gap on the issue of the local security forces” but it would be up to the parties represented in the RCC headed by Lollesgaard to resolve it. Three sources told Reuters last month that the first phase would see the Houthis pull back 5 km (3 miles) from the ports of Saleef, used for grain, and Ras Isa, for oil. Then the Houthis would quit Hodeidah port while coalition forces would retreat 1 km from the city’s “Kilo 8” and Saleh districts.

This would restore access cut off since September to the Red Sea Mills, which holds some 50,000 tons of World Food Programme grain, enough to feed 3.7 million people, and allow humanitarian corridors to be reopened.

Hodeidah handles the bulk of Yemen’s commercial and aid supplies and is critical for feeding the population of 30 million people. It became a focus of fighting last year, raising concern that an all-out assault could disrupt supply lines and trigger mass starvation in the poorest Arabian Peninsula nation.

“I know we’re spending an enormous amount of time, and rightly so, on Hodeidah, but it’s the gateway to the comprehensive settlement and of course failure in Hodeida is not an option,” Griffiths said.

“The aim ultimately of an agreement which will resolve the conflict and end this war is to return governing of Yemen to politicians, to return to the people of Yemen accountable government.”



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Trump card: Veto on Yemen hailed as 'timely and strategic'
Sudanese troops to remain in Yemen: military council deputy