

Turkey's Erdogan meets Iran minister over Syria

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Wed, 2019-04-17 11:58

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday met with Iran's foreign minister, who arrived in Ankara to brief him on his meeting with Syria's President Bashar Assad.

Turkey supports Syrian opposition rebels and Iran backs Assad in Syria's long war, but the two sides have been expanding contacts amid international efforts to end the fighting.

Kazakhstan will host a fresh round of Syria talks on April 25-26 in its capital, recently renamed from Astana to Nur-Sultan.

"I had a long interview with Bashar Assad. I will be giving details of these discussions to Mr. Erdogan," Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif told reporters in translated comments.

Ankara broke ties with Damascus in 2011 after the start of the Syrian war, and Erdogan has in the past described Assad as an "assassin."

But Erdogan acknowledged in February that low-level contacts have been taking place and his rhetoric has also softened in tone in recent months.

"In Syria, from the start, on the ground, we do not agree with Iran on many issues," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Wednesday. "But we have decided to cooperate with Iran for a political solution."

Repeated rounds of UN-backed Syria peace talks have failed to end the bloodshed, and Iran, Russia and Turkey have sponsored the parallel so-called Astana negotiations since early 2017.

Talks among the three countries have focused on the militant-held bastion of Idlib in northwestern Syria, local Syrian media have reported.

That region bordering Turkey, is mostly held by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, and is in theory protected from a massive Syrian regime offensive by a Russia-Turkey deal.

The September accord aimed to set up a buffer zone around Idlib, but was never fully implemented as militants refused to withdraw.



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Turkey, Qatar criticize US designation of IRGC as terror group
Turkish defense minister had 'constructive' US talks: Anadolu

[Israel's president formally nominates Netanyahu as PM](#)

Author:

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Wed, 2019-04-17 10:29

JERUSALEM: Israel's president on Wednesday formally nominated Benjamin Netanyahu for a fourth consecutive term as prime minister, officially launching a process that is expected to result in a new government dominated by religious and nationalist parties in the coming weeks.

In one of the president's few non-ceremonial roles, President Reuven Rivlin tasked Netanyahu with assembling a governing coalition within 42 days. The move was widely expected after Netanyahu's Likud party and its right-wing allies captured a majority of seats in parliamentary elections last week. In a joint appearance after the two leaders signed and presented the official nomination, Rivlin called on Netanyahu to "heal the wounds and rifts" laid bare in Israeli society by the bruising election campaign. Netanyahu said he was "moved" to accept his fifth nomination as prime minister "as though it's the first time, and in a certain way, even more than the first time."

He said he would "do everything to earn the trust that the citizens of Israel have bestowed on me."

In a post-election ritual, Rivlin hosted consultations with party leaders this week to hear their recommendations for who should serve as the next prime minister.

Netanyahu's nationalist and religious allies all lobbied for Netanyahu to continue as prime minister. The last one to hold out, former Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman of the hawkish Yisrael Beitenu party, formally confirmed his support for Netanyahu late Monday.

Netanyahu's right-wing bloc – made up of Kulanu, the Union of Right Wing Parties, Yisrael Beitenu and the ultra-Orthodox Shas and United Torah Judaism – now commands a 65-55 majority in the 120-seat parliament.

In the coming weeks, Netanyahu will have to negotiate coalition deals with his partners, who will jockey for powerful Cabinet posts with large and influential budgets.

If Netanyahu fails to form a coalition within 42 days, Benny Gantz, leader of the rival centrist Blue and White party, would be given a shot at assembling a government.

But that doesn't appear to be in the cards. "We will establish a right-wing government as soon as possible, likely within a month," said Yonatan Ulrich, a spokesman for the prime minister.

In a matter of months, Netanyahu will officially become Israel's longest-serving prime minister, surpassing David Ben-Gurion, the country's founding father.



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[Benjamin Netanyahu](#)

Benjamin Netanyahu passes threshold for nomination as Israel's premier
Israeli president begins consultations before tapping new prime minister

[Turkish defense minister had 'constructive' US talks: Anadolu](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Wed, 2019-04-17 08:08

ISTANBUL: Turkey's defense minister said he had a "very constructive" talks with US Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan and their views have got closer on some subjects, state-owned Anadolu news agency reported on Wednesday.

Defense Minister Hulusi Akar had been visiting Washington with a large Turkish delegation for talks which have in part focused on areas of discord

between the NATO allies, chiefly the purchase of a missile-defense system and the war in Syria.

"The talk was very constructive and occurred with a very positive approach," Akar said of his meeting with Shanahan, according to Anadolu. "We gladly observed that they understood many subjects much better and have got very close to our views on these subjects."

He did not specify which subjects he was referring to.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said last week Washington had told Ankara it could face retribution for buying Russian S-400 missile defense systems under a sanctions law known as Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CATSAA).

President Tayyip Erdogan's spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said on Tuesday Turkey expects President Donald Trump to use a waiver to protect it if the US Congress decides to sanction Ankara over the planned S-400 purchase.

Turkey has not backed down from the acquisition and said it should not trigger sanctions as Ankara is not an adversary of Washington and remains committed to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

US officials have said the S-400 purchase would risk Ankara's partnership in the joint strike fighter F-35 program because it would compromise the jets, made by Lockheed Martin Corp. Turkish companies produce some of the parts for the F-35 stealth fighter jet.

Akar said Turkey had fulfilled its responsibilities on the issue of the F-35 project and that the training of Turkish pilots and maintenance teams was continuing.

"We expect the other eight countries who are partners in this project to fulfil their responsibilities toward us," he said.

Ankara has proposed to Washington that the two countries establish a technical committee under the NATO umbrella to determine whether the S-400s endanger the F-35 jets as the Americans argue, and is waiting to hear back from the United States.

The United States and other NATO allies that own F-35s fear the S-400 radar will learn how to spot and track the jet, making it less able to evade Russian weapons.

The disagreement is the latest in a series of diplomatic disputes between the NATO allies, including Turkish demands that Washington extradite cleric Fethullah Gulen, differences over Middle East policy and the war in Syria, and sanctions on Iran.



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Turkey, Qatar criticize US designation of IRGC as terror group
SRMG announces soft launch of IndependentTurkish.com

[Lebanon's legal system celebrates 100th anniversary amid probe into judicial corruption](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-04-16 21:55

BEIRUT: The Beirut Bar Association on Tuesday celebrated its 100th anniversary with a ceremony in Beirut attended by Lebanese President Michel Aoun, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and Prime Minister Saad Hariri.

The association was founded a year before the creation, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, of Greater Lebanon. The Lebanese Court of Cassation will celebrate its 100th anniversary in June.

The celebrations coincide with the launch of investigations by the political and judicial authorities into allegations of corruption involving many judges in Mount Lebanon and lawyers from a number of regions.

“No country (exists) without an independent, clean judiciary that seeks justice and truth,” Aoun told the audience at the event, which included politicians, members of the judiciary, diplomats and legal professionals. “Purging the judicial body has been the first priority of our war on the corruption that ravages all our institutions.

“The judiciary must remain above suspicion and be an independent constitutional authority that self-purifies itself in accordance with the mechanisms adopted by law, without defamation, extortion or exploitation of any person.”

Justice Minister Albert Sarhan said: “There can be no justice without an independent judiciary...We regret the defamation and abuse of the judiciary, but we believe that the judges’ acquisition and exercise of the culture of independence, (as well as) their impartiality and competence in the conduct of their duties are the greatest immunity that protects them from all prejudice.”

Andre Chidiac, the president of the Bar Association, warned that the legal profession might be affected by “volcanoes of inventions erupting in every field” and that “30 to 40 percent of freelance professions may be threatened with extinction.”

He quoted French professor Louis Assier-Andrieu, who said: “Lawyers are at a crossroads, torn between the legacy that is still alive to defend public freedoms and the increasing impact of economic logic and technological progress.”

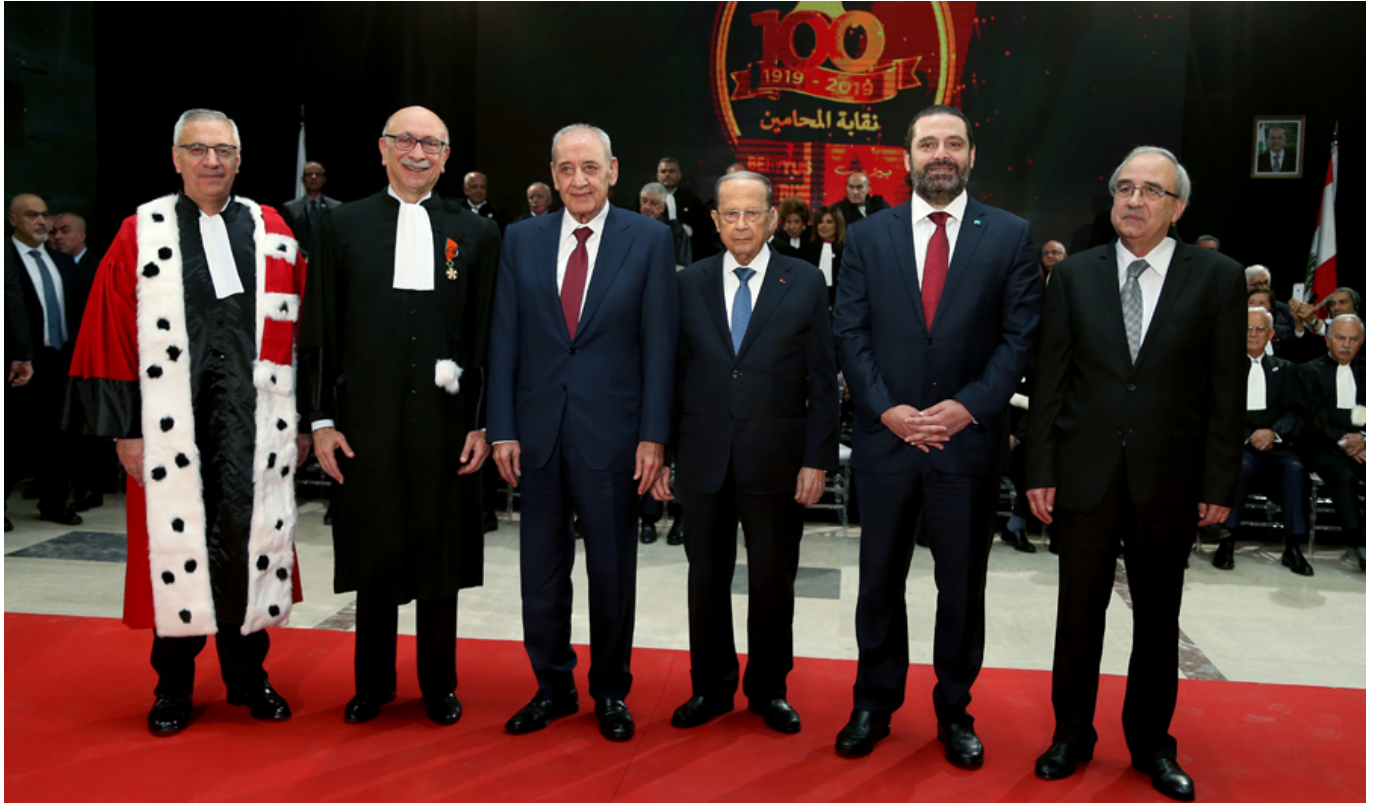
Chidiac said that the legal profession in Lebanon was “catching up with modernity and confronting artificial intelligence, the robotic phenomenon and digital-rights legislation through the formation of a committee to set a modernizing development professional strategy.”

Chief Justice Jean Fahed added: “The lawyers have never abandoned their roles; nor has the judiciary given up its role, either.”

Lebanese authorities are investigating justice officials, security officers and lawyers in connection with the release of detainees and the cleansing of files of individuals accused of drug trafficking. A small number of judges have appeared before the Judicial Inspection Authority. Lebanese news and media outlets have reported allegations of judges holding lavish parties and accepting foreign trips as judicial bribes.

Earlier, Justice Minister Sarhan attempted to reassure citizens, judges and judicial assistants that the investigation into corruption will be unbiased, saying: “The innocent will be proven innocent and the culprits will be punished. There will be no prejudice against anyone. Justice will prevail and we will eradicate the roots of corruption in the judiciary and other related

departments.”



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Decades on, families of Lebanon’s war missing see hopeLebanon approves plan to reform ailing electricity sector

[Sudan military ruler sacks prosecutor general](#)

Tue, 2019-04-16 18:41

KHARTOUM: The head of Sudan’s ruling transitional military council has fired the three highest-ranking public prosecutors, after protesters demanded an overhaul of the judiciary as part of steps toward civilian government. The Sudanese Professionals’ Association spearheading the revolt has issued a long list of demands for wholesale change to end repression and ease an economic crisis after the military deposed veteran autocrat Omar Al-Bashir last week.

In a statement, the military council said its chief Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan had sacked chief prosecutor Omar Ahmed Mohamed Abdelsalam and deputy public prosecutor Hesham Othman Ibrahim Saleh, as well as head of public

prosecutions Amer Ibrahim Majid.

Alwaleed Sayed Ahmed Mahmoud was appointed to carry out Abdelsalam's duties, it said. Mahmoud's background was not immediately known.

In its first news conference on Monday, the SPA – which led weeks of protests that led to Bashir's overthrow after 30 years in power – called for the military council to be dissolved in favor of an interim civilian ruling council with military representatives.

It also called for Abdelsalam's removal along with the chief of the judiciary and his deputies, and added that mass protests would not cease until the demands were met. The judiciary chief was not mentioned in the council's statement.

On Tuesday, hundreds of University of Khartoum professors carrying signs reading "civilian transitional government" and "democracy" marched to a protesters' sit-in outside the Defense Ministry that began on April 6, a Reuters witness said.

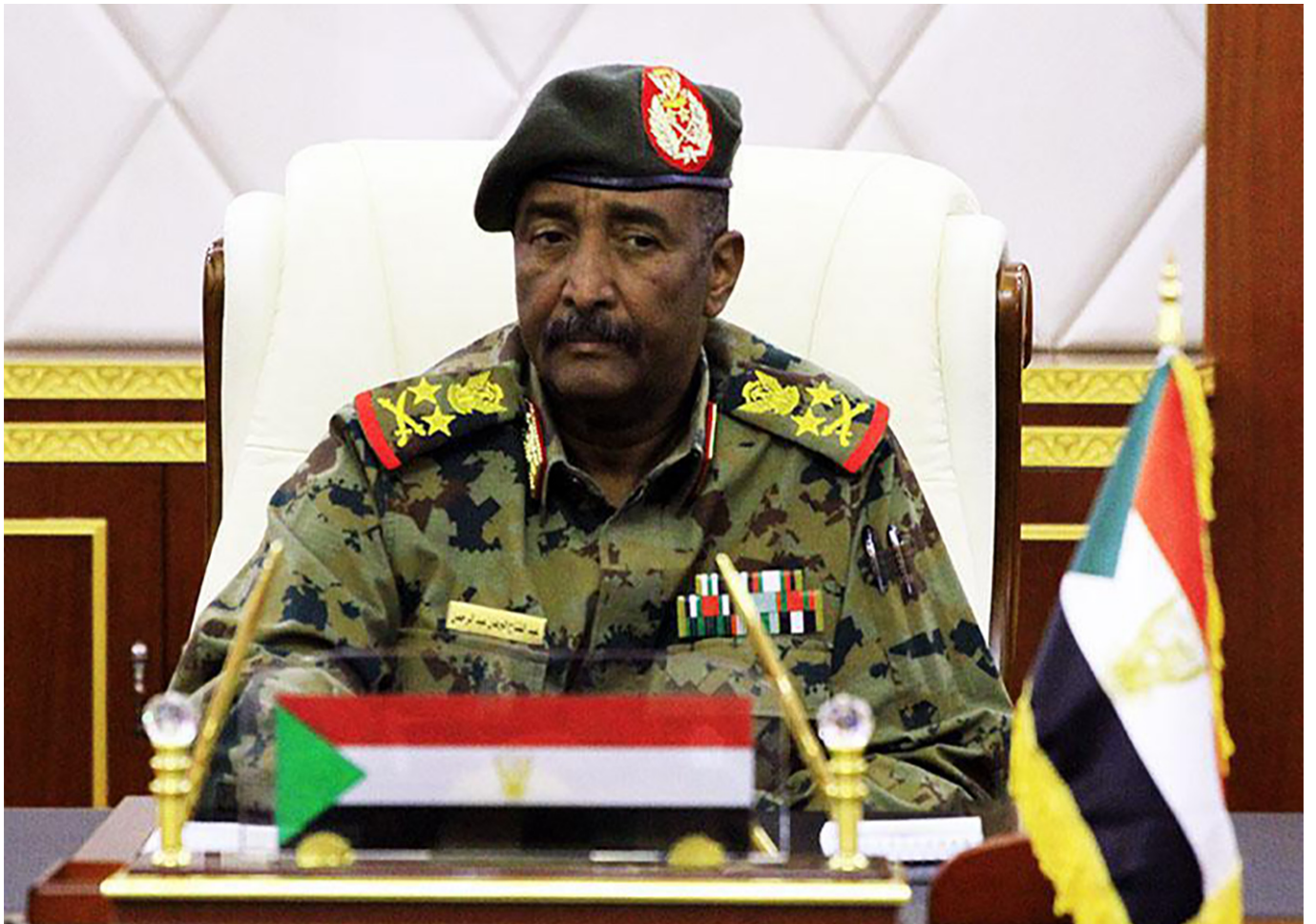
Academics are among the most respected groups in Sudanese society, adding powerful symbolism to the march.

Military council member Jalal Al-Deen Al-Sheikh met African Union Commission Chairman Moussa Faki Mahamat in Addis Ababa and gave him a letter from Burhan on the situation in Sudan and inviting Mahamat to visit, the state news agency SUNA said.

It quoted Sheikh as saying Mahamat had expressed "understanding" for the decisions the military council had taken so far.

On Monday, the AU's Peace and Security Council called for the military council to transfer power to a transitional civilian-led authority within 15 days or risk Sudan being suspended from the AU.

On Monday, Sheikh told a news conference in Addis Ababa, where the African Union is based, that the military council was already in the process of picking a prime minister for civilian rule – ahead of elections promised within two years.



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