

Turkey 'will go it alone' with Syria security zone

Fri, 2019-01-25 15:22

JEDDAH: Turkey may establish its own 32km security zone in northern Syria to keep Kurdish militias away from its border, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday.

The threat by Ankara to "go it alone" with a buffer zone follows silence from Washington on US involvement in the plan.

President Donald Trump proposed the border zone, but has not specified who would create, enforce or pay for it, or where exactly it would be.

"We expect the promise of a security zone, a buffer zone aimed at protecting our country from terrorists, to be fulfilled in few months," Erdogan said on Friday. "Otherwise we will establish it ourselves.

"Our only expectation from our allies is that they provide logistical support to Turkey's effort. Our patience has a limit. We will not wait for ever for the fulfilment of the promises given to us."

Erdogan said neither the UN nor the international coalition formed to protect the Syrian people were capable of creating a safe zone or maintaining security in the region.

"The only power that can in a true sense establish the safety and functioning of this region on our Syrian border is Turkey," he said. "We are closed to all proposed solutions besides this."

He said Turkey had the right to enter Syrian territory when it was threatened under a 1998 agreement with Damascus after Syria expelled the Kurdish militant leader Abdullah Ocalan, now jailed in Turkey.

Ankara regards the Syrian Kurdish YPG as an extension of Ocalan's Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has fought a decades-long insurgency in southeast Turkey.

The YPG has played a key role in the US-led coalition against Daesh. Trump had previously warned Ankara not to attack Kurdish fighters in Syria, and threatened retaliation against Turkey's economy.

US special Syria envoy James Jeffrey held talks in Ankara on Friday with Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar and armed forces chief Gen. Yasar Guler. Akar told him Turkey expected the US to end its support for the YPG and complete the road map which the two countries agreed upon for the Syrian town of Manbij to the west of the Euphrates.

Military operations against Daesh in Syria are wrapping up and the last pockets of the self-proclaimed "caliphate" will be flushed out within a month, a top commander said.

"The operation of our forces against Daesh in its last pocket has reached its end and Daesh fighters are now surrounded in one area," said Mazloum Kobani, head of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

With backing from the US-led coalition, the SDF are in the last phase of an operation started on Sept. 10 to defeat the jihadists in their Euphrates Valley bastions in eastern Syria.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Recep Tayyip Erdoğan](#)

[Syria](#)

[Turkey](#)

Turkey court orders release of hunger striking Kurdish MPTurkey says it has capacity to create 'safe zone' in Syria alone

[France tells Iran new sanctions loom if missile talks fail](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1548418249967544100

Fri, 2019-01-25 12:03

PARIS: France is ready to impose further sanctions against Iran if no progress is made in talks over its ballistic missile program, the French foreign minister said on Friday.

"We are ready, if the talks don't yield results, to apply sanctions firmly, and they know it," Jean-Yves Le Drian told reporters.

Diplomats previously told Reuters in private that France, Britain and other EU countries were considering new economic sanctions against Tehran.

Those could include asset freezes and travel bans on Iran's Revolutionary Guards and Iranians developing the Islamic Republic's ballistic missile program, three diplomats said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Iran](#)

[France](#)

US, UK discuss countering Iran's activities
US sanctions Iranian militias for turning refugees into 'cannon fodder'

[Iraq priest who saved Christian heritage ordained Mosul archbishop](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1548414961827208700

Fri, 2019-01-25 11:05

MOSUL: An Iraqi priest who saved a trove of religious manuscripts from the

Daesh group was ordained on Friday as the new Chaldean Catholic archbishop of Mosul.

Najeeb Michael, 63, was inaugurated in a ceremony in Mosul's St. Paul Church attended by Catholic leaders from the region and the US, as well as local officials and residents.

"Our message to the whole world, and to Mosul's people, is one of coexistence, love, and peace among all of Mosul's different communities and the end of the ideology that Daesh brought here," Michael said.

Michael entered religious life at 24 and spent years serving at Al-Saa Church (Our Lady of the Hour) in Mosul.

There, he managed the preservation of nearly 850 ancient manuscripts in Aramaic, Arabic and other languages, as well as 300-year-old letters and some 50,000 books.

In 2007, he transferred the archives to Qaraqosh, once Iraq's largest Christian city, to protect them during an Islamist insurgency which saw thousands of Christians flee Mosul.

And when Daesh – who was notorious for defacing churches and destroying any artifacts deemed contrary to its neoconservative interpretation of Islam – swept across Iraq in 2014, Michael again took action.

As the militants charged toward Qaraqosh, the Dominican friar filled his car with rare manuscripts, 16th century books and irreplaceable records and fled east to the relative safety of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region.

With two other friars from his Dominican order, Michael also moved the Oriental Manuscript Digitization Center (OMDC), which scans damaged manuscripts recovered from churches and villages across northern Iraq.

From the Kurdish capital Irbil, he and a team of Christian and Muslim experts digitally copied thousands of Chaldean, Syrian, Armenian and Nestorian manuscripts.

Iraqi forces recaptured Mosul from Daesh in the summer of 2017, and Michael returned to the city months later to attend the first post-Daesh Christmas mass.

He found his church in ruins, with rooms transformed into workshops for bombs and explosive belts and gallows had replaced the church altar.

But he insisted there was reason for hope.

"I'm optimistic. The last word will be one of peace, not the sword," Michael said last year.

On Friday, the head of the Chaldean Catholic Church called for more international support to Iraq's Christians.

"Bishops from outside Iraq are participating in this occasion to support the Christians of Mosul," said Patriarch Louis Raphael Sako.

"They are encouraging them to return to their city, rebuild it alongside the other communities and turn a new page based on trust and peaceful coexistence."



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Mosul](#)

[religion](#)

[Iraq](#)

Mosul celebrates first post-Daesh Christmas For Iraq's Christians, a bittersweet first Christmas home after Daesh

[Suspension of visas to EU diplomats hampers Syria aid work](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-01-24 23:10

BRUSSELS, BEIRUT: Syrian President Bashar Assad has suspended special multiple-entry visas for EU diplomats to Damascus.

"We are continuing as the EU ... to do whatever we can to avoid it having an impact on the important work we are doing on the ground," a European Commission spokeswoman said on Thursday.

The special permission to use multiple-entry Syrian visas for access to Damascus was rescinded at the start of January with no explanation from the Syrian regime, complicating efforts to distribute humanitarian aid to civil war victims.

Explosion

Meanwhile, a car bomb exploded in a northeastern neighborhood of the Syrian capital on Thursday causing damages but no casualties, state media said, the third such blast in a city under regime control this week.

State news agency SANA said the bomb hit the Al-Adawi neighborhood just north of the central Old City district. A witness said the blast occurred near a hospital and security forces were examining a blown-up blue car in the street.

SANA reported "a terrorist bombing in the Adawi area with an explosive device planted in a car, causing material damage but no casualties."

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the blast hit near the embassy of key government ally Russia.

The Britain-based war monitor said four people were lightly wounded. On Tuesday, a car bomb detonated in the coastal city of Latakia, near Assad's ancestral village, killing one person and wounding 14, state media reported.

On Sunday, a bomb exploded near a highway at the edge of Damascus and authorities arrested one attacker. Syria's war has killed more than 360,000 people and forced more than half its pre-war population from their homes since it started in 2011 with the bloody repression of anti-government protests that dragged in global powers.

Though Assad has regained control over most of Syria with Russian and Iranian help, attackers have struck in cities he controls with suicide blasts and car bombs.

Latakia and central Damascus have stayed in the military's hands throughout Syria's eight years of war, avoiding the airstrikes that battered other big cities.

The Syrian regime in May retook a final scrap of territory held by Daesh in southern Damascus, cementing total control over the capital for the first time in six years.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Syria](#)

Car bomb hits Damascus: Syrian state media
Turkey says it has capacity to create 'safe zone' in Syria alone

[Cairo book fair gleaming new site opens far from historic market](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1548346597930729100

Thu, 2019-01-24 16:01

CAIRO: The annual Cairo International Book Fair opened this week in a shiny new venue far away, literally and metaphorically, from the city's historic book souk – and many of the old market's merchants stayed away. Marking the prestige of the event, President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi inaugurated the fair's 50th edition at the Egypt International Exhibition Center in the affluent New Cairo area on the outskirts of the capital. Back downtown, among the teetering stacks of mostly second-hand tomes at Azbakeya, a book market that dates back more than a century, merchants complained they had been sidelined.

Dozens of them used to exhibit at the fair's former home in Nasr City, a district easily accessed, including by metro. This year only six were allowed to sell books at the fair after agreeing to stringent conditions.

"We did not cancel the Azbakeya wall, but we set a booklet of conditions to participate in the fair which all publishers committed to," said Haitham Al-Hajj, head of the General Authority for Books, which organizes the event. Authorities are keen to prevent the sale of counterfeit books, which were rampant in the Azbakeya section of the fair last year, including best-sellers such as Michael Wolff's "Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House."

Also at issue for the Azbakeya merchants was the cost – around 1,200 Egyptian pounds (\$67) – of participating, and rules on how they must display their books – stacking them up in high, disorderly piles is no longer acceptable.

"When people are selling old used books, they have a thousand titles rather than one, so, they are unable to display them in any other way, unlike a publisher. A publisher has probably a hundred titles," said Harby Hassan, a 63-year-old Azbakeya bookseller.

The Azbakeya merchants announced their own month-long book fair from Jan. 15, competing with the international event that runs from Jan. 23 to Feb. 5.

Attendance at both was sizeable.

Customers flocked to New Cairo to avoid the crowds and squeeze of downtown, while others preferred Azbakeya for its highly competitive prices.

(\$1 = 17.8400 Egyptian pounds)









Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Egypt](#)

[Cairo](#)

[Books](#)

Ministry sheds light on Saudi judiciary system at Cairo book fair
Book Review: The Tentmakers of Cairo looks at Egypt's overlooked art