

UN rebukes Europe for failing to allow rescued Arab migrants to land

Author:

Tue, 2019-01-22 20:34

GENEVA: UN aid agencies criticized European countries on Tuesday for not allowing migrants to disembark at safe ports, after more than 140 people rescued at sea were taken to a detention center in Misrata, Libya.

An estimated 170 migrants were lost in the Mediterranean in two incidents involving dinghies that left from Libya and Morocco, migrant organizations said on Saturday.

In all, 203 passengers have drowned at sea trying to reach Europe in January; 4,883 have arrived, mainly in Spain, Greece and Italy, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said.

Private rescue ships have been restricted from conducting search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean, putting more lives unnecessarily at risk, the UN refugee agency UNHCR said.

"IOM confirmed yesterday (Monday) that the Sierra Leonean flagged cargo vessel Lady Sham returned 144 rescued migrants to Libya. It remains unclear when and from where these individuals departed," IOM spokesman Joel Millman told a Geneva briefing.

"IOM staff counted 26 women and four children among those rescued and taken to a detention center in Misrata," he said.

Libya, wracked by violence, is no refuge, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said.

"In Libya's current context, where outbreaks of violence and widespread human rights violations prevail, no rescued refugees and migrants should be returned there," said UNHCR spokesman Charlie Yaxley.

"It has been well-documented at this point that the people in these detention centers face pretty appalling treatment, many report going hungry for days on end, not being able to receive dire urgent medical care that they require; others allege to have been tortured," he said.

Matteo Salvini, Italy's interior minister, who has closed off Italian ports to humanitarian rescue vessels since a populist government came to power in mid-2018, has said the ports would remain closed to deter human traffickers.

UNHCR denounced "politicking around sea rescues" by European states that have restricted aid groups from conducting missions.

"Currently, rescue at sea has been taken hostage by politics... decisive leadership that taps into fundamental values of humanity and compassion is

sorely needed," Yaxley said.



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Almost 500 migrants brought back to Libya after foiled attempts to reach Italy
Boat with migrants rescued off Libya looks for port to dock

[Turkish journalist serving life gets another 6 years in prison](#)

Tue, 2019-01-22 20:21

ANKARA: A Turkish court on Tuesday sentenced a prominent journalist serving a life sentence to almost six additional years in prison for leaking information deemed secret by the government, the state-owned Anadolu news agency said.

Nazli Ilicak was sentenced to life in prison along with five other journalists last February for aiding plotters of a 2016 failed coup attempt.

All six of the journalists, including Ilicak, have denied the charges.

On Tuesday, the court sentenced Ilicak to five years and 10 months in prison in a separate case where she was charged with “sharing information that needed to remain secret for the security of the state,” Anadolu said.

Ilicak, a journalist, columnist and former lawmaker, had also been sentenced to 14 months in prison last year for insulting the president, a crime punishable by up to four years in prison in Turkey.

Along with Ilicak, two prominent journalist brothers – Ahmet and Mehmet Altan – were sentenced to life in prison last February. The case had underscored deep concern about press freedom and the independence of the judiciary in Turkey under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The government blames followers of US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen for masterminding the coup, and has waged a crackdown on suspected members of his network since then. Gulen has denied involvement in the coup and condemned it.

Since the abortive putsch, some 77,000 people have been jailed and more than 150,000 sacked or suspended from their jobs in the military, public and private sectors.

Rights groups and Turkey’s western allies have voiced alarm over the scale of the crackdown, saying Erdogan is using the coup as a pretext to quash dissent.

The government, however, rejects the criticism and says the measures are necessary due to the gravity of the security threat it faces.



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Another Turkish journalist jailed over Gulen links
Turkish journalist missing for months in Syria freed

[Jordan upgrades diplomatic ties with Syria](#)

Tue, 2019-01-22 19:37

JEDDAH: Jordan has appointed a chargé d'affaires to Syria in an upgrade of diplomatic ties.

An unnamed Jordanian diplomat with the ranking of advisor will begin work again at the Jordanian embassy in Damascus, a foreign ministry spokesman said. "The decision is inline with the Jordanian stance since the Syrian revolution erupted in 2011," he said.

The decision is the latest move from Arab countries to improve relations with Bashar Al-Assad's government, which was ostracized by many countries in the region when the Syrian war started in 2011.

Last month, the UAE reaopened its embassy in Damascus after seven years and there has been speculation that Syria will be allowed back into the Arab league after it was kicked out in 2011. Bahrain also plans to reopen its embassy in the Syrian capital.

Sudan president, Omar Al-Bashir, became the first Arab leader to visit Damascus when he traveled there in December.

Jordan recalled its ambassador in 2011 but diplomatic ties were never fully severed, despite Amman's support for some rebel groups fighting Assad's forces.

In recent months there have been signs of an improvement in relations. In October, Jordan reopened a border crossing with Syria that had been closed for three years. The route once carried billions of dollars of trade each year.

In November, a delegation of Jordanian MPs traveled to Damascus and met Assad in a visit to discuss ways to improve relations.



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UAE reopens Syrian embassy in Damascus Bahrain resumes activity in embassy in Syria

[Sudan president Bashir to visit Qatar](#)

Mon, 2019-01-21 22:14

Sudan's president Omar Al-Bashir will arrive in Qatar on Tuesday, Qatar's state news agency reported.

It added that Al-Bashir would meet Qatar's Emir on Wednesday to discuss matters of common interest.

Sudan has been rocked by antigovernment protests calling for Al-Bashir to stand down.

More to follow ...



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Sudan protesters show resilience, employ Arab Spring tactics
Sudan police shoot live fire outside home of dead protester

Turkey demands security role in Manbij

Author:

Mon, 2019-01-21 21:56

ANKARA: After Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan told US President Donald Trump on Sunday that Turkey was ready to take over security keeping in Manbij in northern Syria without delay, eyes are turned toward the parameters and feasibility of such a target.

As Moscow tries to have primacy after the pullout of 2,000 American troops from the country, its reaction toward Turkish maneuvers to assume the security-provider role in the predominantly Arab town is still uncertain.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov recently expressed the Kremlin's expectation that the Assad government takes over the territory in eastern Syria after the US withdrawal to establish its sovereignty.

The Kurds are also gradually turning to the regime and the Kremlin for support.

When Russia recently dispatched military police to the western part of Manbij, this move was seen by experts as a counter-maneuver to remind regional partners of Russian presence against any military advancement and to fill the political and military vacuum in the area.

Ankara and Washington are also negotiating the possible creation of a 30-kilometer safe zone along the Turkish frontier with northern Syria to push back Kurdish militants from its border.

Joe Macaron, a resident fellow at the Arab Center in Washington, thinks that while Washington and Ankara remain locked in negotiating the post-US withdrawal, their core interests in northern Syria are irreconcilable.

"It is difficult to see how the US can reach a deal with Turkey to stabilize Manbij and east of Euphrates River without committing to stay in Syria in the short term, at least to make sure there is no Turkish-Kurdish confrontation," he told Arab News.

For Macaron, the stakes are high, as both the US and Turkey want a deal to prevent the Russian-backed Syrian regime from filling the vacuum but this deal seems improbable given their widely different views on the Kurdish role in Syria.

In 2016, the town of Manbij, being located 20 miles south of the Syrian-Turkish border, was captured by US-backed alliance of Arab and Kurdish militia, known as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). However, Ankara has since threatened to launch a military offensive to oblige the Kurdish militia YPG that leads the SDF to withdraw from Manbij, a predominantly Arab town, as

Turkey considers the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) a terror group.

Since early November, American and Turkish troops were conducting joint patrols around the city of Manbij for averting any clashes between Turkey and Kurdish militia.

Some Syrian Arab tribes in Manbij recently called for Turkish intervention against YPG especially following its call for compulsory enlistment and discrimination against Arab locals.

A recent Daesh-claimed suicide attack in Manbij, in which about 20 people, including US service personnel, were killed, is also seen as a development that may slow the US pullout.

On Monday, a bomb attack against a YPG and US army convoy in Hasakah province in northeastern Syria killed at least five.

"As the US and Turkey are negotiating cooperation in northeastern Syria based on the Manbij model, one of the complications is that the Manbij model itself is not successfully completed yet," Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, Ankara office director of German Marshall Fund of the US, told Arab News.

"Therefore, successful implementation of the Manbij road map would not only be an important confidence-building measure as far as Turkey is concerned, but also a prerequisite for US-Turkey cooperation in the east of the Euphrates."

According to Unluhisarcikli, it would also be a litmus test for Turkey's capabilities before it takes on bigger roles.

"The US cannot realistically withdraw its forces from Syria before the transition in the east of Euphrates is completed, in one form or another, and the current pace of the Manbij road map is not very promising for those who desire a quick withdrawal," he said.

Kerim Has, a Moscow-based Russia analyst, thinks that the Kremlin will certainly not wish for and try to impede a new, large-scale military Turkish army incursion into Syria, but may have to concede to Turkey's demands for a 'symbolic military victory' before the local elections in Turkey depending on what it gets in return.

"If Turkey takes the control of Manbij, we may assume firstly that, Ankara and Washington have reached a deal; secondly, YPG is withdrawing from the region and Turkish army is not going to fight against YPG and thirdly, the withdrawal of YPG from Manbij will result in favor of Turkey's advancement in Syria," Has told Arab News.

According to Has, Moscow can give a consent to the Turkish army for entering Manbij only if Turkey transfers control of the city to regime forces in a short period of time.

"In this case, Turkey will play a 'subcontractor role' of saving the face of the US in its relations with Russia and the regime on Syria and Kurds," he

said.

“For Russia, taking Manbij from Turkey, rather than the US, may seem a ‘smooth transition’ of the city’s control to Damascus.”

But, in any case, Has noted, Turkey’s further advancement in Syria is already becoming a risk for Moscow.

“Russians will probably prioritize reaching a deal between regime and the Kurds until the last moment before giving a ‘green light’ to the Turkish forces entering Manbij and put the Idlib issue on the table as the top agenda,” he said.



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Erdogan: Turkey will not allow Syria safe zone that will turn into ‘swamp’ Turkey-backed fighters await ‘zero hour’ to attack Syria’s Manbij