

Turkey targets military over alleged Gulen links

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1544780314133467000

Fri, 2018-12-14 09:21

ISTANBUL: Turkish authorities on Friday ordered the arrest of over 200 military personnel in new raids against suspects linked to the attempted coup in 2016, state media reported.

The Istanbul public prosecutor ordered arrest warrants for 219 soldiers on active duty including four colonels and five lieutenant colonels, state news agency Anadolu said.

Istanbul police launched an operation to capture the suspects on Friday morning.

They are believed to have ties to the group led by US-based Muslim preacher Fethullah Gulen, a former ally turned foe of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Ankara accuses Gulen of being behind the failed coup but he strongly denies any links.

In Ankara, the capital's public prosecutor issued arrest warrants on Friday for 48 people, mainly working in the arms industry, also over alleged links to Gulen.

Turkey refers to the group as the "Fethullah Terrorist Organization" but followers insist they have peaceful goals of promoting Islam and secular education.

Over 50,000 people have been arrested since the failed putsch in a purge lambasted by human rights activists and Ankara's Western allies.

Nearly 130,000 public sector workers have been sacked.

Last week, dozens of people including airforce personnel were detained for suspected links to coup-plotters in nationwide operations.

Turkish officials insist the raids are necessary to cleanse state institutions of the "virus" of infiltration by the Gulen movement.



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Turkey detains dozens nationwide over alleged Gulen links
Turkey will enter Syria's Manbij if US doesn't remove YPG fighters: Erdogan

[Turkey will enter Syria's Manbij if US doesn't remove YPG fighters: Erdogan](#)

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1544776893653319300

Fri, 2018-12-14 08:39

ISTANBUL: Turkish forces will enter the Syrian town of Manbij if the United States does not remove YPG Kurdish fighters, and it will also target Kurdish-controlled areas further east, President Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday. Erdogan said this week that Turkey would launch a new operation within days against the US-backed Syrian Kurdish YPG militia which controls swathes of Syria's northern border region, in what will be Turkey's third military campaign in Syria in two years.

Ankara and Washington have long been at odds in Syria, where the United States has backed the YPG in the fight against the Daesh group. Turkey says the YPG is a terrorist organization and an extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Turkey has complained over the slow implementation of a deal with Washington to pull YPG Kurdish fighters out of Manbij, which lies in mainly Arab territory west of the Euphrates, back to the eastern bank of the river.

"Manbij is a place where Arabs live, but they have surrendered the area to the terror organization," Erdogan told members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in a speech in Istanbul. "Now we are saying that you should cleanse, remove them, or else we will enter Manbij. I am speaking very clearly."

Erdogan said Turkey was also determined to bring "peace and security" to areas east of the Euphrates, where the YPG controls an area stretching more than 400 km (250 miles) along the border toward Iraq.

He compared the promised military campaign to an incursion into northern Syria in 2016 and one earlier this year by Turkish forces and their Syrian rebel allies, who still hold territory there seized from YPG and Islamic State fighters.

A spokesman for the Syrian rebels said on Thursday that up to 15,000 fighters are prepared to support Turkey's latest operation.

The United States, which has set up observation posts on the Syrian side of the border, has warned Turkey against a new incursion and said the newly constructed positions would help deter any security threat against Turkey coming from Syria.

Erdogan, however, said Turkey had waited long enough to act against the YPG militia, which it says is indistinguishable from PKK militants who have waged an insurgency against the state in southeastern Turkey for 34 years.

"We are not only providing security for our country when taking steps in Syria but we are also protecting the honor of people," he said.

Kurdish commander Mazloum Kobanin said on Thursday the Syrian Democratic Forces, which are spearheaded by the YPG, will respond strongly to any attack.



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Syrian Arab tribes call for Turkish intervention against Kurdish YPG forces
Pentagon cautions Turkey over new operation against Syria Kurds

[Lebanese wary as Israel destroys Hezbollah border tunnels](#)

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By SARAH EL DEEB | AP

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1544774984913253400

Fri, 2018-12-14 (All day)

MAYS AL-JABAL, Lebanon: As Israeli excavators dug into the rocky hills along the frontier with a Lebanese village, a crowd of young Lebanese men gathered to watch.

The mood was light as the crowd observed what Israel says is a military operation – dubbed “Northern Shield” – aimed at destroying attack tunnels

built by the Lebanese Hezbollah militia. The young men posed for selfies, with the Israeli crew in the background, as they burned fires and brewed tea to keep warm.

But Lebanese soldiers were visibly on high alert, deploying to new camouflaged posts behind sandbags and inside abandoned homes. About two dozen UN peacekeepers stood in a long line, just ahead of the blue line demarcating the frontier between the two countries technically still at war.

The scene highlights the palpable anxiety that any misstep could lead to a conflagration between Israel and Lebanon that no one seems to want.

Underscoring such jitters, shadowy figures appearing across the misty hills of the border village of Mays Al-Jabal last weekend sparked panic, and Israeli soldiers fired in the air to warn a Lebanese military intelligence patrol, according to Lebanese reports. Israel said it fired at Hezbollah members who came to the site to dismantle sensors installed to detect tunnels.

Israel's tunnel search comes at a time when the civil war in neighboring Syria seems to be winding down. Hezbollah had sent hundreds of troops to Syria in 2013 to fight alongside the forces of Syrian President Bashar Assad. With Assad's forces emerging victorious, attention now seems to be returning to the tense Israel-Lebanon border.

Israel said its troops have discovered at least three tunnels along the frontier – a tactic used by Hezbollah in previous wars – and called on the international community to impose new sanctions on Hezbollah.

The militant group, which fought a bruising but inconclusive war with Israel in 2006, has not commented on the Israeli operation or statements.

Lebanese Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri said Thursday that neither Israel nor Lebanon wanted to go to war, but noted that Israel violates Lebanese airspace and international waters on a regular basis.

He said the Lebanese army “will deal with this issue” after receiving a full report from the UN peacekeeping force, but did not elaborate.

The peacekeeping force, known as UNIFIL, has confirmed the presence of tunnels and said it is working with both sides to address the situation in line with UN Security Council resolutions.

In southern Lebanon on Thursday, Lebanese army soldiers observed the frontier in Mays Al-Jabal, taking photos of their Israeli counterparts operating only a few meters (yards) away. At times, the Lebanese soldiers asked the young men to move back, away from the frontier.

Lebanese homes and farms are nestled at the bottom of the hill where the operations run from daybreak until sundown. No civilian Israeli homes visible from that tense border.

Ali Jaber, a 21-year-old resident of Mays Al-Jabal, said he believes that Hezbollah is more popular after the Syria war, and that this is the reason Israel is now turning to it. “But whoever puts up a shield and is hiding and making fortifications must be scared,” he said.

Hussein Melhem, a 19-year old electrician from the village, came to watch. His cheeks ruddy on a cold but clear day, he covered his head with a tight hood. He alleged that Israel is trying to change the border.

“If they could occupy all of this, they would,” he said, in an apparent reference to Israel's 18-year military occupation of southern Lebanon which ended in 2000. “But the resistance will prevent them.”

As a seven-year-old in 2006, Melhem and his family left Mays Al-Jabal when

Israel invaded. His village was badly damaged but has since largely recovered and he said he found their home intact.

It is hard to forget about war in the villages and towns along the frontier. Pictures of Hezbollah fighters who died in the 2006 war, as well as the one raging in neighboring Syria, known locally as the "Sacred Defense," are everywhere. Posts on town squares boast of defeating Israel or urge the locals to "know their enemy."

During the Syrian civil war, Israel has frequently carried out airstrikes in Syria against Iranian-allied forces, particularly Hezbollah. Israel says it aims to prevent sophisticated weaponry from reaching Hezbollah, which it considers its most pressing security concern.

In Lebanon, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's warnings have raised suspicions that he is also using the tunnel operation as a diplomatic pressure card.

Netanyahu has called for more sanctions against Hezbollah. In a visit to the frontier earlier this week, he warned that if Hezbollah tries to disrupt the search for tunnels, "it will be hit in a way it cannot even imagine."

In Israel, some newspaper commentators have been critical of the UN peacekeeping force, whose mandate Israel and the United States have unsuccessfully attempted to expand to include "intervention and deterrence." About 20 kilometers (12 miles) to the north from Mays Al-Jabal, Israeli soldiers are also operating along another frontier to uncover what they suspect is a tunnel location.

There, a high concrete wall separates them from the Lebanese village of Kfar Kela. Red-roofed Israeli homes on a hill overlook the diggers, who had cleared peach trees to make room for their work. Lebanese residences, some of them luxury summer homes, sat atop hills hundreds of meters from the wall. UN peacekeepers and Lebanese army separately patrol the area. Israel began building the wall in 2012, and this section was completed weeks ago. While graffiti covers the older slabs of concrete, water has collected under the newer segment of the wall.

A UN peacekeeping force was working to clear the water after Lebanese residents complained it comes from irrigation drainage from the other side.



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Lebanon's Aoun says Israeli anti-tunnel action no risk to peace Israel says located second 'Hezbollah' tunnel from Lebanon

[UN investigation delves into Daesh's crimes against Yazidis](#)

Author:

Thu, 2018-12-13 22:43

LONDON: A UN investigation into atrocities committed against Yazidis and others in Iraq will do more than simply gather information that will molder in an archive, the probe's leader said on Wednesday, it will help bring perpetrators to justice.

The team, led by British lawyer Karim Asad Ahmad Khan began its work in August, a year after it was approved the UN Security Council.

Speaking on the sidelines of a London event celebrating Yazidi activist Nadia Murad – who won the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize – Khan said the investigation will get into full gear in 2019.

“We will be pushing forward with greater capacity next year once we have a budget from the United Nations,” he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The investigation aims to collect and preserve evidence of acts by Daesh in Iraq that may be war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide. In September 2017 – after a year of talks with Iraq – the UN council adopted a resolution asking UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to create the team “to support domestic efforts” to hold the militants accountable.

The evidence gathered is primarily for use by Iraqi authorities.

Whether that evidence will then be shared with international courts, will “be determined in agreement with the Government of Iraq on a case-by-case basis,” according to the resolution.

“This mandate was not created to create simply an archive that would gather dust,” said Khan.

“Our bid is ... to ensure that the best possible evidence is presented, is preserved, is collected. The necessary investigations are committed so that those who committed these horrendous acts are subjected to the vigour of the law.”

UN experts warned in June 2016 that Daesh was committing genocide against the

Yazidis in Syria and Iraq, destroying the minority religious community through killings, sexual slavery and other crimes.

Supporters of the Yazidi cause have expressed irritation at delays the probe has faced.

“Four years have passed since the crimes of genocide committed against Yazidis but we have seen no justice as yet for the victims and survivors,” Karwan Tahir, the Kurdish regional government’s representative in Britain told the London event.

About 7,000 women and girls were captured in northwest Iraq in August 2014 and held by Daesh in Mosul where they were tortured and raped.

Murad, a young Yazidi woman who was enslaved and raped by Islamic State fighters in Mosul in 2014, and international human rights lawyer Amal Clooney have long pushed Iraq to allow UN investigators to help.



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Iraqi Yazidis celebrate restoration of temple destroyed by Daesh Yazidis caught in “political football” between Baghdad, Iraqi Kurds

Israel to approve thousands of unauthorized West Bank settler homes

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1544727340218475100

Thu, 2018-12-13 18:40

JERUSALEM: Israel is to authorize thousands of the settler homes built illegally in the occupied West Bank, some of them decades ago, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Thursday.

The move is likely to please pro-settler members of Netanyahu's right-wing coalition while angering Palestinians, who want the West Bank as part of a future state.

"Arranging the rights for the homes allows thousands of residents to be provided with infrastructure of public buildings, educational and religious buildings," Netanyahu's office said in a statement.

It did not give a specific number of homes but Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked tweeted that more than 2,000 homes would be getting permits.

Some 500,000 Israelis live in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, areas that are also home to more than 2.6 million Palestinians.

Settlements are one of the most heated issues in efforts to restart Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, frozen since 2014.

In August, an Israeli court broke new ground, and infuriated Palestinians, by giving legal recognition to the Jewish outpost of Mitzpe Kramim, built without government authorization on privately owned Palestinian land in the West Bank.

Palestinians want the West Bank for a future state, along with East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

Most countries consider all settlements that Israel has built in territory it captured in the 1967 Middle East war to be illegal. Israel disputes this and says their future should be determined in peace talks with the Palestinians.

Netanyahu also said he would try to advance plans for 82 new housing units in the Jewish settlement of Ofra and two West Bank industrial zones.

Netanyahu last month faced a challenge from the far-right after his defense minister resigned and lashed out at the government's acceptance of a cease-fire with the Palestinian militant group Hamas amid a surge in Gaza violence. Other far-right ministers had threatened to quit, but later backed down.



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