

Turkey lambasts ‘unacceptable’ UK court extradition rejection

Thu, 2018-11-29 21:01

ANKARA: Turkey on Thursday lambasted an “unacceptable” decision by a British court to reject a request from Ankara to extradite a prominent businessman accused of providing financial support for the 2016 failed coup.

British judge John Zani on Wednesday said the case against Akin Ipek, owner of the Koza-Ipek media conglomerate, was “politically motivated,” according to his lawyers. Ipek faces charges in Turkey of funding “terrorist” enterprises linked to the US-based Turkish preacher Fethullah Gulen.

Gulen is accused of ordering the July 2016 attempted overthrow of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan but he strongly denies any involvement. Ankara calls Gulen’s “Hizmet” (Service) movement a terrorist group but followers insist they are part of a peaceful organization promoting moderate Islam and education.

Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Hami Aksoy said Turkey had “strongly emphasized to the British authorities” that the ruling was “unacceptable and deeply disappointing.”

SPEEDREAD

Akin Ipek, owner of the Koza-Ipek media conglomerate, faces charges in Turkey of funding “terrorist” enterprises linked to the US-based preacher Fethullah Gulen.

“The reasoning of the court to deny our extradition request is entirely unsubstantiated,” Aksoy said in a statement, adding that Ankara expected the “prompt return” of suspects to then be tried before Turkish courts.

Judge Zani was quoted as saying that Ipek would face “a real risk of ill-treatment in the event of return,” adding that recent events in the country “give this court little comfort that the rule of law has remained undisturbed.”

Hours after the ruling on Wednesday, Turkish Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gul also hit out at the “unacceptable” ruling in a series of tweets.

Gul said Turkey expected the UK to extradite Ipek according to international laws and agreements, thereby showing “friendship” to its NATO ally Turkey.

The Turkish officials’ criticism marks a rare moment of public discord between Ankara and London, whose relations have flourished in recent years even as Turkey’s tensions with other EU countries strained further.

Tens of thousands of people have been arrested by Turkey in the crackdown that followed the attempted putsch and the Turkish authorities have also

brought back suspects in secret operations from foreign countries including Ukraine and Kosovo.

On May 15 this year, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had urged British Prime Minister Theresa May to extradite Turkish exiles from the Gulenist or Kurdish movements, saying that if she did not act against terrorists, it would come back to bite her.



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Turkey indicts Gulen for 2016 assassination of Russian envoy
Soros foundation to close in Turkey after attack by Erdogan

[Opposition blames Russia and Iran for failure of Astana talks](#)

Thu, 2018-11-29 20:50

JEDDAH, ANKARA: The UN Special Envoy for Syria signed off from his posting on Thursday ruing “a missed opportunity” to help end the country’s conflict at talks in Kazakhstan’s capital Astana.

Staffan de Mistura, who announced his resignation last month, capped his term as peace envoy with two days of talks in the Kazakh capital sponsored by power-brokers Russia and Iran – allies of the Syrian regime of Bashar Assad – and opposition-backer Turkey.

A statement from his office noted that he regretted “no tangible progress in overcoming the 10-month stalemate on the composition of the constitutional committee” was made at the talks.

Yahya Al-Aridi, spokesman for the Syrian opposition, blamed Russia and Iran for the talks’ failure. Russia had an upper hand and it could drag the regime in any direction, he told Arab News.

He said that Tehran did not want the Assad regime to get into any political process “because it lives off tension.”

He added: “The UN agreed in Sochi to have a supervisory role in the committee, but Russia and its allies are withdrawing from that commitment now. The UN said that if the committee goes the Russian way, it wouldn’t have the UN blessings. We believe the UN would stick to that stand.”

Al-Aridi said De Mistura was too lenient with the Syrian regime, Russia and Iran. “De Mistura should’ve called a spade a spade from the very beginning as his predecessors did. He thought that with certain compromises and nice talk, he could get the brutal regime to agree to his proposals. I hope, in his briefings next month, De Mistura would dot the i’s and cross the t’s and tell the world who is blocking international efforts for peace.”

He said: “If the world continues tolerating tyrants like Assad, the world is going to have more of his kind.”

The leaders of Turkey, Russia, France and Germany held talks on Syria on Nov. 27 in Istanbul and agreed that the constitutional committee should be established by the end of 2018.

“So it still needs time. This summit was not expected to have the last word on the establishment of this much-awaited committee,” Oytun Orhan, a Syria expert at Ankara-based think-tank ORSAM, told Arab News.

Under the UN plan, the regime would choose 50 of the committee members, while Turkey would propose 50 members from the Syrian opposition, and the UN is expected to nominate the remaining 50 members, composed of technical experts and civil society representatives.

According to Orhan, the key country to overcome the obstacles toward setting up the 150-member constitutional committee is Russia, as Moscow is still negotiating with the Syrian Assad regime, which is rejecting the UN list.

“Turkey puts its emphasis on the eradication of extremist movements in Syria. The ball is now on Russia’s side to increase its pressure on the Assad regime for convincing it on the committee’s composition,” he said.

The constitutional committee is considered a key element in reaching a

political settlement in the country. But while the opposition asks for a new constitution to be drafted, the Assad regime prefers discussing amendments to the current one.

Experts, however, are optimistic about the recent steps that have been taken for building trust.

“The recent swap of prisoners between the Syrian government and rebels is an important step toward supporting the political settlement process,” Orhan said.

Ankara has re-emphasized the importance it attaches to the constitutional committee in Syria. In a meeting on Nov. 27, Turkey’s National Security Council called on parties to establish a constitutional committee under UN observation as soon as possible to reach a permanent solution.

Orhan said that Iran was putting its efforts into breaking the consensus over the Sochi deal that was reached between Russia and Turkey in September for a peaceful resolution on the issue of Syria’s Idlib province.

“But losing Turkey as a partner in Syria would be very costly for Russia,” he said.

According to Orhan, if Russia and the Assad government ever conduct a joint operation to rebel-held Idlib based on the alleged chemical attack by Idlib-based insurgents to attack the government-held city of Aleppo last Saturday, Ankara would react strongly and consider it as a declaration of war.

“So far, Ankara has opted for a policy of appeasing the opposition forces that it supports in Syria. But, in such a case, it would support them for resisting against such an offensive,” he said.

Fabrice Balanche, an associate professor and research director at the University of Lyon 2, thinks that sooner or later the constitutional committee will be formed.

“Damascus shows resistance, but finally it will acquiesce to the decision of Moscow. In fact, the majority of the members in the committee will be of a pro-regime tendency,” he told Arab News.

However, although the slow progress in finalizing the constitutional committee left a mark over the success of the Astana summit, Balanche thinks that nothing concrete will come out of this committee apart from a law on local decentralization, which was planned a long time ago to give more power to the municipalities.

“In any case, there will be no new constitution for Syria until 2021, which is the date of the re-election of Bashar Assad,” he said.

The next phase of Syria negotiations in Astana are scheduled for early February, according to the joint communiqué.



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Two Syrians detained in Lebanon on suspicion of killing Briton
Lebanon army 'detains several hundred Syrians' in raids on camps

[Israeli court extends arrest of top Palestinian official](#)

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Associated Press

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Thu, 2018-11-29 (All day)

JERUSALEM: The lawyer of a top Palestinian official in Jerusalem arrested for illegally collaborating with Palestinian security services says an Israeli court has extended his detention.

Lawyer Rami Othman says the court will hold the Palestinians' Jerusalem governor, Adnan Ghaith, in custody until Sunday.

Ghaith and more than 30 Palestinian activists were arrested this week for allegedly supporting Palestinian security forces in violation of interim peace accords between Israel and the Palestinians.

An Israeli court ordered the release of 24 activists on bail and ordered

another 10 to remain in detention.

The arrests, unusual in scale and made under a rarely enforced offense, appear to have been prompted by the detention of a Palestinian Jerusalemite who allegedly sold property in the city to Jews, a punishable crime under Palestinian law.



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[Ultra-Orthodox jews protest Israeli military draft](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2018-11-29 (All day)

JERUSALEM: Hundreds of ultra-Orthodox Jews have blocked main roads in Jerusalem to protest the arrest of a community member for refusing to register for the country's military service.

Demonstrators brought rush hour traffic to a standstill on Wednesday evening, singing and chanting: "We will die and not be drafted."

Israel has compulsory military service for most Jewish men. But politically powerful ultra-Orthodox parties have secured exemptions for their followers, and attempts to legislate a new draft law have repeatedly faltered.

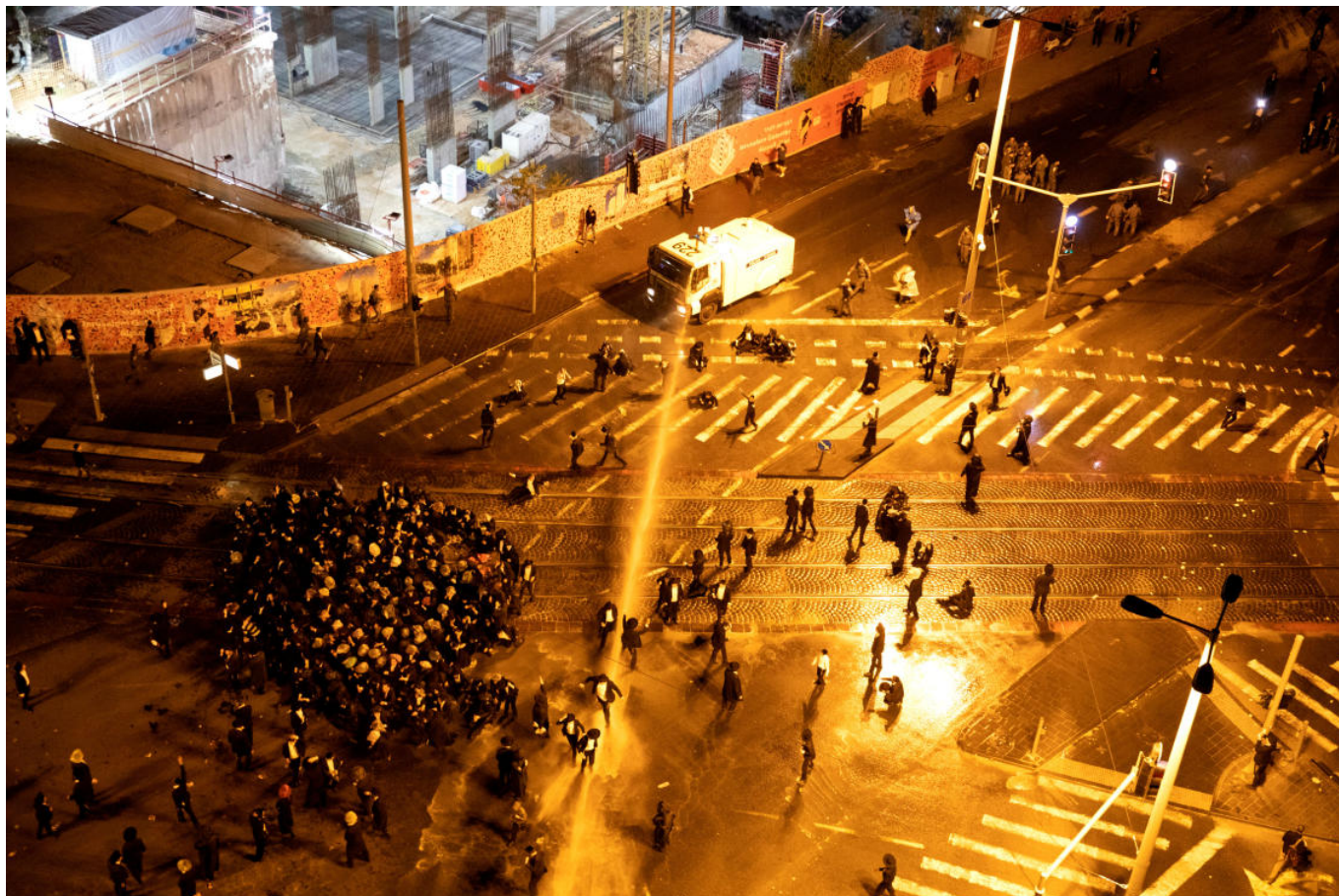
The exemptions have bred resentment among members of Israel's secular majority.

Police and protesters wrangled in the streets and police said 24 protesters were arrested.

A female pedestrian screamed at the crowds of protesters, calling their disturbance "intolerable."







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Israeli police arrest ultra-Orthodox Jews in draft protest
Israeli PM delays conversion bill that angered liberal Jews

[Syrian Arab tribes call for Turkish intervention against Kurdish YPG forces](#)

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Wed, 2018-11-28 19:53

ANKARA: Some Arab tribes in Manbij have called for Turkish military intervention in the northern Syrian town against the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), Syrian sources told Arab News.

The YPG's call for compulsory enlistment was the last straw for prominent Arab tribes such as the Baghara and Ghanaim, the sources said.

Other grievances include discrimination against local Arabs and their displacement from some Arab-majority villages, the sources added.

Located 20 miles south of the Syrian-Turkish border, the population of Kurdish-run Manbij is predominantly Arab. The town was captured by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) from Daesh.

The Bushban tribe expressed in a statement its determination to liberate Manbij from Kurdish rule.

The Bani Said, Naim, Fennel, Popna, Aldamalkh, Majadameh and Al-Bustalan tribes followed suit with their own statements, as did a Turkmen tribe.

Mohammed Najouma, deputy head of the Stabilization Committee in Aleppo governorate, which runs areas captured from Daesh and the SDF, said the region will not be stable until the YPG withdraws from Manbij.

"They're carrying out raids, illegally arresting tribe members, assassinating anyone who dares oppose their policies, and forcing people to join demonstrations in favor of the YPG," he told Arab News.

In line with a road map agreed by Turkey and the US, troops from both countries began conducting joint patrols in Manbij from Nov. 1.

As part of the deal, the YPG, seen by Ankara as a terrorist group, is expected to withdraw from the town, and a new governing council is expected to be formed by local Arabs.

In June, the Popna tribe, the largest in Manbij, welcomed the road map and expressed support for Turkish patrols in the area.

But Washington's insistence on maintaining its partnership with the YPG despite local opposition may shake regional balances and undermine the already fragile implementation of the roadmap, experts told Arab News.

"Given the demographic characteristics of the region and the refusal of local tribes to have the YPG in their areas, any partnership with it means ignoring local and regional interests, and will lead to the escalation of tensions and the return of extremism under different forms," Najouma said.

Ammar Hamou, a Jordan-based Syrian journalist, said Arab tribes believe that the YPG is a temporary authority, so siding with it out of fear will not benefit them in the long run and may provoke tensions between them and other Arab tribes.

The US partnership with the YPG will end as soon as the threat from Daesh is completely eliminated, he added.

"We've witnessed civil disobedience and closure of shops in protest against the YPG in Manbij," Hamou told Arab News.

"Local opposition voices are becoming stronger, and this could be an excuse for Ankara to enter Manbij as it did before in Afrin."

Last week, Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu urged the US to complete implementation of the road map for Manbij by the end of this year.

FASTFACT

The population of Kurdish-run Manbij is predominantly Arab. The town was captured by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) from Daesh.



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Turkey says US support for Syrian Kurdish YPG a "big mistake" Turkey kills YPG militant who fired across Syrian border