

Turkey uneasy about US plan for observation posts on Syria border

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ISTANBUL: Turkey is uneasy about US plans to set up "observation posts" in Syria along parts of its border with Turkey, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said on Saturday.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said on Wednesday the United States was setting up the posts to help keep the focus on clearing the final Daesh militant strongholds in Syria.

The United States has long complained that tension between Turkey and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) – which includes the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia – has at times slowed progress on the fight against Islamic State. Akar said he told US Chief of Staff Joseph Dunford and other US officials during a recent visit to Canada that setting up the posts would have a very negative impact on perceptions of the United States in Turkey.

"During our talks with both political and civilian interlocutors we repeatedly expressed our unease in various ways," he said. "I think actions like this will make the complicated situation in the region even more complicated."

Turkey is angry at US support for the YPG, which it views as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) waging a decades-long insurgency on Turkish soil. The PKK is designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and the European Union.

"Nobody should doubt that the Turkish Armed forces and the Republic of Turkey will take the necessary steps against all kinds of risks and threats from across its borders," he said.

"We expect our US allies to immediately cut their ties with the terrorist YPG, who are not in the slightest bit different from the PKK," Akar added. Daesh is still present in eastern Syria in a pocket east of the Euphrates River near the border with Iraq.

President Donald Trump's administration hopes that the US-backed fight against Daesh in its last foothold in northeastern Syria will end within months. But a top US diplomat recently said American forces will remain to ensure the "enduring defeat" of the militant group.



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Erdogan's AKP gets local election boost from nationalists

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Author:

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Sat, 2018-11-24 10:54

ISTANBUL: Turkey's nationalist MHP will support President Tayyip Erdogan's AK Party candidates in local elections in three key cities next year, the MHP leader said on Saturday, in a boost to the AKP's election prospects.

The AK Party and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) formed an alliance before presidential elections last June, but were subsequently at loggerheads over a disagreement about the MHP's call for an amnesty for some jailed criminals.

A month ago MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli said his party would not seek an alliance with the AK Party in the March 2019 municipal elections which are being held across Turkey.

At the time his comments triggered a weakening of the lira over concerns that

it would lead to political instability.

However, Bahçeli announced a change of position on Saturday saying the MHP would not put forward city mayoral candidates for İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir, Turkey's three biggest cities.

"Whoever the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) candidates are in these three big cities our support will be total," Bahçeli told officials from his party in a speech in Antalya.

The MHP's candidates in other municipalities across Turkey would continue to stand, he said, adding there was no "secret agreement" behind his party's decision.

It was not clear what prompted the change in Bahçeli's position.

Bahçeli and his MHP party had been staunch critics of Erdogan's AK Party before they reached agreement on their election alliance this year. Their alliance had been expected to continue despite last month's decision not to cooperate in the local elections.

The local elections themselves will have little impact on the balance of power in Turkey generally.

Under the presidential system ushered in by the June elections, Erdogan already wields extensive power. However his AK Party requires the support of MHP lawmakers to achieve a majority and push through legislation in parliament.



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Turkey indicts Gulen for 2016 assassination of Russian envoyEU overstepped brief by calling for Kurdish leader's release, says Turkey

[Suspected Daesh gunmen kill nine in southern Libya](#)

Author:

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Sat, 2018-11-24 07:47

BENGAZI, Libya: Gunmen on Friday raided a town deep in Libya's southern desert, killing nine people and kidnapping several others, a resident said, with officials blaming the attack on the militant group Daesh.

A military source said the attackers had occupied a police station in the oasis town of Tazerbo, north of Kufra, until residents expelled them. The source also said the attackers were believed to belong to Daesh.

The town – which was a resting point for tourists going on Sahara camping tours before Libya plunged into chaos in 2011 – listed six residents on its website as having been killed.

A resident said nine people had been killed and 10 wounded, adding that the attackers had kidnapped several policemen and civilians.

Daesh has staged several attacks on southern towns since withdrawing into the desert after losing its main stronghold, the coastal city of Sirte, late in 2016.



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[Iran rejects US chemical weapons accusations](#)

Author:

Fri, 2018-11-23 23:36

TEHRAN: Iran "strongly rejected" on Friday US accusations that it has a chemical weapons program and accused Washington of breaching its own commitments to the international watchdog.

The US allegations are the latest salvo against Iran from the administration of President Donald Trump, who earlier this year pulled out of a landmark 2015 nuclear deal between major powers and Tehran and reimposed crippling unilateral sanctions.

“The United States... has made, as is its habit, baseless accusations against the Islamic republic which we strongly reject,” the Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

“Such incorrect and false accusations are due solely to enmity toward the Iranian nation and are intended to deflect international attention from its own broken commitments and continued support for the Zionist regime’s chemical arsenal and for terrorist groups.”

The US accused Iran on Thursday of failing to declare a chemical weapons program to the global watchdog in breach of international agreements.

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The US accused Iran of failing to declare a chemical weapons program to the global watchdog in breach of international agreements.

US envoy Kenneth Ward told the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague that Tehran was also seeking deadly nerve agents for offensive purposes.

Iran promised its delegation would provide the OPCW with a detailed reply and in turn accused the US of being the “only member state that has a chemical weapons arsenal and has, until now, not acted on its obligations to destroy it.”

Iran is one of the few countries that has been attacked with chemical weapons since the end of World War I in 1918.

Chemical weapons used by Saddam Hussein’s Iraq during its 1980-88 war with Iran killed tens of thousands of Iranian soldiers and civilians.



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Iran failed to declare chemical weapons: US Major powers set to clash as chemical arms watchdog meets

[Migrants situation worse than 2017, warns UN](#)

Author:

Fri, 2018-11-23 23:19

GENEVA: At least 631 African migrants have died trying to reach Spain so far this year, nearly three times more than in all of 2017, and the situation has become “alarming,” the UN migration agency said on Friday.

More than 120 migrants, from North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, have arrived in Spain each day during November, following a record month in October with over 350 per day, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said.

“This is usually a time of slowing down on these routes; that is not happening in Spain,” IOM spokesman Joel Millman told a news briefing.

Migrants are using smaller and less seaworthy boats, he said.

About two dozen migrants drowned off the coast of Cadiz in November, he said. The sole survivor of another shipwreck, a teenage boy from Guinea now in hospital with severe hypothermia, told rescuers that he was traveling with nine others including his brother in an inflatable row boat from Tangiers, Morocco.

The arrival of hundreds of thousands of migrants into Europe has fueled the rise of far-right parties across the continent in recent years, although numbers have fallen over the past three years. Many thousands of people, mostly from Africa and the Middle East, have drowned at sea.

So far this year 104,506 migrants have arrived by sea in Europe and 2,075 have perished, according to the IOM's latest figures. Both figures are about two-thirds of last year's totals and around a quarter of the totals from 2016.

But while traffic on the main sea route from Libya to Italy has fallen sharply over the past year, in part due to agreements with Libyan armed groups to fight smuggling, travel has increased across the western Mediterranean to Spain.

The route from Turkey to Greece, used by more than a million asylum seekers in 2015, was largely shut by an EU agreement with Turkey the following year.

In addition to migrants arriving by sea in mainland Spain, Millman said 36 migrants had died trying to reach the Canary Islands this year, compared to just one last year, Millman said.

"So that is becoming also a dangerous channel for migrants seeking to access Europe through the Canary Islands," he said of the islands, which are a part of Spain located in the Atlantic Ocean off the Moroccan coast.



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Spain saves over 350 migrants crossing Mediterranean Spanish PM visits Morocco to boost migration cooperation