

Turkey indicts Gulen for 2016 assassination of Russian envoy

Fri, 2018-11-23 23:08

ANKARA: Turkey charged 28 people on Friday in relation to the 2016 assassination of the Russian ambassador to Ankara, naming the US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen as the prime suspect in the case, the state-owned Anadolu news agency said.

Andrei Karlov was shot dead by an off-duty policeman while speaking at an Ankara exhibit opening in December 2016. The gunman shouted "Don't forget Aleppo!" as he opened fire, apparently referring to Russia's involvement in Syria. He was shot dead by police at the scene.

President Tayyip Erdogan has said Gulen's movement was behind the assassination, a charge the cleric has denied. Erdogan also blames the preacher's network for an attempted military coup in July 2016.

FASTFACT

Prosecutors say the Gulen's organization was attempting to derail relations between Turkey and Russia with the killing. At the time of the December 2016 killing of Karlov, ties between the two countries had already been strained, after Turkey downed a Russian warplane.

Gulen, who has lived in self-imposed exile in the US since 1999, has condemned the coup and denied any involvement with it.

Authorities charged Gulen and 27 others of attempting to "overthrow the constitutional order," "being a member of a terrorist organization" and of premeditated murder, Anadolu said.

Prosecutors say the Gulen's organization was attempting to derail relations between Turkey and Russia with the killing. At the time of the December 2016 killing of Karlov, ties between the two countries had already been strained, after Turkey downed a Russian warplane over Syria a year earlier.

Since Karlov's assassination, ties between Ankara and Moscow have made steady improvement.



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New evidence links exiled Turkish cleric to Russian envoy's assassination in Ankara: Cop guns down Russian ambassador

[EU overstepped brief by calling for Kurdish leader's release, says Turkey](#)

Author:

Fri, 2018-11-23 23:08

ANKARA: Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Friday accused the EU's top diplomat of overstepping her brief by calling for the release of jailed Kurdish leader Selahattin Demirtas.

"She exceeded her limits a little," Cavusoglu told CNN-Turk television a day after Federica Mogherini expressed hope that Demirtas, who has been held in Turkey for two years on terror charges, would be freed soon.

Demirtas, 45, one of two former co-leaders of the leftist Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), was arrested in November 2016 over alleged links to Kurdish militants.

The Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on Tuesday urged Ankara to release Demirtas – who hailed the move as “legal acknowledgment of my status as a political hostage.”

The court accepted Demirtas had been arrested on “reasonable suspicion” of having committed a crime, but said the reasons given for keeping him behind bars were not “sufficient.”

Mogherini’s view

At a press conference with Cavusoglu in Ankara, Mogherini said on Thursday: “We hope he will be released shortly.”

Demirtas denies all the charges and claims the case against him is politically motivated.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan rejected the European court’s finding.

“The decisions delivered by the ECHR do not bind us,” he said.

HIGHLIGHTS

The ECHR on Tuesday urged Ankara to release Demirtas – who hailed the move as legal acknowledgment of my status as a political hostage.

Erdogan rejected the court’s finding, saying the decisions do not bind the government.

Demirtas on Friday accused the government of putting “political pressure” on the Turkish appeals court to uphold his “completely unlawful” sentence, in a statement released by his party.

“We are witnessing a clear political intervention,” he said.

“The aim here is to sentence me with another contrived political decision to keep me imprisoned, before the ECHR implements its decision.”

But he remained defiant, saying: “We will never bow down, and we will stand tall with determination, our spirits high.”

He added: “We will, soon or later, emerge victorious in our struggle for law, justice, freedom and democracy.”



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EU uneasy over continued detention of activists in Turkey
EU says has strong concerns over detained journalists in Turkey

[Black Friday reveals Lebanese concern about political crisis](#)

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Fri, 2018-11-23 22:15

BEIRUT: "Every day is Black Friday in Lebanon." The term Black Friday in the Lebanese vocabulary has a different meaning when it comes to purchasing power.

Ghada Buqshan, a Lebanese woman, told Arab News that she was among the first to go shopping on Black Friday in order to buy clothes at reduced prices for her children.

She said: "I was shocked to see that the shops have manipulated the concept of Black Friday and reduced the prices of selected products only, while keeping the rest of their stock at normal prices."

"When I go shopping on this particular day, it is because my purchasing power has declined due to a decline in my husband's work, so I try to save money, but the joy of shopping is always there."

The markets in Beirut are not showing unusual trading signals even though the Beirut Traders Association has made Black Friday last for three days in an attempt to attract the largest number of shoppers.

Ahmed, the owner of one of the best women's clothing stores in Beirut, said: "There are many reasons for the decline in sales. Whenever the political situation in Lebanon worsens, the markets freeze."

"In addition to that," he continued, "Black Friday coincides with the end of the month when families have spent most of their monthly salaries without leaving much to be spent on luxuries. Clothes have become a luxury though food, drink, rent and school fees are all priorities."

The manager of another store, who wanted to remain anonymous, pointed out, "The purchasing power in Lebanon is declining year by year." He explained that the store's customers were mostly people on minimum wage as well as affluent individuals.

He added: "Lebanese customers buy specific items which have reduced prices, while non-Lebanese customers spend large sums."

A Saudi woman who was carrying many shopping bags seemed to be in a hurry while shopping in Beirut with her daughter said the market atmosphere was good and the prices were "very reasonable."

However, Nada Hamed, a Lebanese woman who will soon travel to Australia, said: "My purchasing power is like everyone else's; it gets affected by crises, causing my desire to shop to decrease."

Protests against the deteriorating economic situation were translated by activists, who started petitions on social media websites to call for a demonstration in the vicinity of the National Museum of Beirut, During the demonstration, people carried banners that condemned "the quota in power" and "corruption." They also chanted against senior officials and "the ruling mafia."

Economist Ghazi Wazni explained that the decline in demand on Black Friday "reflects the great concern leading people to refrain from making purchases amid this ambiguous political situation which has been a deadlock."

He added: "This year, economic activity dropped by 25 percent, and the trade sector was counting on the two months of November and December, during which several holidays and events take place, making them represent 30 percent of the economic activity in Lebanon. However, it seems the political crisis associated with not forming a government has been worrying people."

Wazni pointed out that more than 35 percent of the Lebanese people are poor, while the middle class does not exceed 40 percent of the population and affluent families represent 25 percent.

“It seems the political crisis has created economic stagnation and sent many establishments into bankruptcy, which has led to economic and political suffering of 75 percent of the Lebanese population,” he added.

The formation of the new government is expected to lead to the implementation of reforms. However, the formation of the new government is still pending due to the existing political problems.



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Lebanon's economy faces stark choice: Reform or collapse
Lebanon celebrates independence without a government

[Iran failed to declare chemical weapons: US](#)

Author:

Thu, 2018-11-22 23:30

THE HAGUE: The US accused Iran on Thursday of failing to declare a toxic arms program to the global chemical warfare watchdog, in breach of international agreements.

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

Tehran did not immediately respond to the accusations, which add to tensions with Washington over Iran's nuclear program, terrorism, and the war in Syria.

"The United States has had longstanding concerns that Iran maintains a chemical weapons program that it failed to declare to the OPCW," ambassador Ward told a five-yearly meeting on the body's future.

"The US is also concerned that Iran is pursuing central nervous system-acting chemicals for offensive purposes."

Ward said Iran had failed to declare the transfer of chemical-filled shells sent to Libya in the 1980s despite an appeal by the OPCW to identify their origin. They were found after the death of Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi in 2011.

"They were clearly of Iranian origin as evidenced by the Farsi writing on the boxes containing the artillery shells," he said.

Iran had also failed to declare a "chemical weapons filling capability" despite the discovery of toxic shells and bombs in Libya and also in Iraq. Finally, Iran had failed to declare riot control agents despite having marketed them at defense expos, he added.

Ward accused Iran and its ally Russia of "enabling" the use of chemical weapons by the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad "while pursuing their own chemical weapons programs."



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Iran says US bases and aircraft carriers within missile range
EU 'considering sanctions on Iran'

[US to set up observation posts along Turkey-Syria border](#)

Thu, 2018-11-22 22:27

ANKARA: Wednesday's announcement by Defense Secretary Jim Mattis that the US is set to install "observation posts" along parts of the Syrian-Turkish border has sparked debate about its possible security repercussions.

The declared aim is to strengthen the focus on defeating Daesh in Syria. The posts will be manned by some of the 2,000 American troops already deployed in the country.

Daesh still has a presence in eastern Syria, east of the Euphrates River near the border with Iraq.

The US is consulting "closely" with the Turkish military, said Mattis.

But experts say his announcement will create further tensions between Washington and Ankara, as the latter will see this as benefitting the Syrian-Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which Turkey considers a terrorist group.

The announcement comes amid a recent rapprochement between Turkey and the US, whose troops began conducting joint patrols in the northern Syrian city of Manbij from Nov. 1.

As part of a road map agreed in June by Washington and Ankara, the YPG is expected to withdraw from Manbij.

BACKGROUND

The Syrian Democratic Forces announced on Nov. 11 they would resume their offensive against Daesh after having previously called it off due to new tensions with Turkey, which had shelled its positions in northern Syria.

Syria's Kurdish minority has established a semi-autonomous region in the north of the country.

Turkey has carried out two operations against Kurdish forces since 2016, the last against the border enclave of Afrin.

Sinan Hatahet, an expert on Syria at Al-Sharq Forum in Istanbul, told Arab News that the announcement by Mattis "will surely spark a new problem with Turkey, although it will have no impact on the ongoing cooperation in Manbij."

The US is trying to strike a fine balance between maintaining its relationships with state actors in Syria and with its local partners on the ground, Hatahet said.

Sinan Ulgen, a former Turkish diplomat who chairs the Istanbul-based Center for Economics and Foreign Policy, said Ankara will likely react negatively to the announcement by Mattis, as it signals the continuation of US backing for the YPG. Turkish-US cooperation in Manbij could be damaged as a result, Ulgen added.

"Of interest will be whether Washington makes commitments in relation to these observation posts in terms of enhancing Turkey's own border security," he said.

Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar recently criticized a photo of US soldiers having dinner with YPG members in Manbij.

"It is unacceptable for the US to provide arms and ammunition by plane and trucks to the YPG terrorist group even when Daesh has been neutralized to a large extent," Akar said.

Oubai Shahbandar, a fellow at the New America think tank, said defeating Daesh requires a long-term sustainable solution.

“That means the US needs to... enhance its military cooperation with Turkey and with Sunni Arab forces on the ground to prevent the type of chaos that allows extremists like Daesh and the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party) terror group to regain lost territory,” he told Arab News.

“The joint military patrols between American and Turkish forces in Manbij have so far been successful, and ought to serve as a model for what works for the rest of northeast Syria.”



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Turkey says US support for Syrian Kurdish YPG a “big mistake”Russia: Moscow and Ankara must take swift decisions on Syria’s Idlib