

# 'Turkey, U.S. to Oversee Withdrawal of Kurds From Manbij'

ANKARA (Dispatches) – Turkey and the United States will oversee the withdrawal of Syrian Kurdish YPG militants from northern Syria's Manbij town, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu was quoted by local media as saying on Tuesday.

Speaking to reporters on his flight to Moscow, Cavusoglu said Turkey and the United States will decide on a plan for securing Manbij during talks on March 19, but said Turkish forces would carry out a military operation if those failed.

Cavusoglu also said Turkey had not made any demands from the Syrian government regarding Manbij, and added Ankara would monitor the return of weapons given to the YPG by the United States, an issue that has strained ties between the NATO allies.

Turkey began attacking the militants, known as Peoples' Protection Units (YPG), in the nearby

region of Afrin on January 19 after the U.S. announced plans to set up a 30,000-strong force with their help close to the Turkish border in Syria.

Later, Ankara threatened to move as far as Manbij where American forces are also present.

Cavusoglu said Tuesday that Turkey and the United States would decide on a plan for the process during talks scheduled for March 19, but said Turkish forces would carry out a military operation if the discussions fail.

He also said Ankara would monitor the return of weapons given to the YPG by the United States.

The U.S.'s arms and training support for the Kurds, whom Turkey ties to anti-Ankara separatists, has long constituted a bone of contention between the two sides.

During a visit to Ankara by then U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in mid-February, the two sides agreed to work together in



Syrian women react as they flee their homes during an ongoing Turkish incursion in northern Syria on March 10, 2018.

their occupation of Syria.

"We will work together... we have good mechanisms on how we can achieve this, there is a lot of work to be done," Tillerson said back then, without elaborating.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has harshly denounced the

U.S. invasion and also slammed the Turkish incursion as an act of aggression.

Last month, Syrian troops were dispatched to Afrin after its authorities demanded Damascus's assistance in the face of the Turkish forces.

## Russia to Start Delivering S-400 Missile Systems to Turkey in Early 2020

ANKARA (Press TV) – Russia will begin the delivery of S-400 surface-to-air missile defense systems to Turkey under an agreement concluded between the two countries late last year.

"Turkey expressed a wish to accelerate its implementation and we managed to find the most appropriate solution as we agreed to accelerate the contract's implementation, so I think we will begin to fulfill it sometime in early 2020," Russian Presidential Aide on Military Cooperation Vladimir Kozhin told state-owned Russian-language Rossiya 24 television news network.

Turkey's English-language Hurriyet Daily News newspaper reported on December 29 that the loan deal for four S-400 surface-to-air mis-

sile batteries had been signed in the Turkish capital Ankara.

The developments came only two days after Sergey Viktorovich Chemezov, the Chief Executive Officer of Russian state corporation Rostec, told the Kommersant daily newspaper that Russia would supply Turkey with four batteries of S-400, worth \$2.5 billion each, and Moscow was expected to begin the first deliveries in March 2020.

Chemezov added that Turkey would pay 45 percent of the cost of the agreement up front, while Russia would provide loans to cover the remaining 55 percent.

The United States has reportedly warned Turkey against the consequences of its decision to buy S-400 surface-to-air missile batteries from

Russia, saying Washington could slap Ankara with sanctions over such a purchase.

An American official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Turkey's plan to buy the Russian S-400 missile system would potentially expose Ankara to a new sanctions law recently passed by Congress, Turkish-language daily Haberturk reported.

On August 2, 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump signed into law the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) that imposed sanctions on Iran, Russia and North Korea.

The S-400, whose full name is the Triumf Mobile Multiple Anti-Aircraft Missile System (AAMS), is an advanced Russian missile system

designed to detect, track, and destroy planes, drones, or missiles as far as 402 kilometers away. It has previously been sold only to China and India.

Turkey is striving to boost its air defense, particularly after Washington decided in 2015 to withdraw its Patriot surface-to-air missile system from Turkey's border with Syria, a move that weakened Turkey's air defense.

Before gravitating towards Russia, the Turkish military reportedly walked out of a \$3.4 billion contract for a similar Chinese system. The withdrawal took place under purported pressure from Washington.

Ankara's ties with its Western allies in NATO have been strained over a range of issues.

### Before Erdogan Meeting

## EU to Offer Turkey More Cash for Syrian Refugees

BRUSSELS (Reuters) – The European Union's executive is due to approve a further 3 billion euros (\$3.7 billion) in funding for Syrian refugees living in Turkey, EU officials said, before a meeting with President Tayyip Erdogan later this month.

Europe's relations with Erdogan have been fraught in recent years but the EU depends on Turkey to keep a tight lid on immigration from the Middle East, where the war in Syria has killed hundreds of thousands and pushed millions

from homes.

Top EU officials will meet Erdogan on March 26 in the Bulgarian city of Varna despite misgivings among many on the European side.

The bloc's top migration official Dimitris Avramopoulos will announce that the European Commission proposes the extra funding on projects benefiting Syrian refugees in Turkey, the sources told Reuters.

Turkey has accepted 3.5 million refugees from Syria, and the EU is already spending a first 3 billion

euro installment to help them.

Over a million more refugees and migrants reached the EU in 2015, most of them flowing through Turkey. Brussels agreed to pay to help host migrants on the Turkish soil in exchange for Ankara preventing more from trying to cross the Aegean to Greece.

This reduced the numbers to a trickle and this cooperation with a key NATO ally has muted EU action against Turkey over a crackdown on critics, dissenters and civil

society following a failed coup in 2016. Erdogan has also attacked EU members Germany and the Netherlands in his speeches.

The bloc has mainly responded by freezing some funding that Turkey had been eligible for as a candidate for EU entry and suspending accession talks that have long been stalled anyway.

The EU will also release in April what the sources said would be a "critical" report on Turkey's accession bid.

### Russia...

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foreign-backed terror groups, particularly the so-called Jaish al-Islam outfit and the Nusra Front, which have practically captivated the civilians and use them as human shield against the government's liberating forces.

Syrian troops have launched a full-scale offensive to crush the terror outfits, which constantly launch mortar attacks against residential neighborhoods in and around Damascus, killing and wounding dozens of people.

Russia and Syria have set up safe corridors for civilians to leave eastern Ghouta, but militants holed up in the region have been shelling the safe routes to block the evacuation process.

Earlier Tuesday, Syrian state TV showed a group of civilians including sick and injured people leaving militant-held areas in eastern Ghouta into the government-held territory.

Yasser Delwan with the Jaish al-Islam militant group also said a group of patients had left under a deal for a medical evacuation with Russia through the United Nations.

### Trump...

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"Mike Pompeo, Director of the CIA, will become our new Secretary of State. He will do a fantastic job! Thank you to Rex Tillerson for his service! Gina Haspel will become the new Director of the CIA, and the first woman so chosen. Congratulations to all!" Trump said on Twitter.

Tillerson joined a long list of senior officials who have either resigned or been fired since Trump took office in January 2017. Others include strategist Steve Bannon, national security adviser Michael Flynn, FBI Director James Comey, White House chief of staff Reince Priebus, health secretary Tom Price, communications directors Hope Hicks and Anthony Scaramucci, economic adviser Gary Cohn and press secretary Sean Spicer.

Tillerson did not speak to Trump before he was sacked Tuesday and has not been given a reason for his ouster, a top aide said.

"The secretary did not speak to the president this morning and is unaware of the reason, but he is grateful for the opportunity to serve, and still believes strongly that public service is a noble calling and not to be regretted," Undersecretary of State Steve Goldstein said.

Trump's choice to be the first female director of the CIA is a career spymaster who once ran an agency prison in Thailand where terror suspects were subjected to a harsh interrogation technique that the president has supported.

Haspel, the current deputy CIA director, also helped carry out an order that the agency destroy its waterboarding videos. That order prompted a lengthy Justice Department investigation that ended without charges.

Haspel, who has extensive overseas experience, briefly ran a secret CIA prison where accused terrorists Abu Zubaydah and Abd al Rahim al-Nashiri were waterboarded in 2002, according to current and former U.S. intelligence officials, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

More than a decade after waterboarding was last used, the CIA is still haunted by the legacy of a tactic that the U.S. government regarded as torture before the Bush administration authorized its use against terrorist suspects.

### Facebook...

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last week for the creation of a new international probe tasked with preparing criminal indictments over atrocities committed in Myanmar. She said the UN-backed investigation should be based out of Bangladesh and should work for three years to "collect, consolidate, map, analyze and maintain evidence of human rights violations and abuses".

"The government leadership who did nothing to intervene, stop or condemn these acts must also be held accountable," she added. Myanmar's civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been the target of global vitriol for a perceived failure to stand up for the stateless minority.

"Complicity is a very serious issue," Lee told reporters, adding though that she still had "a little element of hope that she will put her foot down and say once and for all let's stop this."

### National...

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conclusion that national security cannot be provided without defense capability and high deterrence power," he said.

General Hatami also said the Islamic Republic of Iran has always respected the independence, territorial integrity and the national sovereignty of all states.

"We are mainly focused on strengthening our defense capability and deterrence," he said.

For her part, the Dutch ambassador touched on efforts to expand bilateral ties between Iran and the Netherlands and said her country is interested in enhancing its military ties with the Islamic Republic.

Terstal said the Netherlands is seeking peace and security across the world. The government of the Netherlands, she said, attaches great significance to creating peace and stability.

## Clashes Erupt During Protest Over Arrest of Ultra-Orthodox Zionist Draft-Dodger

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – Ultra-Orthodox Zionists have clashed with police during a protest against the arrest of a young student, who had refused to do active duty in the military.

The rally took place in Bnei Brak, with the protesters blocking the city's main Jabotinsky Road, and stopping vehicles on the nearby Route 4 Highway, The Times of Israel reported.

The highway stayed blocked for two hours. During the clashes, Zionist troops were seen dragging some protesters away. Similar demonstration had taken place in al-

Quds on Thursday.

The arrestee, a student from a conservative sect, had followed the orders of his mentors by refusing to sign "draft deferral" papers, thus becoming a draft dodger under the occupying regime's law.

Protest organizers said "the determination of the Haredi public to fight the enlistment decree will not be deterred," and vowed to "fight in every way the edict that has felled thousands in the spiritual ruin" of the Israeli military.

Ultraorthodox politicians have, meanwhile, threatened to leave the ranks of Zionist Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's ruling coalition unless a law is passed preventing ultra-orthodox youths from serving in the military.

Hundreds similarly rallied in al-Quds last September to protest active duty, and the regime's arrest of around 40 people, including the grandson of a famous rabbi, for refusing conscription. The rallies featured considerable violence on the part of both the protesters and regime forces.

Conscription is mandatory for both men and women in Israel, which is in a continuous war with regional countries and clashes with Palestinians in the occupied territories.