

# Risking Standoff With Turkey

## U.S., Allies Set Up More Syria Posts

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – The United States and its allies Britain and France have been setting up new outposts in northeastern Syria, despite lack of permission from Damascus to have military presence in sovereign Syrian territory.

Officials from a coalition of Arab and Kurdish militants operating in northeastern Syria said Friday that they had been witnessing increased activity by Western forces in the region, adding that military forces from the U.S., Britain, and France had been setting up new bases around the city of Manbij.

“The United States and France have increased the number of their military in Manbij,” said Helil Bozi, the commander of the so-called Military Council of Manbij of the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). He said British forces, too, had been deployed to the same territories.

Bozi, whose ragtag militant group

has been allied to U.S. forces over the past years, said the increased presence was clearly a bid to counter a potential Turkish military offensive into Manbij, as Ankara has vowed to expand its operation from areas in the northwest of Syria, where it has been battling Kurdish militants, to the east.

“The U.S. has deployed its Special Forces units near the Sajur River, thereby setting a red line the crossing of which will be seen by the [U.S.-led] coalition forces as an attack and will prompt retaliatory actions,” he said.

Bozi added that the increased presence proved that the U.S. had no intention of leaving the Kurdish-dominated territories in northern Syria — as demanded by Turkey.

Other Kurdish official confirmed the increased military presence of coalition forces in the region, saying U.S., British, and French forces had also been deployed to Tell Abyad,



A U.S. outpost, installed near the tense front-line between the so-called Syrian Manbij Military Council and the Turkish-backed militants, is seen in Manbij, north Syria, on April 4, 2018.

Dayr al-Zawr, Raqqah, and Tabqa.

The increased deployment comes despite U.S. President Donald Trump’s earlier expression of his tendency to withdraw U.S. forces from Syria “very soon.” He was

reportedly later persuaded by his top aides to take back that stance.

Images of new U.S. bases in Manbij have confirmed earlier plans by the Pentagon to expand U.S. presence in Syria.

### Gaza ...

(Continued From Page One)

Palestinians say protesters were shot while posing no threat to soldiers, and videos that have spread online have fueled their accusations.

Human Rights Watch has called the actions by the Israeli troops “calculated” and illegal. Guterres and the European Union have called for an independent investigation, which Israel has outright rejected.

In the Gaza Strip, almost 1.3 million of the small territory’s two million inhabitants are refugees, demanding their right to return to their pre-1948 homes.

The protests are slated to continue until 15 May, which marks the 70th anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba (Catastrophe), in which more than 750,000 Palestinians were forcibly displaced by Zionist forces in 1948 Arab-Israeli war.

### UK ...

(Continued From Page One)

The UK has helped Bahrain’s ruling Al Khalifah monarchy to put down pro-democracy demonstrations across the country over the past years.

The opening of the new base coincided with Bahrain’s announcement on Wednesday that it had discovered off-shore reservoirs of oil, estimated to contain at least 80 billion barrels of tight oil.

Tight oil is a form of light crude oil held in shale deep below the earth’s surface that is extracted with hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, using deep horizontal wells.

“Agreement has been reached with (American oilfield services company) Halliburton to commence drilling on two further appraisal wells in 2018, to further evaluate reservoir potential, optimize completions, and initiate long-term production,” Bahraini Oil Minister Sheikh Muhammad bin Khalifa Al Khalifa told a news conference in Manama.

### U.S. ...

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“On March 25, Houthi forces in Yemen fired seven missiles at Riyadh. Saudi Arabia confirmed the launches and asserted that it successfully intercepted all seven,” that article read.

“There’s no evidence that Saudi Arabia intercepted any missiles at all,” it added.

“One interceptor explodes catastrophically just after launch, while another makes a U-turn in midair and then comes screaming back at Riyadh, where it explodes on the ground.”

The New York Times said Turkey has also signed a deal with Russia to buy the S-400 system “ignoring American concerns” and despite being a member of the U.S.-led military alliance of NATO.

### In ...

(Continued From Page 2)

Ayatollah Khamenei issued Wednesday’s statement in reply to a letter he recently received from Haniyeh which criticized the support of Arab regimes in the region for the United States.

In his statement, Ayatollah Khamenei called on the people of Muslim countries to defeat the occupying regime of Israel.

“With an intense and planned struggle they should force the enemy to retreat toward the point of demise,” the Leader said.

### Saudi ...

(Continued From Page 2)

Qasemi said the ambitions of the Saudi crown prince have no limitations and are turning out to be a “chronic and incurable disease”.

The power-thirsty prince, he said, has closed his eyes on “all historical realities and seven decades of crimes by the child-killing” Israeli regime and in a “big and blatant act of treason” against the Palestinian cause, the prince spoke about Riyadh’s alliance with the “illegitimate” Tel Aviv regime.

Qasemi was apparently referring to bin Salman’s recognition of Israel and his contention that the Zionists were entitled to their own land in Palestinian territories.

Qasemi said such claims indicate that bin Salman had not studied either history or geography and knows nothing about the suffering of Muslim nations, including the Palestinians.

He warned that all “divisive plots” hatched against Muslim countries during recent years have been aimed at creating terrorist and extremist groups such as Daesh, sowing discord among countries in the Muslim world, undermining the Palestinian cause and ensuring the Israeli regime’s security.

This disgrace would definitely lead to an “ominous outcome” for Saudi Arabia and would be recorded as a “great disgrace” for Riyadh, he said.

### Iran ...

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In January, he decided to stick with JCPOA for now, but gave the European signatories a May 12 deadline to “fix the terrible flaws” of the accord or he will refuse to extend U.S. sanctions relief on Iran.

Late last month, White House principal deputy press secretary Raj Shah said that Trump is “prepared to potentially withdraw” from the Iran deal if changes to the agreement are not made.

Iran maintains that it will not renegotiate JCPOA, an international document endorsed by the Security Council Resolution 2231.

Other parties to the agreement, namely Russia, China, Britain, Germany and France, have all criticized Trump’s hostile views, saying the deal is sound and has proven to be functioning.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which is tasked with monitoring Iran’s nuclear activities, has repeatedly verified Tehran’s full commitment to its side of the bargain.

## After Deadly Kunduz Attack

# Taliban Vow ‘Serious Revenge’



An Afghan resident is treated at a hospital following an airstrike in Kunduz on April 2, 2018.

KABUL (Dispatches) – The Taliban militant group has vowed to “take serious revenge” after a recent Afghan airstrike on a religious school (madrasa) killed dozens of people, including children in northeastern Province of Kunduz.

The group issued a statement saying it “condemns in the strongest terms this major crime and vows to take serious revenge against the perpetrators.”

The Afghan military initially denied

civilians were among the dead and wounded in the aerial attack which took place in the militant-controlled Dashte Archi district outside Kunduz City on Monday

The Afghan government also said the bombing had killed only Taliban commanders and caused no civilian fatalities.

However, the office of President Ashraf Ghani acknowledged late Tuesday that

civilians had been among the dead, and that the bombing would be investigated.

The United Nations said on April 3 it was investigating “disturbing reports of serious harm to civilians” in an airstrike on a religious school in the area.

Local residents and witnesses have now confirmed that helicopters struck the madrasa where a graduation ceremony for religious students was under way.

Abdullah, 40, who lives near the compound housing the madrasa and mosque and was invited to attend as a member of the local community told media outlets that he saw the airstrike happen.

“We were about to finish the ceremony at 1:00 pm when (Afghan military) aircraft bombarded innocent children,” he said. “People were panicked. Children and elders were also wounded in the bombardment.”

An AFP photographer, who visited the scene of the airstrike on Wednesday, saw large piles of hats, turbans and shoes that were said to belong to the victims of the airstrike. At least half a dozen freshly dug graves could be seen nearby.

Government officials in both Kabul and Kunduz have given conflicting figures for the number of casualties.

Security forces now say the attack killed a total of 57 to 70 people, but local officials believe the number to be higher.

Naeem Mangal, the director of the regional hospital in Kunduz, also said they “have received 57 wounded so far, their ages ranging from 7 to 60.”

Airstrikes by US warplanes have significantly increased in recent months against the purported positions of the Taliban militant group and other militant outfits in the crisis-hit country.

According to the United Nations figures released earlier this year, more than 10,000 Afghan civilians were killed or wounded in the Afghan conflict last year. While the main cause of civilian deaths was said to be militant bombings, the report said US airstrikes as well as government forces inflicted a rising toll.

US forces invaded Afghanistan and toppled a ruling Taliban regime some 17 years ago. The ongoing war has failed to bring stability to the country despite the presence of thousands of foreign forces.

## Fire Engulfs Istanbul Hospital, Patients Evacuated

ISTANBUL (AFP) – A huge fire has engulfed a hospital in Istanbul, forcing patients to evacuate as firefighters battle the smoke and flames.

The blaze, which started in the roof, turned the side of the building into a burned-out shell on Thursday, sending a massive black cloud into the sky.

Patients, some wearing oxygen masks, were wheeled out into the street in their sick beds while mothers were forced to leave clutching young babies.

Firefighters used elevation lifts to try to extinguish the fire at the top of the multi-storey hospital building in the

Gaziosmanpasa district of Istanbul.

Local officials said there were so far no reports of casualties although some patients may have been affected by the smoke.

Speaking at the scene, Istanbul governor Vasip Sahin said the fire services had managed to bring the blaze partly under control.

Echoing comments by other officials, he said there were no current reports of casualties. “So far there is no sad news. God willing, it will stay that way,” he told the crowds outside in comments broadcast by television.

Witnesses told Turkish television that the flames spread rapidly around the side of the building.

“The fire was knocking against the windows. It was terrifying,” one woman told CNN-Turk, without giving her name.

Sahin later told reporters said that the fire had been on the outer part of the building -- rather than the inside -- but a “lot of smoke” had penetrated inside which emergency services were now seeking to expel.

He added that some 70 patients had been evacuated outside and those in intensive care moved to a secure place

inside the hospital that was not affected.

There was no immediate information on the cause of the blaze but Sahin said that two prosecutors had already been tasked to investigate.

He said emergency services were now making a final check of the upper floors.

Pictures showed scenes of panic as staff and patients flooded into the street to escape the fumes.

Health Minister Ahmet Demircan, who was rushing to the scene Istanbul, has informed President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of developments, Turkish television said.

## Qatar Introduces National Military Service for Women

DOHA (Press TV) – Qatar’s emir has signed off on a law enabling women to do voluntary military service and extending the service for men for as long as one year.

The official Qatar News Agency said the legislation, which was endorsed by Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani on Thursday, men and women aged between 18 and 35.

Under the law, “national service for females is voluntary.”

It is the first time women are allowed to take up roles in the military beyond administrative duties.

Under previous legislation, Qatari men holding a bachelor’s degree could complete the service in three months and those without one had to serve for four months.

The new law, however, makes the one-year-long military service for all men mandatory regardless of their level of education.

Men have to report themselves for draft within 60 days of turning 18 or face a jail term reaching a maximum of three years and a fine of up to 50,000 Qatari riyals (\$13,700).

The new law comes amid a diplomatic crisis pitting a Saud-led quartet of states against Qatar.

Persian Gulf tensions

The quartet – Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt -- cut their diplomatic ties with Qatar

and imposed an economic blockade on the country last June, accusing it of sponsoring “terrorism” and destabilizing the region. Doha rejects the claims.

Since then, Qatar has been stepping up military cooperation with Turkey, which has backed Doha in the standoff, signing several military agreements with other countries and parties, including NATO and the European Union.