

# After Discouraging Year

## U.S. Officials Expect Review of Afghan Strategy

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – **The United States is preparing to undertake a review of its strategy in Afghanistan, U.S. officials told Reuters, a year after President Donald Trump begrudgingly agreed to extend America’s involvement in the 17-year-old war.**

Officials said Trump has shown signs of frustration over the lack of progress since he unveiled a strategy last August that committed to an open-ended deployment of U.S. military advisers, trainers and special forces and increased air support for Afghan security forces. The goal was to force the Taliban militants to open peace talks with the Kabul government.

Trump was opposed to remaining in America’s longest war, but was convinced by his advisers to give it more time. He authorized last year the deployment of an additional 3,000 U.S. troops, bringing the total to around 15,000.

Nearly a year later, the current situation is in a stalemate in which Afghan civilians are paying a heavy toll, the Taliban are expanding in rural areas but are unable to capture major urban centers and the capability of Afghan security forces remains in doubt.

Several current U.S. officials and other former officials and advisers with direct knowledge said the White House had not yet formally ordered the review, but they were preparing for a government-wide appraisal in the next few months.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss the issue.



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### Britain to Almost Double Troops

Meanwhile, the British government is planning to almost double the number of its troops in Afghanistan after a request from Trump for reinforcements to help tackle the fragile security situation there.

Prime Minister Theresa May announced the government will send an extra 440 troops, which would bring Britain’s total to about 1,100, to help Afghan troops fighting Taliban and Daesh terrorists.

The extra troops will be taking part in a NATO-led training mission, called

Resolute Support, to train and assist Afghan forces. They will be based in Kabul and will not be in a combat role. British troops ended combat operations in 2014.

The announcement comes the day before a NATO summit in Belgium that could turn contentious over Trump’s insistence that allies pay more for their defense.

Trump, who announced the United States would send thousands more troops to Afghanistan last year, has asked Britain and other NATO countries to send more reinforcements to the country.

### Terrorists...

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The Syrian army has seized sophisticated French-made anti-tank weapon systems in Dara’a, online military magazine Defence Blog reported on Tuesday.

The arms, seized in Jadal village, were referred to as 112-mm APILAS (Armor-Piercing Infantry Light Arm System).

“Local media have released imagery showing two captured APILAS anti-tank weapon systems developed in France by GIAT Industries,” it said.

Currently known as Nexter Systems, GIAT Industries is a French government-owned arms manufacturer. France is accused of backing anti-Damascus militancy since 2011.

The use of the APILAS anti-tank weapon system had also been spotted in Syria before, the magazine wrote, saying “as early as 2015, a couple of systems of this type were seized from Free Syrian Army (FSA) militants.”

The FSA has been enjoying ample Western support, most notably from the United States. Washington, however, recently told the militants that it would no longer stand behind them in southern Syria right before the government was about to start the counterterrorism push.

So far, over 120,000 of the APILAS launchers have been produced and handed over to such countries in the region as Saudi Arabia and Jordan, said the magazine.

After liberating Dara’a, Damascus hopes to free its neighboring provinces of Quneitra and Suwaida of terrorist presence. The three provinces form the Arab country’s southern tip near the border with Jordan.

### Outsourcing War

The UAE military’s reliance on foreigners is not exactly new.

Back in 2010, Blackwater founder Erik Prince was tasked with putting together a mercenary army in the UAE that would confront any potential worker or pro-democracy uprisings.

Before he joined the Trump administration, U.S. Defense Secretary General Jim Mattis received permission from the U.S. Marine Corps to serve as a military advisor to the UAE in 2015.

The UAE has also been accused of sending hundreds of Latin American mercenaries - members of the hired gun army Prince founded - to fight in Yemen.

While Emirati troops have deployed to Yemen and played a key role, they have outsourced much of the fighting to their local anti-Houthi allies, limiting their own casualties.

McFate, the former mercenary, said the policy lowers the barriers of entry to war. “Being able to outsource war seems to promise more war in the future; that’s what’s so dangerous about it,” he said.

“If you rent a car and you don’t have to pay for long-term damages, you might want to run it over speed bumps. Where if it’s your own car, you would never do that,” he added. “They (mercenaries) are like a rented car. You can act more recklessly and what it can do is start wars and elongate wars that otherwise wouldn’t have.”

Emirati military ambitions only appear to be growing.

The UAE is at war in Yemen. The country reportedly considered using military action against Qatar. In East Africa, it has built a base in Eritrea and is planning to establish a base in Somaliland, a semi-autonomous region in Somalia.

To support its military ambitions, the UAE introduced a mandatory military service of one year for men between the ages of 18 and 30 in 2014. And on Sunday, the UAE extended that military service period to sixteen months.

“They are in danger of overstretch when you compare their activities to their primary resource constraint: their small population,” said Wasser. “As such, the Emirati armed forces are likely to continue to bolster their small size with non-Emirati contract support in non-combat roles.”

From bombing civilian targets to torturing prisoners in detention centers, the UAE stands accused of a number of war crimes as its war in Yemen enters its fourth year.

So what happens if troops serving under a foreign commander commit a war crime?

Rebecca Hamilton, an assistant professor of law at American University in Washington, DC, said it’s hard to prosecute war crimes, especially when the role of a commanding officer is opaque.

“Just trying to prove the knowledge that you would need even if a war crime is being committed, pinning that down to an individual is always challenging.”

It also comes down to where the foreign commander is from. A foreign commander from the United Kingdom or Australia could potentially be tried at the International Criminal Court, but as the U.S. is not a party to the statute that established the court, that is not an option for Americans.

So as long as Toumajan does not intend to give up his U.S. citizenship and has received permission to work for the Emiratis, he is in the clear.

“If prohibitions on war crimes are not enforced, that sends a signal to people who might perpetrate them that they don’t need to be worried,” said Hamilton, the assistant law professor.

## Turkish Graduates Arrested Over Erdogan Cartoon

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) – **Four recent graduates of a top Turkish university have been arrested for displaying a cartoon mocking Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan at their graduation ceremony, according to the state-run Anadolu agency.**

The Middle East Technical University students in the July 6 ceremony in Ankara made and carried a long banner printed with a cartoon of animals whose faces resembled Tayyip Erdogan, entitled “The World of Tayyip”.

Originally published by a popular satire weekly magazine, the cartoon was the subject of a defamation lawsuit by Erdogan 12 years ago, when he was Turkey’s prime minister. However, an An-

kara court dismissed the case, saying the cartoon was within the limits of freedom of speech.

Anadolu said the four had been “arrested ... in the course of an investigation into a sign containing defamation of Erdogan”.

Turkey has been waging a crack-down on dissent against Erdogan since a failed coup attempt in 2016. Erdogan has led Turkey for the past 15 years and assumed even more sweeping powers on Monday as he was sworn in as the first head of the country’s new, all-powerful executive presidency.

### Preacher, Followers Arrested

In another development, Turkish police launched an operation

on Wednesday and arrested detain 235 people associated with Muslim author and televangelist Adnan Oktar over accusations including forming a criminal gang, fraud and sexual abuse, Istanbul police headquarters said.

It said in a statement the raids were carried out by its financial crimes section in an operation state-run Anadolu news agency described as having been spread across five provinces and that searches of properties were continuing.

Police launched one raid in the early hours on Oktar’s house at Cengelkoy on the Asian side of Istanbul and detained him and his guards, the Sabah newspaper said.

In February, Turkey’s television

watchdog suspended a television program hosted by Oktar that blended theological discussion and dancing, saying it violated gender equality and women’s rights.

Oktar hosts talk show programs on his television channel, A9, on which he has discussed Islamic values and sometimes danced with young women he calls “kittens” and sang with young men, his “lions”.

In 2006, Oktar wrote the Atlas of Creation under his pen-name Harun Yahya, arguing that Darwin’s theory of evolution is at the root of global terrorism. He has written more than 300 books, translated into 73 languages, his channel says on its website.

## Saudi Defense Ministry Official Arrested on Bribery Charges

RIYADH (Reuters) – **Saudi Arabia has arrested a defense ministry official on charges of receiving a 1 million riyal (\$267,000) bribe and abusing his position, the SPA state news agency reported on Tuesday.**

“The official sought to facilitate irregular procedures for the disbursement of financial dues to a company, taking advantage of his professional influence,” a statement quoted Attorney General Sheikh Saud al-Mujib as saying.

It added that the official admitted the crime of bribery and the involve-

ment of two others in the same case, who were also arrested. No names were given.

Last November, authorities detained hundreds of top businessmen and royals in November and held them for months at the Riyadh Ritz-Carlton Hotel in a sweeping anti-corruption investigation.

Saudi Arabia’s crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, who also serves as defense minister, told a U.S. newspaper in February the purge was like chemotherapy of “the cancer of corruption”.

### Over Spying for Zionist Regime

## Lebanese Court Sentences Seven to Hard Labor

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – **Lebanon’s Military Tribunal has sentenced seven Lebanese nationals in absentia to hard labor on charges of espionage for the Zionist regime’s Mossad spy agency and collaboration with Zionist authorities.**

The tribunal, chaired by Brigadier General Hussein Abdallah, issued the verdicts against Fadi Hashem, Charbel Hashem, Maroun Hashem and Lina Aanid after they were found guilty of crossing into occupied Palestinian territories, working with Zionist officials and receiving permits to live there.

The court also stripped them of their rights as Lebanese citizens.

Three other defendants, identified as Salam Fakhoury, Assad Saqr and Antoinette al-Nadaf, were each sentenced in absentia to 15 years of hard labor for collaborating with the Zionist regime.

The military tribunal also revoked the nationality of the trio.

Back in January last year, Lebanese security forces arrested five people over working for Mossad.

The media office of Lebanon’s General Security Directorate announced in a statement that the quintet had confessed to passing information to Mossad via the occupying regime’s em-

bassies in Turkey, Jordan, Britain and Nepal.

The statement stressed that the individuals were arrested following intensive monitoring of Zionist intelligence operations in the country as part of Lebanon’s activities aimed at dismantling similar networks.

It added that the two spies from Nepal were also engaged in recruiting other Nepalese workers in Lebanon.

“After their interrogation, the arrestees were referred to the competent court on the offense of collaboration with the Israeli enemy, and work is underway to arrest the rest of the people involved,” the statement pointed out.