

Turkey Takes Steps Against New Coronavirus

ANKARA (Reuters) – Turkey has prepared thermal cameras and other precautions against the spread of the new flu-like coronavirus, but currently has no cases or at-risk patients, Health Minister Fahrettin Koca says.

The death toll from the virus, which originated in China, has risen to nine with 440 confirmed cases, Chinese health officials said as authorities sought to control the outbreak and evidence showed it spread through “respiratory transmission”. Turkey’s new Istanbul airport is a major international hub, handling more than 50 million passengers last year, and flag-carrier Turkish Airlines operates daily flights to destinations in China including Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

If the right usurped from us is given back to us we shall take it, otherwise we shall go on claiming it.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

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Bin Salman Hacked Amazon Boss Bezos' Phone

SAN FRANCISCO (Dispatches) – Two UN officials are about to report that there is enough evidence suggesting that Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman had hacked Amazon.com Inc founder Jeff Bezos' phone and both the kingdom and the United States should investigate, a person familiar with the matter says.

The United Nations' officials plan a public statement asserting that they found credible forensic evidence commissioned by Bezos' security team which concluded that his phone probably had been hacked with a tainted video sent from a WhatsApp account belonging to bin Salman.

The report by FTI Consulting concluded that massive amounts of data began leaving Bezos' phone about a month after the video was shared in mid-2018, the person said, declining to be identified due to the sensitivity of the subject.

Outside experts consulted by the UN agreed that while the case was not airtight, the evidence was strong enough to warrant a fuller investigation.

The report is set to worsen relations between the world's richest man and the kingdom which had soured following the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018, who was also a columnist for the Bezos'



Amazon CEO and Washington Post owner Jeff Bezos (L) meets with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the US in March 2018.

owned Washington Post.

The digital forensic analysis, whose results were published by The Guardian on Tuesday, found that it is “highly probable” that the intrusion into Bezos' phone was triggered by an infected video file sent from bin Salman's account.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, sources told The Guardian that the two men had been having a seemingly friendly WhatsApp exchange when, on 1 May 2018, the unsolicited file was sent.

Large amounts of data were acquired from Bezos's phone within a

matter of hours, according to a person familiar with the matter.

The Financial Times reported that the malicious file was sent weeks after the pair exchanged numbers at a dinner in Los Angeles.

Cybersecurity expert Anthony Ferrante, who conducted the analysis, said he determined with a “medium to high degree of confidence” that dozens of gigabytes were exfiltrated, possibly with Pegasus spying software.

It came one year after private information about Bezos was leaked to the American tabloid The National

Enquirer.

In January 2019, it published text messages between the billionaire and former Fox television presenter Lauren Sanchez, saying, Bezos had been “caught cheating on his wife of 25 years with the spouse of a Hollywood mogul!”

A month after the publication of that alleged affair, Bezos accused the American Media Incorporated (AMI), The National Enquirer's parent company, of “extortion and blackmail,” saying it had threatened to publish his intimate photos unless he said publicly that the tabloid's reporting was not politically motivated. Saudi experts told The Guardian that Bezos was probably targeted because of his ownership of The Washington Post and its coverage of Saudi Arabia.

In an op-ed for The Daily Beast in March 2019, Bezos' security consultant, Gavin de Becker, wrote, “Our investigators and several experts concluded with high confidence that the Saudis had access to Bezos' phone, and gained private information.”

Khashoggi — an outspoken critic of the heir to the Saudi throne — was killed and his body was dismembered by a Saudi hit squad after being lured into the kingdom's consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, on October 2, 2018.

Lebanon's Government Meets for First Time



Lebanon's President Michel Aoun heads the first meeting of the new cabinet at the presidential palace in Baabda, Lebanon January 22, 2020.

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – Lebanon has ushered in a new government that will need to walk a political tightrope, as President Michel Aoun said its main task was to win back confidence.

Prime Minister Hassan Diab's government met for the first time on Wednesday.

“Your mission is delicate,” Aoun's office cited him as telling the cabinet. “It is necessary to work to tackle the economic situation, restore the confidence of the international community in Lebanese institutions and reassure the Lebanese about their future,” Aoun said.

Lebanon, burdened with a public debt equivalent to about 150% of GDP, won pledges exceeding \$11 billion at an international conference in April 2018 conditional on reforms.

Lebanon's Prime Minister Hassan Diab has announced the formation of the country's new government, saying his cabinet will try to meet the demands of protesters.

Speaking at the Lebanese presidential palace in Beirut on Tuesday,

Diab described his government — made up of 20 specialist ministers backed by the country's political parties — as a technocratic “rescue team” that would work to achieve the goals of protesters who first took to the streets in October last year.

“This is a government that represents the aspirations of the demonstrators who have been mobilized nationwide for more than three months,” Diab said, adding that his government “will strive to meet their demands for an independent judiciary, for the recovery of embezzled funds, for the fight against illegal gains.”

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres welcomed the government formation and said he would work with Diab to support the reform agenda, Guterres' spokesman said in a statement on Wednesday.

The formation of the new government under Diab came after the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement and its allies agreed on a cabinet that must urgently address the economic crisis and ensuing protests that toppled its predecessor.

U.S. Troops Block Russian Forces' Way to Syria Oil Fields

DAMASCUS (Press TV) – U.S. military forces present in areas controlled by militants of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in Syria's northeastern province of Hasakah have reportedly stopped a Russian military convoy from reaching oil fields there.

Turkey's official Anadolu news agency reported on Wednesday that the Russian convoy, which consisted of five armored personnel carriers and a pickup truck, turned back and returned to their home base the previous day, after U.S. troopers stopped them and did not allow them to reach their targeted oil fields.

The report added that the standoff ended without any significant clashes or any real risk of violence between the two sides.

The development took place amid an ongoing dispute between the U.S. and Russia over Rumeylan oil field, which lies in the northeastern flank of Hasakah province.

On January 16, the United States dispatched dozens of truckloads of military and logistical equipment to oil-rich areas under its control in Syria's eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr and Hasakah province.

Local sources from the Kurdish-majority northeastern city of Qamishli, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Syria's official news agency SANA at the time that a convoy of 75 trucks crossed the Semalka border crossing, which is a pontoon bridge across the Tigris, and headed towards U.S. positions in the two provinces.

In late October last year, Washington reversed an earlier decision to pull out all of its troops from northeastern Syria, announcing the deployment of about 500 soldiers to the oil fields controlled by Kurdish forces in the Arab country.

The U.S. claimed that the move was aimed at protecting the fields and facilities from possible attacks by the Daesh terrorist group. That claim came although US President Donald Trump had earlier suggested that Washington sought economic interests in controlling the oilfields.

Pentagon chief Mark Esper then threatened that the U.S. troops deployed to the oil fields would use “military force” against any party that might seek to challenge control of the sites, even if it were

Syrian government forces or their Russian allies.

Syria, which has not authorized American military presence in its territory, has said the U.S. is “plundering” the country's oil.

On December 18, 2019, China's special envoy for Syria said the United States' pretext for extending its military presence in the Arab country, namely to protect Syrian oil fields, was untenable.

“Who have given the Americans the right to do this? And, at whose invitation is the U.S. protecting Syria's oil fields?” Xie Xiaoyan said at a press conference in Moscow.

“Let's think the other way around: will the US allow Syria to send troops to U.S. territory to protect oil fields there?” he said.

Zionist PM Vows to Annex Jordan Valley, West Bank Settlements

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Zionist regime's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has doubled down on his pledge to annex the Jordan Valley and all the settlements in the West Bank as the Zionist regime's elections draw near.

In a speech launching his right-wing Likud party's election campaign in al-Quds, Netanyahu vowed to “apply Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley and the Northern Dead Sea ... without delay and without any veto of [senior Arab-majority Joint List lawmaker] Ahmad Tibi.”

Ahmad Tibi is an Arab member of the Knesset criticized by Israeli politicians for his anti-Zionist positions as well as his close relations with Palestinian parties.

“Not only will we not uproot anyone, we will

apply Israeli law to all Israeli settlements without exception,” Netanyahu added.

The remarks came hours after Netanyahu's main rival, Blue and white party leader Benny Gantz, said he would work to advance the annexation of the Jordan Valley “in coordination with the international community” if he wins the March 2 general elections.

Netanyahu urged Gantz not to wait until after the elections, but rather support the measure if it is brought before the Israeli parliament (Knesset) for a vote.

The office of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said in a statement that the calls to annex areas of the West Bank would “undermine the foundations of the peace process” and regional

stability.

Additionally Palestinian Ambassador Riyad Mansour told a UN Security Council meeting that “neither threatens nor attempts at annexation should go unchallenged.”

“The urgency of stopping Israeli annexation schemes cannot be underestimated; immediate action is needed before it is too late,” he said, noting that the UN Charter's prohibition on acquiring territory by force must be upheld along with Security Council resolutions reaffirming the illegality of the settlements.

Moreover, UN political chief Rosemary DiCarlo reiterated that “all settlements are illegal under international law and remain an obstacle to peace” and warned against any annexation bid.

Hashd al-Sha'abi Cautions Against U.S. Relocation of Daesh

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – A senior commander of Iraqi popular Hashd al-Sha'abi forces has warned that the U.S. troops are transferring the Daesh terrorists from Syria to safe areas in Iraq as part of a seemingly major plan to trigger security problems for the Arab nation again.

“The security forces are stationed and guarding the Iraqi-Syrian borders, but the airspace of these regions are fully open to the U.S. planes and helicopters, including Chinook cargo helicopters,” Kazzem al-Fartousi, a commander of Kata'eb Seyed al-Shohada, told the Arabic-language al-Ma'aloumeh news website on Wednesday.

He warned that the U.S. planes and helicopters are never checked by the Iraqi authorities and they easily transfer the terrorists from Syria to safe zone in Iraq in heliborne operations.

Al-Fartousi joined many other senior military commanders and officials deeply wary of what seems to be a scheme by the U.S. to escalate tensions through a revival of terrorist operations by the remnants of Daesh terrorists to undermine the central government in Baghdad and justify the U.S. buildup in Iraq.

An official had earlier revealed that the U.S. troops in Western Iraq are relocating Daesh ringleaders from Syria to Wadi Houran region in western al-Anbar province after the area was cleansed by Hashd al-Sha'abi.

“After the U.S. forces prevented Iraqi forces from approaching Wadi Houran and the western desert of al-Anbar, finally, Hashd al-Sha'abi could remove the existing obstacles and defeat the Daesh terrorists in the region and cleanse Wadi Houran completely,” head of the Badr Organization's office in al-Anbar Qusai al-Anbari told al-Ma'aloumeh.

“But after the cleansing operations, the U.S. forces stationed near the region facilitated the trafficking of the Daesh terrorists and their transfer to Wadi Houran and the western desert by reopening a number of roads and heliborne operations,” he added.

Al-Anbari said that the U.S. troops have in the first stage transferred a number of Daesh ringleaders with foreign nationalities to Wadi Houran and the western desert of al-Anbar to revive the Daesh under a new name to foment insecurity in Iraq.