

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Iran will respond forcefully to any action by the occupying regime of Israel against its interests in the region, Iran's Foreign Ministry said on Wednesday.

TEHRAN (Tasnim) -- Secretary of Iran's Guardian Council (GC) Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati on Wednesday highlighted the importance of the upcoming elections in the country and made assurances that the council will never allow the people's votes to be manipulated.

Viewpoint

Venezuela Stands Firm vis-à-vis U.S. Subversion

Iran's 'Zohal' Goes to Positively Different Festival



Sepahan Beat UAE's Al Ain 4-0 in AFC Champions League



Palestinians Hail UN Report on Companies With Zionist Settlement Ties



Erdogan Intensifies Threats as Terrorists Near Elimination

Syrian Villagers Confront U.S. Military Convoy

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) -- Syrian troops Wednesday pushed on with their offensive in the country's northwest, securing areas along a key national highway they liberated, as tensions spiraled with Turkey which supports terrorist groups.

After a series of tit-for-tat attacks, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened to strike Syrian forces "everywhere" if his soldiers are harmed and accused Damascus ally Russia of committing "massacres".

Syrian forces have made major inroads in the last terrorist-held area in the northwest, but Turkey has stepped up its provocative moves to curb the advances.

Heightening tensions, a Syrian helicopter was downed by rocket fire in Idlib province on Tuesday. Turkish media blamed the attack on militants while war monitoring group the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said it was carried out by Turkey.

The pro-government Al-Watan newspaper on Wednesday said three air crew were killed in the attack.

In their latest push, Syrian forces have seized a string of towns and villages from terrorists in the west of Aleppo province since Tuesday night, the London-based Observatory and Al-Watan reported.

Hours after completely retaking the economically vital M5 highway linking the country's four largest cities, they cleared all areas directly west of the road in Aleppo province of Takfiri and other terrorists.

Government forces were also poised Wednesday to push terrorists out of the road's eastern environs, in a move that would completely secure the motorway from attacks, the monitor and Al-Watan said.

That M5 links the capital Damascus to the second city of Aleppo through the major hubs of Homs and Hama, and has been a key target for the government as it seeks to restore territorial control and rekindle a moribund economy.

Its recapture will secure Aleppo, the country's former industrial hub, which still comes under sporadic rocket fire from holdout terrorist groups.

Syria's last major terrorist pocket is dominated by Takfiri militants of the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham alliance and their allies.

Government forces have pressed on with a blistering assault in the region since December.

Turkey has sent reinforcements to Syria in recent days following the series of exchanges with the Syrian army, the latest of which

saw five Turkish troops killed by shelling in Idlib on Monday.

According to an AFP correspondent in Idlib, a new convoy of Turkish armored vehicles arrived Wednesday in the town of Binnish, northeast of Idlib city.

Erdogan on Tuesday warned Syria's government that if there are more attacks against Turkish forces, "they will pay a very, very heavy price".

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu urged Russia and Iran to stop Syria's assault on Idlib.

The Kremlin on Wednesday accused Turkey of flouting agreements it had made with Russia to neutralize militants in Idlib and said terrorist attacks on Syrian and Russian forces in the region were continuing.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow remained committed to a deal on Syria it had struck with Ankara, but that Russia considered militant attacks in Idlib to be unacceptable and in contravention of that same agreement.

Russia hashed out a deal with Turkey in 2018 to create a demilitarized zone in Idlib, but those agreements and others between the two countries have come under strain amid mounting tensions in the region.

"In particular, according to this document (the agreement), the Turkish side undertook to ensure that terrorist groups in Idlib were neutralized," said Peskov.

"We continue to note with regret that these groups are carrying out strikes from Idlib on Syrian forces and also taking aggressive action against our military facilities," Peskov told reporters on a conference call. "This is "unacceptable and runs contrary to the Sochi agreements."

U.S. Troops Kill Civilians

A Syrian was killed and another was wounded in a rare clash Wednesday between American troops and a group of Syrians who tried to block a U.S. convoy driving through a village in northeastern Syria.

The killed man was among residents of a village east of the town of Qamishli who had gathered at an army checkpoint, pelting the U.S. convoy with stones and taking down a U.S. flag from one of the vehicles. At that point, American troops fired with live ammunition and smoke bombs at the residents, reports said.

A U.S. military spokesman claimed American forces conducting a patrol near Qamishli

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After Iranian 'Slap' in Response to Assassination: Senate Moves to Rein In Trump's War Powers



U.S. soldiers and journalists stand by the edge of a huge crater caused by an Iranian missile at the Ain al-Asad air base in Iraq, Jan. 13, 2020.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- The U.S. Senate is set to pass a bipartisan resolution this week to limit President Donald Trump's authority to launch military operations against Iran weeks after he ordered the assassination of a top Iranian general.

The War Powers resolution, introduced by Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.), came to the floor Wednesday with a final expected vote Thursday. While the measure is not likely to garner enough support to overturn a likely Trump veto, its expected passage in the Senate nevertheless illustrates a rare congressional effort to rein in the president's executive authority.

With U.S. Trying to Manipulate Situation: WHO Urges World Countries to Help Curb Virus

GENEVA (AFP) -- The death toll in China from the new coronavirus epidemic jumped on Wednesday, as the chief of the World Health Organization urged countries to work together against the "grave threat" posed by the outbreak.

The WHO is holding a conference in Geneva on combating the virus, which has killed more than 1,100 people in China and spread to dozens of countries around the world.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said viruses could have "more powerful consequences than any terrorist action".

Although 99 percent of the infections are in China, where it remains "very much an emergency", it also "holds a very grave threat for the rest of the world", Tedros said at the conference, where the virus was of-

ficially named "COVID-19".

The case of a British man who passed on the virus to at least 11 other people -- without having been in China -- has raised fears of a new phase of contagion abroad.

"We have to use the current window of opportunity to hit hard and stand in unison to fight this virus in every corner," Tedros said, warning that a failure to act would lead to far more cases in the future.

WHO sent an advance team to China this week for an international mission to examine the epidemic, where more than 44,000 people have now been infected.

Chinese authorities have locked down millions of people in a number of cities, but another 94 deaths were reported on Wednesday in the hardest-hit

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In addition to all 47 Democrats, the measure so far has support from Republican Sens. Susan Collins of Maine, Todd Young of Indiana, Mike Lee of Utah, Rand Paul of Kentucky and Jerry Moran of Kansas. The Democratic senators running for president are expected to be in Washington for the vote on Thursday, ensuring that the 51-vote threshold for the War Powers resolution will be met.

"The last thing this country should do is rush into or blunder into another war in the Middle East. And no matter who our president is, no president is smart enough to, on their own, make that kind of

a decision without deliberation," Kaine said in an interview. "The logic of the idea just gets more and more persuasive the more time that elapses after 9/11."

Indeed, Congress has abdicated war-making powers to the executive branch in the years after both chambers adopted authorizations for the use of military force against Al-Qaeda in 2001 and against Iraq in 2002. The war powers issue rose to prominence yet again last month in the days following Trump's Jan. 2 order of an airstrike that martyred General Qassem Soleimani, the head of the Iranian Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)'s Quds

Force.

If the War Powers measure is approved by both chambers as expected, it will be the second time such an effort has reached Trump's desk. Last year, the House and Senate passed a War Powers resolution intended to cut off U.S. military support for Saudi Arabia's war on Yemen -- the first time both chambers of Congress used the 1973 War Powers Act to constrain presidential authority. Trump vetoed that resolution.

Kaine's bill would require Trump to cease all hostilities targeting Iran within 30 days unless explicitly approved by Congress. He has modified the original language of the resolution to attract Republican support, including nixing references to Trump. The measure -- privileged under the War Powers Act -- was on hold during the Senate's three week impeachment trial, which concluded last week.

Like the Yemen vote, Kaine's effort will expose longstanding foreign policy divisions within the Republican Party. While the vast majority of Senate Republicans share the party's historically hawkish positions and supported Trump's decision to martyr Gen. Soleimani, several GOP senators have teamed up with Democrats in recent years to force votes to rein in presidential war-making powers.

"I think we've abdicated our duty to decide whether we should still be at war or not," said Paul, who has long opposed U.S. interventions in foreign conflicts and has

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White Supremacist Propaganda Jumps 120% in U.S.

NEW YORK (AP) -- Incidents of white supremacist propaganda distributed across the nation jumped by more than 120% between 2018 and last year, according to the Anti-Defamation League, making 2019 the second straight year that the circulation of propaganda material has more than doubled.

The Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism reported 2,713 cases of circulated propaganda by white supremacist groups, including fliers, posters and banners, compared with 1,214 cases in 2018. The printed propaganda distributed by white supremacist organizations includes material that directly spreads messages of discrimination against minority communities -- but also items with their prejudice obscured by a focus on gauzier pro-America imagery.

The sharp rise in cases of white supremacist propaganda distribution last year follows a jump of more than 180% between 2017, the first year that the Anti-Defamation League tracked material distribution, and 2018. While 2019 saw cases of propaganda circulated on college campuses nearly double, encompassing 433 separate campuses in all but seven states, researchers who compiled the data found that 90% of campuses only saw one or two rounds of distribution.

Oren Segal, director of the League's Center on Extremism, pointed to the prominence of more subtly biased rhetoric in some of the white supremacist material, emphasizing "patriotism," as a sign that the groups are attempting "to make their hate more palatable for a 2020 audience."

By emphasizing language "about empowerment, without some of the blatant racism and hatred," Segal said, white supremacists are

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