

U.S., Australian Hostages Freed by Afghan Taliban

PESHAWAR (Dispatches) – The Afghan Taliban have released American and Australian university professors held hostage for more than three years, Afghan government officials say, completing a delayed prisoner swap and raising hopes for a revival of talks.

American Kevin King and Australian Timothy Weeks were kidnapped in August 2016 from outside the American University of Afghanistan in Kabul where both worked as professors. They were freed in return for the release of three Taliban commanders under a swap that had been long delayed, the officials said.

The U.S.-backed government's decision to carry out the swap is seen as key to securing direct talks with the militants, who have, until now, refused to engage with what they call an illegitimate "puppet" regime in Kabul.

Talks between the Taliban and the United States aimed at ending their 18-year war collapsed in September after President Donald Trump called off what he described as a planned meeting at his Camp David presidential retreat.

"The two professors are safely freed and are being taken care of now," said a senior Afghan official on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

He did not provide further details.

Earlier on Tuesday, three Taliban sources familiar with the deal, including one in Qatar, home to the political leadership of the Afghan Taliban, said the three Taliban commanders who are part of the swap were freed from jail



Forces with Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security (NDS) escort alleged Taliban and Daesh militants after presenting them to the media, in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, on May 23, 2019.

in Afghanistan.

"Soon after their release, they were flown to Doha and handed over to the political office in Qatar," said a Taliban leader in Afghanistan, who declined to be identified because he is not authorized to speak publicly about the deal.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison confirmed the release of weeks.

"We regard this release as one of a series of confidence-building measures that are taking place in Afghanistan," Morrison said in a joint statement with his foreign minister. "We hope that such measures will set the stage for a ceasefire and intra-Afghan dialogue."

Spokesmen for the Afghan government and the United States embassy in Kabul were not immediately available for comment.

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Moscow's stance is that such settlements on Palestinian territory are illegal under international law, it said.

The UN human rights office said that the settlements in occupied Palestinian territory remain in breach of international law.

"This changes nothing. President Trump can't wipe away decades of established international law that settlements are a war crime," Andrea Prasow, acting Washington director at Human Rights Watch, said in a statement.

Philippe Nassif of Amnesty International said the construction and maintenance of the settlements breached international law and amounted to war crimes.

"Today, the United States government announced to the rest of the world that it believes the U.S. and Israel are above the law: that Israel can continue to violate international law and Palestinians' human rights and the U.S. will firmly support it in doing so," he said in a statement.

The direct impact on the ground may be limited but analysts say it will further embolden the settlement movement and may fend off potential legal moves against the occupying regime of Israel.

The Palestinian Authority -- which considers the U.S. biased and has rejected the Trump administration as a mediator if peace talks are ever revived -- denounced the latest decision.

Chief negotiator Saeb Erekat said the Palestinians would take a series of measures to oppose it. "We began deliberations in the UN to present a draft resolution in the Security Council," he said Tuesday. "We expect a (U.S.) veto but we will do it. Let the United States veto international law."

The U.S. change of policy was widely seen as an attempt to change the legal context for a series of suits and complaints against the occupying regime of Israel.

The European Union's top court last week ruled that EU countries must identify products made in Zionist settlements on their labels.

Ofer Zalberg, senior Middle East analyst with the International Crisis Group think tank, said the U.S. was trying to weaken the legal pressure on its ally.

"The Trump administration is trying to unravel international consensus on this issue of the illegality of settlements," Zalberg said.

Zionist settlers, who overwhelmingly form part of Netanyahu's right-wing constituency, said the U.S. policy change paved the way for annexation of the settlements.

Erekat said it was only the latest move by the U.S. to try and force the Palestinians to capitulate and give up their claims to an independent state.

Until now, U.S. policy was based, at least in theory, on a legal opinion issued by the State Department in 1978 which said that establishing of settlements in the Palestinian territories occupied a decade earlier by the Zionists went against international law.

The Fourth Geneva Convention on the laws of war explicitly forbids moving civilians into occupied territories.

While the United States has generally vetoed Security Council measures critical of the occupying regime of Israel, previous president Barack Obama, exasperated with Netanyahu, in his final weeks in office allowed the passage of Resolution 2334 that called Israel's settlements a "flagrant violation" of international law.

Pompeo said that the United States was rejecting the Obama administration's approach and claimed that the move was not giving a green light to Israel to build more settlements.

U.S. Holding... (Continued From Page One)

children can never be considered as a measure of last resort or in the best interest of the child. There are always alternatives available," Nowak told reporters in Geneva.

He added that even though the U.S. has not ratified the child rights convention, it is bound by the convention on civil and political rights, which forbids cruel and inhuman treatment.

"Separating children, as was done by the Trump administration, from their parents, even small children, at the Mexican-U.S. border... constitutes inhuman treatment for both the parent and the children," Nowak said.

"There are still quite a number of children that are separated from their parents, and neither the children know where the parents are nor the parents know where

their children are. That is something that should definitely not happen again."

Nowak said the Trump administration did not reply to a questionnaire submitted to member states while the report was being researched.

U.S. Prison System Long Plagued

For years, the federal Bureau of Prisons has been plagued by systematic failures, from massive staffing shortages to chronic violence. But the largest agency in the Justice Department has largely stayed out of the public view.

The death of billionaire financier Jeffrey Epstein and the revelation that he was able to kill himself while behind bars at one of the most secure jails in America has cast a spotlight on the agency, which has also been besieged by serious misconduct in recent years.

Staffing shortages at the agency — it employs more than 35,000 people and has an annual budget that exceeds \$7 billion — are so severe that guards often work overtime day after day or are forced to work mandatory double shifts. Violence leads to regular lockdowns at federal prison compounds across the U.S. And a congressional report released earlier this year found "bad behavior is ignored or covered up on a regular basis."

At the same time, the Bureau of Prisons will be responsible for carrying out the first federal executions in more than 15 years, the first of which is scheduled for Dec. 9.

The issues at the Bureau of Prisons were likely to take center stage Tuesday as the agency's new director appeared before the Senate Judiciary Committee. Her appearance came as federal prosecutors in New York prepared to charge two correctional officers who were responsible for guarding Epstein when he took his own life in August at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in Manhattan. The city's medical examiner ruled Epstein's death a suicide.

Rouhani ...

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"Iran welcomes the efforts of its neighbors to resolve regional countries' problems," he said, adding, "We believe that the U.S. military presence has doubled the problems of Afghanistan."

The Pakistani top general, for his part, praised the brotherly relations between Tehran and Islamabad and said that no country can undermine the ties.

The visiting Pakistani general, who arrived in Tehran on Monday, has held meetings with other Iranian officials, including Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hussein Baqeri and Army Commander Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi.

In April, Rouhani and Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan agreed to set up a point rapid reaction unit along the common border to combat terrorism.

Iranian military forces along the southeastern border areas are frequently attacked by terrorist groups coming from Afghanistan and Pakistan.

U.S....

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its role in working with all participating states towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East," he concluded.

A few days ago, the United States had announced it would not participate in the conference "because of Israel," according to Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna.

"The Americans refused to take part because Israel refuses to participate," said Mikhail Ulyanov. Israel is the only possessor of nuclear weapons in the Middle East, but its policy is to neither confirm nor deny having atomic bombs. Estimates show that the regime is currently in possession of 200 to 400 atomic warheads.

The Tel Aviv regime is also believed to possess the capability to deliver its nuclear warheads in a number of methods, including by aircraft, on submarine-launched cruise missiles and the Jericho series of intermediate to intercontinental range ballistic missiles.

The Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction is holding its first session from 18 November to 22 November 2019 at United Nations Headquarters in New York. The President-designate of the First Session is Ambassador Sima Bahous of Jordan.

Erdogan Says Told Trump: Turkey Not to Give Up Russian S-400s



President Tayyip Erdogan says he has told U.S. President Donald Trump during talks in Washington last week that Turkey will not give up on the Russian S-400 missiles it procured this year.

ANKARA (Dispatches) – President Tayyip Erdogan says he has told U.S. President Donald Trump during talks in Washington last week that Turkey will not give up on the Russian S-400 missiles it procured this year, despite protests from its NATO ally.

Ankara and Washington

have been at loggerheads over Turkey's purchase of the S-400s, which Washington says are not compatible with NATO systems and pose a threat to its F-35 stealth fighter jets.

In response, the United States has suspended Turkey from the jet program, where it

was a buyer and a manufacturer, and warned of possible U.S. sanctions over the deal.

Last week, Erdogan and Trump met at the White House to overcome mounting differences ranging from the S-400s to Syria policy. During the talks, Trump urged Erdogan to drop the S-400 systems in lieu of U.S. Patriot systems.

However, Erdogan said on Tuesday he had told Trump during their talks that Turkey will not abandon the S-400s.

"We agreed to seek solutions to the S-400 issue. I explained to Trump once again how we came to the point of buying S-400s," Erdogan told party members in parliament.

"I told him that we could not give up on the S-400s and that Turkey will not turn back," he said.

Erdogan also reiterated a warning that Turkey will seek fighter jets elsewhere if Washington continued to block its planned purchases of F-35s.

"If the current uncompromising stance on the F-35s persists, we told him (Trump) that Turkey would seek alternatives to meet its medium-term needs," Erdogan said.

Tensions between the NATO allies were further strained last month when Turkey launched an incursion against the Kurdish YPG militia in northeast Syria. Ankara views the U.S.-backed YPG as a terrorist group and has been infuriated by American support.

Despite what appears to be warm relations between Erdogan and Trump, the incursion prompted the U.S. Congress to pass one resolution recognizing the mass killings of Armenians in 1915 as "genocide" and another calling for sanctions on Ankara.

While Ankara has said the talks in Washington were fruitful, Erdogan's remarks since then about keeping the S-400s have angered some U.S. lawmakers.

Kuwait FM Named New PM Amid Government Feud

KUWAIT (Dispatches) – Kuwait's ruler has named Sheikh Sabah al-Khalid al-Sabah as prime minister, elevating him from his role as foreign minister, after a row between ruling family members and parliament in the Persian Gulf state led the last government to quit.

Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah initially tapped caretaker premier Sheikh Jaber al-Mubarak al-Sabah to form a new cabinet but he rebuffed the offer on Monday, citing a media campaign against him.

The government resignation came after lawmakers sought a no-confidence vote against the interior minister and as a dispute between senior officials, including the interior and defense ministers, over alleged mis-handling of public funds went public.

State news agency KUNA said the emir on Tuesday asked Sheikh Sabah al-Khalid, who has been Kuwait's foreign minister since 2011, to form a new government.

The oil policy of the OPEC producer, which is set by a supreme petroleum council, and foreign policy, which is steered by the emir, are unlikely to change under the new government.

Kuwait is an ally of the United States.

Power struggles between senior ruling family members have often played out in parliament. Cabinet resignations happen frequently when elected lawmakers are set to question or submit a no-confidence vote against senior government officials.

Saudi Arabia Sentences 18 to Jail for Corruption

RIYADH (Xinhua) – Saudi Public Prosecution has announced that 18 individuals have been sentenced to a total of 55 years in jail in corruption cases, the Saudi Press Agency reported.

The convicts are government officials and employees and companies' managers and staff, and the Public Prosecution presented 726 pieces of evidence against them. Besides the jail terms, they must pay fines worth

more than 1.066 million U.S. dollars.

Among the sentenced, an executive manager in the government was sentenced to 16 years in jail for receiving bribes from a businessman.