

How will Ankara react to oil deal with Syrian Kurds?

Sat, 2020-08-01 23:59

ANKARA: A surprise deal between American Delta Crescent Energy LLC oil company and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on the development of oil fields in northeastern Syria has sparked concerns about the reaction from Ankara.

One of the key disagreements between Turkey and the US on Syria has been about the latter's local cooperation with the SDF.

But Ankara has reportedly kept silent about this deal and not reacted negatively, according to the Al-Monitor news portal, despite the SDF being considered a terror group and a political extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) by Ankara.

The deal was reportedly made "with the acknowledgement and encouragement of the White House" with Republican Senator Lindsey Graham having engaged in talks with SDF leader Mazlum Kobani for the development of oil fields in the region by the American company.

Syria's oil supply is concentrated on the northeastern part of the country, especially in Qamishli and Deir ez Zor, which are controlled by the Kurdish-led autonomous administration.

The Kurdish-led SDF began withdrawing from Turkish-Syrian border zones last October in accordance with a deal brokered by Russia and Turkey. They were then redeployed to new positions about 30 km from the border in northeast Syria.

On July 10, Kobani met the top commander of US forces in the Middle East, Gen. Frank McKenzie, in northeast Syria to discuss regional issues.

Joe Macaron, a Middle East foreign policy analyst at the Washington-based Arab Center, said that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will not jeopardize his good relationship with US President Donald Trump – in arenas from Syria to Libya – for an inevitable US oil contract in SDF-controlled areas in Syria when he knows how important oil is for Trump.

FASTFACT

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"Ankara has made clear strategic gains in Syria and Libya thanks to US

support and has managed to push Kurdish forces away from its border while altering the dynamics in Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean," he told Arab News.

However, Macaron thinks that Erdogan can always bring up the issue at a later stage if the Trump administration shifts policy in Syria or if Trump loses the election. Not reacting now does not mean that Ankara will not make an issue of it in the future.

"This is an official deal between the company and the SDF. The Americans have a plan for this area but we don't know any detail about the contract. It is the reason why Ankara did not react strongly as the deal is not clear," Navvar Saban, a military analyst from the Istanbul-based Omran Center for Strategic Studies, told Arab News.

According to Saban, the vision of the US about the region and on the oil issue had changed in favor of long-term investments.

Nicholas A. Heras, Middle East security program manager at the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War, thinks the deal is more important to the SDF than it is to the Americans, which is probably why Ankara has not reacted strongly.

"The SDF needs to continue to build ties with the United States, and this oil deal strengthens the ties between the SDF and the US," he told Arab News.

According to Heras, Ankara seems to be calculating that because Syrian oil reserves are not large, and this deal is relatively small, if the Turks wanted to pursue further military action in northeast Syria this deal would not cause Washington to stop them.

Ruwan Al-Rejoleh, an independent analyst in Washington, DC, relates this deal with attempts by the US to facilitate intra Kurdish talks and Kurdish-Turkish indirect talks on the Syrian front to reach a settlement for groups in northeast Syria before the US withdrawal.

"President Erdogan offered Russia and US a proposal to use the oil revenues in Syria for reconstruction purposes that can be overseen through an international body but not in any way accepting or allowing the oil revenues to strengthen the local authority of SDF in northeastern Syria," she told Arab News.

Noting that James Jeffery, special US representative for Syria engagement, had reportedly informed Turkey about the oil deal and that Ankara had not reacted negatively, Al-Rejoleh thinks that there is a certain level of understanding between Washington and Ankara about the deal.

"The devil is in the detail; it is important to look at the fields that are included in the deal as well as Russia's position. Russia didn't express a position yet, however. Moscow is keen on the balancing act in a way to ensure that Syrians who live outside the SDF-led area will get their share from the oil revenue," she said.

But, according to Al-Rejoleh, this deal doesn't seem designed to empower the local governance authority of the SDF but rather to create an international understanding and platform, where a political deal can be reached through a shared economic platform of the oil revenues among local and international actors.



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[Syrian Democratic Forces \(SDF\)](#)

US sanctions target Syrian president's son, Syrian army unit
UK politicians call for return of Daesh brides, children from Syrian camps

[Armed group attacks village in Sudan's Darfur: tribal chief](#)

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Sat, 2020-08-01 16:48

KHARTOUM: Armed men attacked a village in Sudan's South Darfur province

causing an unknown number of casualties, a tribal chief said Saturday, in the latest violence to strike the remote region.

"Armed men on Friday attacked the village of Oringa, south of Nyala, the capital of South Darfur state," Yaakoub Mohammad told AFP.

"They set fire to and looted homes and fired upon residents, but we don't know the exact number of casualties," he said.

He added that three days earlier the group's leader had come to the village with armed men to demand that residents leave.

The villagers in turn called the police who arrested the group leader and imprisoned him in Kass district, where he remains in custody.

Sudan's Darfur provinces – which cover an area similar to that of France, much of it desert – have been plagued by years of violence.

The regime of Omar Al-Bashir, who was toppled in April last year, carried out counter-insurgency operations there from 2003 that resulted in the ex-president being indicted for genocide by the International Criminal Court. Alongside the devastating civil conflict in Darfur, which dragged on for years, there has long been localized clashes over land and access to water, mainly pitting nomadic Arab pastoralists against crop-growing farmers from long marginalized ethnic groups.

A week ago, 500 armed men attacked the district of Masteri, killing over 60 people, the majority from the Masalit community, according to the UN. Eighty-eight were wounded.

That attack triggered panic among residents of Masteri and nearby villages.

Around 2,000 families, comprising around 10,000 people, fled toward El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur state, around 50 kilometers from Masteri. Some 200 more families, comprising a further 1,000 people, crossed the border to Chad.

Sudan's Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok announced on July 26 that security forces would be deployed to Darfur to protect "citizens and the agricultural season."

There has as yet been no subsequent indication that any deployment has gone ahead.



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Sudan to deploy troops to Darfur after killings
Gunmen kill at least 20 farmers in Sudan's Darfur, says tribal chief

[Iraqi policemen killed protesters with hunting rifles: Minister](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2020-07-30 18:24

BAGHDAD: Iraqi policemen using their own hunting rifles killed protesters in the capital Baghdad this week, the government said, adding that the perpetrators had been suspended.

"According to eyewitnesses and forensic data, hunting rifles killed" two protesters, Interior Minister Othman Al-Ghanemi told reporters on Thursday.

The minister gave the names of three policemen and displayed the arms and ammunition they had purportedly used.

Hunting rifles were in the personal possession of the three, "who decided on their own account to make use of them," he told reporters.

They have confessed to using the weapons and have been suspended from their duties, Ghanemi said, adding that judicial proceedings were underway.

The account of the killings, which took place earlier this week, differed from that given previously by medics.

Medical sources said three protesters died but authorities mentioned only two deaths on Thursday.

Medics also said the three dead protesters had been hit by tear gas canisters, rather than live rounds, a version of events the government has denied.

Ghanemi said an investigation had been opened because the federal police had deployed "to fire live rounds in the air," contravening orders not to use live fire by the prime minister, who heads the armed forces.

Mustafa Al-Kadhemi came to power in early May, replacing Adel Abdel Mahdi, whose position became untenable amid months of protests stretching back to October last year.

The new premier has been keen to distance himself from his predecessor, who accused an unnamed third force of being behind the deaths of security personnel and hundreds of protesters.

The government announced on Thursday that 560 people had been killed in protests since October, a tally it said included those slain early this week.

Nearly all the dead were demonstrators killed at the hands of security forces, said Hosham Dawod, an adviser to the premier handling an investigation into the protests.

The families of each of the 560 victims will each be compensated with 10 million Iraqi dinars (around \$8,400), Dawod said.



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Ferris wheels and tombs off-limits to Iraqis on Eid holidays

[Iran's prisons 'catastrophically unequipped' to deal with COVID-19: Amnesty](#)

Sat, 2020-08-01 16:17

LONDON: Leaked letters from Iranian officials obtained by Amnesty International have revealed Tehran's complacency in the face of the coronavirus crisis and the country's overstretched prison system.

The [rights group said in a statement](#) Friday that Iran's prisons remained "catastrophically unequipped for outbreaks," after reviewing letters from

prison officials to the Ministry of Health that raised the alarm over a serious shortage of essential medical supplies.

Prison officials' requests for millions of masks and gloves, hundreds of thousands of litres of hand sanitizer and disinfectant, and other equipment essential for preventing the spread of the virus received no response from the Ministry of Health.

Diana Eltahawy, Amnesty's deputy regional director for the Middle East and North Africa, said: "These official letters provide damning evidence of the government's appalling failure to protect prisoners. Requests for urgently needed disinfectant products, protective equipment and medical devices have been ignored for months."

The leaked letters, sent by officials from Iran's Prisons Organization, singled out the presence of "older (people), pregnant women, nursing mothers and their infants who suffer from a weak immune system" throughout the country's prisons, and warned that government inaction would result in "security hazards" and "irreparable harm."

These vulnerable populations made the lack of protective equipment "particularly alarming," Eltahawy said.

"Overcrowding, poor ventilation, lack of basic sanitation and medical equipment, and deliberate neglect of prisoners' health problems, are making Iranian prisons a perfect breeding ground for COVID-19. The Iranian authorities must stop denying the health crisis in Iran's prisons and take urgent steps to protect prisoners' health and lives."

Tehran claimed in April that there had not been a single COVID-19 related death in Iranian prisons, but the documents obtained by Amnesty, as well as investigation by other rights groups, paint a far grimmer picture.

Prisoners with coronavirus symptoms are said to be neglected and ignored for days, before being put in solitary confinement – without medical care – when their symptoms worsen.

Amnesty's statement claimed that at least 20 have died in Iranian prisons from the virus, and at least one female prisoner who tested positive for the virus had been forcibly disappeared.

The outbreak within Iran's prison system is aggravated by chronic overcrowding.

Despite the official capacity of 85,000 detainees, Iran's prison population in July last year was around 240,000.

Tehran introduced a prison furlough scheme to prevent the spread of COVID-19, but only 29,000 prisoners were released. This leaves the number of prisoners still nearly three times higher than official capacity.

Amnesty said the overcrowding had contributed to "filthy and insufficient bathroom facilities," "widespread insect infestations," and "a severe

shortage of beds, meaning many prisoners have to sleep on the floor.”

“We once again call on Iranian authorities to urgently address overcrowding in prisons, including by immediately and unconditionally releasing all those detained for the peaceful exercise of their rights,” Eltahawy said.

The Amnesty report also urged Tehran to “ensure access to adequate food, water, health care, hygiene and bedding for all prisoners” and to “allow international monitors, including the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, to conduct independent, unannounced inspections of prisons.”



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Iran's Khamenei says sanctions failed, no talks with Trump
Number of coronavirus cases in Iran passes 300,000

'Turkish government is keeping key COVID-19 patient figures under wraps'

Author:

Sat, 2020-08-01 01:55

ANKARA: Turkey's top medical body has warned that the government is keeping key COVID-19 patient figures under wraps in order to gloss over the public health challenges facing the country, saying that the official statistics being given out are the "tip of the iceberg."

The government has not disclosed the number of critical care or intubated patients since July 29, sparking fear and concern about the underlying reason for the confidentiality.

Prof. Sinan Adiyaman, chairman of the Turkish Medical Association (TBB), said that the pandemic statistics were being presented in a way that suited the Ministry of Health.

"They should however open more data for society's access and be more transparent about the numbers," he told Arab News. "Turkey still has weak pandemic management and officials in Ankara unfortunately prioritize economic and political concerns over public health measures."

The TBB is expecting an increase in infections during Eid Al-Adha if public precautions are not taken in Turkey, where around 5,674 people have died due to the disease.

"Unfortunately due to the premature and uncontrolled moves of the government, the pandemic cannot be put under control and the figures about coronavirus-related deaths keep increasing since June 1," Adiyaman added. "The local data we directly receive from our local agents show that there is a reality far beyond than the one which is officially announced by the Health Ministry."

Officials in Ankara unfortunately prioritize economic and political concerns over public health measures.

Prof. Sinan Adiyaman, Chairman of the Turkish Medical Association

TBB claims that the center of Turkey's pandemic is Istanbul, followed by the southeastern province of Diyarbakir.

According to Adiyaman, keeping the figures secret is likely to push people into becoming careless and ignoring the seriousness of the health crisis. The latest official figures showed that there was a decrease in the number of daily coronavirus cases, dropping below the critical threshold of 1,000. But the TBB rejected the number, saying that the daily rates reached about 4,000 and that the figures provided by the government were "the tip of the iceberg."

"We keep warning the governmental officials about taking measures to restrict social mobility in the country, but in vain. They adopted normalization measures very quickly by June 1. The number of infected active cases in Turkey are fivefold compared to the world standards, which shows the presence

of patients whose COVID tests went negative, but who are in fact patients in clinical and radiological terms,” Adiyaman said.

The TBB has expressed its concerns since the start of the pandemic. It said that only giving statistics for patients testing positive, without including patients who tested negative but showed all the coronavirus symptoms, would undermine countrywide efforts to stop the pandemic. The information is considered important to stop the pandemic because it gives a fuller picture, as people assume that relatives, neighbors or friends who test negative but have COVID-19 symptoms do not need to respect social distancing or quarantine rules.

The World Health Organization (WHO) uses two key codes for identifying COVID-19 cases. One is for confirmed cases with laboratory testing and the other is for clinical or epidemiological diagnosis. Contrary to WHO guidelines, Turkey, which remains a COVID-19 hotspot in the Middle East, does not use the second code thereby keeping the number of infected people artificially low.

Turkey suspended flights to Iran and Afghanistan as part of its anti-coronavirus measures shortly after Turkish Airlines restarted international flights on June 11.

On Tuesday Germany extended its travel warning to Turkey over pandemic concerns, putting it on its list of high-risk countries.



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