

Idlib still turbulent despite virus agenda

Author:

Thu, 2020-03-26 01:18

ANKARA: Three weeks after the signing of a cease-fire agreement, Ankara is expected to do its homework to uphold its shaky March 5 deal with the Kremlin on Idlib and to ensure full security along the strategic M4 highway.

After their first joint patrol on March 15 was cut short due to local protests against the presence of Russian troops, the Turkish and Russian military conducted a second joint patrol along the M4 highway on the section of the highway linking the cities of Aleppo and Latakia on March 23.

Again, the route of the second joint patrol had to be reduced over security concerns because of tough local dynamics, with some armed factions trying to block joint patrols along the highway.

“The first priority of Turkey and Russia now is to ensure the security of the M4 highway linking Syria’s east and west and to eliminate any potential risk of attack. Establishing the safe passage along this road is our specific duty right now and we have to fulfill it within the upcoming months,” Aydin Sezer, an Ankara-based Middle East analyst, told Arab News.

Turkey recently established three new military posts in the Jisr Al-Shughour countryside in Idlib, located in the villages of Badama, Al-Najiya and Al-Sainiya.

Extremist factions that are not controlled by Turkey, especially Caucasian and Central Asian fighters, have been harshly criticized for continuing their destabilizing activities in Idlib – recently detonating improvised explosive devices on the route of a Turkish convoy patrolling the village of Sfukhon in Idlib province.

The explosions damaged two armored vehicles and injured two Turkish soldiers on March 24. Ankara did not, however, release any official statement about the injury of its troops.

The attack on Turkish soldiers came just four days after the country’s first reported casualties since the cease-fire of early March. Two Turkish soldiers were killed and another was injured in a rocket attack by radical groups in Idlib.

“The Turkish side pledged in the near future to take measures to neutralize radical extremist groups that impede the movement of columns of joint patrols of the M4 highway in the security corridor,” the Russian Reconciliation Center for Syria recently reported.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu visited Damascus on March 23, the same day of the joint patrols with the Turks, for talks with Syrian President

Bashar Assad. The visit came just three days after Putin and Assad had a telephone conversation about developments in Idlib.

Turkey's military is responsible for patrolling up to 6 km deep to the north of the security corridor being set up around the M4 highway, while Russian forces will patrol 6 km deep to the southern flank in the war-torn country's last rebel bastion. Turkish-backed rebels are also expected to remain in place for not torpedoing Putin-Erdogan agreement of March 5.

As part of the implementation of the Astana de-escalation agreement of 2017, control groups keep monitoring the compliance with the cease-fire conditions and detecting some cease-fire violations in Idlib province.

In the meantime, humanitarian actions are being carried out for the Syrian population with a total of 4,021,4074 tons of humanitarian cargo delivered so far, according to data from the Russian Reconciliation Center for Syria on March 25.

According to Sezer, there are signs of an impending escalation in northwestern Syria that are similar to the incidents in early February, and "the silence from Turkish authorities by not commenting either on any injury or on the implementation of the March 5 deal confirms it."

While the Assad regime accuses Turkey of backing rebel sabotage of joint patrols in Idlib, some rebel groups, including Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), rejected the Moscow deal. Some other groups such as Hurras Al-Din, Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria with a considerable number of foreign terrorist fighters in its ranks, is also seen as a rising threat.

"Turkey is expected to distinguish moderate armed opposition and terror groups in Idlib. If Ankara cannot persuade them to lay down arms, it has to enter into a fight to meet the commitments under the Moscow deal. What Russians expect is the total restoration of order in these territories. Therefore, it is early to anticipate a definite success from the Turkish side," Sezer said.

Last month at least 34 Turkish soldiers were killed in a single attack by Russian-backed regime forces. During February, 60 Turkish soldiers died in Idlib.



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UK government orders 10,000 ventilators from Dyson for coronavirus patients
UAE to disinfect public transport in battle against coronavirus

[Former FBI agent Bob Levinson has died in Iranian custody: family](#)

Thu, 2020-03-26 00:49

WASHINGTON: The former FBI agent Robert Levinson, who disappeared under mysterious circumstances in 2007, has died in Iranian custody, his family said Wednesday.

“We recently received information from US officials that has led both them and us to conclude that our wonderful husband and father died while in Iranian custody,” said a statement from Levinson’s family.



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Iran: Case ongoing over missing former FBI agent on unsanctioned CIA job
Pompeo has no comment on possibility of US-Iran prisoner swap

[Lebanese MP unveils Lebanese-made ventilator to aid coronavirus battle](#)

Thu, 2020-03-26 00:38

BEIRUT: Lebanese MP Neemat Frem revealed a ventilator prototype on Wednesday, two weeks after launching an initiative to build one with a group of specialized engineers and doctors.

Frem said: "The machine, which will benefit the country's intensive care units, was built according to high specifications and accurate, advanced and versatile technologies."

He was accompanied at the unveiling by Dr. Fadlo Sayegh, the head of the Anesthesiology and Reanimation Department at Notre Dame University Hospital

in Jounieh.



The ventilator was created by the engineering and technical team of Phoenix Co., which is affiliated with INDEVCO Industrial Group, headed by Frem.

“This Lebanese invention will be tested very soon. We will then work of making larger quantities of the ventilators if needed,” Frem said, noting that “initiatives like these highlight the strength of our society and our people’s high level of social responsibility. we will be preparing for the worse in coordination with the Ministry of Industry, which is bringing together all the initiatives and relevant ministries.”



“We are also working on manufacturing pre-fabricated isolation rooms, field hospitals and large quantities of medical face masks.

“What facilitated the manufacturing of the ventilator is the guidelines that were set by the UK in order to deal with the novel coronavirus. We adhered to these guidelines and even went beyond them,” Frem added.





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Coronavirus, work freezes and lockdown violators fuel Lebanon crisis UAE to disinfect public transport in battle against coronavirus

[UAE to disinfect public transport in battle against coronavirus](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-03-26 00:11

DUBAI: The UAE will carry out an extensive program to disinfect public facilities and transport including the Dubai Metro to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

The “national disinfection program” will take place over the weekend and will begin at 8:00 p.m. on Thursday and end at 6:00 a.m. on Sunday.

The movement of people and traffic will be restricted during this period, and public transport, including Dubai Metro, will close.

Citizens and residents are urged to stay at home for the duration of the program, except to buy food and medicine, receive healthcare or to work in vital sectors.

Vital sectors include energy, banking, communications, postal services, shipping, water and food, civil aviation and construction.



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UAE says medical masks are only necessary for people with chronic illness, flu symptoms

[France to withdraw all troops from Iraq due to coronavirus outbreak](#)

Wed, 2020-03-25 23:52

PARIS: France will withdraw its contingent of troops from Iraq, mostly trainers to local armed forces, because of the coronavirus pandemic, the chief of staff said on Wednesday.

France has around 200 military personnel working in Iraq either as trainers or in the headquarters of coalition forces in Baghdad.

“In coordination with the Iraqi government, the coalition has decided to adjust its deployments in Iraq and provisionally suspend training activities,” it said in a statement.

The UK defence ministry had already announced some of its troops would come home, citing a “reduced requirement for training” Iraqi security forces.

Iraq’s military had halted all training in early March to minimise the risk of the illness spreading among its forces, including from the US-led coalition helping fight remnants of the Islamic State group.



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