

Turkey-Russia spat 'not to affect missile agreement'

Mon, 2020-02-17 03:19

ANKARA: The dispute between Moscow and Ankara over Syria's rebel-held Idlib province will not affect the purchase of Russia's S-400 missile system, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Saturday after meeting his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov.

"They're two different issues," Cavusoglu added. "We can't change our principal stance, our policies, because of one disagreement with this country or that country. We shouldn't let the Syrian problem undermine our cooperation and also our relations."

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has demanded that the Syrian regime withdraw its Russian-backed forces from territory captured in its ongoing offensive in Idlib by the end of the month or face military retaliation. The ultimatum follows the killing of 13 Turkish soldiers by regime shelling in one week.

Aaron Stein, director of the Middle East program at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, tweeted: "Idlib isn't magic, and the S-400 issue won't magically go away. It is going to end badly."

In December 2017, Turkey and Russia signed a \$2.5 billion deal, vehemently opposed by the US, for the delivery of four S-400 batteries.

The transfer of all components of the S-400 system was completed last year. Turkey received the first batch of S-400s last year. The delivery date of the second batch is yet to be announced.

Ozgun Unluhisarcikli, Ankara office director of the German Marshall Fund of the US, said Washington sees the current tension between Ankara and Moscow as an opportunity to fix its relationship with Turkey.

FASTFACT

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"Ankara appears open to the approach. However ... Turkey has already taken delivery of (the S-400 system) from Russia," he told Arab News.

"Turkey's operationalization of the S-400s could be sanctioned by the US Congress despite the US administration's efforts to improve relations. Therefore, if the US and Turkey are serious about fixing their relationship, they need to find some sort of solution to the S-400 crisis."

Sinan Ulgen, a former Turkish diplomat who chairs the Istanbul-based Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies, told Arab News: "If we do witness

escalation in the coming days, with Turkey entering into direct military conflict with Syria, backed by Russia, it would be difficult to imagine a scenario where Turkey purchases yet another strategic weapons system from Russia, a second battery for the S-400, all the more so since it seems that Turkey is seeking more political support from its partners in the West, particularly from the US.”

Ulgen said if Ankara wants to improve its ties with the West, it will have to review its purchases of strategic weapons systems from Russia.



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Hezbollah slammed for unveiling Soleimani monument in Lebanon
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[Lebanese scouts group investigated over Hezbollah link](#)

Author:

Mon, 2020-02-17 03:15

LONDON: Famous for their fleur-de-lis symbol, nonpolitical education and

focus on outdoor adventure, scouting groups have been established all over the world.

But Britain's Mail on Sunday newspaper has reported that the World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM) is investigating a Lebanese scouting outfit for alleged links with terror group Hezbollah.

The Imam Al-Mahdi Scouts, which has 45,000 young male and female members, stands accused of training young Lebanese to become terrorists.

The Lebanese group has adopted the world-famous fleur-de-lis symbol, which was introduced by Robert Baden-Powell, a lieutenant general in the British Army in the early 20th century. The young scouts also wear the movement's traditional scarves and uniforms.

But they differ from other scouting organizations by being the youth wing of Hezbollah, which has carried out terror attacks throughout the Middle East. Hezbollah was last year proscribed "in its entirety" by the British government, having previously only faced legal sanctions for its military wing.

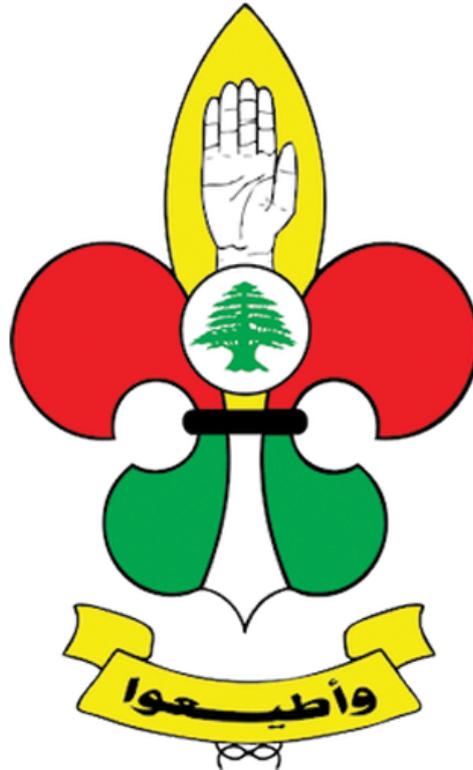
An investigation by the Mail on Sunday appears to show that young recruits to the Imam Al-Mahdi Scouts are indoctrinated from the age of four to become fighters for Hezbollah, which receives Iranian financial and military backing. Iran has been banned from World Scouting since 1999.

The Lebanese scouts have provided "honor guards" for the funerals of known Hezbollah terrorists, while photos show scouts posing with armed fighters. Despite the strictly nonpolitical nature of the scouting world, some of the photographed youngsters are seen wearing military uniforms.

Despite the revelations, the Imam Al-Mahdi Scouts remain an official member of the Lebanese Scouting Federation and the WOSM.

Membership of the group is limited to Shiite Muslims in Hezbollah's heartlands in southern Lebanon, Beirut and the Beqaa Valley.

On Saturday, the WOSM said it had launched an investigation into the group. Spokesman David Venn said: "WOSM disapproves of any practices that misuse the Scout program to involve children and youth in political recruitment or in using the Scout program for affiliation with any political party."



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Hezbollah slammed for unveiling Soleimani monument in Lebanon Iranian-backed Hezbollah stepping in to guide Iraqi militias after death of Qassem Soleimani

[Hezbollah slammed for unveiling Soleimani monument in Lebanon](#)

Author:

Mon, 2020-02-17 03:01

BEIRUT: Hezbollah on Saturday unveiled a monument to Iranian Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, who was killed by a US drone strike on Jan. 3.

The monument, on a hill in the southern Lebanese border town of Maroun Al-Ras, has been widely criticized on social media and by Lebanese politicians opposed to Hezbollah. "Are we in Lebanon or Iran? Why insist on changing the identity of Lebanon," tweeted May Chidiac, former minister for administrative development.

"Every day, Hezbollah asserts that it is a branch of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards ... not (a) Lebanese (party)."

Former Justice Minister Ashraf Rifi said: "The establishment of the Soleimani Monument in the south has nothing to do with the confrontation with Israel,

but rather with the assertion of Iran's mandate over Lebanon." He added: "The (Iranian) Quds Forces did not fight

HIGHLIGHT

Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani arrived in Beirut to meet with senior Lebanese leaders.

for Jerusalem, but rather destroyed Syria and Iraq and transformed Lebanon into a failed state." Meanwhile, Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah on Sunday called for a boycott of American goods and for "resistance" throughout the Arab and Islamic worlds. His remarks came as Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani arrived in Beirut to meet with senior Lebanese leaders.

Larijani had come from Syria, where he met with President Bashar Assad and reiterated Tehran's support for Damascus.

Nasrallah appeared on a screen at a gathering that Hezbollah had organized in southern Beirut to mark 40 days since the US drone strike that killed Soleimani and the deputy head of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis.



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Iran militias assassinated Lebanon's Rafik Hariri: Saudi Deputy Defense

Turkey tells Russia: Syria regime attacks on Idlib must stop

Author:

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Sun, 2020-02-16 15:03

ANKARA: Turkey's foreign minister said on Sunday he has told his Russian counterpart that the Damascus regime's attacks on the last rebel-held bastion in Syria must stop.

Backed by Russian air power, Syrian President Bashar Assad has been intensifying his assault on the holdout northwestern province of Idlib. And tensions have been running high between Ankara and Moscow after 14 Turks were killed in shelling by Syrian government forces in the region.

"I stressed that the attacks in Idlib must stop and it was necessary to establish a lasting cease-fire that would not be violated," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told journalists in Germany.

Cavusoglu met Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Saturday during the Munich Security Conference.

Turkey has 12 observation posts in Idlib as part of a 2018 deal reached between Ankara and Moscow in the Russian resort of Sochi to prevent a regime offensive.

But despite the agreement, Syrian regime forces, backed by Russian air strikes, have pressed ahead with an assault to retake the province, killing hundreds of people.

Four of the Turkish posts are believed to be encircled by Syrian forces, and Ankara has threatened to attack Damascus if they do not retreat by the end of February.

A Turkish delegation will head to Moscow on Monday, after Russian officials visited Ankara last weekend but no concrete agreement emerged.

Rebel supporter Turkey and Damascus ally Russia have worked closely on Syria in recent years despite being on opposing sides of the nine-year conflict.



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Car bomb kills two in Turkish-controlled Syrian town

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Sun, 2020-02-16 19:41

ANKARA: A car bomb attack Sunday killed two people in a Syrian border town controlled by Turkish forces, Turkey's defense ministry said. The explosion occurred in Tal Abyad, held by Turkish forces and Syrian proxies after Ankara launched a military operation against a Kurdish militia in October 2019.

Five other people were injured, the Turkish ministry said on Twitter. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the bombing. But the ministry blamed the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia, which Ankara sees as a "terrorist" offshoot of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

“The terrorist responsible for the attack and a terrorist who arrived in the area with another car containing bombs for a second attack were caught alive,” it added.

The PKK is blacklisted as a terrorist organization by Ankara and its Western allies.

But the West worked closely with the YPG in the fight against Daesh in Syria. Since Turkey’s offensive, there have been multiple car bombings blamed by Ankara on the YPG in which several civilians and Turkish soldiers have been killed.



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Turkey met responsibilities over Syria’s Idlib in Russia deal: vice president
Turkish-backed rebels down Syrian helicopter in Idlib