

Turkey should scrap Russian missile system or face US sanctions -White House official

Author:

Sun, 2019-11-10 23:17

WASHINGTON: The United States is very upset about Turkey's purchase of Russian missile defense systems and could impose sanctions on Ankara if it does not "get rid" of them, White House National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien said on Sunday.

"Turkey will feel the impact of those sanctions," O'Brien told CBS's "Face the Nation" in an interview, referring to penalties under the US law known as the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, which he said would pass Congress with "overwhelming" bipartisan support.

His comments came ahead of a visit by Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan to Washington on Nov. 13 to meet US President Donald Trump for likely crucial talks as the two NATO allies have been at loggerheads over a range of issues. One key disagreement is Ankara's purchase of the Russian S-400 anti-aircraft missile system, which Washington says is incompatible with NATO defenses and threatens its Lockheed Martin F-35 fighter jets.

Despite threats of US sanctions, Turkey started receiving its first S-400 deliveries in July.

In response, Washington removed Turkey from the F-35 program, in which Ankara was a manufacturer and buyer. But so far, it has not slapped any sanctions on Ankara.

Turkey has not yet activated the S-400 batteries it received, and Washington still hopes to persuade its ally to "walk away" from the Russian systems.

"There's no place in NATO for the S-400. There's no place in NATO for significant Russian military purchases. That's a message that the president will deliver to him (Erdogan) very clearly when he's here," O'Brien said.

Earlier this month, the head of Turkey's Defense Industry Directorate said a second S-400 delivery to Turkey may be delayed beyond a planned 2020 timeline by talks on technology sharing and joint production.

The S-400 issue is part of a wider range of disagreements between Turkey and the United States.

Washington was incensed by Turkey's offensive into northern Syria against US-allied Kurdish YPG fighters last month. Turkey halted the incursion after the Kurds withdrew from a border region under a US-brokered truce



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Will Turkey abandon S-400? Trump meeting will give answer
Is it the end of US nukes in Turkey?

[Tunisia's Islamist-inspired party wants leader to be house speaker](#)

Author:

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Sun, 2019-11-10 16:57

TUNIS: Tunisia's Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party which last month came top in legislative polls put forward its leader Rached Ghannouchi on Sunday to head the next parliament.

Ennahdha, which won 52 out of 217 seats in October's parliamentary election –

well short of the 109 needed to govern – also insisted that the new prime minister of Tunisia should be selected from the party. Ghannouchi, a divisive figure and veteran leader of Ennahdha, was proposed as candidate for speaker of parliament by the party's Shoura Council, according to council chief Abdelkarim Harouni. Ghannouchi has led Ennahdha since it was founded almost 40 years ago, carrying the movement to victory in a 2011 election, just months after the party reemerged from underground following the revolution that ousted autocrat Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. He has never run for office but won a parliamentary seat in Tunis in the October 6 legislative polls. Harouni on Sunday reiterated that Ennahdha wants one of its own figures to head the new government in the North African country. The Islamist-inspired party has until Friday to announce its candidate for the premiership. Ennahdha has been holding negotiations with other political groups to form a new government. But Harouni said "certain parties want to deprive the winner of the legislative election" from heading the cabinet. Tunisia's new parliament is expected to hold its first full session on Wednesday. The legislative polls were held between the first and second round of Tunisia's presidential election which was won by political outsider Kais Saied, a conservative academic.



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Top US military official says 500 troops to remain in Syria

Sun, 2019-11-10 20:19

WASHINGTON: US troop levels in northern Syria will probably stabilize around 500, a top American military leader said Sunday, weeks after President Donald Trump had announced a complete withdrawal.

"There will be less than 1,000, for sure," General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said on ABC's "This Week." "Probably in the 500ish frame, maybe six."

Trump's abrupt announcement last month that he had ordered a full troop withdrawal drew angry rebukes at home and abroad, with critics saying it could allow a resurgence of Daesh, while leaving US-allied Kurdish fighters in Syria vulnerable to a Turkish invasion.

The US president later relented in part, saying he would leave some troops in the region to protect valuable oil fields.

Milley, who has commanded troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, told ABC that it was important for US troops to remain in Syria so long as Daesh has a presence there.

"There are still Daesh fighters in the region," he said, using an alternate term for Daesh. "Unless pressure is maintained, unless attention is maintained on that group, there's a very real possibility there could be a re-emergence of Daesh."

Asked about the killing Oct. 26 of Daesh leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi by a US special forces unit, Milley said it would have a "significant disruptive effect on the organization." He said the US had "a considerable amount of information on his successor," Abu Ibrahim Al-Hashimi Al-Quraishi.

"Where opportunities arise," Milley said, "we'll go after him."

Trump has said he wants to wind down US military entanglements abroad where possible, but Milley predicted that American troops, already in Afghanistan for 18 years, would remain there "for several more years."

He was also asked whether he knew Alexander Vindman, the army lieutenant colonel and White House Ukraine expert who has testified about his concerns over a controversial phone call between Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Milley declined to comment "on a witness to an active investigation" – the House of Representatives' impeachment inquiry into Trump.



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Syrian, Turkish forces reignite clashes near border town
Turkish-Russian patrols pelted by residents in north Syria

[Hezbollah says its 'arm won't be twisted' as Lebanon crisis deepens](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Sun, 2019-11-10 15:11

BEIRUT: Political talks to agree an urgently needed Lebanese government are still deadlocked, as Hezbollah indicated it would not be forced into

concessions.

The latest failure to break Lebanon's political impasse will worsen pressures on an economy gripped by its deepest crisis since the 1975-90 civil war, amid protests against a political establishment widely regarded as corrupt and inept.

Since reopening a week ago, commercial banks have been seeking to stave off capital flight by blocking most transfers abroad and imposing curbs on hard-currency withdrawals, though the central bank has announced no formal capital controls.

A big part of Lebanon's economic crisis stems from a slowdown of capital inflows which has led to a scarcity of US dollars and spawned a black market where the Lebanese pound has weakened below its official pegged rate.

A meeting on Saturday evening between caretaker Prime Minister Saad Hariri and senior officials from Hezbollah and its Shiite ally Amal failed to yield any breakthrough toward forming the new cabinet, the sources said.

"The crisis is deepening," one source familiar with Hariri's position said. A senior source familiar with the view of Hezbollah and Amal said: "Nothing has changed. So far the road is completely blocked." A third senior source said the situation was still deadlocked.

Hariri quit on Oct. 29 in the face of unprecedented protests fueled by poverty, joblessness and lack of basic services like electricity.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

Hariri wants to lead a technocratic government devoid of other politicians, while Amal, Hezbollah and its Christian ally the Free Patriotic Movement want a government mixing technocrats and politicians.

The source familiar with Hariri's views has said he believes a cabinet composed of both technocrats and politicians would not be able to secure Western assistance and would also anger protesters who want to see a change of leadership.

Hariri reiterated his position in the meeting with caretaker Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil of Amal and top Hezbollah official Hussein Khalil, the senior source familiar with Hezbollah and Amal's view said.

Both Hezbollah and Amal communicated their view – that Hariri should return as premier of a new 'technopolitical' cabinet – at the meeting. Hariri said he would only agree to head a technocratic cabinet.

"Practically, what he wants is a government devoid of Hezbollah," the senior source said. "After 10 days have passed, matters must be decided."

The source familiar with Hariri's position said he believed Hezbollah, Amal and the FPM were seeking the inclusion in the cabinet of politicians rejected by the protesters.

These include FPM leader Gebran Bassil, foreign minister in the outgoing cabinet and a son-in-law of President Michel Aoun.

"If these faces return to government we will have pushed the street to return to protest in a greater way," the source familiar with Hariri's position

said.

One dollar was buying 1,800 pounds or more on Friday compared to 1,740 on Thursday, two market sources said. The pegged rate is 1,507.5 pounds.

In a statement apparently referring to the deadlock and to Hezbollah's loss of fighters in various conflicts, Hezbollah lawmaker Mohammad Raad said: "Our arms will not be twisted nor can we be neutralized from achieving the goals of the martyrs."

Lebanon's highest Christian authority urged the president to hasten the appointment of a prime minister and the formation of a government that meets protesters' demands.

"The country's situation cannot withstand another day of delays," Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Al-Rai said.



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Petrol pumps shut down in protest-hit Lebanon over dollar shortage
Lebanon's grand mufti calls for protesters' demands to be met

Blast in northern Iraq injures five Italian soldiers -army

Sun, 2019-11-10 18:53

ROME: A roadside blast wounded five Italian military members on Sunday in northern Iraq as they returned from a mission aimed at helping Iraqi troops combat Daesh, Italian military officials said.

The Italian Defense Ministry said three of the wounded were in "grave condition" after the explosion.

Rear Admiral Fabio Agostini said the five – three members of the navy and two of the army – are part of a special forces team that was traveling back after a mission aimed at finding Daesh refugees.

Agostini told Italian Rai state TV that Iraqi armed forces members were also injured in the blast but didn't say how many.

An Iraqi security official said the bomb exploded next to their vehicle as they were traveling just outside Kirkuk, wounding six Italian soldiers.

The discrepancy in the number of wounded wasn't immediately explained.

Italy's wounded were evacuated by US military helicopters to hospital in Baghdad.

"Our men were training Iraqi security forces engaged in fighting Daesh,"

Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio said, using an alternate term for Daesh.

"I am following the situation with sorrow and apprehension," he wrote on Twitter.

One Italian soldier lost a leg to amputation due to injuries from the bomb and another suffered serious internal injuries, Italian Gen. Nicola Lanza de Cristoforis told state TV.

The blast happened three days before the 16th anniversary of a suicide attack in the southern Iraqi city of Nassiriya, which killed 18 Italian servicemen, an Italian civilian and nine Iraqi civilians.

Iraq declared victory against Daesh militants two years ago, but the group continues to stage insurgent-type attacks across the country, particularly in northern Iraq.

Italy currently has more than 800 regular soldiers and some 80 special forces in Iraq.

(With AP and Reuters)



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Three killed in southern Iraq protests as Amnesty calls for urgent end to 'bloodbath'
Rockets hit Iraq base with US troops; no word on casualties