

# US Middle East envoy Greenblatt to resign after plan released

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WASHINGTON: Jason Greenblatt, President Donald Trump's special envoy for the Middle East, plans to resign once the long-delayed US peace plan for Israel and the Palestinians that he has been working on is released, officials said on Thursday.

Greenblatt, who had intended to stay only two years when he began working at the White House in early 2017, is eager to return to his wife and six children who stayed behind at their home in New Jersey, the officials said. Greenblatt and White House senior adviser Jared Kushner, as well as the US Ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, have led the effort to develop a peace plan for Israel and the Palestinians and have spent the entire Trump presidency working on the project.

Described by Trump as the "deal of the century," the Republican president's plan to solve one of the world's most intractable disputes has drawn deep skepticism from Palestinians.

Trump called Greenblatt "a loyal and great friend and fantastic lawyer" and said he would be leaving to pursue work in the private sector. "His dedication to Israel and to seeking peace between Israel and the Palestinians won't be forgotten," Trump said in a Twitter post.

So far, the White House has outlined a \$50 billion redevelopment plan for the Palestinians and neighboring countries but have yet to release their proposals for resolving difficult political issues like the status of Jerusalem.

US officials said the political plan is now complete and will be made public when appropriate. Trump has said he will release it some time after Israel holds an election on Sept. 17 that will decide the fate of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a close Trump ally.

Whether Trump releases the plan immediately after the election or he waits until a governing coalition is formed, a process that could take weeks, remains unclear.

The Palestinian Authority has boycotted the US peace effort since late 2017 when Trump decided to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, reversing decades of US policy.

The political details of the plan have remained under wraps, with Kushner refusing to say even whether it would offer Palestinians a state of their own.

Greenblatt will hand over much of his Middle East responsibilities to Kushner aide Avi Berkowitz. Brian Hook, the leader of the State Department's Iran team, will take on an increased role, a senior administration official said. Greenblatt, a former lawyer for Trump, said he was grateful to have been part

of the team to draft “a vision for peace.”

“This vision has the potential to vastly improve the lives of millions of Israelis, Palestinians and others in the region,” he said in a statement. Greenblatt has been a player in all of Trump’s moves aimed at bolstering support for Israel, such as the US recognition of both Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. The developing peace plan, which Greenblatt and others have kept secret, is viewed skeptically among many in the Arab world because of expectations it will be a pro-Israel vision. The US team says the plan will require concessions from the Israelis.

Kushner, in a statement, said Greenblatt “has done a tremendous job leading the efforts to develop an economic and political vision for a long sought after peace in the Middle East.”

“His work has helped develop the relationships between Israel and its neighbors as he is trusted and respected by all of the leaders throughout the region. He is a close friend and partner and will continue to make a positive impact on the world,” he said.





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## [Six suspected militants killed in Egypt](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2019-09-05 14:42

CAIRO: Six suspected extremists were killed on Thursday in a shootout with police near the Bahariya oasis southwest of the Egyptian capital, the interior ministry said.

Police carried out a dawn raid against “terrorist elements” in a desert area near Bahariya, roughly 300 kilometers (190 miles) southwest of Cairo, the

ministry said in a statement.

A shootout led to the death of six suspects, the ministry said, adding that a number of hunting rifles and four assault rifles were found at the site. Militants have launched several attacks in the vast desert area west of the Nile.

In November 2018, a Daesh attack killed six Copts and an Anglican after they left the Saint Samuel monastery west of the Nile in Minya province.

Daesh carried out another attack nearby in May 2017, killing 29 Coptic pilgrims, many of them children.

Tourists have also been killed in attacks, but the violence has mostly targeted police and soldiers.

Hundreds of security personnel have died in an escalation of attacks since the military overthrow of president Muhammad Mursi in 2013.

The ouster was led by then-army-chief Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, who became president following 2014 polls before securing an official 97 percent of the vote in elections last year.

In February 2018, the army launched a nationwide offensive against militants, focused mainly on North Sinai, where Daesh has a significant presence.



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## Kurdish official: Syria's 'safe zone' off to a good start

Author:

Wed, 2019-09-04 22:00

DARBASIYAH, Syria: The creation of a so-called "safe zone" in northeastern Syria has gotten off to good start, with US-backed Kurdish-led forces pulling back from a small, initial area along the Turkish border, a Syrian Kurdish official said – but calm can only prevail if Turkey also removes its troops. Ilham Ahmed, co-chair of the executive committee of the U.S-backed Syrian Democratic Council, said the understanding reached between Washington and Ankara last month, and in coordination with the Syrian Kurdish-led forces, constitutes a step toward starting a dialogue over mutual security concerns. "We seek to find a way to dialogue, and starting to implement this plan expresses our readiness and seriousness," Ahmed said in an interview Tuesday with The Associated Press.

"We want to tell the world and the coalition that we are ready to take serious steps to get to dialogue," she added.

Turkey views the US-backed Kurdish People's Protection Units, or YPG, in Syria as an extension of a Kurdish insurgency within Turkey.

Ankara has already carried out military offensives inside Syria to push the group away from the western end of the border. Over the last weeks, Turkish officials threatened a similar offensive in northeastern Syria, where troops from the US-led coalition are deployed to help the Syrian Kurdish-led forces in combatting remnants of the Daesh group.

The Syrian Kurds have been America's only partners on the ground in Syria's chaotic civil war. With US backing, they proved to be the most effective fighting force against the Daesh group and announced its territorial defeat earlier this year. The Kurds now worry about being abandoned by the US amid Turkish threats to invade Syria, and are keen to work out an agreement with both parties that would safeguard their gains.

Ankara and Washington announced last month that they would begin measures to implement a border "safe zone" to address Turkish security concerns. The Kurdish-led forces are expected to pull out of the zone, but details must still be worked out – including who then would patrol and administer it. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan over the weekend repeated threats of an offensive if Turkey's demands on the zone are not satisfied, including that its soldiers control the area.

Ahmed said more US troops will probably be needed to implement the zone, though the Americans have not said whether they will deploy any.

"In the coming days, and because of the needs of the formation and implementation of the security mechanism, they may need more forces. It is not yet clear what the US administration would decide," she said.

There was no immediate comment from the US-led coalition.

There are around 1,000 US troops in Syria on a mission to combat IS militants. President Donald Trump had said he wants to bring the troops home,

but military officials have advocated a phased approach.

Ahmed said initial steps have been positive but for calm to prevail Turkish troops must also retreat from the Syrian borders. She said while Turkey expresses concerns about the Kurdish-led forces, it is Ankara that has been a source of threat to Syria with the various military operations and its military posts in western Syria.

The Kurdish-led forces have begun removing fortifications along the border and have moved some troops away from the border. At least two U.S-Turkish joint reconnaissance flights have flown over the area, and on Tuesday, joint patrols between US troops and Kurdish-led forces also examined the area where fortifications have been removed.

The deal envisions an area five to 14 kilometers deep (three to eight miles) with no YPG presence, as well as removal of heavy weapons from a 20-kilometer-deep zone (12 miles), she said. Turkey wants a deeper zone. The length of the zone has not yet been agreed on, but will likely stretch hundreds of kilometers (miles).

Ahmed said discussions over other details of the security mechanism will open the way for Syrians who had been displaced from those areas, many of them fled to Turkey, to return. Turkey is home to 3.6 million Syrian refugees and Ankara said it wants the safe zone to provide an opportunity for many to return home.

Ahmed said only those originally from eastern Syria would be allowed to return. Kurdish officials worry Turkey wants to bring back large numbers of Syrians to the areas, which were previously controlled by IS militants, changing the demographic balance in the area. Syria's Kurds are predominantly from the country's northeast, living in mixed or Kurdish-dominated villages and towns there. She said no residents will be displaced because of the implementation of the safe zone.

"Calm must bring with it sustainable dialogue. Calm alone is not enough," Ahmed said. "If Turkish troops don't pull away from the borders, it will always be considered a threat."

Another top Kurdish official, Aldar Khalil, said the Kurdish-led administration and forces would not accept Turkish forces or permanent bases in the so-called safe zone or a free hand for Turkish flights over the area. He said while an understanding has been reached, a final deal would constitute an indirect Turkish recognition of the Kurdish-led administration in northeastern Syria. He said, however, a final deal is not imminent.



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Syrian Kurds to remove fortifications from Turkish border

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## [British MPs unruly? Come to Lebanon, Mr. Speaker](#)

Wed, 2019-09-04 21:16

BEIRUT: House of Commons Speaker John Bercow provoked widespread mirth in Lebanon on Wednesday when he told unruly British MPs they were setting a bad example to a visiting delegation of Lebanese politicians.

"I'm not sure at the moment how impressed they'll be," said Bercow, pointing to the visitors' gallery as MPs in the Commons chamber argued and shouted at each other in a heated debate over Brexit.

In fact, the visitors probably thought it was a relatively uneventful session, Lebanese commentators said, pointing out that Lebanon's

parliamentary speaker Nabih Berri often used his ceremonial hammer to break up actual fights.

“Bercow does not know what happens in the Lebanese Parliament,” writer Hassan Daoud said. “They are not exactly a role model.”

Visiting Parliamentary delegation from [#Lebanon](#) including [@JaberYassine](#) [@NahasNicolas](#) and Ibrahim Azar together with [@LebanonEmbUK](#) [@mortadarami](#) formally welcomed by the Speaker of the [@HouseofCommons](#) Rt Hon John Bercow MP with UK-Lebanon APPG Chair Rt Hon John Hayes MP [pic.twitter.com/CY0tBtj0iK](https://pic.twitter.com/CY0tBtj0iK)

– BGIPU (@BGIPU) [September 4, 2019](#)

Actor and playwright Zaki Mahfoud said: “No matter how loudly the British MPs argue with each other, none of them will challenge another by saying ‘My father is stronger than your father.’”

“They won’t show off about the number of votes they got, or boast that their weapons brought the president to office, as Lebanese MPs do.”

Jad Shahrour, of the SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom, said: “If Bercow had been following what was happening in the Lebanese parliament, he would have heard the screams and insults exchanged by MPs.”

One of the Lebanese MPs visiting Westminster, Yassin Jaber, also appeared to find the Commons uproar unsurprising. The visit took place “at a sensitive political moment in the history of the UK,” he said.



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British PM Johnson to restrict parliament time before Brexit

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## [Israel's Netanyahu makes snap trip to London for Johnson talks](#)

Wed, 2019-09-04 20:57

JERUSALEM: With less than two weeks to go before Israel's general election, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said he is to visit London on Thursday for talks with Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

It said Netanyahu, facing what could be a tough fight for re-election on September 17, would also meet US Defense Secretary Mark Esper while in the British capital.

Netanyahu returns to Israel on Friday.

It would be his first meeting with Johnson or Esper since the two took up their current posts, his office said in a statement.

“The PM will discuss with British prime minister Johnson the situation in the (Middle East) region and how to repel Iranian terror and aggression,” it said.

The meeting with Esper, it added, would focus on “Israel’s security needs” after the two had spoken by phone on Tuesday and agreed to “expand their conversation in London.”

Israeli media have said the United States and Israel are discussing the possible announcement of some form of defense alliance, likely to boost Netanyahu’s image as an international statesman.

Just ahead of inconclusive April 9 parliamentary polls, US President Donald Trump acknowledged Israeli sovereignty over the Golan, in what amounted to a major pre-election gift to his close ally Netanyahu.

On March 25 the two men met in Washington for a signing of Trump’s order recognizing Israel’s right to the strategic Golan Heights it captured from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War.



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Nancy Pelosi assails ‘weakness’ of Donald Trump, Benjamin Netanyahu