

Russia announces ceasefire in Syria's Idlib from Saturday

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Fri, 2019-08-30 09:17

MOSCOW: Russia on Friday announced that Syrian government forces would cease fire in the northwestern province of Idlib from Saturday morning.

An agreement was reached on "a unilateral ceasefire by Syrian government forces in the Idlib de-escalation zone, from 6:00 am on August 31," the Russian Reconciliation Centre for Syria said in a statement.

The announcement came after Russian-backed regime forces advanced in the militant-held bastion, one of the last holdouts of opposition to President Bashar Al-Assad's regime.

The statement said the ceasefire aimed "to stabilise the situation" in Idlib and urged anti-government fighters to "abandon armed provocations and join the peace process".

After months of intense bombardment, regime forces launched a ground offensive against Idlib earlier this month.

Syria's war has killed more than 370,000 people and displaced millions since it started in 2011.

Russia launched a military intervention in support of Assad's regime in 2015, helping his forces to reclaim large parts of the country from opposition fighters and militants.

Earlier on Friday, Turkey's foreign minister said Russia had assured Turkey its observation posts in northwest Syria would not be attacked.

Speaking in Oslo, Mevlut Cavusoglu warned that continued attacks by Russian-based Syrian government forces in rebel-held Idlib province could unleash another wave of Syrian refugees to Europe. He added that Turkey's military, which backs some Syrian rebel groups, would leave the region only when a political solution was found.



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Turkey demands smaller Syria safe zone in US negotiations Trump, Erdogan speak over telephone about trade and Syria situation

[UK calls for broad support to tackle Gulf shipping threats](#)

Author:

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Fri, 2019-08-30 11:01

LONDON: British Foreign Minister Dominic Raab will call for more international support to protect shipping in the Strait of Hormuz when he meets his French and German counterparts later on Friday for talks about

Iran.

Last month, Iran seized a British-flagged oil tanker in the strait, the Gulf's outlet to the open seas, in apparent retaliation for Britain's seizure in Gibraltar of an Iranian ship accused of violating European sanctions by taking oil to Syria.

Britain joined a US-led mission to escort merchant vessels through the Strait of Hormuz at the start of August but Germany and France declined to take part amid fears that it could increase the chance of open conflict with Iran.

"We...need the broadest international support possible to tackle the threats to international shipping in the Strait of Hormuz," Raab said in a statement before he attends a meeting of European foreign ministers in Helsinki.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said a possible separate European maritime defense operation would be discussed in Helsinki, though her foreign minister Heiko Maas previously acknowledged it would be slow to get off the ground. French defense minister Florence Parly told AFP on Thursday that she would back an EU-led "dissuasive presence."

Last week, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said international waterways would be less secure if his country's oil exports faced complete sanctions.

Raab reiterated Britain's commitment, alongside Germany and France, to a 2015 nuclear deal that US President Donald Trump pulled out of last year, reimposing sanctions on Iran.

"The nuclear deal is the only deal on the table that prevents Iran from getting a nuclear weapon and we will continue working together to encourage Iran to uphold the agreement in full," Raab said.

The 2015 deal between Iran and six world powers, reached under former US President Barack Obama, aimed to curb Iran's disputed uranium enrichment program in exchange for the lifting of many international sanctions on Tehran.

Trump said on Monday at a G7 summit in Biarritz, France, that he might be willing to meet Rouhani in the coming weeks to end confrontation over the deal.



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[US Treasury sanctions Lebanon's Jammal Trust Bank for Hezbollah support](#)

Thu, 2019-08-29 22:05

WASHINGTON: The US on Thursday sanctioned Lebanon-based Jammal Trust Bank SAL and its subsidiaries for allegedly facilitating the financial activities of Hezbollah, according to the Treasury Department.

It said the bank gives money to the families of suicide bombers.

"The Treasury is targeting Jammal Trust Bank and its subsidiaries for brazenly enabling Hezbollah's financial activities," the statement said.

“Corrupt financial institutions like Jammal Trust are a direct threat to the integrity of the Lebanese financial system.

“Jammal Trust provides support and services to Hezbollah’s Executive Council and the Martyrs Foundation, which funnels money to the families of suicide bombers,” said Sigal Mandelker, Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence.

“The US will continue to work with the Central Bank of Lebanon to deny Hezbollah access to the international financial system. This action is a warning to all who provide services to this terrorist group.”

Separately, the Treasury also sanctioned four individuals for moving money from Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to Hamas through Hezbollah, which the US says is backed by Iran.

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Changes to proposed US anti-Hezbollah sanctions allay Lebanon’s fears
Kingdom extends Hezbollah sanctions

Ousted mayors in Turkey denounce 'political' sackings

Author:

Thu, 2019-08-29 21:11

ISTANBUL: Three pro-Kurdish mayors sacked by the Turkish government this month over alleged links to militants lambasted on Thursday a “political putsch” they vowed to challenge in court.

The mayors of the eastern cities – all members of the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) elected in March – were removed on Aug. 19 over alleged ties to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).

The sacking of the Diyarbakir, Mardin and Van mayors – Adnan Selcuk Mizrakli, Ahmet Turk and Bedia Ozgokce Ertan respectively – came after they had won strong majorities.

Since their removal, there have been protests in the Kurdish-majority region, often blocked by police using heavy force including water cannon.

“We were deprived of the opportunity to serve the people by the political putsch on Aug. 19,” said Turk, the deposed Mardin mayor and a key figure in the Kurdish movement.

“It’s a political decision aimed at preventing the Kurdish people’s struggle for democracy, to intimidate the people and to block our efforts to bring about change in Turkey,” he added.

Ertan said the HDP was going to “exhaust all legal channels” to challenge the sackings.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan last week defended the decision accusing the mayors of serving “terrorists instead of the people.”

The Interior Ministry said there had been complaints against the three of providing financial support to the PKK. The PKK is banned as a terrorist organization by Ankara and its Western allies.

Turk said the allegations were “unfounded.”

The Ankara-appointed governors of each province will be in charge of the three municipalities.

Erdogan often accuses the HDP of having links to the PKK, but the party says it is being targeted because of its strong opposition to the president.

Dozens of officials and elected HDP MPs were arrested during a crackdown after a failed 2016 coup bid.



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Turkey suspended mayors of 3 major Kurdish-majority cities. What's next? Istanbul's new opposition mayor cuts funding to some pro-government groups

[Palestinians to file complaint over Honduras Jerusalem move](#)

Author:

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Thu, 2019-08-29 15:03

RAMALLAH: The Palestinian foreign ministry said Thursday it would file a complaint at the United Nations against Honduras, after the Central American state recognised the disputed city of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Israel considers all of Jerusalem as its undivided capital, while the Palestinians see the eastern part of the city as the capital of their future

state.

US President Donald Trump recognised Jerusalem as capital of the Jewish state in December 2017, breaking with decades of international consensus that the city's status should be decided in peace talks.

Both Washington and Israel have since encouraged other countries to take similar steps.

So far only Guatemala and Paraguay have transferred their embassies, and Paraguay later reversed its decision.

On Tuesday, Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez announced that his country would open a diplomatic office in Jerusalem.

The mission will be an extension of Honduras' Tel Aviv-based embassy, but Hernandez said Tuesday it was "recognition that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel."

In a statement Thursday, the Palestinian foreign ministry confirmed it would submit a formal complaint against Honduras to the UN's Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

It called the decision a "direct aggression" against the Palestinian people and a "blatant violation of international law and legitimacy."

Israel occupied predominantly Palestinian east Jerusalem in 1967 and later annexed it in moves never recognised by the international community.

Around 200,000 Israelis now live in east Jerusalem in settlements considered illegal by much of the international community.

In a statement, senior Palestinian official Hanan Ashrawi said the leadership would "reassess its relationship with Honduras".

"The status of Jerusalem as an occupied city is endorsed by the vast majority of states, in line with their standing legal and moral obligations to uphold international law," she added.

Hernandez is expected to visit Israel and open the new mission in the coming days.

Ashrawi also condemned the tiny Pacific Ocean island state of Nauru, which recently recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital.



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