

Syria at peace talks says cease-fire depends on Turkey

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Fri, 2019-08-02 12:11

NUR-SULTAN, Kazakhstan: Syria's representative at peace talks in Kazakhstan on Friday said the success of a cease-fire in the northwestern region of Idlib would depend on Turkey disarming rebels of heavy weapons and implementing a buffer zone.

Syrian negotiator Bashar Jaafari attacked the Turkish military presence in the northwest of the country and called Syria's cease-fire statement on Thursday "a test of Turkey's intentions."

The comments came during the second day of talks brokered by Syria's allies Russia and Iran, along with rebel-backer Turkey.

Jaafari also called on the guarantors of the talks to assume "their responsibilities by putting pressure on Turkey" to fulfil the conditions of an accord struck last year.

"The cease-fire agreement is conditioned on Turkey upholding the Astana and Sochi agreements by disarming terrorists of heavy and medium weapons," Jaafari said.

Jaafari accused the militant groups of shelling areas under regime control in northwest Syria "from areas Turkey controls in Idlib."

"Even though we are patient, this time our patience will be limited. We will not be waiting endlessly for Turkey to fulfil its commitments," he said.

Syria's state news agency SANA reported Thursday that the government had agreed to a truce in Idlib on condition a Turkish-Russian buffer-zone deal is implemented.

It cited a military source who announced the regime's "approval for a cease-fire in the de-escalation zone in Idlib starting from tonight" on the condition that jihadists and rebels withdraw forces and weaponry from a buffer zone as per a September accord.

Moscow welcomed the statement.

Idlib is the last major jihadist-run bastion in Syria after eight years of brutal conflict.

Idlib and parts of the neighboring provinces of Aleppo, Hama and Latakia are under the control of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, a jihadist group led by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate.

The region is supposed to be protected from a massive government offensive by a September buffer zone deal, but it has come under increasing bombardment by the regime and its Russian ally over the past three months.

A joint statement on the talks in Kazakhstan's capital Nur-Sultan released by Russia, Iran and Turkey showed little progress toward ending Syria's conflict.

The war in Syria has killed more than 370,000 people and displaced millions since it started in 2011 with a crackdown on anti-government protests.



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Airstrikes halt in Syria's Idlib as truce goes into effect
Syrian regime gains ground in opposition bastion

[Tunisia presidential hopefuls line up for September polls](#)

Author:

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Fri, 2019-08-02 11:23

TUNIS: Presidential hopefuls in Tunisia began registering their candidacies on Friday for snap September polls called after the death of 92-year-old

leader Beji Caid Essebsi.

Eight would-be candidates, including media magnate Nabil Karoui, submitted their papers to the North African country's electoral commission.

Prime Minister Youssef Chahed has not yet officially registered, although his party said on Wednesday he would stand in the polls.

Originally scheduled for November, the vote was brought forward to September 15 following Essebsi's death in late July.

Karoui was charged with money laundering this month after stating his intention to stand in the polls.

He was nearly removed from the race in June when the parliament passed an amended electoral code that would bar any electoral candidate who handed out "favours in cash or in kind" in the year before the vote.

But Essebsi neither rejected nor enacted the bill, leaving the door open for Karoui to run.

The media mogul was an active supporter of Essebsi's election in 2014 and has become the prime minister's fiercest rival.

Chahed, who studied agricultural engineering, entered politics after the 2011 uprising which ousted autocratic president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

Launched at the start of the year, his Tahia Tounes has become the second largest party in parliament, behind Islamist-inspired Ennahdha.

Longtime Ben Ali opponent and head of Tunisia's Democratic Current party Mohamed Abbou also submitted his candidacy on Friday.

He was joined by Abir Moussi, the only woman so far running in the polls.

She heads a party formed from the remnants of Ben Ali's ruling party and has called for the exclusion of Islamists, including Ennahdha.

Presidential hopefuls have until August 9 to register, with the commission set to provide a final list of candidates on August 31.

The campaigns are scheduled to run from September 2 to September 13, with the preliminary results announced two days after the polls.

A date for the second round of presidential elections has not yet been decided, but the electoral commission said it would be held no later than November 3.



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Tunisia prime minister to run for president following Essebsi's death
Tunisia bids farewell to president Essebsi at state funeral

[Yemen's Daesh affiliate claims Aden police station attack](#)

Author:

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Fri, 2019-08-02 10:11

SANAA: Daesh's affiliate in Yemen has claimed responsibility for a deadly attack on a police station in the southern city of Aden the previous day. That attack killed 11 people and involved suicide bombers using a car, a bus and motorcycles laden with explosives that targeted a police station in the

city's Omar al-Mokhtar neighborhood during a morning police roll-call. It was one of two major attacks in Aden on Thursday that killed a total of 51 people. The other attack involved a ballistic missile fired by Yemen's Houthi militants at a military parade and killed at least 40 troops.



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Al-Qaeda attack kills 19 soldiers in south Yemen: security officials
Tehran blamed for Yemen carnage after scores die in parade attack

[**Airstrikes halt in Syria's Idlib as**](#)

truce goes into effect

Author:

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1564732546496277400

Fri, 2019-08-02 07:41

BEIRUT: Opposition activists said airstrikes have stopped in northwestern Syria after a truce went into effect there, seeking to reduce violence in the wake of a three-month government offensive.

Syrian state media quoted an unnamed military official as saying the conditional cease-fire went into effect at midnight Thursday.

The reports say the rebels will have to retreat 20 kilometers from demilitarized areas around the stronghold agreed to in a cease-fire deal reached last September.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says the province of Idlib is witnessing "cautious calm" on Friday as warplanes stopped flying over the province.

Ahmad Sheikho of the opposition's Syrian Civil Defense, also known as White Helmet, says that since midnight "there are no warplanes in the air" but that artillery shelling continued.



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First group of Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian pilgrims leave Beirut for Hajj
Syrian regime gains ground in opposition bastion

Syrian regime gains ground in opposition bastion

Author:

Thu, 2019-08-01 22:48

BEIRUT: Syrian regime forces have gained some ground in the country's last opposition bastion during a Russian-backed offensive that aid agencies warn is growing bloodier.

The wave of violence in northwest Syria since late April has killed more than 400 civilians and forced more than 440,000 to flee toward the Turkish border, the UN said last week.

Syria's army seized a handful of villages, fields and hills in the Hama countryside in the past two days, a military media unit for Lebanon's Hezbollah, which fights alongside Damascus, said on Thursday.

The region – including Idlib province and parts of nearby Hama – is part of the last major stronghold of armed opposition to Syria's Bashar Assad, who has vowed to reclaim all of Syria, though his side has not made major advances in this latest assault.

In rare public comments, the Syrian army's political chief pledged to seize Idlib if Russia, Assad's key ally, does not reach a diplomatic solution with Turkey, long an opposition backer.

Airstrikes by the Syrian regime and its allies have hit schools, hospitals, markets and bakeries, UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet said last week. She denounced the "apparent international indifference" to the mounting civilian casualties.

Bombing has escalated in the last four weeks, killing and wounding more people than at any time this year, the nonprofit Doctors Without Borders said on Wednesday night.

At least 33 children were killed since the end of June, more than during all of 2018, the charity Save the Children said last week. "Bodies, some torn into pieces or burned beyond recognition, are still being recovered from the rubble," it said.

Maj. Gen. Hasan Hasan, head of the Syrian Army's political bureau, said on Thursday that the military path to eliminate "terrorism" in the north is ongoing.

He told the pro-regime Al-Watan newspaper that it would be good if Moscow or Tehran could find a solution through talks with Ankara, which has Turkish forces stationed in the northwest.

“But at the same time, when matters reach a dead end, then the Syria Arab Army which cleansed all these vast areas ... will not stop at all, neither at Idlib nor at any area,” he said.

The dominant force in Idlib is Tahrir Al-Sham, formerly the Nusra Front, and factions backed by Turkey also have a presence in the region.

The regime has described its operations as responses to militant violations and has denied targeting civilians during the eight-year war.

Idlib falls within a “de-escalation zone” agreed on last year.



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Syrian regime, Russian forces kill over 40 civilians in Idlib province:
MonitorUN experts: Daesh aims for resurgence in Iraq, Syria