

US plan for military deployment costs worries Turkey

Author:

Mon, 2019-03-11 22:32

ANKARA: The US plans to demand that allies hosting American troops cover the full cost of their deployment and pay an additional amount, Bloomberg reported on Friday.

The idea, which US President Donald Trump has floated for months, has raised concerns in fellow NATO member Turkey, where American troops are stationed in the Incirlik air base, 250 miles southeast of Ankara.

Analysts say the plan may cause a further deterioration in US-Turkish relations, and may trigger a debate in Turkey about whether the presence of American troops is desirable.

In a separate move, the Pentagon recently warned Turkey that it could be banned from buying the US F-35 and Patriot defense systems if it goes through with plans to buy Russia's S-400 air defense system.

Ziya Meral, senior resident fellow at the British Army's Center for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research, said Turkey's Incirlik is used by the US for its own purposes, not to defend Turkey.

If Washington implements its plan regarding deployment costs, "it would add fuel to the fire of voices in Turkey asking Ankara to put an end to the US presence in Incirlik," Meral told Arab News.

Combined with the crisis over the S-400s, and strained US-Turkish relations, he said it may trigger a strategic rift that would be the final nail in the coffin of bilateral ties.

"This would not only harm US military operations and reach in the region ... but would also be a major win for Russia and a blow to NATO's integrity," he added.

Incirlik has been in use since December 1954, when Turkey and the US signed a joint-use agreement. It was also used by coalition forces during the first Gulf War for combat missions over Iraq.

The base is currently home to the 39th Air Base Wing of the US Air Force, and holds B61-type hydrogen bombs.

In 2015, Turkey authorized the use of the strategically important base as a launching pad for aerial operations by the US-led anti-Daesh coalition in Syria. The base is believed to host about 2,000 American service members.

Calls to close it, especially by Turkish nationalists, have increased recently as relations between Ankara and Washington have deteriorated.

Ankara has warned several times that it would consider denying the US access to the base, which has also been used as leverage against Germany.

After Turkey refused to permit German MPs to visit the base, Berlin decided to relocate its military planes from Incirlik to Jordan in 2017.

Prof. Serhat Guvenc, from Istanbul's Kadir Has University, said Jordan's Al-Asrak air base has always been seen by the US as an alternative to Incirlik.

"It wouldn't provide similar advantages like the Incirlik air base, but the US may renounce its presence in Turkey considering the increased political burdens," he told Arab News.

Asking Turkey for a premium for the presence of US troops on its soil is a non-starter, he said.

"In that case, Ankara may either request that the US leave its soil completely, or decrease its military presence to a minimum," he added.

But Oubai Shahbandar, a defense analyst and fellow at the New America think tank's International Security Program, said US military cooperation with Turkey in Syria will be as crucial ever with Daesh's defeat.

"Iran-backed militias in Iraq want to close down the US Al-Asad air base in the Iraqi desert, which could make Incirlik as important as ever to support kinetic strikes against Daesh terror remnants," he told Arab News. A satisfactory deal will eventually be reached between Washington and Ankara, he said.



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Algeria's President Bouteflika says he will not stand for fifth term and postpones election

Mon, 2019-03-11 20:36

ALGIERS: Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika bowed to widespread protests on Monday by announcing he will not seek a fifth term and delaying next month's presidential election.

After 20 years in power, Bouteflika made the dramatic move in a letter to the Algerian people released by his office. He promised an interim leadership structure to plan new elections, and said he will not seek to run again.

Bouteflika, who is 82, has barely been seen in public since a 2013 stroke. He has faced unprecedented protests in recent weeks demanding that he abandon plans to seek another term.

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President Bouteflika returns to Algeria amid fresh protests

[Tunisia minister says hospital infection killed 12 newborns](#)

Author:

AFP

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Mon, 2019-03-11 14:45

TUNIS: A dozen newborn babies whose deaths at a Tunisian state hospital sparked public outrage are believed to have been killed by an infection acquired in the clinic, the acting health minister said Monday. Sonia Ben Cheikh told a news conference that a 12th infant had died at the

Rabta state hospital in Tunis on Sunday.

According to the preliminary findings of the ongoing investigation, a nosocomial (hospital-acquired) infection caused the deaths, she said. "The whole health sector is in a state of emergency," she told a news conference.

Reforms were needed to restore confidence, added Ben Cheikh, whose predecessor resigned Saturday in the face of a growing outcry over the deaths.

Prime Minister Youssef Chahed swiftly vowed that "those responsible for any negligence" will face prosecution.

Officials launched medical and judicial investigations after the premature babies began dying on Thursday at the Rabta state hospital in Tunis.

The public health system, once a source of pride in Tunisia, has been hit by management and financial problems that lowered standards and caused drug shortages.





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[Sudan's parliament shortens state of emergency to six months – witness](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Mon, 2019-03-11 14:23

KHARTOUM: Sudan's parliament voted on Monday to shorten a state of emergency declared by President Omar Al-Bashir last month from one year to six months, a Reuters witness said.

Parliament may renew the state of emergency.

Bashir declared the nationwide state of emergency, the first since 1999, on Feb. 22 to try to quell persistent protests that have posed the most serious challenge to his three-decade rule.

Many analysts however believe he wants to avoid a conflict with unpredictable results while campaigning for re-election in Israel's April 9 polls.

The Qatari Gaza Reconstruction Committee, in a statement, said "disbursement began Monday of the fourth payment of cash assistance to poor families in the Gaza Strip."

In total 55,000 families in the strip would receive payments of \$100 each. Thousands of Palestinians could be seen queueing early at post offices across Gaza.

"I am here to receive \$100, but \$100 does not solve the crisis," said Bassam Khalil Jaber, 40. "We need permanent solutions, and this grant is a temporary solution."

In November, the Gulf state, which is a longtime Hamas ally, committed to around \$15 million a month in aid over six months.

In exchange, Hamas committed to relative calm along the Israeli border, which has been rocked by often violent Hamas-backed protests since March 2018.

But the deal became a major bone of political contention in Israel – whose territory was used for delivery of the cash – and also in Gaza.

Part of the funds were originally used to pay salaries of Hamas employees, but this was stopped after political criticism in Israel.

Instead much of the money will be funneled into cash for work programs with the United Nations.

The impoverished strip, which has a population of around two million, has been under a crippling Israeli blockade for more than a decade.

Israel says it is necessary to isolate Hamas but critics say it amounts to collective punishment of residents of the densely-populated coastal territory.

The two sides have fought three wars since 2008.



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