

[Security Council votes to send cease-fire observers to Yemen](#)

Fri, 2018-12-21 21:19

JEDDAH: The UN Security Council on Friday unanimously approved a resolution that authorizes the deployment of observers to war-torn Yemen to oversee a fragile truce in the strategic Red Sea port of Hodeidah.

The draft, which was submitted by Britain, had been the subject of tough negotiations among the 15 council members, and was amended several times before the vote.

It also endorses the results of UN-brokered peace negotiations in Sweden last week. Yemen's warring parties agreed to a cease-fire that took effect Tuesday and the withdrawal of fighters in Hodeidah, a key gateway for aid and food imports.

The city is a vital lifeline for millions, and the cease-fire between Saudi-backed government forces and Houthi Shiite militias is seen as the best chance yet of ending four years of devastating conflict.

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The agreement also included a planned prisoner swap involving some 15,000 detainees.

Welcoming the resolution, Saudi Arabia's deputy permanent representative at the UN, Dr. Khaled Manzalawi, said the resolution confirmed "the success of the military pressure by the coalition and the Saudi diplomatic efforts in forcing the Houthis to withdraw from Hodeidah."

The resolution, he said, granted the UN the right to deploy a team to monitor the cease-fire in Hodeidah, which will reduce Houthis' room for maneuver and prevent their obstructive attempts and repetitive violations in the past.

[#SaudiArabia](#) welcomes the [#UK](#) led [#UNSC](#) resolution on [#Yemen](#). The resolution affirms the efforts of Saudi diplomacy led by His Excellency the Saudi Foreign Minister [@AdelAljubair](#) and the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom to the [@UN](#) Ambassador [@amouallimi](#) [pic.twitter.com/06S4bkCzqL](#)

– KSA Mission UN (@ksamissionun) [December 21, 2018](#)

The UN Security Council resolution “insists on the full respect by all parties of the cease-fire agreed” for Hodeidah.

It authorizes the UN to “establish and deploy, for an initial period of 30 days from the adoption of this resolution, an advance team to begin monitoring” the cease-fire, under the leadership of retired Dutch general Patrick Cammaert.

The resolution also authorizes UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to “submit proposals as soon as possible before Dec. 31, 2018 on how the UN will fully support the Stockholm Agreement as requested by the parties.”

DPR [@khaledManzlawiy](#): We extend our deepest thanks to our Kuwaiti [@KuwaitMissionUN](#) & American [@USUN](#) colleagues for their efforts in reaching the appropriate resolution which is in the interest of the brotherly people of Yemen and the maintenance of international peace & security

– KSA Mission UN (@ksamissionun) [December 21, 2018](#)

French Ambassador Francois Delattre said the unanimous vote sent a “strong signal of the council’s unity and engagement” on Yemen, and that it had put its weight behind the UN-brokered talks.

Diplomats said the UN observer mission could consist of 30 to 40 people, tasked with ensuring the withdrawal of the warring parties from Hodeidah and the safe passage of humanitarian aid.

The UN said the first members of the mission were already en route to the region.



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UN council to vote on monitors for truce at key Yemen port
Charity says Yemenis face 'double threat' of cold, hunger

[Turkey welcomes US decision, vows to clear Syria of Kurd militia and Daesh](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

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Fri, 2018-12-21 13:55

ISTANBUL, PARIS, BERLIN: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Friday promised to clear Syria of Kurdish militia and Daesh insurgents after the US

decision to pull troops out.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu earlier welcomed the US decision to withdraw its troops from Syria, and said Washington should coordinate with Ankara on the pull-out.

US President Donald Trump's announcement that the US would withdraw its 2,000 troops has upended a pillar of American policy in the Middle East. Critics say it will make it harder to find a diplomatic solution to Syria's seven-year-old civil war.

Trump made the shock decision during a phone call with his Turkish counterpart who said Turkey could clear the remaining militants from the country, media reported.

But for Turkey, Trump's abrupt move marks a removal of a major source of friction with the US. The two NATO allies have long been at odds over Syria, where Washington has backed Syrian Kurdish YPG fighters. Turkey considers the YPG a terrorist organization.

"With regards to the withdrawal, the decision of the United States to withdraw from Syria, we welcome that decision and Turkey fully supports the territory integrity of (Syria)," Cavusoglu told reporters in Malta, during an official visit.

"We need to coordinate this withdrawal with the United States and we are already in touch at different levels."

Erdogan said this week Turkey might start a new military operation in Syria at any moment. Its forces have intervened to sweep YPG and Daesh militants from territory west of the Euphrates over the past two years. It has not gone east of the river, partly to avoid direct confrontation with US forces.

Turkey has repeatedly voiced frustration over what it says is the slow implementation of a deal with Washington to pull YPG fighters out of Manbij, a town in mainly Arab territory west of the Euphrates.

"We have the Manbij road map, we discussed whether we can implement this by the time that they (US forces) withdraw," Cavusoglu said, referring to the Manbij deal.

"So many issues that Turkey and the United States should coordinate (on) and there shouldn't be any vacuum in the country that terrorist groups might also fill."

Syrian Kurdish forces leading the battle against Daesh remnants in Syria could withdraw from the frontlines and redeploy to the Turkish border if the region they control is attacked by Turkey, one of their leaders said on Friday in Paris.

Two leaders of the political wing of the Kurdish-led force, who held talks with French officials about the planned US military withdrawal from Syria, also said they feared the escape of some 1,000 militants being held in Syrian

Kurdish jails should guards be drafted to fight elsewhere.

Ilham Ahmad, one of two co-chairs of the Syrian Democratic Council, the political arm of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), warned that a Turkish attack could bring the battle against Daesh in Syria to a halt. "We will continue our mission but confronting this terrorism will be difficult because our forces will be forced to withdraw from the frontlines in Deir Ezzor to take up positions on the border with Turkey to counter any attack we may face," she said.

Syrian Kurdish forces could "lose control" over detained foreign militants if Daesh used the US pullout to regroup, or if Turkey pushed ahead with its threatened offensive against the Kurds' region of Rojava, she warned. Hundreds of foreign Daesh militants are being held in Syrian Kurdish prisons. Asked if the Kurds would go as far as releasing them, Riad Darar, the council's other co-chair, said: "Of course not. But we fear that the chaos will not allow us to protect the premises where they are located."

The international coalition fighting Daesh in Syria "has a job to finish" despite Trump's "very serious" decision to withdraw American troops from Syria, the French defense minister said on Friday.

"The decision taken by the US president changes things pretty radically," Florence Parly told RTL radio.

"We consider that the job must be finished," she said, adding that failing to do so could mean Daesh might regroup.

Parly also suggested that implementing the withdrawal of 2,000 US soldiers from Syria should be discussed among the allied coalition, adding that "you can't withdraw troops from one day to another."

France has aircraft in the region, along with long-range artillery in position along the Iraqi-Syrian border.

Washington says France has also deployed special forces inside Syria, though France has never acknowledged this.

The German government says it wasn't consulted by Washington before the US announced the withdrawal of US troops from Syria. Government spokeswoman Ulrike Demmer told reporters in Berlin on Friday that Berlin would have appreciated prior consultations.

Demmer said the US decision could affect the dynamics of the conflict, adding that "much remains to be done" for a final victory over Daesh. She said the US is an "important ally" but declined to say whether Germany considers it a "reliable" one, too.

German Defense Ministry spokesman Jens Flosdorff said the decision has no immediate impact on Germany's aerial surveillance missions over Syria.

The Netherlands, joining other US allies, voiced disquiet on Friday at the US decision and said Washington's plan to reduce its military presence in Afghanistan was premature given continuing conflict there.

Thursday's announcement by Trump surprised the Dutch, who contribute to military missions in Syria and Afghanistan, Defense Minister Ank Bijleveld told journalists in The Hague.

The Netherlands supports the fight against Daesh militants with F-16 jets. The Dutch are set to end their participation in that operation, which falls under US military command, on Dec. 31.

Bijleveld said an end to the US military presence in Syria would have "far-reaching consequences for the region and security." Daesh has "not yet been completely defeated and the threat is not gone," she said, a position at odds with Trump's assessment.

The Dutch were also surprised by the announcement of Washington's plans to significantly draw down its forces in Afghanistan, she said.

Bijleveld said it would be premature to scale back forces in Afghanistan, where the Netherlands has 100 troops in a NATO-led mission – known as Resolute Support – supporting Afghan Army and police forces.

"We are intensifying efforts in Afghanistan because the security situation is not improving quickly enough," she said.



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'It is right for me to step down': Mattis quits Turkey welcomes US decision, vows to clear Syria of Kurd militia and Daesh

Israeli gunfire kills three Gazans during border protest

Fri, 2018-12-21 17:56

GAZA: Israeli forces shot and killed three Palestinians, including a teenager, in the Gaza Strip during the latest of weekly protests along the border with Israel on Friday, Palestinian health officials said.

About 8,000 Palestinians gathered near the border fence, the Israeli military said. Most kept their distance, while some burned tires and tried to throw an explosive device into Israel, though it did not land across the border, the military said.

A military spokeswoman said the troops responded with "riot dispersal means" and fired in accordance with Israeli procedure.

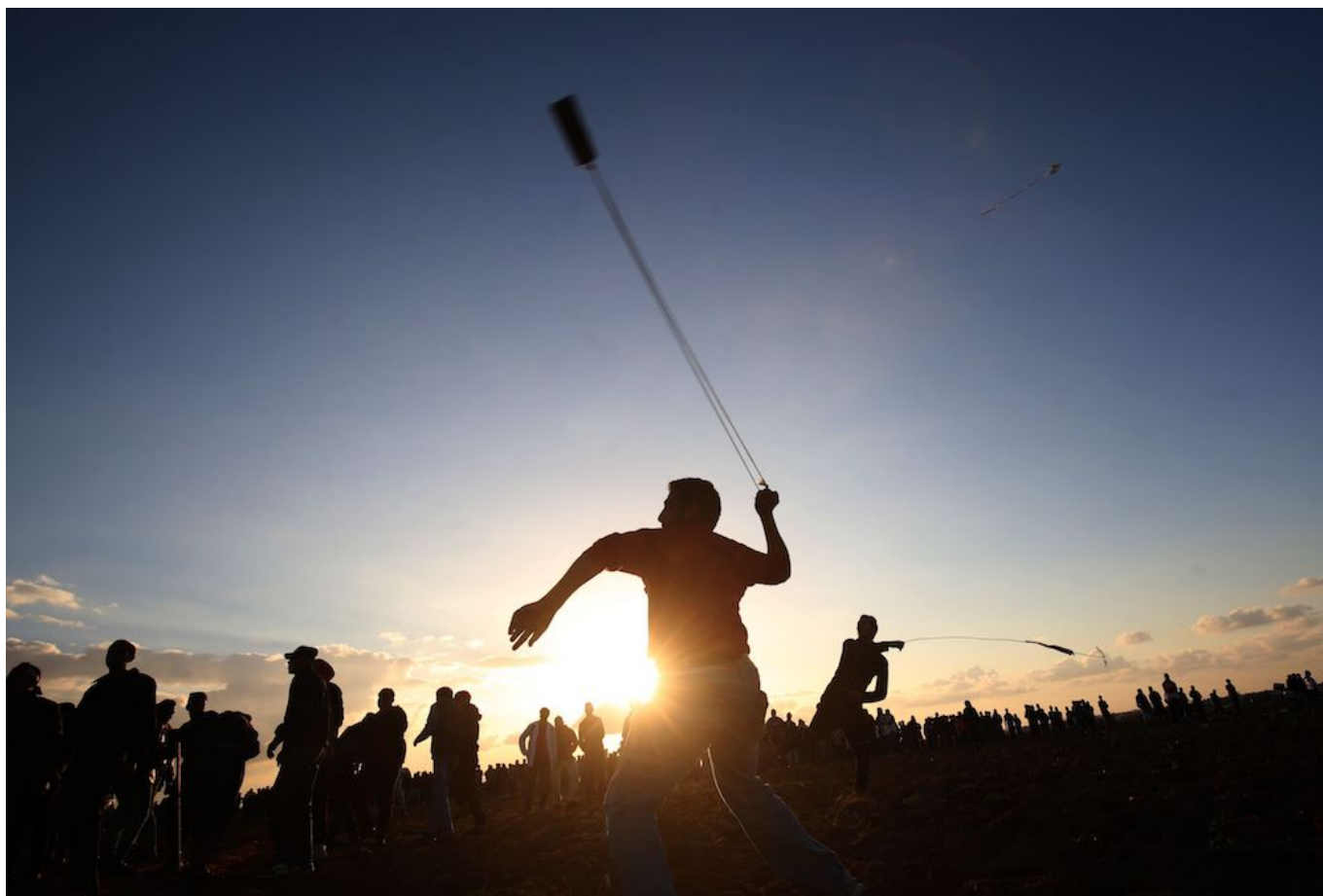
Gaza's health ministry said 16-year-old Mohammad Jahjouh was fatally shot in the neck, while 25 others, including a local journalist, were wounded by Israeli gunfire.

It later said two men, aged 28 and 40, died of injuries they sustained at protests in two separate locations along the fence with Israel earlier in the day.

Health officials in Gaza, which is run by Hamas, say more than 220 Palestinians have been killed since they began weekly border protests on March 30 to demand the easing of Israel's blockade on the territory and the right to return to land lost in the 1948 war of Israel's founding.

Israel has ruled out any such right, concerned that the country would lose its Jewish majority.

Israel withdrew settlers and soldiers from Gaza in 2005 but maintains tight control of its land, air and sea borders. The wider Israeli-Palestinian peace process has been stalled for several years.



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Palestinian child dies of wounds after border clash: Gaza ministry
For Palestinian children in Gaza, an education in conflict

[‘Infiltrators’ derail peaceful demonstrations in Sudan](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1545398679974749300

Fri, 2018-12-21 12:32

KHARTOUM: A Sudanese government spokesman said on Friday that nationwide protests over soaring prices that have left at least eight people dead in the past two days had been “derailed and transformed by infiltrators.”

“Peaceful demonstrations were derailed and transformed by infiltrators into subversive activity targeting public institutions and property, burning, destroying and burning some police headquarters,” spokesman Bishara Jumaa said in a statement released by the official Sudan News Agency.

He did not name anyone but he also said the protesters, some of whom have called for the overthrow of President Omar Bashir, were being exploited by opposition parties.

“Some political parties emerged in an attempt to exploit these conditions to shake security and stability in order to achieve their political agenda,” Jumaa said. He did not identify the parties.

He added that the demonstrations had been “dealt with by police and security forces in a civilized way without repression or opposition.”

Public anger in Sudan has been building over price rises and other economic hardships, including a doubling in the cost of bread this year and limits on bank withdrawals. At 69 percent, Sudan’s inflation rate is among the world’s highest.

Leading Sudanese opposition figure Sadiq Al-Mahdi returned to Sudan on Wednesday from nearly a year in self-imposed exile and called for a democratic transition in Sudan.

“The regime has failed and there is economic deterioration and erosion of the national currency’s value,” Mahdi, who was Sudan’s last democratically

elected prime minister and now heads the Umma party, told thousands of supporters.

The demonstrations on Wednesday and Thursday were among the biggest since crowds came out against cuts to state subsidies in 2013.

Officials told Sudania 24 TV that six people died in protests in the eastern city of Al-Qadarif and two more in northern Nile River state, without giving details on how they were killed. Police fired teargas to break up a crowd of around 500 people in the capital Khartoum, then chased them through back streets and made arrests, a witness said.

Some of the demonstrators chanted: "The people want the fall of the regime" – a slogan used in the "Arab Spring" protests that unseated rulers across the Muslim world in 2011. Many called for a new government in 2013.

In the northern city of Dongola, protesters set fire to the local offices of Bashir's ruling National Congress Party, witnesses said. To the northeast in Atbara, they hid their faces behind scarves as they came out for a second day, chanting "freedom" and setting car tires alight, video footage showed.

The latest violence erupted in Atbara on Wednesday, where crowds also set fire to the ruling party's office.

Authorities declared a state of emergency in Al-Qadarif, which is near the border with Ethiopia, and extended one in Atbara to the cities of Al-Damir and Berber.

"The situation in Al-Qadarif has become dangerous and the protests have developed to include fires and theft and it's now out of control," its independent MP, Mubarak Al-Nur, told Reuters. He said he was related to one of the protesters who died.

Sudan's economy has struggled to recover from the loss of three quarters of its oil output – its main source of foreign currency – since South Sudan seceded in 2011, keeping most of the oilfields.

The US lifted 20-year-old trade sanctions on Sudan in October 2017. But many investors have continued to shun a country still listed by Washington as a state sponsor of terrorism.

Bashir, one of Africa's longest-serving leaders, took power in 1989. Lawmakers this month proposed a constitutional amendment to extend term limits that would have required him to step down in 2020.

In recent months he has dissolved the government, named a new central bank governor and brought in a package of reforms, but the moves have done little to contain an economic crisis.

In October, Sudan sharply devalued its currency after the government asked banks and money changers to set the exchange rate on a daily basis.

The move led to further price increases and cash shortages, while the gap

between the official and black market rates has continued to widen.

“I went out to protest because life has stopped in Atbara,” said a 36-year-old man who asked not to be named.

He told Reuters he had not been able to find any bread in the shops for four days.

“Prices have increased and I have still not been able to withdraw my November salary ... because of the liquidity crisis. These are difficult conditions that we can't live with, and the government doesn't care about us.”



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At least six killed as thousands protest against price rises in Sudan
Sudan president lands in Syria in 1st visit by Arab leader

[**Israeli army says destroys Hezbollah**](#)

tunnel from Lebanon

Author:

AFP

ID:

1545396946694594900

Fri, 2018-12-21 12:41

JERUSALEM: The Israeli army said Friday it has blown up a cross-border tunnel dug by Hezbollah from Lebanon, the first of four it has uncovered – and pledged to destroy – in recent weeks.

“A cross-border attack tunnel dug from the Shiite village of Ramyeh into Israel was detonated” in an operation on Thursday night, the army said in a statement.

The Israeli military “holds the Lebanese Government responsible for digging the attack tunnels and the consequences of this action,” it said.

A video distributed by the army shows an officer using a megaphone to call on residents of the Lebanese village of Ramyeh to evacuate the area since the military was about to “blow up this tunnel built by Hezbollah.”

Israeli soldiers are also seen inserting rope-like objects into a hole in the ground, while the explosion was documented from a number of angles.

On Thursday night, a military spokesman had said the detonation would be on the Israeli side of the demarcation line with Lebanon, known as the Blue Line.

“We are conducting a defensive activity,” Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus told reporters.

In launching an operation to cut off the tunnels on December 4, Israel’s military said it located four underground passageways infiltrating Israeli territory.

Israel alleges Hezbollah had planned to use the tunnels to kidnap or kill its civilians or soldiers, and to seize a slice of Israeli territory in the event of any hostilities, while noting they were not yet operational.

A month-long war in 2006 between Israel and Hezbollah killed more than 1,200 Lebanese, mostly civilians, and more than 160 Israelis, mostly soldiers.

The UN confirmed the existence of the four tunnels and its Under Secretary for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix has called them “a serious violation of Resolution 1701,” which ended the 2006 war.



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Israel urges UN action over Hezbollah 'attack tunnels' from Lebanon