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UK Justice rules unlawful delay of parliament & to extend Brexit past Oct 31

10.23.19 - News Placed in Oct 24 spot -

UN Palestinian calls for ban on Israeli products to end Israel's 52-year-old occupation

UN expert calls for ban on settlement products

Human Rights expert tells the UN the international community has a responsibility and a legal obligation to compel Israel to completely end its occupation and remove barriers to self-determination for the Palestinians

Associated Press|Published: 10.23.19 , 23:10

The U.N. independent expert on human rights in the Palestinian territories called Wednesday for an international ban on all products made in Israeli settlements, as a step to potentially end Israel's 52-year-old "illegal occupation."

Michael Lynk told the General Assembly's human rights committee that the international community should also issue "a clarion call to the United Nations" to complete and release a database "on businesses engaged in activities related to the illegal settlements."

Israel's Foreign Ministry declined to comment.

Lynk said the international community has a responsibility and a legal obligation to compel Israel to completely end its occupation and remove barriers to self-determination for the Palestinians.

He said Israel's occupation of territory the Palestinians want for their own state has been characterized by numerous and serious violations of international law, and yet "the international community has displayed great unwillingness to impose any meaningful accountability on Israel."

Israel is deeply opposed to a **Palestinian-led international boycott movement**, which it views as an attack on its very existence.

Supporters of the boycotts say they are a non-violent way of protesting Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.

**10.23.19**

**Hamas' funding channeled from Tehran to Gaza via New York to reduce exposure  
 Hamas' cat and mouse game over terrorist funding**

As the U.S. cracks down on **funds channeled from Tehran to Gaza via New York**, the terror group in charge of Gaza is using banks and non-digital interaction **to reduce its exposure**, says IDF terror finance expert

Yoav Zitun|Published: **10.23.19** , 21:53

Hamas is trying to thwart efforts to crack down on the funding it receives to sponsor terrorist activity by spreading the money around and using regular bank transactions to hide in plain sight, says an IDF intelligence officer who monitors terrorist funding in the West Bank.

"Most of the money transfers to Hamas are done physically through a human facilitator, most of them are normal bank transactions", says Lt. Col. A., a senior intelligence officer in the IDF Central Command.

The **IDF** intelligence branch has intensified its **surveillance of terrorist funding routes**, most of them coming from Iran, through Lebanon and Hezbollah and from there ending up in Gaza.

"We have increased our research capabilities to track these routes (and) these actions unequivocally hurt the military wing of Hamas," he says.

"The organization tries to smuggle terrorist funding through covert ways that are hard to discover from an intelligence standpoint. Hamas decentralizes its cash flow as much as possible, not operating through a coherent 'ministry of finance'."

Money launderers have been one of the main targets of operations by the IDF intelligence division for a while. These money launderers facilitate cash flow intended for sponsoring terrorist and civilian initiatives by Hamas and the Islamic Jihad in Gaza

At times, these counterterrorist measures are assisted by the U.S., such as in August, when the U.S. Treasury announced that it has blacklisted three Palestinian businessmen who were used as money facilitators for terrorist organizations in Gaza.

Little was widely known about these facilitators until six months ago, when one of the main Hamas money launderers, Hamad Hadri, became the first target eliminated by the IDF since Operation Protective Edge in 2014.

According to the IDF, Hadri oversaw delivering enormous quantities of cash from Iran to terrorist groups in Gaza.

The money collected by these launderers is transferred to the military wings of various terrorist organizations.

Most of that money is then smuggled into the West Bank, if not caught by Israel, or transmitted through anonymous bank transactions.

These terrorist organizations try to fund civilian initiatives in Gaza, such as charity and schools, on behalf of their branches in the West Bank, but also fund organized terrorist cells trying to spark disorder in the West Bank.

The three individuals, Kamal Awad, Fawaz Nasser and Muhammad Al-Ayy, were reported to the U.S. Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) and as a result, had all their properties and interests in the United States blocked.

In addition, persons that engage in certain transactions with the individuals may themselves be exposed to sanctions or enforcement actions, the Treasury says.

These businessmen were central facilitators for money transitions to terrorist organizations in Gaza, transferring millions of dollars over the last few years.

The three reside in Gaza, but their businesses and money were being transferred through the U.S.

As part of their legitimate business actions, they occasionally went abroad leaving Gaza via Cairo.

During their travels, they laundered millions for Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

“This administration will not falter to hold Hamas and its Iranian leaders accountable for their violence. The treasury will continue to disrupt terrorist networks by targeting those who generate funds to carry out the Iranian regime’s violent agenda,” said Sigal Mandelker, the Treasury’s Israeli-born Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence.

The IDF says that the individual most hurt by these sanctions is Muhammad Al-Ayy, the main facilitator among the group.

"His financial damage is approximated at around \$10 million dollars," says the IDF, adding that it is "not familiar with any holdings in the U.S., but all of the bank transactions attributed to him were made through a New York bank. This is the main reason for targeting his assets and properties."

According to Lt.-Col. A., "Al-Ayy is even senior to Hadri (the Hamas money launderer killed by the IDF in May).

"The executive decree freezing their assets in the U.S. is a warning to all those who intended to do business with them," says Lt.-Col A.

He warns that the three are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to terror financing. "There are dozens of facilitators working through many axes," he says.

10.23.19 - News Placed in Oct 23 spot -

Rivlin tasks Gantz with 28 days to form a coalition government after Netanyahu handoff  
Rivlin tasks Gantz with forming government after Netanyahu failure

This is the first time that someone other than the Likud leader has been asked to put together coalition in more than a decade; Gantz said 'I intend to form a liberal unity government as I had promised voters'

Ynet |Published: 10.23.19 , 20:16

President Reuven Rivlin on Wednesday tasked Blue and White Party leader Benny Gantz with trying to form a coalition government, two days after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he was unable to do so when his allotted 28 days came to an end.

This is the first time that someone other than Netanyahu has been asked to form the government for more than a decade.

President Rivlin said: "Now there is a need for a national unity government" adding he hopes all sides make the necessary compromises to allow one to be formed.

Benny Gantz said he felt honored and humbled by the task at hand and intends to fulfill his promise to form a liberal unity government

Gantz met earlier Wednesday with the three other senior members of his party - MKs Yair Lapid, Moshe Ya'alon and Gabi Ashkenazi - to formulate the Blue and White policy ahead of his meeting with Rivlin.

Like Netanyahu, Gantz falls short of support from the 61 MKs needed to form a majority government. Yisrael Beytenu leader Avigdor Liberman has repeatedly called for a unity government between Likud and Blue and White, and with his party's eight Knesset seats has become a de facto political kingmaker.

Netanyahu announced on Monday night that he was unable to form a government, blaming what he called Gantz's intransigence in a video

"I have informed President Rivlin that I'm giving the mandate back to him," the prime minister said in his video message. "Ever since I received the mandate I have worked tirelessly, both openly and covertly, to form a broad coalition government. That's what the people want, and that's what Israel needs in face of the ever-growing security threats in the region."

"I did my best to form a broad coalition government and avoid another round of elections, unfortunately, time after time, Gantz refused. First he refused the president's outline for a (unity) government, then he refused to meet with me, then he refused to send his negotiating team, and finally, he refused the compromise I presented to him."

Following Netanyahu's announcement, the director-general of the president's official residence, Harel Tubi, informed political party leaders that Rivlin was to give the mandate to Gantz, who like Netanyahu will have 28 days to form a coalition.

According to senior sources in the Likud, Netanyahu will now battle against the formation of a minority coalition by Gantz, which the Likud says is solely aimed at ousting Netanyahu.

"The nightmare scenario is the formation of a minority government whose purpose isn't to properly govern, but to remove Netanyahu from the position of prime minister," the Likud sources said.

Netanyahu intends to fight the formation of such a government with a whole political campaign, he's intentions includes fighting for the public's opinion, and pressuring political players to be uncooperative with such a coalition, additionally, Netanyahu intends to strengthen the unity among the right-wing bloc and to further cement his position in the Likud.

In response to Netanyahu's claim that Gantz was unwilling to cooperate, Blue and White party said: "The time for spin is over, now it is time to act. Blue and White is determined to form a liberal unity government headed by Benny Gantz, just like the public voted for a month ago."

Blue and White intends to meet with the heads of all the Knesset's factions, including those in Netanyahu's right-wing bloc.

The party is set to hold its first coalition meeting with Likud representatives in order to discuss the possibility of a unity government formed and initially headed by Gantz.

"Outgoing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has failed once again to form a coalition and is finally forced to return the mandate to the president. We once again remind everyone that we were only supposed to go to elections next month, and all we've been through stems from the criminal involvement and fight for survival of Netanyahu - the rest is all spins and lies."

Meanwhile, Joint List MK Ahmad Tibi said earlier Wednesday that his party has been in contact with Blue and White, adding that **most of the Arab population is in favor of support for a government from the outside** but that Netanyahu and Likud had "failed" at leading the country and had to go.

**10.23.19**

**Israel focusing defense capabilities to deter missile strikes by Iran supplied allies**

**Israel reportedly preparing for Iran missile strike**

Local media says Jerusalem preemptively bolstering defenses should Iran retaliate to ongoing series of attacks on its proxies attributed to IDF; sources says military will focus on **detering harder to detect, low-flying cruise missiles and drone strikes**

i24NEWS|Published: **10.23.19** , 13:54

Israel is preemptively bolstering its defenses over fears that Iran may retaliate against an ongoing series of attacks on its proxies in Syria and Iraq that have been attributed to Israel, Army Radio reported Tuesday night.

Citing unnamed sources, the report claimed **Israel was focusing its defense capabilities on harder to detect, low-flying cruise missiles and drone strikes** - unlike high-arcing ballistic missiles that are easier to intercept.

As tensions escalate in the region, the IDF has been on high alert and the security cabinet will convene for an impromptu meeting next week, according to sources.

Last month, citing several Iranian, Western and Iraqi sources, Reuters reported that **Tehran had dispatched missiles to its allies as a "back-up plan"** in case Iran was attacked by the United States or Israel.

The **missiles**, of which were said to be **in the dozens**, were intended to send a warning to the U.S. and Israel, especially following several airstrikes on Iranian troops in Syria that analysts have attributed to the Israel.

According to the report, the missiles have ranges of between 200 to 700 kilometers, saying Israel's densely populated city of Tel Aviv and Saudi Arabia's capital Riyadh were within striking distance if launched from southern or western Iraq.

Earlier this week, eyes have been on the Syrian-Turkish border as the U.S. pulled its troops from the region, but at Israel's request, U.S. President Donald Trump said he would leave a "small contingent" behind.

The pullback of the military presence by Israel's biggest ally has been a key concern in Jerusalem, and Israeli leaders have been outspoken on their mission to defend the country against the Iranian threat.

10.23.19

IDF says Israeli drone crashed in Lebanon, no threat of intel leakage

IDF says Israeli drone crashed in Lebanon, no threat of intel leakage

Although Lebanese media says Hezbollah is responsible for the downing, the TV station affiliated with the terror group reported the UAV was shot down by a resident of a village near the border with Israel

Daniel Salami, Yoav Zitun|Published: 10.23.19, 09:28

Israel Defense Forces said an Israeli drone crashed in Lebanon on Wednesday during a routine operation near the border between the two countries.

The military said the nature of the UAV there is no possibility of intelligence to be leaked.

Lebanese media later reported that Lebanese terror group Hezbollah is responsible for the downing of the drone.

However, a Lebanese satellite television station affiliated with Hezbollah - Al-Manar - said a resident of Kafarkela, a village in southern Lebanon not far from Israeli border, downed the UAV with his shotgun.

The IDF uses dozens of drones near the border with Lebanon on a daily basis for intelligence gathering purposes, with technical failures which result in the crashing occurring on average once every month.

Two months ago, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah threatened to destabilize Israel's drone activity in the area. "Since the year 2000, our skies have been full of UAVs," he said in a speech from his bunker.

"This does not mean that we will down every drone ... otherwise Israel will start sending dozens of UAVs in order to make us waste our air defense capabilities," he said. "Our goal is to show the enemy that they cannot feel comfortable moving around in our airspace."



10.22.19 - News Placed in Oct 22 spot -

Wild weather ahead as thunderstorms and floods predict unusually cold season

Wild weather ahead as thunderstorms and floods predicted

Rainfall accompanied by thunder expected all across the country, but meteorologists say that although the rain has arrived, temperatures show winter isn't coming any time soon

Attila Somfalvi | Published: 10.22.19, 21:32

Summer seems to be finally over in Israel, as temperatures are projected to go down over the coming week accompanied by rain and thunderstorms across the country. Tuesday night will mark the start of the change, with local showers accompanied by thunderstorms.

Meteo-Tech forecaster Tzachi Waksman told Ynet that although first showers of the new season have been and gone, a complicated rain pattern is ahead.

"Formation of rain clouds could already be seen (Tuesday afternoon) around the country, mostly in the eastern parts of Israel. There is credible concern for flooding in the desert area of southern Israel," he said.

"Rainstorms are predicted for most of Israel on Tuesday night. Not heavy rains, but there will be some thunder. We project an unusual forecast for Wednesday, with storm clouds forming along the coast line, bringing in storm winds and maybe even hail."

He also warned that there was a strong possibility of heavy rainfall and flooding.

Nonetheless, he said, winter was still not here.

"We're at the beginning of fall, therefore temperatures are still nice and warm during the day," he said, adding that the rain should decline by Thursday.

"The rainfall might resume over the weekend and maybe even get colder in the days that follow," he said.

Some rain accompanied by thunderstorms will fall throughout Wednesday, with temperatures expected to go down and the winds to become stronger.

Thursday will be partly cloudy during the morning and unusually cold for the season. There will be some rainfall along the coast, including thunderstorms and winds reaching 50 kph.

During the afternoon, the rain will spread towards the center and south of Israel, with a chance of flooding in the south and east.

Friday will remain unseasonably cool and there will be some rain along the coast and in the north, which will decline on Saturday.

Daylight savings time will end this weekend, with clocks going back an hour at 2am on the night between Saturday and Sunday.

Alexandra Lukash and Amir Alon contributed to this report

10.21.19 - News Placed in Oct 21 spot -

Netanyahu relinquishes government effort, president to give Gantz a shot at Coalition

Netanyahu relinquishes government effort, president to give Gantz a shot

PM returns mandate to form government to President Rivlin; Gantz will have 28 days to establish government; Blue and White: 'Determined to form unity government'

Itamar Eichner, Moran Azoulay and Yuval Karni | Published: 10.21.19, 21:07

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has informed President Reuven Rivlin Monday that he is returning the mandate he received to form a government, since he was unable to do so.

A statement from the president's office issued in response says President Rivlin will pass the mandate to forming a government to Blue and White leader MK Benny Gantz as soon as possible.

"President Rivlin received Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's announcement that he is returning the mandate to form the government to the president because he was unable to do," read the statement.

"In accordance with the provisions of Basic Law: The Government (2001), the Director General of Beit HaNasi (President's residence), Harel Tubi, will speak to all Knesset factions to inform them that the president intends to transfer the mandate for forming the government, as soon as possible, to Chairman of Blue and White, MK Benny Gantz and to make available to him the 28 days allocated to do so under the law".

Blue and White officials responded to Netanyahu's decision, saying they are 'determined to establish a liberal unity government led by Gantz'.

"The time for spins had passed, it's time for action," read a statement released by the party. "Blue and White is determined to establish the liberal unity government led by Benny Gantz, which the people elected a month ago".

Number 2 on the Blue and White list MK Yair Lapid wrote on Twitter: "Bibi has failed again. It is already becoming a serial failure".

Blue and White MK Ofer Shelah wrote on Twitter: "Netanyahu wants elections, it is clear. Now those who care have 28 days to form a government with us that will repair the damages Netanyahu had caused".

10.18.19 - News Placed in Oct 18 spot -

Pompeo and Netanyahu meet to assure Israel focus stays on Iran threats

Pompeo and Netanyahu meet as the U.S. seeks to assure Israel focus stays on Iran "threat"

Trump's Syria about-face was the latest in recent decisions that have stirred discomfort within Netanyahu's conservative cabinet, which had previously seen itself and the Trump administration as marching in lockstep

Ynet, Agencies|Published: 10.18.19, 13:16

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem Friday.

Following the meeting, the secretary described the relationship between the two countries as "strong as it has ever been" adding the two discussed the challenges facing the world, the United States and Israel.

Pompeo said he and Netanyahu discussed "all the efforts we've made to push back against the threat not only to Israel but to the region and the world from the Islamic Republic of Iran."

"We shared our ideas about how we can ensure Middle East stability together, and how we would further our efforts to jointly combat all the challenges that the world confronts here in the Middle East," Pompeo told reporters with Netanyahu by his side.

The secretary underscored U.S.-Israeli efforts to counter Iran in the meeting, in an apparent attempt to ease concerns in Israel that Tehran could exploit a U.S. military pullback in Syria.

Pompeo and Netanyahu met hours after Turkey agreed with the United States to pause its offensive on Kurdish forces in Syria.

Turkey launched its assault against the Kurdish YPG militia in Syria last week after President Donald Trump pulled a U.S. contingent out of the way, creating a new front in Syria's eight-year war and prompting 200,000 civilians to take flight.

Israel sees Syria's Kurds, once U.S. allies, as a counterweight to Islamist insurgents in northern Syria.

It also worries that its arch-foe Iran or local allies could fill the vacuum left by a disengaged United States.

The Kurds responded to the U.S. withdrawal by inviting Syrian government forces, backed by Moscow and Tehran, into towns and cities in areas they control.

Asked for his reaction to the pause in Turkey's offensive, Netanyahu said: "We hope things will turn out for the best."

Thursday's pause, brokered in Ankara by a U.S. team including Pompeo and U.S. Vice President Mike Pence, gives Kurdish forces five days to withdraw from a "safe zone" Ankara had sought to capture.

A spokesman for the Syrian Kurdish forces says a border town remains besieged Friday and is being shelled by Turkey and its allied forces, despite a cease-fire agreement.

Pompeo's visit on the heels of the ceasefire was widely seen in Israel as an attempt to assuage Israeli concerns that a U.S. force drawdown could expose it to attacks by Iran or its proxies.

Officials close to Netanyahu are quick to talk up the Republican president's unprecedentedly pro-Israel policies, such as quitting the Iran nuclear deal and recognizing Jerusalem as the Israeli capital and the Golan Heights as Israeli-annexed.

However, Trump's Syria about-face was the latest in recent steps that have stirred discomfort within Netanyahu's conservative cabinet, which had previously seen itself and the Trump administration as marching in lockstep.

Indeed, Trump's recent diplomatic outreach to Tehran and firing of hawkish National Security Adviser John Bolton have cast a cloud over Netanyahu, who highlighted in two inconclusive Israeli elections this year what he described as his close relationship with Trump.

Amos Harel, military correspondent for the left-wing Haaretz daily, said the muted U.S. reaction to the Sept. 14 attack on Saudi oil facilities and abrupt end in support to Syria's Kurds "forces Israel to rethink its Middle East strategy".

"The American withdrawal raises questions about the extent of Trump's commitment to Israel when push comes to shove," he wrote on Thursday.

The conservative Netanyahu faces a Wednesday deadline to form a government following a deadlocked Sept. 17 contest with his main opponent, former armed forces chief Benny Gantz.

While in Israel, Secretary Pompeo called on the UN Security Council to renew its embargo on weapon sales to Iran that is due to expire next year.

Secretary Pompeo · 18 2019

Because of the flawed Iran deal, the UN arms embargo on Iran will expire in one year. Countries like Russia and China will be able to sell Iran sophisticated weapons. The Iranian regime will be free to sell weapons to anyone. This will trigger a new arms race in the Middle East.

If you're worried about Iran's behavior now, imagine what Iran will do with advanced missiles, drones, tanks, and jets. **The Security Council must renew the arms embargo.**

Later on Friday, Pompeo will fly to Brussels for a meeting with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg.

**10.17.19 - News Placed in Oct 17 spot -**

**Pence announces ceasefire deal with Erdogan to end Turkey's Syria offensive**

**Pence announces ceasefire deal with Erdogan to end Turkey's Syria offensive**

All military operations would be paused to allow pullback of Kurdish YPG militia over 120-hour period from swathe of land designated by Turkey to turn into "safe zone" for Syrian refugees

Reuters|Published: **10.17.19**, 21:51

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence said on Thursday he had reached a deal with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan for a ceasefire in northern Syria to end an eight-day-old Turkish offensive against Kurdish-led forces.

Speaking after crisis talks with Erdogan in Ankara, Pence said that under the deal all military operations would be paused to allow a pullback of Kurdish YPG militia over a 120-hour period. The Turkish military operation would end once that withdrawal was complete, Pence told a news conference.

"Today the United States and Turkey have agreed to a ceasefire in Syria," Pence told a news conference after more than four hours of talks at the presidential palace in Ankara.

"The Turkish side will pause Operation Peace Spring in order to allow for the withdrawal of YPG forces from the safe zone for 120 hours,"

Pence said. "All military operations under Operation Peace Spring will be paused, and Operation Peace Spring will be halted entirely on completion of the withdrawal".

Pence said U.S. forces in the region had already begun to facilitate a safe disengagement of YPG units.

The deal struck with Erdogan also provided for Turkey not to engage in military operations in the flashpoint Syrian border town of Kobani.

Pence said the United States and Turkey had committed to a peaceful resolution of Ankara's demand for a "safe zone" in northern Syria near Turkey's border, one of the objectives of the Turkish offensive.

Pence added that he had spoken to U.S. President Donald Trump after the talks and that Trump had expressed his gratitude for the ceasefire accord.

The deal was a major contribution to relations between NATO allies Turkey and the United States, which have become strained in recent months.

After Pence and Erdogan met at the presidential palace, talks between Turkish and U.S. delegations continued for over four hours - well past their expected duration.

Pence's mission was to persuade Erdogan to halt the internationally condemned offensive, but Turkish officials had said before the meeting began that the action would continue regardless.

The Turkish assault has created a new humanitarian crisis in Syria with 200,000 civilians taking flight, a security alert over thousands of Islamic State fighters abandoned in Kurdish jails, and a political maelstrom at home for U.S. President Donald Trump.

Trump has been accused of abandoning Kurdish-led fighters, Washington's main partners in the battle to dismantle Islamic State's self-declared caliphate in Syria, by withdrawing troops from the border as Ankara launched its offensive on Oct. 9.

10.16.19 - News Placed in Oct 16 spot -

New Israel Police plan on Arab violence: Tougher penalties, no plea deals

New Israel Police plan to combat violence in Arab sector: Tougher penalties, no plea deals

Police claim they arrive at crime scenes in Arab towns after evidence has been tampered with because they require back up and special forces to operate there

Eli Senior|Published: 10.16.19 , 22:48

Israel Police has unveiled new policies to combat the massive increase in violent crime in the Arab communities.

Following growing public criticism, police officials and the Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan say they are conducting studies to determine why the Arab sector has seen a rise in crime as opposed to the general population.

Officials say the proposals will require new legislation and a change in prosecution policies.

There will be no more plea bargaining in crimes involving illegal weapons.

The police will litigate such cases to the end to ensure the maximum prison terms are handed down to offenders according to sources.

Responding to public criticism, a high-ranking police official says that, "the situation is not entirely the fault of the police."

"In the Jewish sector when we get a call, we rush right in and secure the scene," he said, but in the Arab sector police wait for backup and special forces.

"By the time we arrive on the scene, evidence has been tampered with," he said.

Responding to claims the police has been effective in dealing with organized crime in the Jewish sector while those in Arab communities have been allowed to operate undisturbed, officials say only 10% of violent shooting incidents in Arab towns that have claimed dozens of lives this year alone can be attributed to the criminal underworld.

"Most shooting incidents are the results of fights between clans and families, old feuds and silliness that ended with live fire," the official said. "Many of the victims were targeted for family affiliation."

But police and community leaders all agree the problem is in the number of illegal weapons on the street.

"Many of the weapons are homemade or smuggled from the West Bank," said a police source. "That will require a different approach on our part."

10.16.19 - News Placed in Oct 15 spot -

Pompeo said heading to Israel to discuss Turkey's Syria invasion on Kurds

Pompeo said heading to Israel to discuss Turkey's Syria invasion

Trump plays down crisis sparked by Turkish operation against Syrian Kurds, says U.S. allies in fight against Islamic State are 'not angels'; secretary of state and VP due in Ankara for Erdogan talks

Ynet, Reuters|Published: 10.16.19 , 19:32

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will arrive in Israel on Thursday for talks with senior officials on Turkey's offensive against the Kurds in northeastern Syria, the Axios website reported.

Meanwhile, U.S. President Donald Trump on Wednesday played down the crisis in Syria touched off by Turkey's incursion against U.S.-allied Kurdish forces, saying the conflict was between Turkey and Syria and that it was "fine" for Russia to help Damascus.

Trump, speaking to reporters at the White House, said imposing U.S. sanctions on Turkey would be better than fighting in the region and that it was up to the countries there to work it out.

Kurdish-allied forces, backed by American troops, had been a strategic U.S. partner in the fight against Islamic State in northeastern Syria before Turkey launched an assault in the area following a phone call between Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan and Trump last week.

The Kurds are "not angels," Trump said.

Later Wednesday, Pompeo and Vice President Mike Pence were scheduled to travel to Ankara to meet with Erdogan, who Trump has invited to the White House next month.

Pompeo said earlier Wednesday that the goal was to seek a ceasefire.

Erdogan, speaking to reporters in the Turkish parliament earlier on Wednesday, said he was reevaluating his planned visit to Washington in November but may visit Russia.

10.15.19

Netanyahu will ask Putin on Tuesday to Extradite Israeli computer hacker from Moscow  
Extraditing Russian hacker to U.S. will 'complicate situation' says lawyer of jailed Israeli  
Naama Issachar's attorneys officially appeal the 7.5 year prison term and warn Israel  
against extraditing the Russian national suspected of cyber offences against the  
Americans

Noa Lavie|Published: 10.15.19, 10:14

The lawyer of an Israeli jailed in Russia for drug offenses said on Tuesday the extradition of a Russian hacker to the United States will "complicate our situation."

Naama Issachar, 26, was arrested on April 9 while in transit in a Moscow airport, en route from India to Israel, and accused of carrying 9 grams of cannabis, her family said. Russian authorities charged her with drug smuggling.

"The extradition procedure will complicate our situation," said Alexandra Teitz.

Sources told Ynet on Monday that Justice Minister Amir Ohana is expected to sign off on the extradition request for Alexei Burkov, a Russian national detained by Israel during a 2015 visit. Israel says he is wanted by the United States for suspected cyber offences.

The mother of the 26-year-old woman, Yafa, said on Monday "it doesn't make sense" for Israel to extradite the hacker while Russia holds her daughter as a "bargaining chip."

"I don't think that's going to happen, I want to believe it won't."

In the meantime, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday will officially ask Russian President Vladimir Putin to grant clemency to Issachar. This will be Israel's



second clemency request after President Reuven Rivlin appealed to the Russian leader on Friday.

Issachar's lawyers on Monday officially appealed the sentence.

10.14.19

Israel sets to extradite Russian hacker to U.S.

Israel sets to extradite Russian hacker to U.S.

Government officials estimate hacker will be extradited to U.S. after PM rules out any possibility of potential trade deal between cyber felon and Israeli jailed in Russia

Tova Tzimukij|Published: 10.14.19 , 20:57

Minister of Justice Amir Ohana is expected to sign an extradition order in the coming days against Russian hacker Alexei Burkov, who is wanted in the United States, government officials said Monday.

In recent days, several consultation rounds have been held between state officials headed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in light of the fact that both the United States and Russia are seeking Burkov's extradition.

During the talks Netanyahu had ruled out any possibility of a potential trade deal between Burkov and Naama Issachar, a 26-year-old who was arrested in April while in transit in a Moscow airport, en route from India to Israel, and accused of carrying 9 grams of cannabis. Russian authorities charged her with drug smuggling and sentenced her for 7.5 years in prison.

Official documents and decisions of the Jerusalem District Court and the Supreme Court in Israel that discussed Burkov's appeal show that the United States was the first to request Burkov's extradition three and a half years ago.

Alexei Burkov, a Russian national detained by Israel during a 2015 visit. Israel says he is wanted by the United States for suspected cyber offences.

President Reuven Rivlin on Sunday appealed in an official letter to his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to grant a pardon to Issachar.

10.14.19 - News Placed in Oct 14 spot -

Kurds ally with Syrian forces to fight Turkish invasion as U.S. troops withdraw

Kurds ally with Syrian forces to fight Turkish invasion as U.S. troops withdraw

Move could trigger military confrontation between Syrian army and Turkey as well as resurgence of Islamic State, after Trump pulls U.S. troops from area

Ynet, Agencies|Published: 10.14.19 , 09:11

Syrian forces Sunday entered the Kurdish city of Manbij in Northern Syria following a deal struck between the Kurds and the Assad regime.

This latest move could bring about a military confrontation between the Syrian army and Turkey as well as the resurgence of ISIS that had already been defeated, while U.S. President Donald Trump backs out of the area leaving it to the control of Assad's chief ally, Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Syrian Kurdish officials say they will work with the country's central government in Damascus to fend off Turkey's offensive against Kurdish fighters.

Sunday's announcement came hours after U.S. officials said American troops will leave northern Syria.

They're pulling out because of the chaos caused by Turkey's rolling offensive, which began five days ago. Ahead of the Turkish invasion, President Donald Trump ordered U.S. troops to step aside, a decision the Kurdish allies saw as a betrayal.

Turkey and allied fighters swept into northern Syria, clashing intensely with the Kurdish fighters. U.S. troops found themselves caught in the middle, and the decision was made Sunday to pull out.

The Kurdish-led force had shrugged off Damascus' rule in 2012 at the height of Syria's civil war, when the Syrian government pulled out troops to focus on the fighting elsewhere.

Syrian state TV says government troops are moving to the north to confront an ongoing Turkish-led invasion of northern Syria but gave no further details.

A Syrian Kurdish official and a war monitor also said Sunday that Syrian government forces were poised to enter Kurdish-controlled towns, from which U.S. troops are withdrawing amid the Turkish offensive.

The Kurdish official would not disclose details but said a deal with Syrian Kurdish forces through Russia has been reached to deploy government forces in certain border towns. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because an official announcement has not yet been made.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the deal covered the towns of Kobani and Manbij. U.S. troops have been deployed in the towns after they were cleared of Islamic State militants in 2015.

The announcement comes after U.S. officials said American troops are withdrawing from northern Syria amid the unfolding Turkish offensive against the U.S.-allied Kurdish fighters.

Turkey's official Anadolu news agency says Turkey-backed Syrian forces have advanced into the center of a Syrian border town, Tal Abyad, on the fifth day of the Turkey's military offensive against Kurdish fighters in Syria.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a war monitor, said Sunday that the Turkey-backed forces had "near full control" of the town.

Sporadic gunfire and an occasional mortar round could still be heard hitting Tal Abyad from just across the border in the Turkish town of Akcakale. There were some celebrations in Akcakale, with people waving Turkish flags.

The Turkish government views the Syrian Kurdish fighters as terrorists because of their links to an insurgency in southeast Turkey. But those same Syrian Kurdish forces were a key U.S. ally in the war against the Islamic State group.

Turkey has vowed to carve out a "safe zone" inside Syria along the border.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said earlier 17 villages around Tal Abyad had also been captured.

The Syrian Kurdish fighters had themselves captured the town from IS in 2015.

On Sunday, Recep Tayyip Erdogan slammed western allies for standing by the Syrian Kurdish militias and said Turkey won't negotiate with "terrorists."

NATO member Turkey views the Syrian Kurdish fighters as terrorists because of their links to an insurgency in southeast Turkey. But those same Syrian Kurdish forces were a key U.S. ally in the war against the Islamic State group.

Turkey has vowed to carve out a "safe zone" inside Syria along the border.

Without specifying which countries made a mediation offer, Erdogan asked: "What kind of prime minister, what kind of head of state are those who offer to mediate between us and the terror group?"

Turkey, the U.S. and the European Union all designate the Turkish-based Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, as a terror group.

10.10.19

Netanyahu condemns Turkish invasion into Syria

Netanyahu condemns Turkish invasion into Syria

PM warns against 'ethnic cleansing of the Kurds' by Turkey and its allies and says Israel is ready to provide humanitarian aid to the 'gallant Kurdish people'; Turkey launched a large-scale offensive against Kurdish fighters in northern Syria on Wednesday

Associated Press, Ynet |Published: 10.10.19 , 16:26

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is condemning the Turkish invasion of Kurdish areas in Syria and warning of an "ethnic cleansing" against them.

Turkey launched airstrikes, fired artillery and began a ground offensive against Kurdish fighters in northern Syria on Wednesday.

"Israel strongly condemns the Turkish invasion of the Kurdish areas in Syria and warns against the ethnic cleansing of the Kurds by Turkey and its proxies," Netanyahu said Thursday at a memorial ceremony for the fallen soldiers of the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

Israel's leader added that Israel is prepared to extend humanitarian assistance to the "gallant Kurdish people."

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced the campaign following President Donald Trump's abrupt decision to withdraw forces from the region. It essentially abandoned Syrian Kurdish fighters and left the U.S. ally vulnerable to a Turkish offensive that was widely condemned around the world.

The prime minister, however, refrained from criticizing the United States, opting instead to thank the Americans for providing aid to Israel toward the tail end of the Yom Kippur War.

"Like in 1973, today we very much appreciate the important support of the US, which has greatly increased in recent years, as well as the major economic pressure that the US is using on Iran," Netanyahu said.

"The current focus of aggression in the Middle East is the Iranian regime in Tehran. Iran is striving to tighten its grip in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and the Gaza Strip," he added.

Trump's decision was a major shift in U.S. policy, raising fears in Israel that the unpredictable Trump could just as easily renege of his traditional support of Israel.

10.10.19 - News Placed in Oct 10 spot -

Israel Prize laureates petition Supreme Court to include nation minorities

Israel Prize laureates petition Supreme Court against Nation-State Law

Some of the country's leading writers, entertainers, researchers and scientists seek an amendment to controversial legislation so that it not only defines Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people but also as homeland of the minorities that live in it

Yael Freidson|Published: 10.10.19 , 11:19

A group of 40 of Israel's most prestigious writers, entertainers, researchers and scientists are planning to petition the Supreme Court against the controversial Nation-State Law, which critics say discriminates against the country's non-Jewish citizens.

Among the long and respected list of petitioners - all recipients of the Israel Prize - are writer David Grossman, actor and comedian Gavri Banai, educator Prof. Alice Shalvi, choreographer Ohad Naharin and artist Michal Na'aman.

The law, passed by the Knesset last year, defines Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people and strips the Arabic language from its status as an official language alongside Hebrew, instead defining it as a language with "special status."

The petition aims is to see a special clause added to the legislation to protect the rights of minorities in Israel.

"Without the inclusion of minorities as part of the identity of Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people, the National-State Law is unconstitutional," says the petition.

The legislation caused a wave of protests within the Arab and Druze community.

Several petitions have already been filed against the law – but this one proposes a direct solution to the lack of mention of minorities.

The petitioners propose an additional clause be placed at the beginning of the law stating that "Israel is the national home land of the Jewish people" and that "it is the home land of all minorities who live within."

The group of laureates stress that a nation state bill cannot exist without the inclusion of the rights to which minorities are entitled.

They reference as an example the Croatian constitution, which states the it is the nation state of the Croatian people, but also the state of Muslims, Jews and all other minorities within it.

"Israel is the state of the Jews from a national standpoint, but from a civilian and judicial standpoint, it is also the state of the Druze, Bedouin and other citizens who live in it. More than two million citizens are not 'visitors' in the nation state of the Jews: they are part of this land and belong to it", says the petition.

David Harel, a professor at the Weizmann Institute of Science, Israel Prize laureate and Vice-President of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, said Saturday that: "The principle of equality among all citizens is not sacrosanct because of people's belief

in it, rather it has been a cornerstone of democracy. When a legislation such as this passes, you automatically ignore 20 percent of the population and that is not democracy."

Sculptor Dani Karavan, another from the group of laureates, added: "I think it is my moral duty to join this petition. I believe in human rights within democracy, equality and I'm against discrimination.

"Anyone who fights for equality and human rights, I'm on his side. I'm filled with appreciation for the many young people who get up and fight not only for their rights, but

10.09.19 - News Placed in Oct 9 spot -

Turkey launches offensive against Kurdish fighters in Syria after US withdrew

Turkey launches offensive against Kurdish fighters in Syria

In its call for a general mobilization, the local civilian Kurdish authority known as the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria asked the global community to live up to its responsibilities as 'a humanitarian catastrophe might befall our people'

Associated Press|Published: 10.09.19, 19:55

Turkey launched airstrikes and fired artillery aimed at crushing Kurdish fighters in northern Syria on Wednesday after U.S. troops pulled back from the area, paving the way for an assault on forces that have long been allied with the United States.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced the start of the campaign, which followed an abrupt decision Sunday by U.S. President Donald Trump that American troops would step aside to allow for the operation.

Trump's move, which has drawn harsh bipartisan opposition at home, represented a shift in U.S. policy that essentially abandoned the Syrian Kurdish fighters who have been America's only allies inside Syria in the fight against the Islamic State group.

After Turkey's offensive began, there was sign of panic in the streets of Ras al-Ayn-- one of the towns under attack with residential areas close to the borders. Cars raced to safety, although it was not clear if they were leaving the town or heading away from border areas.

Near the town of Qamishli, plumes of smoke were seen rising from an area close to the border after activists reported sounds of explosion nearby.

At least one member of the Kurdish-led force known as the Syrian Democratic Forces was killed in the Turkish bombardment, Kurdish activists and a Syria war monitor said.

Turkey's campaign -- in which a NATO member is raining down bombs on an area where hundreds of U.S. troops are stationed -- drew immediate criticism and calls for restraint from Europe.

"Coalition forces are not near the places Turkey has struck so far," an official with the U.S.-led coalition told The Associated Press.

The Kurdish forces have warned of a "humanitarian catastrophe" that could potentially unfold because of the Turkish military operation.

"Our mission is to prevent the creation of a terror corridor across our southern border, and to bring peace to the area," Erdogan said in a tweet.

He added that Turkish Armed Forces, together with Turkish-backed Syrian fighters known as the Syrian National Army, had begun what they called "Operation Peace Spring" against Kurdish fighters to eradicate what Erdogan said was "the threat of terror" against Turkey.

Minutes before Erdogan's announcement, Turkish jets began pounding suspected positions of Syrian Kurdish forces in the town of Ras al Ayn, according to Turkish media and Syrian activists. The sound of explosions could be heard in Turkey.

A photograph released to Turkish media showed Erdogan at his desk, reportedly giving orders for the start of the operation.

It was difficult to know what was hit in the first hours of the operation.

Mustafa Bali, a spokesman for the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, said Turkish warplanes were targeting "civilian areas" in northern Syria, causing "a huge panic" in the region.

Before Turkey's attack, Syrian Kurdish forces that are allied with the United States issued a general mobilization call, warning of a "humanitarian catastrophe."

The Turkish operation meant to create a so-called "safe zone" carries potential gains and risk for Turkey by getting even more deeply involved in the Syria war. It also would ignite new fighting in Syria's 8-year-old war, potentially displacing hundreds of thousands.

Turkey has long threatened to attack the Kurdish fighters whom Ankara considers terrorists allied with a Kurdish insurgency in Turkey. AP journalists on the Turkish side of the border overlooking Tal Abyad saw Turkish forces crossing into Syria in military vehicles.

Expectations of an invasion increased after Trump's announcement, although he also threatened to "totally destroy and obliterate" Turkey's economy if the Turkish push into Syria went too far.

In the U.S., Republican critics and others said he was sacrificing an ally, the Syrian Kurdish forces, and undermining Washington's credibility. Trump tweeted that he is

focused on the "BIG PICTURE" that does not include American involvement in "stupid endless wars" in the Middle East.

Turkey "has legitimate security concerns" after suffering "horrendous terrorist attacks" and hosting thousands of refugees, said NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg.

But he also said in Rome that Turkey should not "further destabilize the region" with its military action in Syria.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas condemned the offensive, saying it will "further destabilize the region and strengthen IS." The operation also was criticized by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker.

The EU is paying Turkey 6 billion euros (\$6.6 billion) to help the country cope with almost 4 million Syrian refugees on its territory in exchange for stopping migrants leaving for Europe.

But Ankara seeks more money amid concerns that thousands of Syrians could soon cross its border.

Fahrettin Altun, the Turkish presidency's communications director, called on the international community to rally behind Ankara, which he said would also take over the fight against the Islamic State group.

Turkey aimed to "neutralize" Syrian Kurdish militants in northeastern Syria and to "liberate the local population from the yoke of the armed thugs," Altun wrote in a Washington Post column published Wednesday.

Erdogan discussed plans for the incursion by phone with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Erdogan's office said he told Putin the military action in the region east of the Euphrates River "will contribute to the peace and stability" and also "pave the way for a political process" in Syria.

In its call for a general mobilization, the local civilian Kurdish authority known as the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria asked the global community to live up to its responsibilities as "a humanitarian catastrophe might befall our people."

The Kurds also said they want the U.S.-led coalition to set up a no-fly zone in northeastern Syria to protect the civilian population from Turkish airstrikes.

The U.S.-backed Syrian Kurdish group urged Moscow to broker and guarantee talks with the Syrian government in Damascus in light of the military operation. The Syrian Kurdish-led administration said it is responding positively to calls from Moscow encouraging the Kurds and the Syrian government to settle their difference through talks.



Syria's Foreign Ministry condemned Turkey's plans, calling it a "blatant violation" of international law and vowing to repel an incursion. He said some Kurdish groups were being used as a tool to help an alleged "American project," but added Syria is ready to welcome back its "stray sons if they return to their senses," referring to the pro-U.S. Kurdish fighters.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused Washington of playing "very dangerous games" with the Syrian Kurds, saying that the U.S. first propped up the Syrian Kurdish "quasi state" in Syria and now is withdrawing its support.

"Such reckless attitude to this highly sensitive subject can set fire to the entire region, and we have to avoid it at any cost," he said in Kazakhstan. Russian news media said Moscow communicated that position to Washington.

Earlier Wednesday, IS militants targeted a post of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces in the northern Syrian city of Raqqa, which was once the de facto IS capital at the height of the militants' power in the region.

The SDF, which holds thousands of IS fighters in detention facilities in northeastern Syria, has warned that a Turkish incursion might lead to the resurgence of the extremists. The U.S.-allied Kurdish-led force captured the last IS area controlled by the militants in eastern Syria in March.

In the IS attack, three suicide bombers struck Kurdish positions in Raqqa. There was no immediate word on casualties. An activist collective known as Raqqa is being Silently Slaughtered reported an exchange of fire and an explosion.

The Observatory said the attack involved two IS fighters who engaged in a shootout before blowing themselves up.

IS claimed responsibility, saying one of its members killed or wounded 13 SDF members.

10.07.19 - News Placed in Oct 6 spot -

Monday is Fourth and final day of PM's pre-hearings

Fourth and final day of PM's pre-indictment hearings to highlight Case 2000

Netanyahu's pre-trial hearings are set to wrap up with a case which alleges that Israel's leader and Yedioth Ahronoth publisher had a quid pro quo of positive coverage for prime minister and his wife in exchange for weakening of rival newspaper

Ynet |Published: 10.07.19 , 08:42

The fourth and final day of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's pre-indictment hearings are set to begin on Monday with the third corruption case involving an alleged

quid pro quo media scheme set to take the limelight. Netanyahu's attorneys are expected to arrive to the Justice Ministry in Jerusalem to fend off the allegations.

Netanyahu faces possible indictment in three criminal corruption investigations known as Cases 4000, 1000 and 2000. Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit already has recommended that Netanyahu be indicted on fraud, breach of trust and bribery charges.

Case 2000 concerns alleged discussions Netanyahu and Yedioth Ahronoth publisher Arnon Mozes had over a quid pro quo of positive media for the prime minister in return for Netanyahu weakening Yedioth's main rival newspaper Israel Hayom.

The hearing on Sunday focused on Case 1000 which alleges Netanyahu has received **expensive gifts worth up to one million shekels** from billionaire Arnon Milchan and Australian billionaire James Packer.

The defense lawyers in Case 1000, Amit Hadad and Yossi Askenazi said shortly before the hearing was due to begin that once the attorney general hears their arguments "there will be no choice but to close the cases."

The first two hearings focused solely on Case 4000, which involves an alleged plan to ease regulations for telecommunications mogul and Bezeq chief Shaul Elovitch in return for positive coverage on his Walla! news website.

Netanyahu has called the allegations part of a witch hunt, lashing out against the media, police, prosecutors and the justice system.

**09.24.19 - News Placed in Oct 31 spot -**

**UK Justice rules unlawful suspension of parliament & to extend Brexit past Oct 31**

**UK Supreme Court rules Johnson's suspension of parliament was unlawful**

**11-justice panel rules unanimously** that PM acted unlawfully, says parliament has not been prorogued; Speaker Bercow says House of Commons to resume deliberations Wednesday morning, will discuss events of recent weeks

Reuters |Published: **09.24.19** , 15:04

LONDON - The United Kingdom's Supreme Court ruled on Tuesday that British Prime Minister Boris Johnson had acted **unlawfully when he advised Queen Elizabeth to suspend parliament weeks before Brexit** - and that **therefore the suspension was void.**

The ruling paves the way for legislators to return to parliament, where Johnson has no majority. It could give lawmakers, most of whom are opposed to leaving without the EU

without a divorce agreement as he has threatened to do, further opportunity to impede his strategy.

"The decision to advise Her Majesty to prorogue parliament was unlawful because it had the effect of frustrating or preventing the ability of parliament to carry out its constitutional functions without reasonable justification," Supreme Court President Brenda Hale said.

"Parliament has not been prorogued. This is the unanimous judgment of all 11 justices," Baroness Hale added. "It is for parliament, and in particular the speaker and the (House of) Lords speaker, to decide what to do next."

Parliament was suspended, or prorogued in the British jargon, from Sept. 10 to Oct. 14. The prorogation was approved by Queen Elizabeth, Britain's politically neutral head of state, on the advice of the prime minister.

"I welcome the Supreme Court's judgment that the prorogation of Parliament was unlawful," said the speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow.

He said parliament would resume its deliberations Wednesday at 11:30 a.m., adding that there will be full scope for emergency debates following the court. He said the ruling means the suspension never took effect.

"I have instructed the House authorities to prepare not for the recall - the prorogation was unlawful and is void - to prepare for the resumption of the business of the House of Commons," he told reporters.

"Specifically, I've instructed the House authorities to undertake such steps as are necessary to ensure that the House of Commons sits tomorrow and that it does so at 11.30 am," he said.

Bercow said there will not be a Prime Minister's Questions on Wednesday as Johnson is in New York for the United Nations General Assembly.

Some lawmakers, including those thrown out of Johnson's Conservative Party for rebelling against his Brexit plans, had said he should resign if he was found to have misled the queen.

Brexit Party chairman Richard Tice said the ruling means Britain will have to ask the European Union to push back the Brexit deadline again. Johnson has pledged to leave the EU on October 31, come what may.

"What is absolutely clear is that the public needs to understand we're not leaving the European Union on Oct. 31, there will have to be a request to the European Union for an extension," Trice said.

Opposition Labour Party lawmaker Hilary Benn, who introduced legislation compelling Johnson to **stop a no-deal Brexit** and extend its deadline, said he looks forward to returning to Parliament.

Benn said Johnson had "acted unlawfully in proroguing Parliament because he didn't want us holding him to account" over Brexit.

He added: "I look forward to the House of Commons returning as soon as possible."

Transparency campaigner Gina Miller called the ruling "a win for Parliamentary sovereignty, the separation of powers and independence of our British courts."

Miller, who is one of the people who brought the case against the government, said the court unanimously ruled that Johnson advised the queen to shut down **Parliament** "to **silence our democratically elected MPs** at one of the most critical times in our country's modern history."

As a result of Tuesday's decision, Miller said: "Parliament is open – it

**10.21.19**

**US soldier blast Trump's Syria retreat**

**U.S. soldiers who fought alongside Kurds blast Trump's Syria retreat**

Legions of American service members have a deep gratitude and respect for Kurdish fighters they served alongside through the Iraq war and, more recently, conflicts with the Islamic State in Syria

Reuters |Published: **10.21.19** , 14:10

In the summer of 2004, U.S. soldier Greg Walker drove to a checkpoint just outside of Baghdad's Green Zone with his Kurdish bodyguard, Azaz. When he stepped out of his SUV, three Iraqi guards turned him around at gunpoint.

As he walked back to the vehicle, he heard an AK-47 being racked and a hail of cursing in Arabic and Kurdish. He turned to see Azaz facing off with the Iraqis.

"Let us through or I'll kill you all," Walker recalled his Kurdish bodyguard telling the Iraqi soldiers, who he described as "terrified."

He thought to himself: "This is the kind of ally and friend I want."

Now retired and living in Portland, Oregon, the 66-year-old former Army Special Forces soldier is among legions of U.S. servicemembers with a deep gratitude and respect for Kurdish fighters they served alongside through the Iraq war and, more recently, conflicts with the Islamic State.

So he was "furious" when President Donald Trump this month abruptly decided to pull 1,000 U.S. troops from northeast Syria, clearing the way for Turkey to move in on Kurdish-controlled territory.

Walker's rage was echoed in Reuters interviews with a half dozen other current and former U.S. soldiers who have served with Kurdish forces. Mark Giaconia, a 46-year-old former U.S. Army special forces soldier, recalled similar camaraderie with the Kurds he fought with in Iraq more than a decade ago.

"I trusted them with my life," said Giaconia, who now lives in Herndon, Virginia, after retiring from the Army with 20 years of service. "I fought with these guys and watched them die for us."

The Trump administration's decision to "leave them hanging" stirred deep emotions, Giaconia said.

"It's like a violation of trust," he said.

The White House declined to comment.

#### Bipartisan criticism

Trump's abrupt decision to pull back U.S. troops from along the Syria-Turkey border allowed Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan to launch an offensive into the region aimed at creating a 20 mile (32 km) "safe zone" clear of the Kurdish YPG militia.

The Kurdish fighters had been Washington's main ally in the region but the Turkish government regards them as a terrorist group.

In the face of criticism from both Democrats and his own Republicans, Trump defended the move, saying that it fulfilled a campaign promise to reduce foreign troop presence and asserting that the Kurds were "not angels."

The Kurds pivoted quickly, allying themselves with Syria to try to hold off the Turkish onslaught.

Trump then sent Vice President Michael Pence to Ankara to negotiate a pause in the fighting that the United States said would allow the Kurds to pull back from the area Turkey aimed to take, and which Turkey said achieved the main goal of the assault it launched Oct. 9.

Congressional Republicans - including Senator Lindsey Graham, normally a staunch Trump ally - fretted that the move would risk allowing the Islamic State militant group to resurge.

"Congress is going to speak with a very firm, singular voice," Graham said at a Thursday news conference to unveil legislation to impose new sanctions on the Turkish government.

He said the "Turkish outrage" would lead to the re-emergence of Islamic State, the destruction of an ally - the Kurds - and eventually benefit Iran at the expense of Israel.

The House of Representatives voted 354 to 60 last week to condemn Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. forces from northeastern Syria - a rare case of Republicans voting en masse against Trump. A Senate vote on the resolution was blocked, however, by Republican Senator Rand Paul.

Paul, a senator from Kentucky, has voiced his support Trump's withdrawal of troops, saying during a Senate hearing on Thursday that "the Constitution is quite clear, no authorization has ever been given for the use of forces in Syria."

History of 'betrayal'

Some of the U.S. soldiers interviewed by Reuters pointed out that the United States has history of forging alliances with Kurdish forces only to later abandon them.

In the 1970s, the administration of President Richard Nixon secretly agreed to funnel money to Iraqi Kurds fighting for autonomy from Iraq, only to drop that aid after Iraq and Iran reached a peace treaty to end border disputes in 1975.

Likewise after the 1991 Gulf War, a Kurdish uprising against Iraqi President Saddam Hussein eventually led to a brutal crackdown after U.S. forces left the region.

Those incidents came up often among Kurds who fought alongside a U.S. Army soldier who did several tours in the Middle East.

"Even then, they were bringing up the 1991 betrayal of the Kurds. This idea of betraying the Kurds was something that was very, very front of mind," said the soldier, who spoke on the condition of anonymity since he is still in the military. "There was definitely some skepticism of our support of them long term."

Kurds have come to know betrayal, said Kardos Dargala, a 38-year-old Iraqi Kurd whose relationship with the U.S. military dates back to 2004 and the second U.S. invasion of Iraq.

"Feeling betrayed, throughout history it is a very familiar pattern," said Dargala, who worked as a security contractor for the U.S. military until 2008 - when he immigrated to the United States, joined the U.S. Army, and was deployed to Afghanistan.

Dargala, a U.S. citizen, was injured multiple times in combat. He returned to Iraq earlier this year to spend time with family members who are unable to travel to the United States.

The president's withdrawal of troops from Syria left him in disbelief. Dargala said Trump's decision ran counter to U.S. values and interests and sent the wrong message to its allies.

"The path the president is on," he said, "is a very destructive path."

10.23.19

Russia warns Syrian Kurds must pull back from border or face Turkish army

Russia warns Syrian Kurdish YPG must pull back or face Turkish army

Erdogan is said to consider a victory the full removal of the Kurds from Syria's northeastern border with Turkey, an area occupied by U.S. troops for many years, but will now be patrolled by Russian and Turkish forces

Reuters|Published: 10.23.19, 13:53

Russia warned Syrian Kurdish YPG forces on Wednesday they face further armed conflict with Turkey if they fail to comply with a Russian-Turkish accord calling for their withdrawal from the entire length of Syria's northeastern border with Turkey.

Moscow's warning came shortly before Russian and Syrian security forces were due to start overseeing the removal of YPG fighters and weapons at least 30 km (19 miles) into Syria, under the deal struck by presidents Vladimir Putin and Tayyip Erdogan.

A complete pullout of the YPG would mark a victory for Erdogan, who launched a cross-border offensive on October 9 to drive the Kurdish militia from the border and create a "safe zone" for the return of Syrian refugees.

The accord, which expands on a U.S.-brokered deal last week, also underlines Putin's dominant influence in Syria and seals the return of his ally President Bashar al-Assad's forces to northeast Syria for the first time in years, by endorsing the deployment of Syrian border guards from noon (0900 GMT) on Wednesday.

Six days later, Russian and Turkish forces will jointly start to patrol a 10 km strip of land in northeast Syria where U.S. troops for years were deployed along with their former Kurdish allies.

Those changes reflect the dizzying pace of changes in Syria since President Donald Trump announced the withdrawal of U.S. forces from northern Syria earlier this month, shaking up the military balance across a quarter of the country after eight years of conflict and prolonged freezes on the frontlines.

Kurdish militia commanders have yet to respond to the deal reached in Russia's Black Sea resort of Sochi, and it was not immediately clear how their withdrawal could be enforced.

## RUSSIAN WARNING

A joint Turkish-Russian statement issued after six hours of talks between Putin and Erdogan said they would establish a "joint monitoring and verification mechanism" to oversee implementation of the agreement.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov was more blunt. If Kurdish forces did not retreat, Syrian border guards and Russian military police would have to fall back. "And remaining Kurdish formations would then fall under the weight of the Turkish army," he said.

In a swipe at Washington, which has called into question how the deal will be guaranteed, Peskov said the United States had been the closest ally of the Kurdish fighters but had now betrayed them.

"Now they (the Americans) prefer to leave the Kurds at the border and almost force them to fight the Turks," he said in remarks to Russian news agencies.

The Kurdish-led SDF were Washington's main allies **in the fight to dismantle Islamic State's self-declared caliphate in Syria**. Trump's decision to pull troops out was criticized by U.S. lawmakers, including fellow Republicans, as a betrayal.

In a further sign of growing ties between Ankara and Moscow, which have alarmed the U.S. administration, the head of Russia's defense sales agency was quoted by the Interfax news agency on Wednesday as saying Moscow could deliver more S-400 missile defense systems to Turkey.

Turkey, a NATO member, has already been frozen out of a programme to buy and help produce F-35 jets and faces possible U.S. sanctions for buying the S-400 systems, which Washington says are incompatible with NATO's defenses and threaten the F-35 if operated near the stealth fighter.

Overnight, Turkey's defense ministry said that the United States had told Ankara the YPG had completed its withdrawal from the area of Turkey's military offensive.

There was no need to initiate another operation outside the current area of operation at this stage, the ministry said, effectively ending its military offensive that began two weeks ago, drawing widespread criticism.



10.23.19

Republicans Demand access to closed-door depositions on Impeachment

Republicans Disrupt House Impeachment Inquiry, Delaying Testimony From Pentagon Aide

October 23, 2019 2:01 PM ET

Flanked by about two dozen House Republicans, U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., argues that all GOP lawmakers should have access to closed-door depositions in the impeachment inquiry. Committee rules dictate that only those on the panels conducting the probe can attend.

Alex Wong/Getty Images Updated at 4:29 p.m. ET

Republican members of Congress disrupted the closed-door proceedings of the House impeachment inquiry, preventing a Pentagon official from giving her testimony.

Arguing that the inquiry's interviews should not be held behind closed doors, GOP lawmakers entered the secure area in the Capitol Wednesday where witnesses are typically questioned.

"Behind those doors, they intend to overturn the results of an American presidential election" said Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz, a Republican ally of the president's. "We're going to try to go in there ... on behalf of the millions of Americans that we represent that want to see this Congress working for them, and not obsessed with attacking a president who we believe has not done anything to deserve impeachment."

Democratic lawmakers have argued that the initial interviews of the investigation must be done in private to prevent witnesses from coordinating testimony.

"As the investigation proceeds, and at a time that it will not jeopardize investigative equities, we will make the interview transcripts public," House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff said in a letter to colleagues last week.

Schiff also promised public hearings would be coming in the future "so that the full Congress and the American people can hear their testimony firsthand."

This was not enough to mollify the group of GOP lawmakers. On Wednesday morning, led by Gaetz, approximately two dozen lawmakers attempted to enter the rooms in the Capitol where Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Laura Cooper was scheduled to be interviewed.

Since these lawmakers were not members of the committees overseeing the impeachment inquiry, they were denied access. The impeachment inquiry is being led by the House Intelligence, Foreign Affairs and Oversight committees.

The effort proved disruptive to the day's proceedings. Cooper's testimony was delayed for several hours, but eventually resumed Wednesday afternoon when those GOP lawmakers not permitted to attend left the area.

The area is designated as secure — classified materials and witness testimony is discussed there and only lawmakers and a small number of staff are allowed entry.

Rep. Ted Lieu, a Democrat, said that Republican lawmakers tried to enter with their cellphones, which is a violation of the rules for the secure information facility. Lieu said that the Republican effort to enter the secure area without authorization was an "attack on the investigation."

"They're freaked out. They're trying to stop this investigation; they don't want to hear from witness Cooper today," Lieu said.

The GOP effort follows testimony of William Taylor, a career diplomat who told the committees that President Trump had pushed a parallel foreign policy effort to leverage U.S. aid to Ukraine for a commitment from the government to conduct investigations that would boost his domestic political campaign.