

## Turkey, Iran in spat on eve of Syria talks

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Relations between Turkey and Iran have become strained following an exchange of words between the two neighbors, just days before a new round of Syria peace talks are in Geneva. Turkey's Foreign Ministry denounced a statement from an Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, who called on Turkey to not "test Iran's patience."

"It is neither acceptable nor comprehensible for a country, which does not even hesitate to push to the battlefield refugees seeking shelter from crises, accuses others of being responsible for regional tensions and instability," Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Hüseyin Müftüo lu said.

"Iran should take constructive steps and review its regional policies instead of putting the blame on countries which criticize it," he stated, adding that Iran has attracted complaints on international platforms. His remarks came after Bahram Qassemi, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, said Turkey "should not test Iran's patience."

"Those who have immature dreams about rebuilding an empire and have taken meddlesome, illegal and illegitimate measures and supported terrorist groups cannot shirk their responsibility for such moves through a blame game," Qassemi said in a statement late Feb. 19, as quoted by Iran's Tasnim News Agency. "They should be aware that insecurity and instability in the region has no perpetrator other than them and some other paranoid states," he added. Qassemi referred to Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu's speech at the Munich Security Conference in Germany, where he called on Iran to stop conducting a sectarian policy for the sake of maintaining regional stability and security.

"Iran wants to turn Syria and Iraq Shiite," Çavuşoğlu told delegates at the security conference, adding that Turkey was against sectarianism in the Middle East and had called on Iran to stop threatening the region's stability. In addition, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said, during a visit to Bahrain that Iran was pursuing "Persian nationalism" in the region.

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım also warned Iran about highlighting sectarian division in Syria, saying this could cause problems in Turkey-Iran relations, while also terming Iran as a historic neighbor of Turkey.

Iran summoned the Turkish ambassador in Tehran, Rıza Hakan Tekin, over comments made by Çavuşoğlu, Erdoğan and Yıldırım. But on Feb. 20, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister and government spokesman Numan Kurtulmuş struck a more conciliatory tone, downplaying any reports of tension. "Iran and Turkey are friendly nations. There can be differences in views from time to time, but there can't be animosity because of comments," he told reporters during a news conference after a cabinet meeting. "Even if our political differences with Iran emerge, these shouldn't be blown out of proportion," he said.



Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım met with U.S. Vice President Mike Pence on the margins of the Munich Security Conference, for the first high level meeting between the two countries after Trump took office.

“Both leaders agreed that they would not allow Iran to undermine stability in the region,” readout from the White House stated. However, a press note provided by the Turkish Prime Ministry did not mention any topic regarding Iran.

Turkey and Iran along with Russia have been the sponsors of a series of meetings in Astana, the Kazakh capital, in January and February, where the warring sides of the Syrian war, the Syrian regime and the oppositions forces, came together to find a solution to the ongoing conflict.

Though a cease-fire reached between Turkey and Russia on Dec. 30, 2016, has been holding across Syria, the Syrian regime has escalated its fighting in the northern parts of Damascus in the past few days. The United Nations expressed alarm over the escalating fighting in the Damascus area as the world body prepared to launch a new round of peace talks in Geneva on Feb. 23.

U.N. officials have received reports of civilian deaths and injuries from shelling in Qabun, Barzeh, Tishreen and the western Harasta districts of the city, said U.N. spokesman Farhan Haq. “The U.N. is alarmed by the intensification of fighting in the Damascus area in recent days,” said Haq. Over 100,000 civilians in need live in those neighborhoods which have seen an upsurge in fighting since Feb. 18, he added.

U.N. envoy Staffan de Mistura was in Geneva awaiting the arrival of delegations to peace talks set to begin on Feb. 23. The U.N. spokesman indicated that there were still questions concerning the delegations. “We do expect clarifications on who precisely will be coming over,” he said.

The Syria peace talks are based on the broad mandate of a U.N. resolution that asks the U.N. mediator to hold talks on a “political transition process,” an official involved in the talks said. Last week the United Nations appeared to back away from using the phrase “political transition,” which is understood by the opposition to mean a removal of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad or at least an erosion of his powers.

Michael Contet, chief of staff for de Mistura, told a regular U.N. briefing that de Mistura was putting the final touches to arrangements for the talks. “The invitations as well as the substantive agenda for the negotiations are all based on the wide scope of Security Council resolutions, in particular [U.N. Security Council Resolution] 2254, which is our main guidance in this process. The second operative paragraph of 2254 requests the special envoy to convene formal negotiations on the political transition process,” Contet said.

# Zero tolerance for terrorism everywhere: Turkish FM in Cologne

Hurriyet Daily News, 17.02.2017



Terrorism cannot be tolerated anywhere, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said on Feb. 16 ahead of a security conference in Munich. "It's our [Turkey's] right to expect concrete steps," Çavuşoğlu said during an event in Cologne.

"We cannot be slack on issues regarding terrorism," he added. Çavuşoğlu's remarks follow German Chancellor Angela Merkel's visit to Ankara, where she said her country was working on Turkey's requests for the extradition of fugitives of the Gülen movement, accused of being behind the July 2016 failed coup attempt.

During a joint news conference with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Merkel said Germany needed "to have proof to take steps and measures" and the courts are evaluating the latest evidence Turkey sent. Along with an extradition request for Gülenists, Ankara wants Berlin to take tougher action against alleged outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) members in Germany.

After attending the G20 foreign ministers meeting in Bonn, Çavuşoğlu will head to Munich for the security conference and will hold bilateral talks. Meanwhile, Çavuşoğlu voiced optimism on Feb. 16 for closer cooperation with the U.S., following his first face-to-face meeting with new U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.

"The new [U.S.] administration is aware of the mistakes of the previous administration. We will continue to work together to find ways to correct those mistakes and to develop more powerful strategies," state-run Anadolu Agency quoted Çavuşoğlu as telling reporters after his meeting with Tillerson in Bonn, Germany.

The two men held a bilateral meeting on the margins of a G20 foreign ministers' meeting, which brought together top diplomats from the world's 20 largest economies. Çavuşoğlu said he had a frank discussion with Tillerson on the mistakes of the Obama administration, such as its support for the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), which Turkey regards as a terror organization due to its ties to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), in northern Syria plus Washington's reluctance to extradite U.S.-based Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen, who the Turkish government accuses of orchestrating a failed coup attempt in July 2016.

"These have had a deep impact on our relations, and negatively influenced the feeling of Turkish people toward the United States. This has increased anti-Americanism. We have to address these problems," Çavuşoğlu added. He also said regional issues were discussed with Tillerson, including efforts for a political solution in Syria, the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and developments in Iraq. "We have had a very fruitful meeting, in a constructive atmosphere. This has been a good start," he stressed.

Çavuşoğlu underlined that high-level meetings between U.S. President Donald Trump's administration and the Turkish government would continue this weekend, with Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım's planned meeting with U.S. Vice President Mike Pence on the margins of the Munich Security Conference.

Recalling that Trump and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan recently held a telephone conversation, Çavuşoğlu said talks are currently underway to organize a meeting of the two leaders in the near future.

## Turkey to US: Act over Syria's Manbij or we'll reconsider

Reuters, 22.02.2017



The United States should act in order to fulfill its promise to make Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) forces leave Syria's Manbij in line with Ankara's request or Turkey would have to reconsider an operation there, Turkish Defense Minister Fikri İsmail said Feb. 22.

“One of the crucial aims of Turkey is to end the PKK [outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party] – Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) presence in Manbij. If the United States does not do so, Turkey will have to re-evaluate this operation,” Turkish Defense Minister Fikri İsmail said on Feb. 22 in a televised interview.

Turkey does not want PYD forces to go to the west of the Euphrates River, agreeing with the U.S. that PYD forces would leave Manbij and retreat to the east of the Euphrates following the town's liberation from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The full withdrawal has not yet been realized, according to Turkey.

“This is something that will affect the Raqqa operation. Our advice, as Turkey, is to do this with the right actors who will solve the problem permanently in Raqqa,” İsmail said, noting that they might not need Turkish ground troops in the Raqqa offensive. “We do not think Turkish troops will be needed much in the Raqqa operation,” he stated.

İsmail said the U.S. was aiming to finalize its plans for the Syria offensive. The new U.S. administration has closer perspective toward Turkey, compared to the previous Barack Obama administration, he said. Elaborating on Turkey's proposal to launch the Raqqa offensive with Arab elements instead of cooperating with the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), İsmail stated that Washington was concerned of a possible delay in the Raqqa operation. In his meeting with new U.S. Defense Minister James Mattis in Brussels, İsmail stressed that he opposed the idea of uniting Syrian Kurdish cantons in northern Syria.



Less than 100 ISIL jihadists were still holed up in al-Bab in northern Syria as part of Turkey's ongoing Euphrates Shield operation, while half of the town was in the hands of Turkish troops and the Ankara-backed Syrian rebels, I ik said.

Elaborating on Russia's relations with the PYD, he said Ankara did not welcome Moscow's attitude on the issue. Although Turkey was speaking about its concerns regarding the group, which Ankara sees as offshoot of the PKK, "I can't say they clearly understand us," he stated.

On the ground, Turkish forces have killed at least 14 ISIL militants in northern Syria over the last 24 hours, the Turkish military stated on Feb. 22. The General Staff said Turkey's land and air forces targeted 110 ISIL sites as part of the Euphrates Shield operation.

Ground forces hit a total of 89 ISIL targets, including shelters, command control facilities, weapons and vehicles, the statement said. Turkish fighter jets, meanwhile, carried out 21 air strikes and destroyed 18 buildings used as shelters, two weapons depots and an armed vehicle, it added.

The Euphrates Shield operation began on Aug. 24, 2016, to improve security, support coalition forces and eliminate the terror threat along the Turkish border using Free Syrian Army (FSA) fighters backed by Turkish artillery and jets.

## Turkey to EU: No summit, no progress

Hurriyet Daily News, 23.02.2017



The only way to jumpstart stalled Turkey-EU ties is to hold a high-level summit between the two parties, Turkish EU Minister Ömer Çelik has said, suggesting that it should occur in the first half of 2017 and produce concrete results in Turkey's accession process, as well as a visa exemption to Turkish nationals.

"There can be no progress without a proper Turkey-EU summit," Çelik told a group of journalists. Turkey has long called on the EU to hold a high-level summit to revise issues of concern to both sides, especially on the implementation of the March 18, 2016, migrant agreement.

Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım conveyed Ankara's message to the EU on the need to update the political framework during a trip to Malta, the EU's term president, last week. Turkey's message included two important points, Çelik said. "First, this summit should be held in the first of half of this year.

Second, it should not introduce theoretical perspectives but concrete progress. This summit should not be limited to issues related to Turkey's struggle against terrorism or migration. We want to see what can be produced in Turkey's accession process, as well as grant visa exemptions to Turkish nationals."



Although Turkey has fulfilled its obligations stemming from a March 2016 agreement, it needs to be seen whether the EU really wants to continue the deal or wishes to abandon it, Çelik said. Recalling that the EU was in a process of abolishing visa requirements for the nationals of Ukraine, Georgia and Kosovo, Çelik said: "If the criteria is about security, there is no doubt that Turkey is much stronger in fulfilling it. There is no solid reason for not providing a visa exemption to Turkey."

Çelik also said Turkey's ongoing struggle against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in al-Bab, Manbij and elsewhere in Syria was part of an effort to ensure the security of European capitals from terrorists.

"Turkey was able to clear its borders of DAESH all alone while a coalition of 60 countries failed to do so. These borders are NATO borders as well and have been cleared of terrorists," he said, using an Arabic acronym for ISIL.

Çelik also drew attention to the EU's decision not to invite negotiating countries to the 60th anniversary of the Rome Treaty, which will be held in Rome on March 25. Expressing Ankara's disturbance, Çelik said: "They said they have not invited the United Kingdom either. This reflects the EU's lack of vision. Putting countries that are negotiating to be admitted to the EU and, therefore see their future inside the EU, and the U.K., which decided to exit it, into the same basket is a clear collapse of vision."

The meeting, which is being organized by European Council President Donald Tusk, will be attended by the heads of state and governments of EU countries on March 25 in Italy. Ties between Ankara and Brussels became increasingly tense last year after the European Parliament issued a recommendation to the EU to cut ongoing negotiations with Turkey upon rapporteur Kati Piri's report.

When asked about Piri's presence in Ankara for official talks, Çelik said he refused to give an appointment to her on the grounds that she was solely reflecting the position of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) and was failing to draft a balanced text on Turkey.

"She should not report as if she is the spokeswoman of the HDP. Her reports are only the translation of HDP officials' routine statements into English," Çelik said, calling on her to contribute to the Turkey-EU relationship and not damage it. Still, Çelik said Turkey's new EU ambassador, Faruk Kaymakçı, had related that Piri will exercise a more balanced position in her future works.

Çelik also said a note on Turkey's upcoming referendum had been given to EU officials during Yıldırım's meetings last weekend in Germany. The EU commissioner for migration, Dimitris Avramopoulos, demanded information on the content of the constitutional changes at a meeting that took place at around midnight, Çelik said, underlining that the note was prepared and given to EU officials the following morning.

# Turkey, Syrian rebels in 'near complete control' of Syria's al-Bab

Anadolu Agency, 23.02.2017



Turkish armed forces and allied Syrian rebels have almost total control of the Syrian flashpoint town of al-Bab after entering the center of the former jihadist stronghold, Turkish Defense Minister Fikri Işik said on Feb. 23.

“It’s been a long time since we entered al-Bab but today we can say that near complete control has been taken of al-Bab and the city center has been entered,” Işik said in a statement. Turkey and Ankara-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA) members have been seeking to oust the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) from al-Bab since last year but have encountered heavy resistance and suffered heavy casualties.

Earlier in the day, state-run Anadolu Agency said Turkish Armed Forces and FSA fighters seized central al-Bab on Feb. 23. “When the search and combing operations are over, we will be able to say that al-Bab has been completely cleared of Daesh elements,” said Işik, using an Arabic acronym for ISIL. “This does not need too much more time. As of today, the city center has been entered and search and combing operations [for remaining jihadists] have been launched.”

Işik reaffirmed that Turkey was now ready to join any operation by international coalition forces to take the Syrian city of Raqqa, the de facto capital of the extremist group. But he insisted such a campaign must not include the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD). Işik said such an operation should include pro-Ankara FSA rebels and Raqqa’s own residents.

“Turkey would be able to provide such a coalition operation with the necessary support,” he said. A rebel commander said al-Bab had been totally liberated, according to Reuters. “We are announcing al-Bab as completely liberated, and we are now clearing mines from the residential neighborhoods,” said Ahmad Othman, a rebel commander.

“After hours of fighting, we chased out the last remaining [ISIL] rank and file that were collapsing after the fierce shelling of their positions,” he added. The developments came as a new round of peace talks between the warring sides over the six-year-old Syrian war was launched in Geneva on Feb. 23.

U.N. Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura convened his first morning meeting with the delegation of the Syrian government, headed by Bashar al-Ja’afari. He later met with the head of the opposition delegation in Geneva, Yahya Kadamani, and Nasr Hariri, a senior member of the largest opposition group, the Syrian National Coalition. The talks are the latest bid to end the country’s catastrophic six-year war that has killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced millions more. The Geneva talks come after cease-fire discussions in Astana, Kazakhstan, that were coordinated largely by Turkey and Russia, whose air power has supported al-Assad’s forces.

In those meetings, the two sides sat face-to-face and a fragile cease-fire has since mostly been holding, though violations occur daily. Hours after rival delegations arrived, de Mistura admitted there was limited ground for progress on making peace. “Am I expecting a breakthrough? No, I am not expecting a breakthrough,” the veteran diplomat said, noting that “momentum” toward further talks was likely the best that can be hoped for.

On the eve of the talks an HNC spokesman said the umbrella group wanted face-to-face discussions with government representatives. “We ask for direct negotiations... It would save time and be proof of seriousness instead of negotiating in [separate] rooms,” Salem al-Meslet told AFP.

Russian President Vladimir Putin voiced hope on Feb. 23 for the success of a political settlement in Syria, saying it would help defeat the “terrorist malaise.” Putin said at a meeting with Russian mariners that Moscow’s goal in Syria was to help stabilize the legitimate government and fight international terrorism. Russia has called on al-Assad to stop his bombing campaign while peace talks take place this week, but a political breakthrough on the war remains unlikely, de Mistura said Feb. 22

## McCain makes secret trip to Syria to meet US troops

Hurriyet Daily News, 17.02.2017



A spokeswoman for Republican Senator John McCain said Feb. 22 that he traveled to northern Syria last week to discuss plans for defeating the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) with U.S. forces stationed there.

McCain, an Arizona Republican, is chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. In a statement on Feb. 22, McCain’s spokeswoman described the visit as a “valuable opportunity to assess dynamic conditions on the group in Iraq and Syria,” The Associated Press reported. McCain had not announced the trip in advance.

This visit came before a visit to Turkey, during which McCain met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım on Feb. 20 in Ankara. McCain has been a harsh critic of U.S. President Donald Trump’s worldview, declaring his administration in disarray. But the statement said the president “has rightly ordered a review of U.S. strategy and plans to defeat” ISIL.

A member of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a U.S.-backed force composed mainly of Kurdish fighters along with some Arab members, told Russia’s sputniknews.com on Feb. 23 on condition of anonymity that McCain had also come to Kobane, a Kurdish-dominated area in northern Syria, and held talks there with SDF members. The SDF source said they had demanded more weapons and support from the U.S., claiming that McCain had promised more support.



The SDF is mostly comprised of the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Unit (YPG), which Turkey regards as a terror organization due to its ties with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and does not want the YPG to exert a strong presence along the border with Syria. The U.S. regards the YPG and its political wing, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), as reliable partners in the fight against ISIL.

## Lower immigration could be the biggest economic cost of Brexit

*Economist, 24.02.2017*



Despite its vote to leave the European Union, plenty of Europeans still seem keen to move to Britain: in eastern European cities such as Kiev and Chisinau leaflets promising “English visas” still flutter.

Marion, a lawyer who recently moved to London from Paris, says that Brexit barely featured in her decision. “I guess that emotionally I still find Brexit hard to believe.” Britain's government, however, is busy thinking of ways to keep them out. Since June's referendum result, many have wondered anxiously whether Britain will remain part of the EU's single market after Brexit.

The pound tumbled when Theresa May, the prime minister, said that she planned to leave it. People have worried less, however, about the economic impact of the government's post-Brexit immigration policy. This is strange: the impact of slashing the number of foreigners allowed into Britain could be as serious as anything that could happen to trade.

In the year to September net migration (immigration minus emigration) was under 300,000, split about evenly between EU and non-EU folk. It has been high by historical standards (see chart) since the mid-2000s, when citizens from new, poorer EU members acquired the right to move to Britain.

Despite the continuing influx, net migration into Britain is hardly out of control, at least compared with other rich countries. On average annually it amounts to about three times the attendance at a Manchester United football match. Compared with their population, Ireland, Australia and Canada see far more new arrivals.

But British concern about immigration has little to do with raw numbers. Even in 1995, when net migration was well under 100,000, two-thirds of Britons wanted it cut. No reference to immigration appeared on the ballot paper, but politicians believe that the Brexit vote represented a desire to “take back control” of the country's borders. Since then Mrs May and Amber Rudd, the home secretary, have repeated a long-standing commitment to cut annual net migration to the “tens of thousands”.



That will be no easy task. The government will have to count on about 50,000 Britons continuing to quit the country each year. If settling in Europe becomes harder for Britons after Brexit, that may not happen. Even if the rules are changed, the number of non-Britons settling each year, minus the number leaving, would have to fall to around 150,000.

Net migration of family members and refugees is around 70,000. On February 22nd the government largely prevailed in a case in the Supreme Court, allowing it to set tough income requirements on those who want a loved one to join them. The ruling's wording, however, implies that tightening these rules further will be tricky. Meanwhile, reducing immigration by unskilled workers from outside the EU is difficult since it is almost non-existent, says Jonathan Portes of King's College London.

About half of the EU nationals emigrating to Britain move into less-skilled jobs. Cutting that sort might reduce net migration by EU workers to 50,000 (a slowing economy is already helping). Halving net migration of foreign students, say by restricting the growth of universities (though that would hamper a lucrative industry), might reduce it to 50,000. But that might still leave total net migration at around 150,000. If the government is serious about hitting its tens-of-thousands target, it may have to restrict skilled migration.

That would sit oddly alongside its recent white paper on Brexit, which promised to "encourage the brightest and the best to come to this country". And it would weaken Mrs May's negotiating hand. In 2015 combined net migration from America and India was about 30,000. Cutting that would be awkward for the prime minister, who is desperate to strike post-Brexit trade deals with both.

How would the economy cope if the tens-of-thousands target were reached? Firms reliant on foreigners are worried. Food manufacturers are vulnerable: 40% of such workers are non-British. Skilled industries would also suffer: a quarter of scientific researchers are foreign-born. It may be for that reason that David Davis, the Brexit secretary, this week hinted that Britain is not about to shut the door even on unskilled EU migrants.

Other Brexiteers, however, counter that ending the supply of cheap workers would shake up Britain's business model for the better. Firms would invest in labour-saving technology, boosting Britain's low productivity. One study of American tomato-growers finds some evidence to support this thesis. If productivity rose, those workers left behind might see higher wages. Britons might also see less competition for jobs.

But these effects are likely to be small. If the benefits of investing in technology were so great, bosses should have already done so. And many jobs—such as care work—are not easily performed by robots. In these industries, many firms will either become less profitable or go under.

Few economists see lower immigration leading to a wage bonanza for locals. One paper calculates that cutting migration to the tens of thousands could boost wages in industries most affected by it by an imperceptible 0.2-0.6% by 2018.

And these tiny increases would be dwarfed by a slowdown in the wider economy. According to research by Katerina Lisenkova of Strathclyde University, annual net migration of 100,000 would lower GDP per person by 1% in the long term. Others reckon the economic cost of lower migration could match that of the hit to trade from Britain leaving the single market.

The biggest loser from slashing immigration would be the public finances. Native Britons are ageing rapidly; the number who are of working age is shrinking. When counting only native-born folk, Britain has a higher “old-age dependency ratio” (the number of elderly people as a share of those of working age) than that of many European countries, including France, and it is worsening fast. This drives up spending on health care and pensions.

As it stands, the flow of people into and out of Britain tilts the numbers favourably, improving the dependency ratio. Britain exports old, creaky people and imports young, taxpaying ones. More than 100,000 British pensioners live it up in sunny Spain; meanwhile, up to 100,000 working-age Spaniards brave the British cold.

With low net migration, Britain’s elderly would be more burdensome. Workers would need to be taxed more heavily to pay for care for their elders. The government’s fiscal watchdog suggests that by the mid-2060s, with annual net migration of about 100,000, public debt would be roughly 30 percentage points higher than if that figure were 200,000. Taking back control comes with a whopping bill.

## EU welcomes Pence assurance of Trump’s support

Reuters, 21.02.2017



**U.S. Vice President Mike Pence assured the European Union in Brussels on Feb. 20 that the Trump administration will develop their cooperation in trade and security and backs the EU as a partner in its own right.**

**A month after U.S. President Donald Trump caused alarm by renewing his endorsement of Brexit and suggesting others may follow Britain out of the EU, Pence told reporters that he had come to “the home of the European Union” with a message from the president. Speaking of a “strong commitment ... to continue cooperation and partnership with the European Union”, Pence added:**

“Whatever our differences, our two continents share the same heritage, the same values and above all, the same purpose to promote peace and prosperity through freedom, democracy and the rule of law.” Donald Tusk, who chairs the European Council of EU leaders, told reporters that Pence had given him affirmative answers to three questions on Trump’s support for: the current system of international law, NATO and “the idea of a united Europe.”

“Reports of the death of the West have been greatly exaggerated,” Tusk said, in a nod to American writer Mark Twain. EU officials said they were encouraged by what they called Pence’s clear assurances, including on U.S. backing for holding the European Union together after Brexit, though they will watch closely to see how far Trump’s actions match his deputy’s words.

“We got everything we were looking for,” one official said. Pence noted the building of common European institutions after World War Two and said: “With this union and in cooperation with the United States, history will attest that when the United States and Europe are peaceful and prosperous, we do advance the peace and prosperity of all the world.”

Pence also met Jean-Claude Juncker, head of the executive European Commission, and EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini. She said they discussed Syria, Ukraine, Libya, the Middle East, Iran, Afghanistan and North Korea. Pence was later due to meet NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg before flying home.

## Outspoken general named Trump’s top security adviser

Foreign Policy, 13.02.2017



**U.S. President Donald Trump on Feb. 20 named Lieutenant General Herbert Raymond McMaster as his new national security adviser, choosing a military officer known for speaking his mind and challenging his superiors.**

**McMaster is a highly regarded military tactician and strategic thinker, but his selection surprised some observers who wondered how the officer, whose Army career stalled at times for his questioning of authority, would deal with a White House that has not welcomed criticism. “He is highly respected by everybody in the military and we’re very honored to have him,” Trump told reporters.**

“He’s a man of tremendous talent and tremendous experience.” One subject on which Trump and McMaster could soon differ is Russia. McMaster shares the consensus view among the U.S. national security establishment that Russia is a threat and an antagonist to the United States, while the man whom McMaster is replacing, retired Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, appeared to view it more as a potential geopolitical partner.

Trump in the past has expressed a willingness to engage with Russia more than his predecessor, Barack Obama. Flynn was fired as national security adviser on Feb. 13 after reports emerged that he had misled Vice President Mike Pence about speaking to Russia’s ambassador to the United States about U.S. sanctions before Trump’s inauguration.

The ouster, coming so early in Trump’s administration, was another upset for a White House that has been hit by miscues, including the controversial rollout of a travel ban on people from seven Muslim-majority countries, since the Republican president took office on Jan. 20. The national security adviser is an independent aide to the president and does not require confirmation by the U.S. Senate.





He has broad influence over foreign policy and attends National Security Council meetings along with the heads of the State Department, the Department of Defense and key security agencies. Republican Senator John McCain, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee and a frequent Trump critic, praised McMaster as an “outstanding” choice. “I give President Trump great credit for this decision,” McCain said in a statement.

A former U.S. ambassador to Russia under Obama, Michael McFaul, a Democrat, praised McMaster on Twitter as “terrific” and said McMaster “will not be afraid to question his boss.” McMaster, who flew back to the Washington area from Florida with Trump on Air Force One, will remain on active military duty, the White House said.

Trump also said Keith Kellogg, a retired U.S. Army general who has been serving as the acting national security adviser, as chief of staff to the National Security Council. John Bolton, a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, would be asked to serve the administration in another capacity, Trump said.

“He has a good number of ideas that I must tell you I agree very much with,” Trump said of Bolton, who served in Republican President George W. Bush’s administration. Kellogg and Bolton were among those in contention as Trump spent the long Presidents Day weekend considering his options for replacing Flynn. His first choice, retired Vice Admiral Robert Harward, turned down the job last week.

McMaster, 54, is a West Point graduate known as “H.R.,” with a Ph.D. in U.S. history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He was listed as one of Time magazine’s 100 most influential people in 2014, partly because of his willingness to buck the system.

A combat veteran, he gained renown in the first Gulf War - and was awarded a Silver Star - after he commanded a small troop of the U.S. 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment that destroyed a much larger Iraqi Republican Guard force in 1991 in a place called 73 Easting, for its map coordinates, in what many consider the biggest tank battle since World War II.

As one fellow officer put it, referring to Trump’s inner circle of aides and speaking on condition of anonymity, the Trump White House “has its own Republican Guard, which may be harder for him to deal with than the Iraqis were.” The Iraqi Republican Guard was the elite military force of ousted dictator Saddam Hussein. Trump relies on a tight, insular group of advisers, who at times appear to have competing political agendas. Senior adviser Steve Bannon has asserted his influence by taking a seat on the National Security Council. McMaster’s fame grew after his 1997 book “Dereliction of Duty” criticized the country’s military and political leadership for poor leadership during the Vietnam War.

Trump’s pick was praised by one of the president’s strongest backers in the U.S. Congress, Republican Senator Tom Cotton, who called McMaster “one of the finest combat leaders of our generation and also a great strategic mind.” In a July 14, 2014, interview with the Columbus Ledger-Enquirer in Columbus, Georgia, where Fort Benning is located, McMaster, then the base commander, said: “Some people have a misunderstanding about the Army. “Some people think, hey, you’re in the military and everything is super-hierarchical and you’re in an environment that is intolerable of criticism and people don’t want frank assessments.



“I think the opposite is the case. ... And the commanders that I’ve worked for, they want frank assessments, they want criticism and feedback.” That attitude was not always shared by his superiors, and it led to his being passed over for promotion to brigadier general twice, in 2006 and 2007. On McMaster’s third and last try, General David Petraeus - who at one point was also on Trump’s candidate list for national security adviser - returned from Iraq to head the promotion board that finally gave McMaster his first general’s star.

Then a colonel, McMaster was commander of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment that in the spring of 2005 captured, held and began to stabilize Tal Afar on the Iraqi-Syrian border. The city was held by Sunni extremists, a crossing point between Syria and Iraq for jihadists who started as al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia under Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and morphed into Islamic State after he was killed.

McMaster’s preparation of the regiment is legendary: He trained his soldiers in Iraqi culture, the differences among Sunnis, Shiites and Turkmen, and had them read books on the history of the region and counterinsurgency strategy.

It was a sharp change from the “kill and capture” tactics the United States had used in Iraq since the invasion in March 2003, and to which the Obama administration returned in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

The strategy was largely a success, although McMaster’s use of it and especially his willingness to acknowledge that Iraqis had some legitimate grievances against one another and the occupying coalition forces, did not endear him to his superiors and helped delay his promotion to brigadier general.

The strategy did not survive the departure of McMaster’s troops, with Tal Afar falling into the hands of Sunni militants. Along with the west part of Mosul, it is now a key objective in the battle to rid Iraq of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

# Announcements & Reports

## *Why is it so hard to reach the EU's 'poverty' target?*

**Source** : Bruegel  
**Weblink** : <http://bruegel.org/2017/01/why-is-it-so-hard-to-reach-the-eus-poverty-target/>

## *Political polarization and the 2016 congressional primaries*

**Source** : Brookings  
**Weblink** : <https://www.brookings.edu/research/political-polarization-and-the-2016-congressional-primaries/>

## *Will engaging China promote good governance?*

**Source** : Brookings  
**Weblink** : <https://www.brookings.edu/research/will-engaging-china-promote-good-governance/>

# Upcoming Events

## *Competitive Gains in the Economic and Monetary Union*

**Date** : 25 February 2017  
**Place** : Brussels - Belgium  
**Website** : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/534-competitive-gains-in-the-economic-and-monetary-union/>

## *The Future of Capitalist Democracy: UK-Japan Perspectives*

**Date** : 25 February 2017  
**Place** : London - UK  
**Website** : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/future-capitalist-democracy-uk-japan-perspectives>

## *13th Asia Europe Economic Forum (AEEF)*

**Date** : 26 February 2017  
**Place** : Beijing - China  
**Website** : <http://bruegel.org/events/13th-asia-europe-economic-forum/>

## *Emerging Markets and Europe: Time for Different Relationships?*

**Date** : 27 February 2017  
**Place** : Brussels - Belgium  
**Website** : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/524-emerging-markets-and-europe-time-for-different-relationships/>



## *What future for Europe's Social Models?*

**Date** : 27 February 2017  
**Place** : Brussels - Belgium  
**Website** : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/526-what-future-for-europes-social-models/>

## *Challenges for Growth in Europe*

**Date** : 27 February 2017  
**Place** : Brussels - Belgium  
**Website** : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/521-challenges-for-growth-in-europe/>

## *Global Governance of Public Goods: Asian and European Perspectives*

**Date** : 28 February 2017  
**Place** : Paris - France  
**Website** : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/529-global-governance-of-public-goods-asian-and-european-perspectives/>

## *The Future of the Welfare State*

**Date** : 28 February 2017  
**Place** : Berlin - Germany  
**Website** : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/541-the-future-of-the-welfare-state/>

## *Vision Europe Summit 2016*

**Date** : 28 February 2017  
**Place** : Lisbon - Portugal  
**Website** : <http://bruegel.org/events/vision-europe-summit-2016/>