

Four new names in Davutoglu cabinet with Cavusoglu as FM

Hurriyet Daily News, 29.08.2014



No time has been wasted for the formation of Turkey's new government. With Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu at the helm, the newly-minted Cabinet has been announced Aug. 29, just one day after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan officially took office at the presidential Cankaya Palace.

Wrapping up a hectic day during which he took oath at Parliament, attended a handover ceremony hosted by outgoing President Abdullah Gul, and hosted foreign guests at a reception at the Cankaya Palace, Erdogan met outgoing Foreign Minister Davutoglu late on Aug. 28 and tasked him with forming a Council of Ministers.

Accordingly, Davutoglu introduced the list of his Cabinet to President Erdogan before noon on Aug. 29 and it is expected that the list will be approved later today. Only four new names have been introduced in the new government, while the economy administration remained untouched. The Foreign Ministry seat left vacant by Davutoglu's nomination as prime minister was handed to Turkey's former EU Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu. For his part, Cavusoglu was replaced by Volkan Bozkir, chair of Parliament's Foreign Relations Commission. Deputy Prime Ministers Besir Atalay and Emrullah İsler have been replaced by Yalcin Akdogan and Numan Kurtulmus. Atalay was a key figure in the peace process for the Kurdish problem. Akdogan, a close confidant of Erdogan, is expected to take over Atalay's duty.

The only "dramatic" change in the Cabinet is in Customs and Trade Ministry, with the name of Hayati Yazici being crossed in favor of Nurettin Canikli, the ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) Deputy Parliamentary Group Chair. Here is footage showing the moment when Davutoglu presented the new Cabinet list to Erdogan in a red folder: The Cabinet of Turkey's 62nd government is as follows (the new appointments are shown in bold): Four deputy prime ministers - Bulent Arinc, Ali Babacan, Yalcin Akdogan, Numan Kurtulmus; Foreign Minister - Mevlut Cavusoglu; Interior Minister - Efkani Ala; Justice Minister - Bekir Bozdag; Finance Minister - Mehmet Simsek; Economy Minister - Nihat Zeybekci; Energy and Natural Resources Minister - Taner Yildiz; Defense Minister - İsmet Yilmaz; Family and Social Policies Minister - Aysenur İslam; EU Minister - Volkan Bozkir; Science, Industry and Technology Minister - Fikri İsik; Labor and Social Security Minister - Faruk Celik; Environment and Urban Planning Minister - İdris Gulluce; Youth and Sports Minister - Akif Cagatay Kilic; Food, Agriculture and Livestock Minister - Mehdi Eker; Customs and Trade Minister - Nurettin Canikli; Development Minister - Cevdet Yilmaz; Culture and Tourism Minister - Omer Celik; Education Minister - Nabi Avci; Forestry and Water Affairs Minister - Veysel Eroglu; Health Minister - Mehmet Muezzinoglu; Transportation, Maritime Affairs and Communication Minister - Lutfi Elvan.

Erdogan sworn in as Turkey's 12th President

Hurriyet Daily News, 28.08.2014



Recep Tayyip Erdogan sworn in as Turkey's 12th President on Aug. 28. Erdogan read the presidential oath before the Turkish Parliament before taking his seat from Abdullah Gul, in a splendid handover ceremony with the participation of leaders from more than 90 countries.

“In my capacity as president I swear upon my honor and integrity before the Turkish Grand National Assembly and before history to safeguard the existence and independence of the State, the indivisible integrity of the country and the Nation and the absolute sovereignty of the Nation....,” read Erdogan in his oath.

The oath obliges presidents to abide by the constitution, the rule of law, democracy and the principles of the secular republic. Erdogan was elected to the presidency by the people's direct vote on Aug. 10 as he got 52 percent of votes, leaving his contenders behind. Since the completion of presidential elections, he was heavily preoccupied for shaping the new management of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the next government. The presidential handover ceremony took place just a day after he left the AKP leadership to Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu.

The first venue of half-day long ceremonies was the Parliament. Erdogan and his family members were welcomed by Parliament Speaker Cemil Cicek who read the minutes that officially announced the country's 12th president. The General Assembly was full of AKP lawmakers, sympathizers and Erdogan's family members as well as the military echelon, representatives of diplomatic missions. However, seats reserved to foreign diplomats were occupied by spouses of some lawmakers, Erdogan's special invitees, bureaucrats as well as prime ministry advisor Yusuf Yerkel who became a worldwide known celebrity after his pictures kicking a relative of Soma mine tragedy in April hit the front pages of the world media, another controversial advisor Yigit Bulut, Erdogan's brother Mustafa Erdogan, famous advertiser of the AKP Erol Olcak, sports commentator Ridvan Dilmen and etc.

The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and the People's Democracy Party (HDP) were also present at the ceremony while the Republican People's Party (CHP) boycotted Erdogan's sworn in. “We are living the joy and sadness at the same time,” said Development Minister Cevdet Yilmaz while expressing the common feeling of the AKP group. Second address of the handover ceremonies was the mausoleum of Ataturk, Anitkabir, the founder of the modern republic. Erdogan laid a wreath on Ataturk's tomb and showed his respect before writing his message to the Anitkabir Special Book. “Beloved Ataturk; I take over as the Republic's 12th President and the first directly elected president. After your death, the bond between the office of the presidency and the people was weakened. I believe that the tenure I start today is a means for the people to embrace their president and for the state to embrace its nation,” he wrote.



The long convoy of President Erdogan and his wife, Emine Erdogan, arrived at the Cankaya Palace in a nearly 20-minutes long drive which was greeted by the people's along the route. Carrying Turkish flags and shouting slogans in favor of Erdogan, thousands of people cheered over the new president. "Cankaya is much more beautiful with you," read a placard while Erdogan's convoy entered into the presidential compound. The dramatic handover ceremony took place at the Cankaya Palace late afternoon as 11th President Abdullah Gul and his wife, Hayrunnisa Gul, met with their successors, President Erdogan and First Lady Emine Erdogan. The Erdogan couple was welcomed through the country's highest level ceremony as the military fired a 21-gun salute in the honor of the new president. After a behind-doors meeting between Gul and Erdogan families, the former and new presidents delivered short speeches to the crowded participants.

"I feel honor in handing my position to President Erdogan, a friend of mine over the last 40 years. This is why today's ceremony has a special importance," Gul said in his highly emotional speech. Recalling that they founded the AKP together with Erdogan 14 years ago and they served together to make Turkey a more powerful and prosperous country, Gul stressed that the country will make new records of success under the leadership of Erdogan. Gul thanked to everyone who worked with him but presented special thanks to his wife Hayrunnisa Gul over her support to him over the years even during difficult times. Hayrunnisa Gul recently expressed her disturbance over the attacks against her husband aiming at nixing his ambitions to return to the active politics. "They think as if we do not read anything, do not hear anything, are not aware of anything. So far I have stayed silent, but that won't last for too long. I will start speaking up, perhaps I will be the one to start an intifada," recently told Hayrunnisa Gul, making the headlines of newspapers.

After Gul, Erdogan took the floor to make his first speech as the president. Describing himself as the first head of nation elected by the people in the 2000 years of Turkish history, Erdogan said today was the beginning of a new era in Turkey. "I want to express my proud for it and also my conscious about my growing responsibility," Erdogan said. Reiterating that he worked in full harmony and coordination with Gul during his seven years of presidency Erdogan stressed "I have to tell you that I will continue to benefit from his experience and his ideas afterwards." In the second part of his address, Erdogan vowed that he will continue to work to make Turkey a more democratic and prosperous country and gave some hints from his foreign policy understanding.

"The main axis of our foreign policy is peace, solidarity and welfare. Turkey doesn't have an eye on any country's territories or their internal issues. We don't have any plans or project like that," he added. He also added that Turkey's path to EU membership will continue. After the speeches President Erdogan presented a State Medal of Distinguished Service to Gul as he received the presidential flag from outgoing president. As the ceremony ended Erdogan bid farewell to Gul as 11th President and his wife departed from the Cankaya Palace. Following the departure of Gul's family from the Cankaya Palace, Erdogan hosted his foreign guests first at a reception and then at a dinner.

Analysis: Erdogan not really leaving active politics

Hurriyet Daily News, 27.08.2014



Some called Aug. 27's extraordinary convention of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) as a farewell congress to President-elect Recep Tayyip Erdogan who left the party chairmanship to Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu. However, messages delivered by Erdogan hinted that it won't be an absolute departure from active politics in line with his earlier description of his forthcoming presidency.

He will be a sweating, running president..."This is not a farewell. We will again meet with you at our public rallies, during our visits to 81 provinces," Erdogan addressed his AKP fellows during his nearly two-hour long speech.

Therefore he confirmed that he will soon hit the roads again to hold public rallies in Turkey's cities, this time, to thank the Turkish people for electing him as the 12th president. Needless to say that these rallies will highly be political in which Erdogan will find the opportunity to address his views on political matters. These rallies have already been seen by the oppositional parties as Erdogan's efforts to ask for votes at the upcoming 2015 elections. President-elect Erdogan recalled once again the importance of the 2015 polls and the majority the AKP will get at Parliament in order to accomplish their aim in changing the constitution in favor of a presidential system.

In fact, he does not hide that he will be heavily involved in daily political issues. "I am not going to be a president that blocks government's actions but a president that enables the government to serve better to the public," he stressed. Plus, he will not only support and contribute to government, but also the AKP which he calls "his fifth child." One of the areas he will never lose interest will be the ongoing fight against pro-Fethullah Gulen community in the police and judiciary, which he calls "the parallel state." "No one shall expect me to remain silent against this treacherous gang as president," Erdogan vowed, also instructing the next government not to show a piece of tolerance against this organization within the state.

Davutoglu's speech also supported this idea. "Our biggest assurance is Mr. Erdogan at president," he said while thanking congress for electing him as the new AKP chairman. One other thing he underlined was that there will never be a conflict or disharmony between him and the president, as both come from the same political movement. The fact that both men have underlined the upcoming judges and prosecutors supreme council election as one of their immediate priorities, it's no doubt that we'll continue to see an orchestrated and coordinated reaction against the Gulen community. Erdogan has no intention in leaving politics and Davutoglu is welcoming this.

Davutoglu sets out with 'restoration program'

Hurriyet Daily News, 27.08.2014



Ahmet Davutoglu, the sole candidate for the ruling party congress today and likely next prime minister, is set to chart a course of "restoration" in the government's new program. "The era of great restoration" was what Davutoglu spelled out after being nominated as the candidate by President-elect Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Aug. 21.

However, the term does not refer to restoring the Ottoman Empire. The struggle against the movement of U.S.-based Islamic scholar Fethullah Gulen, also dubbed by the government and Erdogan as the "parallel structure," is another concept to be included in the government program.

Davutoglu and his team carried out two studies over the weekend on the eve of the convention in Ankara, with one of them focusing on his inauguration and the other group revising the government's program. Davutoglu reportedly told allies that he already had a speech in mind and would emphasize that "We are Turkey all together" and that this call would include references to all ethnic roots. Separate teams worked on revisions on items to the judiciary, the Constitution and the economy and merged them into one text based on "restoration." "Once it is read out in Parliament, you will find information on the 2023 targets, necessary work to improve Turkey in all fields and the vision for action," the source said. "Seeing all these, you will notice that the comments on 'returning to the Ottoman Empire, an Islamic state, are all unreal and baseless,'" he added.

The new program does not aim to regress 90 years back but rather seeks to repair the republic, democracy, foreign policy and a model of the economy that has been "injured" for the past 90 years, according to the source. However, the party is not considering giving further information before the speech in Parliament. The changes in the government program will not be very large, the source also said. Mahir Unal, a deputy chair of the ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) parliamentary group, said the target of the new government would be a "strong economy, strong defense and strong political will." Unal said the era would be called the "New Turkey and Process of Restoration," with three focuses: The struggle against the parallel structure, the Kurdish peace process and the new Constitution.

The Gulen movement and the government have been at odds since Dec. 17, 2013, when a graft probe that engulfed Cabinet ministers and their families was launched. This was followed by government's counter attack against civil servants and officials who were reportedly close to the Gulenists, who it accuses of organizing a "coup attempt" against the government. Erdogan has pledged to continue efforts to find a peaceful solution to the lingering Kurdish issue, as the government has already signaled that the military leaders of the outlawed Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) might be included in the ongoing talks.

The program is slated to be read out in Parliament on Sept. 1 while the legislature may hold a vote of confidence on Sept. 6. Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc clarified his words on the need for ministers to resign before the new prime minister starts shaping his Cabinet. Arinc said his Aug. 25 suggestion was about politeness to the incoming prime minister and did not mean that the whole Cabinet had resigned. Also rouching on Arinc's remarks, Justice and Development Party (AKP) spokesperson Huseyin Celik said the move was a "requirement." "Membership in the central executive board will automatically end with the election of the new prime minister," he said. The new chairman of the party can choose anyone for these posts as long as the member is from the AKP's highest decision-making body, the Central Decision and Executive Board, he said.

Davutoglu takes helm, pledges unity, harmony with presidency

Hurriyet Daily News, 28.08.2014



Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, the only candidate to become the ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) chairman, and therefore the prime minister, has pledged to work "in harmony" with President-elect Recep Tayyip Erdogan and promised "unity" within the party.

Speaking at the ruling party's extraordinary congress on Aug. 27, Davutoglu addressed outgoing Prime Minister Erdogan as "my president" and stressed that the convention was not one of "farewell," but of "fidelity." Davutoglu struck a high pitch not only in terms of history and ideology, but also with his tone of excitement and lofty rhetoric.

A key political message ran throughout it: There will be no conflict between the president and the prime minister, who have both been elected by popular vote. "Nobody should try to stir up controversy between comrades," Davutoglu said, stressing unity in the party. He presented a nine-point of "restoration" summary of AKP rule for the past 12 years, which he said will continue in the "walk for the new Turkey." "With the rule of AKP, this interregnum had come to an end ... We have achieved a major construction along last 12 years," Davutoglu said, claiming that "old Turkey" had come to a "deadlock" in 2001.

"This recovery has nine fundamentals and this determined walk in nine areas will continue," he added, citing the economy, culture, judiciary, freedom, foreign policy and "state structure" as being among these areas. "We are ready to make any sacrifice to carry the AKP movement to its goals," he said. Davutoglu's speech was replete with historic and religious symbolism, with references to the Prophet Muhammad, Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, as well as the political predecessors of the ruling AKP. He frequently addressed the audience saying "my comrades." "They accused us of being utopians and they said we were only dreaming. That's true, we dream. But those who do not dream should be ashamed," he said.

Davutoglu also touched on the issue of the new Constitution, which the AKP needs a two-thirds majority at Parliament in the 2015 election to write unilaterally. He also slammed last year's anti-government Gezi Park protests and the corruption investigations for trying to "overthrow the government." "The goals of the Gezi incidents and the Dec. 17 and 25 plots aimed to destroy the self-assurance that we have instilled in the people," he said. He vowed that the AKP would continue the ongoing Kurdish resolution process "with determination," and rejected any approach based on sectarianism. "Both our Sunni citizens and Alevi citizens are essential constituents of this land and will remain so," Davutoglu said, stressing that "freedoms" would be under the guarantee of the AKP government. Davutoglu was nominated as a candidate for the AKP chairmanship after receiving the votes of 1,382 AKP delegates at the congress, who struggled throughout the day at the Ankara Arena due to the air-conditioning failing to defeat the hot August sun.

Turkish Central Bank maintains key interest rate, but narrows rate corridor

Hurriyet Daily News, 27.08.2014



The Turkish Central Bank has kept its main policy interest rate the same, but trimmed its interest rate corridor's upper band by 0.75 points, triggering a boost to the Turkish Lira. In its first meeting after Recep Tayyip Erdogan's presidency win, the Monetary Policy Board shaved the overnight lending rate, which sets the upper band of the interest rate corridor, from 12 percent to 11.25 percent.

However, the main policy rate, the overnight borrowing rate, was kept at 8.25 percent, in line with expectations. The majority of economists and business representatives have been saying high inflation undermines the case for rate cuts.

The bank also did not change the overnight borrowing rate, preserving the lower band of the corridor at 7.5 percent. The markets welcomed the rate decision as lira-to-dollar ratio fell to 2.1525 liras per dollar after the Central Bank's announcement, reaching its lowest level in two weeks. The bank was expected not to make further reductions at this month's meeting, as inflation in the country, the main driver of the bank's monetary policies, has been higher than the bank's year-end forecasts. Earlier this month, the central bank said the inflation forecasts from its monthly survey had risen to 8.7 percent at the end of the year from 8.3 percent previously, despite its aggressive rate hike in January.

"The adverse impact of exchange rate developments since mid-2013 on annual inflation is gradually tapering off," the Bank said in the statement released to announce meeting decisions. "However, elevated food prices continue to delay the improvement in the inflation outlook. In this respect, the Committee also evaluated the possible impact of the drought and the geopolitical risks on the inflation outlook," it further said. The board also noted that monetary policies and limitations introduced on loans and credit card spending has been effective to pressure excessive loan growth.

The Bank has trimmed its main interest rate by 175 base points since May, despite stubborn inflation. So far, it has resisted even larger cuts called for by Erdogan as he geared up for the Aug. 10 presidential election. Erdogan, wedded to the idea that high rates in fact cause inflation, has repeatedly urged the Central Bank to make bigger rate cuts, after an emerging market sell-off in January forced it to almost double rates at a midnight meeting. “The market was not expecting any change. A cut to the upper band can be perceived as a move to please the economy management,” Istanbul-based Global Securities said in a note to clients after the decision was announced. Economy Minister Nihat Zeybekci told Reuters a day after Erdogan’s victory that the government would continue to seek lower rates, adding that the central bank’s mandate should include employment and growth as well as price stability.

Isis accused of ethnic cleansing as story of Shia prison massacre emerges

Hurriyet Daily News, 18.08.2014



The UN said that fighters from Islamic State (Isis) had killed as many as 670 prisoners in Mosul and had carried out further abuses in Iraq that amounted to crimes against humanity. Navi Pillay, the UN high commissioner for human rights, said Islamic State and allied fighters were committing “grave, horrific human rights violations” on a daily basis.

These included targeted killings, forced conversions, abductions, trafficking, slavery and sexual abuse. The jihadists, who are consolidating their control of northern and eastern Iraq, have also destroyed religious and cultural monuments and have laid siege to whole communities.

“They are systematically targeting men, women and children based on their ethnic, religious or sectarian affiliation and ruthlessly carrying out widespread ethnic and religious cleansing in the areas under their control.” Pillay gave fresh details of an alleged massacre carried out on 10 June by Islamic State extremists. The fighters had just taken control of Mosul, Iraq’s second biggest city, after the Iraqi army fled. About 3,000 inmates were being kept in Mosul’s Badoush prison. During the power vacuum some managed to escape from minimum security areas, but between 1,000 and 1,500 remained after many had escaped during the chaos.

Citing testimony from eyewitnesses and survivors, the UN said Islamic State gunmen arrived at the front gate in a group of pick-up trucks. Several carried machine guns. They took out the prisoners and sorted them into two groups, Sunni and 670 Shias. The fighters grilled the Sunni group, asked them to recite prayers, and interrogated them about family backgrounds. Some Shia prisoners tried to pass themselves off as Sunni. They were discovered and returned to the Shia line-up. The Islamic State militants told their Shia captives they would be “released” once their identities were verified. The prisoners had to give a number in turn – beginning with one, with the last prisoner saying: “I’m 679”.

The fighters then loaded the them into trucks and drove three to four kilometres south-east to an uninhabited “desert-like location”, somewhere between Mosul’s main road and its railway line. According to the UN, the prisoners were lined up in four rows. They were told to kneel, and then shot. The UN said a handful survived by playing dead. It said it conducted extensive interviews with 20 survivors of the massacre and 16 further witnesses, with evidence taken in Irbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdish, and Basra. “Such cold-blooded, systematic and intentional killings of civilians, after singling them out for their religious affiliation may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity,” Pillay said on Monday. The mass execution in June was merely the latest to have taken place in Mosul. According to Amnesty International, Iraqi government forces also massacred Sunni prisoners in several cities, including Mosul, before retreating in the face of the rapid Isis advance.

Kurdish officials in Irbil confirmed that Islamic State had separated Sunni and Shia inmates after taking over Badoush and other prisons. They said that some Shia prisoners from Badoush were killed by Islamic State, with Sunnis freed after swearing allegiance to Isis. But they raised doubts that the figure was as high as 670. Fewer may have been executed, they suggested. Residents inside Mosul, meanwhile, said that local Islamic State fighters were looting houses belonging to Christians and other minorities on a daily basis. They said the militants were also forcing locals to give allegiance to the group, which declared an Islamic caliphate in June. They added that young men were terrified of going out onto the street because the group was desperately looking for new recruits and there was a danger they might be seized. One resident said the city had ground to a halt. Resentment was growing, and the Islamic State was incapable of administering the city, he said.

Islamic State kills 150 captured troops in Syria, say activists

The Guardian, 28.08.2014



Islamic State militants killed more than 150 of the troops captured in recent fighting in north-eastern Syria. It is the latest mass killing attributed to the extremists, activists said, with the violence coming during a 24-hour period. The troops were either shot or slashed with knives.

In southern Syria, meanwhile, the United Nations said that gunmen detained 43 United Nations Fijian peacekeepers during fighting on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights, and another 81 peacekeepers from the Philippines were trapped in the area by the heavy clashes between rebels and Syrian troops.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said many of the soldiers killed were rounded up on Wednesday in the arid countryside near the Tabqa airfield, three days after Islamic State fighters seized the base. The government troops were among a large group of soldiers from the base who were stuck behind the front lines after the airfield fell to the jihadi fighters.



The Observatory said around 120 captive government troops from Tabqa were killed near the base. Islamic State fighters killed at least another 40 soldiers, most of whom had been taken prisoner in recent fighting for other bases in the Hamrat region near Raqqa city, the group's stronghold. A statement posted online and circulated on Twitter by supporters of the Islamic State group claimed the extremists killed "about 200" government prisoners captured near Tabqa. It also showed photographs of those it said were the prisoners: young men stripped down to their underwear marching in the desert. The photos could not immediately be verified.

A video showing the same also emerged online, followed by another video posted later showing more than 150 men lying motionless – apparently dead – in a row in the sand. While the videos could not be independently confirmed, they appeared to illustrate the claims made online by Islamic State group supporters and Syrian activists about the mass killing. There was no immediate comment from the Syrian government. In its rise to prominence over the past year, the extremist group has frequently published graphic photos and videos of everything from beheadings to mass killings. In Iraq, for example, the group killed nearly 200 men – most of them Iraqi soldiers – in late June near the northern city of Tikrit, human rights groups and Iraqi officials say. It published photos online showing dozens of men dressed in civilian clothes lined up or lying face down as militants aimed rifles at their backs. A final set of photos showed their bloodied bodies.

Such killings have not been limited to Iraq. Earlier this month, Islamic State fighters shot and beheaded hundreds of tribesmen in eastern Syria who had risen up against the group. A UN commission accused Islamic State on Wednesday of committing crimes against humanity in Syria – echoing UN accusations against the group in Iraq. Islamic State's surge is one aspect of Syria's multi-layered civil war, a bloody conflict that has killed more than 190,000 people and destabilised the region. The office of UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon did not identify the armed group holding the 43 UN peacekeepers in the Golan, where fighting has raged this week between Syrian rebels and government forces. Several rebel groups operate in the Golan, while Islamic State has no known presence. The UN said another 81 peacekeepers were "currently being restricted to their positions" in the vicinity of Ruwaihaniyeh and Burayqa. UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said the 81 trapped troops were from the Philippines and the 43 seized ones from Fiji, Reuters reported

The Philippine army said in a statement that militants had surrounded the Philippine contingent's encampments with Fijian hostages in tow and demanded that the Filipino troops surrender their firearms. "The Philippine peacekeepers held their ground and demonstrated their resolve to defend their positions," it said. "They did not surrender their firearms as they may in turn be held hostage themselves." The Syrian government denounced the "kidnapping" of the UN peacekeepers. In a statement issued by the Syrian foreign ministry, the government said it held "the terrorist groups and those who support them fully responsible for the safety of the UN peacekeepers, and calls for their immediate release".

The statement from Ban's office said the UN was "making every effort to secure the release of the detained peacekeepers," who are part of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (Undof), the mission that has been monitoring a 1974 disengagement accord between Syria and Israel after their 1973 war. As of July, Undof had 1,223 troops from six countries: Fiji, India, Ireland, Nepal, Netherlands and the Philippines. Fijian army commander Brigadier-General Mosese Tikoitoga told Reuters on Friday he would not recommend to his government that Fijian forces should abandon the country's commitment to peacekeeping in Syria.

“If I was to make any recommendation, I would increase our forces in Syria ... If we don’t want to do this, then who else in the world would want to do this?” he said. Heavy fighting has engulfed the Syrian side of the Golan since Wednesday, when rebels captured a crossing on the disputed frontier with Israel. A rebel spokesman said the opposition is focused on fighting President Bashar Assad, and poses no threat to Israel. On Thursday, government warplanes targeted several rebel positions in the area, including in the village of Jaba, the Observatory said. The Local Coordination Committees, another activist group, also reported the air raids. The Observatory said heavy clashes were raging between the rebels and the Syrian military in Jaba and the surrounding countryside. White plumes of smoke set off by exploding mortar rounds could be seen on Thursday from the Israeli side of the Golan. The sound of small arms fire could be heard echoing in the background.

Obama authorises surveillance flights over Syria

ITAR-TASS, 26.08.2014



US President Barack Obama has authorised American intelligence services to conduct surveillance flights over Syria, US. They said the administration has a need for reliable intelligence from Syria and called the surveillance flights an important avenue for obtaining data.

Experts say this is a move that could pave the way for US airstrikes against Islamic State (IS) militant targets. The US began launching strikes against the Islamic State inside Iraq earlier this month, with Obama citing the threat to American personnel in the country and a humanitarian crisis in the north as his rationale.

Top Pentagon officials have said the only way the threat from the militants can be fully eliminated is to go after the group inside neighbouring Syria as well, according to AP. The White House would not comment on Obama’s decision to authorise surveillance flights over Syria. “We’re not going to comment on intelligence or operational issues, but as we’ve been saying, we’ll use all the tools at our disposal,” said Caitlin Hayden, spokeswoman for the White House National Security Council. Colonel Edward W. Thomas, Jr., a spokesman for the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, said on Monday that the US authorities were viewing a possibility of military operations against the Islamic State militants in Syria and Iraq. He said the US side was “preparing options to address IS both in Iraq and Syria with a variety of military tools including airstrikes.

Long-term Gaza truce agreed with Israel and Palestinians

Hurriyet Daily News, 26.08.2014



The Palestinians have reached agreement with Israel on a “permanent” truce for Gaza, in a move Hamas hailed as a “victory.” There was no immediate comment from Israel on the claimed deal to end seven weeks of deadly conflict in and around the territory.

The Palestinian official said that President Mahmud Abbas would give further details in a speech from his West Bank headquarters at 1600 GMT. “The contacts that have been going on have led to a permanent ceasefire, a (deal to) end the blockade and a guarantee that Gaza’s demands and needs will be met,” the official told AFP.

The Islamist Hamas movement, de facto ruler of Gaza and party to the Abbas-led efforts to agree a truce, also said a deal had been struck with Israel. “The negotiations ended with an agreement which embodies the resistance of our people and a victory for the resistance,” its exiled deputy leader Mussa Abu Marzuk wrote on his Facebook page. The Palestinian official told AFP the truce deal had been finalised after 48 hours of intensive shuttle diplomacy by Azzam al-Ahmed, head of the Palestinian delegation to the protracted, on-off truce talks. “Over the past 48 hours, he has been shuttling between the leadership of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, all the factions, and Egyptian leaders, travelling between Ramallah, Gaza, Doha overseas,” he said. In Gaza, Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said Egypt was expected to make an official announcement of the deal.

On the battlefield, Israeli warplanes kept up their pressure on Hamas with air strikes killing six and raids hitting two high-rise apartment blocks in Gaza City, leaving 40 people wounded. In the first strike, warplanes fired at least six rockets at a 16-storey complex in the Nasser neighbourhood, in which there were 60 apartments and a commercial complex, completely destroying the building and wounding 25. But no-one was killed after the army warned residents to leave in a pre-recorded message, a witness told AFP. “The army told them to leave immediately and they all ran out into the street to find shelter,” he said.

Warplanes then fired on the 14-storey Al-Basha building in Rimal neighbourhood, causing massive damage and wounding 15, witnesses and medics said. The Israeli army acknowledged hitting buildings serving as “ Hamas command and control centres ” as well as two schools in central and northern Gaza from which “ low-trajectory fire ” had been directed at Israel. In an Arabic-language text message sent to residents’ mobile phones after the strikes, the army said the towers were hit because they were “ used by Hamas for military purposes ” and warned that the battle would continue. Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhum denounced the bombardment of the two towers as “ a war crime aimed at terrorising the people ”.



The group's armed wing confirmed firing on Tel Aviv and Haifa in response, although the army said nothing had hit further north than Ashkelon, where a rocket hit a bungalow causing major damage and wounding 21. Yuval Cohen, owner of the house, said the family was sleeping when the air raid sirens sounded, saying it was a miracle they had not been killed. "We were in our bedroom when the alarm started. We ran to the children's room to wake them and while we were running with the kids, the rocket exploded in the bedroom," he told AFP. "Luckily, we escaped by a miracle. We didn't even make it to the shelter.

"We don't sleep at nights, we don't sleep during the days, we don't rest at all. Everybody says 'it won't happen to me' but in the end, it did." Since midnight, 69 rockets have been fired at Israel, 61 of which struck the south while another six were intercepted, the army said. "The goal of the fighting isn't to finish off every last launcher, the goal is to convince the other side to say 'enough'," a senior Israeli military official told Haaretz newspaper, saying Hamas was quite close to that point.

Political officials also believe most of the Islamist movement is looking for a quick end to the conflict, particularly after three of its senior military commanders were killed in a targeted assassination last week. "The targeted killings have created a situation in the last week in which Hamas wants a ceasefire," said Science Minister Yaakov Peri, an observer in the eight-member security cabinet. "The man who is digging in his heels... is Khaled Meshaal," he said, referring to the movement's exiled leader who is based in Doha.

Haaretz's military correspondent Amos Harel said Meshaal was "the last obstacle on the way to declaring a ceasefire," noting that the assassinations had bolstered his position in relation to the movement's Gaza-based leaders. Meanwhile, Abbas was to convene a meeting of his leadership in the West Bank city of Ramallah later Tuesday, officials said. Although Israeli officials have refused to comment on the Egyptian truce proposal, army radio said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had been locked in discussions late into the night with the defence minister and the chief of staff. A Palestinian official told AFP on Monday that the proposal would involve the easing of restrictions at border crossings into the battered enclave and allow for the delivery of aid and reconstruction materials. "The disputed points will be discussed in a month," he told AFP, saying they were waiting for Israel's response.

Israeli PM claims victory in Gaza

Anadolu Agency, 27.08.2014



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed that Israel has won a “great military and political” victory in the Gaza Strip. Speaking at a press conference on Wednesday, Netanyahu said that Palestinian faction Hamas was “hit hard” by the Israeli military offensive on the Gaza Strip.

“Hamas has sustained a massive military and diplomatic blow,” he said. Netanyahu said that Hamas won few gains in the Egyptian-brokered cease-fire deal that brought the Israeli onslaught to a halt. “Hamas did not receive any of its demands - airport, seaport, prisoner releases, salaries,” he said.

“Israel successfully convinced international community that Hamas, ISIS, and Al-Qaeda are all part of the same family,” he said. An Egypt-brokered cease-fire went into effect on Tuesday, ending 51 days of relentless Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip, which saw 2,145 Palestinians killed – the vast majority of them civilians – and nearly 11,000 injured. The cease-fire deal calls for opening all border crossings between the Gaza Strip and Israel – effectively signaling the end of the latter’s seven-year blockade on the coastal territory. It also calls for expanding the zone in which Palestinian fishermen are allowed to ply their trade to six miles off the Gaza coast. Under the agreement, Palestinian and Israeli negotiators will hold indirect negotiations on other core Palestinian demands – including the release of prisoners and the establishment of a Gaza seaport – one month later.

Netanyahu said that it was premature to talk about a durable cease-fire in the Gaza Strip. “Israel also convinced the world that the long-term goal is disarmament in the Gaza Strip,” he said. Since Israel’s “Operation Protective Edge” began on July 7, at least 69 Israelis – 64 soldiers and five civilians – have been killed, according to Israeli figures. Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya’alon, for his part, dismissed criticism of army chief of staff Benny Gantz over the Gaza offensive. He, however, said that security forces “will learn the lessons of the operation”. Ya’alon pledged to return the remains of soldiers Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul, who were killed in the Gaza, to Israel for burial. “We will return remains of the soldiers to Israel,” Ya’alon vowed.

Ukraine president calls snap election for October

The Guardian, 26.08.2014



Ukraine's president, Petro Poroshenko, has dissolved parliament and called for early elections in October as his country continues to battle a pro-Russia insurgency in its eastern regions, and Kiev again accused Russia of sending soldiers into its territory.

In a statement, Poroshenko said snap elections would be held on 26 October, and that the dissolution, signalled by the breakup of the majority coalition last month, was in line with "the expectations of the vast majority of the citizens of Ukraine" and called it a move toward "cleansing" the parliament.

In advance of a meeting between Poroshenko and Vladimir Putin, Kiev said Moscow was trying to alter the reality on the ground ahead of the talks, sending in a column of Russian armoured vehicles disguised as local separatists. Russia denied any such moves, though foreign minister Sergei Lavrov said on Monday that Moscow plans to send another humanitarian convoy into Ukraine, with or without Kiev's agreement. Ukraine's security service said soldiers from the 98th airborne division based in central Russia had been captured near the Ukrainian village of Dzerkalne, about 50km (30 miles) south-east of Donetsk. "Investigators opened a criminal probe into illegal border crossing by Russian armed citizens," it added.

Ukraine's defence minister, Valeriy Geletay, said on his Facebook page: "Today Ukrainian armed forces captured many Russian soldiers. Officially, they are at exercises in various corners of Russia. In reality, they are participating in military aggression against Ukraine." He added that their families knew nothing about their true fate, he said. Putin and Poroshenko will meet on the sidelines of a summit in Minsk on Tuesday afternoon, but hopes that the dialogue will bring about any major improvement are slim. On Monday Poroshenko expressed "extraordinary concern" over the alleged military moves and the second convoy in a telephone call with Herman van Rompuy, president of the European Council. In recent weeks the separatists have been pushed into areas outside their strongholds of Donetsk and Luhansk, but they could yet make life harder for the Ukrainian forces by opening a second front from the south.

The Minsk summit is a meeting between the EU and the heads of state of Putin's Customs Union, which includes Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan. Russia has long wanted Ukraine to join the Customs Union, and it was former president Viktor Yanukovich's U-turn over signing an EU integration pact in favour of further consultations on the Customs Union that sparked the protests last December that brought about his downfall. Ukrainian officials did not hold out much hope for a breakthrough at the talks. "Putin has been the dictator of Russia for 14 years and is used to dealing in blackmail, threats and provocations," said Anton Gerashchenko, adviser to Ukraine's interior minister, in an interview with Ukrainian television.



“He will do everything to make Ukrainian citizens feel nervous and threatened.” Vladimir Putin’s spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, said that the meeting between Putin and Poroshenko would probably touch on “the internal Ukrainian crisis”, as well as issues of Russian humanitarian aid, “to avoid unnecessary delays” in its delivery. Last week a convoy of over 200 repainted military trucks entered east Ukraine from Russia, carrying aid for the beleaguered residents of Donetsk. Ukraine said Russia sent in the convoy without proper permission, in what amounted to an “invasion”, while Russia accused Ukraine of manufacturing delays to keep the trucks out. Some have suggested that the parade was a breach of the Geneva conventions.

Lavrov said lawyers should examine the footage, but personally he found nothing humiliating about it. The prisoner parade was held as a response to a large military parade in Kiev to mark Ukraine’s Independence Day, which included 1,500 soldiers and 90 units of military vehicles and heavy weaponry, including the Grad rockets that have caused many civilian casualties in eastern Ukraine. European politicians have come down harshly on Russia for its actions in eastern Ukraine, with several rounds of sanctions imposed by the EU and US. However, there has also been pressure on Ukraine to make concessions, with Angela Merkel telling Poroshenko during a visit to Kiev on Saturday that Kiev should increase autonomy for the eastern regions.

After leaving Kiev, Merkel said in an interview with German television that “decentralisation” of power in Ukraine was important, and hoped that a breakthrough could be made in Minsk. “I want to find a way, as many others do, which does not damage Russia. We want to have good trade relations with Russia as well. We want reasonable relations with Russia. We are depending on one another and there are so many other conflicts in the world where we should work together, so I hope we can make progress,” said Merkel. With pressure from nationalists in both countries, it is unclear whether either side could make enough concessions to satisfy the other. Ukraine has said that signing a new version of the EU integration agreement is non-negotiable. Kiev is also against introducing Russian as a second-state language and federalising the political system, both things that Russia is demanding. Kiev wants Russia to stop organising and funding the insurgency, something that Russia denies it is doing at all.

Lavrov again insisted on Monday that there are no illegal incursions over the border, claiming Russia was “fully responsible” for its side of the border and noting that an OSCE observer mission had not fixed any illegal crossings of weaponry. However, the OSCE are only mandated to monitor the official checkpoints, and are not allowed to observe the long, unguarded stretches where dirt tracks criss-cross the border and where unmarked military vehicles can frequently be seen coming and going. It was on one of these tracks, close to the Russian border town of Donetsk, that the Guardian saw a Russian military column make an incursion over the border into Ukraine earlier this month. Ukrainian officials said they had later destroyed it, but did not provide any evidence. Russia denied the column ever crossed the border, claiming it was a border patrol mission that operated strictly on the Russian side.

No headway on Ukraine after five-hour Minsk summit

Anadolu Agency, 27.08.2014



Russia and Ukraine have failed to reach a concrete agreement over the crisis in eastern Ukraine after talks in the Belarus capital Minsk. Belarus's President Alexander Lukashenko said the two countries' presidents had different views over the solution to the crisis that has killed more than 2,000 people.

"The parties have different ideas for the solution, but the both sides believe in dialogue to resolve the crisis," Lukashenko said following a five-hour summit. Both President Vladimir Putin and President Petro Poroshenko had signaled that they were open to any offer that would resolve the stalemate.

Lukashenko said that the two leaders agreed on the de-escalation of the crisis and the freeing of prisoners. Putin and Poroshenko met face-to-face for the first time since a short meeting in Normandy in June. It is hoped the meeting will pave the way for an end to the four-month conflict between Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian rebels. The meeting was also attended by Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev and Baroness Catherine Ashton, the European Union's foreign affairs representative. The negotiations are part of a Customs Union summit. The union consists of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

Western sanctions, Russia's response negatively affect German exports

ITAR-TASS, 25.08.2014



The West's sanctions against Russia and Russia's response negatively affect Germany's exports, the Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations said in a press release on Monday. German exports to Russia dropped by 15.5% in the first six months of 2014 and reached €2.8 billion, the press release said.

Russia has dropped to third place among Germany's East European importers after Poland and the Czech Republic. The Committee believes that the negative tendencies created by the mutual European and Russian sanctions will only gain momentum, the press release said.

"By the end of the year we'll lose from 20% to 25% in terms of export to Russia. This will jeopardize about 50,000 jobs in Germany," the press release quoted the Committee's chairman, Eckhard Cordes, as saying. "Last spring's discussion on the sanctions alone had a negative impact on the unstable economic situation in the EU and Russia. Everything must be done to prevent a spiral of sanctions and 'turn off' the sanction regime through constructive dialogue," Cordes said. Last year trade turnover between Germany and Russia reached €76 billion. About 6,000 German companies cooperate with Russian entrepreneurs. The total investments amounted to €20 billion. About 300,000 jobs in Germany depend on economic relations with Russia.

Around 3-4 thousand Russian volunteers fighting for Donetsk People's Republic

ITAR-TASS, 28.08.2014



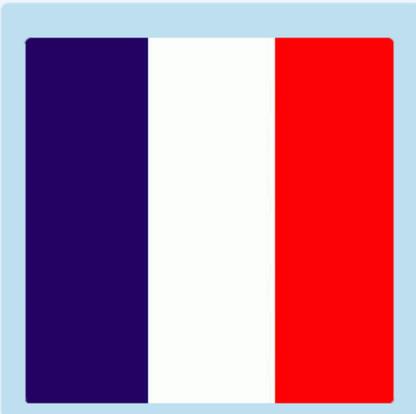
Prime Minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) Alexander Zakharchenko said that around 3-4 thousand Russian volunteers were fighting for DPR militia. "Many of them have left the republic, but the majority stayed here," he said in an address on Russian TV news channel Rossiya 24.

"Today very many questions are asked how this could have happened that the DPR army grew from scattered guerrilla units in a strong military organisation which can not only resist Ukrainian armed forces, but also defeat them on the battlefield," Zakharchenko said.

Zakharchenko added that "Kiev and the West stated repeatedly about Russian military invasion to justify somehow massive defeats which Ukrainian army has been suffering already for several months. "We have never concealed that many Russians are fighting in our ranks without aid of which we would be in a very difficult situation and this would be much heavier for us to fight." Zakharchenko said that many retired Russian servicemen were struggling among volunteers. "Current servicemen are also fighting in our ranks, as they came to us to struggle for our freedom instead of their vacations. This is characteristic only for Russians," he said, recalling about dramatic events in Serbia in the late 1990s. The DPR prime minister said that Russian volunteers "unfortunately sustained some casualties".

France hit by governing crisis as government resigns

Anadolu Agency, 25.08.2014



France is hit by a governing crisis as Prime Minister Manuel Valls's four-month working government unexpectedly resigned on Monday leaving President Francois Hollande to request the formation of a new cabinet, his third in just over two years in power.

The new government is to be formed by Tuesday 26 August in line with "the direction that the President Hollande has defined for our country," reads a statement by Elysee Palace. Only after 147 days into the job, Valls's new government cracked down under the pressure from critics on its economic policies.

Valls defends the economic policies his government put in place and said that it is "out of question" to change it, describing opponents calling for another strategy as "irresponsible." Critics, however, came from within the government itself as the Economy Minister Arnaud Montebourg and Minister of Education Benoit Hamon called for a change in the country's economic policies. Montebourg criticized Germany's austerity measures on Saturday and warned France it would no longer "be pushed around" by the EU's economic powerhouse. He called on both Prime Minister and President to make "a major change" in the economy policy.

The French government's collapse underlines the mounting political and economic pressures on Hollande and Valls's government after new figures released by the national statistics institute showed the French economy had come to a halt, displaying zero growth for the second consecutive quarter. With a zero growth figure, the central bank warned this month that Hollande had no hope of reaching his target of 1.0 percent growth for 2014. In April, French members of parliament approved Valls's budget "responsibility pact," which included €50 billion of social cuts, as well as a €41 billion cut in corporate payroll taxes for the next three years. After the resignation of Valls's government, the 10-year borrowing bond rate fell to a record low.

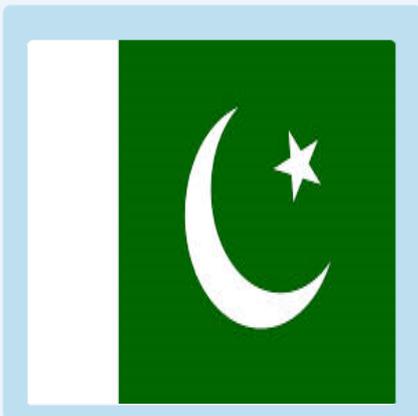
As Valls prepares to receive all the ministers of his resigning government at Matignon one by one, the French daily "Le Parisien" reported that Valls said to Hollande "C'est Moi ou Montebourg", meaning "Me or Montebourg." Valls's comment made as a result of Montebourg's criticism was the last straw that led the government to resign and which lead media reports to comment that the new government team will almost certainly exclude Economy Minister Montebourg. There is also some speculation that both Justice Minister Christiane Taubira and Culture Minister Aurelie Filippetti might leave as the pair appeared to support Montebourg's call for economic policy change. Valls came to power in a government reshuffle after Hollande's Socialist Party suffered deep losses against the right-wing National Front party in the country's municipal elections last May.

On Sunday, a survey revealed that Valls's popularity is plummeting and Hollande's approval rating remains lower than that of any past French president. A week earlier, another poll revealed that more than eight out of ten French citizens do not trust the government of Prime Minister Valls to improve the country's economic situation. As various reactions from across the political spectrum in France appear, the majority see it as an end to socialist governance. It seems that Hollande might have to face the decision of calling for the dissolution of parliament and go back to elections. The head of the far-right National Front party, Marine Le Pen, says the only viable option open to Hollande now is to dissolve parliament and hold elections.

New elections could most probably see her party perform well, given the party's strong uprising in the local and European elections earlier this year. "It's the continuation of the disintegration of the policy of François Hollande," Le Pen told French daily, Le Figaro. "We are close, closer than ever to the dissolution that we have been calling for weeks." The former center-right mayoral candidate Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet, seems to share the same opinion, tweeting "Hollande, already disowned by public opinion, is on his way to losing his majority in the National Assembly." For the Socialist Deputy Jean-Louis Gagnaire, the new government is "the government of the last chance."

Pakistan Taliban weakened by new splinter group

Anadolu Agency, 27.08.2014



Already shaken by splits and armed infighting, the main network of Pakistani Taliban militant groups has been hit by the formation of a new splinter group. The newly emerged Jamat-ul-Ahrar group is being formed under the leadership of Qassim Khurrassani who had previously led a different splinter group named Ahrar-ul-Hind.

Former Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan spokesman Ehsanullah Ihsan, now in the new group, posted a 90-minute video on his Twitter page showing the new leader, former Taliban chief for the Mohmand region Omar Khalid Khurrassani and other commanders making the announcement.

They said they would continue to follow the leader of the Afghan Taliban, Mullah Omar. "The formation of the new group had become essential after groupings and infighting within the TTP, which has weakened our struggle for a true Islamic system in Pakistan," Qasim Khurrassani said. "Some commanders have made the TTP hostage, and have deviated from the objective for which the TTP was formed." He warned that the Pakistani army, politicians, and "stooges" of western countries would be their prime targets. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan network was formed by Baitullah Mehsud in 2007 but disputes about leadership and goals have contributed to the gradual breakup of the group, especially since the killing of Baitullah's successor, Hakeemullah Mehsud, in a November 2013 U.S. drone strike.

More than 100 Taliban fighters have been killed in infighting that has gripped the group since Hakeemullah's death and the appointment of Mullah Fazlullah as leader, the first who did not belong to the influential Mehsud tribe. The Mehsud tribe broke away from the main network in May, taking almost half of the Taliban's fighters and putting them under the leadership of renegade commander Khan Syed Sajna, who had been close to Hakeemullah. Qasim Khurrassani's short-lived Ahrar-ul-Hind breakaway group collapsed in April, not long after it gained attention for its bombing of an Islamabad court in March.

Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan border guards engage in shootout again

ITAR-TASS, 26.08.2014



Border guards of Central Asian countries of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan engaged in a shootout again. The incident has occurred near a village in Lyailyak district of the republic, Kyrgyz border service told ITAR-TASS on Tuesday.

“Tajik border guards tried to place a border checkpoint at state border section not agreed upon beforehand,” the press service said, adding that “At this time citizens of a neighbouring country from the village of Ovcha-Kalacha tried to destroy a bridge across Gulkandoz River by an earth-moving machine. Kyrgyz residents went mainly on the bridge to the homeland.

Kyrgyz border guards demanded dismantlement of the bridge should be stopped and a new border post should be removed from the non-established border section. Tajik servicemen opened fire at them in retaliation. “Tajik side used mortars in the clash,” Kyrgyz border service confirmed. The situation on Kyrgyz-Tajik border remains “tense”, Kyrgyz border guards said. This is already third clash between border guards of the two countries this year. One serviceman was killed and around ten were wounded in these clashes.

Australia says it is willing to join US in air strikes on Iraq

The Guardian, 27.08.2014



Australia has signalled its willingness to contribute Super Hornets to US-led air strikes in Iraq, with the defence force “at a high state of readiness”. The defence minister, David Johnston, said Australia was yet to be approached to provide assistance other than humanitarian relief, but would continue to talk to the US about steps to preserve civilian life from the threat posed by the Islamic State (Isis).

Australian Foreign minister Julie Bishop said in a statement that Australia “stood ready to receive any further requests from the US” for Australia to “support efforts to disrupt and defeat [Isis].”

“It will be based on an assessment of risk, what achievable human purpose might be available and of course what clear and proportionate role there would be for Australia,” she told media on Wednesday evening. “We’re focused on ensuring that Isis can be defeated, that its barbaric ways can be stopped, and that the civilians they so brutally targeted are safe.” The Labor opposition has requested a briefing on the latest developments, while the Greens argued military engagement in Iraq could “make the situation worse” in Iraq. Labor’s foreign affairs spokeswoman, Tanya Plibersek, acknowledged the international community had a responsibility to protect against genocide, but said Australia must be thoughtful and calm when weighing up any potential involvement.

Plibersek said the US-led war that began in 2003 had been “very damaging” for Iraq, and the government must be cautious not to do more harm than good. Australia has left the door open to contributing to US-led air strikes in Iraq but indicated it was not considering putting combat forces on the ground. Australia outlined its position on Wednesday following a report in the New York Times that Barack Obama had begun to mobilise a broad coalition of allies behind potential American military action in Syria and was moving towards expanded air strikes in Iraq. The report cited US administration officials as saying they expected Britain and Australia would be willing to join the US in an air campaign.

In an interview late on Wednesday, Johnston said Australia’s relationship with the US was “very close” and their discussions “would touch on these atrocities, the potential genocide, the mass murders and all of the things that we’re seeing unfolding in Iraq at the moment that give us cause for serious concern”. “We haven’t been approached yet other than with respect to humanitarian relief,” he told the ABC’s Lateline program. Johnston said Australia’s Super Hornet strike aircraft were “incredibly capable”. “They’re exactly what flies off US aircraft carriers. Now, that’s an obvious first port of call were we to consider it necessary to participate with our friends and our ally,” he said.



Asked whether Super Hornets were in the region, or prepared to go to the region, Johnston said: "Well, we're at a high state of readiness. We're at a good state of readiness at all times. Apart from saying that, I wouldn't want to say any more." Johnston said the US and Australia wanted to see a stable government in Baghdad and that would not happen until 10 September when the new prime minister, Haider al-Abadi, took over. Johnston said American and Australian ministers had agreed it was "appropriate that a more inclusive government in Baghdad should be established before we start talking to them about what level of military assistance from the sort of group of allies who are concerned would start to materialise". "Secondly, we will need an invitation from the Iraqi government. We'll need to settle rules of engagement. We'll need to do a whole host of things before we start talking about any form of deployment. These things are not just done at the turn of a key, although they may seem as much. So there's a long way to go before we start talking about deploying these sorts of systems into the field."

Johnston said the ADF had started to develop its readiness after the emergence of "beheadings, mass executions, genocidal villages wiped out, ethnic cleansing". He said the US was already carrying out air strikes in Iraq with the purpose of "preserving civilian lives". "Now, if this situation continues, I think it's incumbent upon nations that have a strong, clear and understandable reputation and sense of right and wrong to do the right thing here and assist a stable Iraqi government if we can get one to defend itself and to retake and assert some reasonable level of legitimate control over these villages." Johnston said the focus was on Iraq, not Syria, where the situation was "much more clouded, much more muddied". The deputy leader of the Greens, Adam Bandt, said the actions of Isis were "terror and horror, pure and simple".

"But we were told over a decade ago that sending combat forces to Iraq would stop this kind of terror and horror from happening and that plainly hasn't worked." Bandt repeated calls for the issue to be debated in parliament before any commitment was made. He said the onus was on those who thought military involvement was the answer to prove their case to the Australian people and parliament. "If history teaches us anything it's that military involvement is not a cure-all," he told media in Canberra. "In fact it has the potential to destabilise these regions even further and allow these kind of horrors to flourish. The question is for those who think that Australian forces should go and join others in bombing another country, prove to us that it will make the situation over there safer, and that it will make Australia safer."



Announcements & Reports

▶ *Global wealth and asset management industry outlook*

Source : Ernst & Young

Weblink : [http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY-Global_wealth_and_asset_management-industry-outlook/\\$FILE/ey-global-wealth-and-asset-management.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY-Global_wealth_and_asset_management-industry-outlook/$FILE/ey-global-wealth-and-asset-management.pdf)

▶ *Sharing deal insight: merger and acquisition activity in Turkey's financial sector*

Source : PwC

Weblink : http://www.pwc.com.tr/tr_TR/tr/publications/industrial/finance/pdf/finans-sektorundeki-birlesme-ve-satin-almalar-2013.pdf

▶ *Insurance 2020: the digital prize – taking customer connection to a new level*

Source : PwC

Weblink : <http://www.pwc.com.tr/tr/publications/industrial/insurance/pdf/sigorta-2020-digital-hediye.pdf>

▶ *Annual report 2013*

Source : SAM

Weblink : http://sam.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Sam_Annual-Report_20132.pdf

▶ *Pakistan and Afghanistan: international indicators of progress*

Source : CSIS

Weblink : http://csis.org/files/publication/140820_afghan_pakistan_indicators.pdf



Upcoming Events

▶ *Japan's new role in a changing Asia*

Date : 31 August 2014
Place : Nagoya - Japan
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/japan%C2%80%C2%99s-new-role-changing-asia>

▶ *A national counterterrorism center threat assessment of ISIL and Al Qaeda in Iraq, Syria and Beyond*

Date : 03 September 2014
Place : Washington - USA
Website : <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2014/09/03-national-counterterrorism-center-threat-assessment-isil-al-qaeda-iraq-syria-beyond>

▶ *Launch of the Memos to the new EU leadership*

Date : 04 September 2014
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/view/450/>

▶ *President Erdogan: Turkey's election and the future*

Date : 04 September 2014
Place : Washington - USA
Website : <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2014/09/04-turkey-election-erdogan>

▶ *Lingering questions on President Reagan's role in the Iran-contra scandal*

Date : 05 September 2014
Place : Washington - USA
Website : <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2014/09/05-lingering-questions-president-reagans-role-iran-contra-scandal>

▶ *Annual meeting - Europe: the way ahead | Read more at Bruegel*

Date : 05 September 2014
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/451-annual-meeting-europe-the-way-ahead/>

▶ *Business opportunity and political risk in the Gulf and Middle East*

Date : 07 - 08 September 2014
Place : Manama - Bahrain
Website : <https://www.iiss.org/en/events/geo-economics%20seminars/geo-economics%20seminars/archive/2014-fea4/business-opportunity-8b49>



► *Effects of income tax changes on economic growth*

Date : 09 September 2014
Place : Washington - USA
Website : <http://taxpolicycenter.org/events/effects-of-income-tax-changes.cfm>

► *Ankara transatlantic trends survey 2014 launch*

Date : 10 September 2014
Place : Ankara - Turkey
Website : <http://www.gmfus.org/archives/33626/>

► *The Khodorkovsky Saga, power politics and legal reform in Russia*

Date : 10 September 2014
Place : London – United Kingdom
Website : <https://www.iiss.org/en/events/events/archive/2014-0f13/september-1f6e/the-khodorkovsky-saga-76e5>

► *Turkey's presidential elections 2014: What do they mean for Turkey's democratization process, the Kurdish question and Turkey's foreign policy?*

Date : 11 September 2014
Place : Washington - USA
Website : <http://www.tesev.org.tr/turkey-s-presidential-elections-2014--what-do-they-mean-for-turkey-s-democratization-process,-the-kurdish-question-and-turkey-s-foreign-policy-/Content/1681.html>

► *Istanbul finance summit*

Date : 15 - 16 September 2014
Place : İstanbul - Turkey
Website : <http://www.istanbulsummit.com/anasayfa/?lang=trk>

► *Fifth annual conference in political economy, "The crisis: scholarship, policies, conflicts and alternatives"*

Date : 16 - 18 September 2014
Place : Naples – Italy
Website : http://iippe.org/wp/?page_id=1943

► *International conference on economics, energy, environment and agricultural sciences*

Date : 21 September 2014
Place : Kuala Lumpur - Malaysia
Website : <http://www.pakrdw.com/>



► *Europe's strategic choices: building prosperity and security*

Date : 17 – 19 October 2014
Place : Berlin - Germany
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/Berlin2014>

► *The new shape of banking: regulation, reform and resilience*

Date : 20 October 2014
Place : Berlin - Germany
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/Banking>

► *7th international energy congress expo*

Date : 24 - 25 November 2014
Place : Ankara - Turkey
Website : <http://www.energy-congress.com>

► *Food security: mapping risks, building resilience*

Date : 01 – 02 December 2014
Place : London – United Kingdom
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/foodsecurity2014>