

Turkey calls Russia to continue its influence over Assad in Aleppo evacuations

Hurriyet Daily News, 16.12.2016



Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım spoke to his Russian counterpart, Dimitry Medvedev, on the phone to ask Russia to pressure Damascus to uphold the continuation of civilians' evacuation from Aleppo, sources from the prime ministry said.

Yıldırım said he expected Russia would continue to use its influence over relevant actors in Aleppo to maintain evacuation operations are carried out without further security risks and damage to civilians. He also stated that Turkey would “take the necessary measures to improve human conditions and guarantee the evacuation continues.”

Stressing that the regime and the opposition should be encouraged to seek political processes for a solution, Medvedev said they were closely monitoring the issue and were expecting Turkey to pressure opposition forces to comply with the ceasefire.

Both prime ministers mutually expressed their agreement to stay in close contact for regional and other international developments, including Syria, and mutually shared their contact information for “hotline” implementations between their offices. Medvedev also expressed his condolences to Turkey over the Dec. 10 Istanbul terror attack that killed 44 and wounded hundreds.

Turkish FM: More than 7,000 civilians evacuated from Aleppo

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More than 7,000 civilians have been evacuated from Syria's besieged city of Aleppo in the first five convoys, as part of a ceasefire and evacuation deal reached by the efforts of Turkey and Russia, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said on his official Twitter account.

Meanwhile, close to 8,000 civilians have been evacuated from Aleppo with a sixth convoy currently "en route to safety," a Turkish official said, according to Reuters. Private broadcaster CNN Türk also said that a sixth convoy, which is comprised of 20 ambulances and 13 buses, had hit the road to safer areas inside the country.

The report said that each convoy carried between 1,000 to 1,200 people, while also adding that heavy construction equipment had crossed the border from Turkey to Syria, where they are expected to help set up new tents for the incoming displaced people.

The head of the Turkish Red Crescent, Kerem Kınık, told reporters that preparations to receive civilians evacuated from war-torn Aleppo had been completed and that the wounded would be the first to be transferred to Turkey. CNN Türk said more than 50 wounded Syrians had been brought to Turkey for treatment.

The evacuation, from the last rebel bastion in Aleppo, began, amid diplomatic efforts by Turkey and Russia and concerns over the implementation of a cease-fire that would end years of fighting in the city. The International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) said the evacuation of rebels and civilians in Aleppo is likely to take several days.

Ankara snubs EU decision to halt accession talks

Anadolu Agency, 14.12.2016



Turkish EU Minister Çelik has harshly criticized the EU, declaring it lacked self-confidence after bloc unanimously decided not to open new chapters in accession talks.

“Not opening new chapters means let’s not talk anymore. This is a sign of a lack of self-confidence,” Çelik said while speaking to the press on the sidelines of an event held by the Kebler Foundation in Berlin. A “chapter” is a specific area of negotiations in the membership talks covering a wide range of issues. “Under the currently prevailing circumstances, no new chapters are considered for opening,” said a statement from the EU presidency.

Austria, however, refused to sign the statement because it wants to completely terminate Turkey’s long-stalled process in joining the 28-member bloc, including ongoing negotiations. Several foreign ministers at a meeting in Brussels argued against Austria’s calls for a tough stance against Ankara.

The bloc has criticized Ankara’s sweeping dismissals and arrests after the July 15 failed coup attempt, but is wary of upsetting Turkey too much as it needs its cooperation on curbing immigration to the bloc and dealing with the conflict in Syria.

Some further collaboration with Turkey is needed for the fight against terrorism, to exchange information on fighters and to manage the migration issue together,” said Belgian Foreign Minister Didier Reynders. “About the accession process, it is true that it’s impossible now to go further with such a very difficult situation in Turkey ... we will say certainly that it is impossible to open new chapters for the accession process.” French EU Minister Harlem Desir agreed, adding that he wanted “a demanding, clear and firm dialogue on the principles and values which are those of Europe.” This decision comes despite a promise by the EU in March to prepare to open new chapters at an “accelerated pace” as part of a landmark deal with Ankara to tackle the migrant crisis.

The EU opened one new chapter in June, but this brings the tally to only 16 out of the 35 required for Turkey to join the bloc. Arguing for a tougher line, Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz said: “Accession talks with Turkey have to be put on hold ... Turkey has drifted away from Europe more and more, and over the past months, this development has increased in terms of drama and speed.” The Netherlands is also in the hawkish camp. But EU leaders are not likely to agree on a formal halt of the accession process. Meanwhile, Çelik also has said condemnations on terrorism and messages of solidarity from leading politicians from Europe after the Dec. 10 suicide bomb attack, which killed 44 in Istanbul, were more positive compared to reactions to previous terror attacks. “Still, words are not enough. We should look at the practice,” he said, calling on Europe to take actions against the terror groups active in Turkey.

Turkish military delegation visits Syria's Manbij for field investigation

Hurriyet Daily News, 15.12.2016



A military delegation from the Turkish Armed Forces, accompanied by U.S. soldiers, visited Syria's Manbij region last week for a field investigation to ensure fighters from the YPG were not present in the area, a Turkish official has told.

The U.S. is not a facilitator for talks between Turkey and the SDF, the official also said, refuting a statement released by a Washington-led anti-Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) coalition official. "This week, we're facilitating joint discussions with Turkey, the SDF and other coalition partners to promote de-escalation in the area," anti-ISIL coalition spokesman, Air Force Col. John Dorrian, had told reporters.

"Every party to these discussions has an overriding interest in common: The defeat of ISIL, an enemy that threatens us all," Dorrian said. Turkish leaders have repeatedly urged the U.S. to keep its promise for the withdrawal of YPG fighters from Manbij to the east of the Euphrates River. Washington and the Democratic Union Party (PYD) have said at multiple times that the YPG forces had either left Manbij or would leave the city soon.

The SDF is primarily comprised of the YPG, which is the military wing of the Syrian Kurdish PYD. Turkey views the YPG and PYD as the Syrian offshoots of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), with which it has been in an armed conflict since the mid-1980s. Turkey, along with the U.S. and the EU, designates the PKK as a terrorist organization.

The U.S., however, does not similarly label the YPG, the PYD, or the SDF - which is composed of Kurdish and Arab militias - as terrorist groups. Washington has extensively relied on these groups to roll back ISIL inside Syria.

The SDF is currently carrying out a campaign to oust ISIL from its self-declared Syrian capital of Raqqa. A major goal of the U.S.-led coalition is to eliminate the jihadists from territories under its control in the region.

Painful exit from Aleppo

Reuters, 15.12.2016



The evacuation of wounded civilians and rebels from the besieged parts of Aleppo started, amid diplomatic efforts by Turkey and Russia and concerns over the implementation of a cease-fire that would end years of fighting in the city.

A convoy of ambulances and buses, which was led by vehicles from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, followed by ambulances and then green government buses, left rebel territory in Aleppo. Evacuees spent several hours gathering at a staging area with assistance from the ICRC before the vehicles left at around 2:30 p.m..

Ingy Sedky, the ICRC's spokeswoman in Syria, said the first convoy included 13 ambulances and 20 buses carrying civilians. "They have crossed the front line and are on their way to rural parts of western Aleppo" province, including the opposition-controlled town of Khan al-Aassal, she told AFP.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said there were 19 ambulances and 21 buses taking part in the evacuation. Elizabeth Hoff, WHO's representative in Syria, told Reuters from the evacuation area in the Ramousah district: "We saw women and small children on the buses and some men. They were not full. Everything went very smoothly. It was very calm."

Syrian state television reported that at least 4,000 rebels and their families would be evacuated under the plan. The ICRC said in a tweet in the first minutes of the evacuation that the first batch of buses was carrying around 200 wounded people.

An AFP correspondent at the staging area said people were piling onto the buses, filling seats and even sitting on the floor, with some worried that there would not be another chance to evacuate. Many were in tears and some hesitated to board the buses, afraid they would end up in the hands of regime forces.

The start of the evacuation came after a convoy carrying civilians was hit by pro-regime fire, during which at least one civilian was killed and another four were injured. Turkey's state-run Anadolu Agency gave the death toll of the attack by Iranian-backed Shiite militias at four, while Reuters said only one person was killed by forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad. The evacuees are free to choose between going to either to Idlib or Turkey.

Turkish Red Crescent head Kerem Kınık, who was in the southern province of Hatay and Syria's Idlib to inspect the preparations, said they expected that most of the evacuees would opt for Idlib. The fragile cease-fire and evacuation deal was supposed to begin on the morning of Dec. 14, after Turkey and Russia agreed late Dec. 13, but collapsed briefly with a return to violence sending panicked civilians who had gathered to leave scrambling to find safety.



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, agreed during a phone conversation in the afternoon of Dec. 14 that the cease-fire agreement should be put into effect completely and that violations to the agreement should be prevented.

They also confirmed the decision to make joint efforts to start the evacuation of the civilians and the opposition from Aleppo as soon as possible. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and his Iranian counterpart, Javad Zarif, spoke over the phone four times in a bid to secure the implementation of the cease-fire deal, Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hüseyin Müftüoğlu said Dec. 15.

Addressing allegations that Iran had imposed new conditions on the agreement, including the evacuation of some civilians from two Shiite-majority villages in northwestern Syria under rebel siege, Müftüoğlu simply said, "It would not be right to impose additional conditions on the Aleppo deal."

He added that efforts for the evacuation of civilians from Aleppo and the opening of a humanitarian corridor between "should be kept separate, if Iran has some demands," stressing that Turkey's priority was the safe evacuation of civilians from Aleppo.

One day prior, Çavuşoğlu said Turkey, Iran and Russia would meet at a summit of foreign ministers in Moscow on Dec. 27 to discuss efforts to secure a cease-fire in Syria. "The best solution [on Syria] is always a political one. We are making efforts to provide a cease-fire across the entire country and at the same time to initiate a resumption of negotiations. Our efforts will continue in this direction," Çavuşoğlu told private broadcaster TGRT late on Dec. 14.

"In this framework, we will be conducting a trilateral Turkey-Iran-Russia meeting in Moscow on Dec. 27," he added. U.N. Syria humanitarian adviser Jan Egeland said Dec. 15 that Russia told a United Nations humanitarian task force meeting on Dec. 15 that the evacuation of people from eastern Aleppo would be quick and peaceful.

Russia confirmed at the meeting "that this is a swift, un-bureaucratic, non-intrusive evacuation and no harm will meet those who are evacuated," Egeland told reporters in Geneva. "It's a three-pronged evacuation – of wounded and sick, of vulnerable civilians, and evacuation of fighters," he said. "All in all it surely must be well over 1,000, it could be in the thousands."

The U.N. was not involved in mediating the evacuation deal but was ready to monitor and accompany evacuees all the way to their destination, Egeland said. Earlier in the day, the Russian Defense Ministry said Syrian authorities had guaranteed the safety of the rebels leaving the city.

Meanwhile, the United States refused to say its diplomatic efforts to end the war in Syria had failed on Dec. 14, as U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry spoke with his counterparts in Russia, Turkey and Qatar, and the U.N. special envoy for the conflict, Staffan de Mistura. "In all of these conversations, the secretary has stressed the need to continue to try to stop the bloodshed and the violence through a meaningful cease-fire," said Kerry's spokesman, John Kirby.

UK Special Representative for Syria: The fall of Aleppo is not the end of the war in Syria

Hurriyet Daily News, 15.12.2016



The fall of Aleppo will not mean the end of the war in Syria and the fundamental aspect of this war has not changed, U.K. Special Representative for Syria, Gareth Bayley, has told.

“It is a human catastrophe, an absolute tragedy. Across the country there are nearly 600,000 people in besieged areas that need the international community’s help. It looks ahead like we will be seeing yet more instability, yet more human catastrophe,” Bayley said. Following the reestablishment of control by the Russia-backed Bashar al-Assad regime over eastern Aleppo, Bayley briefed journalists.

He said it was clear there are crimes against humanity being carried out in east Aleppo. “There are very credible reports of disappearances, arbitrary detention and torture. Anyone who commits crimes must be brought to account. There must be accountability in this war, as there has been in other wars,” Bayley added, stating that nobody knows how far the regime will advance after Aleppo.

“One choice is for it to go to Idlib city, the other is to retake Palmyra, a third option is to head east to Deir ez-Zor or Raqqa. It depends how much Russia and Iran decide they are prepared to support the regime. How much cost are Iran and Russia prepared to bear to complete this idea of a full Syria? Iran may think it has already achieved its objectives, having got its corridor to the Mediterranean Sea. The Russians have their bases. Those military objectives have been achieved,” he said.

Bayley described Turkey’s receiving of 3 million refugees as an “extraordinary contribution” to the humanitarian agenda, but warned that al-Assad might push for more refugees to come to Turkey. “Al-Assad will try to push more [people] into Hatay if he can. Idlib is already full of people, where will they go? If he can push them out further to Kilis, he would do that,” he said.

Bayley said the al-Assad regime is completely dependent on foreign support, including “irregular militia support.” “The obvious problems here are the positions of Iran and Russia. We urge Iran and Russia to rethink their policy and to recognize they face enduring costs to their sponsorship of the al-Assad regime. It is not going to be an easy future for either of these countries, and the cost in supporting a regime like this is incredibly high.

We won’t get stability this way,” he added, while stressing that he does not foresee an imminent return to political talks or an end to the war in Syria in the near future. “Firstly, the al-Assad regime, through its negotiator [Bashar] Jaafari, has never shown any willingness to actually negotiate.

Secondly, the opposition knows that if they go back to Geneva talks, recent history shows us that violence increases as the al-Assad regime tries to strengthen its hand at the table. Before they go to negotiations, violence increases,” Bayley said.

The U.K.’s priority in the Syrian crisis right now is aid and assistance, he added. “The U.K. is the second largest donor country in this crisis. We have committed over 2.3 billion pounds [around 10.5 billion Turkish Liras] to this crisis and we are working with our partners to meet the humanitarian requirements of people who are displaced in Aleppo, which has been totally destroyed. You need \$200 billion to reconstruct Syria,” Bayley said.

Regarding the role of the Syrian Kurds, Bayley said the U.K.’s consistent message has been that “the Kurds need to play a role in a Syrian process, not just in a regional process.” “When we have spoken to the PYD for example, we have said things like the unilateral announcement of the Rojava administration, outside the Geneva negotiations, are not acceptable and we don’t recognize them,” he added.

How Brexit may not mean Brexit

Financial Times, 15.12.2016



The risk with referendums, as Margaret Thatcher used to say, is that they become a device for demagogues and dictators: the people have spoken so now they must be silent ever more. The point about liberal democracy is that citizens are offered a chance to change their minds.

Britain’s referendum on EU membership was won by the Eurosceptics. Only the other day the House of Commons backed by a large margin the government’s plan to begin the process of departure before the end of March 2017 by invoking Article 50 of the EU treaties. The leavers, you might imagine, would be brimming with seasonal good cheer.

For some, this is the culmination of a life’s political work. They should be dancing in the streets. Instead, gripped by a fear that verges on paranoia, they see dark plots and dastardly conspiracies in every doorway.

True enough, the judges of the UK Supreme Court have been asked to rule on the legal modalities of the Article 50 process. They may decide, as did a lower court, that parliament should have a say before Mrs May posts her Article 50 letter to Donald Tusk, the president of the European Council, to start the clock running on a two-year exit timetable.

The possibility of such scrutiny has provoked uproar among more excitable Brexiters, with the judges condemned as “enemies of the people”. In the manner of authoritarians through the ages, they contend that the rule of law belongs to politicians rather than the courts.



This is confusing at best for those who took at face value the leavers' claim to be the champions of parliamentary "sovereignty" against the depredations of Brussels. Mrs May's contention that she can decide without consultation with MPs is calculated, after all, to subtract from this very same sovereignty.

No one expects Westminster actually to derail the Article 50 process. What disturbs the leavers is that parliament may take the opportunity to express a view on the relationship Britain should have with the EU once it departs. The referendum answered a simple "in or out" question, saying nothing about what next.

The Brexiters want a clean break with Brussels and all its works. A debate about future ties might reach a more nuanced conclusion. Some who voted for Brexit might want to maintain close collaboration, by, say, staying in the single market and customs union. Horror of horrors, confronted with the full complexity and costs of Brexit, they might have second thoughts about leaving.

The failure of Mrs May's government to come up with anything resembling a plan points to the scale of those costs. The prime minister has an overriding political priority: to complete the legal process of Brexit before the 2020 election: "You voted for it, I delivered." But she also has to keep the Tory party together and forestall a disorderly Brexit and economic recession.

If the prime minister has a strategy equal to the task she has not shared it with colleagues. Instead she leans this way and that — telling the Tory conference that Britain will jettison the European Court of Justice and the EU's free movement rules for migrants and, in the next breath, assuring Nissan, Ford and EasyJet among others that their businesses will not be disrupted by Brexit. Privately as well as publicly she refuses to acknowledge the contradictions. The mood among Whitehall officials veers from frustration to despair.

The best guess is that Mrs May wants to combine a series of bespoke "carveouts" for Britain within the customs union and, though less likely, the single market, with a transitional arrangement that extends well beyond the mid-2020 British election. Philip Hammond, the chancellor, sees such a transition as the parachute to a soft landing.

The first of Mrs May's demands — a tailor-made deal — is unlikely to survive contact with the other 27 EU states. If Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, has been clear about anything it is that the rules of the single market are indivisible. Former members cannot be given deals unavailable to those in the club. This sentiment is heard over and over again in capitals across the continent.

A cliff-edge Brexit would be in no one's interest. And two years is too short a period to hammer out a comprehensive agreement. But, while ambiguity would suit Mrs May, the 27 want clarity about the shape of a final deal. And, once the clock starts ticking, they hold the advantage. The Brexiters face another harsh truth.

For all their bluster about the leverage afforded by Britain's imports of German cars, Italian prosecco and French cheese, there is no doubt which side would suffer most from a breakdown in the relationship. The EU would lose business in an important market. British-based companies would face new barriers across 27 states. Mrs May is fond of saying "Brexit means Brexit".

But it is easy to see how a transitional arrangement could turn into a final destination — that, even as Britain formally departs the EU not much else changes. Nor is it impossible to imagine that a recession would see popular support for Brexit waning fast.

The clear probability is that Britain will indeed leave the union but, to borrow from John Maynard Keynes, faced with some uncomfortable facts, the people might just change their minds. There resides the real source of the Brexiters' neuroses. It has nothing to do with plots or conspiracies. It is called, simply, democracy.

The US economy needs more productivity, not jobs

Foreign Policy, 15.12.2016



Ask business leaders what Donald Trump's economic priority should be, and you'll get an array of predictable answers: Cut business taxes. Reduce the debt. Reform trade deals. Jeffrey Immelt, CEO of General Electric Co., has a different response. "We have to find ways to raise productivity," Immelt told.

Otherwise, he warned, America could face years of below-trend growth with all the associated problems: rising debt, falling living standards, and so on. Conversely, GE economists estimate that if the world boosted industrial productivity by just 1 percent, it could add \$15 trillion to the global gross domestic product over the next 15 years.

At first glance, Immelt's answer seems peculiar. It's easy to feel that hyper-efficiency is ubiquitous. According to a McKinsey study, digitization influences up to 98 percent of the U.S. economy—thanks to the 87 percent of adults who use the internet, for example, and the 64 percent who have smartphones. The annual growth rate of e-commerce is dependably robust, vacillating between 15 and 17 percent since 2010.

GE is the poster child of the productivity gains many people associate with the U.S. economy. A half-century ago, its factories had human assembly lines. Today, it puts robots to work on a massive scale.

This year alone, it anticipates making \$500 million in productivity gains by applying digital technology to its operations. Looking ahead, Immelt expects 3-D printing to produce about a fifth of GE's industrial output in the next two decades, raising productivity even further.

Yet looks can be deceiving. Consider the official data on economic activity produced per hour of labor in the United States. Starting in the 1950s, the average annual rate of productivity growth was 2.3 percent, rising above 4 percent in some years. As recently as the early 21st century, it topped 3 percent. Over the past decade, however, the figure has tumbled.



The average of annual rates from the five years leading up to 2016—the sort of rolling measurement statisticians consider to be the most accurate indication of an underlying trend—was a mere 0.4 percent. The matter is provoking anxiety at the Federal Reserve, where Chair Janet Yellen has described the data as “puzzling” and “disappointing.”

This is not just a made-in-America phenomenon, however. Productivity rates have been falling sharply around the world. A survey of 30 rich member-states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found that 29 had recorded slowdowns between 2005 and 2014.

A survey of 30 rich member-states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found that 29 had recorded slowdowns between 2005 and 2014. The decline has been particularly striking in the United Kingdom, which has had barely any measured increase in output per worker for almost a decade. As in Washington, U.K. economic experts freely admit that they are uncertain about what’s going on.

Some pundits have suggested that the data are just wrong. Charlie Bean, a former deputy governor of the Bank of England, says statisticians could be failing to count all of the productive activity in cyberspace because keeping track of it is so difficult. In a similar vein, they might not be measuring all the output of free services, such as apps. Or maybe last decade’s credit bubble distorted the data: It artificially inflated the value of financial services, making today’s economy look smaller by comparison.

Other experts posit that the numbers are correct—companies are just failing to invest in new technologies or to generate smart ideas. More optimistic sorts, such as economists Andrew McAfee and Erik Brynjolfsson at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, suggest that there is a time-lag effect. Companies are still investing and creating, the argument goes, but it can take years to bring important innovations to scale.

Another explanation, however, is gaining ground at the Fed and elsewhere: that America suffers from a multi speed economy. This theory contends that some companies, such as Silicon Valley powerhouses like Google and forward-thinking, competitive manufacturers like GE, are becoming more productive and tend to grab public attention. All the rest, though, are dragging down the productivity growth rate.

It’s difficult to measure this divergence. Researchers at the Bank of England are parsing micro-level data from companies, collected by the OECD, to see if they can quantify the trend. Their early, informal estimates suggest that only around 20 percent of all companies have generated most productivity gains in recent years and that they tend to be manufacturers.

Meanwhile, data collected by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate that American manufacturers’ productivity rose by 1.8 percent annually between 2007 and 2015, 40 percent higher than the national average. In the previous decade, the gap was even more stark: Productivity in manufacturing rose 4.7 percent between 2000 and 2007, and just 2.6 percent among businesses overall. The takeaway is that responsibility for poor efficiency lies not with widget-makers or technology giants but with health care providers, educational institutions, food services, and other sectors.

If this last explanation is correct—and I think it almost certainly is—there are huge implications for Trump’s economic priorities. During the campaign, there was extensive debate about how to enable American industry to flourish on the world stage.

A hot topic was whether domestic jobs need “protection” in the form of trade barriers and other measures. Seen through the lens of productivity, however, this is clearly the wrong approach to expanding the economy. Politicians ought to be talking about where gains could be made by introducing technological innovations, streamlining workflows, and cutting bureaucratic fat in sluggish sectors, which tend to be those less exposed to international trade.

Admittedly, these priorities aren’t sexy. They don’t generate easy political sound bites, nor are they tailor-made for exciting photo-ops or jet-setting trips to negotiate international deals. Yet they could stoke a revolution. As Yellen has said, “Productivity growth is the key determinant of improvements in living standards.”

If Trump wants to leave an indelible mark on the U.S. economy, unleashing more dynamism and efficiency would be the place to start. Although it’s exciting and commendable that GE has robots manning factory floors and 3-D printing defining future business strategies, the economy won’t appreciate the full potential of these technologies until they reach classrooms, shops, offices, and, yes, government agencies. Only then will productivity rise to the level where the smartphone generation already imagines it to be.

Trump backs ‘safe zones’ in Syria

Hurriyet Daily News, 14.12.2016



Donald Trump said that the United States would create “safe zones” in Syria, a demand Turkey had been longing for and just as the evacuation of civilians and rebels from the besieged parts of Syria’s Aleppo was ongoing.

“When I look at what’s going on in Syria, it’s so sad,” the New York Times quoted Trump as telling a crowd during one of his “Thank You” tours in Pennsylvania. “It’s so sad, and we’re going to help people,” he said. Trump said he would ask the Persian Gulf nations to put up money for the project, adding, “We’ll build and help build safe zones in Syria, so people will have a chance.”

This was his first reference to such an American role in the war in Syria since he was elected, and one that comes as the Syrian government has all but recaptured the rebel stronghold of Aleppo. Ankara has long been demanding for the establishment of a safe zone between in northern Syria and a no-fly zone so that refugees would not be threatened. Trump talked during the campaign about building safe zones, presenting them as a way to stem the tide of refugees into Europe. But this was the first time he had repeated the proposal since he began receiving intelligence briefings.

Some analysts and military commanders have warned that it would be a significant and potentially dangerous undertaking on a complex battlefield over which Russian planes have been flying raids. Trump's safe zone announcement came hours before the head of the Turkish Red Crescent, Kerem Kınık, said Turkey would set up 10,000 tents for Aleppo refugees at camps in the Syrian city of Idlib.

Kınık told state-run Anadolu Agency Dec. 16 that the Turkish body had begun building a tent city using heavy-construction equipment some 6 to 7 kilometers (around 4 miles) from the Turkish border near the southern province of Hatay. Kınık said the tent city would be built as soon as possible.

The Turkish Red Crescent is also preparing to increase the capacity of the refugee camps as reports surface that the number of people evacuated from Aleppo could reach up to 50,000, he added. Kınık said the camp near the Turkish border would host rest areas, school, health center, mobile toilets and bath facilities.

"The first phase of the camp will be completed within three to four days," he said. Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said Dec. 16 that Turkey would take in the most vulnerable - including the old, children and sick - but would consider allowing more in later "if there's a need." "But it looks like those people, with the hope of returning to Aleppo one day, want to remain within Syria even if there are safer areas available," Çavuşoğlu said.

Trump chooses Exxon CEO as top US diplomat

Hurriyet Daily News, 13.12.2016



U.S. President-elect Donald Trump on Dec. 13 tapped ExxonMobil chief Rex Tillerson, an oilman with deep ties to Russia, as his nominee to be secretary of state, promising that the CEO, who is personal friends with Vladimir Putin, has "second to none" relationships with world leaders.

Tillerson's nomination comes days after the Central Intelligence Agency accused Russia of interfering with the U.S. election in a bid to help U.S. President-elect Donald Trump win, in a development which could complicate the ExxonMobil chief Rex Tillerson confirmation hearings before the Senate.

A statement by Trump's communication office said Tillerson "will be a forceful and clear-eyed advocate for America's vital national interests, and help reverse years of misguided foreign policies and actions that have weakened America's security and standing in the world," according to AFP. As ExxonMobil's president and chief executive, the 64-year-old Texan oversees the company's business activities in more than 50 countries.



“Rex knows how to manage a global enterprise, which is crucial to running a successful State Department, and his relationships with leaders all over the world are second to none,” Trump said in the statement.

Tillerson has opposed sanctions on Russia and in 2013 was awarded Russia’s Order of Friendship by Putin following several years of Exxon projects in the country. U.S. media have reported for days on secret CIA findings that Moscow sought to bolster Trump’s election bid against Democratic former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton by releasing hacked Democratic Party documents.

Tillerson – who has no formal foreign policy background – is sure to face sharp questions in the Senate confirmation hearings. Leading senators on Dec. 12 threw their backing behind a congressional investigation into U.S. intelligence assessments on Russia election interference, putting top Republicans on a collision course with the incoming president.

The president-elect has dismissed the intelligence reports about Russian interference as “ridiculous,” defying an increasing number of senators from his own party, as well as top Democrats, the CIA and the outgoing White House. Tillerson bested eight or nine contenders for the job of secretary of state, including former CIA Director David Petraeus, former U.N. Ambassador John Bolton, Senate Foreign Relations Chairman Bob Corker and erstwhile Trump critic and former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney.



Announcements & Reports

An anatomy of inclusive growth in Europe?

Source : Bruegel
Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2016/10/an-anatomy-of-inclusive-growth-in-europe/>

A glass half full: The rebalance, reassurance, and resolve in the U.S.-China strategic relationship

Source : RAND
Weblink : <https://www.brookings.edu/research/a-glass-half-full-the-rebalance-reassurance-and-resolve-in-the-u-s-china-strategic-relationship/>

Income convergence during the crisis: did EU funds provide a buffer?

Source : Bruegel
Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2016/10/income-convergence-did-eu-funds-provide-a-buffer/>

Upcoming Events

Competitive Gains in the Economic and Monetary Union

Date : 19 December 2016
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 : 19 December 2016
Place : London - UK
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/future-capitalist-democracy-uk-japan-perspectives>

13th Asia Europe Economic Forum (AEEF)

Date : 20 December 2016
Place : Beijing - China
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/13th-asia-europe-economic-forum/>

Emerging Markets and Europe: Time for Different Relationships?

Date : 21 December 2016
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 : 22 December 2016
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 : 23 December 2016
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 : 24 December 2016
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 : 24 December 2016
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 : 25 December 2016
Place : Lisbon - Portugal
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/vision-europe-summit-2016/>