



TERROR STRIKES AGAIN IN TURKEY

A police officer and people walk next to the wreck of public bus following an explosion in Kayseri, central Turkey yesterday. *Inset*, Injured people waiting for an ambulance following the explosion. Thirteen Turkish soldiers were killed and dozens more wounded yesterday in a suicide car bombing targeting off-duty conscripts, the latest in a string of attacks to rock Turkey in recent months. The government said all signs so far suggested the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) was behind the bombing in the city of Kayseri, a usually calm industrial hub in Anatolia.

PHOTO: AFP

ALLEGED RUSSIAN HACKING

Obama warned Putin personally

Vows to send 'clear message' to Russia

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama vowed Friday to send a "clear message" to Russia for trying to sway the US election, while calling on Donald Trump and Republicans to put national security before politics.

Obama all-but accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of personally ordering an audacious cyber hack that many Democrats believe gravely wounded Hillary Clinton in a closely fought election.

The US intelligence community has concluded that a hack-and-release of the Democratic Party emails was designed to put Trump -- a political neophyte who has praised Putin -- into the Oval Office.

But with tensions rising between the world's two preeminent nuclear powers and US political anger near boiling point after Trump's shock election, Obama sought to exude calm while promising a measured response.

Assuring Americans that the ballot itself was not rigged, he promised to "send a clear message to Russia or others not to do this to us, because we can do stuff to you."

Noting that "not much happens in Russia without Vladimir Putin," Obama said he had personally told the former KGB officer when they met in September to "cut it out."

"In fact we did not see further tampering of the election process," he told journalists before heading for his Christmas vacation in Hawaii.

Regarding specific acts of retaliation, Obama said some would be carried out publicly, but that in other cases, "the message will be directly received by the Russians and not publicized."

Obama belittled Russia as a second rate power with little going for it, using language that is sure to infuriate the status-conscious Russian leader.



Bye-bye US, we do not need you

Says Duterte

REUTERS, Manila

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte yesterday told the United States to prepare for repeal of an agreement on deployment of troops and equipment for exercises, declaring that America's money could be replaced.

Duterte, however, suggested relations could improve under President-elect Donald Trump. "I like your mouth, it's like mine, yes Mr. President. We are similar and people with the same feathers flock together."

But returning his focus to the present US administration, which has criticised Duterte over reports of extrajudicial killings in his campaign against drugs, he delivered a different message.

"We do not need you," Duterte said in a news conference after arriving from visits to Cambodia and Singapore. "Prepare to leave the Philippines. Prepare for the eventual repeal or abrogation of the VFA."

The Visiting Forces Agreement, signed in 1998, accorded legal status to thousands of US troops who were rotated in the country for military exercises and humanitarian assistance operations.

"Bye, bye America and work on the protocols that will eventually move you out of the Philippines," he said.

'The end of peace process'

Palestinians warn of 'chaos' if US embassy moved to Jerusalem

AFP, Bethlehem

A senior Palestinian official warned US president-elect Donald Trump Friday that moving the American embassy to Jerusalem would destroy prospects of peace with Israel and push the region into turmoil.

The remarks by the secretary general of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, Saeb Erekat, came as Israeli officials praised Trump's decision to nominate David Friedman as envoy to the Jewish state.

The Palestinians regard east Jerusalem as the capital of their future state.

Moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv before a final agreement on the conflict "will be the destruction of the peace process," Erekat told journalists.

He also warned of the potential outcome of moving the embassy and a change in the "longstanding position" of the United States that considers "the settlements as illegal".

"I look David Friedman and Trump in the eye and tell them -- if you were to take these steps

of moving the embassy and annexing settlements in the West Bank, you are sending this region down the path of something that I call chaos, lawlessness and extremism," he said.

Friedman, a bankruptcy attorney, supports settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, characterised by successive US administrations as an "obstacle to peace" with the Palestinians.

In a Trump transition team statement on Thursday announcing his appointment, Friedman said he wanted to work for peace and looked forward to "doing this from the US embassy in Israel's eternal capital, Jerusalem".

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and members of his right-wing government welcomed on Friday Friedman's nomination.

The United States and most UN member states do not recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and the city's status is one of the thorniest issues of the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

They don't cry anymore

Injured Aleppo children so traumatised they have stopped crying

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Some of the thousands of children caught up in the devastating siege of Aleppo are so traumatised that they have stopped crying.

According to the United Nations, at least 2,700 children were among 8,000 evacuees allowed to leave the war-torn Syrian city in recent days.

But many more remain trapped in the remaining rebel-held areas.

In video footage, aired by Channel 4 News, one toddler, called Aya, sits on a stretcher in Aleppo's last hospital, her face covered in dust and dried blood.

As chaos engulfs the



room around her, the toddler doesn't cry.

Her mother, Um Fatima, the only surviving adult of three families whose apartment block was obliterated by a Russian or Syrian bomb, says the family was sleeping when their home was hit.

The footage shows the

unimaginable horrors suffered by the last remaining civilians waiting for safe passage to neighbouring towns in the rebel-held province of Idlib.

Mahmoud, a teenage neighbour of Um Fatima, cradles his one-month-old brother Ishmael Mohamed

who was suffocated to death in the apartment collapse.

Two other small children, a brother and sister, are seen wandering the blood-stained hospital corridors.

They are dust-covered and shell-shocked, looking for their mother. Neither is crying.

A nurse is heard asking adults: "Are these your children?"

"Aleppo is now a synonym for hell," UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said, urging a resumption of the evacuation.

Barack Obama accused Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, along with his Russian and Iranian allies, of committing "atrocities".



Mourners attend the funeral of Raheeq Berawi, a Palestinian woman who was killed while allegedly carrying out an attack on Israelis, in the West Bank village of Assira al-Shamaliya yesterday, after Israeli authorities returned her body to her family.

PHOTO: AFP

US offers \$25m for IS leader

REUTERS, Washington

The United States on Friday more than doubled its previous reward for information on Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, offering \$25 million for information that would help locate, arrest or convict the head of the jihadist group.

The US State Department's Rewards for Justice program previously offered \$10 million for information on Baghdadi, announced in October 2011. The increase was announced in a statement on Friday.

Baghdadi, an Iraqi whose real name is Ibrahim al-Samarrai, declared himself the caliph of a huge swath of Iraq and Syria two years ago.

His exact location is not clear. Reports have said he may be in the Islamic State-held city of Mosul, Iraq, or in Islamic State-held territory to the west of the city, close to the border with Syria.

Kurdish officials believe that growing pressure resulting from a coalition military assault on Mosul is causing Baghdadi and his top lieutenants to move around and try to hide themselves.



NEWSIN brief

India picks new army, air chiefs

NDTV ONLINE, New Delhi

The government yesterday appointed vice chief of army staff Lt Gen Bipin Rawat as the new Army chief superseding his two senior officers, while vice chief of air staff Air Marshal BS Dhanoa has been made the new chief of the Indian Air Force. "Government has decided to appoint Lt Gen Bipin Rawat, vice chief of army staff, as the next chief of army staff with effect from afternoon of December 31," the Defence Ministry said in a tweet. It also tweeted that Air Marshal BS Dhanoa will take over as IAF chief with effect from afternoon of December 31. Lt Gen Rawat will replace General Dalbir Singh, while Air Marshal Dhanoa will take over from IAF chief Arup Raha.

Militants kill 3 Indian soldiers in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar, India

Suspected militants killed three Indian soldiers after ambushing a convoy in restive Indian-administered Kashmir, officials said yesterday. An unknown number of people on motorbikes opened fire on the army convoy near Pampore town on the key highway a few miles south of Srinagar, the region's main city, officials said. "Motorcycle-borne militants ambushed an army convoy. There have been casualties but details are being ascertained," K. Rajendra Kumar, police chief of the Kashmir region, told AFP. An Indian army official on condition of anonymity told AFP that "three soldiers were martyred in the attack".

All eyes on Ivanka role in Trump White House

AFP, New York

A month before Donald Trump becomes president, chattering classes in New York and Washington are abuzz with signs that his elegant daughter Ivanka will play an active role in his White House.

Ivanka, currently vice president in the family business, and her real estate developer and publisher husband have been a constant presence by the president-elect's side since his November 8 election victory.

CNN reports that the 35-year-old mother of three is poised to play an active role as an adviser, assume some duties normally assigned to the first lady and get office space in the East Wing of the White House.

Ivanka and husband Jared Kushner, who has been credited with being the brains behind the scenes that helped get his father-in-law elected, have been reportedly house hunting in Washington for days.

While Trump's third wife, Melania, is still expected to play a role, she is planning to live in New York with the couple's young son at

least until the end of the school year in 2017.

"We would benefit tremendously by having them inside the administration if in fact that can happen," top Trump aide Kellyanne Conway told reporters on Thursday.

Ivanka was a key surrogate among women voters and since the election has been seen attending her father's meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his Wednesday meeting with tech industry leaders.

She also set up talks between her father and environmental campaigner Al Gore, a former Democratic vice president.

Trump announced this week that he would hand over the reins of his company to his two adult sons, Donald Jr and Eric, raising questions about Ivanka's role.

Ivanka's brothers admit that Ivanka is their father's favorite child. She runs her own company and has moved to separate her business and personal social media accounts to limit accusations about conflicts of interest.



China seizes US naval probe

AGENCIES

China and the United States are using military channels to "appropriately handle" the seizure by the Chinese navy of a US underwater drone in the South China Sea, China said yesterday, and a Chinese state-run newspaper said it expected a smooth resolution.

The drone was taken on Thursday, the first seizure of its kind in recent memory, about 50 nautical miles northwest of Subic Bay off the Philippines, just as the USNS Bowditch was about to retrieve the unmanned underwater vehicle (UUV), US officials said.

"It is understood that China and the United States are using military channels to appropriately handle this issue," China's Foreign Ministry said in a brief statement sent to Reuters, without elaborating.

"The UUV was lawfully conducting a military survey in the waters of the South China Sea," a US official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "It's a sovereign immune vessel, clearly marked in English not to be removed from the water - that it was US property," the official said.

The Pentagon confirmed the incident at a news briefing on Friday, and said the drone used commercially available

technology and sold for about \$150,000.

Still, the Pentagon viewed China's seizure seriously since it had effectively taken US military property.

The seizure will add to concerns about China's increased military presence and aggressive posture in the disputed South China Sea, including its militarization of maritime outposts.

A US research group said this week that new satellite imagery

indicated China has installed weapons, including anti-aircraft and anti-missile systems, on all seven artificial islands it has built in the South China Sea.

The drone seizure coincided with sabre-rattling from Chinese state media and some in its military establishment after US President-elect Donald Trump cast doubt on whether Washington would stick to its nearly four-decades-old policy of recognising that Taiwan is part of "one China."

Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam have competing claims in the South China Sea, which is laced with the world's most heavily traveled international trade routes.

While the United States takes no position on sovereignty claims in the South China Sea, it has repeatedly stressed all maritime claims must comply with international law.

TENSIONS IN SOUTH CHINA SEA

