

'Don't be a fool'

AFP, Washington
 "Don't be a fool," Donald Trump warned his counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan in an extraordinary letter sent the day Turkey launched its incursion into northeastern Syria -- warning history risked branding him a "devil."

Three days after appearing to greenlight an invasion by pulling US troops from the Kurdish-dominated region, Trump told the Turkish president he would wreck Ankara's economy if the invasion went too far.

In language shorn of diplomatic niceties, Trump began with an outright threat.

"Let's work out a good deal," Trump wrote in the letter dated October 9, whose authenticity was confirmed to AFP by the White House.

"You don't want to be responsible for slaughtering thousands of people, and I don't want to be responsible for destroying the Turkish economy -- and I will."

"History will look upon you favorably if you get this done the right and humane



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson salutes French President Emmanuel Macron (R) as he arrives for a round table meeting as part of a European Union summit at European Union Headquarters in Brussels, yesterday. Britain and the European Union reached a new divorce deal yesterday that could allow Brexit on October 31, but faced immediate opposition among MPs in London -- who can still block it.

PHOTO: AFP

Philippines' leader Duterte hurt in motorcycle crash

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte hurt his hip and suffered scratches in a motorcycle accident, senior aides of the 74-year-old leader said yesterday. Duterte, whose health has been the subject of intense public speculation, suffered the mishap at the Malacanang presidential palace compound late Wednesday, according to spokesman Salvador Pano. The crash came 10 days after Duterte -- the oldest person to be elected Philippine president -- disclosed he is suffering from myasthenia gravis, an autoimmune disease that could potentially have serious complications. A source said the president's injury will not require major treatment. Duterte was trying to park the vehicle after driving around a courtyard Pano said, adding the leader was now resting at the palace.

Two Americans detained in China on border charges

Two Americans from an English-teaching business in China have been detained and jailed in the east of the country on suspicion of "organising others to illegally cross the border," the foreign ministry said yesterday. Jacob Harlan, a father of five, and Alyssa Petersen were taken into custody in Jiangsu province on September 29 and then released on bail, said foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang. Their Idaho-based company China Horizons, which arranges for Americans to teach English in Chinese schools, said in a post on its Facebook page on Saturday that the charges were "bogus". The detentions come amid diplomatic and trade tensions between China and the United States. But Geng denied the incidents are linked.

Democrat Cummings, at center of Trump probe, dies



Senior Democratic Congressman Elijah Cummings, who was at the center of the Trump impeachment inquiry, died early yesterday at the age of 68, US media reported. The veteran Baltimore representative passed away at Johns Hopkins Hospital "due to complications concerning longstanding health challenges," reports said, quoting a statement from his office. As chairman of the House Oversight and Reform Committee, Cummings was at the center of the impeachment inquiry into President Donald Trump and had clashed with him. Cummings had a number of clashes with the president over issues including detention of immigrants, attacks on three immigrant female US lawmakers. He was born in 1951, one of seven children to a couple who were sharecroppers.

SOURCE: AFP

Trump: Kurds 'not angels'

US president defends his Syria decision as Congress issues bipartisan rebuke

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump has hailed his surprise decision to withdraw US troops from Syria as "strategically brilliant", declaring that the Kurds were "not angels".

Speaking to reporters at the White House on Wednesday, Trump said the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has waged a decades-long armed campaign against Ankara, were "probably" a bigger "terrorist threat" than the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), or ISIS, armed group.

"Now the PKK, which is part of the Kurds, as you know, is probably worse at terror, and more of a terrorist threat in many ways than ISIS," he said referring to the group which has been

Trump calls Pelosi a 'third-rate politician' after 'meltdown'

UNSC warns of Syria jihadists 'dispersion' risk



designated a terrorist group by the US, EU and Turkey.

"I'm not going to get involved in a war between Turkey and Syria, especially when, if you look at the Kurds, and again I say this with great respect, they're not angels," he added.

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), spearheaded by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), was founded in 2015 and has helped the United States in its fight against ISIL.

Ankara says its military operation is

against Kurdish militants in Syria.

In a sign of Trump's deteriorating relationship with Congress, where the House is conducting an impeachment inquiry, Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate minority leader Charles Schumer walked out of what they said was an acrimonious White House meeting with Trump.

Schumer said Trump had called Pelosi a "third-rate politician" while the speaker said the president had experienced a "meltdown."

Trump then took to Twitter, accusing Pelosi of having her own "meltdown," while adding that the Democratic leader "needs help fast!"

"There is either something wrong with her 'upstairs,' or she just plain doesn't like our great Country," the president wrote.

The president denied he gave green light to President Erdogan for the offensive.

Trump emphasized to reporters that US troops were out of harm's way and that the fallout from the US withdrawal was for Syria, Turkey and Russia to work out among themselves.



way," Trump said. "It will look upon you forever as the devil if good things don't happen."

The US leader told Erdogan a "great deal" was possible if he negotiated with the head of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, Mazloum Abdi, whom Turkey has labelled a "terrorist" for his ties to the Kurdish PKK militants in Turkey.

"Don't be a tough guy. Don't be a fool," he finished, adding: "I will call you later." Trump has come under intense fire for effectively giving Turkey a green light to invade northern Syria, but he dismissed those concerns.

BUS CRASH NEAR MADINA IN SAUDI ARABIA

35 foreigners killed

Asian pilgrims among dead; nationalities of victims not disclosed

AFP, Riyadh

Thirty-five foreigners were killed and four others injured when a bus collided with another heavy vehicle near the Muslim holy city of Madina, Saudi state media said yesterday.

The accident on Wednesday evening involved a collision between "a private chartered bus... with a heavy vehicle" near the western city, a spokesman for Medina police said, according to the official Saudi Press Agency.



Those involved were Arab and Asian pilgrims travelling from Medina to Makkah, according to local media, which carried pictures of the bus engulfed in flames and with its windows blown out.

The injured have been transferred to Al-Hamna Hospital, SPA added. Authorities

have launched an investigation.

The Okaz newspaper said that the victims were expatriates who lived in the kingdom and who were performing the umrah. The hajj and the umrah centre on Makkah and its surrounding hills and valleys, in the west of the kingdom, but the itinerary also often takes in the other holy city of Madina.

Prince Faisal bin Salman, the governor of Madina region, expressed his condolences, SPA said. The nationalities of the victims was not known but Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi also sent his condolences.

"Anguished by the news of a bus crash near Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Condolences to the families of those who lost their lives. Praying for a quick recovery of the injured," he tweeted.



Students protest during a demonstration in Barcelona, yesterday. Catalan separatists were back out on the streets again yesterday, with students rallying as they kicked-off a two-day strike and thousands more pressing on with a long cross-country march towards Barcelona.

PHOTO: AFP

Trump pushed for Ukraine probe of firm tied to Bidens

US diplomat tells Congress

AFP, Washington

A US diplomat yesterday told Congress that President Donald Trump and his personal lawyer injected domestic politics into talks with Ukraine, including seeking a probe of a Ukrainian company with ties to the son of Trump's Democratic rival Joe Biden.

US Ambassador to the EU Gordon Sondland told congressional committees conducting an impeachment inquiry that Trump ordered diplomats in May to involve his personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani in talks between Washington and administration of President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Trump and Giuliani are accused of linking US military aid to Ukraine to Zelensky's agreement to open an investigation into Biden and his son Hunter, as well as whether Ukraine was involved in meddling on behalf of Democrats in the 2016 US election -- a popular but widely discredited conspiracy theory.

"Mr Giuliani emphasized that the president wanted a public statement from President Zelensky committing Ukraine to look into anticorruption issues," Sondland said in a prepared statement.

"I did not understand, until much later, that Mr Giuliani's agenda might have also included an effort to prompt the Ukrainians to investigate Vice President Biden or his son or to involve Ukrainians, directly or indirectly, in the President's 2020 reelection campaign," he said.

"Mr Giuliani specifically mentioned the 2016 election (including the DNC server) and Burisma as two anti-corruption investigatory topics of importance for the President," Sondland said.

Ex- Nazi guard, 93, goes on trial

AFP, Hamburg

A 93-year-old former SS guard went on trial in Germany yesterday for complicity in the murder of more than 5,000 people at a Nazi concentration camp during World War II, in what could be one of the last such cases.

Bruno Dey stands accused of abetting the murder of 5,230 people when he worked at the Stutthof camp near what was then Danzig, now Gdansk in Poland.

"As an SS guard at Stutthof concentration camp between August 1944 and April 1945, he is believed to have provided support to the gruesome killing of Jewish prisoners in particular," prosecutors said in a statement.

During Dey's time at the camp, the "Final Solution" order to exterminate Jews was issued by the Nazi leadership, leading to the systematic killing of inmates in gas chambers, while others died of starvation or because they were denied medical care, prosecutors said.



first worked at Stutthof.

Dey reportedly did not deny working at the camp during pre-trial questioning. But he said he ended up in the SS-Totenkopfsturmbahn (Death's Head Battalion) that ran the camp only because of a heart condition that prevented him from being sent to the front, according to Tagesspiegel daily.

Citing prosecution documents, the newspaper said Dey argued that he killed no one and questioned what a 17-year-old forced to become a camp guard could do against Adolf Hitler's regime.

Dey also reportedly confirmed he knew of the camp's gas chambers, where he saw SS prisoners being pushed inside.

Yesterday's trial is among a handful of the final such cases involving surviving SS personnel.

Since the landmark Demjanjuk ruling, German courts have convicted Oskar Groening, an accountant at Auschwitz, and Reinhold Hanning, a former SS guard at the same camp, for complicity in mass murder.

Both men were found guilty at age 94 but died before they could be imprisoned.

In April, a German judge suspended the trial of a former Stutthof concentration camp guard after the 95-year-old defendant was hospitalised with heart and kidney problems.

Catalonia should hold a new vote on independence in 2 yrs

Says Catalan regional chief after night of violence

REUTERS, Barcelona

Catalonia should hold a new vote on independence from Spain within two years, the head of the region's government said yesterday in a fresh challenge to Madrid following days of unrest by pro-separatist protesters.

Nearly 100 people were injured across the northeastern region on Wednesday in a third day of violence after Spain's Supreme Court sentenced nine Catalan leaders to lengthy jail terms over their failed effort to secure independence, with a referendum Madrid ruled was illegal, in 2017.

Cars and rubbish bins were torched in the Catalan capital Barcelona overnight and Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska said 97 protesters had been arrested since the outbreak of some of the worst violence seen in Spain in years.

Grande-Marlaska said security reinforcements would be sent in with further protests planned, when unions have called a strike and protesters from around the region are due to converge

on Barcelona, one of Europe's top tourist cities.

Addressing the Catalan parliament, pro-independence regional chief Quim Torra criticised the rioting, saying the separatist cause was a peaceful movement.

But he also pushed the case for forging ahead with the stalled secessionist drive, saying Monday's sentences would not deter a new vote on independence.

"We'll return to the ballot box again on self-determination," he said. "If all parties and groups make it possible, we have to be able to finish this legislative term by validating independence," he added.

The regional parliament's term expires in December 2021.

The Constitutional Court warned Catalan officials on Wednesday of legal consequences if they broke the law by pursuing independence.

A source close to Torra said any eventual vote could be a regional election that would be considered a plebiscite on independence - a move that could circumvent Madrid's refusal to sanction a referendum.