

Iraq doesn't need US combat troops: PM

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Iraq's prime minister has said his country no longer requires American combat troops to fight ISIL, but a formal timeframe for their redeployment will depend on the outcome of talks with US officials this week.

Mustafa al-Kadhimi said in an interview with The Associated Press news agency that Iraq will still ask for US training and military intelligence gathering, but will seek a timeline for the withdrawal of combat troops, which was announced in April amid ongoing talks between Washington and Baghdad.

"There is no need for any foreign combat forces on Iraqi soil," he said in the interview published yesterday before a planned trip to Washington, where he is slated to meet President Joe Biden on



Monday for a fourth round of strategic talks.

Al-Kadhimi will visit the White House amid growing pressure, particularly from Shia political groups, for a reduced US role in the country.

Meanwhile, the threat of an ISIL resurgence remains ever-present in Iraq, with al-Kadhimi careful to stress Baghdad is not seeking a full withdrawal.

"What we want from the US presence in Iraq is to support our forces in training and developing their efficiency and capabilities, and in security cooperation," al-Kadhimi said.

Previously, former President Barack Obama had withdrawn US forces from Iraq in 2011, creating a security vacuum that aided the rise of ISIL. US troops were redeployed in 2014.



PHOTO: REUTERS

A firetruck is seen on the foreground of a wildfire in Douglas County, Nevada, US, in this screen grab obtained from a social media video recorded on July 23. As greenhouse emissions accelerate, heatwave-caused wildfires flared recently across the globe destroying forests vital to prevent global warming.

Four nations threat to climate goal

Warn scientists as 51 nations meet in UK ahead of crucial Cop26

AGENCIES

Ahead of a key climate meet in London, scientists have warned that only four leading G20 nations' climate targets would lead to disastrous global warming.

The warning comes as Britain yesterday hosted climate and environment ministers from 51 countries for "critical" climate talks ahead of November's Cop26 summit in Glasgow.

British minister Alok Sharma, President of COP26, will lead the two-day meeting, which London said will address "key issues that require resolution" at the summit.

Environment and climate ministers from the US, India and China will be among those taking part in the closed-door meeting, which will include both virtual and in-person attendance.

According to The Guardian, the scientist said that China, Russia, Brazil and Australia all have energy policies associated with 5C rises in atmospheric temperatures, a heating hike that would bring devastation to much of the planet.

The analysis, by the peer-reviewed group Paris Equity Check, raises serious worries about the prospects of key climate agreements being achieved at the Cop26 summit in Glasgow in three months. The conference - rated as one of the most important climate summits ever staged - will attempt to hammer out policies to hold global heating to 1.5C by agreeing on a global policy for ending net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050.

The EU and UK have outlined emission pledges that could bring the world close to these

aspirations. However, those of China, Russia, Brazil and Australia - which remain reliant on continued fossil-fuel burning - would trigger temperature rises of 5C if followed by the rest of the world. This dramatic discrepancy reveals a deep division over the energy and environment policies of the world's richest nations.



"Without more ambition from China, Brazil, Russia and Australia, Cop26 will fail to deliver the future our planet needs," warned Tanya Steele, chief executive at WWF.

The stark difference between the climate plans of different G20 nations - who together are responsible for 85% of all global carbon emissions - was underlined last week in Naples, when a meeting of member states' energy and environment ministers ended with the group failing to agree on a package of commitments to tackle climate change.

"The G20 is failing to deliver," said the online activist network Avaaz.

A world that would be 5C hotter than it was

before the Industrial Revolution, when fossil-fuel burning began in earnest, would be one in which a quarter of the global population would face extreme drought for at least one month a year; rainforests would be destroyed; and melting ice sheets would result in dangerous sea-level rises.

In addition, loss of reflective ice from the poles could cause oceans to absorb more solar radiation, while melting permafrost in Siberia and other regions would release plumes of methane, another pernicious greenhouse gas. Inevitably, temperatures would soar even further.

By contrast, scientists say that if temperature rises can be kept below 1.5C, then the worst impacts of climate change could be prevented - though they also point out that temperatures have already risen 1.2C, leaving the world facing very tight margins to avoid the worst impacts of global warming over the next 30 years.

The extent of the climate crisis has also been highlighted this month with extreme weather events causing devastation across the world: deadly floods have swept through Germany, Belgium and China, while massive wildfires have gripped the US and Siberia. Global warming has been implicated in every case.

Under the 2015 Paris Agreement, nearly 200 countries committed to submit new climate plans every five years with a goal to limit global warming to well below 2C, aiming at 1.5C, compared to pre-industrial levels. However, earlier this year, the United Nations issued a "red alert" over current climate plans, warning they were "nowhere close" to meeting the Paris goals.

NEWS IN brief

Landslide kills nine in northern Indian state

Nine people were killed by a landslide in the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh yesterday as boulders fell and hit the vehicle they were travelling in, news agency ANI reported. The vehicle was carrying 11 people and the two others, as well as a passer-by, were injured, ANI, a partner of Reuters, said, citing Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP). ITBP teams rushed to the spot near Badseri village in the Kinnaur district of hilly Himachal Pradesh state to conduct a rescue operation, ANI reported. In the western state of Maharashtra, at least 125 people died in the last two days after torrential monsoon rains sparked major landslides and flooding there.

Seventh presidential hopeful arrested in Nicaragua

Another presidential candidate was arrested in Nicaragua on Saturday, police said -- the seventh potential contender detained by Daniel Ortega's government in the lead-up to elections on November 7. Noel Vidaurre was put under house arrest, accused of "undermining the sovereignty" of the country, police said, in the latest of a series of arrests condemned by the United States and European Union. Nicaragua's long-term leader Ortega will seek a fourth consecutive presidential term at the November 7 elections, a senior ally said last week.



60 Cubans prosecuted so far over protests: official

About 60 Cubans have been prosecuted so far for participating in unprecedented demonstrations against the government earlier this month, a senior official said Saturday. The cases were over minor charges, and the total number of people detained has not been released amid complaints from relatives seeking information about loved ones. On July 11 and 12, thousands of Cubans took to the streets, shouting "Freedom," "Down with the dictatorship" and "We're hungry" in the biggest protests since the revolution that brought Fidel Castro to power in 1959. Hundreds of people were arrested and many face charges of contempt, public disorder, vandalism and propagation of the coronavirus epidemic for allegedly marching without face masks.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



PHOTO: AFP

Demonstrators hold up placards, one of which reads 'Freedom - No to the pass' during a protest against the vaccination and the compulsory health pass called for by the French government, in Toulouse, France, on Saturday. Despite the protests, lawmakers from France's upper and lower houses of parliament were yesterday seeking to agree a deal to allow the adoption of legislation making vaccine passports vital for French daily life.

Macron pushes for Israeli probe into spyware concerns

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

Emmanuel Macron has reportedly spoken to the Israeli prime minister, Naftali Bennett, to ensure that the Israeli government is "properly investigating" allegations that the French president could have been targeted with Israeli-made spyware by Morocco's security services.

In a phone call, Macron expressed concern that his phone and those of most of his cabinet could have been infected with Pegasus, hacking software developed by the Israeli surveillance firm NSO Group, which enables operators of the tool to extract messages, photos and emails, record calls and secretly activate microphones from infected devices. The leaked database at the heart of the Pegasus project includes Macron's mobile phone number.

NSO has said Macron was not a "target" of any of its customers, meaning the company denies he was selected for surveillance using Pegasus. The company says that the fact that a number appeared on the list was in no way indicative of whether that number was selected for surveillance using Pegasus.

The Pegasus project could not examine the mobile phones of the leaders and diplomats, and could therefore not confirm whether there had been any attempt to install malware on their phones.

The Pegasus project - a consortium of 17 media outlets, including the Guardian - revealed last week that government clients around the world have used the hacking software sold by NSO to target human rights activists, journalists and lawyers.

The investigation has been based on forensic analysis of phones and analysis of a leaked database of 50,000 numbers, including that of Macron and those of heads of state and senior government, diplomatic and military officials, in 34 countries.

As the mammoth impact of the disclosures has become clearer, the diplomatic pressure on Israel is mounting. On Thursday, Israeli MP Ram Ben-Barak - a former deputy head of the Mossad spy agency - confirmed that the Israeli defence establishment had "appointed a review commission made up of a number of groups" to examine whether policy changes were needed regarding sensitive cyber exports.

THE PEGASUS PROJECT

Slow Taliban's momentum

Suggests Pentagon chief as thousands of Afghan families flee fighting in Kandahar

AGENCIES

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has suggested that the Afghan security forces' first job was to make sure they could slow the Taliban's momentum before attempting to retake territory, as Afghan forces plan to consolidate forces around strategically important parts of the country.

Reuters reported that Afghanistan's military is overhauling its war strategy against the Taliban to concentrate forces around the most critical areas like Kabul and other cities, border crossings and vital infrastructure.

"They are consolidating their forces around the key population centers," Austin told reporters during a visit to Alaska.

"In terms of whether or not it will stop the Taliban, I think the first thing to do is to make sure that they can slow the momentum," Austin said, speaking as the U.S. military is set to end its mission in Afghanistan on Aug. 31, on orders from President Joe Biden.

Austin added that he believed the Afghans had the capability and the capacity

to make progress, but "we'll see what happens."

The politically perilous strategy appears to be a military necessity as over-stretched Afghan troops try to prevent the loss of provincial capitals, which could deeply fracture the country.

Taliban insurgents are gaining control of more and more territory, which the Pentagon estimated on Wednesday now extends to over half of half Afghanistan's district centers.

On the ground, more than 22,000 Afghan families have fled from their homes to escape fighting in the former Taliban bastion of Kandahar, officials said yesterday, as authorities arrested four suspected insurgents over this week's rocket attack on Kabul.

Local authorities had set up four camps for the displaced people who are estimated to be about 154,000.

Kandahar, with its 650,000 inhabitants, is the second-largest city in Afghanistan after Kabul. The southern province was the epicentre of the Taliban's regime when they ruled Afghanistan between 1996 to 2001.



Typhoon drenches flood-hit China

AFP, Ningbo

Typhoon In-Fa uprooted trees and drenched communities in knee-deep water in parts of eastern China, but there were no reports of major damage as it made landfall yesterday.

Sea, air and rail traffic had been shut down across a swathe of the coast centered on the major shipping port of Ningbo, where the weakening typhoon rumbled ashore around midday packing winds of up to 38 metres per second, according to the China Meteorological Administration.

Response teams in Ningbo cleared away fallen trees in the city centre, while residents in some neighbourhoods waded through floodwaters and merchants piled up sandbags in front of their businesses to keep out water.

The typhoon hit as the central province of Henan was still cleaning up after torrential downpours dumped a year's worth of rain in just three days last week. Government officials yesterday added another five dead to the toll from the freak flooding in Henan, raising the total to 63.

In-Fa's effects were also felt in the metropolis of Shanghai, China's largest city, with strong gusts of wind and steady but not heavy rainfall. All inbound and outbound flights were cancelled yesterday for the city's two international airports, as were dozens of scheduled trains, while activity at the ports of Shanghai and Ningbo -- two of the world's largest -- was also shut down.

The meteorological administration said that after landfall In-Fa would weaken but continue to hover over a wide expanse of eastern China for days, ringing itself out and bringing heavy rainfall.

DECADES OF NUKE TESTING IN FRENCH POLYNESIA

Macron urged to apologise

AFP, Papeete

French President Emmanuel Macron faced pressure to apologise for the devastating impact of decades of nuclear testing as he kicked off his first official trip to French Polynesia.

During his four-day visit, Macron plans to address the legacy of nuclear testing from 1966 to 1996 as France developed atomic weapons, as well as discuss the South Pacific territory's strategic role and the existential risk of rising seas posed by global warming.

Residents in the sprawling archipelago of more than 100 islands located midway between Mexico and Australia are hoping Macron apologises and confirms compensation for radiation victims.

The tests remain a source of deep resentment, seen as evidence of racist colonial attitudes that disregarded the lives of islanders.

French officials denied any cover-up of radiation exposure at a meeting earlier this month with delegates from the semi-autonomous territory led by President Edouard Fritch.

The meeting came after French investigative website Disclose reported in March that the impact from the fallout was



far more extensive than authorities had acknowledged, citing declassified French military documents on the 193 tests.

Only 63 Polynesian civilians have been compensated for radiation exposure since the tests ended in 1996. Disclose said, estimating that more than 100,000 people may have been contaminated in total, with leukaemia, lymphoma and other cancers rare.

"We're expecting an apology from the president," said Auguste Uebe-Carlson, head of the 193 Association of victims of nuclear tests.

Patrick Galenon, the former chairman of the territory's CPS social security system, said female Polynesians aged 40 to 50 "have the highest thyroid cancer rates in the world."



JULY 26

1945 - Britain, China and the United States issued the Potsdam Declaration threatening Japan with "prompt and utter destruction" if it did not surrender unconditionally to end World War Two.

1965 - The Maldiv Islands in the Indian Ocean became independent after 78 years as a British protectorate.

2016 - Hillary Clinton becomes first female nominee for President of the United States.

2016 - Solar Impulse plane completes first fuel-free flight around the globe.

SOURCE: REUTERS