

Syrian safe zones go into effect

By SARAH EL DEEB
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BEIRUT — A deal hammered out by Russia, Turkey and Iran to set up “de-escalation zones” in mostly opposition-held parts of Syria went into effect in the early hours of Saturday.

The plan is the latest international attempt to reduce violence in the war-ravaged country, and is the first to envisage armed foreign monitors on the ground in Syria. The United States is not party to the agreement and the Syrian rivals have not signed on to the deal. The armed opposition, instead, was highly critical of the proposal, saying it lacks legitimacy.

The plan, details of which will still be worked out over the next several weeks, went into effect at midnight Friday. There were limited reports of bombing in northern Homs and Hama, two areas expected to be part of the “de-escalation zones,” activists said. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

It is not clear how the cease-fire or “de-escalation zones” will be enforced in areas still to be determined in maps to emerge a month from now.

Russian officials said it will be at least another month until the details are worked out and



AP Photo/Pavel Golovkin
Col. Gen. Sergei Rudskoi of the Russian General Staff, speaks to the media in the Defense Ministry in Moscow, Russia, Friday.

the safe areas established.

In the tangled mess that constitutes Syria’s battlefields, there is much that can go wrong with the plan, agreed on in talks Thursday in Kazakhstan.

There is no clear mechanism to resolve conflict and violations— like most other previous deals struck by backers of the warring sides.

A potential complication to implementing the plan is the crowded airspace over Syria. The deal calls for all aircraft to be banned from flying over the safe zones.

Syrian, Russian, Turkish and U.S.-led coalition aircraft operate in different, sometimes same areas in Syria. It is not yet clear how the new plan

would affect flightpaths of U.S.-led coalition warplanes battling Islamic State militants and other radical groups — and whether the American air force would abide by a diminished air space.

Russia and Iran — two of the plan’s three sponsors — are key allies of President Bashar Assad’s government and both are viewed as foreign occupation forces by his opponents. Rebels fighting to topple Assad are enraged by Iran’s role in the deal and blame the Shiite power for fueling the sectarian nature of Syria’s conflict, now in its seventh year.

Turkey, the third sponsor, is a major backer of opposition factions and has also sent

troops into northern Syria, drawing the ire of Assad and his government.

Yet troops from the three countries are now expected to secure four safe zones. An official with Russia’s military general staff said other countries may eventually have a role in enforcing the de-escalation areas.

Russian Col.-Gen. Sergei Rudskoi told reporters on Friday personnel and formations from Russia, Iran and Turkey will operate checkpoints and observation posts.

He said “security belts” will be created along the borders of the “de-escalation zones” to prevent incidents and fighting between opposing sides. The checkpoints and observation posts will ensure free movement of unarmed civilians and humanitarian aid and will facilitate economic activities, he said.

Rebels have expressed concerns the deal is a prelude to a de facto partitioning of Syria into spheres of influence.

Osama Abo Zayd, a spokesman for the Syrian military factions at the Kazakhstan talks, told The Associated Press it was “incomprehensible” for Iran to act as a guarantor of the deal. A cease-fire is unsustainable in the presence of the Iranian-backed militias in Syria, he said.

Online leak rattles French campaign

By RAPHAEL SATTER
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PARIS — Many feared this was coming.

For months pundits and journalists worried over the possibility that a strategically timed leak could destabilize France’s election, a replay of the obsessively covered disclosures that some Americans blame for scuppering Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton’s campaign and many others fear are sapping popular faith in Western democracy.

Late Friday, with only minutes left before France’s presidential campaign duel was due to cease fire for the weekend, it came.

Well, maybe it did. Or not. It’s hard to tell with so little time to evaluate the mass of material suddenly leaked online. And that might be the point.

All that can be said with much certainty is that shortly before midnight French time, someone on 4chan — a message board known for, among other things, elaborate hoaxes and political extremism — posted links to a large set of data purportedly taken from the campaign

of Emmanuel Macron, the youthful centrist politician who is tipped to beat far-right politician Marine Le Pen in the second round of the French presidential election Sunday. Macron’s campaign swiftly confirmed that several officials had had their email inboxes pillaged and that at least some of the messages, financial data, and book keeping published to the internet was genuine.

The timing of the leak could be seen either as idiotic or inspired.

The documents’ release just before France enters a roughly two-daylong media blackout — during which politicians, journalists and even ordinary citizens are legally required to pull back from any public election talk — means that the leak may have very little impact beyond the overheated world of Twitter and Reddit. On the other hand, the publication just before France’s media-political machinery shuts down for the weekend might mean that talk of the leak — regardless of its veracity — will dominate dinner table conversations as French voters make up their minds Saturday.

NATIONAL NURSES DAY

May 6, 2017

A very special thanks for the hard work and dedication of the nurses at St. Anthony Hospital

National Nurses Day is celebrated annually on May 6th to raise awareness of the important role nurses play in the community. It marks the beginning of National Nurses Week which ends on May 12th, the birthday of Florence Nightingale.