



Volume 1 | Issue 1

SYLLOGE ON WEST ASIA

FOCUS, NUCLEAR, MISSILES & OTHER
SECURITY ISSUES IN WEST ASIA

BY KUSHAL AGRAWAL

14 January - 21 January 2021



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES
मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

IRAN

Trump Orders Military Shift to Spur Israeli-Arab Cooperation Against Iran

The Wall Street Journal, 14th January, 2021

President Trump has ordered that the major U.S. military command for the Middle East be expanded to include Israel, in a last-minute reorganisation of the American defence structure that pro-Israel groups have long advocated to encourage cooperation against Iran, U.S. officials said Thursday. The move means that the U.S. Central Command would oversee American military policy involving both Israel and Arab nations, a departure from decades of U.S. military command structure put in place because of acrimony between Israel and some of the Pentagon's Arab allies.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-orders-u-s-military-reorganization-favored-by-pro-israel-groups-11610670130>

Iranian-made semi-heavy submarine test fires torpedo

Islamic Republic News Agency, 14th January, 2021

Iran's domestically-developed semi-heavy "Fateh" (the Conquerer) submarine test-fired torpedoes and successfully hit the hypothetical target. The shooting from the submarine was tested during "Marine Power 99" military drills of Iranian Army Navy, which started on Wednesday in Makran coasts and northern Indian Ocean, spokesman of the drills Rear-Admiral Hamzeh Ali Kaviani said. Meanwhile, earlier in January, the first major drone exercise of the Iranian Army was staged in northern province of Semnan.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84185614/Iranian-made-semi-heavy-submarine-test-fires-torpedo>

"Zereh" missile launches midget more competent than its predecessor

Islamic Republic News Agency, 14th January, 2021

Deputy head of IRI Armed Forces said here on Thursday that Iran's new midget Zereh (war attire) has more capabilities compared with Iran's former missile launcher warships. Major-General Mohammad-Hossein Dadras focusing on facilities of IRI Army's new warship said that Zereh has greater combat capabilities, according to Public Relations Office of Army. The deputy head of IRI Armed Forces elaborated on IRI Navy's invaluable services in converting the Mokran Port Commercial Ship into a logistical ship that is capable of constant presence in free waters and oceans. He added: "Today the Iranian armed forces are capable in every possible field of responding to the antagonist moves of the enemies of Islamic Revolution and the new facilities provided for them add to their naval war combat readiness." He referred to the recent large-scale war game of the IRI Army launched in Semnan province, in which hundreds of new generation of Iranian drones, which are both a lot more advanced, tougher, and matching Iran's surveillance and operation needs were practically put to use.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84186090/Zereh-missile-launches-midget-more-competent-than-its-predecessor>

US' return to JCPOA without removing sanctions to result in extortion: Official

Islamic Republic News Agency, 15th January, 2021

Head of the Foreign Policy Strategic Council Kamal Kharrazi said that if the US returns to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) prior to removing the sanctions it has

brutally imposed against Iran, Washington will then resort to distortion. "If the US decides to return to the JCPOA without lifting sanctions, this would amount to extortion, because the US will put forward a new request for the lifting of every ban," Kharrazi said.

Kharrazi pointed out that the US should lift all the sanctions that were imposed in the form of executive orders by the US president, be it nuclear-related sanctions or those sanctions slapped under the labels of terrorism and human rights before rejoining the JCPOA.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84186372/US-return-to-JCPOA-without-removing-sanctions-to-result-in-extortion>

Iran tests 'bomber drones' and missiles in third military exercise this month

Middle East Eye, 15th January, 2021

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) launched a drone and missile drill in central Iran on Friday, its official website reported, in the country's third military exercise in less than two weeks. The moves come at a time of heightened tensions with the United States in the final days of US President Donald Trump's administration. Dubbed the Great Prophet 15, Friday's drill featured a "new generation" of surface-to-surface ballistic missiles, according to the Sepahnews website.

"The bomber drones struck the hypothetical enemy missile shield from all directions, completely destroying the targets," a state TV broadcast said of Friday's drill. "Also, an abundant number of a new generation of ballistic missiles were fired at selected targets, inflicting deadly blows to the hypothetical enemy bases."

<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iran-bomber-drones-missiles-test-military-exercise>

E3: Iran making uranium metal, a nuke component, has 'grave military' potential

Times of Israel, 16th January, 2021

Britain, France and Germany say Tehran has 'no credible civilian use' for the material, which it says it is now researching in breach of nuclear deal. "The production of uranium metal has potentially grave military implications," said the foreign ministers of Britain, France and Germany, the so-called E3, in a joint statement. Uranium metal can be used as a component in nuclear weapons. Iran had signed up to a 15-year ban on "producing or acquiring plutonium or uranium metals or their alloys" under the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) signed in 2015 with world powers.

"We strongly urge Iran to halt this activity, and return to compliance with its JCPOA commitments without further delay if it is serious about preserving the deal," said the ministers. Their call came after Iran told the UN nuclear watchdog on Wednesday that it was advancing research on uranium metal production, saying it is aimed at providing advanced fuel for a research reactor in Tehran.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/europe-iran-producing-uranium-metal-may-indicate-grave-military-implications/>

AEOI issues statement in response to E3

Islamic Republic News Agency, 16th January, 2021

The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) in response to three European countries' remarks in a statement on Saturday reiterated the issue of metallic uranium factory differs from the production of advanced fuel, silicide, to be used in Tehran Research Reactor (TRR). The AEOI statement announced that the issue of producing metallic uranium in

accordance with the Parliament's 'Strategic Act Aimed at Annulment of Sanctions and Safeguarding Iranian Nation's Rights' which commissions the AEOI to do so is completely different with the production of the advanced fuel, silicide. The AEOI has still not presented information in a questionnaire on design of the factory to produce metallic uranium, the subject of Article 4 of the International Atomic Energy Organization (IAEA) to the agency, that of course will be done after its completion in due time and will be accordingly be presented to the nuclear watchdog, reads the statement. The AEOI statement further underlined that the advanced fuel, silicide program report by Iran, as it is stated in the recent IAEA report, was first presented to the agency more than two years ago.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84187943/AEOI-issues-statement-in-response-to-E3>

Iran's Revolutionary Guard tests long-range missiles, drones

Al Jazeera ,16 January, 2021

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) tested long-range missiles and drones against land and sea targets in Iran's fourth large-scale military show of force in two weeks amid tensions with the United States. The IRGC on Saturday fired long-range ballistic missiles that travelled 1,800km (1,118 miles) and struck artificial targets in the northern part of the Indian Ocean. The fourth show of Iranian military force in the new year, the IRGC drill comes after two months of renewed tensions with the outgoing US President Donald Trump administration around the January 3 anniversary of the assassination of Iran's top general by the United States. In the past two months, the US has flown nuclear-capable strategic bombers over the Middle East and has stationed an

aircraft carrier in the region to "deter" a potential Iranian response.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/16/irans-revolutionary-guards-test-long-range-missiles-drones>

Iran's long-range missile land close to US Navy ships in Indian Ocean

Al-Arabiya, 16th January, 2021

Long-range missiles from Iran landed close to a commercial ship in the Indian Ocean and 100 miles from the Nimitz aircraft carrier strike group of the US Navy, according to a Fox News report. Iran's Revolutionary Guards test-fired ballistic missiles against targets in the Indian Ocean as they wrapped up a two-day exercise on Saturday, their official website reported. The missiles of "various classes" targeted "the enemy's battleships and destroyed them from 1,800 kilometers (1,125 miles) away," according to the Sepahnews website.

<https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2021/01/16/Iran-military-Iran-s-long-range-missile-land-close-to-commercial-ship-US-Navy-ships-in-Indian-Ocea>

Iran responds to European alarm over uranium metal

Al Jazeera, 17th January, 2021

Iran says it is advancing research on uranium metal production with the aim of feeding a research reactor in Tehran. Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation has called on a global nuclear watchdog to prevent "misunderstandings" after three European powers issued a warning over the country's advancing nuclear programme. In a statement on Saturday, France, Germany and the United Kingdom – the three European signatories of Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers

– said Tehran’s plans to produce uranium metal has “potentially grave military implications” and the country has “no credible civilian use” for the product.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/17/iran-responds-to-european-alarm-over-uranium-metal>

Two US bombers fly over Israel towards Persian Gulf

Middle East Monitor, 17th January, 2021

Two American Boeing B-52 Stratofortress military bombers were spotted on Sunday flying over Israeli airspace heading to the Persian Gulf, according to Israeli daily Yedioth Ahronoth, Anadolu Agency reported. "This is the fifth time in recent months American aircraft of this particular model were seen passing in the area", the newspaper said, without giving further details.

On Jan. 7, the newspaper reported that two B-52 bombers capable of carrying nuclear bombs accompanied by American F-16 fighters flew over Israel for the fourth time in two months. A day later, the Saudi Ministry of Defense released video footage showing the Saudi Royal Air Force and the US Air Force performing a joint exercise involving Saudi F-15 fighter jets, US bombers B-52, and F-16 fighters.

<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20210117-2-us-bombers-fly-over-israel-towards-persian-gulf/>

Qatar calls on Gulf nations to engage in diplomacy with Iran

Al Jazeera, 19th January, 2021

Qatar is urging Gulf nations to enter into a dialogue with Iran and has offered to broker negotiations after a three-year blockade on Doha was recently removed by its Arab

neighbours. Qatar, which shares a major gas field with Iran, has for years called on Gulf Arab states to enter talks with Iran, which they accuse of fomenting unrest in the Middle East, accusations Tehran denies. “We still believe this should happen. This is also a desire that’s shared by other GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] countries [for talks with Iran],” Sheikh Mohammed said. Iran’s arch-rival Saudi Arabia has not publicly indicated any willingness to engage with Iran. Instead Saudi Arabia insisted this month’s rapprochement with Qatar meant the Gulf family would be better able to combat “the threats posed by the Iranian regime’s nuclear and ballistic missile programme”.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/19/qatar-urges-gulf-countries-to-revive-diplomacy-with-iran>

Iran holds fifth military drill in two weeks amid tension with US

Al-Jazeera, 19th January, 2021

Iran showcases special forces, helicopters and tanks shortly after the US flies B-52 bombers over the Middle East again. Iran’s army has conducted another drill along the country’s southern coasts days after the United States flew nuclear-capable B-52 bombers over the Middle East. In what is the fifth military show of force in two weeks, the army’s ground forces held land, air, and sea war games along the coast of Makran and the Sea of Oman. “The power and might of the army’s ground forces in responding to threats will be displayed in this exercise.” The drill came days after the US once more flew B-52 bombers over the region, the fifth time in the past two months.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/19/iran-army-holds-war-games-again-after-us-flies-bombers>

Why Iran's nuclear facilities are still vulnerable to attack

BBC News 19th January, 2021

Israel remains extremely concerned, not just by Iran's civilian nuclear activities but by its prolific programme to develop its arsenal of ballistic missiles. On Thursday, Israel's Defence Minister Benny Gantz was quoted as saying, in reference to Iran's nuclear development programme: "It is clear that Israel needs to have a military option on the table. It requires resources and investment and I am working to make that happen."

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-55271429>

As Trump departs, Iran says 'ball in Washington's court' to reinstate nuclear deal

Al-Monitor, 20th January, 2021

Addressing a Cabinet meeting Jan. 20, Rouhani said that "the ball is now in Washington's court" to abide by its obligations under the 2015 accord from which Trump walked away in May 2018, reinstating a set of onerous economic sanctions against the Islamic Republic. "If Iran comes back into compliance, we would too," Biden's pick for secretary of state Tony Blinken told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Tuesday. A new agreement, according to the incoming top US diplomat, could address Iran's missile program and its regional activities. Reacting to those comments, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif made it clear following the Wednesday Cabinet meeting that the US government must return to the nuclear deal "without any need for negotiations." As for the Iranian missile program and regional activities, Zarif noted that the nuclear deal signatories had agreed

from the outset to keep the two issues out of the accord.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/01/trump-departs-iran-rouhani-nuclear-deal-biden-sanctions.html>

Iran's missile program not subject to negotiation, Zarif says

Tehran Times, 20th January, 2021

"We have a strong agreement that the Security Council voted unanimously for in a resolution co-sponsored by the United States," Zarif told reporters after a cabinet meeting. The chief diplomat also rejected calls for negotiations on Iran's defensive missile program, emphasizing "what is and what is not in the accord has all been agreed upon." "The first issue is the scheduling; this issue was one of the longest issues during the negotiations and it is impossible to renegotiate it. Americans need to abdicate this idea that they have always had and say, 'What I have is mine and what you have can be negotiated. If this idea has influenced other countries, it will not influence the Islamic Republic of Iran,'" the foreign minister noted. Zarif added, "We agreed from the beginning (of nuclear negotiations) that regional and missile issues will not be negotiated in the JCPOA."

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/457185/Iran-s-missile-program-not-subject-to-negotiation-Zarif-says>

Antony Blinken: US must act urgently to stop Iran nuclear weapon

Arab News, 20th January, 2021

A new nuclear deal could address Iran's aggressive policies in the Middle East, America's next top diplomat Antony Blinken said on Tuesday. The secretary of state-

designate told his confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the administration of President-elect Joe Biden would seek a “longer and stronger deal.” Blinken said the new administration had “an urgent responsibility” to do what it could to stop Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon.

“The breakout time - the time it would take Iran to produce enough fissile material for one weapon - has gone from beyond a year, as it was under the JCPOA, to about three or four months, based at least on public reporting,” Blinken said. President Biden, he added, would rejoin the deal if Iran returned to complying with its terms. A new agreement could address Iran’s “destabilising activities” in the region as well as its missiles, Blinken added.

<https://arab.news/n6y8q>

Biden to talk Iran deal in early calls with foreign leaders, White House says

Al-Monitor, 21st January, 2021

The Biden administration plans to hold early conversations with foreign leaders ahead of any effort to reenter the Iran nuclear deal, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Wednesday. If Iran returns to strict compliance under the nuclear pact, President Joe Biden has said he will reenter the multilateral pact as a starting point for follow-on negotiations to “tighten and lengthen Iran’s nuclear constraints” and address Iran’s missile program. “The president has made clear that he believes that through follow-on diplomacy, the United States seeks to lengthen and strengthen nuclear constraints on Iran and address other issues of concern. Iran must resume compliance with significant nuclear constraints under the deal in order for that to proceed,” Psaki said during her first White House briefing on Wednesday.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/01/iran-biden-nuclear-deal-consult-foreign-governments-rejoin.html#ixzz6ksJJujzc>

ISRAEL

Israel: army to devise new plan for attack on Iranian nuclear programme

Middle East Monitor, 15th January, 2021

The Chief of Staff of the Israel Defence Forces has asked officers to draw up a new plan to attack Iran's nuclear programme, Israel Hayom reported on Thursday. General Aviv Kochavi has apparently asked the Strategy and Third Circle Directorate, also known as the Iran Directorate, to develop three alternate proposals for Israel to undermine Tehran's nuclear programme or, if necessary, to counter Iranian aggression. The plans will be presented to the government soon. The newspaper did not elaborate on the alternatives, although it said that one of the proposals entails a military strike on Iranian nuclear sites. The development, it added, has been prompted by recent moves by Tehran, mainly its plans to accelerate the programme.

<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20210115-israel-army-to-devise-new-plan-for-attack-on-iranian-nuclear-programme/>

TURKEY

Erdogan calls for 'positive steps' with Biden on F-35 program

Al-monitor, 15th January, 2021

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hopes the incoming Biden administration will take “positive steps” regarding Turkey’s exclusion from the F-35 stealth fighter

program. “We don’t know what the Biden administration will say at this stage,” Erdogan told reporters in Istanbul on Friday. “Despite having paid a serious fee on the F-35s, the F-35s still have not been given to us. This is a serious wrong the United States did against us as a NATO ally.” “My hope is that, after we hold talks with Biden as he takes office, we will take much more positive steps and put these back on track.” The Trump administration booted Turkey from the Joint Strike Fighter program in July 2019 over its multibillion-dollar purchase of the Russian-made S-400 missile defence system, which the United States says poses a threat to NATO’s air defence capabilities and may compromise the security of its own F-35 stealth fighter jets.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/01/erdogan-f-35-program-s-400-biden-missile-nato-sanctions.html>

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

UAE signs deal with U.S. to buy 50 F-35 jets and up to 18 drones

Reuters, 20th January, 2021

The United Arab Emirates has signed an agreement with the United States to purchase 50 F-35 jets and up to 18 armed drones, people familiar with the situation told Reuters on Wednesday. Although the UAE and the United States were working to ink a deal before President Joseph Biden took office on Wednesday, the new president has said he will re-examine the agreements. The UAE, one of Washington’s closest Middle East allies, has long expressed interest in acquiring the stealthy F-35 jets made by Lockheed Martin and was promised a chance to buy them in a side deal when it agreed to normalize relations

with Israel last August. The jets are a major component of a \$23 billion sale of high-tech armaments from General Atomics, Lockheed Martin Corp and Raytheon Technologies Corp to the UAE announced this fall. The UAE government also signed a separate agreement to buy up to 18 drones, the second-largest sale of U.S. drones to a single country, the people said.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-emirates-f35/uae-signs-deal-with-u-s-to-buy-50-f-35-jets-and-up-to-18-drones-sources-idUSKBN29P2AO?il=0>