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DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

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IRAN

MP reveals Iran's next step: Launching metal uranium factory

Tehran Times, 16th May, 2021

In an interview with the Young Journalists Club news agency on Sunday, Abolfazl Amouei, spokesman for the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, revealed that the next big step of Iran's master plan is to develop its peaceful nuclear activities. Stating that the parliamentary law on Strategic Action for Lifting Sanctions has changed the approach of Western countries in putting pressure on Iran, he said that Iran's next big step has been drawn within the framework of the law, and it is to launch a metal uranium factory in Isfahan. "During our recent visit to the Isfahan nuclear industry complex, we observed the process of construction and operation of this plant. Effective steps have been taken, which is in its final stages, and we hope that the metal uranium plant will open in due course," the MP said.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/460969/MP-reveals-Iran-s-next-step-Launching-metal-uranium-factory>

Iran FM in Italy on 2nd leg of his European tour

Islamic Republic News Agency, 16th May, 2021

Rome is the second leg of foreign minister's European tour which started from Madrid, Spain, on May 13. In Rome, Zarif is to hold talks with officials of Italy and Vatican City. Talks are planned to focus on expansion of bilateral cooperation as well as issues of mutual interests in international arenas. About his Madrid visit, Zarif

tweeted on Friday, "We had extensive talks about economic relations."

"We discussed Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Palestine, Persian Gulf, Afghanistan and other regional and global issues as well."

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84330569/Iran-FM-in-Italy-on-2nd-leg-of-his-European-tour>

Saudi Arabia, Iran moving towards de-escalation

Islamic Republic News Agency, 16th May, 2021

After five years of disputes between Saudi Arabia and Iran, both countries have started de-escalating relationship step-by-step, and the recent change of attitudes from the two sides is promising that bilateral and regional issues can be resolved. Riyadh and Tehran severed ties in 2016, when then-US President Donald Trump entered the White House and certain regional issues such as war on Yemen and disagreements on Syria and Lebanon escalated tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Saudi Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman expressed hope that good relationship will be established between the two neighbouring states, stipulating that the two countries enjoy common interests to improve ties and regional situation.

The remarks have been welcomed by Iranian officials, including Saeed Khatibzadeh, Foreign Ministry spokesman, who underlined that Riyadh and Tehran can leave behind disagreements and enter a new chapter of interaction in order to bolster regional peace and security.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84330802/Saudi-Arabia-Iran-moving-towards-de-escalation>

Khatibzadeh: We need to give Vienna talks time

Tehran Times, 17th May, 2021

Speaking at his weekly press briefing on Monday, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman said that the Vienna talks are ongoing and many empty brackets have been filled. “It seems that we should give an opportunity (to talks),” Saeed Khatibzadeh said. He noted that Iran does not allow these talks to protract, as it does not want an agreement to be reached that is not within the framework of the establishment's policies and instructions issued by Tehran.

The spokesman referred to Seyyed Abbas Araghchi, the head of the Iranian negotiating team's meeting with the European delegations in Vienna on Sunday, saying that it was decided to help the working groups in the next few days.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/46101/3/Khatibzadeh-We-need-to-give-Vienna-talks-time>

Defense Ministry plans to provide 1000 new drones to Army

Tehran Times, 17th May, 2021

The Iranian Defense Ministry plans to supply the Army with 1,000 unmanned aerial vehicles UAVs, commonly called drones, in the near future. The plan to provide the army with drones was signed in a “strategic agreement” between the Defense Ministry and Army on Monday, Tasnim reported.

The agreement is intended to promote the drone power and the equipment carried by the unmanned military aircraft. Under phase one of the agreement, the ministry

undertook to supply the Army with 1,000 drones in a short time.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/46100/6/Defense-Ministry-plans-to-provide-1000-new-drones-to-Army>

No discussion like "preliminary agreement" in Vienna talks: Iran

Islamic Republic News Agency, 17th May, 2021

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said on Monday that no topic called "preliminary agreement" was raised in Vienna talks to revive the JCPOA, as a considerable part of the remaining issues were finalized in tripartite groups with some of them left for political decisions. In his weekly press conference, Khatibzadeh said that the Joint Commission of the JCPOA would reconvene this week if deemed necessary, adding that there was nothing called preliminary agreement.

“No agreement would be there until conditions are met,” he underlined.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84332146/No-discussion-like-preliminary-agreement-in-Vienna-talks-Iran>

Spokesman: No IAEA Access to Iranian N. Sites beyond Safeguards Agreement

Fars News Agency, 17th May, 2021

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors have no access to Iran's nuclear installations beyond the safeguards agreement based on the parliament's law of strategic action to remove sanctions. “The parliament's law is binding, and what is agreed between Iran and the IAEA is within the same framework. The parliament law

bans the Agency's access beyond the safeguards agreement and its implementation started three months ago and now the Agency has no access beyond the safeguards agreement and we agreed that the footages should be recorded and not given to them. We can clear the tapes at the end of three months or extend the agreement based on an internal decision made by lawmakers," Khatibzadeh told reporters in a press conference in Tehran on Monday.

<https://www.farsnews.ir/en/news/14000227000373/Spkesman-N-IAEA-Access-Iranian-N-Sies-beynd-Safegards-Agreemen>

Iran's advances in aircraft engine highlighted by top general

Tehran Times, 18th May, 2021

Iranian scientists have made significant progress in designing and manufacturing engines used in various aircraft and missiles, according to Major General Mohammad Hossein Bagheri, Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces. During a visit to a factory producing homegrown "Owj" turbojet engines, General Bagheri said Iran is now among a select group of countries in the world with the knowledge to manufacture engines for aerial vehicles that are at the cutting-edge of technology. Iran has fully matured in designing and manufacturing advanced aerial engines due to the efforts of its experts and scientists, he added, noting that thousands of aircraft, drones, and missiles in Iran have been equipped with homegrown engines.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/461068/Iran-s-advances-in-aircraft-engine-highlighted-by-top-general>

Iranian Army holds cyber defense drill

Tehran Times, 18th May, 2021

Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, Deputy Chief of the Army for Coordination Affairs, stated that the drill, dubbed Fath-1 (Conquest-1), was intended at strengthening the Army's cyber defense capabilities and testing cyber threat response methods. According to the commander, the cyber drill included numerous techniques devised by the young personnel. He added, "We have a lot of strong points in the drill and strive to improve them." The rear admiral announced that in cyber war drills that the Army will hold soon efforts will be made to close the loopholes. "With the war exercises we will stage soon, God willing, we will lessen and eliminate the weaknesses in dealing with cyber threats," he explained.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/461069/Iranian-Army-holds-cyber-defense-drill>

Vienna talks to end in victory of Iranian nation: President

Islamic Republic News Agency, 19th May, 2021

Speaking in a cabinet meeting, President Rouhani criticized some internal political groups for opposing ongoing talks among Iran and other participants of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), informally known as the Iran nuclear deal, saying that their opposition contradicted their positions on supporting the livelihood of Iranian people. Rouhani said that regardless of internal oppositions, his administration concluded any negotiations it had with foreign countries with victory for Iranians. "I promise the nation that

Vienna talks will end in victory for Iranian nation. We have already taken great steps today,” he maintained.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84334888/Vienna-talks-to-end-in-victory-of-Iranian-nation-President>

Iran Navy 76th fleet departs for high seas

Islamic Republic News Agency, 19th May, 2021

Iranian Navy 76th fleet, consisting of the Alborz destroyer and the Khark helicopter carrier, departed Bandar Abbas on Wednesday for international waters so as to carry out their missions. Deputy Commander of first Imamat Zone of Iran's Army Nay second rear Admiral Amir Jalil Moghaddam said at the see-off ceremony of the 76th naval fleet on Wednesday that despite all sanctions and shortages, Iran is today present in international waters with power ans has turned threats into opportunities.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84334770/Iran-Navy-76th-fleet-departs-for-high-seas>

JCPOA Joint Commission meeting kicks off in Vienna

Islamic Republic News Agency, 19th May, 2021

The joint JCPOA meeting began minutes ago with the presence of representatives of Iran and the P4+1 at the Grand Hotel in Vienna. Earlier, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araghchi referred to reducing disputes in Vienna talks and said participants are returning to their respective capitals to get consultations to resolve the remaining key issues. Elaborating on the latest developments with regard to Vienna talks,

he said that after two weeks of negotiations, delegations will return home for consultations.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84335458/JCPOA-Joint-Commission-meeting-kicks-off-in-Vienna>

Iran Dismantles 3 Spy Networks

Fars News Agency, 20th May, 2021

Director-general of the intelligence ministry's office in West Azerbaijan province said on Wednesday that the security and intelligence forces in the Northwestern province identified and dismantled three espionage networks in the past 58 days which sought to deal a blow to the Islamic Republic and create insecurity and instability inside the country. He added that also during the past 58 days, the three terrorist teams affiliated with the ISIL and Wahabbism, that had entered the country to carry out acts of sabotage, were identified and arrested by the Iranian security forces. He also noted that lots of equipment and documents were seized from the terrorist and espionage teams.

<https://www.farsnews.ir/en/news/14000230000520/Iran-Dismanles-3-Spy-Newrks>

IRGC Seizes Weapons Cargo in Western Iran

Fars News Agency, 21st May, 2021

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) seized a consignment of weapons in Iran's Western province of Ilam.

Commander the IRGC's Amir al-Mo'menin Base in Ilam province Brigadier General Jamal Shakarami told FNA on Wednesday that a shipment of weapons was seized in the Western parts of the country. “In cooperation and intelligence operations of

the IRGC intelligence organization of Amir al-Mo'menin (AS) base of Ilam province and the IRGC security base of Hazrat Abolfazl Al-Abbas (AS) in Khuzestan province, a consignment of smuggled arms, including 10 Kalashnikov rifles, were discovered and seized from outlaws and smugglers while crossing the bordering area of Dehloran in Ilam province," he said.

<https://www.farsnews.ir/en/news/14000229000749/IRGC-Seizes-Weapons-Carg-in-Wesern-Iran>

New Drone, Missile, Radar Systems Unveiled by IRGC

Fars News Agency, 21st May, 2021

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps unveiled three strategic products, including a super heavy drone, an air defense missile system and a radar system. "Gaza" drone, "9th of Dey" surface-to-air missile system and "Qods" radar system were the three strategic products unveiled by IRGC on Friday during a ceremony attended by IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami and IRGC Aerospace Force Commander Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh. The wide-body drone (Gaza) is a new defense achievement made by the experts in IRGC that can carry out various surveillance, combat, reconnaissance missions with a flight duration of 35 hours. "This drone is capable of carrying 13 bombs in a range of over 2,000 kilometers in combat missions, as well as carrying 500 kilograms of various reconnaissance and signal equipment," General Hajizadeh said.

<https://www.farsnews.ir/en/news/14000231000336/New-Drone-Missile-Radar-Systems-Unveiled-by-IRGC>

Iran: IAEA No More Entitled to Access AEOI Cameras

Fars News Agency, 23rd May, 2021

Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said that the International Atomic Energy Agency has no right any more to get access to the footage recorded by the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) cameras that was to be kept for three months after a recent parliament approval to be transferred to the IAEA in case the US removes the sanctions as a result of the talks underway in Vienna.

"The IAEA has no right to access the camera footages and information of the AEOI due to the expiration of the deadline," Qalibaf said in an open session of the Parliament on Sunday, adding, "We are determined that the 'Law on Strategic Action to Lift Sanctions and Protect the Interests of the Iranian Nation' be implemented at the specific time and in accordance with the ratification, and the Leader has repeatedly emphasized this issue."

<https://www.farsnews.ir/en/news/14000302000270/Iran-IAEA-N-Mre-Eniled-Access-AEOI-Cameras>

President: Iran to Continue Vienna Negotiations until Final Agreement

Fars News Agency, 23rd May, 2021

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Sunday that the country's negotiators will continue talks with the Group 4+1 (China, Russia, Britain and France plus Germany) until reaching an agreement, adding that the US sanctions have not been able to stop Iran's progress in different economic and industrial fields. "Production growth figures in various industrial sectors of the

country are the best evidence of the fruitlessness of the US policy of maximum pressure and this has forced them to admit the failure of these policies, and given the recent talks in Vienna, they have explicitly declared their preparedness to lift sanctions in accordance with the nuclear deal,” President Rouhani said, addressing the 227th meeting of the Government's Economic Coordination Headquarters in Tehran on Sunday. “We will continue negotiations (in Vienna) until a final agreement is attained,” he added.

<https://www.farsnews.ir/en/news/14000302000531/Presiden-Iran-Cnine-Vienna-Negiains-nil-Final-Agreemen>

Security Forces Dismantle 3 Terrorist Teams in Southeastern, Northwestern Iran

Fars News Agency, 23rd May, 2021

Iranian security forces smashed 3 terrorist teams in the Southeastern province of Sistan and Balouchestan and the Northwestern province of West Azerbaijan, arresting the terrorists who had killed an adolescent in March. Last March, a blind terrorist explosion near Kouzeh square in Saravan city in Sistan and Balouchestan province resulted in the martyrdom of a 16-year-old teenager and wounding of several innocent passers-by, according to a report by the intelligence ministry on Sunday. Members of the team which carried out the attack were affiliated to Jeish al-Adl terrorist group, who had received military training in a foreign country and committed the crime under the command of the terrorist group.

<https://www.farsnews.ir/en/news/14000302000680/Secriy-Frces-Dismanle-3-Terris-Teams-in-Sheasern-Nrhwesern-Iran>

President Rouhani terms Iran-China relations as strategic

Islamic Republic News Agency, 24th May, 2021

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on Monday described the relations between Iran and China as strategic. In a telephone conversation with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping, President Rouhani welcomed inking Iran-China Cooperation Program.

He expressed hope that the bilateral and regional relations will be further enhanced in all areas. Expressing Iran's readiness to boost joint economic cooperation with China in the West Asia region, he urged bolstering the relations between the two countries, particularly in economic and trade fields, including increasing Iran's oil and non-oil exports to China. He also called for speeding up the presence of Chinese companies in Iran in areas of interest.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84341748/President-Rouhani-terms-Iran-China-relations-as-strategic>

Iran Continues Uranium Enrichment at 5, 20, 60 Percent Purity Levels

Fars News Agency, 25th May, 2021

“The %5, 20% and 60% enrichments still continue and the quantity of our stored %20 enriched uranium is now over 90 kilograms,” Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Ali Akbar Salehi Salehi said, adding that the 90-kilogram uranium was achieved in four months. “The quantity of Iran’s 60% enriched uranium is over 2.5 kilograms and our stored 5% uranium weighs more than five tons,” he noted.

<https://www.farsnews.ir/en/news/14000304000216/Iran-Cnines-Uranim-Enrichmen-a-5-20-60-Percen-Priy-Levels>

Iranian Army Overhauls F-5 Bomber

Fars News Agency, 25th May, 2021

“With the efforts of young, talented and committed specialists and experts of martyr Habibi Zaham base in Mashhad, an F-5 fighter-bomber aircraft was overhauled in 10,000 man-hours of work, relying on domestic power and indigenous know-how, and joined the air fleet of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” Commander of the base General Hamid Mostafavi said on Tuesday. “Today, the know-how to overhaul different types of aircraft, train pilots and supply the needed parts and weapons has become indigenized in the Army Air Force and we are not dependent on foreign countries at all,” General Mostafavi said.

<https://www.farsnews.ir/en/news/14000304000308/Iranian-Army-Overhals-F-5-Bomber>

Army Starts “Sky Shield 1400” Drills in Central Iran

Fars News Agency, 25th May, 2021

Iran’s Army started the joint wargames “Sky Shield 1400” on Tuesday with the presence of the electronic warfare strategic units of the Army's four forces in the general zone of Isfahan stretching over a wide area of the country. Sky Shield 1400 drills are the most practical joint drills in the field of electronic warfare of Iran’s Army in recent years as Rapid Reaction Units and Electronic Warfare Systems of the Army Ground, Air Defense and Naval Forces have participated. The exercise will be conducted in a wide area of the country by implementing offensive and defensive tactics in the field of electronic warfare; and will use achievements and capabilities in this sensitive and strategic area. The Iranian Army will also fulfill the specified missions in various fields of signal information in the

form of controlled two-way electronic warfare.

Last week, Iran’s Army held cyber defense exercises codenamed ‘Fath 1’ to enhance their power in confrontation against attacks in the cyber space.

<https://www.farsnews.ir/en/news/14000304000495/Army-Sars-“Sky-Shield-400-Drills-in-Cenral-Iran>

There are important issues yet to be solved: Araghchi

Islamic Republic News Agency, 25th May, 2021

Iran’s Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Tuesday that some significant and serious issues are still remaining that need to be solved during talks over reviving a 2015 Iran nuclear deal – known as JCPOA. Araghchi made the remarks upon arrival in Vienna prior to a Joint JCPOA Commission meeting. Araghchi, who heads the Iranian delegation in the talks, said the previous four rounds of negotiations have made good progress. He expressed hope that Iran and the G4+1 will reach a final solution during this round of talks in the Austrian capital.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84343015/There-are-important-issues-yet-to-be-solved-Araghchi>

IRGC dismantles terrorist group in NW Iran

Islamic Republic News Agency, 30th May, 2021

The Ground Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has dismantled a terrorist group in northwestern Iran, said a statement released by the public relations department of the base. Forces of Hamzeh Seyyed of-Shohada Base battled

last night (Saturday) with a team of miscreants and anti-revolutionaries who were attempting to enter the country from the Piranshahr border, according to the statement. Two members of the terrorist team were killed and some weapons and ammunition were seized from them.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84349102/IRGC-dismantles-terrorist-group-in-NW-Iran>

Iran, E3, China, Russia confer on JCPOA in Vienna

Islamic Republic News Agency, 31st May, 2021

Iran's negotiating delegation in two separating meetings with Russia, China, EU, and E3 on Monday examined the latest Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action aka JCPOA revival talks. The two separate meetings are held on the sidelines of a new round of talks between Iran and the G4+1 – Britain, France, Russia, China, and Germany – to explore ways for reviving the multinational accord. During the meeting, the Iranian delegation outlined its views on the draft texts and the remaining issues for the Chinese and Russian sides. While offering some comments and explanations, the Chinese and Russian delegations urge their full support for Iran's stances.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84350472/Iran-E3-China-Russia-confer-on-JCPOA-in-Vienna>

IRAQ

Iraqi aviation strikes on ISIS tunnels in Nineveh

Iraqi News Agency, 16th May, 2021

The Security Media Cell announced that Iraqi warplanes had directed strikes on ISIS tunnels in Nineveh. The cell stated, in a

statement received by the Iraqi News Agency (INA), that "according to accurate intelligence information from the Counter-Terrorism Service, Iraqi F16 planes carried out a series of air strikes southeast of Mosul." The cell added, "The strikes targeted tunnels that were used by ISIS terrorist elements' in their operations against the security forces."

<https://ina.iq/eng/11903-iraqi-aviation-strikes-on-isis-tunnels-in-nineveh.html>

CTS begins a specific operation south of Mosul

Iraqi News Agency, 17th May, 2021

The spokesman for the Commander-in-Chief, Major General Yahya Rasul, announced today, Monday, that the anti-terrorist forces have launched a qualitative operation in the Hammam Al-Alil area, southeast of the city of Mosul, while noting that the operation led to the killing of 8 ISIS terrorist elements and the discovery of weapons and charges. In a statement received by the Iraqi News Agency (INA), Rasul said, "According to the directive of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, and through careful follow-up and monitoring of the remnants of ISIS terrorist gangs, the units of the Counter-Terrorism Service began a qualitative operation in the Hammam Al-Alil area, southeast of the city of Mosul."

<https://ina.iq/eng/11913-cts-begins-a-specific-operation-south-of-mosul.html>

PDC: The security agreement between Baghdad and Erbil is awaiting implementation

Iraqi News Agency, 18th May, 2021

Committee reporter Nasser Harki told the Iraqi News Agency (INA): "Several

meetings were held between Baghdad and Erbil regarding the formation of joint military points in the areas experiencing a security vacuum within the disputed areas, in order to control security in those areas and prevent any security breaches." He added that "there is a meeting held several days ago, and it was agreed upon the locations and locations of these military points on the ground," noting that "the agreement is awaiting implementation by the central government, and it must implement the agreement to prevent new violations that lead to the loss of citizens' lives and martyrs." From the Peshmerga, the PMF, or the army of all kinds. "

<https://ina.iq/eng/11925-pdc-the-security-agreement-between-baghdad-and-erbil-is-awaiting-implementation.html>

Security forces receive an international coalition equipment

Iraqi News Agency, 18th May, 2021

In a statement received by the Iraqi News Agency (INA), the International Coalition said, "At Ain Al-Asad base, Al-Jazeera Operations Command, the Iraqi security forces delivered ammunition and weapons estimated at \$ 1,407,938 from the coalition forces (Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve). He added, "This equipment to support Iraq in its mission to defeat ISIS and is part of the Training and Equipping Fund to Combat ISIS program that has been implemented since 2014 and is funded through the Ministry of Defense budget allocated to Operation Inherent Resolve." Overseeing its implementation, Operation Inherent Resolve, to support the Iraqi government in the battle against ISIS.

<https://ina.iq/eng/11941-security-forces-receive-an-international-coalition-equipment.html>

PDC: Initial understandings with France to import aircraft and radars

Iraqi News Agency, 21st May, 2021

The head of the committee, Deputy Muhammad Ridha Al Haidar, told the Iraqi News Agency (INA): "Iraq has advanced F-16 planes, but they are few in number compared to the operations carried out against the remnants of ISIS terrorist gangs," indicating that "Iraq is currently heading to France, in agreement with The French Consul in Baghdad, who will be strengthened by an expected visit from the Chair of the French Security and Defense Committee to Iraq next Sunday, and this issue will be raised and there are preliminary written understandings that include importing French aircraft while strengthening the radars of the Air Defense Command and enhancing their capabilities."

<https://ina.iq/eng/11975-pdc-initial-understandings-with-france-to-import-aircraft-and-radars.html>

Turkish warplanes bomb the Jumanki district in Dohuk

Iraqi News Agency, 21st May, 2021

The director of Jumanki district, Al-Nad Amir, told the Iraqi News Agency (INA), that "Turkish aircraft continued from 12:30 in the afternoon until one and five minutes by bombing the villages of Atouch and Bebadi, which are five kilometers from the center of Jumanki district." Amir emphasized that "the bombing did not result in loss of life, but there are material damage and fires in the farmers' farms," indicating that "the residents of the villages were displaced from it due to the constant bombing, but they go to it for agricultural

work." He added, "Because of the presence of PKK elements within the borders of these areas and villages, the Turkish planes bombed continuously, which caused constant terror and fear among the civilians of the area." For his part, the head of the Foreign Relations Committee in the Parliament of the Kurdistan Region, Rebwar Babaki, told the Iraqi News Agency (INA), that "the Turkish bombing is old and has continued since 1992 and until now due to the illegal presence of PKK elements in Iraq and the region."

<https://ina.iq/eng/11979-turkish-warplanes-bomb-the-jumanki-district-in-dohuk.html>

Iraqi armed factions using drones against US-led coalition

Al-Monitor, 27th May, 2021

An unmanned aerial surveillance system (UAS, or small drone) struck on May 8 Iraq's Ain al-Asad Air Base in the western part of the country where US and other coalition forces are stationed, without causing injuries. Speaking to Al-Monitor, a security source at the air base said the attack actually involved two drones. One was downed; it is unknown what happened to the second drone. While fingers of accusation were pointed at the armed factions opposing the presence of US troops in Iraq, no faction has yet claimed responsibility for the attack. The armed factions have already conducted similar attacks in the past. In fact, armed militias claimed responsibility for attacks on Saudi Arabia in January and for an attack on Erbil International Airport in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in April. Fadel Abu Ragheef, a security analyst close to the Iraqi intelligence services, told Al-Monitor

that the use of drones as an alternative to Katyusha rockets would escalate security tensions in Iraq.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/05/iraqi-armed-factions-using-drones-against-us-led-coalition#ixzz6wV15eOA7>

ISRAEL

Hamas again threatens to strike Tel Aviv after Israel kills Islamic Jihad commander

Al-Monitor, 17th May, 2021

The Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas threatened again on Monday to target the Israeli city of Tel Aviv with rockets after Israel's military killed the top military commander of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). More than 150 rockets have been launched toward Tel Aviv since fighting between Palestinian factions and Israel broke out last Monday. Meanwhile, the Gaza Strip continues to be hit by Israeli bombardment. Israel's military killed top PIJ commander Hussam Abu Harbeed in an airstrike coordinated with Israel's Shin Bet intelligence service in the northern Gaza Strip earlier today.

Rockets landed in southern Israeli towns of Ashdod, Beersheba, Ashkelon and Kiryat Malachi in response to his killing, according to Israeli reports. Three people were injured when a house in Ashdod was struck.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/05/hamas-again-threatens-strike-tel-aviv-after-israel-kills-islamic-jihad-commander#ixzz6wVtb1enh>

Gaza violence sparks debate over conditioning US military aid to Israel

Al-Monitor, 18th May, 2021

The mounting death toll from Israel's campaign of airstrikes against militants in Gaza has thrust US military assistance to the Jewish state into the spotlight, as a small but vocal group of Democrats call for conditions to be placed on the several billions of dollars the United States provides Israel with each year.

“American taxpayer money is being used to commit human rights violations,” tweeted Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.). “Congress must condition the aid we send to Israel and end it altogether if those conditions are not followed.” “We cannot remain silent when our government sends \$3.8 billion of military aid to Israel that is used to demolish Palestinian homes, imprison Palestinian children and displace Palestinian families,” Rep. Ayanna Pressley (D-Mass.) said on the House floor. “A budget is a reflection of our values.”

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/05/gaza-violence-sparks-debate-over-conditioning-us-military-aid-israel#ixzz6wVu8rP8t>

US expects 'significant de-escalation today,' Biden tells Netanyahu

Al-Monitor, 19th May, 2021

President Joe Biden told Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that he expected “significant de-escalation” on Wednesday — the same day the Israeli leader told diplomats there was “no timeframe” for ending the fighting with Hamas. Netanyahu and Biden “had a detailed discussion on the state of events in Gaza, Israel’s progress in degrading the capabilities of Hamas and

other terrorist elements, and ongoing diplomatic efforts by regional governments and the United States,” according to a White House readout of the call. “The President conveyed to the Prime Minister that he expected a significant de-escalation today on the path to a cease-fire,” the readout said.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/05/us-expects-significant-de-escalation-today-biden-tells-netanyahu#ixzz6wVuhdn00>

Israel announces unconditional ceasefire with Hamas, ending Gaza combat

Jerusalem Post, 21st May, 2021

The Israeli security cabinet voted to accept a ceasefire late Thursday as the Israeli South and Gaza remain inflamed. The security cabinet unanimously agreed to a “mutual and unconditional” cessation of hostilities, according to a statement from the Prime Minister's Office. A barrage of rockets fired from Gaza into southern Israel and reported IDF strikes on targets in the Gaza Strip continued leading up to the ceasefire, however skies have remained quiet since the ceasefire began at 2 a.m. on Friday morning.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi thanked US President Joe Biden for his role in the success of the Egyptian brokered ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did however inform the IDF to prepare for a scenario in which Hamas did not respond to Egypt's ceasefire offer.

<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/no-rocket-sirens-since-1-am-as-israel-hamas-ceasefire-said-to-be-close-668607>

A 'new level of force': Netanyahu warns against further Hamas attacks

Al-Monitor, 21st May, 2021

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged Friday that Israel would respond with "a new level of force" to future rocket attacks from the Palestinian militant group Hamas. "If Hamas thinks we will tolerate a drizzle of rockets, it is wrong," Netanyahu said during a press conference with top defense officials in Tel Aviv. "We will respond with a whole new level of force to every instance of aggression against the Gaza-envelope communities or anywhere else in Israel," he warned. Speaking hours after the Egyptian-brokered, US-backed cease-fire took effect Friday, Netanyahu claimed victory in the bloodiest conflict the region has witnessed since the 50-day war in 2014, which left more than 2,200 people dead — a majority of them Palestinians. Israel says more than 4,300 rockets were fired by Hamas and the Islamic Jihad group during the week and a half of hostilities, most of them intercepted by the Iron Dome missile defense system.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/05/new-level-force-netanyahu-warns-against-further-hamas-attacks#ixzz6wVwuLLJT>

Blinken Reaffirms Israeli Right to Self-defense, Stresses Gaza Reconstruction

Haaretz, 25th May, 2021

U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken reiterated Washington's commitment to Israeli security during remarks delivered alongside Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday morning in

Jerusalem. Addressing reporters, Blinken said that he had been sent by President Joe Biden to "demonstrate the commitment of the United States to Israel's security and start to work toward greater security and reduce tensions in the West Bank and Jerusalem" as well as to discuss the reconstruction of Gaza following the recent conflict. "The United States fully supports Israel's right to defend against attack," he asserted.

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-blinken-reconfirms-israeli-right-to-self-defense-stresses-gaza-reconstruction-1.9841390>

Police to Arab affairs committee: 8,000 to 10,000 weapons in sector

Jerusalem Post, 27th May, 2021

Some 2,000 to 3,000 police officers would result in the tipping point against crime in the Arab sector said Israel Police representative Commander Yigal Ezra. Ezra went on to say that there are an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 weapons in the sector, despite the fact that "many talk about tens of thousands of weapons in the Arab sector." Ezra said that reserve officers called up enabled police to take actions based on intelligence they gathered and make arrests. Police actions were focused on weapons offenses, violence and vandalism, said Ezra, who expressed his hope that police would continue to be able to make use of larger forces.

<https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/arab-affairs-committee-provocative-use-of-police-force-at-al-aqsa-mosque-sheikh-jarrah-669367>

Egypt Invites Hamas, Palestinians, Israel for Further Talks, Intel Official Says

Haaretz, 27th May, 2021

Egypt has invited Israel, Hamas and the Palestinian Authority for separate talks that aim at consolidating the cease-fire that ended an 11-day war between Israel and the Gaza Strip's militant Hamas rulers, an Egyptian intelligence official said Thursday. The talks would also focus on accelerating the reconstruction process in Gaza. "We are seeking a long-term truce, that would enable further discussions and possibly direct talks," said the official, who had close knowledge of the proceedings that had led to the ceasefire and who spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't allowed to brief reporters.

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/egypt-invites-hamas-palestinians-israel-for-further-talks-intel-official-says-1.9851749>

Report: Israel to condition rebuilding of Gaza on progress in prisoner issue

Ynet News, 27th May, 2021

Israel has conditioned the rebuilding of the Gaza Strip on promoting the issue of bringing back its citizens held by the Hamas terrorist group, Lebanese newspaper Al-Akhbar reported Thursday morning. The Gaza terrorist outfit holds the bodies of fallen IDF soldiers Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul, who were killed in action, and civilians Avera Mengistu and Hisham a-Sayed. According to the report, Israel will also demand to hold talks through two separate mediation channels. Aiming to play key role in mediation of talks, Egypt said to seek establishing a designated directorate that would supervise a future

settlement between the parties and make sure that aid money doesn't fall in Hamas hands.

<https://www.ynetnews.com/article/B19nyh3Fd>

Israel's FM Tells Egyptian Counterpart Gaza Aid Tied to Return of Israelis Held by Hamas

Haaretz, 29th May, 2021

Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi met with his Egyptian counterpart in Cairo on Sunday, in the first such meeting since 2008, amid efforts to secure a long-term cease-fire in Gaza and organize a future summit with the participation of Palestinian officials.

In his meeting with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, Ashkenazi said they discussed ways to ensure stability in Gaza, bilateral relations and "the duty to block any attempt to harm regional stability by terror organization and radical bodies like Iran and its proxies."

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-israeli-foreign-minister-to-discuss-gaza-reconstruction-in-cairo-visit-1.9855749>

Public Security Ministry drafts plan to handle possible future unrest

Jerusalem Post, 30th May, 2021

Public Security Minister Amir Ohana is working to develop a new plan of action to tackle violence between Jews and Arabs in Israel's mixed cities, N12reported. The program includes enlisting about 5,000 new police officers over the course of three years, with 300 to be enlisted immediately to assist in local authorities. Five Border Police reserve units will also be placed in

mixed towns to assist the police as well. The Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) will also be involved, and will search for suspects on social media platforms.

<https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/public-security-ministry-drafts-plan-to-handle-possible-future-unrest-669578>

JORDAN

JP: Ceasefire between Israel, Hamas may be within reach - Egypt, Jordan

Ammon News, 17th May, 2021

Jordanian King Abdullah and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi have both tried to promote a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, as operation “Guardian of the Walls” enters its eighth day, Jerusalem Post reported. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said on Monday that a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas might be within reach. Egypt is going to great lengths to reach a ceasefire between the Israelis and Palestinians - and hope still exists that a collective action could end the conflict," he said in an interview to the Al Arabiya news outlet. Al-Sisi's comments echoed those of Jordan's King Abdullah, who said on Sunday that his kingdom was involved in intensive diplomacy to halt what he characterized as Israeli military escalation in the worst Israeli-Palestinian violence in years, according to Jerusalem Post.

<https://en.ammonnews.net/article/49428>

Jordanian Parliament Session On Israel-Hamas Fighting: MPs Call To Annul Accords, Agreements With Israel, Target Zionists All Over The World, Praise Hamas Rockets

MEMRI TV, 17th May, 2021

The Jordanian parliament held a special session to discuss recent fighting between

Israel and Hamas. The session aired on Palestine TV on May 17, 2021. During the session, Jordanian MP Safaa Momani called for an annulment of all agreements with Israel, "because the Jews are the slayers of prophets, who have betrayed all the pacts and contracts." Jordanian MP Firas Al-Qudah said that the "Zionist enemies" should be targeted in every corner of the world. Jordanian MP Saleh Al-Armouti commended Hamas and its rockets, and said: "Power to Hamas is power to the Jordanian state." Jordanian MP Suleiman Abu Yahya said that Allah cursed the Jews in the Quran, and that the Jews fear the Palestinians more than they fear Allah. He added that the Jews are cowards and that their soldiers wear diapers. Jordanian MP Salamah Al-Bluwi said that the criminal Zionist sons of apes and pigs are carrying out war crimes against the Palestinians.

<https://www.memri.org/tv/jordan-parliament-session-discuss-israel-hamas-fighting-annul-agreements-salute-rockets-target-zionists-cowards-wear-diapers-apes-pigs>

Joint Statement of the leaders of France, Egypt and Jordan

Ammon News, 19th May, 2021

The President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Abdel Fattah El-Sissi, and the King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Abdallah II, held a meeting today, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported. The President of the French Republic, the King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt called on the parties to immediately agree on a ceasefire. They also decided to work with

international partners to reach such a cease-fire including through the UN Security Council, according to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The three leaders emphasized the urgency of addressing the root causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by resuming effective negotiations to achieve a just and lasting peace.

<https://en.ammonnews.net/article/49488>

Jordan picks up regional diplomacy following Blinken, Bin Zayed visits

Al-Monitor, 28th May, 2021

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken referred to Jordan as a key partner and friend in his recent visit to Amman, yet the Hashemite kingdom is facing a new geopolitical reality making its diplomatic role in Mideast peace more challenging. Jordan has been stepping up its regional diplomacy in last 48 hours after receiving both US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Abu Dhabi's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Zayed, in Amman. The meetings follow the ceasefire announced last week to end the exchange between Israel and Hamas, and Blinken's earlier stops in Jerusalem, Ramallah and Cairo this week. There were however carefully picked words of denunciation and warnings from King Abdullah II and Foreign Minister Ayman al-Safadi throughout the crisis about Israel's assault on the Al-Aqsa Mosque and its efforts to evict residents of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in occupied East Jerusalem.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/05/jordan-picks-regional-diplomacy-following-blinken-bin-zayed-visits#ixzz6wWLdTFzd>

KUWAIT

Kuwaiti Islamic Scholar Tareq Al-Suwaidan Blasts 'Defeatist' Arab Countries On Al-Jazeera: 'Shut Up And Let The Mujahideen Do Their Work'; The Muslims Will Conquer Rome, Dominate The World Again

MEMRI TV, 18th May, 2021

Kuwaiti Islamic scholar Tareq Al-Suwaidan criticized "defeatist countries" that recognized "their enemy" Israel. He said: "Shut up and let the mujahideen do their work." He made his remarks during an interview that aired on Al-Jazeera Network (Qatar) on May 12, 2021. Al-Suwaidan continued to say that the defeatist countries sent their condolences to Israel following the Meron stampede, but not to the "martyrs of Hamas's Al-Qassam Brigades." He also said that if Arabs are not capable of confronting Israel now, they must not surrender, but pass the banner on to the next generation that might invent a nuclear bomb. Al-Suwaidan quoted a hadith, according to which the Muslims would conquer Rome and Constantinople, adding: "The Muslims will dominate the world once again."

<https://www.memri.org/reports/kuwaiti-islamic-scholar-tareq-al-suwaidan-blasts-defeatist-arab-countries-al-jazeera-shut>

Interior Minister, Pakistani counterpart discuss cooperation

Kuwait Times, 31st May, 2021

Kuwait's Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Sabah and his Pakistani counterpart Sheikh Rashid Ahmad on Sunday discussed some topics of

common concern, and mechanisms of coordination and cooperation in all domains relating to security. The talks focused on sharing information and expertise between the two ministries, and a number of regional and international issues, the ministry's security media and public relations department said in a statement. The Kuwaiti minister lauded the depth of relations between the two countries and their nations, stressing the importance of such meetings in sharing views in several security issues that concern the two sides, it added. The Pakistani minister accompanied by a high-level delegation arrived in Kuwait earlier in the day on a two-day official visit.

<https://news.kuwaittimes.net/website/interior-minister-pakistani-counterpart-discuss-cooperation/>

Kuwait resumes visa issuance for Pakistanis after 11 years

Kuwait Times, 31st May, 2021

Kuwait will resume issuing work and family visas for Pakistani nationals after an 11-year (unofficial) suspension, Pakistani Interior Minister Sheikh Rasheed Ahmad told reporters at a press conference yesterday. "I am glad to announce today that after 11 years, Kuwait is opening family and business visas for Pakistani nationals. Kuwait has also approved visas for oilfield workers, doctors and teachers, apart from visas to be issued for the construction, IT and technical sectors," he said. For more than a decade, Kuwait has unofficially banned nationals from Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Yemen from entering the country over security and political concerns. The blacklist includes trade, tourist and visit

visas, as well as visas sponsored by spouses. There are around 94,000 Pakistanis in Kuwait, down from a peak of as many as 150,000 in 2009.

<https://news.kuwaittimes.net/website/kuwait-resumes-visa-issuance-for-pakistanis-after-11-years/>

LEBANON

Hamas Official Says No Need for 'Rockets from South Lebanon'

Naharnet, 16th May, 2021

A senior Hamas official has said that the Palestinian movement is not encouraging anyone to fire rockets at Israel from south Lebanon. "The resistance in Gaza has rockets that can reach entire Palestine and we don't need the firing of rockets from south Lebanon," the official, Ali Barakeh, said in a TV interview. "We call on everyone to stand by us but we are not asking anyone to open fronts and subject their countries to danger," the Palestinian official added. He also noted that "coordination with Hizbullah is excellent" and that there are "meetings, consultations and cooperation" between the two movements. Barakeh's remarks come after three rockets were fired from south Lebanon at northern Israel.

<http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/281545-hamas-official-says-no-need-for-rockets-from-south-lebanon>

Israel shells Lebanon after failed launches toward Israeli territory

The Daily Star, 17th May, 2021

Six rockets were fired from Lebanon towards northern Israel on Monday but fell short of crossing the border, the Israeli military said. It said that in response,

artillery was fired at "the sources of the launches" in Lebanon. A Lebanese security source said shells were heard being fired from south Lebanon and efforts were being made to identify the location. The source said about 22 shells were fired by Israeli artillery on Lebanese territory. The Lebanese shelling caused Israeli air raid sirens to blare near the kibbutz of Misgav Am, along Israel's northern border with Lebanon.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2021/May-18/520203-rockets-fired-towards-israel-from-lebanon-fall-short.ashx>

Lebanese Minister Of Foreign Affairs Charbel Wehbe Causes Outrage By Referring To Saudis As 'Bedouins,' Accusing Gulf States Of Financing ISIS; Adds: Hizbullah's Weapons Are Lebanon's Insurance Policy Against A Gaza Scenario

MEMRI TV, 17th May, 2021

Charbel Wehbe, Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, defended the honor of Lebanese President Michel Aoun and senior politician Gebran Bassil to a Saudi guest on an Al-Hurra TV (U.S.) talk show that aired on May 17, 2021. He spoke in response to Salman Al-Ansari, president of the Saudi-American Public Affairs Committee, in a segment of the show that was edited from the online version. Wehbe asked the host of the show: "Am I supposed to be insulted by one of those Bedouins?" He then accused the Gulf states of financing ISIS and bringing it into Iraq and Syria. Wehbe then said that Hizbullah's weapons are an "insurance policy" against a possible Gaza scenario, in which Lebanon is attacked by Israel. The interview has since

caused public uproar, and Wehbe was forced to announce his resignation from the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs.

<https://www.memri.org/tv/lebanon-fm-charbel-wehbe-causes-outrage-saudis-bedouins-gulf-states-financing-isis-hizbullah-weapons-insurance>

Army Finds Unlaunched Rocket, Launchpads of 6 Others

Naharnet, 18th May, 2021

The Lebanese Army on Tuesday announced finding an unlaunched rocket and six empty rocket launchpads in the outskirts of the southern town of al-Hibbariyeh, hours after the six rockets fell inside Lebanon after being fired toward Israel. The unlaunched rocket was destroyed in its place in a controlled detonation. The army also said that several towns in the al-Hibbariyeh and Kfarshouba areas were hit by artillery shells fired by Israel in the wake of the botched rocket attack.

<http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/28158-6-army-finds-unlaunched-rocket-launchpads-of-6-others>

Germany Bans Three Groups Close to Hizbullah

Naharnet, 19th May, 2021

The German government said Wednesday it is banning three groups close to Hizbullah, the Lebanese movement that opposes Israel, against the backdrop of the current military escalation in the Middle East. Interior Minister Horst Seehofer "has banned three groups that are financing the terrorist organisation Hizbullah," his spokesman wrote in a tweet.

"Whoever supports terror will not be safe in Germany... They will find no refuge in our country." The interior ministry said that searches were currently under way in a number of different regional states in Germany.

<http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/281603-germany-bans-three-groups-close-to-hizbullah>

Grenades, Unrest as Tensions Linked to Syrian Vote Spread to Tripoli

Naharnet, 21st May, 2021

The northern city of Tripoli witnessed several security incidents on Thursday evening in connection with the Lebanese-Syrian unrest that rocked several Lebanese regions during the day. As assailants in the city torched the Kataeb Party's office and a clinic affiliated with the Lebanese Forces with Molotov cocktails, an Energa-type, rifle-fired grenade was launched in the area between al-Qobbeh and Bab al-Tabbaneh, wounding two people. The army meanwhile imposed a security cordon around the LF's office in the city to prevent any attacks. Earlier in the day, young men had blocked the al-Nour Square roundabout in protest at convoys by Syrians who support President Bashar al-Assad, calling for the deportation of any Syrian who voted for him at the Syrian embassy.

<http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/281640-grenades-unrest-as-tensions-linked-to-syrian-vote-spread-to-tripoli>

US pledges additional support for Lebanon's army amid financial collapse

Al-Monitor, 22nd May, 2021

The US on Friday announced an additional \$15 million in aid to Lebanon's military for

2021 following a first-of-its-kind conference between senior State Department and Defense Department officials and the commander of Lebanon's armed forces, Gen. Joseph Aoun. The two sides agreed to increase US defense cooperation with Lebanon's armed forces and to "develop a five-year plan to develop the army's capabilities," the Lebanese armed forces said in a statement. The United States has already agreed to provide Lebanon's navy with three Protector-class patrol boats by 2022 to enhance its counter-smuggling and other maritime security abilities.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/05/us-pledges-additional-support-lebanons-army-amid-financial-collapse#ixzz6wWUqLK3>

Senior Hizbullah Official: The Smuggling Of Rockets Into Palestine Continues At Full Force

MEMRI TV, 28th May, 2021

Naim Qassem, Hizbullah deputy secretary-general, in an interview to the Al-Nour, Hizbullah-owned radio station in Beirut discussed the relationship that pertained between his organization and the Palestinian factions during the fighting, and the support that his organization gave, and will continue to grant, to the factions. He asserts that "the smuggling of the rockets into Palestine continues at full force." He also says that Palestinian operatives have undergone instruction and training by members of the "axis of resistance" in order to develop their capability to produce weapons. Qassem explains that his organization was responsible for "most" of the demonstrations and protests that took place on the Lebanon-Israel border during

the last round of fighting, and that the Lebanese citizen who was killed by IDF fire during the protests was a member of Hizbullah.

<https://www.memri.org/reports/senior-hizbullah-official-smuggling-rockets-palestine-continues-full-force>

QATAR

Amir meets head of Hamas Political Bureau

Gulf Times, 23rd May, 2021

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani met at his Amiri Diwan office yesterday morning with Head of the Political Bureau of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) Dr Ismail Haniyeh. His Highness the Amir affirmed Qatar's continued support for the brotherly Palestinian people and their just cause and the importance of the unity of Palestinian ranks in order to obtain their legitimate national rights, foremost among which is their right to establish their independent state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital in accordance with the two-state solution, international legitimacy decisions and the Arab Peace Initiative, and in a way that enhances security and stability in the region and the world. Talks during the meeting also dealt with the latest developments in Palestine and efforts to rebuild Gaza.

<https://www.gulf-times.com/story/692127/Amir-meets-head-of-Hamas-Political-Bureau>

Qatari foreign minister visits Egypt

Al-Monitor, 25th May, 2021

Qatar's top diplomat visited Egypt on Tuesday in a further sign that relations are improving between the two states.

Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani met with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry in Cairo on Tuesday. The two discussed improving bilateral ties. More specifically, they talked about the Nile River dam dispute between Egypt and Ethiopia. Thani also thanked Shoukry for Egypt's help in brokering the recent cease-fire between Israel and Hamas, according to the official Qatar News Agency. Qatar's foreign minister will remain in Cairo for two days and will meet with other Egyptian officials. They plan to discuss the situation in post-civil war Libya and the Palestinian territories following the recent conflict with Israel, the Egyptian state-owned Al-Ahram news outlet said.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/05/qatari-foreign-minister-visits-egypt#ixzz6wWkPlvzb>

Deputy Prime Minister receives phone call from the US Secretary of State

Gulf Times, 27th May, 2021

HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, received a phone call Anthony Blinken, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the United States of America. During the call, they reviewed the latest developments in Palestine. The US Secretary of State thanked Qatar for its great efforts in achieving a ceasefire between the Palestine and the Israel, stressing the importance of mobilizing international support for the humanitarian and development efforts in Gaza. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, during the call, thanked the United States of America for its support to the

Palestinian people, stressing the importance of humanitarian support and encouraging countries to contribute to the reconstruction of Gaza, adding that Qatar will be at the forefront of supporting the brotherly Palestinian people.

<https://www.gulf-times.com/story/692472/Deputy-Prime-Minister-receives-phone-call-from-the-US-Secretary-of-State>

SAUDI ARABIA

Amid Present Round Of Fighting With Israel, Saudis Criticize Hamas, Palestinian Authority: Palestinians Are Paying With Their Lives For Hamas' Loyalty To Iran; Palestinian Leadership In West Bank, Gaza, Responsible For Bloodshed

MEMRI TV, 19th May, 2021

During the present round of fighting between Israel and Hamas, there was a shift in the Saudi media's coverage of the conflict. While at first the Saudi media focused on the issue of Jerusalem and the Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah, while largely ignoring the events in Gaza and refraining from criticism of Hamas, in the recent days it began publishing articles harshly critical of Hamas and of the other armed organizations in Gaza. The articles claim that Hamas used the issues of Jerusalem and Sheikh Jarrah to spark the present confrontation with Israel, and that the destruction in Gaza and the hundreds of Palestinians killed and wounded are the result of Hamas's loyalty to the Iranian agenda.

Hamas, they say, is exploiting the Palestinian cause to further the interests of Iran, Turkey and the political Islam

organizations; it thereby not only causes bloodshed among Palestinians but also undermines the Arab solidarity with the Palestinian cause. The Saudi criticism is not confined to Hamas, but also extends to the Palestinian Authority (PA), headed by President Mahmoud 'Abbas. The writers accuse the PA and 'Abbas of mishandling the Palestinian cause and pursuing personal interests at the expense of the Palestinians.

<https://www.memri.org/reports/amid-present-round-fighting-israel-saudis-criticize-hamas-palestinian-authority-palestinians>

Saudi foreign minister 'hopeful' over exploratory talks with Iran

Alarabiya, 19th May, 2021

Saudi Arabia foreign minister says Kingdom is "hopeful" after exploratory talks with Iran, in a rare comment on delicate discussions whose details have been closely guarded. The official-level meetings aim to restore relations severed five years ago between the Sunni Muslim kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Shia Islamic Republic of Iran. "We have initiated some exploratory talks. They are at a very early stage but we are hopeful," Prince Faisal bin Farhan said in Paris on Tuesday, where he is participating in two international summits. The talks with Iran, facilitated by Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi, had remained secret until the Financial Times reported that a first meeting had been held in Baghdad on April 9.

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2021/05/19/Saudi-foreign-minister-hopeful-over-exploratory-talks-with-Iran>

Saudi FM Prince Faisal says ball is in Houthis' court for Yemen ceasefire

Alarabiya, 19th May, 2021

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said Wednesday that the Kingdom's peace initiative to end the war in Yemen was currently stalled because of the Iran-backed Houthis. "There is no stability without addressing the concerns of the countries in the region about Iran's behavior, the issue of Iran's ballistic missiles and interventions must be addressed; the ball is now in the Houthis' court," Prince Faisal told Al Arabiya during an interview.

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2021/05/19/Saudi-FM-says-ball-is-in-Houthis-court-for-Yemen-ceasefire>

Arab Coalition destroys armed Houthi drone targeting Jazan

Saudi Gazette, 20th May, 2021

The Arab Coalition on Thursday intercepted and destroyed an explosive-laden drone launched by the Iranian-backed Houthi militia toward the Saudi city of Jazan, a statement from the coalition said. In the statement, the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen said that the Houthi militia continues to try to target civilians, adding: "It is taking operational measures to protect civilians and civilian facilities from terrorist attacks." A week ago, the Arab Coalition said it intercepted and destroyed as many as 8 armed drones and 3 ballistic missiles launched by the Houthi militia targeting Saudi Arabia.

<https://www.saudigazette.com.sa/article/606823/SAUDI-ARABIA/Arab-Coalition-destroys-armed-Houthi-drone-targeting-Jazan>

MWL welcomes Gaza ceasefire, says violence will never be answer

Saudi Gazette, 21st May, 2021

The Muslim World League (MWL) has welcomed the announcement of an unconditional ceasefire to end the recent hostilities in Gaza, Jerusalem, and elsewhere. The MWL urges immediate efforts to address the long-standing grievances of the Palestinian people. The MWL, which is headquartered in the holy city of Makkah and represents the interests of the world's 1.8 billion Muslims, believes that preserving the sanctity of life for innocent men, women and children must be paramount. The MWL concurrently demands that authorities preserve the sanctity of Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem and elsewhere, and avert any evictions or other provocative actions against the Palestinians that would only risk reigniting the crisis.

<https://www.saudigazette.com.sa/article/606875/SAUDI-ARABIA/MWL-welcomes-Gaza-ceasefire-says-violence-will-never-be-answer>

Expertise refined during the concluded Saudi-US military exercise

Saudi Gazette, 22nd May, 2021

A joint military exercise between the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF) and the United States Air Force (USAF) concluded recently, Saudi Press Agency reported on Saturday. Maneuvers carried out during exercise Desert Mirage 3 aimed to refine expertise, and raise the level of joint combat readiness. It aims to deepen the bonds of cooperation between Saudi and American forces in order to reach the deterrent force required for any possible attack threatening

the security and safety of the region. The exercise also highlighted air capabilities, operational integration, and strengthening the concept of air command and control.

<https://www.saudigazette.com.sa/article/606898/SAUDI-ARABIA/Expertise-refined-during-the-concluded-Saudi-US-military-exercise>

Arab Coalition foils Houthi attack using explosive-laden boat in Red Sea

Saudi Gazette, 24th May, 2021

The Arab Coalition said it has foiled an attack launched by the Houthi militia using a booby-trapped boat in the southern Red Sea. In a statement on Monday, the spokesman of the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen said that Iranian-backed militia continues to threaten shipping lines and global trade. The militia is using the Stockholm Agreement as an umbrella to launch hostile attacks from Hodeidah, the spokesman added.

Russia and Saudi Arabia prepare for joint manned space mission

Alarabiya, 26th May, 2021

Russia is training cosmonauts from Saudi Arabia as both countries are preparing for a joint manned space mission, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak was quoted as saying in a government statement on Tuesday. "Speaking of the two countries' work on the joint use of outer space, Alexander Novak said the work under way was promising, in particular on the training of cosmonauts and the development of a joint manned space mission," the government said after an online meeting of the intergovernmental commission of Russia and Saudi Arabia.

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2021/05/26/Russia-and-Saudi-Arabia-prepare-for-joint-manned-space-mission>

SYRIA

Little-known groups target Turkish military presence in Syria

Al-Monitor, 20th May, 2021

A group that goes by the name of Ansar Abu Bakr al-Siddiq Brigade has claimed responsibility for an attack against Turkish forces as they crossed the Bab al-Hawa/Idlib road near the village of Kafraya, east of Idlib city in northwest Syria. This attack is the second one for which Ansar Abi Bakr Al-Siddiq Brigade claimed responsibility in the past two months. On March 15, it claimed responsibility for an explosion that targeted a fuel tanker near a Turkish military convoy close to Idlib.

The little-known group had also claimed attacks targeting the Turkish army in Idlib in August and September 2020. Another previously unknown group calling itself the Khattab al-Shishani Brigades also says it has targeted Turkish soldiers in Idlib several times since July 2020.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/05/little-known-groups-target-turkish-military-presence-syria#ixzz6wWwTD3B2>

Russian MoD: Al-Nusra terrorists preparing to stage new chemical provocations in Idlib

Syrian Arab News Agency, 24th May, 2021

The Russian Defense Ministry has announced that Jabhat al-Nusra terrorists are preparing to stage a new false flag

chemical attack against the civilians in Idleb western countryside to accuse the Syrian Arab Army of it. “On the eve of the presidential elections in Syria, terrorists are planning to stage false flag chemical attack against the local population to accuse the Syrian government forces of it,” Deputy commander of the Russian Coordination Center in Hmeimim, Rear Admiral, Alexander Karpov said in a press statement on Sunday. Karpov added that according to the information, al-Nusra terrorists, in coordination with the “White Helmets” terrorists, moved today “6” containers containing toxic chlorine to the Jisr al-Shaghour area, in preparation for the fabrication of the alleged attack.

<http://www.sana.sy/en/?p=234228>

Russia reveals deployment of nuclear-capable bombers to Syria airbase

Al-Monitor, 25th May, 2021

Russia has based nuclear-capable bomber aircraft on the Mediterranean for the first time, the Defense Ministry in Moscow said Tuesday. Three Tupolev Tu-22M3 long-range bombers were sent to Russia’s Hmeimim Air Base in western Syria after improvements were made to runways at the site. The aircraft will participate in training exercises over the eastern Mediterranean before returning to Russia, the ministry said. If confirmed, the deployment would demonstrate an extension of Russia’s aircraft-based nuclear strike range well into the Middle East and Mediterranean region. Moscow has flown Tu-22s in combat missions in Syria before, but they were not based in the country.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/05/russia->

[reveals-deployment-nuclear-capable-bombers-syria-airbase#ixzz6wWvvhai9](https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/05/islamic-state-escalates-operations-against-syrian-forces-during-ramadan#ixzz6wWvvhai9)

Islamic State escalates operations against Syrian forces during Ramadan

Al-Monitor, 25th May, 2021

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said in a recent report that a military convoy affiliated with the Syrian government and allied Iranian militias were ambushed by the Islamic State (IS) on May 18 in the south of al-Mateyah village in the Maskanah desert, east of Aleppo. According to SOHR sources, five four-wheel-drive vehicles of the government’s 25th Division and Iranian militias were attacked while passing through the area. Clashes ensued between IS members and government-affiliated forces, which led to the killing of eight people, including a commander of the Iranian militias. Between March 24, 2019, and May 18, the UK-based war monitor documented the killing of 1,430 government forces and Syrian and foreign fighters loyal to them, including two Russians at least.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/05/islamic-state-escalates-operations-against-syrian-forces-during-ramadan#ixzz6wWxYzLnQ>

US warns allies of sanctions for those who engage with Syria’s Assad regime

Alarabiya, 26th May, 2021

Syria held presidential elections on Wednesday, despite the United States and Europe saying they would not recognize the outcome, which is widely expected to see Bashar al-Assad re-elected. And as Assad continues to cement his grip on power in the war-torn country, a senior State Department official warned against normalizing ties

with the Syrian president. Several Arab states have re-established diplomatic ties with Damascus, and reports suggest that more countries could follow suit. Iran and Russia have invested fighters and money to prop up Bashar al-Assad, who has been in power for 21 years.

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2021/05/26/US-warns-allies-of-sanctions-for-those-who-engage-with-Syria-s-Assad-regime>

TURKEY

Turkey's 1st indigenous utility helicopter Gokbey to go full-scale testing

Anadolu Agency, 21st May, 2021

The Turkish Aerospace Industry (TAI) announced on Friday that the first indigenous multirole utility helicopter, Gokbey, will undertake full-scale static testing (FSST), which enables original products to test critical parts before performing flight activities.

The Gokbey is the country's first indigenous new generation multirole helicopter, a twin-engine, six-ton class helicopter designed in response to a growing market demand.

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/science-technology/turkeys-1st-indigenous-utility-helicopter-gokbey-to-go-full-scale-testing-/2250334>

Russia Reacts Coolly To Erdogan's Proposal To Establish Joint Middle East Peacekeeping Force

MEMRI TV, 21st May, 2021

The one opportunity for a more active Russian role came when Russia was invited by her frenemy, Turkish President Recep

Tayyip Erdogan to participate in a peacekeeping contingent to the conflict zone. In a phone conversation Erdogan asked Russian President Vladimir Putin to back the proposal at the UN, given the countries shared position on the Jerusalem crisis. Erdogan explained to Putin that UN Security Council involvement in the situation was crucial and that the organization "should demonstrate a tough and decisive position to compel Israel to stop attacking" the Gaza Strip. Erdogan noted that one of the main mandates of the peacekeeping force was to protect the Palestinians"^[2] Erdogan was effectively dangling before Putin the prize of greater Russian influence in the region and supplanting the US as the main peacemaker. The proposal did not entice Putin and press commentary was generally skeptical and claimed that Erdogan basically wanted to yoke Russia to a mission that would enhance Erdogan's position.

<https://www.memri.org/reports/russia-reacts-coolly-erdogans-proposal-establish-joint-middle-east-peacekeeping-force>

Turkish Armed Forces conduct joint military drill with 5 allies

Daily Sabah, 24th May, 2021

"The International Anatolian Phoenix-2021 Drill," with the participation of military elements of the United States, Azerbaijan, Qatar, Slovakia and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), aims to improve education, cooperation and coordination between the countries' personnel rescue teams. The drill will be conducted until June 4.

The Turkish Air Forces' F-16 jets, E-7T planes, ANKA-S drones, Casa CN-235

planes will be used in the drill as well as the Turkish Land Forces' AS-532 and T-129 helicopters, a Gendarmerie Command S-70 helicopter and a Special Forces Command S-70 helicopter. Among other task forces participating in the event, a Turkish Naval Forces' SAT mission task force will be in attendance.

<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkish-armed-forces-conduct-joint-military-drill-with-5-allies>

Poland buys 24 Turkish drones in first for NATO and EU

Daily Sabah, 24th May, 2021

Poland's purchase of Turkish armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) marks the first time a NATO or European Union member state acquired drones from Turkey, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said Monday. The deal will be a boost for the Turkish defense sector, which Erdoğan has said should meet the country's own military hardware requirements and export to allies abroad.

The sale was announced during a state visit to Ankara by Poland's President Andrzej Duda, who will head to Istanbul on Tuesday to visit the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and Polonezköy, a village established by Polish emigres fleeing retribution after the 1830 uprising. Poland will buy 24 Bayraktar TB2 drones from the private Baykar company, which has also exported the TB2 model to Ukraine, Qatar and Azerbaijan.

<https://www.dailysabah.com/business/defense/poland-buys-24-turkish-drones-in-first-for-nato-and-eu>

Hamas: Maritime demarcation with Turkey to bear positive outcomes

Daily Sabah, 25th May, 2021

Bilateral talks for maritime demarcation between Turkey and Palestine in the Eastern Mediterranean will bear positive outcomes, Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh stated on Monday, underlining that “any step the Palestinian state will take together with Turkey, will be to the advantage of both countries.” Speaking during an interview with Habertürk news channel, Haniyeh said: “Turkey’s rights in the Eastern Mediterranean can of course not be opened to discussion. All policies prioritizing Turkey’s own interests and security are its right. At the same time, when we consider that the Palestinian state is also a country with a shore on the Eastern Mediterranean, it has the same rights.”

<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/hamas-maritime-demarcation-with-turkey-to-bear-positive-outcomes>

Biden's nominee pledges to 'eliminate' Turkey from F-35 program

Daily Sabah, 26th May, 2021

U.S. President Joe Biden’s Air Force secretary nominee pledged to halt the manufacturing of F-35 components in Turkey, which continues to be one of the stumbling blocks in bilateral ties between the two countries. “Under the current situation with Turkey, I think we should not be making F-35 parts in Turkey,” Frank Kendall told the Senate Committee on Armed Services Tuesday. In response to a question about if he would do everything to ensure that the manufacturing of the

aforementioned components was halted in a timely manner, Kendall said, “Yes, I will.”

<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/bidens-nominee-pledges-to-eliminate-turkey-from-f-35-program>

Guided missile from Turkey's armed unmanned surface vessel hits target

Anadolu Agency, 28th May, 2021

Turkey's T129 ATAK helicopter has been upgraded with the identification friend or foe (IFF) system developed by Turkish defense giant Aselsan, according to information gathered by Anadolu Agency.

Aselsan's IFF Mod 5/S transponder has been integrated into the T129 ATAK helicopter and all tests have been successfully completed. All ATAK helicopters to be delivered from now on will come with the upgrade.

The transponder is already being used in a number of helicopters, airplanes, unmanned aerial vehicles, and ships, with NATO armies also transitioning to the IFF Mod 5/S. IFF is a radar-based secure identification system that detects and tells the difference between friendly and enemy elements.

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkeys-atak-chopper-upgraded-with-aselsans-recognition-system/2257132>

YEMEN

Hezbollah military expert killed in raid in Marib: Yemeni army source

Alarabiya, 25th May, 2021

A military expert from Lebanon's Hezbollah was killed in a raid by Arab Coalition forces in Yemen's Marib, a Yemeni army source told Al Arabiya on

Tuesday. Al-Gharawi was killed in the Serwah front, west of Marib, where he had joined the Houthis from Sanaa on April 21, according to the source. Mustafa al-Gharawi, a member of Hezbollah's military team working with the Iran-backed Houthi militia, was killed by an airstrike on Monday, the source added. The Yemeni army had on Monday announced the downing of two drones launched by the Iran-backed Houthis, one of which targeted a popular market in Marib. Several civilians were killed as a result, the army said.

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2021/05/25/Hezbollah-military-expert-killed-in-raid-in-Marib-Yemeni-army-source>