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

BY KUSHAL AGRAWAL

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मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

IRAN

Iran can enrich uranium to 60% and beyond

Tehran Times, 16th April, 2021

In the latest move to achieve advanced nuclear technology, Iran announced on Friday that it produced the first batch of 60% enriched uranium for the first time.

“On Wednesday, we ordered the launch of 60% and today at 00: 40 AM (Friday) we got the 60% product. The product we produce now is about 9 grams per hour. They are working on arranging the chains, which reduces our production of 60% [enriched uranium] and may reach 5 to 6 grams. But with these two chains, we produce 20% [enriched uranium] at the same time,” Ali Akbar Salehi, head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), told state TV on Friday noon.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/459894/Iran-can-enrich-uranium-to-60-and-beyond>

Leader: Nuclear deal talks must not be prolonged

Tehran Times, 16th April, 2021

In a televised speech broadcast late on Wednesday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei pointed to the ongoing negotiations in Vienna for a possible revival of the 2015 nuclear deal, saying negotiations must not last long. “We do not argue (about the negotiations), but care must be taken not to prolong the negotiations,” the Leader remarked. He advised the parties not to delay the negotiations because it is detrimental to the country.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/459872/Leader-Nuclear-deal-talks-must-not-be-prolonged>

Taliban needs to reform based on democratic ways, says Zarif

Tehran Times, 16th April, 2021

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif spoke at the Raisina Dialogue 2021 forum on situation in Afghanistan on Friday, saying the Taliban needs to reform itself. The forum, organized by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, was also attended by Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, India’s Minister of External Affairs, and Hamdullah Mohib, National Security Advisor to the Afghan government. “The commitment of the U.S. to finally withdraw from Afghanistan is a positive move. The Taliban should not use this opportunity to increase their violence. They should understand that the people of Afghanistan have had enough violence,” said the minister. Zarif said he believes that the Taliban has to reform based on democratic ways. “If they want to go back to their 90s ideology, it will be impossible, as there is a new and different Afghanistan today,” Zarif remarked.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/459900/Taliban-needs-to-reform-based-on-democratic-ways-says-Zarif>

Biden says enrichment to 60% by Iran not helpful, but glad about talks

Tehran Times, 17th April, 2021

U.S. President Joe Biden said on Friday that Iran's enrichment of uranium to 60% purity is not helpful but said he is pleased Tehran is still in indirect talks with the U.S. about both countries resuming compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). "We do not support and do not think it's at all helpful that Iran is saying it's going to move to enrich to 60 percent," Biden told reporters in Washington during

a joint news conference with Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga. "We are, though, nonetheless pleased that Iran has continued to agree to engage in discussions - indirect discussions - with us and with our partners on how we move forward and what is needed to allow us to move back into the (nuclear deal)," Reuters quoted Biden as adding.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/45992/0/Biden-says-enrichment-to-60-by-Iran-not-helpful-but-glad-about>

IAEA confirms Iran has started enriching 60% uranium

Tehran Times, 18th April, 2021

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said on Saturday that Iran has begun the process of enriching uranium to 60 percent fissile purity at the nuclear plant in Natanz, confirming earlier statements by Iranian officials. "The Agency today verified that Iran had begun the production of UF6 enriched up to 60%... at the (above-ground) Natanz Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant," the UN nuclear watchdog said in a statement. More information was given in a confidential IAEA report to member states obtained by Reuters. "According to Iran's declaration to the Agency, the enrichment level of the UF6 produced at PFEP was 55.3% U-235. The Agency took a sample of the produced UF6 for destructive analysis to independently verify the enrichment level declared by Iran. The results of this analysis will be reported by the Agency in due course," the report said.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/45998/7/IAEA-confirms-Iran-has-started-enriching-60-uranium>

Iran, P4+1 start drafting nuclear deal, Russia says

Tehran Times, 20th April, 2021

Diplomats from Iran and the remaining parties to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal have entered the stage of drafting a new agreement to revive the nuclear deal, the Russian envoy to the Vienna nuclear talks said on Monday. Russia's representative to the international organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov expressed satisfaction with the fact that negotiating teams in Vienna started drafting a new agreement on how to revive the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"Summing up the results of 2 weeks of deliberations on JCPOA restoration we can note with satisfaction that the negotiations entered the drafting stage. Practical solutions are still far away, but we have moved from general words to agreeing on specific steps towards the goal," Ulyanov said on Twitter.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/46003/4/Iran-P4-1-start-drafting-nuclear-deal-Russia-says>

Iran has taken air superiority from U.S., says CENTCOM

Tehran Times, 21st April, 2021

"For the first time since the Korean War, we are operating without complete air superiority," Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander Gen. Kenneth McKenzie acknowledged on Tuesday. The Marine Corps general in charge of the U.S. CENTCOM made the acknowledgment in a House Armed Services Committee hearing. McKenzie said that Iran is extensively using small and medium-sized drones for surveillance and attack.

He added, “What we have found is that, particularly against Iran, they do not like their activities to be exposed.” On June 20, 2019, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) shot down a United States RQ-4A Global Hawk BAMS-D surveillance drone with a surface-to-air missile over the Strait of Hormuz.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/460117/Iran-has-taken-air-superiority-from-U-S-says-CENTCOM>

Russia, China hail success at Vienna nuclear talks

Tehran Times, 21st April, 2021

Russian and Chinese diplomats participating in Vienna discussions over how to resurrect the 2015 Iran nuclear deal welcome progress made in the latest round of talks. Wang Qun, the Chinese envoy to the United Nations and other international organizations in Vienna, said that the negotiations in recent days have been “beneficial” and that the current negotiations have entered a new stage, according to the Chinese state news agency Xinhua. “Complete lifting of all relevant sanctions, including those on Iran and third parties, is the key to the success of the current negotiations to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal,” the Chinese diplomat was quoted by Xinhua

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/460116/Russia-China-hail-success-at-Vienna-nuclear-talks>

Change in mode of uranium enrichment ‘technical,’ Iran says

Tehran Times, 23rd April, 2021

Iran’s ambassador to the Vienna-based international organizations has offered explanation about the country’s decision to change the mode by which it was producing

uranium up to 60%, saying the decision was “technical.” “There is no need for odd speculations. Change in the mode of 60% enrichment is a technical decision and was foreseen in the DIQ which was provided to the IAEA last week before the operation,” Kazem Gharibabadi said on Twitter on Friday. He added, “In the new mode, two IR-6 & IR-4 cascades are coupled and with one time UF₆ injection enriched up to 5%, two different products of 60 & 20% is accumulated. Enrichment operation became more efficient.” The Iranian diplomat was commenting on press reports suggesting that Iran had changed the mode of producing 60% uranium enrichment.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/460160/Change-in-mode-of-uranium-enrichment-technical-Iran-says>

Iranian Army unveils turbojet engine, new radar

Tehran Times, 25th April, 2021

On Sunday, the Iranian Army unveiled seven indigenously-developed high-tech military equipment, including air defense systems, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and electronic warfare devices. The ceremony rolled out a radar warning system capable of detecting and jamming airborne interception radars used in drones, helicopters and fighter jets, in addition to an alarm system for detection of laser-guided weaponry and airborne threats, which can be employed against the enemy’s short-range air defense systems and has the ability to send alerts to UAV ground control stations, Press TV reported. The Ground Force also showcased Ranesh-1 (Propulsion-1) micro turbojet engine, which can be used in various drones, single-seat light aircraft, a wide array of missile systems, and unmanned boats. The other home-grown products included self-

protection and drone-mounted TIAM 1400 system for detection of the enemy's radars and air surveillance.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/46023/1/Iranian-Army-unveils-turbojet-engine-new-radar>

Step-by-step plan for reviving JCPOA has been set aside, says Araghchi

Tehran Times, 25th April, 2021

Deputy Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi said on Sunday that a step-by-step removal of sanctions plan for possible revival of the JCPOA has been put aside altogether. "The step-by-step plan has long been abandoned. The Islamic Republic of Iran rejected the step-by-step proposal to lift the sanctions before Nowruz (Iranian New Year), and the issue of step-by-step negotiations is out of the question," Araghchi told reporters on a meeting with MPs sitting on Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee. He said, "Discussions on the final stage of the continuation of the agreement, i.e. the arrangements envisaged by the Islamic Republic, are being discussed."

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/46025/6/Step-by-step-plan-for-reviving-JCPOA-has-been-set-aside-says>

Iran, P4+1 agree to expedite the process to restore JCPOA

Tehran Times, 27th April, 2021

The new round of the JCPOA Joint Commission meeting began on Tuesday and ended in a positive manner, with all sides agreeing to expedite the process of reviving the 2015 nuclear deal. At the meeting, the negotiators decided to continue expert group meetings in the two areas of lifting sanctions and the nuclear measures required to be taken by Iran in an

"intensive and rapid" way. It was also decided to set up a third expert group called the "executive arrangements expert group" to discuss practical arrangements needed to implement the process of lifting of sanctions and then the return of the United States to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/46033/7/Iran-P4-1-agree-to-expedite-the-process-to-restore-JCPOA>

U.S., P4+1 have no choice but to surrender to Iran, says Rouhani

Tehran Times, 28th April, 2021

Speaking to his cabinet on Wednesday, President Hassan Rouhani discussed sanction issues and reiterated that the U.S. and P4+1 have no choice but to surrender to Iran's rightfulness.

"They (the enemies) conspired for four years to isolate Iran, but now the Americans and P4+1 have realized that they have no choice but surrender to the international law and Iran's rightfulness", Rouhani added. 'Framework for the nuclear deal has been designed by the leader' He reiterated that the Leader has clarified the path to the deal, and the negotiating team is walking in the same direction.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/46039/0/U-S-P4-1-have-no-choice-but-to-surrender-to-Iran-says-Rouhani>

US Navy fires warning shots in encounter with Iranian patrol boats

Al-Monitor, 28th April, 2021

A US Navy patrol ship fired warning shots to ward off Iranian fast-attack boats in the Persian Gulf on Monday, marking the second run-in between the two countries' naval forces this month. Three boats belonging to the navy of Iran's Islamic

Revolutionary Guard Corps abruptly approached the USS Firebolt and Coast Guard USCGC Baranoff in the northern Persian Gulf and ignored both radio and loud-hailer warnings, the US' Fifth Fleet said. The IRGC vessels came within 70 yards of the US patrol ships, but backed off after crew members on the USS Firebolt fired warning shots. The two US ships "were conducting routine maritime security operations in international waters during the time of the incident," the Navy said, adding that such actions increase the risk of collision and unintended escalation.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/us-navy-fires-warning-shots-encounter-iranian-patrol-boats#ixzz6vAVjXFqT>

IRAQ

No plans for full US withdrawal from Iraq, top general says

Al-Monitor, 21st April, 2021

The top commander of US forces in the Middle East told lawmakers that he does not foresee a full US withdrawal from Iraq amid continued dialogue with officials in Baghdad. "That move is not contemplated," head of US Central Command Gen. Kenneth "Frank" McKenzie told members of the House Armed Services Committee during a hearing on Tuesday. "I don't see us withdrawing completely from Iraq in the future," he said. McKenzie's response was prompted by a question posed by Rep. Scott DesJarlais (R-TN) about the potential consequences of removing the roughly 2,500 US troops who remain in Iraq as the core of the multinational campaign against the Islamic State.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/no-plans->

[full-us-withdrawal-iraq-top-general-says#ixzz6vAcpGU26](https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/baghdad-airport-hit-latest-iraq-rocket-strike-no-injuries#ixzz6vAcpGU26)

Baghdad airport hit in latest Iraq rocket strike, no injuries

Al-Monitor, 23rd April, 2021

Baghdad International Airport, which houses personnel of the US-led international military coalition against the Islamic State, was targeted by at least three rockets on Thursday night. No one was reported injured in the strike, which landed at the edge of the airport near an area housing US military forces, according to an Iraqi military statement. Iraqi military personnel reportedly located the rockets' launch site near the Baghdad neighborhood of al-Jihad and defused unlaunched rockets, according to the statement. The barrage is at least the fourth such attack on Iraqi security facilities in just over two weeks, and the second targeting sites used by US military personnel.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/baghdad-airport-hit-latest-iraq-rocket-strike-no-injuries#ixzz6vAd8ao50>

Turkish forces in fresh offensive against PKK in Iraqi Kurdistan

Al-Monitor, 29th April, 2021

The Turkish military has launched a critically timed ground and air offensive against Kurdish militants in a mountain range in neighboring Iraqi Kurdistan, the latest in a series of cross-border campaigns since 2019 that have resulted in dozens of Turkish bases in the region. The extensive offensive, consisting of two operations codenamed Claw-Lightning and Claw-Thunderbolt, began late April 23, targeting the Zap, Metina and Avashin areas, home to long-standing camps of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), the armed outfit that

has fought Ankara since 1984 and is designated as a terrorist group by much of the international community. The operation involves fighter jets, attack helicopters and combat and surveillance drones as well as artillery units at the border. On the ground, commando forces have moved in, both by land and by airdrops.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/turkish-forces-fresh-offensive-against-pkk-iraqi-kurdistan#ixzz6vAjqZDBY>

Turkey to establish new military base in Iraqi Kurdistan

Al-Monitor, 30th April, 2021

Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soyly announced today that Turkey will establish a military base in Metina, a mountainous area close to the Turkish border in Iraqi Kurdistan, to surveil the broader region. Speaking to members of the ruling Justice and Development Party's executive board, Soyly said, "Metina is an important region. Just as we did in Syria, we will build a base here and monitor the region. This area is a route to Qandil; we will control this route." Soyly was referring to the Qandil mountains on the Iraq-Iran border, where the main command center of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) is based.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/turkey-establish-new-military-base-iraqi-kurdistan#ixzz6vAkyvJ9M>

ISRAEL

Syrian missile exposes Israel's fragility

Al-Monitor, 23rd April, 2021

According to Israeli military assessments, the Syrian anti-aircraft missile that

exploded in the pre-dawn hours of April 22 near the southern town of Dimona was not targeting Israel's nearby nuclear reactor. However, the Israel Defense Forces are concerned about the failure of sophisticated anti-missile defenses to intercept the Syrian missile on its 300-kilometer (190-mile) trajectory to such a strategically sensitive area. The Israeli air force is investigating the failed intercept, which raises troubling questions regarding Israel's defenses in the event of a widespread escalation along its northern front.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/syrian-missile-exposes-israels-fragility#ixzz6vBlxUwBJ>

LEBANON

US to send mediation team for Israel-Lebanon maritime talks next week

Al-Monitor, 30th April, 2021

The United States will send a delegation next week to mediate resumed maritime border talks between Israel and Lebanon aimed at resolving a dispute over potentially lucrative oil and gas resources in the eastern Mediterranean. A US mediating team led by Ambassador John P. Desrocher will travel to Lebanon on Monday, according to a statement from the State Department. The talks between representatives from the Lebanese and Israeli governments are due to resume on Tuesday. "The U.S. welcomes the resumption of the Israel-Lebanon maritime talks," State Department spokesman Ned Price tweeted on Friday.

"We are committed to mediating and facilitating negotiations at the request of both countries as they work toward an

agreement benefiting Lebanese and Israeli citizens.”

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/us-send-mediation-team-israel-lebanon-maritime-talks-next-week#ixzz6vAscAe8u>

SAUDI ARABIA

Fmr. Saudi Intelligence Chief Prince Turki Al-Faisal: I Do Not Believe The JCPOA Will Stop Iran From Obtaining Nuclear Weapons; GCC Countries Have The Capabilities To Obtain Nuclear Weapons In Response

MEMRI TV, 17th April, 2021

Former Saudi intelligence chief and ambassador to the U.S. Prince Turki Al-Faisal said that he does not believe that the JCPOA will stop Iran from gaining nuclear capabilities. He made these remarks in an interview that aired on Al-Arabiya Network (Saudi Arabia) on April 17, 2021. Prince Al-Faisal elaborated that the fact that Iran continued to enrich uranium even while the nuclear deal was in effect proves that what it really wants is to obtain nuclear weapons. He said that if the GCC countries decide that they too must obtain nuclear weapons in response, they have the capabilities to do so.

<https://www.memri.org/tv/fmr-saudi-intel-chief-prince-turki-faisal-not-believe-jcpoa-stop-iran-obtaining-nukes-gcc-capable>

Saudi Arabia, Iran held direct talks in bid to ease tensions

Al-Monitor, 19th April, 2021

Top officials from Saudi Arabia and Iran held talks in Baghdad earlier this month in a bid to ease tensions between the regional

rivals. The talks, first reported by the Financial Times, are thought to be the first direct discussions since Riyadh and Tehran severed diplomatic ties in 2016. They also come as the US administration under President Joe Biden renews a diplomatic push to end Yemen’s civil war and seeks to return to the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran. Though the talks held in Baghdad on April 9 were described as positive, no clear outcome was achieved, according to Reuters. One Iranian official described talks as “low-level” and exploratory. The two sides discussed Yemen’s Houthis targeting Saudi territory with what the United States says is Iranian weapons technology. They also discussed the ongoing political crisis in Lebanon amid that country’s financial collapse.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/saudi-arabia-iran-held-direct-talks-bid-ease-tensions#ixzz6vApdBfxD>

Greece to loan Patriot missile units to Saudi Arabia

Al-Monitor, 21st April, 2021

Greece will lend a US-made Patriot missile air defense system to Saudi Arabia to help protect energy infrastructure, according to an agreement signed by the two countries in Riyadh this week.

Greek Defense Minister Nikos Panagiotopoulos inked the deal with Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan in the kingdom’s capital on Tuesday, calling it a “big step forward for our country regarding cooperation with the Gulf countries” and “a contribution to the wider security of the energy sources for the West.” Saudi Arabia has suffered repeated missile and drone attacks from Iran-linked groups in the region over Riyadh’s support for the

Yemeni government against Houthi rebels in the country's civil war.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/greece-loan-patriot-missile-units-saudi-arabia#ixzz6vBkqaIbK>

Houthis claim drone attack on Aramco site, Saudi air base

Al-Monitor, 23rd April, 2021

Yemen's Houthi rebels claimed to have fired bomb-laden drones on an oil facility and an air base in southern Saudi Arabia, the latest in a series of cross-border attacks targeting the kingdom. Houthi military spokesman Yahya Sarea tweeted on Friday that the Iran-aligned group targeted "important and sensitive locations" at the King Khalid Air Base in the southwestern Saudi city of Khamis Mushait, as well as an oil site owned by Saudi Aramco in the Red Sea city of Jizan.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/houthis-claim-drone-attack-aramco-site-saudi-air-base#ixzz6vBmKfBA4>

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Al Saud: We Agree With Biden Administration On 90% Of Issues; China, Russia, India Are Strategic Partners Of Saudi Arabia; We Will Not Accept Interference In Our Internal Affairs

MEMRI TV, 27th April, 2021

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud said that Saudi Arabia and the Biden administration agree on "over 90% of the U.S.-Saudi interests." He made these remarks in an interview with Channel 1 (Saudi Arabia) which aired on April 27, 2021. Bin Salman said that American

influence on the world economy has decreased in the past decades, and that "the world has begun to regain its balance." He added that Saudi Arabia hopes to maintain its strategic ties with its partners in the region, to strengthen its alliances with its partners throughout the world, and to strike up new partnerships. Bin Salman said that today, China, Russia, and India consider Saudi Arabia to be their strategic partner. He added that Saudi Arabia will never accept any pressure or interference in its internal affairs.

<https://www.memri.org/tv/ksa-crown-prince-mbs-saudi-agree-90-percent-issues-biden-america-china-russia-india-strategic-partners-not-accept-intervention>

Saudi Arabia seeks 'good' relationship with Iran, says crown prince

Al-Monitor, 28th April, 2021

Saudi Arabia's crown prince said his country is aiming for a "good and positive relationship" with its archrival Iran more than five years after the two countries cut ties. "Iran is a neighboring country, and all we aspire for is a good and special relationship with Iran," Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said in a TV interview broadcast on Tuesday. "We do not want Iran's situation to be difficult. On the contrary, we want Iran to grow ... and to push the region and the world toward prosperity," said the crown prince. Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler added that he hopes to "build a good and positive relationship with Iran that would benefit everyone."

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/saudi-arabia-seeks-good-relationship-iran-says-crown-prince#ixzz6vAq8vDjQ>

SYRIA

Russian Defense: Eliminating 200 terrorists in strikes by aerospace forces on their bases near Palmyra

Syrian Arab News Agency, 20th April, 2021

Russian Defense Ministry announced Monday that Russian Aerospace Forces aircrafts have destroyed a base for training terrorists near Palmyra city, killing about 220 terrorists, noting that the terrorist organizations are planning to carry out terrorist practices in Syria to destabilize it.

Rear Adm. Alexander Karpov, Deputy Head of Russian Coordination Center in Hmeimim said in a press statement that there is information about that terrorist organizations have established terrorist base northeast of Palmyra, in addition to producing handmade explosive devices and creating terrorist groups to dispatching them to several areas in the country to carry out terrorist operations there. Karpov added that after confirming the data about the terrorists' positions, Russian Aerospace Forces aircrafts carried out airstrikes, asserting that they eliminated two hideouts and up to 200 militants, 24 four-wheel drive vehicle equipped with machineguns, as well destroying 500 kg of ammunition and raw materials for producing hand-made explosive devices.

<http://www.sana.sy/en/?p=230381>

Syria condemns decision of Conference of States Parties in Chemical Weapons' Convention

Syrian Arab News Agency, 21st April, 2021

Syria strongly condemned decision which was passed on Wednesday by Western countries at the 25th session of the Conference of States-Parties in the

Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons against Syria, stressing that it constitutes a dangerous development in the organization' track and contradicts its charter. "The Syrian Arab Republic condemns, in the strongest terms, the hostile approach embodied today in the work of the twenty-fifth session of the Conference of the States Parties in the Chemical Weapons convention, as western countries, especially the US , Britain and France practiced the most heinous methods of blackmail, threats and pressure to pass a Western decision against Syria in a dangerous precedent in the history of the organization." a statement by Foreign and Expatriates Ministry said.

<http://www.sana.sy/en/?p=230507>

Russian Defense Ministry observes 25 terrorist attacks from de-escalation zone in Idleb

Syrian Arab News Agency, 25th April, 2021

Russian Ministry of Defense announced that terrorist organizations deployed in the de-escalation zone of Idleb carried out 25 attacks during the last hours. Deputy commander of the Russian Coordination Center in Hmeimim, Rear Admiral, Alexander Karpov, said in a statement that 25 attacks were observed from areas where terrorist organizations are present in Idleb, including 12 attacks in Idleb, 6 in Lattakia, 6 in Hama and 1 in Aleppo. The Russian Defense Ministry announced Friday that the terrorist organizations in the de-escalation zone in Idleb are planning new provocations by fabricating the use of chemical weapons to accuse the Syrian Arab Army.

<http://www.sana.sy/en/?p=230868>

Russian Defense Ministry observes 34 terrorist attacks from de-escalation zone in Idleb on neighboring areas

Syrian Arab News Agency, 27th April, 2021

Russian Ministry of Defense announced that terrorist organizations deployed in the de-escalation zone of Idleb carried out 34 attacks during the last hours. Deputy commander of the Russian Coordination Center in Hmeimim, Rear Admiral, Alexander Karpov, said in a statement that 34 attacks were observed from areas where terrorist organizations are present in Idleb, including 15 attacks in Idleb, 14 in Lattakia and 5 in Hama. The Russian Defense Ministry announced on Tuesday that the terrorist organizations deployed in the de-escalation zone in of Idleb have carried out 25 attacks during the past hours.

<http://www.sana.sy/en/?p=231121>

TURKEY

Sweden continues YPG support as talks with terrorist head resume

Daily Sabah, 20th April, 2021

Sweden continues to support the PKK terrorist group's Syrian branch, the YPG, as the Swedish defense minister recently held a videoconference with the terrorist group's leader Monday, pledging cooperation. Speaking with Ferhat Abdi Şahin, code-named Mazloun Kobani, head of the YPG, Peter Hultqvist underlined that Sweden is ready to resume its cooperation with the YPG "for a long time." "We need to find a solution to the problem of detention centers and prisoners. I, personally, will work on building new and improved detention centers and renovating the old ones. I will discuss this topic further with both my government and allies," the Swedish

minister reportedly said during the meeting, referring to the conditions of the imprisoned Daesh terrorists at the hands of the YPG.

<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/sweden-continues-ypg-support-as-talks-with-terrorist-head-resume>

Greek PM expresses interest in meeting Erdoğan to strengthen ties

Daily Sabah, 23rd April, 2021

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said on Thursday that there needs to be communication between Turkey and Greece, and alluded to a future meeting with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to work on improving bilateral ties.

"There will be a meeting with (Turkish President Recep Tayyip) Erdoğan. But I am not in a position to say when. The meeting will happen because we need to communicate," Mitsotakis told a private TV channel. He said the meeting would be held in the near future and said the only framework to resolve the bilateral disputes between the two countries was international law.

<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/greek-pm-expresses-interest-in-meeting-erdogan-to-strengthen-ties>

Erdoğan, Biden hold phone call, agree to meet at June NATO summit

Daily Sabah, 23rd April, 2021

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and U.S. President Joe Biden held a phone call on Friday, the White House announced.

The two leaders agreed to meet during the NATO summit in June, the statement said. The meeting will take place on the sidelines of the June 14 NATO leader meeting in Brussels, Belgium, and will be

used "to discuss the full range of bilateral and regional issues," the White House said after the leaders held a bilateral telephone call. The call is the first between Biden and Erdoğan since the American president assumed office in January.

<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/erdogan-biden-hold-phone-call-agree-to-meet-at-june-nato-summit>

Turkish Cyprus ready for UN-led talks, 'two-state solution' on agenda

Daily Sabah, 25th April, 2021

The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) is ready to attend the United Nations-led talks in Geneva this week as President Ersin Tatar highlighted their determined position on a two-state solution while expressing his confidence in Turkey's support. Tatar answered an Anadolu Agency (AA) correspondent's questions before the U.N.-led conference on Cyprus, which will be held on April 27-29 with the participation of the Cypriot parties and the guarantor powers Turkey, Greece and the United Kingdom within the scope of the informal 5+1 format. Four years after their last peace talks failed, rival Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders will meet in Geneva next week to explore elusive "common ground" on the divided Mediterranean island.

<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkish-cyprus-ready-for-un-led-talks-two-state-solution-on-agenda>

Turkey, others should avoid Russian weapons: Blinken

Daily Sabah, 28th April, 2021

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Wednesday that Turkey and all other U.S. allies should refrain from making further purchases of Russian weaponry, saying this

could trigger more sanctions. "It's also very important going forward that Turkey, and for that matter all U.S. allies and partners, avoid future purchases of Russian weaponry, including additional S-400s," Blinken said at a virtual event at Washington's Foreign Press Center. "Any significant transactions with Russian defense entities, again, could be subject to the law, to CAATSA, and that's separate from and in addition to the sanctions that have already been imposed," he said

<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkey-others-should-avoid-russian-weapons-blinken>

Cyprus talks in Geneva lack common ground, UN chief Guterres says

Daily Sabah, 29th April, 2021

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Thursday stated that there is "no common ground yet" to resume formal negotiations on the settlement of the Cyprus problem. Diplomats had been trying to make headway to end a decades-old conflict between rival Greek and Turkish Cypriots that destabilizes the Eastern Mediterranean and is a key source of tension between NATO allies Greece and Turkey. "The truth is that at the end of our efforts, we have not yet found enough common ground to allow for the resumption of formal negotiations," Guterres told a news conference in Geneva. On the last day of the talks that started Tuesday, Guterres stated that he will convene another round of U.N. 5+1 talks to move the Cyprus process forward.

<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/cyprus-talks-in-geneva-lack-common-ground-un-chief-guterres-says>

YEMEN

Qods Force Official Rostam Ghasemi: Iran's Friends In The Region Have Retaliated Against Israel And Will Continue To Do So; We Have A Few Military Advisors In Yemen And Have Provided Weapon-Manufacturing Technology To The Yemenis

MEMRI TV, 21st April, 2021

Former Iranian Minister of Oil General Rostam Ghasemi, Qods Force Commander's assistant for economic affairs said that Israel is behind every sabotage operation around the world and in Iran and that Israel's actions will not go unanswered. He made these remarks in an interview with Russia Today TV that aired on April 21, 2021. General Ghasemi said that while Iran has "espoused a policy of patience and restraint," it has retaliated against Israel with the help of its "many friends in the region" and it will continue to do so. He added that the Yemenis participated in retaliation against Israeli ships. General Ghasemi continued to say that "all the weapons the Yemenis possess are a result of our aid."

<https://www.memri.org/tv/iran-gen-rostam-ghasemi-israel-knows-actions-not-unanswered-friends-retaliation-weapons-yemen>