

US, Russian Military Talks Quietly Proving Useful: Officials

WASHINGTON - U.S.-Russian talks on their separate fights against the Islamic State group are improving and becoming more frequent, American officials said, with each side trading information in real time and even outlining some of their strategic objectives in the months ahead. The progress dispels the notion that ties between the former Cold War foes are "frozen." In the discussions, Russia has made clear its counter-terrorism priority in Syria is retaking the ancient city of Palmyra, officials said. The U.S. is determined to pressure IS' headquarters



in Raqqa. The closer contacts have developed despite the former Cold War foes' bitter accusations against one another over the devastation in Aleppo and Moscow's claim that relations are now "frozen on all practical levels." The confidential military discussions aren't focusing on the two countries' opposing positions in Syria's civil war, where Russia is fighting alongside the government and the United States has backed rebel groups, officials said. But U.S. officials with knowledge of the ongoing ... (More on P4)...(19)

Scores of S. Korean Ruling Party Lawmakers Defect to Create New Conservative Party

SEOUL - Scores of South Korean ruling Saenuri Party lawmakers on Tuesday bolted from their party to create a new conservative party following the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye. A group of 29 members of the party's anti-President Park faction officially declared their defection and the formation of their new party tentatively named "New Conservative Party of Reformists." The defection reduced the number of Saenuri legislators to 99, lower than 121 lawmakers of the main

opposition Minjoo Party. The minor opposition People's Party has 38 parliamentary seats. The new party would usher in a four-party system in the South Korean political scene in about three decades as it meets the requirement of over 20 parliamentary seats to form a floor negotiation body. The four-party system came as the People's Party was launched earlier this year by former Minjoo Party members, while the anti-Park faction's defection divided the ... (More on P4)...(20)

Iraqi PM Says three Months Needed to Eliminate Islamic State

BAGHDAD - Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said on Tuesday it would take three months to eliminate Islamic State, as U.S.-backed forces battle to dislodge the militants from their city stronghold of Mosul. Abadi previously said the city would be retaken by the end of this year but commanders blame the slower pace on the need to protect civilians who have mostly stayed in their homes rather than fleeing as was expected. "Conditions indicate that

Iraq needs three months to eliminate Daesh (Islamic State)," state TV quoted Abadi as saying. More than two months into the operation, elite Iraqi soldiers have retaken a quarter of Mosul, but entered a planned "operational refit" this month. A U.S. battlefield commander told Reuters on Monday Iraqi forces would resume their offensive in the coming days, in a new phase of the operation that will see American troops deployed closer to the front line inside



the city. Mosul, the largest city held by Islamic State anywhere across the once-vast territory it controlled in Iraq and neighboring

Syria, has been held by the group since its fighters drove the U.S.-trained army out in June 2014. (Reuters)

Syrian Refugees in Turkey Urged to Join Forces Against IS

ISTANBUL - Some Turks have suggested enlisting Syrian refugees for the Turkish armed forces, as the death toll is growing for Turkish troops on mission in northern Syria. An online campaign was launched lately, calling for recruiting Syrian men in Turkey who are aged between 18 to 45 and sending them to the battlefield. As many as 260,000 Turks have signed on the petition within days, which will be sent to the Turkish General Staff for consid-

eration when the figure hits 300,000. Last week, 17 Turkish soldiers were killed in three suicide bomb attacks by the Islamic State (IS) militants in the northern Syrian town of al-Bab, bringing the total number of Turkish deaths to 37 since Ankara launched what it called Euphrates Shield Operation on Aug. 24 in Syria's north. The military offensive is aiming chiefly at preventing the Syrian Kurds from seizing more land for an ... (More on P4)...(21)

Obama Reflects on Election, Says he Could Have Won

WASHINGTON - In an interview released Monday, U.S. President Barack Obama said he could have won the November presidential election if it was he who faced Donald Trump. "I am confident that if I had run again and articulated it, I think I could've mobilized a majority of the American People to rally behind it," Obama said. Obama made the remarks during an interview with CNN, in which he reflected on the presidential election last month and its implications and

lessons. "I think there was a double standard with her," Obama said of Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton. "For whatever reason, there's been a longstanding difficulty in her relationship with the press that meant her flaws were wildly amplified." "The problem is that we're not there on the ground communicating not longly the dry policy aspects of this, but that we care about these communities," Obama said, hinting that the Democratic Party may have lost



touch with the grassroots. But Obama maintained that his party "is better for all working people." Trump later responded to Obama's remarks by tweeting "President

Obama said that he thinks he would have won against me. He should say that but I say NO WAY! -- jobs leaving, ISIS, OCare (Obamacare), etc." (Xinhua)

Turkish Army Hits 158 IS Targets in Northern Syria

ANKARA - Turkish army hit 158 targets of Islamic State (IS) terrorists and neutralized 13 IS terrorists in the Al-Bab area of Northern Syria, Turkish General Staff stated on Tuesday. Turkey's military often uses the word "neutralized" to imply the terrorists in question were captured, heavily wounded or killed. Ankara has criticized international coalition forces for not doing enough to support Turkey in its offensive on al-Bab against the IS, calling especially for U.S.



backing for the operation. "These circles, which always level criticism at Turkey on IS, are not giving the necessary support for our struggle against IS in Azez, Jarablus, Dabiq and

al-Bab. This is unacceptable," Turkish presidential spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin told reporters on Monday. In the past week, clashes and ... (More on P4)...(22)

Fighting in E. Ukraine Eases Amid Truce

KIEV - The ceasefire which took effect in eastern Ukraine on Saturday has brought a relative calm to some areas in the conflict-ravaged region over the weekend. Still, the rival sides accuse each other of ignoring the truce, raising worries of a possible resumption of full-scale hostilities. In the small town of Mariinka in the Donetsk region, which lies on the front-line between government troops and independence-seeking insurgents, guns fell almost silent despite the sporadic sounds of small arms being fired. The residents and soldiers living in the town, tired from months of artillery shelling, pay little attention to the shots. In the meantime, the Ukrainian Defense Ministry said the security situation in some areas along the frontline was far from peaceful during the weekend. Insurgents carried out 33 attacks on positions held by government ... (More on P4)...(23)

Romania's President Says he Won't Name Muslim Woman to be PM

BUCHAREST, Romania - Romania's president on Tuesday declined to nominate as prime minister an economist who could have become the country's first female Muslim premier. President Klaus Iohannis said he had "carefully weighed the arguments for and against" and decided not to nominate Sevil Shhaideh, 52, a relative political novice, to the post of prime minister. He called on the Social Democratic Party, which won the Dec. 11 elections to name another candidate. Iohannis' refusal prompted an angry response from the Social Democrats, which put her name forward last week. Social Democrat chairman Liviu Dragnea said the party would consider impeaching Iohannis "if ... we reach the conclusion it is good for the country." He said the party could not find a "constitutional reason or other reason ... connected to possible risks" for refusing the party's nomination. He said Iohannis "wants to start a political crisis." Dragnea is unable to become prime minister himself because he was convicted this year of election fraud. Iohannis did not say why he would not name Shhaideh, criticized by some observers for lacking sufficient political experience. She briefly served as regional development minister in 2015. (AP)

Not Much Hope for Peace as Yemen Leaves Tragic Year of War

SANAA - Yemen is receiving the new year with not much hope about peace or an end to the catastrophic humanitarian situation. The only good news after a tough year which has seen a fierce civil war, an utterly vicious Saudi-led bombing campaign and deepening crises is that Jordan is considering hosting talks between the Yemeni factions. But even this news is not calling for optimism as the talks will be dedicated to discussing possible ways for de-escalation. The talks are backed by the quartet on Yemen which comprises the United States, Britain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Adil ... (More on P4)...(24)

Russia Calls U.S. Move to Better Arm Syrian Rebels a 'Hostile Act'

MOSCOW - Russia said on Tuesday that a U.S. decision to ease restrictions on arming Syrian rebels had opened the way for deliveries of shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles, a move it said would directly threaten Russian forces in Syria. Moscow last year launched a campaign of air strikes in Syria to help President Bashar al-Assad and his forces retake territory lost to rebels, some of whom are supported by the United States. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said the policy change easing restrictions on weapons supplies had been set out in a new U.S. defence spending bill and that Moscow regarded the step as a hostile act. U.S. President Barack Obama,

who has been sharply critical of Russia's intervention in Syria, signed the annual defence policy bill into law last week. "Washington has placed its bets on supplying military aid to anti-government forces who don't differ than much from blood thirsty head choppers. Now, the possibility of supplying them with weapons, including mobile anti-aircraft complexes, has been written into this new bill," Zakharova said in a statement. "In the administration of B. Obama they must understand that any weapons handed over will quickly end up in the hands of jihadists," she added, saying that perhaps that was what the White House was counting on happening. (Reuters)

Neighbor News

China Contributes to over 70 Percent of Global Poverty Reduction

BEIJING - The number of Chinese people lifted out of poverty in the last 30 years accounts for more than 70 percent of the world's total, according to a blue paper on poverty reduction released Tuesday. Since 1978, China has made great achievements in reducing poverty. From 1978 to 2015, the rural population of China in poverty decreased from 770 million people to 55.75 million, said the blue paper co-produced by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty

Alleviation and Development. Based on the international poverty line which the World Bank updated to 1.9 U.S. dollars per person per day (in purchasing power parity) in 2011, the world's poverty population reduced by 1.1 billion people from 1981 to 2012. During the same period, China took 790 million people out of poverty, 71.82 percent of the world total. The paper also analyzed the challenges faced by China in building an all-round moderately prosperous society. (Xinhua)

\$30bn in CPEC Projects Implemented so Far: Ahsan Iqbal

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Reform Ahsan Iqbal said Tuesday that projects worth \$30 billion have been implemented under China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Addressing academics from Peking University in China prior to 6th Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC) scheduled on December 29 the minister said that CPEC was the biggest project under China's One-Belt One-Road initiative that will unite the entire region. He said that with the ad-

dition of new projects in the 6th JCC, investment in CPEC will further increase. He said that CPEC related industrial cooperation will kick-start an economic revolution in Pakistan while the economic zones will generate investment and employment opportunities for the country. Eight industrial zones will be set up in all provinces of the country, he said, adding that there is recommendation of 2 zones within Balochistan, including Gwadar free zone. For the security of ... (More on P4)...(25)

Iran in Talks with Australia, Brazil to Export Hexamine

TEHRAN - Iran held talks with Australia and Brazil for the export of hexamine to both countries in the near future, an Iranian trade official was quoted as saying by Press TV on Tuesday. According to Hamed Vahedi, a member of Tehran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, the talks with Australia over exporting hexamine were finalized. Vahedi also said that measures will be taken to send a cargo of the petrochemical product to be used in the plastics industry as well as

in the production of explosives, rubber, and the medical field in the near future. The official added that similar talks for exporting hexamine to Brazil were also finalized. Vahedi said Iran's petrochemicals exports increased following the lifting of the U.S.-led sanctions against the country earlier this year. Iran's petrochemical exports were limited under the sanctions imposed against the country from 2011 to 2016. Sanctions were lifted after the deal between Iran ... (More on P4)...(26)

Turkmenistan Joining ICAO Public Key Directory

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov has given instructions to the State Migration Service to ensure the realization of measures related to the country's accession to the International Civil Aviation Organization's Public Key Directory (ICAO PKD), the Turkmen government said in a message on Tuesday. Under the document, the decision was made in or-

der to guarantee the security of citizens' rights to travel abroad and enter Turkmenistan, to simplify passing of biometric passport holders through passport control at checkpoints open for international traffic, etc. The State Migration Service is the authorized state body of Turkmenistan on cooperation with the abovementioned Public Key Directory. (Trend)

Russia Wants to Boost Air Force Presence in Tajikistan

DUSHANBEH - Russia wants to expand its air force deployment to Tajikistan and is in talks with Dushanbe for joint use of an air base in the former Soviet republic, the Russian ambassador to Dushanbe said on Tuesday. Russia already has an infantry base near Dushanbe with up to 7,000 troops stationed there and last year deployed four attack and transport helicopters to a nearby Ayni air base.

Ambassador Igor Lyakin-Frolov told reporters the Russian and Tajik governments were in talks over an agreement that would allow Russia joint use of the Ayni base and to expand its presence there. Tajikistan, which borders Afghanistan, is seen by Russia and the West as a possible conduit for Islamist militants. The Fergana Valley, a fertile and densely populated strip of ... (More on P4)...(27)