

NATO to Send Surveillance Planes to Turkey: Germany

BERLIN - German officials say NATO plans to deploy AWACS surveillance planes to Turkey as part of a package of reassurance measures recently agreed by the alliance.

Defense Ministry spokesman Boris Nannt stressed Monday that the deployment will be a "purely defensive measure" and said military planning is currently underway. Officials didn't give details on how many planes or crew will be deployed,

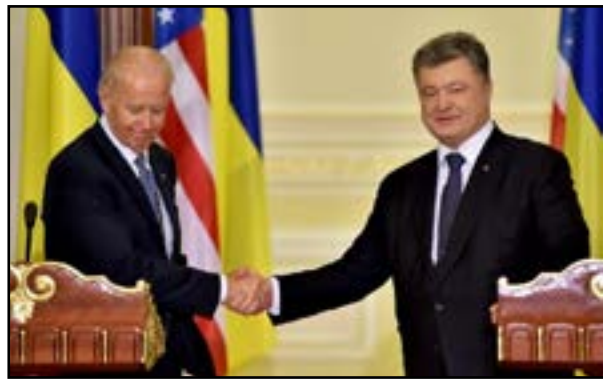


or when, to the Turkish city of Konya. On Dec. 18, after tensions flared between Turkey and Russia, the U.S. and other NATO allies decided on a package of assurance measures for NATO member Turkey in view of the volatile situation in the region. Alongside increased AWACS presence, the package also includes an increased naval presence in the eastern Mediterranean. Germany contributes about a third of AWACS crews.(AP)

Political Feuding Imperils Ukraine's Future, Obama's Record

KIEV - On his most recent visit to Kiev, U.S. Vice-President Joe Biden said he spends more time speaking to Ukrainian officials than to his own wife. He may not be exaggerating; senior U.S. officials, including Biden, are deeply embroiled in trying to persuade Ukraine's leadership to hold the line and implement the reforms they have promised to carry out. But despite these efforts, divisions inside the ruling coalition are growing and many of the reforms are stalled. If the leaders

fail, it will be a deep embarrassment to Washington, the EU, and the IMF which sacrificed relations with Russia to support these people. "I think we may have logged close to 1,000 hours on the telephone," Biden told reporters during his visit this month, referring to his calls with Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko, before adding the quip that it was more time than he spends talking to Mrs. Biden. The Obama administration, with the EU, has invested deeply in mak-



ing a success of Ukraine's Feb. 2014 revolution, when protesters forced a Russian-backed leader to flee and pro-Western opposition figures took over. A look at statements

issued by Biden's office shows that since 2014 the vice president spoke by telephone 40 times with Poroshenko and 16 times with Prime Minister Arseny Yatseniuk.(Reuters)

War Against KSA has Yet to Begin: Yemen's Former President

SANAA - Yemen's former President Ali Abdullah Saleh said on Sunday that the war against Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has yet to begin, vowing his supporters to continue fight unless the Saudi-led coalition halts air and ground campaigns against his country. Saleh made these remarks in a meeting with representatives of his General People's Party and Shiite Houthis group who took part in recent UN-sponsored peace talks in Switzer-

land. He said Saudi Arabia should be ready for a long war that would begin soon. "Only if the war halts, we will go for a direct talks with Saudis themselves, not their mercenaries," he said, referring to the upcoming UN-sponsored peace talks that set to be held at mid January. "War has not started yet, and it will begin if Saudis and their followers (Yemeni government) did not choose peace under the auspices of ... (More on P4)...(19)

Russia Not Fights IS Militants in Syria: Turkey

ANKARA - Turkish Presidential Spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin said on Monday that Russia does not fight the militants of the Islamic State (IS) in Syria and they have made this clear by supporting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his regime. Speaking at a press conference in Ankara, Kalin said the IS was used as an excuse to preserve the Assad regime, which is accused of killing over 400,000 civilians in Syria. He argued that the locations provided by Assad regime to Russia to strike the IS

targets have no relation with the IS. Kalin also noted that Turkey actively participates in the coalition against the IS and has deported over 2800 suspects. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said that only 10 percent of Russian airstrikes target the IS, while the remaining attacks target Turkmen and other Muslims opposing the Assad regime. Russia has been carrying airstrikes in Syria since Sept. 30 in a bid to support the Assad government. The Syria... (More on P4)...(20)

U.S. Sees Bearable Costs, Key Goals Met for Russia in Syria so Far

WASHINGTON - Three months into his military intervention in Syria, Russian President Vladimir Putin has achieved his central goal of stabilizing the Assad government and, with the costs relatively low, could sustain military operations at this level for years, U.S. officials and military analysts say.

That assessment comes despite public assertions by President Barack Obama and top aides that Putin has embarked on an ill-conceived mission in support of Syrian Presi-



dent Bashar al-Assad that it will struggle to afford and that will likely fail. "I think it's indisputable that the Assad regime,

with Russian military support, is probably in a safer position than it was," said a senior administration official, who

requested anonymity. Five other U.S. officials interviewed by Reuters concurred with the view ... (More on P4)...(21)

Cooperation Among Muslim Nations Against Terror Inevitable: Rouhani

TEHRAN - Iran's President Hassan Rouhani says collective cooperation among all Muslim nations in the fight against violence and extremism is an "inevitable necessity." In separate messages on Monday to the heads of Muslim states on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Prophet Muhammad, Rouhani expressed hope that Muslims would further strengthen unity and peace would be established in the world. It is necessary that Muslim countries make more efforts and bolster cooperation to portray a real image of Islam, a religion that kindness and observance of people's rights are among its main principles, he said. The Iranian president added that Muslims should adopt measures to clear up a false image of Islam which has ... (More on P4)...(22)

Davutoglu Says would Not Look Positively on 'Hostile Forces' West of Euphrates

BELGRADE - Turkey would not look positively on Syrian forces hostile to Ankara moving to the west of the Euphrates, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said on Monday, after a U.S.-backed alliance of Kurds and Arab rebels took a dam on the river from Islamic State.

Turkey has long opposed advances by Syrian Kurdish forces for fear this will lead to the creation of a Kurdish state on its border which in turn might encourage its own Kurdish minority.

Speaking at a news conference in the Serbian capital where he was on an official visit, Davutoglu said the government's current information showed that the groups that crossed the Euphrates over the weekend were Arabs, not Kurdish, forces. (Reuters)

Bombs in Syria Kill 32, Wound 90 : Monitoring Group

BEIRUT - At least 32 people were killed and 90 wounded in two bomb explosions in the Syrian city of Homs on Monday, monitoring group the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The blasts, one from a car bomb and another from a suicide attack, struck the Zahra district in the middle of the city, said the Britain-based Observatory, which monitors the conflict through a network of contacts on the ground. Syria's state news agency SANA reported two car bomb blasts, but gave a lower initial toll of six dead and 37 wounded. It was the second major attack in



the city since a ceasefire deal took effect earlier this month, paving the way for the government to take over the last rebel-controlled area of Homs. Twin blasts on Dec. 12, also in Zahra, killed at least 16 people. Islamic State claimed responsibility for that attack, saying

it had detonated a suicide car bomb. Under the Homs ceasefire deal, at least 700 insurgent fighters and members of their families left the last rebel-controlled area of the city, al Waer district. The United Nations presided over implementation of the deal.(Reuters)

IS Group Gains and Losses in Iraq and Syria

BAGHDAD - Following the Iraqi forces' victory in Ramadi, here is a recap of key cities and towns in Iraq and Syria seized by the Islamic State group or recaptured from them. RAMADI: This Sunni Arab city 100 kilometres (60 miles) west of Baghdad is the capital of Anbar, the country's largest province, which stretches from the borders with Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia to just west of the capital. IS seized Ramadi in mid-May in an assault involving dozens of suicide bombers driving explosives-

rigged vehicles. Iraqi troops retook Al-Tameem, a large area on the southwestern side of the city on December 8 with support from US-led air strikes. They reached the city centre on December 22, and drove IS fighters from their last stronghold in a government complex on the 27th, effectively sealing victory. TIKRIT: Hometown of late Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein located 160 kilometres (100 miles) north of Baghdad. It was recaptured in April by Iraqi troops, police... (More on P4)...(23)

Denmark wants Geneva Convention Debate if Europe Cannot Curb Refugee Influx



COPENHAGEN - Danish Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen called on Monday for debate on possible changes to the Geneva Convention on the rights of refugees if Europe cannot soon curb an uncontrolled influx of asylum seekers. Denmark was the first country to sign the 1951 U.N. convention - the legal foundation for the protection of refugees worldwide - but, like other European Union member states faced with an unprecedented inflow of asylum seekers this year, has set about tightening border checks and some immigration rules. "There comes a time when you have to discuss (...) whether to adjust the rules of the game," Rasmussen said in an interview with Danish broadcaster TV 2. Asked whether he meant international conventions that regulate refugee rights, he said "yes" and added: "It's clear that at some point, if Europe does not get this under control, then you have to start a discussion." Rasmussen cited two aspects of refugee rights dealt with by the convention that he said should be reviewed, one of them touching on Turkey from where the majority of Syrian and other migrants fleeing war and deprivation have moved on to Europe.(Reuters)

Nieghbor News

China Opposes Filipinos Landing on S. China Sea Island

BEIJING - China voiced strong dissatisfaction at the arrival of Filipino demonstrators on China's Zhongye Dao Island in the South China Sea on Monday.

"China has indisputable sovereignty over the Nansha Islands, including the Zhongye Dao Island," said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang in response to a

question on the Filipino demonstrators, who landed on the island over the weekend.

Lu said China urges the Philippines to withdraw its personnel and facilities from the illegally-occupied Chinese island, and never do anything that harms regional peace and stability as well as China-Philippines relations. (Xinhua)

IRGC Receives Latest Domestically-Built Ballistic Missile

TEHRAN - Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has taken delivery of the country's latest domestically-built ballistic missile, a senior Iranian commander says. Brigadier General Hossein Salami, the second-in-command of the IRGC, said on Monday that precision-guided long-range Emad missiles may be fired during the IRGC's upcoming military drill, without referring to its date.

On October 11, Iran successfully test-fired the

surface-to-surface missile, which has been completely designed and manufactured by experts at Iran's Aerospace Industries Organization affiliated with the Iranian Ministry of Defense. The launch sparked uproar among US politicians, who accused Iran of violating United Nations (UN) resolutions. On July 20, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2231, which bars Iran from developing missiles "designed to carry nuclear warheads." (PressTV)

Pakistan in talks with US to Procure Latest F-16 Jets: Air Chief

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan's Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sohail Aman, on Monday said Pakistan is in negotiations with the United States to procure the latest F-16 fighter jets, but did not specify an exact number. "We are in talks with US defence officials to get some latest F-16s but the deal may take some time," the Air chief said while talking to reporters after the rolling out cer-

emony of the 16th JF-17 Thunder aircraft at the Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC) Kamra. The Air chief said by the year 2020, Pakistan Air Force will say "goodbye to some of its old fighter jets including the Mirage." He expressed satisfaction over the production and quality level of the JF-17 Thunder and said it is at par with the F-16 in terms of performance and operations.(Agencies)

Uzbekistan, Russia Developing Agreement on Labour Migrants

BISHKEK - Uzbekistan and Russia are developing a draft intergovernmental agreement on labour migrants, Russian Ambassador to Uzbekistan Vladimir Tyurdenev said Monday.

The agreement will regulate processing of staying of Uzbekistan citizens, who want to work in Russia, in the territory of the Russian Federation.

He underlined that Russian migration legislation is improved regularly. He recalled that new order of attraction of foreign workers was introduced in Russia al-

most a year ago. He said that foreign workers, who do not need visas to enter Russia, should obtain special permissions to work in Russia, UzDaily reports. The Russian diplomat said that Russian introduced mechanism of banning entrance of people to Russia was also introduced in 2015. If the person exceeds maximum term of staying in Russia for 120 days, he or she will not be able to enter Russia for three years, for 270 days - five years and for over a 1 year - 10 years. (AKIpress)

EU Supports Earthquake Victims in Tajikistan with €84,000 in Emergency Aid

BISHKEK - The European Union (EU) is providing a total of €84,000 in humanitarian aid to the victims of a devastating earthquake that struck the Gorno-Badakhshan province on 7 December, the EU Mission in Dushanbe said on Monday.

Over €36 000 will go to the Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan to enable the quick delivery of much needed assistance to the 195 most vulnerable families. A total of 935 people living in households with

several children or disabled people will receive kitchen sets, hygiene kits and food. This EU assistance covers more than half of the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) appeal, which is issued by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Society (IFRC) when a National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society requires immediate financial support to respond to a disaster. European Commission partners working in the Disaster ... (More on P4)...(24)