

Iran Security Chief: US Suffered Strategic Defeat in Syria

TEHRAN - Iran's security chief says the United States has been forced to decide to leave Syria because it has suffered a strategic defeat there, and that Washington will ultimately have no choice but to leave the whole region.

Last month, President Donald Trump made an abrupt announcement to withdraw the roughly 2,000 American troops from Syria, claiming that the US had accomplished its goal of defeating Daesh.

Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani, however, said, "The US has had no role in defeating Daesh in Syria and has suffered defeat in its strategy there."

"In 2019, America's compulsory withdrawal from our region will begin and in the future, they will be forced to start their pullout from the Persian Gulf," the official told an international seminar on defense and security in West Asia that was held in Tehran on Monday.

Shamkhani said US withdrawal from Syria and Iraq portends "a dark future" for the United States. "Today, a trend has begun against the forces of instability in our region, which has somehow prompted the compulsory exit of the United States."

"Today, the Americans are talking about leaving Afghanistan, while they have fulfilled none of the security components there," Shamkhani said.

Trump has ordered the start of withdrawing some 7,000 troops from Afghanistan, about half of the total number of American boots on the ground in the war-torn country, The New York Times reported last month.

More than 2,400 Americans have died in Afghanistan since 2001, with 13 troops killed this year. US forces have remained bogged down in Afghanistan through the presidencies of George W. Bush, Barack Obama and now Trump since they invaded the country 2001. (Press TV)

Netanyahu Takes Aim at Graft Probes Ahead of Israel Polls



JERUSALEM - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has in recent days taken aim at what seems to be his main opponent ahead of upcoming elections: corruption investigations that may lead to his indictment.

In a widely criticised social media video at the weekend and elsewhere, Netanyahu has spoken out against the possibility that the at-

torney general will announce his decision on whether to indict him before April 9 elections.

Polls show the premier is likely to win despite the investigations hanging over him, but a move to indict him pending a hearing could shake up the campaign.

With that in mind, he has publicly urged the attorney general to postpone his announcement, leading to

criticism that his comments are out of bounds.

After his video on Saturday, former supreme court justice Eliyahu Matza compared Netanyahu's rhetoric to that of a crime boss.

In the video, Netanyahu stands before a map of the Middle East, smiling as if recounting a joke, and refers to amputation as punishment in certain countries. (AFP)

Victims of Poland Escape Room Fire to be Buried Together

WARSAW, Poland - The five teenage girls who died in a fire at an escape room entertainment site in northern Poland will be buried together in a joint ceremony this week, the city mayor said Monday. Fire officials said that 26 similar sites have been shut down because of security flaws since Friday's tragedy. Inspections of around 1,100 sites across Poland continue.

The man who designed the escape room in the city of Koszalin has been detained and charged with intentionally creating a fire danger and unintentionally causing the deaths. The local court ordered the man, identified only as 28-year-old Milosz S., arrested for three months while the case proceeds.

Prosecutors said the site's heating system was faulty and there was no emergency evacuation route.



Koszalin Mayor Piotr Jedlinski said the city is arranging and financing the joint burial Thursday of the 15-year-old victims, who were friends from the same school class and celebrating a birthday when they died. Prosecutor Ryszard Gasiorowski said Monday that an employee at the site who suffered burns and remains hospital-

ized told investigators that one of the gas cylinders in the reception room's heating system began making a strange sound and he couldn't fix it. He said the fire started suddenly and cut off his way to the door of the locked room where the girls were. The employee then ran out of the building and asked passers-by to call for help. (AP)

PMA Highlights Alarming Population Statistics

KARACHI - The Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) on Sunday said the country registered birth of 15,000 babies on the first day of the New Year, showing an increase of over five million in a year, which was not a good omen for a country which had miserably limited resources to run itself.

It demanded the government to formulate an effective policy to control the alarmingly increasing population.

"The PMA has been raising its voice for long to curb the rapid increase of population in Pakistan. The birth of 15,000 babies in Pakistan on the first day of 2019 is an alarming sign," said PMA secretary general SM Qaisar Sajjad in a policy statement of the medical fraternity's premier body.

The PMA official cited a report issued by the United Nations agency for children giving the number of births per day in Pakistan.

"It means we have 450,000 births in a month and 5.4 million in a year. This proves that Pakistan is among the countries registering the fastest population growth in the world."

The PMA said at present Pakistan was a country with more than 200 million people and in a few years it would be the fourth most populous nation in the world.

"The PMA thinks that it is a distressing situation as at the moment 60 per cent of the national population stands below the age of 25 years; 25 million children are not going to school and 90pc population is not being provided with clean drinking water. Malnutrition is another big issue and food scarcity is a grave problem as well.

"The PMA believes that the unchecked rise in population is a looming disaster, and concrete steps should be taken to efficiently implement family planning and make people friendly economic policies to overcome these difficulties and save the coming generations." (Agencies)

(1) Kabul Cautious...

High Peace Council is set to visit Pakistan to discuss matters related to peace.

The Taliban, however, are dubbing the proposed Jeddah conference as the continuation of Abu Dhabi talks. In a statement issued by the group's spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahed, the rebels have vowed not to meet the Afghan government delegation. (AA)

(2) Documents of...

Rauf Enami, a lawmaker from Badkhashan province, said acting ministers were not answerable to the parliament. He asked colleagues to ensure the rule of law because little time remained in the incumbent house's extended mandate. (Pajhwok)

(3) Govt Criticized for...

Culture (MoIC) said government is committed to complete the digitalization of Kabul public library in three stages.

According to the officials, a working group has been assigned the task to find out the financial needs and tenure of the program.

"This means that we further expand the assets which we have inside the books or in other words, make it open so that everyone can use it even to undertake online selling," said Hadi Hedayati, deputy minister MoCIT for finance.

Officials said Kabul theater has hosted at least 60 shows over the past three years. (Tolo news)

(4) 25% of Afghanistan's...

by the money we had begged. In some cases, the problems were in government departments, they did not design them correctly. But now the residents of the country destroy parts of the roads," Acting Finance Minister Mohammad Humayun Qayumi said.

Head of Transportation Companies Union, Tela Mohammad Atmanzai, called on government to prevent corruption in relevant departments which are involved in transportation and transit affairs on highways and roads.

"When a truck has loaded the allowed amount of goods arrives at the high Tonnage scales, they are asked to pay bribe. When the driver says that his truck is not overloaded, they are told that it is their own problem that their truck is not overloaded and they are asked to pay Af\$ 10,000," said Atmanzai.

Officials from Ministry of Transport said that in many cases, one number plate is used by multiple trucks. The ministry said new number plates will be issued to trucks to overcome the problem. (Tolo news)

(5) 34 Taliban...

also destroyed, the official added. Abdul Rassoul, a resident of the area, confirmed the death of the three commanders. He said heavy casualties were inflicted on the militants in the overnight operation.

Elsewhere, Afghan forces targeted a Taliban hideout and killed Qari

Tajuddin -- known as Dai Munhadam -- and his deputy Damullah Zakir along with 13 other militants.

At least 20 rebels were injured in the Toqoz valley of Andkhoi district, the source said.

Mohammad Shoaib, a resident of the area, said the militants had gathered at a guesthouse when they came under attack. However, he did not give exact figures. Three civilians were also among the killed, he claimed.

The Taliban confirmed the raids but did not give details. (Pajhwok)

(6) Khamenei Aide...

Khamenei slapped down an offer of direct talks made by Trump last year and Iranian officials have said Washington's crippling sanctions would fail to wreck the economy.

In July, Iranian authorities said Tehran had rejected eight U.S. requests for a meeting between Trump and President Hassan Rouhani on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly in Sept 2017.

"America's fantasy and hostile measures have led nowhere, in spite of all their vengeful efforts towards the Iranian people, and will certainly not in the future," Iranian state TV quoted Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qasemi as saying on Monday.

"Our nation will never yield to the cruel pressures of the United States. We will never bend to those who talk the language of sanctions and build walls instead

of bridges." (Reuters)

(7) AGO Implements...

four recommendations witness a partial progress while one is yet to be implemented," he said.

He said the formation of a five-year strategy, finalization of the conflict of interest form for prosecutors, activating 38 AGO offices in insecure districts of 16 provinces, increase in recruitment of women employees, the increase in presence of women in AGO from three percent to 21 percent and data entry of 5,050 attorney generals' short bios in the HR system are some of developments in the AGO.

Salam said pressure of powerful individuals and government officials on the Attorney General activities had reduced but concerns in this regard still existed.

AGO spokesman Jamshid Rasouli also acknowledged implementing 25 recommendations of the MEC and said the remaining were being implemented.

He said the MEC in coordination with the AGO had offered 51 recommendations last year to improve work and performance of state institutions.

He, however, said one recommendation of the anti-corruption body was in contradiction of the law and its implantation would be difficult. (Pajhwok)

(8) Taliban Storm...

spokesman, said in statement they killed 34 members of the security forces and pro-govern-

ment militias and seized many weapons and ammunition.

Leaders of the hardline Islamist group and the U.S. officials are scheduled to meet this month to discuss the withdrawal of foreign forces and a possible ceasefire.

Officials from the warring sides have met at least three times in recent months to try to agree on a way to end the 17-year war. But in the meantime, both sides are keeping up their attacks.

The Taliban say they are fighting to topple the Western-backed government and restore strict Islamic law after their ouster in 2001. (Reuters)

(9) Presidential...

have the ability to ensure transparency we are ready to help them," he remarked.

Lewal called on presidential candidates to cooperate with IEC in conducting a rigging-free election before they registered.

Abdul Latif Pedram and Mohammad Hakim Torsan have registered as presidential candidates. His suggestion to prevent disputes and differences are:

The IEC should conduct the electoral process to the satisfaction of candidates and the nation;

The panel should have the capability to carefully evaluate support votes and documents before candidate registration

The commission should provide runners vote percentage based on estimates in areas where it cannot hold elections. (Pajhwok)