

Ex-MI6 Chief Says Theresa May's Brexit Deal 'Threatens National Security,' Hurts US Relationship

LONDON - A former head of British intelligence agency MI6 has warned that Prime Minister Theresa May's Brexit deal with the European Union threatens British national security by placing control of British security "in foreign hands."

The letter, written by former MI6 head Sir Richard Dearlove and former defence chief Lord Guthrie, and obtained first by Sky News, claims May's controversial withdrawal agreement hurts NATO as well as "our close bilateral defence and intelligence relationship with the USA" and urges MPs to vote against the deal.

The first duty of the state, above trade, is the security of its citizens," the letter says. "The Withdrawal Agreement abrogates this fundamental contract and would



place control of aspects of our national security in foreign hands."

The deal, which is expected to be defeated in

Parliament next week when it is voted on, has split May's Conservative Party and sparked numerous resignations -- with Brexiteers un-

happy that it would keep the U.K. in a customs union until a trade deal is forged. The so-called "backstop" to prevent a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, has led to fears that it would keep Britain in the E.U. permanently. Former Brexit Secretary Dominic Raab said in his resignation letter that it would give the E.U. "a veto over our ability to exit." Dearlove and Guthrie say that the deal "threatens to change our national security policy by binding us into new sets of E.U.-controlled relationships." According to The Daily Telegraph, the letter also says that the deal is "the exact opposition of the people's instruction to take back control" when Brits voted in 2016 to leave the bloc. (Fox News)

Neighbor News

Iranian Fighter Jets Fire Domestically Made Missiles on 2nd Day of Large-Scale Military Drills

ISFAHAN - The Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF) launched the second day of its massive military drills in the central province of Isfahan on Friday, targeting various positions with domestically made missiles and smart bombs.

On the second day of the drills, the F-4 Phantom fighter jets fired Maverick tactical air-to-ground missiles and the domestically-manufactured "Qassed" smart bombs.

Laser-guided, anti-radar and thermal missiles as well as ultra-light aircraft were also tested during the maneuvers attended by all Iranian air force bases.

Various bombers, large military transport aircraft, interceptor and reconnaissance planes, and patrol aircraft were used in the drills.

Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and offense drones were also used for reconnaissance operations and bombing mock enemy positions. A spokesperson for the war game said the warplanes detonated ground targets of the hypothetical enemy by dropping 2,000-pound Qassed standoff bombs, which are smart, have pinpoint accuracy, and have been developed by the IRIAF experts, Tasnim news agency reported. (Press TV)

Swedish Parties Agree New Government to End Vote Deadlock: Aftonbladet

STOCKHOLM - Four Swedish parties have agreed on a deal to give Stefan Lofven a second term as prime minister, potentially ending months of political deadlock, the Aftonbladet newspaper reported on Friday, citing unnamed sources.

Lofven's Social Democrats, as well as the Centre, Liberal and Green parties, all declined to comment on the report. And a deal could still be blocked by each party's executive group, who have the final say - some Liberal and

Centre lawmakers have expressed strong doubts about such a partnership. But the report raised hopes of a breakthrough after September's inconclusive election left a hung parliament and a caretaker government forced to administer a budget voted through parliament by the opposition.

It was not immediately clear whether the plan was for a coalition or for the Social Democrats to form a government with informal support from some or all of the others. (Reuters)

China Could Lift Life Expectancy by Nearly Three Years If It Meets WHO Smog Standards: Study

BEIJING/SHANGHAI - China could raise average life expectancy by 2.9 years if it improves air quality to levels recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO), according to a new study from a U.S. research group.

China has vowed to determine the precise impact of air and water pollution on health as part of its efforts to raise average life expectancy to 79 years by 2030 from 76.3 years in 2015.

According to the Energy Policy Institute (EPI) at

the University of Chicago, big air quality improvements made in the last five years have already been enough to push up average lifespans.

"China is winning its war against pollution ... (The country) is due to see dramatic improvements in the overall health of its people, including longer lifespans, if these improvements are sustained," EPI director Michael Greenstone said at an event in Beijing on Thursday.

According to the EPI's



findings, air quality improvements made in the smog-prone northern city of Tianjin over the last five years are

already expected to have raised the average lifespan of its 13 million residents by 1.2 years. (Reuters)

Moscow Demands U.S. Explain Charges against Russian Trump Tower Lawyer



MOSCOW - Russia on Friday demanded an explanation from the United States about charges brought against

a Russian lawyer who attended a June 2016 meeting at Trump Tower who was this week charged in a separate

case. Natalia Veselnitskaya, who represented Russian defendants in a money laundering case

settled in 2017, has been charged with obstructing justice in that case for submitting a declaration that she falsely represented came from the Russian government independently, U.S. prosecutors said on Tuesday.

Speaking at a weekly news conference, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said it had become a habit in the United States to open criminal against Russians based on vague claims. (Reuters)

ADB Chief Hails China-Proposed Belt and Road Initiative

SUVA - President of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Takehiko Nakao on Friday welcomed the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), saying that it is nice to build connectivity between countries through the initiative.

"Together with other development banks like the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, we have a memorandum of understanding for cooperation with the Belt and Road Initiative," he told Xinhua while attending a press conference in the Fijian capital city of Suva. Hailing the Belt and Road Initiative as a good idea, Nakao said "We can cooperate through BRI to support the countries that need our help." Proposed by China in 2013, the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative aims to build a trade and infrastructure network connecting Asia with Europe and Africa based on ancient land and maritime trade routes. (Xinhua)

New Transit Point Expected to Start Operating Along the Tajik-Uzbek Border in the Near Future

DUSHANBE - A new border crossing point (BCP) is expected to begin operating along the Tajik-Uzbek border in the near future, Trend reports referring to news.tj

The new transit point will operate on the border between Tajikistan's Hisor district and Uzbekistan's Uzun district, a source in the Tajik government told Asia-Plus in an interview.

According to him, the new BCP "Babatag" will not have an international status. The new BCP will operate only in the daytime. Border services of both countries continue exploring the possibility

of opening new border crossings along the mutual border, the source added.

According to the preliminary data, from three to fifteen new transit points can be launched along the Tajik-Uzbek border this year.

An agreement on opening new transit points along the mutual border was reached during Tajik President Emomali Rahmon's state visit to Uzbekistan in August last year. Under a 2002 agreement, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan actually have 16 crossings along their shared border and nine of them have an international status. (Trend)

UN Expert: N.Korea Nuclear Talks Should Include Human Rights

SEOUL, South Korea - A U.N. rights investigator said Friday that negotiations on North Korea's denuclearization must also include its abysmal human rights situation. Tomas Ojea Quintana told reporters that he wants North Korea to accept his call for a dialogue on its rights conditions. He said North Korea has not allowed him to visit despite his requests over the past three years for cooperation.

Quintana, the U.N. special rapporteur on North Korean human rights situation, said the issue was sidelined in diplomatic efforts last year on stripping North Korea of its nuclear weapons. (AP)

Head of Japan's Olympic Committee Under Investigation in France on Suspicion of Corruption

PARIS - The president of Japan's Olympic Committee, Tsunekazu Takeda, is under formal investigation by French prosecutors for suspected corruption related to Japan's successful bid to host the 2020 Olympic Games, a French judicial source said on Friday.

The source said Takeda, a retired equestrian sportsman, was indicted last month by the national financial prosecutor's office in Paris. Prosecuting judge Renaud Van Ryymbek suspected Takeda of paying bribes to secure Japan's winning bid.

In Tokyo, Takeda said no improper actions such as bribery had taken place in connection with Tokyo's games bid and he had not been indicted by French authorities. (Reuters)

US Troop Withdrawal from Syria Has Begun, Military Official Confirms

DAMASCUS - The US has begun withdrawing its forces from Syria, according to wire reports that cite a spokesman for the US-led military coalition. Earlier, CNN reported that some American hardware had already been removed. Colonel Sean Ryan, spokesman for the US-led coalition purportedly formed to fight Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS), said in a statement released to the media on Friday that the US had started "the process of our deliberate withdrawal from Syria."

US President Donald Trump declared on December 19 that IS has been defeated and there was no more need



for American troops to remain in Syria. The troops were deployed without an invitation from Damascus or a mandate from the UN Security Council and were stationed predominantly in the Kurdish-controlled northeastern part of Syria.

The announcement came amid complaints from US ally Turkey,

which sees the Kurdish militias - the YPG in particular - as a national threat and vowed to attack them, unless they pull back from the Turkish border.

Sharply contrasting views on Syria's Kurds have strained relations between Washington and Ankara, driving a wedge between the two NATO allies. (RT)

India to Build More Multipurpose Dams

NEW DELHI - India's federal water resources minister Nitin Gadkari Friday signed an agreement with the chief ministers of six states - Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Delhi and Himachal Pradesh for the construction of Renukaji Multi-Purpose Dam project, officials said.

"There is enough water available in the country but the real issue is effective water management," Gadkari said. "Signing of agreement for Renukaji Dam project a historic moment."

According to officials, three storage projects are proposed to be constructed on the river Yamuna and two of its tributaries - Tons and Giri in the hilly regions of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh of Upper Yamuna basin. (Xinhua)

Global Stocks Mixed on Fed Restraint, US-China Trade Hopes

SINGAPORE - Global markets were mixed Friday as investors cheered the Federal Reserve's more restrained stance and opted to view this week's U.S.-China trade talks in a positive light.

KEEPING SCORE: In Europe, Germany's DAX slipped 0.1 percent to 10,908.54 and the CAC 40 in France also edged 0.1 percent lower to 4,798.56. Britain's FTSE 100 rose 0.6 percent to 6,982.74. Wall Street was positioned for a flat opening. Futures for the S&P 500 index fell 0.1 percent to 2,591.60 and those for the Dow were flat at 23,949.00.

ASIA'S DAY: Japan's Nikkei 225 index advanced 1 percent to 20,359.70 and South Korea's Kospi was 0.6 percent higher at 2,075.57. Hong Kong's Hang Seng rose 0.6 percent to 26,667.27. The Shanghai Composite surged 0.7 percent to 2,553.83, but Australia's S&P ASX 200 lost 0.4 percent to 5,774.60. Shares rose Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia but fell in the Philippines.

POWELL SPEECH: Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said Thursday that the U.S. central bank has the "ability to be patient" with its plans to gradually raise interest rates. He echoed the tone of other Fed officials who were present at a meeting last month. Minutes of the meeting, which were released a day earlier, showed the officials believed that the central bank could afford to take their time with rate hikes, given recent volatility in financial markets, trade tensions and shaky global growth. (AP)

Turkmenistan Takes Part in Heimtextil 2019 in Germany

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan took part in the Heimtextil 2019 international exhibition in Germany's Frankfurt, Trend reports referring to Turkmen Foreign Ministry.

Over 3,000 foreign companies and organizations took part in the exhibition. Representatives of Uzbekistan's Ministry of Textile Industry and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry were in the Turkmen delegation.

The Turkmen delegation held a meeting with the exhibition company, Messe Frankfurt. During the talks, the possibilities for expanding the range of textile products produced by Turkmenistan and the development of cooperation were discussed,

the report said. More than one million tons of cotton are grown annually in Turkmenistan. The textile industry of Turkmenistan is represented with a wide range of exported products - from cotton fiber and yarn to finished garments and knitwear, which are produced by the largest textile complexes in Central Asia, located in the capital and in all regions of the country.

A significant part of the products of Turkmenistan, supplied abroad, are home textiles, sportswear and jeans produced under the world-famous trademarks IKEA, Puma, Walmart, Lidl, Bershka, Pool & Bear, River Island, Cosco. (Trend)