

Tillerson Says he and Trump Disagree over Iran Nuclear Deal

WASHINGTON - U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson acknowledged on Tuesday that he and President Donald Trump disagree over the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, and said the two men discuss how to use the international agreement to advance administration policies.

Trump at times vowed during the 2016 presidential election campaign to withdraw from the agreement, which was signed by the United States, Russia, China and three European powers to curb Iran's nuclear program in return for lifting most Western sanctions.

Trump has preserved the deal for now, although he has made clear he did so reluc-



tantly after being advised to do so by Tillerson.

"He and I have differences of views on things like JCPOA, and how we should use it," Tillerson said at a State Department briefing, using the acronym for the deal, formally called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Tillerson said that Washington could "tear it up and walk away" or stay in the deal and hold Iran accountable to its terms, which he said would require Iran to act as a "good neighbor."

Critics say the deal falls short in addressing Iran's support for foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria, arms shipments around the Middle East and ballistic missile tests. (Reuters)

Turkey Starts Joint Military Exercise with Qatar: Report

ANKARA - Turkey and Qatar military started a joint exercise on Monday with participation of more than 250 Turkish militants and over 30 armored vehicles, Turkey's local media reported on Tuesday.

Turkish land forces are participating in the first phase of the joint military exercise, while the second stage will include the naval forces of the two countries, Hurriyet Daily News reported.

Turkish frigate "TCG Gokova" arrived in Hamad Port, southeast of the capital Qatar, with 214 personnel on July 31, to

participate naval drill in Qatar territorial waters. The joint exercises are conducted as part of military cooperation agreements between Turkey and Qatar in the fight against extremism and terrorism.

The latest joint exercise comes amid political tension among Gulf countries. Turkey has strongly backed its ally Qatar after the Gulf diplomatic crisis, which has continued almost two months since June 5, when the Saudi Arabia-led Arab alliance cut diplomatic ties with Qatar. (Xinhua)

Russian Planes "Followed" by NATO Jet over Baltic: Russian Defense Ministry

MOSCOW - Two Russian MiG-31 fighter jets and an An-26 military transport plane, on a training flight over the Baltic Sea neutral waters, were "followed" by a NATO fighter jet, Russian Defense Ministry said Tuesday.

"While the Russian planes were flying over neutral waters of the Baltic Sea, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)'s F-18 fighter jet approached the Russian aircraft and followed them at a safe distance for about one minute.

Later, it changed its course and flew away towards the airspace of the Baltic state," the ministry said.

NATO said earlier that its fighter jets of the Baltic air-policing mission had intercepted three Russian planes over the Baltic Sea.

The Russian Defense Ministry has repeatedly stated that the flight of the Russian aircraft was performed in strict compliance with the international rules of



the airspace use and air border of other countries were not violated.

The number of air incidents involving Russian planes and NATO ones has increased over the past years since the U.S.-led alliance ratcheted up its military presence on Russia's western border in 2014. (Xinhua)

Neighbor News

US Plans Trade Probe over China's Demands for Tech Transfers

BEIJING - The Trump administration is weighing plans to punish China for forcing U.S. and foreign companies to share their technology in return for access to the vast Chinese market, a personal familiar with U.S. discussions said Wednesday.

The administration is considering invoking the rarely used Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, which empowers Washington to investigate Chinese trade practices and impose sanctions, including tariffs, within months, said the person who spoke on condition of anonymity because the plans have not been made public.

The investigation would focus on China's alleged "forced technology transfer policies and practices," the person said, adding that the Trump administration could move to launch such a probe this week.

U.S. and other Western governments and business groups accuse Beijing of unfairly nurturing Chinese competitors - in fields ranging from medical equipment to renewable energy to electric cars - by requiring foreign firms to hand over proprietary technologies in exchange for being allowed to operate in China.

China's Ministry of Commerce did not immediately respond to a faxed request for comment.

These deliberations come as the administration signals a harsher stance on trade than it took in the first six months of Trump's presidency. (AP)

Iran, Russia Stress Continued Cooperation on Syria

TEHRAN - Senior Iranian and Russian diplomats hold talks on the latest developments in Syria, emphasizing the need for continued cooperation to facilitate the progress of the ongoing peace process, which has brought the Arab country's warring sides to the negotiating table in Astana.

At a Tuesday meeting in Moscow, Hossein Jaber Ansari and Russian Presidential Envoy for the Middle East and Africa and Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov called for the continuation of the peace process, which has been underway in the Kazakh capital, Astana, since January.

Russia, Iran, and Turkey helped bring about an all-Syria ceasefire late last year, a mechanism which was later endorsed by the United Nations. The ceasefire paved the way for the three states to start mediating the Astana process, which has so far seen five rounds of negotiations between the Syrian government and armed opposition groups.

The Astana talks helped revive a long-stalled peace process, supervised by the UN, in the Swiss city of Geneva. During the fourth round of the talks in May, an agreement was signed on the creation of four de-escalation zones across Syria, where airstrikes were agreed to be halted. (Presstv)

Pak Army to Continue Efforts to Eliminate Terrorism: COAS

ISLAMABAD - Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa on Wednesday emphasized that Pakistan Army would continue its efforts to eliminate the menace of terrorism and ensure that the borders remain secure.

This demands the highest standards of faith, professionalism and perseverance in the service of the nation, the COAS said while speaking at the opening session of a special two-day long Baloch Regiment Conference, being held at Baloch Regimental Center Abbotabad.

The COAS was presented the honour and ranks of Colonel in Chief of Baloch Regiment.

The COAS lauded the proud traditions and contribution of Baloch Regiment, which is one of the most decorated regiments of Army due to sterling performance over the years.

He praised the sacrifices of the 'Shuhada' and assured their families that Army would never forget those who gave their blood to defend and strengthen the nation.

The COAS also laid floral wreath at 'Yadgar-e-Shuhada' to pay homage to martyrs of Baloch Regiment for laying their lives for defence of motherland.

Lieutenant General Nadeem Raza, Commander 10 Corps and a large number of serving and retired Gen officers of Baloch Regiment, including former COAS Gen Mirza Aslam Beg, Gen Ashfaq Parvez Kayani and former Chairmen JCS Committee Gen Tariq Majid and Gen Rashid Mehmood were also present. (APP)

Not only one EU Leader Think Brexit may not happen



VALLETTA - Maltese Prime Minister Joseph Muscat on Tuesday said in a TV interview that he is not the only EU leader

who thinks Brexit may never happen.

However during the interview with CNN, he refrained from revealing the names of the other EU leaders who share his thoughts about this issue.

This interview follows his words on uncertainty around Brexit happening in last Friday's interview with Dutch newspaper De Volkskrant.

He stated he was sensing doubts about the decision of Britain to quit the EU beginning to creep in.

"For the first time, I'm starting to believe that Brexit will not happen. I am seeing hopeful signs that indicate things will change. I see encouraging signs that the tide is turning. I'm not saying the Brits have made a mistake, but the mood is changing," he said.

"It would be good if a political leader in the UK stands up and is courageous enough to address this new situation. Someone who says: let's put the Brexit end-deal to a popular vote," added Muscat. (Xinhua)

Tillerson Laments Sour Ties with Russia, but Holds out Hope

WASHINGTON - The top American diplomat put the onus on Russia to take steps to repair flagging relations with the United States, even as he conceded that congressional sanctions would pose a new obstacle.

Holdings out hope for warmer ties, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said he'd meet with his Russian counterpart within days.

In a wide-ranging assessment of his first six months in office, Tillerson on Tuesday also:

- Revealed the U.S. is looking at options to en-
- Vice President
- Nicolas Maduro to leave power peacefully.
- Insisted the U.S. doesn't blame China for North Korea's nuclear behavior despite the American pressure on Beijing.
- He said the U.S. is open to talks with Pyongyang.
- Argued that Iran's military must leave Syria for the U.S. to cooperate with Russia on ending the Syrian civil war.
- Named retired Gen. Anthony Zinni as special representative to try to resolve the Persian Gulf diplomatic crisis over Qatar. (AP)

US Vice President Says Future of Balkans is 'In the West'

PODGORICA, Montenegro - U.S. Vice President Mike Pence said Wednesday that the future of Europe's Balkan nations is in the West, reaffirming Washington's commitment to the region as Russia works to assert its historical influence there.

Pence spoke in Montenegro, his third and final stop in a European trip that saw him voicing support for nations pressured by Russia and highlighting U.S. allegiance to its allies overseas. He is the highest-ranking American official to visit the small Adriatic state in 100 years.

"We truly believe the future of the Western Balkans is in the West," Pence said in Podgorica, Montenegro's capital. The Western Balkans refers to countries in the former Yugoslavia that aspire to or have already joined Western institutions, including the European Union and NATO. It also includes Albania. (AP)

UAE Says Economic Sanctions on Qatar Violate No WTO Deal

DOHA - The economic sanctions imposed on Qatar by the Gulf states violate no World Trade Organization (WTO) agreement, according to a United Arab Emirates (UAE) official.

"The sanctions imposed by the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain did not contradict the agreements of the WTO," Juma Mohammed al-Kait, an assistant undersecretary in the Economy Ministry, was quoted by UAE state news agency WAM as saying late Tuesday.

Al-Kait also said the boycott complies with articles 21 and 14 of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), which allows such moves in the case of security exceptions. (Xinhua)

BRICS Nations Unite to Fight Protectionism

SHANGHAI - Trade ministers from BRICS countries agreed to oppose protectionism and safeguard the multilateral trade system after concluding their annual meeting in Shanghai Wednesday.

All member countries, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, are also members of the WTO, playing a major part in global economic governance, according to a statement released after the meeting.

Ministers agreed to oppose protectionism, calling on other countries to follow suit. They also encouraged more coun-



tries to participate in the WTO, and asked the organization to show more commitment to least developed countries.

"Safeguarding the multilateral trade system and the rise against protectionism serves the common interests of emerging and develop-

Trump "Weighed in" on Son's Statement of Russia-Related Meeting: White House

WASHINGTON - The White House said Tuesday that U.S. President Donald Trump "weighed in" on a statement his eldest son had made about a controversial Russia-related meeting.

The statement that Donald Trump Jr. issued "is true," said White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders in a briefing on Tuesday afternoon. "There is no inaccuracy in the statement."

The meeting between Trump Jr. and a Russian lawyer during the 2016 campaign was brought back into limelight after Trump reportedly dictated the July 8th statement that claimed the meeting was "primarily" about American families adoption of Russian children.

Sanders pushed back the story, saying Trump "certainly didn't dictate" the statement but he "weighed in as any father would, based on the limited information that he had."

The matter was "of no consequence", Sanders stressed.

But her remarks appeared to have contradicted with Jay Sekulow, one of the attorneys representing Trump in the Russia probe, who has repeatedly denied that the president played a role in drafting his son's statement.

Sekulow has denied in previous interviews that Trump had any involvement in the drafting of the statement, which, he said, was written by Trump Jr. with consultation with his lawyer.

A Washington Post report said on Monday Trump dictated the document while flying back on Air Force One from the G20 summit in Hamburg, Germany, held on July 7-8. (Xinhua)

Russia Takes over U.S. Compound in Moscow in Retaliation over Sanctions

MOSCOW - Russian authorities on Wednesday took over a summer-house compound in Moscow leased by the U.S. embassy, five days after the Kremlin ordered Washington to slash its diplomatic presence in Russia.

In retaliation for new U.S. sanctions, President Vladimir Putin has ordered the United States to cut around 60 percent of its diplomatic staff in Russia by Sept. 1, and said Moscow would seize a dacha country villa used by U.S. embassy staff and a warehouse.

U.S. employees cleared out the dacha

on Tuesday and a Reuters journalist who visited the property on Wednesday saw a large metal padlock securing the front gate.

The one-storey building and courtyard, previously used by diplomatic staff at weekends and to host embassy parties, was empty and cleared of barbecue equipment and garden furniture.

Two policemen in a car in front of the main entrance said they had been instructed to guard the property and did not expect any visits from U.S. or Russian officials. (Reuters)

Turkmenistan Developing Construction Materials Industry

ASHGABAT - According to the Turkmen Dowllet Habarlary (state news agency), 1,800 out of around 1,900 big facilities are being built by the domestic enterprises in Turkmenistan.

The priority direction of the construction materials industry is the cement production. Portland cement produced at the country's plants is used in construction of the high-rise buildings and other facilities in the seismic zone. Furthermore, the production of oil well cement for the oil and gas industry, as well as sulfate-resistant cement, used for laying foundations, construction of bridge supports and other hydraulic structures, has been established in the country.

The metallurgical and gas-concrete plants in the Ovadan Depe in the country's Ahal province contribute to the diversification of the national economy. Turkmen enterprises also produce lehr panels, reinforced blocks, expanded clay, prefabricated reinforced concrete products, ceramic bricks and facing slabs. (Trend)