

U.S. Military to Step up Drone Flights by 2019: WSJ

WASHINGTON - The U.S. military plans to widen its surveillance and firepower in conflict zones worldwide, including in Ukraine and the South China Sea, with a major expansion of U.S. drone flights, the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reported.

The Pentagon plans to increase daily flights by 50 percent over the next four years, expanding them from 61 a day now to as many as 90 by 2019, the Journal said in its report late Sunday, citing senior defense officials.

Increased flights could also be used in other areas such as Iraq, Syria and



North Africa, the paper said. Reuters could not

immediately confirm the report, and representa-

tives for the Pentagon could not be immediately

reached for comment. Unmanned drone flights

can be used on reconnaissance missions to gather video, photos and other surveillance data. They can also be used to launch air strikes, which has been controversial under President Barack Obama.

Under the phased-in plan, the U.S. Air Force would continue to launch 60 drone flights a day, the Army would dispatch 16 and the Special Forces Command could contribute up to four, according to the newspaper. As many as 10 non-strike flights a day would come from private government contractors, it said. (Reuters)

Iraqi PM Cuts Cabinet Posts, Criticism Expected

BAGHDAD - Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has cut 11 ministerial posts in his cabinet as part of an anti-corruption reform plan, but a Kurdish politician said on Monday that the move could draw criticism from political blocs. In a statement late Sunday, Abadi announced the decision to cut the number of ministers in his cabinet from 33 to 22, in a bid to curb corruption and mismanagement, which were seen as the main reasons behind the failure of rebuilding the country's economy and public services. Mahmoud Othman, a veteran Kurdish politician, said he expects that Abadi will face objections from most of the political blocs which used to have their own portfolios according to power-sharing agreements and political consensus. "All the po-

litical blocs want to see their ministers in their ministries, thus the coming days will witness objection by those blocs on Abadi's decision to reduce the number of ministries and merge others," Othman said. Abadi's latest move includes cutting the posts of three deputy prime ministers, of the minister of human rights and of three ministers of state for women's affairs, provincial and parliament affairs. His reform also merged four ministries with four others, including those in science and technology, culture and municipalities. The cabinet shuffle came as Abadi pushes ahead with his comprehensive reform plan to combat corruption and mismanagement, under the pressure of massive ... (More on P4)...(23)

Turkish Prime Minister Holds Last-Ditch Coalition Talks



ANKARA - Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu has met with a nationalist party leader in a last-ditch effort to form a coalition alliance before a deadline for establishing a government runs out this week. Prospects for a partnership between Davutoglu's Islamic-rooted party and the nationalist party look slim and the premier has already said that new elections appear to be Turkey's "only option." The ruling party lost its

majority in elections in June. Coalition talks with Turkey's pro-secular party collapsed last week. The nationalist party has set stiff conditions for a partnership while Davutoglu reportedly is seeking a short-lived alliance to govern until early elections. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who founded the ruling party, is also reported to favor new elections in the hopes that the party can win back its majority. (AP)

Russian FM Appeals for new Efforts to Ease Mounting Tension in SE Ukraine

MOSCOW - The line of contact between Ukrainian government troops and insurgent militias in southeastern Ukraine has turned into a frontline, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Monday, blaming Kiev for the negative development in the region. "The situation at the fronts has been disturbing. We may speak about, in essence, a frontline, not just about a dividing line," Lavrov told reporters following talks with his visiting Iranian counterpart, Mohammad



Javad Zarif. Last week, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) monitoring mission in eastern Ukraine said violence in the restive areas has been increasing, with

both sides allegedly using heavy weapons in violation of a six-month-old ceasefire agreement signed in Minsk. "Let's just implement what has been agreed on in Minsk," said Lavrov, ap-

pealing for new efforts of the Normandy Four -- Russia, Ukraine, France, Germany -- to ease the mounting tension there. Lavrov reiterated his calls to the Western countries to exercise pressure on Kiev to force it to resume dialogue with the Donbass insurgents. Meanwhile, Lavrov described as "delirium" the latest claims of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko that Russia has been prepared for aggression against Europe. (Xinhua)

Fiji Seeks India's Support for Climate Change Talks in France

SUVA - Fiji has called on India to support Fiji and other Pacific island countries at the climate change talks to be held in Paris, France later this year, the government-owned Fiji Broadcasting Corporation (FBC) confirmed Monday. "The (Fijian) prime minister (Voreqe Bainimarama) highlighted this in a letter to his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi as he

congratulated the (Indian) prime minister on India's 69th independence anniversary," the FBC said. As he paid tribute to the historic relations shared between the two countries, Bainimarama pointed to areas that have the potential to boost and strengthen the Fiji-India ties. Bainimarama is set to join leaders at the second Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FI-



PIC) summit from Thursday to Friday in India to discuss ways to enhance India's relationship with Fiji and other Pacific is-

land countries. Due to historical and colonial reasons, nearly 40 percent of Fiji's population are of Indian descent. (Xinhua)

British Gov't Puts up for Sale Stake in Significant Development Site

LONDON - The British government Monday put up for sale its stake in one of the most significant redevelopment sites in Europe. Proceeds from the sale of the 36.5-percent interest in the 27-hectare site at London's King Cross station will raise millions of dollars. The money will go to the British Treasury to help reduce the nation's deficit. Indications are that the stake will exceed an early estimate which placed a 540-million U.S. dollar price tag

on the government holding. Worldwide interest in the King's Cross Central site is expected to be high. Would-be purchasers have until Sept. 7 to place the offer and the government has hired the international consultancy Lazard to act as financial advisors in the deal. The government's sale of its interest is seen as a significant opportunity for private capital to gain exposure to one of Europe's most important city center regeneration projects, said a spokesman for the

Department for Transport. The site is adjacent to King's Cross Station, which services six London Underground lines, and St Pancras Station, from where Eurostar rail services connect to Paris and Brussels. Chief Secretary to the Treasury Greg Hands said: "Selling our stake in the land around King's Cross is an important milestone which will raise money to pay down the public debt while also encouraging private sector investment in an im-

portant London site." The 67-acre King's Cross estate is being developed into 744,000 square meters of mixed-use space, consisting of offices, apartments, retail space, educational establishments and leisure areas. There are to be 50 new and refurbished buildings and, with almost 28 hectares of public realm, 10 new parks and squares, 20 new streets and three new bridges across the Regent's Canal. Its current occupiers include Google, ... (More on P4)...(24)

UN Special Envoy Slams Air Raids in Syria

GENEVA - The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, on Monday condemned Sunday's air raids on a market place in Douma, located northeast of Damascus. According to preliminary reports, the attack claimed scores of lives and injured significant numbers of people. The death toll is still being determined. "The government's bombing of Douma yesterday is devastating. Attacks on civilian areas with aerial indiscriminate bombs, such as vacuum

bombs, are prohibited under international law. Hitting crowded civilian markets killing almost one hundred of its own citizens by a government is unacceptable in any circumstances," Mistura said. Sunday's attack came on the heels of indiscriminate shelling of Damascus last week by armed opposition groups and the cutting off of water supplies, all measures which affect civilians and are also unacceptable. The special envoy's office said the "latest

attack is yet another illustration of the brutality of the ongoing conflict." Mistura said humanitarian access must be allowed unconditionally and the killing must stop, adding a solution to the conflict would not be achieved through military means, as had been proven over the recent years. The special envoy called on all Syrian parties to urgently cease all acts of violence and start dialogue to find a political solution to this crisis. (Xinhua)

Poland's New President to Visit Estonia in 1st Foreign Trip

WARSAW - Poland's new conservative president will make his first foreign trip to Estonia, followed by visits to Berlin, London and New York, where he will meet with President Barack Obama, a top official said Monday. Choosing one of the Baltic states for his first trip underlines President Andrzej Duda's intention to strengthen Poland's alliances with other Central and Eastern European nations in a bid to give a strong voice to a region that is nervous about neighboring Russia's re-

surgence. Notably absent from his first round of travels are Paris and Brussels, traditional first destinations for Polish leaders. Talks are underway over the timing of these visits, but their absence now demonstrates Duda's plans to shift away from the mainstream of the 28-nation European Union. Duda, who took office Aug. 6, believes that Poland has been too deeply immersed in EU policy. Also notable is no date for a Vatican visit by the Catholic president.

Duda's foreign policy adviser, Krzysztof Szczerski, said the visit to Tallinn, Estonia, on Sunday comes on an anniversary of the 1939 pact between Nazi Germany and Russia that led to the invasion of Poland and to World War II and will underscore the need for stability in Eastern Europe. The conservative Law and Justice party that backs Duda has sometimes been skeptical of Germany's intentions toward Poland, and Duda wants to recalibrate ties in order to make Warsaw's voice stronger. (AP)

Neighbour News

Iran Still Closed to U.S. Influence After Nuclear Deal: Khamenei

DUBAI - Iran will remain closed to U.S. influence and continue to oppose U.S. policies in the Middle East after its nuclear deal with big powers, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Monday, noting either country can still block the accord.

The 76-year-old cleric, Iran's highest authority, has refrained from making decisive statements on the July 14 nuclear agreement, but gave President Hassan Rouhani crucial political cover to pursue talks with the six powers. Tehran agreed to verifiable limits on its atomic energy program to cre-

ate confidence that it will not be put to developing nuclear weapons, in exchange for lifting international sanctions crippling its oil-based economy.

"They thought this deal - and it is not clear if it will be passed in Iran or in America - will open up Iran to their influence," Khamenei was quoted on his website as saying at a meeting with members of the Islamic Radio and Television Union.

"We blocked this path and will definitely block it in the future. We won't allow American political, economic or cultural influence in Iran." (Reuters)

China Media Urges US 'Sincerity' over Escaped Officials

BEIJING - Chinese state media on Monday urged the United States to show more "sincerity" towards Beijing's moves to track down its corrupt officials overseas, saying the US should not become a safe haven for criminal suspects.

The New York Times had reported that Washington has warned Beijing about Chinese agents it says are operating secretly on its soil to pressure fugitives wanted for corruption and other misdeeds to return to China.

Citing unnamed US officials, the Times said Sunday that the agents, working undercover for

China's Ministry of Public Security as part of a global manhunt Beijing dubs Operation Fox Hunt, were probably entering the country on tourism or trade visas.

But China's official news agency Xinhua described them as Chinese law enforcement and said they had been ordered by the United States to return home immediately.

"The US government's decision to force China's law enforcement staff to leave the country obviously reveals that Washington lacks sincerity and has failed to translate its words into action," Xinhua said in a commentary. (AFP)

Pakistani Forces Kill 65 Terrorists in Tribal Regions: Army

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani army said that fighter jets on Monday bombed hideouts of the militants in two tribal regions and killed 65 terrorists. Death toll of the militants killed reached 105 in two days.

The army said at least 50 terrorists were killed in a precise aerial strikes in Shawal and Gharlamai area of North Waziristan tribal agency Monday afternoon, an army statement said. "Reportedly terrorist's infrastructures in area which include ammunition dump are badly damaged," the statement from the Inter-Services Public Relations said.

In a separate statement 15 terrorists were killed in precise aerial strike in Khyber tribal region near the Afghan border on Monday. "Reports also indicate two suicide bombers were among

the killed terrorists," the statement said. The security forces have increased bombing of the militants' positions following a suicide bombing that killed a minister in Punjab province and 18 other people on Sunday.

Pakistani military said fighter jets killed at least 40 militants in North Waziristan on Sunday. Thousands of troops are battling the Taliban and other armed groups in North Waziristan. The military launched the major offensive in June last year and security officials said over 2,500 militants have so far been killed and over 90 percent of the areas cleared of the militants. Gen. Raheel Sharif, the army chief, who visited the region last month, said the operation code-named Zarb-e-Abab is in its final stage. (Xinhua)

Tajikistan Asks Russia to Extradite Opposition Members

DUSHANBE - Tajikistan has reportedly requested that Russia extradite seven men accused of being members of a banned opposition group. According to RFE/RL, the Tajik Interior Ministry expects the request to be honored by Russia since the men were arrested by request of Tajikistan.

The seven men are accused of being members of Group 24, an opposition group labeled by Tajikistan as an extremist organization in October 2014 after its leader called for a public protest in

Dushanbe using slogans like "Tajikistan without Rahmon." Group 24 was founded in 2012 by Umarali Quvatov, an exiled Tajik businessman living in Moscow.

Eurasianet wrote in 2014 after Quvatov's protest fizzled that he was "not well-known or well-liked" in Tajikistan but the authorities were swift to intervene, blocking websites, "deploying armored vehicles, and holding a mock demonstration during which police repelled actors pretending to march on Dusti Square." (Agencies)