

'We're Going to Work Towards That End': Pompeo on Inviting Russia Back into G7

WASHINGTON - US State Secretary Mike Pompeo has said that the Trump administration, himself included, will make an effort to secure Russia's return to the G7, as it is what US President Donald Trump thinks Washington should do.

Pompeo doubled down on Trump's earlier statement that Russia, booted out of the cohort of the most industrialized nations over its reunification with Crimea and the Ukrainian turmoil, should be invited to the group's next meeting in an interview on Tuesday. Asked if Russia should be invited back so the group can become the G8 once again, Pompeo said: "Yeah, the President thinks so."



However, when asked if he agrees with his boss's stance on the issue, Pompeo dodged the question, merely stating that he would be pursuing that goal as well.

While Pompeo fell short of explicitly agreeing

with Trump's Russia policy, despite being his country's top diplomat and thus the man in charge of implementing it, he still reaffirmed Trump's interest in seeing Russia return to the club.

The US president has repeatedly spoken about

the need to readmit Russia. As the G7 summit in Biarritz, France wrapped up on Monday, Trump tentatively invited Russian President Vladimir Putin to the next year's G7 meet-up hosted by the US.

Saying that he would "certainly" invite the Russia leader and "it would have been easy" if Russia had been represented during many of the roundtables, Trump noted that Putin, as "a proud person," might as well not accept the invite.

It was not the first time Trump has floated the idea, and he has not been the only one warning of the dangers of alienating Russia from the West. (RT)

Far Right to Deal Blow to Shaky Merkel Coalition in Eastern Votes

BERLIN - The far right is set to make strong gains in two regional elections in eastern Germany on Sunday, potentially upending 30 years of rule by the two main parties and hastening the break-up of Chancellor Angela Merkel's national coalition. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) is harnessing voter anger over refugees and the planned closure of coal mines in the region and cast themselves as the heirs of the demonstrators who brought about the fall of the Berlin Wall three decades ago.

Double-digit gains for the AfD threaten Merkel's conservatives in Saxony and could mean her Social Democrat (SPD) national partners lose power in Brandenburg. The parties have led the respective states since reunification in 1990, mostly in coalitions.

The AfD is expected to take votes from both parties in the elections held two months before Germany marks 30 years since the fall of the Cold War's most potent symbol, the Berlin Wall. (Reuters)

Australia Tries to Curb Foreign Interference at Universities

CANBERRA, Australia - Australia announced Wednesday that it has formed a task force to crack down on attempts by foreign governments to meddle in Australian universities.

The move comes as concerns grow over Chinese influence at Australia's universities, where Chinese students are by far the largest group of foreign students. Pro-Beijing student demonstrators have recently clashed with Hong Kong democracy advocates on Australian campuses.

Australia has also raised concerns about the influence of Beijing-funded Confucius Institutes at Australian universities.

Education Minister Dan Tehan said the task force will comprise half university staff and half government agency officials.

"Our government is taking action to provide clarity at the intersection of national security, research, collaboration and a university's autonomy," Tehan said.

"Universities also understand the risk to their operations and to the national interest from cyberattacks



and foreign interference and we are working constructively to address it," he added. The task force includes a cybersecurity working group that will better protect university networks against unauthorized access and damage. (AP)

As Maritime Rows Resurface, Duterte Readies to Raise Ruling with China



MANILA - When Philippine leader Rodrigo Duterte visits China this week, he'll need to salvage something from a "pivot"

to Beijing that has left him empty-handed, and exposed his neighbors to a new level of brinkmanship in the South China Sea.

Despite his huge domestic popularity and great affection for China, Duterte is under growing pressure to push back at its growing maritime assertiveness. After avoiding the issue for three years, he has vowed to raise with President Xi Jinping a 2016 arbitration ruling that invalidated China's claim to sovereignty over most of the South China Sea.

The trip comes amid a recent rise in tension on multiple fronts, with Chinese vessels challenging energy assets and sea boundaries of Malaysia,

Vietnam and the Philippines, prompting warnings and rebukes by the United States, which accuses China of "coercive interference" and holding hostage \$2.5 trillion of oil and gas.

China called that "warrantless criticism" with distorted facts. Duterte's motivation, experts say, is to tackle public unease over his refusal to speak out against a deeply mistrusted China, and frustrations among a defense establishment that has started to find its own voice. (Reuters)

Hezbollah to Hit Back at Israel but War Unlikely: Deputy Chief

BEIRUT - Hezbollah will respond with a "surprise" strike against Israel after drones crashed in Lebanon, but a new war remains unlikely, the Iran-backed movement said, amid heightened fears of a full-scale confrontation between the longtime adversaries. Israel has not claimed responsibility for the two drones that crashed at the weekend in the Hezbollah-dominated southern suburbs of Beirut. One of them exploded, causing some damage to Hezbollah's media center in the district, but

nobody was hurt. "I rule out that the atmosphere is one of war, it is one of a response to an attack," Hezbollah deputy leader Sheikh Naim Qassem said in a TV interview on Tuesday night. "Everything will be decided at its time." Lebanon's Hezbollah is planning a "calculated strike" but seeks to avoid a new war with Israel, two sources allied to the Shi'ite Muslim group, which fought a deadly month-long war with Israel in 2006, told Reuters earlier on Tuesday. (Reuters)

Boris Johnson Asks Queen to Suspend Parliament to Push Through No-Deal Brexit

LONDON - British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has asked Queen Elizabeth II to temporarily suspend Parliament in order to prevent lawmakers from pushing through new legislation on a so-called no-deal Brexit.

In a letter to lawmakers released Wednesday, Johnson said he "spoke to Her Majesty The Queen to request an end to the current parliamentary session." He said an integral feature to the legislative program will be the introduction of a bill to leave the European Union and "to secure its passage" before Oct. 31. (Fox News)

Jaw-Dropping Stunts & NEW Russian Aircraft Unveiled at MAKS 2019 Air Show

MOSCOW - Russia's newest narrow-body passenger jet MC-21 has demonstrated solid performance during its public debut at the MAKS-2019 air salon, while military aircraft like the Su-57 stunned the visitors with breathtaking aerial stunts.

The Irkut MC-21 hit the skies before the general public on Tuesday. The Russian-made passenger jet, whose makers hope it could emerge as a potential competitor to Boeing's ill-fated 737 MAX, was outfitted with a full passenger cab. It swept up into the sky right after taking off from the Zhukovskiy Moscow regional airport and performed some quick turns while still at a relatively low altitude. (RT)

South Korea Summons Japan Ambassador as Export Trade Curbs Take Effect

SEOUL - South Korea summoned Japan's ambassador to protest against a decision to remove Seoul's fast-track export status, which took effect on Wednesday amid a deepening political and economic feud.

Japan dropped South Korea from a so-called white list of favored trade partners this month, which could mean more paperwork and on-site inspections for some Japanese exporters and potentially slow supplies of a range of goods.

The decision prompted South Korea to drop



Japan from its favored trading list and scrap an intelligence-sharing agreement.

South Korean deputy national security adviser Kim Hyun-chong said it was deeply regrettable that Japan's decision to scrap fast-track export

status for South Korea had taken effect.

South Korea would be willing to reconsider its decision to end the intelligence-sharing pact if Japan corrected its "unjust measures", Kim told a news conference. (Reuters)

Tunisia's Zbidi Says He Will Amend Constitution If Elected President

TUNIS - Tunisia's Defence Minister Abdelkarim Zbidi will amend the constitution if he wins September's presidential election to end an "unreasonable" division of power between the prime minister and the head of state, he told Reuters, a move rivals oppose.

Zbidi, among a few prominent candidates in a field of 26, is supported by some secular parties, but he said in a Reuters interview on Tuesday that he is ready to work with the moderate Islamist

Ennahda.

He also said he would quickly reopen Tunisia's embassy in Syria, citing a need for security cooperation and the difficulties faced by Tunisians living there.

Despite economic troubles, Tunisia has had a smoother march towards democracy than any of the other Arab nations that tried to follow its example in 2011 by throwing off autocratic rule, and it will also hold a parliamentary election in October. (Reuters)

World Bank Approves 200-Mln-USD Loan to Support Ukrainian Agriculture

KIEV - The Ukrainian Ministry of Finance and the World Bank have signed an agreement on a 200-million-U.S. dollar agriculture loan here, local media reported Wednesday.

The agreement was signed between Ukraine and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) under a program to facilitate private investment in agriculture, the press service of the finance ministry said.

The program aims to improve the competitiveness and diversification of Ukraine's agricultural sector through policy support, and ensure greater efficiency and transparency of the state agricultural land use, which are crucial factors for agricultural development, according to the press service.

The project will be implemented as part of the Strategy on Attracting Private Investment in Agriculture until 2023, approved by the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers earlier in July.

The strategy aims to support the Ukrainian government, especially the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Regional Development and the Ministry of Justice in creating favorable conditions in the agriculture sector for private investments.

The IBRD, an international financial institution under the World Bank, offers loans to middle-income developing countries. (Xinhua)

Neighbor News

ECP Among Respondents Served Notice Amid New Appointments Issue

ISLAMABAD - The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday heard a petition challenging the appointment of two members of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). IHC Chief Justice Athar Minallah, while hearing the petition, issued notices to the respondents, including the secretary to the president, Principal Secretary to Prime Minister Azam Khan, the two members in question, and the ECP. The petitioner Jahangir Jadoon challenged the notification of the ap-

pointment of Abdul Gaffar Soomro and Justice (r) Shakeel Baloch as members of the commission, contending that their appointments were made without fulfilling the legal parameters. According to the petition, the two members were appointed by the president, bypassing mandatory consultation of the prime minister and National Assembly opposition leader. The court adjourned the hearing till September 12. (Agencies)

Iran's Deterrence Power Prevented US Action after Drone Downing

TEHRAN - Iran's top military commander says the Islamic Republic's deterrence power prevented the US from taking an action against Tehran following the downing of an intruding American drone.

"If the US came close to taking action against us after the shooting down of the Global Hawk unmanned aerial vehicle but changed its mind under the pretext that several people would be killed [as a result of military action against Iran], it is because of our deterrence power," Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Baqeri said on Wednesday.

He added that Iran's strong deterrence power emanates from the Iranian thought and prudent measures of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei. The Iranian nation has stood tall in the defense and security sectors despite all problems thanks to the Islamic Revolution, he concluded.

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) announced on June 20 that its air defense force had shot down an intruding American spy drone in the country's southern coastal province of Hormozgan.

In a statement, the IRGC said the US-made Global Hawk surveillance drone was brought down by its Air Force near the Kouch-e Mobarak region - which sits in the central district of Jask County - after the aircraft violated Iranian airspace. (Press TV)

India Intends to Invest in Number of Industries in Uzbekistan

TASHKENT - A delegation from India announced the country's intention to invest in a number of industries in Uzbekistan, including pharmaceutical and industrial sectors, Trend reports citing the official website of the Tashkent administration.

Members of the delegation made the statement during a meeting in the administration of Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. The Indian side also noted plans to strengthen cooperation in the field of culture and art.

The participants dis-

cussed bilateral relations between countries in terms of their development and strengthening opportunities. At present, cooperation between the two countries continues in the field of medicine and information technology, agriculture, education and culture, the report said.

Currently, more than 145 joint ventures operate in the country. Furthermore, this year, branches of the Indian Amity University in Tashkent and of Shard University in Andijan were opened. (Trend)

Turkmenistan Privatizes Textile Industry

ASHGABAT - Two public joint-stock companies (PJSC) in the textile sector will be formed in Turkmenistan, Trend reports referring to the Turkmen Textile Industry Ministry.

These include the textile complex located in Gypchak and the enterprise for the processing of cotton waste located in Buzmeyin (both in Turkmenistan's Ahal Region).

The textile complex in Gypchak is one of the largest in the country. The company was built in conjunction with Turkey's Norsel and launched in 1997. The complex specializes in the production of cotton yarn, knitted fabric, finished sewing and knitwear. About 95 percent of its produce is exported to the

US, Canada, Germany, Turkey, and Russia.

The complex's production capacity is as follows: cotton yarn - 4,250 tons per year; severe knitted fabric - 4,050 tons per year; dyed knitted fabric - 3,850 tons per year; finished garments - 15.0 million pieces per year. The enterprise in Buzmeyin was commissioned in 2005. It produces purified cotton spinning waste with an annual capacity of 2,500 tons. The equipment used at the enterprise is provided by Turkey's "Balkan" company.

Turkmenistan grows more than 1 million tons of cotton annually, which is a highly demanded raw material for the country's rapidly developing textile industry. (Trend)