

# Moscow Warns of Retaliation for NATO Eastward Expansion

MOSCOW - Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Pevkov said Wednesday that the continuous eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) will lead to retaliatory measures from Russia. "NATO's military infrastructure to the east, cannot but lead to retaliatory measures from Russia in terms of ensuring security interests and supporting the parity of interests," Pevkov commented on NATO's decision to invite Montenegro to join the military alliance. Earlier in the day, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the



decision was not about Russia, nor directed at any third-party country.

In response to Stoltenberg's remarks on the possible resumption of

NATO-Russia Council's work, Pevkov said he had not heard of the spe-

cific statement and was unaware of any movements toward this. The

NATO-Russia Council was created during the 2002 NATO Summit in Rome as an official diplomatic tool for handling security issues and joint projects between NATO and Russia, yet was suspended in 2014 as tensions rose between the two sides when Russian troops moved into Crimea. Russia is ready to meet with NATO in the NATO-Russia Council format if the military bloc puts forward such a proposal, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was quoted as saying by the Interfax news ...*(More on P4)...(17)*

## Russia Says It has Proof Turkey Involved in Islamic State Oil Trade

MOSCOW - Russia's defense ministry said on Wednesday it had proof that Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan and his family were benefiting from the illegal smuggling of oil from Islamic State-held territory in Syria and Iraq. Moscow and Ankara have been locked in a war of words since last week when a Turkish air force jet shot down a Russian warplane near the Syrian-Turkish border, the most serious incident between Russia and a NATO

state in half a century. Erdogan responded by saying no one had the right to "slander" Turkey by accusing it of buying oil from Islamic State, and that he would stand down if such allegations were proven to be true. But speaking during a visit to Qatar, he also said he did not want relations with Moscow to worsen further. At a briefing in Moscow, defense ministry officials displayed satellite images which ...*(More on P4)...(18)*

## Abadi Says no need for Foreign Troops to Combat IS in Iraq

BAGHDAD - Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has said his country does not need foreign troops to fight Islamic State militants, but welcomes outside support through weapons and training, local media reported on Wednesday. "There is no need for foreign combat troops on Iraqi soil," NINA news agency quoted a statement by Abadi's office as saying. The presence of foreign troops in Iraq, if any,

must be approved by and coordinated with the Iraqi government, said Abadi, who is also the commander-in-chief of the Iraqi armed forces. "Any military operation or deployment of any foreign force, special or not, at any place in Iraq cannot happen without approval (of) and coordination (with) Iraqi government) and full respect of Iraqi sovereignty," the statement said. Abadi's comments ...*(More on P4)...(20)*

## Reaffirms Support for Ukraine, Calls for Stable Relations with Russia

BRUSSELS - NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on Wednesday underlined NATO would continue its political and practical support to Ukraine, and stressed the need to restore predictability in relations with Russia. Calling the Minsk agreements "the only path to a political solution," Stoltenberg said after the NATO-Ukraine Commission meeting that while there has been some progress in the implementation, "there is a real risk of a resumption of violence." NATO will continue to help Ukraine in several areas, including

modernizing command control, cyber defense and logistics capabilities. "NATO is committed to supporting a peaceful and diplomatic end to the conflict," Stoltenberg added. He further welcomed Ukraine's commitment to implementing reforms, and urged the country to continue along this path. "Challenges posed by Russia's actions in the Euro-Atlantic area will be with us for a long time," Stoltenberg said, adding: "We agreed that our priority now is to work to restore predictability in our relations." He said



last week's incident of the Russian jet downing by Turkey highlights the importance "to step up work on transparency and risk reduction" between the two sides. According to him, increasing openness

and transparency concerning military activities is necessary "through intensive efforts to reach agreement next year on a substantive update of the OSCE's Vienna Docu ...*(More on P4)...(19)*

## Iraq Briefed on U.S. Special Forces Plan: Kerry

BRUSSELS - The Iraqi government is fully briefed on U.S. plans to deploy American special forces to Iraq and the two governments will consult closely on where they will go and what they will do, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said on Wednesday. U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter said on Tuesday Washington would deploy a new force of special operations troops to Iraq to combat Islamic State militants who have seized swathes of Iraq and neigh-

boring Syria. The group is also known as ISIL and ISIS. Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's office said it welcomed foreign assistance but Iraq's government would need to approve any deployment of special operations forces anywhere in Iraq. He also said foreign ground combat troops were not needed in Iraq, although it was unclear whether Baghdad viewed these U.S. special operations forces in that role. "The government of Iraq was of course briefed



in advance of Secretary Carter's announcement," Kerry told reporters at NATO. "We will continue to work very, very closely with our Iraqi partners on exactly who would be de-

ployed, where they would be deployed, what kinds of missions people would undertake, how they would support Iraqi efforts to degrade and destroy ISIL." ...*(More on P4)...(21)*

## PNA Warns Against Bypassing Palestine Issue in Arab-Israeli Ties

RAMALLAH - The foreign ministry of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) on Wednesday warned against Israeli initiatives to form bilateral relations with Arab countries that bypass the Palestine issue. In a statement, the ministry noted that Israel claims to "search for regional powers that share similar views for a so-called regional peace, that ignores the international foundations for the peace process." It said that at the front of these foundations is the "Arab Peace Initiative," launched by the Arab League in 2002, which emphasizes the need for Israel to completely withdraw from the occupied territories



before normalizing relations with Israel. The Palestinian leadership is apparently trying to urge other Arab countries to coordinate with it in dealing with the Israelis. The ministry accused Israel of attempting to exploit the conditions of the Arab region to "rebuild a new map of alliances in the

region based on tactical interests that don't tackle the Palestine issue." These interests only serve Israel and harm the Palestinians, the statement said. "Israel is trying to cover up failing all opportunities for peace and negotiations with the Palestinians," the statement said, ...*(More on P4)...(22)*

## Al-Qaeda Fighters in 'Show of Force' in South Yemen

ADEN - Al-Qaeda fighters drove pro-government forces out of a town in southern Yemen Wednesday in a new show of strength by the jihadists, who have exploited the country's turmoil to expand their territory.

Yemen, home to what the United States considers Al-Qaeda's most dangerous affiliate, has been convulsed by unrest since Iran-backed Shiite Huthi rebels seized the capital Sanaa in September last year. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has tightened its control over parts of southeast Yemen, including Mukalla, the capital of the vast province of Hadramawt, imposing a strict form of Islamic Sharia law. On Wednesday the jihadists briefly took control of Jaar, a town in the southern province of Abyan to the west, in fighting that killed 15 people.

A military source described Jaar as a key link between Mukalla and the main southern city of Aden, the base of President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi who returned from exile in Saudi Arabia last month.

Jaar is a stronghold of the pro-government "Popular Resistance" which includes Sunni Islamists, tribesmen, loyalist soldiers and southern separatists who have been fighting the Huthi rebels.

The Al-Qaeda jihadists blew up the main Popular Resistance headquarters in the town and hunted down pro-government fighters, most of whom fled, witnesses said. (AFP)

## Yemen 'Extremely Fragile' for Aid Workers: Red Cross

GENEVA - A Red Cross employee's kidnapping in Yemen underscored the "extremely fragile" situation in the country for humanitarian workers, with the coming days crucial for securing the hostage's release, ICRC Director-General Yves Daccord said Wednesday. The International Committee for the Red Cross said two people were taken by unidentified assailants on Tuesday in Yemen's capital Sanaa, but that one was released unharmed. A Tunisian female staffer was being held hostage. "The situation in Yemen is extremely fragile for an organization like the ICRC and the national Red Crescent", Daccord told AFP in Geneva. "When something like this happens, the kidnap of colleagues, this is always a shock. "We have to regroup immediately, try to understand what happened. This is exactly where we are right now," he added. Daccord said that in this type of situation, "you most likely have two to three days" to try to connect with the possible perpetrators. ...*(More on P4)...(23)*

## UK Parliament to Vote on Expanded Attacks on Islamic State

LONDON - The British Parliament is set to decide Wednesday whether to take more aggressive action against Islamic State extremists even as U.S. officials announced additional forces would be sent to the region as part of a global push against the radical group. The British vote would authorize the Royal Air Force to launch airstrikes against suspected IS positions inside Syria, allowing it to take a more active role in the U.S.-led coalition seeking to ...*(More on P4)...(25)*

## Stranded Migrants Clash with Police on Greek-Macedonian Border

IDOMENI, Greece - Macedonian police fired tear gas at hundreds of mostly Pakistani migrants who tried to storm into the Balkan country from Greece on Wednesday demanding passage to wealthier northern Europe. About 1,500 Pakistanis, Moroccans and Iranians have been stuck in no-man's land between Greece and Macedonia for weeks after non-EU Balkan states began filtering migrants and granting passage only to refu-

gees fleeing Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Protests have swelled among desperate migrants stranded for days in squalid tent camps on the border in temperatures barely above freezing. Wednesday's violence broke out after about 200 people were denied passage and began walking, for several kilometers (miles), alongside a newly erected border fence, seeking an alternative opening. Macedonian police ...*(More on P4)...(24)*

## Nieghbor News

### 'Iran Biggest Investment Attraction in Decades'

TEHRAN - Global financial services firm Morgan Stanley in a report has described Iran as the next biggest investment attraction for international corporations after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Morgan Stanley in its report has emphasized that Iran's vast fossil fuel resources have specifically added to its numerous advantages as a lucrative market for international investors. Iran is considered as the most literate nation in the region with a large and modern economy. It also has a largely urbanized country where 60 percent of the population is un-

der 30. These, the report added, are among other key advantages of Iran. Morgan Stanley further said Iran is an uncharted territory for investors, stressing that there is no other hydrocarbon frontier economy that has been subjected to comparable economic and political sanctions. "In the next few years, there are some pretty rapid growth forecasts for Iran - the World Bank expects GDP growth to rise to 6.7% in 2017, largely on the back of increased production of oil and natural gas," the US-based bank said in its report. (PressTV)

### Pakistan Hangs 4 Militants over School Attack

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan hanged four convicted militants on Wednesday who were sentenced to death over a Taliban attack on an army-run school last year that killed more than 150 people, mostly children, officials said. The two officials said the men were executed at a high-security prison in the northwestern city of Kohat. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to media. The four are the first convicted militants to be executed in connection with the school massacre. The Dec. 16 attack, which was claimed by the Pakistani Taliban, hor-

rified the country and led the government to lift a 2008 moratorium on the death penalty. However, most of the nearly 300 people hanged since then have been convicted criminals, not militants. Parents of children killed in the assault welcomed the executions and demanded that all those connected to the attack be given the same punishment. "Today's executions cannot return my son to us, but I am happy to know that at least four terrorists have been hanged for their role in the killing of our children," said a woman who identified herself only as the wife of Arshad Zafar, in keeping with local custom. (AP)

### Fears of Islamic Militancy Reportedly Run high in Tajikistan



DUSHANBE - An article "As Tajikistan Limits Islam, Does It Risk Destabilization?" that was posted on Radio Liberty's website on noted that seeing the rise of Islamic State and other extremist groups in recent years, Tajik authorities have done their best to eliminate outward displays of what they see as dangerous, imported aspects of Islam in recent years. This has put women who dress in Islamic attire traditionally worn in Tajikistan, as well as men who wear long, bushy beards, in the spotlight. Men have been detained on the street and forcibly

shaved at police stations. And when President Emomali Rahmon used a Women's Day speech in March to publicly chastise those who wear "foreign" dress, saying that outsiders were using clothing to develop an "extremist" trend in Tajikistan, it was taken as a warning. The look of Dushanbe's streets has changed as a result. Whereas solid-colored black or brown hijabs had become a common sight, today anything but officially acceptable and traditional Tajik head scarves - colorful and tied behind the head - are a rarity. (Asia-Plus)

### China Criticizes French Reporter's Terrorism 'Double Standards'

BEIJING - The Chinese Foreign Ministry on Wednesday criticized the "double standards" of a French journalist after speculation that China is refusing to renew her press card after controversial reporting. Ursula Gauthier, working for French magazine Le Nouvel Observateur, published an article on Nov. 18 blaming government policy in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region for terrorist attacks in China. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying told a regular press briefing that the article

had strongly offended the Chinese people. She noted that it came days after the Paris attacks, which were covered very differently by the French media. "We fail to understand why terrorism is accepted as such in other countries, but turns into 'ethnic' or 'religious' problems when it occurs in China," she said. "We cannot understand why China's anti-terrorism efforts are described as repression of ethnic minorities." "This ridiculous logic is typical of the West's double standards and political bias," Hua added. (Xinhua)