

# France's Macron Says Necessary to Work with Assad to Build Peace in Syria

PARIS - French President Emmanuel Macron on Sunday said he believed that it was necessary to talk with Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad and his representatives to end the civil war and prepare the way to lasting stability in the country.

"My stance changes from what was done before, where we decided we could not talk with him (al-Assad) anymore," Macron said during an interview with state-run France2 television. "We will win the war against Islamic State in Syria by the end of February".

Breaking with the previous administration's policy which set al-Assad departure



as a pre-condition to resolve the conflict, Macron said: "It is necessary to speak with Bashar even if he has to answer for his crimes."

France joined U.S.-led military coalition to combat Islamic State insurgents in Syria in September 2015. Macron expected the international military offensive would meet its target of liberating Syrian territories from the terrorist group by the end of February.

Syria's conflict, which started with peaceful protests in 2011, has claimed hundreds thousands of lives and forced millions to displace, triggering Europe's worst migration crisis. (Xinhua)

## Syria's Assad Welcomes UN Role in Possible Syrian Elections

DAMASCUS - Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said Monday that his administration welcomes any role of the UN in possible Syrian elections as long as it respects the Syrian sovereignty, according to the Syrian presidential media office.

Assad made the remarks to reporters following his meeting with a Russian official and economic delegation headed by Russian Deputy Prime Minister, Dmitry Rogozin.

The president said any role of the UN in Syrian elections must be based

on the UN charters and respect the Syrian sovereignty.

"This is why we are not worried about any role of the UN and we can say that we welcome any role of the UN," the president told reporters.

The elections and constitution in Syria are expected to be discussed in the upcoming talks in the Russian city of Sochi earlier next year.

Assad said if there is a constitutional amendment, there will be elections based on the constitution. (Xinhua)

## EU Complains US Tax Plans Could Endanger EU-US Trade

BRUSSELS - The European Union's executive branch is warning the United States that its planned tax overhaul could violate some of its international obligations and risks "seriously hampering" trans-Atlantic trade. In a letter to U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin, the EU Commission reinforced a similar move by Germany, France, Britain, Italy and Spain to stress it has serious concerns over several tax initiatives. EU Commission spokesman Margaritis Schinas said Monday



that "the draft U.S. tax bill as it currently stands contains elements that risk seriously hampering trade and investment"

Schinas said EU institutions and nations "believe that it is in the joint EU-U.S. interest to avoid this." EU nations have been warily

eyeing President Trump's domestic tax proposals and fear they might hurt world trade and EU companies in particular. (AP)

## Trump to Unveil National Security Strategy on Dec. 18

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Donald Trump will unveil a national security strategy report on Monday, the first of its kind since he took office and the 17th since the Reagan administration began to submit such a report to Congress in 1987, officials said Sunday. National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster was quoted as saying earlier that the report will identify four pillars of U.S. national interests, namely, protecting the U.S. people, promoting U.S. prosperity, "preserving peace through

strength" and advancing U.S. influence. The doctrine was reportedly meant to guide future U.S. policies and help the country regain advantages in "an ever competitive world" where U.S. interests, the White House argued, were often undermined by shifts in global balance of power. According to Michael O'Hanlon, a senior fellow on foreign policy at the Brookings Institution, Trump's upcoming report shows "there is a sense among some of the top team" in the White House that other nations



are taking advantage of the United States. Dan Mahaffee, senior vice president and director of policy at the Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress, also told Xinhua that the upcoming security strategy reflects the U.S. position that future geopolitical challenges will be less about the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, Africa and Afghanistan, but "much more about the challenges posed by peer competitors in a range of domains from maritime conflicts to cyberspace and space." (Xinhua)

## S. Korean President Says Visit to China Sets Foundation for Full-Scale Cooperation

SEOUL - South Korean President Moon Jae-in said Monday that his state visit to China last week had set a foundation for a full-scale cooperation and relations between the two countries.

Moon told a meeting with his senior secretaries that his four-day visit to China was very fruitful as it set a foundation for the full-scale cooperation and normalized ties between South Korea and China in all areas including politics and security as well as economy.

Moon said his China tour last week had a great meaning as it completed South Korea's urgent assignment of diplomacy before the end of this year. Through this visit, Moon said, South Korea and China established a firm, mature strategic cooperative partnership that will not be wavered by external factors. He asked politicians both in the ruling and opposition parties as well as the media and the general public to support the government's position. (Xinhua)

## UK Government to Start Thrashing out Post-Brexit Vision

LONDON - British Prime Minister Theresa May was meeting Monday with senior ministers to begin thrashing out Britain's plans for its long-term relationship with the European Union after Brexit.

May was meeting with her Brexit "war cabinet" to formally discuss what trade deal Britain wants with the EU - whether to stay aligned with the EU's trade rules and maintain close economic ties with the bloc, or seek more flexibility so Britain could strike its own trade deals around the world. Among those who want more flexibility is Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, who said that Britain would "have gone from a member state to a vassal state" if it continues to adhere to EU trade rules after Brexit. "What we need to do is something new and ambitious, which allows zero tariffs and frictionless trade but still gives us that important freedom to decide our own regulatory framework, our own laws and do things in a distinctive way in the future," he told the Sunday Times.

Brexit Secretary David Davis has said he wants Britain to adapt a free trade deal with the EU that's more substantive than the one Canada has with the bloc. But the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, Michel Barnier, insists Britain has to "realize there won't be any cherry picking."

"No way. Later Monday, the prime minister will outline to Parliament her plans for the two-year transition period Britain wants to implement after it leaves the EU in March 2019. May is expected to tell lawmakers that Britain wants its current access to European markets unchanged during the transition period - even though it would have formally left the EU's single market and the customs union by then. (AP)

## Russian Presidential Election Campaign Officially Launched

MOSCOW - The Russian presidential campaign has been officially launched, according to a resolution published on the government's newspaper Rossiyskaya Gazeta on Monday.

The resolution issued by the Russian Federation Council, or the upper house of parliament, officially gives a start to the election campaign.

The Russian Central Election Commission (CEC) will approve the plan of the upcoming election campaign on Monday. A total of 23 candidates have declared their intentions to run for the president,



including Vladimir Putin, said the CEC chairperson Ella Pamfilova.

To be registered as an independent presidential candidate in Russia, a candidate has to collect at least 300,000 voters' signatures on his or her behalf by Feb. 1.

If a candidate wishes to

run within the framework of a political party, this party will have to collect no less than 100,000 signatures on the candidate's behalf. The Russian Federation Council on Friday officially set the country's presidential election date for March 18, 2018. (Xinhua)

## UN Security Council to Meet on U.S. Jerusalem Decision

UNITED NATIONS - The United Nations Security Council will hold its regular monthly briefing on the Middle East Monday, focusing on U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, sources said Sunday. UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov will do the briefing, which will include discussions on a draft resolution, sources said.

The briefing comes amid a flurry of diplomatic activities following the decision by the U.S. administration on Dec. 6 to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital

and to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. In response to the U.S. declaration, the Palestinian delegation to the UN has been meeting with Security Council members to discuss the contours of a Security Council resolution likely to be circulated in the coming days, the sources added. Egypt circulated a draft text on Saturday, which stresses that Jerusalem is an issue "to be resolved through negotiations" and expresses "deep regret at recent decisions concerning the status of Jerusalem," without specifically mentioning Trump's move. (Xinhua)

## Arab League Forms Ministerial Delegation to Counter U.S. Move on Jerusalem

CAIRO - The Arab League (AL) announced Sunday that it has formed a ministerial delegation tasked with responding to the U.S. decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

The delegation will respond on the diplomatic and media levels to "the dangerous U.S. decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel," AL spokesman Mhamoud Afifi said in a statement.

The delegation includes the foreign ministers of Jordan, Palestine, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), as well as AL Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit. Afifi said the delegation was formed in light of the contacts made by Jordan in recent days, in its capacity as the chair of the Arab summit and the Arab Peace Initiative Committee.

He added that the delegation will hold its first meeting in the Jordanian capital Amman early next week.

Defying strong opposition and warnings from the Palestinians and Muslim countries, U.S. President Donald Trump announced on Dec. 6 to recognize the disputed holy city of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and ordered to move the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The move has sparked widespread condemnation and protests from Muslim countries across the world, especially the Palestinians and Arab states in the Middle East. The Palestinians insist that East Jerusalem should be the capital of their future independent state. (Xinhua)

## Neighbor News

### China is a Globally Strong Country in Many Areas: Global Survey

BEIJING - China has already become or is on the way of becoming a globally strong country, a survey carried out by the Global Times has found that more than 80 percent of the polled believe so.

The most prominent international image of China in 2017 is "confidence," according to the survey of 17,583 people from 16 foreign countries around the world, including the US, Russia, Japan, Germany, the UK, France, Brazil, and South Africa.

Over 70 percent of the foreigners have faith in or are neutral about the positive role of China in global governance under the country's new leadership with Xi Jinping as the core, the survey indicated.

The Global Times carried out the survey between Nov. 11 and Dec. 8, and found that people in Spain, Brazil, Ukraine,

and Kazakhstan are more confident that China has become a strong country in the world.

About 66.4 percent of the surveyed believe China's economic strength is what makes a country strong, while other respondents said that scientific and technological capability, political and diplomatic influence, as well as military strength are also contributors.

The foreign respondents ranked China after the US as the second country believed to have the largest influence on global governance in the next 10 years, followed by Russia.

Over 40 percent of the surveyed believe China is likely to grow to the most influential country in Asia in the next 10 years.

Over 63.6 percent of the foreigners believe their country should maintain good relations with China. (Agencies)

### Pakistan, China Say Economic Partners Till 2030

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan and China on Monday unveiled a long-term cooperation plan in economic development envisioning cooperation until at least 2030 in areas ranging from infrastructure to information technology.

It is the first time the two countries have announced how long they plan to work together on the project, known as the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

The long-term CPEC plan was made public in a ceremony in Islamabad attended by Pakistani Minister for Planning Ahsan Iqbal and Chinese Ambassador Yao Jing.

The document did not, however, give specific details on the projects, such as terms and condi-

tions of investments and loans, nor did it provide details for Special Economic Zones, some of which are already underway in Pakistan.

The (CPEC), a flagship of Beijing's Belt and Road initiative to build a new "Silk Road" of land and maritime trade routes across more than 60 countries in Asia, Europe and Africa, has committed a \$57 billion investment in Pakistan.

The long term plan highlighted key cooperation areas between the two neighbors, which included connectivity with a road and rail infrastructure, information network infrastructure, energy, trade and industrial parks, agriculture, poverty alleviation and tourism. (Reuters)

### Iran FM Hails Nation's Regional, Global Ties

TEHRAN - Iran is an active and influential country both in the region and across the world and is considered to be an important actor on the international relations scene, said the Iranian foreign minister on Monday.

"The common history of Iran and its neighbors reveals that our country over the past centuries has been influential in shaping the regional and global developments," Mohammad Javad Zarif said, addressing the first conference on the History of Iran International Relations in Tehran.

The Iranian top diplomat went on to praise Iranians as the people living in a country with an ancient civilization and long history who from the very

early days have been eager to establish relations with other nations. "As a nation we have been tempered in the furnace of history."

Located at the historical crossroad of old times, Iran used to provide a safe passage for caravans, facilitating their exchanges of goods, ideas and cultures, while affecting the whole process, the Iranian foreign minister said.

Zarif also urged a closer look at the Iranian history, its cultural exchanges with the countries around it and Iran's engagements with its neighbors.

"This could provide us with a strong basis for promoting today's relations," he said. (IRNA)

### Uzbek President to Receive Delegation of Turkish Agency

TASHKENT - President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev will receive the head of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) Serdar Cam, said the Uzbek Foreign Ministry's press service in a message Dec. 18.

The TIKA delegation will arrive in Tashkent today, according to the message. The visit's program includes meetings and

negotiations at the government, Foreign Ministry, State Committee for Investments. TIKA was founded in 1992 in order to provide technical assistance to developing countries and to boost relations with them in the fields of economy, trade, technology, culture, education and social development through the projects and programs of the organization. (Trend)