

Arab Leaders Bemoan Lack of Strategy, Weapons against Jihadists

MUNICH - Arab leaders bemoaned what they called a lack of strategy and weapons in the fight against jihadists like Islamic State (IS) at a security conference attended by Western leaders in Munich on Sunday.

IS fighters have brought large areas in Syria and Iraq under their control, using extreme violence against civilians, journalists and Arab and Kurdish soldiers.

U.S.-led air strikes and arms deliveries from Western countries to Kurdish fighters have helped contain IS expansion into Kurdish territory in northern Iraq. But on the ground, IS - known as Daesh in Arabic - uses



heavy weapons captured from a weakened Iraqi army, leaving local fighters painfully exposed. "I don't see that there is a clear strategy how to deal with (IS)," Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad al-Malki said. "How to

face it, how to contain it, control it, defeat it and eliminate it. I don't see it... Unless the air strikes is a strategy. That's not a strategy."

Last month, the head of NATO said air strikes alone would not be

enough to defeat IS and greater Western help in building up Iraqi security forces could also play a role. Qatar also criticized current efforts against IS, especially in Iraq where many Sunnis have felt disenfranchised by the

Shi'ite-dominated leadership in Baghdad.

"If we want those people (Sunnis) to fight for themselves, to clean Iraq from any terrorists, we have to not only issue a program but to implement this program tangibly," Qatar's Foreign Minister Khalid al-Attiyah said in Munich.

"We still need to have a strategy in Iraq from our allies. There is no strategy, I'll be very frank on this." Saudi Arabia and Jordan have taken part in air strikes against IS. Other countries like Egypt say the international community is not helping enough in their fight against other jihadist groups such as Ansar

Beyt al-Maqdis in the Sinai peninsula, bordering Israel.

"We need more weapons, the quality, the sophistication of the weapons, the technology so that we can track and be able to infiltrate these organizations," Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry told Reuters on the sidelines of the Munich conference. Echoing Egypt's calls for a more comprehensive strategy, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani urged leaders in Munich to act on militants operating from his country, adding that this threat should not be treated in isolation from IS and other groups. (Reuters)

Russia Confirms Participation in Minsk Quartet Meeting

MOSCOW - Russian President Vladimir Putin said leaders of Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine have agreed to meet in Minsk next Wednesday, provided that certain positions are agreed upon by then, Interfax news agency reported Sunday.

"I have just finished conversations with leaders of Germany, France and Ukraine in the so-called Normandy Format," Putin said during a meet-

ing with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.

Meanwhile, the Belarusian president confirmed that the summit would be held on Wednesday evening local time, adding that Minsk will properly organize the meeting to achieve calm "in our common house."

A Russian diplomatic source told Interfax that deputy foreign ministers of the four parties will meet in Berlin on Mon-



day to prepare for the upcoming summit of their leaders. (Xinhua)

Iraqi Security Forces Retake Town

TIKRIT - The Iraqi security forces on Sunday retook control of an oil refinery town in Iraq's northern central province of Salahudin after three days of clashes with the Islamic State (IS) militants, a provincial security source said.

Thousands of Iraqi soldiers and Shiite militiamen backed by Iraqi aircraft pushed into the central part of the town of Baiji, some 200 km north of the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, after heavy clashes with the IS operatives, the source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity. The troops later advanced to the north and managed to break the siege of other forces who were trapped for weeks inside Iraq's largest oil refinery, just north of the town, the source said. Fierce battles continued in the afternoon as the troops still fighting to free the remaining small pockets inside the town.

Teams of explosive experts are defusing dozens of landmines, roadside bombs and booby trapped buildings which the extremist militants planted in the town, the source added. The Iraqi forces on Thursday launched an offensive from their positions in south of Baiji but their

advance was slow as they were encountered by stiff resistance from the IS militants in addition to roadside bombs, he said.

Last year, the Iraqi forces freed the town and its refinery in November, but the IS militants again in December 21 seized the town after they forced the security forces and allied Shiite and Sunni tribal militiamen to withdraw to the villages to the south of Baiji, and imposed a siege on the nearby refinery.

Meanwhile, the troops advanced to the nearby small town of Seniyah, some 7 km west of Baiji, and seized its small oil refinery site, while they are still fighting the IS militants at the edges of the town, the source said. Elsewhere in the province, heavy clashes erupted early in the day between the IS militants and the Shiite militiamen near the town of Balad, some 80 km north of Baghdad, leaving at least five IS militants and two militiamen killed, the source added. Salahudin, a predominantly Sunni province with its capital of Tikrit, some 170 km north of Baghdad, is the hometown of former President Saddam Hussein. (Xinhua)

Jordan Launched 56 Airstrikes against IS

AMMAN, Jordan - Jordan has launched 56 airstrikes against Islamic State group weapons depots, training centers and military barracks since militants released a video of them burning a Jordanian pilot to death, Jordan's air force chief said Sunday.

Jordanian officials have said they would retaliate harshly for the slaying of the pilot, Lt. Muath al-Kaseasbeh, who was set ablaze while trapped in a cage.

Since Thursday, the Jordanian air force has attacked and destroyed 56 Islamic State targets, the air force chief, Gen. Mansour al-Jabour, told reporters. This includes 19 targets on the first day, 18 on the second and 19 on the third, he said.

"We achieved what we were looking for: revenge for Muath," the general said. "And this is not the end. This is the beginning."

In recent days, Jordanian officials have delivered tough warnings to Islamic State, saying the retaliation campaign would



not stop until the group has been destroyed.

The United States and several Arab allies, including Jordan, have been striking the Islamic State group in Syria since Sept. 23, while warplanes from the U.S. and other countries have been waging an air campaign against the extremists in Iraq for even longer. The campaign aims to push back the jihadi organization after it took large parts of Iraq and Syria and declared a "caliphate."

Al-Jabour said coalition planes have flown 5,500 sorties since the beginning of the air campaign, including 2,000 reconnaissance flights. He did

not say whether this included flights over both Syria and Iraq. He said Jordan's air force participated in 946 sorties.

The general said about 7,000 Islamic State group militants have been killed since the beginning of the coalition airstrikes, without elaborating. Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have been participating in the Syria airstrikes, with logistical support from Qatar. U.S. officials have said that the UAE suspended airstrikes after the capture of the Jordanian pilot. The UAE announced Saturday it was sending a squadron of F-16 fighters to Jordan. (AP)

including foreigners stranded in a kidney disease hospital and 15 families from their home in Benghazi's southern area. Libyan national army last week announced that it has controlled Benghazi port area. The port, vital to importing food and gasoline, fell to the Islamist militants last October. Benghazi, the birthplace of the 2011 protests that toppled Libya's former leader Muammar Gaddafi, has since witnessed a drastic escalation of violence. The city has been a focal point for the clashes between the army and Islamist militants, and is plagued by suicide attacks, assassinations, kidnappings. (Xinhua)

DPRK Fires 5 Short-Range Missiles



SEOUL - The Democratic People's Republic of Korea fired five short-range projectiles, presumed to be tactical missiles, into east waters Sunday afternoon, reported Yonhap News Agency citing the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The five projectiles were fired off between 4:20 p.m. and 5:10 p.m. local time from Wonsan area in eastern DPRK into a northeasterly direction. Those are estimated to have flown about 200 km. The projectiles are believed to be a new type of DPRK tactical missiles that were also launched in August 2014.

It marked the DPRK's second missile launch in 2015, just two days after Pyongyang fired off ship-to-ship missiles in waters off Wonsan area.

The South Korean military is closely monitoring the DPRK's possible firings of additional missiles.

The firings came ahead of joint annual war games between Seoul and Washington scheduled for early March to April. Pyongyang proposed to suspend nuclear tests in return for the halt of joint annual military drills between South Korea and the United States in 2015, but the two countries flatly rejected the proposal. The DPRK fired a number of short-range missiles from Feb. 21 to mid-August last year amid frosty inter-Korean relations in protest against the joint war games.

South Korea offered to hold high-level talks with the DPRK in January, but Pyongyang has kept mum about it and called for the halt of the joint drills, the stop of anti-DPRK leaflet dispersion and the lifting of DPRK sanctions as preconditions for the dialogue resumption. (Xinhua)

Greek Leader to Reject EU's Austerity, Lay Out Leftist Program

ATHENS - New Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras will lay out his radical left-wing government's policies in a speech later on Sunday, firmly rejecting any more austerity forced on his debt-strapped country by its euro zone partners. In his first major speech to parliament as premier, Tsipras is expected to say that Greece wants no more bailout money, plans to renegotiate its debt deal and wants a "bridge agreement" to tide the country over until a new pact is sealed.

A second part of the speech will touch on his government's social and fiscal policy over the longer term and is likely to repeat pledges for such things as a rise in the minimum wage and free electricity for poorer Greeks. The speech will be closely watched by European Union leaders who to date have shown scant willingness to meet Tsipras's demands, fearing a wholesale backtracking on the fiscal and economic reforms international lenders have demanded in exchange for

some 240 billion euros worth of assistance.

British finance minister George Osborne, speaking from outside the euro zone, has said the standoff is one of the major risks facing the global economy.

Greece's current bailout expires on Feb. 28 and most lenders want Athens to apply for an extension, including the commitment to reforms. Greece has ruled that out. Tsipras will meet EU leaders at a summit in Brussels on Thursday. Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis will meet euro zone counterparts the day before.

A Greek official said EU leaders should not expect Tsipras, who rode to power on a groundswell of anger over EU-imposed austerity that has helped impoverish many Greeks, to say one thing at home and another to them.

"What the prime minister will say in parliament will be ... the same things that we will say in Brussels," said the official, who asked not to be named. "He will be very specific." (Reuters)

Neighbor News

Germany, China Express Willingness to Further Promote Cooperation

MUNICH - German Chancellor Angela Merkel met Saturday with Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi with both sides showing willingness to further promote cooperation between Germany and China.

Yang, who is attending the 51st Munich Security Conference in Germany, conveyed to Merkel the cordial greetings from Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang. Yang said China and Germany have enjoyed close high-level exchanges last year and established an all-round strategic partnership.

China attaches great importance to Sino-German relations, Yang noted, adding that his country is willing to strengthen the mutually beneficial cooperation with Germany in all fields, and to work with Germany to conduct successfully important bilateral activities, including the Year of China-Germany Innovative Cooperation. For her part, Merkel asked Yang to extend her good wishes to Xi and Li. She said rela-

tions between Germany and China have been developing well, and her country hopes to further strengthen the all-round cooperation with China.

The annual Munich Security Conference, an important forum for world leaders and experts to discuss major security issues, kicked off Friday in the southern German city of Munich and will run through Sunday.

In his address at Friday's opening of the conference, Yang elaborated on the security concept that China actively advocates, calling for fostering a vision of a common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security. During his stay in Munich, Yang has also met with German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Romanian Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu, Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Kumar Doval and others for exchanges of views on the promotion of ties between China and their countries, as well as major international and regional hot issues. (Xinhua)

No Nuclear Deal Better Than Bad One: Ayatollah Khamenei

TEHRAN/MUNICH - Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Sunday that no nuclear deal is better than a bad deal, as Iran and world powers gear up for a deadline by the end of March. "I agree with an agreement (on Iran's nuclear issue) ... but no agreement is better than any agreement which undermines the interests of our nation," Khamenei said in a meeting with Iran's air force commanders. "Our (nuclear) negotiators are striving to disarm the enemy with the sanction weapon. If this happens, so much the better; otherwise, everybody should know that

there are many mechanisms available in the country which can blunt this weapon," Khamenei was quoted as saying by official IRNA news agency. Negotiation means that all sides should strive to reach common grounds. No single side should expect only their demands to be put in the deal, he said. "To reach an agreement, Iran accepted to temporarily stop developing its (uranium) enrichment machines, producing 20 percent uranium enrichment, and working on Arak (heavy water plant) and Fordow (underground high-grade uranium facility)," he added. (Xinhua)

EU Trade Deal Boosts Pakistan Exports by \$1bn: Minister

ISLAMABAD - Pakistani exports to the European Union increased by more than a billion dollars after a landmark trade deal last year which made its products more competitive, the Pakistani commerce minister told AFP.

The EU signed a law in late 2013 granting Pakistan so-called "GSP-plus" status, which means firms pay no tax on certain categories of goods exported to the 27-nation bloc for 10 years. The EU makes GSP-plus conditional on implementing international conventions on human and labour rights, and there have been fears Pakistan's decision to end a moratorium on executions could affect the deal. Pakistan's

key textile industry in particular welcomed the agreement, which came into force in January 2014, and in an interview with AFP commerce minister Khurram Dastgir Khan hailed its impact.

"As a result of GSP-plus, Pakistan's exports to the EU have increased by \$1.08 billion during the period January to October 2014 as compared to the same period in 2013," Khan said. Read: Exports to EU markets grow by \$700m. Exports to the EU in January-October 2014 totalled \$6.38 billion, up by just over 20 per cent from the \$5.3 billion recorded in the corresponding period in 2013, he said. (Monitoring Desk)

Turkmenistan Supporting Iran's N. Rights: Deputy FM

TEHRAN - Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister (FM) Ebrahim Rahimpour underlined that senior Turkmen officials have voiced their support for Tehran's right to use nuclear energy for civilian purposes.

"... Turkmenistan supports Iran's peaceful nuclear activities and this was quite evident in my bilateral talks with senior Turkmen officials," Rahimpour told FNA on Sunday. Rahimpour is in Ashgabat to hold talks with senior Turkmen of-

ficials over expansion of bilateral ties.

The Iranian deputy foreign minister pointed to his talks with Turkmen officials, and said, "We had good talks on other issues as well, such as the Caspian Sea regime ... and it seems that the two sides, specially the two countries' presidents are much interested in regional cooperation."

He noted that the two sides also discussed President Hassan Rouhani's upcoming visit to Ashgabat.

Over 40 Killed in Clashes in Libya

BENGHAZI - More than 40 people were killed and dozens others injured after days of fierce clashes in Libya's second largest city of Benghazi, security and medical sources said on Sunday.

Libyan national army has mounted massive assaults in Benghazi's areas of Buhdeima, Buatni, Leithi, Gamfouda, Gawarsha, Halees and Sabri, attempting to wipe out the Islamist militants led by Ansar al-Sharia and its allies, a military official, who declined to disclose his name, told Xinhua.

The official said that the army dubbed the manoeuvre as "final offensive," and tanks, warplanes, helicopters as well as

missiles were used, attempting to eliminate the Islamist militants "once and for all."

The national army, which has allied with some pro-secular militia, has been mounting attacks since last May trying to retake the city. Sources at Jalaal Hospital and Benghazi Medical Center said they have received at least 13 dead and 62 wounded. The local media Libya Herald quoted the army spokesperson as saying the national army has killed some 30 Ansar al-Sharia fighters, and three of their own soldiers died in combat.

Libya's Red Crescent on Saturday said they have evacuated 118 people from the war zone,