

Libya Needs Govt. before Weapons: US, Britain

UNITED NATIONS - Two of the most powerful members of the U.N. Security Council are rejecting Libya's call to lift a U.N. arms embargo so it can defend itself against the Islamic State group, saying Thursday that the chaotic country needs a national unity government first.

Libya's foreign minister told an emergency council meeting Wednesday that lifting the embargo is necessary as the militant group establishes a presence in northern Africa and moves closer to Europe. Alarm soared after a video released over the weekend showed the beheading of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians there.

"If we fail to have arms provided to us, this can only play into the hands of extremists," Mohammed al Dairi said.

But the United States and Britain are openly worried about allowing more weapons into a country that has two separate governments, multiple militant groups and a high risk of weapons falling into unwanted hands.

Both countries, as permanent members of the 15-seat council, can use their veto to block any proposed action.

"The problem is that



there isn't a government in Libya that is effective and in control of its territory," British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond said during a visit to Spain. "There isn't a Libyan military which the international community can effectively support."

Libya first needs a government of national unity in place, along with a U.N. presence in the country, he said.

"But simply pouring weapons into one faction or the other, which is essentially what has been proposed, is not to bring us to a resolution to the crisis in Libya, and is not going to make Europe safer, is going to make it more at risk," Hammond

said. Libya is split between the internationally recognized government based in Tobruk in the east and another government in Tripoli, backed by Islamist militias. The U.N. embargo has been in place since 2011, the year that long-ruling dictator Moammar Gadhafi was overthrown.

In Washington, State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said the U.S. position on keeping the arms embargo hasn't changed. "It permits transfers necessary to support the Libyan government while allowing the Security Council to seek guard against the high risk that weapons may be diverted to non-state actors."

A spokesman for Libya's mission to the U.N. said he could not comment Thursday night.

Libya can apply for weapons imports under an exemption in the arms embargo for the Libyan government, but the Security Council committee that considers such requests has been cautious about giving approval amid concern that weapons might be leaked to armed groups.

The Security Council on Thursday night was preparing a press statement saying council members fully support U.N. envoy to Libya Bernardino Leon's efforts aimed at a compromise between Libya's two governments. (AP)

Australian Govt. Refuses to Apologize to Former Guantanamo Bay Detainee

CANBERRA - The Australian federal government has continued its refusals to apologize to former Guantanamo Bay detainee David Hicks despite that the United States overturned his conviction for supporting terrorism.

Hicks, who was held in Guantanamo Bay for five years between 2002 and 2007 after being captured in Afghanistan and wrongly convicted under the Military Commissions Act, had his name cleared on Thursday after it was found the charge did not exist at the time of his arrest.

His father immediately called for official apolo-

gies from both the Australian and American federal governments for supporting his conviction. However, Australia has been quick to reject such proposals.

In a report published by News Ltd. on Friday, Prime Minister Tony Abbott said "not now, not ever" would he apologize to Hicks, adding: "He was up to no good, on his own admission."

In the same report, Australian attorney general George Brandis questioned Hicks's motives for being in Afghanistan and challenged the legalities of the verdict reached by the U.S. government. (Xinhua)

Greek PM 'Certain' Euro Zone will Accept Loan Deal, Germans Soften

BRUSSELS/ATHENS - Greece's new prime minister said on Friday he was certain euro zone finance ministers would accept Athens' request for an extended loan as EU paymaster Germany softened its hostile tone.

The start of an emergency meeting of the 19-nation Eurogroup in Brussels was postponed until 1530 GMT (10:30 a.m. EST) to allow more time for preparatory talks among Greek, euro zone and IMF officials.

Hours before the talks,

leftist Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras said in a statement to Reuters: "I feel certain that the Greek letter for a six-month extension of the loan agreement with the conditionalities that accompany it will be accepted." A report by German magazine Der Spiegel that the European Central Bank was making contingency plans for a possible Greek exit from the currency area if the talks fail, on which the ECB declined comment, highlighted the high stakes. (Reuters)

Nieghbor News

Turkey Favours China Missile Deal for Air Defence

ANKARA - Turkey appears ready to buy a long-range Chinese surface-to-air missile system despite its incompatibility with Nato equipment.

Turkey is a key Nato member, and reports say US and French arms firms have been vying with China's CPMIEC.

The \$3.4bn (£2.2bn) Chinese system would be used "without integrating with Nato systems", Turkish Defence Minister Ismet Yilmaz said.

Reports say Nato and the US have urged Turkey not to accept the Chinese offer.

According to a Turkish defence industry official, Ankara has not yet taken a final decision on its planned long-range missile defence system and contract talks with China are continu-

ing, Reuters news agency reports. He was speaking after the comments from Mr Yilmaz, who was responding to MPs' questions about Turkey's missile defence project.

Mr Yilmaz said Turkey had finished the evaluation process for the project. The Russian news website Lenta.ru reports that Turkey plans to buy at least 12 Chinese HQ-9 missile batteries. The Chinese system is cheaper than rival systems, it reports. The other contenders for the contract, Lenta.ru reports, were: the Patriot made by Raytheon and Lockheed Martin in the US, the SAMP/T made by the French-Italian consortium Eurosam, and Russia's Antey-2500 made by Rosoboronexport. (BBC)

Iran has Stopped Questionable Nuclear Centrifuge Testing: IAEA

VIENNA - Iran has refrained from expanding tests of more efficient models of a machine used to refine uranium under a nuclear agreement with six world powers, a U.N. report shows, allaying concerns it might be violating the accord.

Tehran's development of advanced centrifuges is sensitive because, if successful, it could enable it to produce potential nuclear bomb material at a rate several times that of the decades-old version of the machine now in use. An interim accord in 2013 between Iran and the United States, France, Germany, Britain, China and Russia stipulated Tehran could continue its "current enrichment R&D (research and development) practices", implying they should

not be stepped up.

But a U.N. nuclear agency report in November said Iran had been feeding one of several new models under development, the so-called IR-5 centrifuge, with uranium gas, prompting a debate among analysts on whether this may have been a violation.

A confidential document by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), distributed among its member states on Thursday and obtained by Reuters, showed the IR-5 had been disconnected.

"The disconnection reflects Iran addressing concerns about its enrichment (of uranium)," said the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS), which closely tracks Iran's nuclear program. (Reuters)

Yemen Parties Close to a Deal to End Crisis: UN

SANAA - Yemen's political parties are edging closer to a deal that would resolve the crisis caused by the Shiite Huthi militia seizing power, UN envoy Jamal Benomar has said.

Parties including the powerful Huthis have agreed on the "form of the legislative authority in the interim period", Benomar wrote on his Facebook page late Thursday.

He hailed the preliminary accord as an "important step towards achieving a comprehensive political agreement that would end the current crisis".

The Huthis seized Sanaa in September before tightening their grip and prompting Western-backed President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi to offer to resign in protest. They dissolved parliament and installed a "presidential council" on February 6, sparking security concerns that saw several Arab and Western states close their embassies and evacuate diplomats.

The new deal stipulates that the current parlia-



ment dominated by ousted president Ali Abdullah Saleh's party would remain in place, while a parallel "People's Transitional Council" would be formed to include "unrepresented components", Benomar said.

Half of the seats in the new council would go to representatives of formerly independent South Yemen, while women and youth groups would get a 30 percent and 20 percent quota respectively.

The two chambers together would form the "national council," the UN envoy said.

"This progress is not an agreement, but is an important breakthrough that paves the way towards a comprehensive

agreement," he wrote.

On Sunday, the UN Security Council urged the Huthis, known officially as Ansarullah, to "immediately and unconditionally" engage in "good faith" in UN-brokered negotiations, withdraw their forces from government institutions and relinquish power.

In a new resolution, adopted unanimously by all 15 members, the council also demanded that the militia release Hadi, his Prime Minister Khalid Bahah and other officials and activists under de facto house arrest or in detention.

In response on Monday, the Huthis told the Security Council to "respect the will and sovereignty of ... (More on P4)... (23)

US, Iran Resume Bilateral Nuke Talks

GENEVA - Delegations from the United States and Iran started on Friday another round of bilateral talks over Tehran's long-disputed nuclear program.

A diplomatic official with the U.S. Mission in Geneva told Xinhua that the talks began this morning.

The source said that issues regarding the Iranian nuclear program including centrifuges and sanctions would be on the table during these closed-door meetings.

The bilateral talks were at the moment led by Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi and U.S. Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, according to Iran's official news agency IRNA.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad-javad Zarif and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry will join the talks on Sunday and Monday, Araqchi said earlier.

Kerry's trip was confirmed by the U.S. Department of State in a statement, which noted that the top U.S. diplomat will travel on Feb. 22 to Geneva to meet with



his counterpart Zarif "as part of the ongoing nuclear negotiations".

The source with the U.S. Mission told Xinhua that Kerry was scheduled to leave Geneva late Monday afternoon.

Following the bilateral talks, further discussions may be held with the participation of other members of the P5+1 group, which comprises the United States, Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany, IRNA reported.

Iran has been a target of UN sanctions due to its alleged attempts to build nuclear weapons. The West accuses Iran of developing nuclear weapons under the cover of civilian nuclear programs, which Iran has denied, insisting that its nuclear

programs are for peaceful purposes only.

The sides agreed in November 2014 to extend the deadline for another seven months and aimed to reach a political framework deal within the next four months.

However, Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei expressed concerns over the two-phased arrangement earlier this month, saying a framework agreement on generalities may be abused by Iran's opponents as a tool for bargaining over details in the final deal. How much nuclear capability Iran can keep, and the steps to lift West-imposed sanctions against Tehran are among the main sticking points for the ongoing negotiations. (Xinhua)

Kiev Accuses Russia of Sending More Tanks to East Ukraine

DEBALTSEVE - Kiev accused Russia on Friday of sending more tanks and troops into eastern Ukraine and said they were heading towards the rebel-held town of Novoazovsk on the southern coast, expanding their presence on what could be the next key battlefield.

Russia did not immediately respond to the accusation which, if confirmed, would be almost certain to finally kill off a tattered European-brokered truce that came into force on Sunday. Moscow has always denied such charges in the past.

Novoazovsk lies on the Sea of Azov, 40 km (25

miles) east of the port city of Mariupol. It was captured by rebels last year and could be a launching-pad for more pressure on Mariupol, a gateway to the south and possibly to the Crimea peninsula annexed by Russia a year ago.

"In recent days, despite the Minsk (ceasefire) agreement, military equipment and ammunition have been sighted crossing from Russia into Ukraine," military spokesman Andriy Lyenko said.

He said more than 20 Russian tanks, 10 missile systems and busloads of troops had crossed the border into Ukraine.

Western nations have

clung to the hope that they can revive the peace deal brokered by France and Germany in the Belarussian capital Minsk on Feb. 12 even though the rebels ignored it to seize the important railway hub of Debaltsseve.

The German, Russian, Ukrainian and French foreign ministers are expected to meet next week to pursue peace moves, Russian media reported.

But hopes were slim even before the latest sighting of Russian reinforcements, also reported by the United States this week.

Renewed fighting between the pro-Russian separatists and gov ... (More on P4)... (24)

France, Germany Want Ukraine Ceasefire Fully Observed: Hollande



PARIS - France and Germany are more convinced than ever that the Minsk agreements aimed at resolving an ongoing crisis in Ukraine should be fully implemented and a ceasefire observed, French President Francois Hollande said on Friday.

"With the (German) Chancellor we have never stopped speaking since the (September

2014) Minsk agreements and we are more convinced than ever that they must be applied - all the agreements, nothing but the agreements," Hollande said in a joint news conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Any country that failed to respect the Minsk agreements would face sanctions, he added. (Reuters)

Gulf Bloc Backtracks on Criticism of Egypt in Qatar Row

RIYADH - The Gulf Cooperation Council has backtracked on criticism of Egypt in its row with bloc member Qatar over Libya, in a move a Saudi-owned daily said Friday reflected divisions among member states.

GCC secretary general Abdullah al-Zayani had issued a statement on Thursday rebuking Egypt for accusing Qatar of supporting terrorism in Libya because of reservations it expressed about Egyptian air strikes earlier this week.

But late in the evening, Zayani issued a new statement disavowing the earlier one and insist ... (More on P4)... (25)

Midia Committee Refuse to Broadcast IRP's Agitation Videos

DUSHANBE - The Committee for TV and Radio-broadcasting under the Government of Tajikistan has reportedly refused to broadcast agitation video materials of the Islamic Revival Party (IRP). "The Committee for TV and Radio-broadcasting has refused to broadcast our three agitation video materials called 'Answers to Questions,' 'What We Know about the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan' and 'Elections,'" Mahmudjon Fayzrahmonov, a spokesman for the IRP, told Asia-Plus in an interview.

According to him, the Committee justified its refusal to broadcast IRP's video materials by saying that only studios having official operating licenses have the right to produce audio and video materials.

"The Committee noted in its letter that the studio that produced IRP's video materials is unknown, and therefore, it refused to broadcast them," Fayzrahmonov said, noting that the video materials had been produced by the IRP election campaign staff. (Asia-Plus)