

Most Americans Believe NATO Should be Maintained: Poll

WASHINGTON - Eighty percent of Americans believe the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) should be maintained despite doubts about the alliance among the Trump administration, a latest Gallup poll has found. This is sharply up from 64 percent in 1995 when Gallup last time asked the same question, according to Gallup. But there is big difference in Americans' partisan views of the NATO, as 97 percent of Democrats voice support to the alliance, compared to 69 percent of Republicans. When Gallup first asked Americans about their views on NATO in July 1989, 75 percent thought the alliance should be maintained. Ameri-



cans' support to the alliance dropped to 62 percent in 1991, months before the Soviet Union's formal collapse.

Three years later, support for the alliance increased to 70 percent, but it dipped back down to 64 percent in 1995 during NATO's intervention in the Bosnian War, according to Gallup.

The latest Gallup's poll was conducted on Feb. 1-5 after the election victory of Republican candidate Donald Trump in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

During his campaign, Trump questioned the traditional U.S. commitment to the alliance, referring to it as "obsolete." But he has since backed down...*(More on P4)...(16)*

Trump's Defense Chief, in Iraq, Says: We're not Here for Your Oil

BAGHDAD - The U.S. military is not in Iraq "to seize anybody's oil," Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said, distancing himself from remarks by President Donald Trump at the start of a visit to Iraq on Monday. Mattis, on his first trip to Iraq as Pentagon chief, is hoping to assess the war effort as U.S.-backed Iraqi forces launch a new push to evict Islamic State militants from their remaining stronghold in the city of Mosul. But he is likely to face questions about Trump's re-

marks and actions, including a temporary ban on travel to the United States and for saying America should have seized Iraq's oil after toppling Saddam Hussein in 2003. Trump told CIA staff in January: "We should have kept the oil. But okay. Maybe you'll have another chance." Mattis, however, flatly ruled out any such intent. "We're not in Iraq to seize anybody's oil," he told reporters traveling with him. His remarks are the latest...*(More on P4)...(17)*

UN and others Play Down Expectations for Syria Talks

MUNICH - The United Nations and other parties to Syrian peace efforts on Sunday softened any expectations of a major breakthrough at UN-led talks in Geneva next week, with US policy on the crisis in disarray and its ties with Russia unclear.

UN envoy Staffan de Mistura told the Munich Security Conference the lack of a clear US position made resolving the complex issues of the six-year civil war far more complicated than his ear-

lier mediation efforts for Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I can't tell you (if it will succeed), but we have to push with the momentum. Even a ceasefire cannot hold too long if there is no political (solution)," he said, referring to the shaky ceasefire brokered by Russia and Turkey in the Kazakh capital Astana. Questions abound over Washington's approach to ending the war, even after the first interna-



tional foray by members of US President Donald Trump's foreign policy team. It remains unclear if Trump will make good his promise to build closer ties to Russia, especially in the fight against the militant Islamic State group. *(Reuters)*

France's Le Pen Narrows Gap in Presidential Race: Poll

PARIS - French far-right leader Marine Le Pen has gained some ground on her main election rivals, independent Emmanuel Macron and conservative Francois Fillon, but would still lose to either of them in the May 7 runoff for the presidency, a poll showed on Monday. The Opinionway poll of voting intentions had Le Pen easily beating her four main rivals and winning the April 23 first round with a score of 27 percent to move through to the two-way runoff against either Macron or Fillon. In a straight fight with Macron she would go down

by 42 percent against his 58, while against Fillon she would lose with 44 percent to his 56, the poll showed. French government bond yields rose sharply on news of the poll, reflecting investors' apprehension over Le Pen's proposals to quit the euro zone, hold a referendum on EU membership, and slap taxes on imports and on the job contracts of foreigners. Her improvement in ratings was most notable against Macron, with whom she was seen a week ago as polling 36-37 percent to his 63-64 percent...*(More on P4)...(18)*

New Russian Ballistic Missiles can Penetrate US Missile Defense: Vice Premier

MOSCOW - The newly-developed ballistic missiles of Russia can penetrate any U.S. missile shield, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin said. At a program on the Rossiya-1 television channel, Rogozin said Russia's nuclear deterrence forces are made up of various missiles, including the Soviet-era classical missile Voevoda. Now Russia is developing new missiles. According to the deputy prime minister, the U.S. missile defense system is

not a threat to Russia. "We can clear this defense," he said. In the field of high-speed helicopter, Russia doesn't lag behind the United States, Rogozin said. The newly-developed Russian helicopter has reached a cruising speed of 405 km per hour during last year's test, and the mass production of the helicopter will begin in 2018, he explained. The Russian tanks based on a new generation of heavy tracked unified platform "Armata," ac-



ording to Rogozin, are superior to Israeli, American and European tanks in its technical characteristics. "For example, one of the new tanks -- T-14 -- has full digital equipment, an uninhabited tower and isolated armored capsule for the crew," the vice premier said. *(Xinhua)*

ASEAN Ministers to Discuss Ways to Revitalize 50-Year-Old Regional Bloc

BORACAY, Philippines - Southeast Asian foreign ministers are to meet this week in this beach island of Philippines to discuss ways to revitalize the 50-year-old, 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) bloc amid the various challenges confronting the region and the world. Philippine Foreign Secretary Perfecto Yasay will chair the ASEAN foreign ministers' retreat on Tuesday in Boracay, an island in central Philippines famous



for its powdery white sand and shallow azure water ideal for swimming and snorkeling. The meeting is the first major meeting of ASEAN under the Philip-

pine chairmanship of ASEAN in 2017. "During the retreat the ASEAN foreign ministers will take stock of ASEAN's...*(More on P4)...(19)*

Merkel to Visit Algeria to Boost Economic Partnership

ALGIERS - German Chancellor Angela Merkel is to visit Algeria on Monday at the invitation of Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, said a statement of the president's office on Sunday. Merkel is due to hold talks with President Bouteflika and exchange views, notably on the relations between Algeria and the European Union, as well as the situation in the Maghreb, the Sahel and the Middle East, said the statement. It said the visit of German chancellor will be an opportunity to give a new impetus to the bilateral cooperation in all fields. Merkel is heading a delegation of 30 businessmen and employers, as Germany and Algeria are hoping to sign partnership projects as part of the 6th Algerian-German joint cooperation committee and business forum, added the...*(More on P4)...(20)*

French Far-Right Chief Says Assad Solution to Syria Crisis

BEIRUT - French far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen on Monday called Syrian President Bashar Assad "the most reassuring solution for France," a major divergence with her nation's official policy. Le Pen, head of the anti-immigration National Front, spoke after meetings with Lebanese President Michel Aoun and Prime Minister Saad Hariri. They were among numerous officials, including the Christian Maronite patriarch, that Le Pen was meeting on her two-day visit to Lebanon, a former French protectorate. The trip represented the first major foray into foreign policy for Le Pen, a leading candidate in France's April 23 and May 7 election. She said she told Hariri that there is "no viable and workable solution" to the Syrian civil war beyond choosing between Assad and the Islamic State group. "I clearly explained that in the political picture the least bad option is the politically realistic. It appears that Bashar al Assad is evidently today the most reassuring solution for France." Le Pen has made known her preference for Assad in the past -- a position that runs counter to the French government's strong anti-Assad approach -- but it carries extra weight being stated while on a foreign visit with a Syrian neighbor, and during unusual meetings with the nation's top officials. The trip is Le Pen's first real public foray into foreign policy. *(AP)*

US Vice President Reaffirms Strong Commitment to EU

BRUSSELS - U.S. Vice President Mike Pence on Monday reaffirmed "strong commitments" to the European Union (EU), in a bid to allay the bloc's doubts on the new U.S. administration's stance towards it. "Today is my privilege to be on behalf of President (Donald) Trump, to express strong commitments of the United States to continue cooperation and partnership with the EU," Pence said at a joint press conference with European Council President Donald Tusk after their meeting in Brussels. He stressed that despite differences between the United States and the EU, the two sides "...*(More on P4)...(21)*

United States Needs "Strong, United EU": EU's Juncker

BRUSSELS - European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker on Monday said the United States needs "a strong and united" European Union (EU) on all possible issues, in the presence of visiting U.S. Vice President Mike Pence. "I do not think that the moment has come to divide the United States and the EU. We are partners for so many decades in the world," he told reporters before their meeting here. Underscoring that global stability heavily depends on good relations between the United States and the EU, Juncker said the United States and European Union collaborate on issues such as defense, "where

we want to step up our own defense efforts, including in a broader understanding of what stability in the world means." He also highlighted EU's importance to the U.S. economy, saying "The U.S. economy is depending -- more than some in the United States think -- on exchanges, trade volumes between the United States and the European Union." Pence is on his first diplomatic visit to Brussels as U.S. vice president, after attending the Munich Security Conference in Germany. Earlier on Monday, Pence also met with EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini and European Council President Donald Tusk. *(Xinhua)*

Nieghbor News

China, Nepal Discuss About Strengthening Defense Cooperation

KATHMANDU - A military delegation from the Chinese People's Liberation Army Western Theater Command held a meeting with Nepalese Chief of the Army Staff Rajendra Chhetri in Kathmandu on Sunday. The two sides held discussion about various issues of mutual interests and bilateral ties, the Nepal Army Headquarters

stated in a press statement.

In the statement, the Nepal Army has expressed hope that the ongoing visit of the Chinese military delegation has helped to further expand and strengthen defense cooperation between the two armies. The meeting was attended by top officials of the Nepalese Army. *(Xinhua)*

Iran Calls for Dialogue with Persian Gulf Arabs to Tackle Common Challenges

TEHRAN - Iran's foreign minister on Sunday called for talks between the Islamic republic and the Persian Gulf states aimed at addressing the mutual and regional issues. "Countries in the Persian Gulf region need to surmount the current state of division and tension and instead move in the direction of erecting realistic regional arrangements," Mohammad Javad Zarif said at the 53rd Munich Security Conference. "It can perhaps start with a modest regional dialogue forum," he said, urging the Persian Gulf Arab states to work with Iran to address "anxieties" and violence across the region, according to Press TV. On Wednesday, Iranian

President Hassan Rouhani made formal trips to Kuwait and Oman on the reconciliation mission between Iran and the Arab states.

His trip followed the January visit by Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled al-Sabah to Tehran who delivered a message on a "basis of dialogue" between Arab states and Iran. Following that, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman said the Iranian government was mulling a response to the reconciliation overture. Relations between Iran and some Arab states have deteriorated over the past years over the ongoing conflicts in Syria, Yemen and Bahrain. *(Xinhua)*

Pakistan Says Airstrikes Have Killed 'Dozens' of Militants

PESHAWAR - Pakistani airstrikes killed "dozens" of militants on Monday in a tribal region along the Afghan border, the military said. Pakistan had vowed to fight back after a series of suicide bombings last week killed more than 100 people, including 88 worshippers gathered at a famed Sufi shrine. The attacks were claimed by various Islamic militant groups, which have long operated in the porous border region. The warplanes targeted militant hideouts in the Wucha Bibi area of North Waziristan, the Pakistani army said in a statement. The information could

not be independently confirmed, as media access to the region is heavily restricted. Pakistan carried out a blistering artillery assault on suspected terrorist camps in Afghanistan on Friday and Saturday after giving the Afghan government a list of 76 alleged Pakistani terrorists it said where sheltering there. The artillery assault displaced nearly 200 families, according to the Norwegian Refugee Council. On Monday, the Afghan ambassador to Pakistan handed Islamabad a list of 85 suspected terrorist leaders that Kabul says...*(More on P4)...(22)*

Turkmenistan Celebrates Day of National Flag

ASHGABAT - Turkmenistan celebrated the day of national flag on February 19. The major festive events were held in the Turkmen capital where the flower laying ceremony at the Main Flag of the country took place, reports the state news agency of Turkmenistan. The national flag of Turkmenistan was adopted on

February 19, 1992. "This year the holiday coincided with one more significant event symbolizing a major landmark in the life of the country. During the national elections which took place on February 12, the leader of nation of Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov was again elected head of the...*(More on P4)...(23)*

US, Uzbekistan Celebrate 25th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations

TASHKENT - US President Donald Trump sent a congratulatory message to Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in connection with the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the United States of America. On 19 February, the United States and Uzbekistan mark the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. We may be proud of many

accomplishments in our bilateral relations, the message said. "In the coming years, I hope to work with you on promoting our common goals in the sphere of regional security and stability. The United States support the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Uzbekistan and its neighbors, as well as your endeavor, aimed at building more interrelated and prosperous Central Asia." *(Monitoring Desk)*