

# Heading to Europe, Pentagon Chief to Boost Military Support

WASHINGTON - Heading to Europe, U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter is carrying a strong message of U.S. military support for American allies and Baltic nations to help calm growing concerns about Russian actions.

A key theme at all his stops will be how the United States, NATO and other partners can best deal with the Kremlin in the wake of Moscow's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea region and its military backing of separatists battling Ukraine's government on the eastern border. Officials said Carter, who was leaving Washington on Sunday, plans to encourage allied min-



isters to better work together in countering threats facing Europe. His talks are sure to draw the ire of Russian President Vladimir Putin, whose economy is hurting due to low oil prices and U.S. and European Union sanctions against Russia for its actions in Ukraine.

At a NATO meeting, defense ministers will discuss plans to involve the alliance more officially in the fight against Islamic State militants in Iraq. According to U.S. officials, NATO leaders will consider providing ministry-level advice and other training assistance in Iraq. (AP)

## IS to Bomb Syria's Ancient City of Palmyra: Monitor

DAMASCUS - The Islamic State (IS) militants have rigged the millennia-old city of Palmyra in central Syria with explosives, a monitor group reported on Sunday.

The IS militants planted mines and explosive devices in the ancient part of Palmyra, where 2,000-year-old monuments and temples are located, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. It was not immediately clear whether the IS planted explosives to prevent the government troops from approaching,

or to detonate the archeological sites as they previously did in Iraq, according to the London-based group, which relies on a network of activists on ground. Last month, the IS detonated the notorious military prison in Palmyra, just days after capturing that city in the eastern countryside of the central province of Homs. Palmyra, a UNESCO World Heritage site, contains monumental ruins of a city that was one of the most important cultural centers in ancient times. (Xinhua)

## Pentagon Chief to Push U.S. Allies to Ditch 'Cold War Playbook'

WASHINGTON - U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter will urge NATO allies to "dispose of the Cold War playbook" during a trip to Europe this week, as the alliance adapts to a new kind of threat from Russia in the east and Islamic State to the south, U.S. officials said. Carter heads first to Berlin, where he is expected to call for a more muscular global security role from Germany, Europe's largest economy. Germany



remains hesitant to deploy troops abroad, seven decades after the end of World War Two.

"He will encourage Germany, under the firm leadership of the minister of defense, to increase their

security role in the world, commensurate with their political and economic weight," a senior U.S. defense official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. Relations between Moscow and the West have plunged to a post-Cold War low since Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimea region. NATO says Russian is still actively providing military support for separatists in eastern ... (More on P4)... (18)

## Israeli PM Slams French Peace Initiative, Calls it "Dictate"

JERUSALEM - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday slammed a France-backed initiative to settle Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The initiative intends to help restore long-stalled peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, and establish a Palestinian state within 18-months' time. Netanyahu, who made the statements on Sunday at

the weekly cabinet meeting, will meet later in the day with French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, who is in the region for a two-day visit to promote the Paris-sponsored initiative. He described the French proposal as a "dictate," which doesn't take into consideration Israel's "security needs," according to a statement from the prime minister's office, adding that Israel "strongly" rejects such

an international dictate. The statement also said that peace can only be the result of negotiations rather than unilateral moves.

Fabius arrived in Jordan on Sunday morning. He will meet separately with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, as well as Benjamin Netanyahu. (Xinhua)

## Inaction on Peace Risks Setting Israeli-Palestinian Conflict 'Ablaze': France

CAIRO - French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius warned Israel and the Palestinians on Saturday that the stalemate in the peace process risked setting the conflict "ablaze" and urged both sides to return to the negotiating table quickly. U.S.-led efforts to broker a so-called two-state solution collapsed in April 2014 and leaders on both sides have since been weakened politically. But with the region's crises worsening and Washington reassessing its options on relations with Israel, France sees a narrow window to resume negotiations. "We have to do the maximum so that the two sides restart negotiations," Fabius told reporters after meeting Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. "We think



that by doing nothing there will be the twin risk of stalemate and setting (the conflict) ablaze." Fabius was on a two-day trip to the Middle East to promote a French-led initiative that would see the peace process relaunched through an international

support group comprising Arab states, the European Union and U.N. Security Council members. These states would then work to pressure both sides to make compromises that neither wants to make alone. (Reuters)

## Air Strikes Kill 15 in Yemen Attacks: Houthi Media

SANAA - Arab air strikes killed 15 people and wounded dozens across Yemen late on Saturday, the Houthi-run Saba news agency reported.

The dead included five women and two children in attacks on Saada and Marib provinces, the agency said.

A Saudi-led Arab coalition has been bombarding Houthi rebels and allied army units since March 26 in a campaign to restore exiled President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi to power. Hadi, Riyadh's ally, was pushed aside last year when Houthis advancing from their northern strongholds overran the government in the capital Sanaa and went on to capture lands to the south. Anti-Houthi forces said they repelled an attack by Houthi and allies in Yemen's army on the southern ... (More on P4)... (21)

## Syria Accuses Israel of Treating Al-Qaida-Linked Militants

DAMASCUS - Syria accused Israel of providing medical treatment for the wounded militants of the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front in its hospitals, official SANA news agency reported Sunday.

The "authorities of the Israeli occupation" are moving the wounded terrorists of Nusra Front from the outskirts of the Syrian town of Hadar to the Israeli-occupied Go-

lan Heights to treat them, SANA said. The official media has for long accused Israel of backing the rebels of Nusra Front in southern Syria, namely in the Qunaitera province, near Golan Heights, and in Daraa province.

Military experts said Israel aims at securing its areas near Syria, by backing a militia that could serve in securing a buffer zone between Syria and Israel,

akin to what it did during the Lebanese civil war. Several jihadi groups unleashed recently a wide-scale offensive against the remaining government troops' positions in Qunaitera, near the Golan Heights. Their recent assault was focused on the predominantly Druze town of Hadar, just a couple kilometers from Golan Heights. Israel has reportedly ... (More on P4)... (19)

## Iraqi Army Continues to Battle IS Militants in Key Provinces

BAGHDAD - Iraqi security forces on Sunday continued their battles against the Islamic State (IS) militants in the provinces of Salahuddin and Anbar, security sources said. In Salahuddin province, tit-for-tat battles have kept ramping up since Saturday night between the security forces backed by some allied

militias and the IS fighters in districts inside the battleground town of Baiji, some 200 km north of the capital Baghdad, a provincial security source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity. Meanwhile, the troops and the militias, also known as Hashd Shaabi, or popular mobilization, made an advance into an IS-held village adjacent

to Iraq's largest oil refinery of Baiji, just north of the town with the same name, the source said, adding that at least five IS operatives and one militiaman were killed with six more wounded. Also in the province, federal police forces carried out an operation in west of the city of Samarra, some 120 km ... (More on P4)... (20)

## Neighbour News

### Iran Rejects U.S. Terror Report as "Baseless"

TEHRAN - Iran's Foreign Ministry rejected as "baseless" a recent U.S. report saying that the Islamic republic continues to sponsor global terrorism, local media reported on Sunday. The report's anti-Iran allegations are "repetitive and politically-motivated," and Washington's double-standard approach towards terrorism is the root cause of the spread of terrorism, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Marzieh Afkham was quoted as saying by Tasnim news agency. On Friday, a U.S. State Department annual re-

port on terrorism enlisted Iran among the countries that "continued to sponsor global terror" activities in 2014. The Islamic Republic of Iran has been the "biggest victim of terrorism" over the past three decades, and such accusations against Iran is an attempt to divert attention from the real supporters of terrorism in the world, Afkham said. Washington's failure to take a serious action against extremist groups inside the U.S. and its indifference to Israel's crimes against the Palestinians undermine the credibility of such reports on terrorism, she added. (Xinhua)

### China Busts Group Staging Paid Protests

JINAN - Police in east China's Shandong Province have busted a group that allegedly organized multiple mass protests to influence court sentences, according to the Ministry of Public Security. The group in question specialized in paying a "relatively regular" group of people who acted as mass protesters in the name of protecting the rights of petitioners and assisting lawyers advocating their rights, the ministry said in a late Sunday statement, citing police investigations. Among the detained is Zhai Yanmin, 54, the main organizer that paid people to stage protests, and Liu Jianjun, a lawyer who accepted cases from involved parties who hoped to influence judges and assigned them to Zhai. They are under the charge of staging illegal gather-

ing to disrupt social order. "The group was close-knit with specific assignments for its members, and their activities were seen in heated cases across the country," the statement said. The statement cited one incident on June 15, when unidentified protesters holding banners saying "people have the rights to supervise justice" and "Xu is not guilty" gathered in front of the Intermediate People's Court of Weifang, a city in Shandong, resulting in a huge number of onlookers and severe traffic jams. At the same time, pictures and stories were posted on foreign websites, claiming that petitioners gathering before the court accused the judicial organ of wrongful convictions, according to the statement. (Xinhua)

### PPP Stresses Joint Fight against Militancy

ISLAMABAD - PPP Co-Chairman Asif Ali Zardari said on Saturday that all national institutions must work within their assigned parameters in order to ensure victory in the ongoing fight against militancy. "Fight against militancy is a collective fight of the whole nation. It can be fought successfully only when it is fought collectively, with each institution performing its assigned duties, within (its) parameters," the former president said in his message on the eve of the 62nd birth anniversary of his late spouse and former prime minister Benazir Bhutto. "As for the PPP, we are committed to exterminating the militant ideology that is posing an existential threat to the country," he said. The message was released by the party's media office hours before Mr Zardari's departure from Islamabad where he will hold meetings with PPP office-bearers on Sunday. Mr Zardari, whose outburst against the military leadership during a speech at a function here on June 17 created ripples in the political circles, termed the ongoing fight against terrorism a success and gave credit to the "unity of political forces" and "state agencies". (Agencies)

### Turkmenistan to Hold Iran's 2nd Energy Exhibition

ASHGABAT - According to Abdolhamid Asadian, executive official of Iran Project, the four-day exposition will be held in the Turkmen capital city on August 19-21, Press TV reported. In an interview with Fars news agency, the official said Iran's President Hassan Rouhani and his Turkmen counterpart, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow, signed 17 memorandums of understanding for all-out cooperation between the two countries during a visit to Ashgabat by Rouhani in March. The two countries have

also indicated their readiness and determination to boost the volume of bilateral trade to USD 60 billion in the next 10 years, he added. Asadian further noted that this year's exhibition will focus on barter trade between the two countries according to which natural gas from Turkmenistan will be exchanged with Iranian goods and services. The official said qualified Iranian companies active in the fields of industrial production and export of technical and engineering services can take part in this year's event. (Agencies)

## U.S., Allies Target Islamic State with 18 Air Strikes in Iraq



WASHINGTON - U.S. and coalition forces launched 18 air strikes against Islamic State targets in Iraq on Saturday, with four each in Tal Afar and Mosul, the U.S. military said in a statement. The air strikes hit near nine Iraqi cities in all, destroying Islamic State buildings, tactical units, heavy machine guns and vehicles, the Combined Joint Task Force said in a statement Sunday.

Near Haditha, two air strikes hit a militants' safe house and an Islamic State headquarters, it said. Other cities affected were Baghdad, Ar Rutbah, Baiji, Fallujah, Makhmur and Sinjar, it said. In Syria, three air strikes near Tal Abyad on Saturday hit three Islamic State tactical units, destroyed three fighting positions and a heavy machine gun, the military coalition said. (Reuters)

## UN Chief Welcomes Signing of Peace Accord in Mali



UNITED NATIONS - UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Saturday welcomed the signing of peace accord by the main rebel coalition of Mali in the African country's capital Bamako. In a statement released by Ban's spokesperson, The UN Secretary-General congratulates the Malian parties and the Algeria-led Mediation team for their efforts to bring the signing process to a successful completion. On May 15, in absence of the Malian main rebel coalition, the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), which include three major rebel groups

in northern Mali, Mali's government signed the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Bamako with pro-government militias as well as some of the country's minor rebel groups. "The Secretary-General notes that signature by all parties paves the way for the full and timely implementation of the Peace Agreement," said the statement. Saying the ultimate responsibility for peace lies with Mali and the Malians, the Secretary-General urged all parties to continue to work in good faith to advance progress and to fully implement the provisions of the ceasefire. (Xinhua)