

US Deploys B-52 Bombers to Qatar amid Iran Threat Hiatus

WASHINGTON - The US Air Force released images of B-52 Stratofortress bombers landing in Qatar. The deployment is part of a larger US military build-up in the region touted as a countermeasure to an unspecified threat from Iran.

The strategic bombers arrived at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar on Thursday night, the Air Force said. They were provided by the 20th Bomb Squadron of Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana. Other B-52s were moved to an unspecified location in "southwest Asia," the statement said.

Earlier, the US Air Force released a video showing the bombers taking off from Barksdale for the CENTCOM area of responsibility.

The deployments come as



the US threatens Iran with retaliation for a claimed plan to attack "American interests."

The White House earlier trumpeted the move of the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier

strike group towards the Persian Gulf, which was touted as a strong warning to Iran. Washington is reportedly acting on a vague tip from Israel. Officials in Tehran rejected Washington's rhetoric and mocked the statements about the USS Abraham Lincoln, saying its movements are old news.

The Boeing B-52 Stratofortress is a veteran strategic aircraft designed with the capability to drop nuclear weapons. The current B-52H version has been in production since 1961, with dozens of aircraft delivered to the USAF. The bomber was used for Cold War era patrols as well as delivering strikes as part of numerous wars starting with Vietnam. (RT)

Neighbor News

Iranians Rally in Support for Countermeasures Against US Nuclear Withdrawal

TEHRAN - Iranians have held nationwide rallies expressing support for the decision of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) to suspend the implementation of some of Iran's commitments under the JCPOA in response to the United States' withdrawal from the deal.

The rallies took place after Friday prayers as the people across the country marched and chanted slogans and held placards in support of the decision.

Demonstrators in Tehran finished the rallies by issuing a statement welcoming the decision and warning the US against any further provocation against the country.

The statement also called for a full suspension of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) if European signatories further failed to uphold the deal.

Iran has complained to Europe for its long-delayed implementation of a promised European financial mechanism designed to bypass US sanctions. The dem-

onstrations came after Iran's President Hassan Rouhani announced a decision made by the SNSC on Wednesday.

According to the decision, Iran will stop selling its excess low-enriched uranium and heavy water as it was contractually obliged under the nuclear deal.

Rouhani said Iran would take further steps in 60 days if the other signatories failed again to ensure that it still benefited from staying in the nuclear accord despite the US's withdrawal. In a statement, the SNSC has said the order is aimed at "safeguarding the Iranian nation's security and interests" in the line with national rights under Articles 26 and 36 of the JCPOA.

The document says Tehran has exercised utmost self-restraint and patience since Washington's exit from the deal last May, and has given the remaining signatories "considerable" time at their own request to compensate for Washington's withdrawal and guarantee Iran's interests. (Press TV)

Turkmenistan, Romania Mull Business Partnership Prospects

ASHGABAT - A round table meeting was held in Bucharest on the topic "Current economic challenges and prospects in the Caspian Sea region - the experience of Turkmenistan", Trend reports with reference to the Turkmen Foreign Ministry.

The meeting was organized by the Embassy of Turkmenistan with the assistance of the Economic Academy of Bucharest.

At the round table meeting an exchange of views took place on the prospects for further development of economic cooperation between Turkmenistan and Romania.

The event was timed to the holding of the first Caspian Economic Forum in Avaza tourist zone in Turkmenistan on August 12, 2019.

Earlier it was reported that the two countries agreed to explore the best routes of the Black Sea - Caspian Sea trade and transport corridor by using the advantages of Constanta and Turkmenbashi ports.

The issue is the formation of the Eurasian Transport Corridor. In particular, Turkmenistan has been recently exploring the possibility of transporting cargo, including liquefied gas, to Constanta port. (Trend)

Uzbekistan Bans Use of Persistent Organic Pollutants

TASHKENT - The President of Uzbekistan signed the law on ratification of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), which aims to reduce the use and complete elimination of these substances.

The Convention was earlier ratified by the national parliament, Trend reports with reference to the Ministry of Justice of Uzbekistan.

Ratification of the convention will require Uzbekistan to provide information on available hazardous chemicals, ban or restrict usage of POPs, and

dispose them by environmentally friendly methods.

Convention was adopted in the city of Stockholm on May 23, 2001. To date, 182 states are parties to the convention.

Ratification of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (Stockholm, May 22, 2001) is one of the conditions of the European Union for Uzbekistan to obtain additional tariff preferences for the supply of domestic goods to the European market within the framework of the General System of Preferences "GSP +". (Trend)

Japanese Incoming Ambassador Calls on COAS

RAWALPINDI - Incoming Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan, Kuniori Matsuda Friday called on Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General Qamar Javed Bajwa here at the General Headquarters. Matters of mutual interest including regional security issues were discussed during the meeting, an Inter Services Public

Relations press release said.

The two noted the exceptional mutual relations between both countries and pledged to further improve the same.

The visiting dignitary acknowledged and appreciated Pakistan's contributions for conflict prevention in the region. (Monitoring Desk)

South Africa's ANC Poised for Election Victory but Support Ebbs

PRETORIA - The African National Congress was headed for victory in South Africa's election on Friday, although the party was on course for its worst performance since it took power 25 years ago.

By 1100 GMT, 86% of ballots in 22,925 voting districts had been counted, showing the ANC to be leading the parliamentary race with 57% of the vote. The main opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) was on 21% and

the leftist Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) had garnered 10%.

ANC officials acknowledged the decline in support for the party since the last election in 2014, when it won 62% of the vote, but said the results were still strong enough.

"People have shown they are willing to forgive the ANC," said Ronald Lamola, a member of the ANC's top governing body. "We are looking at a clear mandate for our policies." (Reuters)

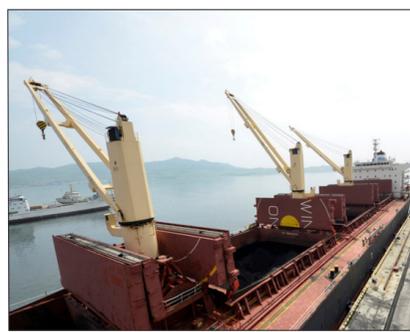
US Seizes N. Korea's 2nd Largest Bulk Carrier Ship amid Spiraling Tensions

WASHINGTON - The US Justice Department has taken possession of North Korea's second-largest freighter, seized in Indonesia last year for allegedly shipping coal in violation of UN sanctions, ratcheting up tensions between the two countries.

The DOJ has asked a federal judge to transfer ownership of the 17,000-ton Wise Honest - North Korea's second-largest bulk cargo ship - to the US through civil forfeiture, a controversial legal process that allows authorities to take possession of vehicles and

other property involved in felonies like drug smuggling.

This process has never been used to seize a North Korean ship for sanctions violations, but because the DPRK used American banks to finance the ship's upkeep, the US is entitled to take it, according to the complaint, which charges the vessel itself with crimes including money laundering. Accusing the Korea Songi Shipping Company of "concealing the origin of their ship" to sell coal in violation of UN sanctions, US Attorney



for the Southern District of New York Geoffrey Berman alleged the Wise Honest was also used to "import heavy machinery to North Korea, helping expand North Korea's capabilities and continuing the cycle of sanctions evasion." (RT)

China Vows to Take 'Necessary Countermeasures' After US Tariff Hike, Stalling Talks



BEIJING - China plans to take "necessary countermeasures" in response to the US' decision to increase tariffs to 25 percent on \$200 billion in Chinese goods, a decision China's

Commerce Ministry said it "deeply regrets." The ministry did not elaborate on what those countermeasures might be, but added in a statement that it hoped the US could

come to a mutually satisfactory agreement with China through "cooperation and consultation."

Beijing's statement was made as the increase in tariffs took effect at the turn of midnight on Friday Eastern Time, between two days of desperate talks aimed at rescuing a trade deal that has been in the making for months now.

US President Donald Trump announced the hike on Sunday, accusing China of backtracking on commitments it had made while fleshing out the

deal; he later said, "they broke the deal." Chinese officials rushed to the US to continue the negotiations, a move they said proved that they were "serious" about reaching an agreement. None has been forthcoming so far, with the talks in Washington moving into the second day without visible progress.

The tariffs impact a wide range of imported consumer products, including electronics, luggage, furniture, construction materials, seafood, and lighting. (RT)

Poland's President to Meet Trump at White House in June

WARSAW, Poland - Polish President Andrzej Duda and his wife have been invited to the White House in June to meet with U.S. President Donald Trump and first lady Melania Trump, an aide to Duda said Friday.

Krzysztof Szczerski, who heads the president's office, said the exact dates of the visit would be announced in Washington in coming days but that the meeting would be shortly after the June 5-6 Three Seas Initiative summit in Slovenia of regional

leaders.

Szczerski said the talks in Washington would focus on energy, transport, telecommunications and economic issues, as well as increasing U.S. business and military presence in Poland. Duda will also visit the U.S. West Coast and Texas for energy talks. Duda said recently he always meets with Trump "very eagerly and with great pleasure" and that such meetings are a good opportunity to discuss matters of great importance to Poland. (AP)

Pompeo Will Meet with Russia's Putin, Lavrov During Visit to Russia

WASHINGTON - U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will travel to Russia on May 12-14, where he will meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Pompeo's Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, the State Department said on Friday.

They will discuss "the full range of bilateral and multilateral challenges," the State Department said in a statement. (Reuters)

Saudi Vessel Leaves French Coast without Arms Cargo

PARIS/LE HAVRE - A Saudi vessel that had been due to load arms in France left the country's Le Havre port without its cargo of weapons and is now sailing towards Santander in Spain, according to ship tracking data, a local official and a lawyer.

Two French human rights groups on Thursday sought to block the loading of weapons onto the ship through a legal filing, arguing the cargo contravened an international arms treaty.

A French judge threw out their complaint but the Bahri-Yanbu moved off the coast of Le Havre shortly after. It had been at anchor 25 kilometres off the Le Havre, northern France, since Wednesday evening.

"The boat has left and without its cargo," Laurence Greig, a lawyer representing the ACAT rights group told Reuters. "It is extremely embarrassing for the executive because we thought that we could stop this only with a legal recourse." (Reuters)

North Korea Requested US Send 'Famous Basketball Players' to Normalize Relations: Report

PYONGYANG - North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un reportedly requested the U.S. send "famous basketball players" to the Hermit Kingdom in an effort to normalize the relationship between the two countries.

The request took place ahead of the second summit between President Trump and Kim in Vietnam. North Korea insisted at one point the agreement be a part of a joint statement on denuclearization, ABC News reported Thursday, citing two U.S. officials. It wasn't clear whether specific NBA players were mentioned in the



request. "While we did not reach an agreement with the [Democratic People's Republic of Korea] at Hanoi, we exchanged detailed positions and narrowed the gap on a number of issues," an unidentified U.S. State Department of-

icial told ABC News. The U.S. and North Korea failed to reach an agreement on denuclearization at the second summit in February. North Korea has since fired off multiple projectiles over the last few weeks. (Fox News)

Japan Enacts Legislation to Provide Broader Childcare Support amid Demographic Crisis

TOKYO - Japan's upper house of parliament on Friday approved legislation to provide broader childcare support including making preschool education free as a means to address the nation's dire demographic crisis, which includes a declining birthrate.

"The financial burden of education and child-rearing weighs heavily on young people, becoming a bottleneck for them to give birth and raise children. That is why we are making education free," Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told a parliamentary session a day earlier.

The bill, which passed the lower house in April, is slated to cost 776.0 billion yen (71 billion U.S. dollars) a year and is part Abe's push to expand social security provisions.

It will be funded by revenue generated from a planned consumption tax hike in October, the government has said.

The legislation mandates that preschool education will be free from October for all children aged between three and five years old and day-care facilities will be free for low-income households for children up to two years old. (Xinhua)

Economic Watch: AIIB President Says BRI Promising

BEIJING - The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) originated in China and, with proper implementation, could become an inclusive international platform that continuously benefits the world, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) President Jin Lique said in an exclusive interview with Xinhua on Friday.

Jin's remarks came a day after AIIB priced its first-ever global bond in London.

The five-year bond raised 2.5 billion U.S. dollars and will drive AIIB's priorities of investing in sustainable infrastructure, developing cross-border connectivity and promoting Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) investing in Emerging Asia.

Noting AIIB's board of directors has approved up to 7.94 billion USD in investments for 39 projects in 15 countries, Jin acknowledged that some projects are located in B&R countries. "But one thing is always clear," he said. "We never label projects with 'B&R' or non-'B&R', and we will never do that."

AIIB has been strictly adhering to high standards of "Lean, Clean and Green," Jin said, adding that each and every project was deliberately chosen and examined.

"That's why AIIB has gained increasing attention and recognition, not only within Asia but from other parts of the world."

Jin stressed, as he did several times before, that "AIIB is initiated by China, but not owned by China." ... (More on P4)... (14)