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SYLLOGE ON WEST ASIA

FOCUS, NUCLEAR, MISSILES & OTHER
SECURITY ISSUES IN WEST ASIA

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IRAN

Pentagon reassures Middle East partners on deterring Iran

Al-monitor, 29th January, 2021

As the Biden administration weighs next steps with Iran, the Pentagon is reassuring regional partners that deterrence remains central to US strategy toward Iran. "Iran continues to be a malign actor in the region, continues to support terrorism throughout the Middle East, and they still pose threats to our partners and friends there," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters in his first press briefing under the new US administration Thursday. "They still have an active ballistic missile program and they have been recently re-spinning centrifuges," Kirby said, adding, "We still have national security interests in the Middle East and in the Persian Gulf specifically."

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/01/pentagon-iran-biden-blinken-nuclear.html#ixzz6m8er07ka>

Biden picks Robert Malley as special envoy for Iran

Al-monitor, 29th January, 2021

Malley, who currently runs the International Crisis Group in DC, will oversee Biden's efforts to rejoin the Iranian nuclear agreement. White House press secretary Jen Psaki announced Malley's selection during a briefing with reporters Friday. In his new role as Biden's point person on Iran, Malley will oversee the administration's efforts to revive diplomacy with the country after two years of President Donald Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign of sanctions. Malley, as part of President Barack Obama's National Security Council, played a key role in the negotiations that led to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which in 2015 gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for restrictions on its nuclear activity.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/01/robert-malley-iran-special-envoy-biden-nuclear-agreement.html#ixzz6m8g9No1H>

Iran's IAEA envoy: Extra-ordinary cooperation may be no longer on agenda

Tehran Times, 29th January, 2021

Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to international organizations in Vienna, has warned about a possible change in the level of cooperation between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In a tweet, Gharibabadi wrote, "Cooperation and good-will are two-way streets NOT a one-way boulevard. The new law of the parliament has given also another chance to maintain the extremely unprecedented and impressive cooperation with the IAEA by removing the sanctions." In another tweet, he asserted, "Let's hope to see the opportunities won't be missed and the extra-ordinary cooperation is not back to ordinary."

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/457496/Iran-s-IAEA-envoy-Extra-ordinary-cooperation-may-be-no-longer>

Iran has stockpiled 17 kilogram of 20% enriched uranium

Tehran Times, 29th January, 2021

Behrooz Kamalvandi, spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), said on Thursday that after the implementation of the strategic law on lifting sanctions, Iran has accumulated about 17 kilograms of 20 percent enriched uranium. According to "The Strategic Action to Lift Sanctions Act" approved by the Iranian Parliament, Rouhani's administration was obliged to accelerate Iran's peaceful nuclear program. Article one of the law orders the AEOI to immediately after the ratification of the act, produce 20%-enriched uranium for peaceful purposes and stockpile at least 120 kilograms of it annually, and fully and promptly meet domestic need for uranium enriched above

20-percent purity level for peaceful purposes. Iran started enriching uranium up to 20% purity at its Fordow facility on January 4. Pointing to installing IR-2m centrifuges, he announced that according to the parliament's law on the strategic plan for lifting the sanctions on the Natanz nuclear site, Iran will install 1,000 IR2m centrifuge machines within three months.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/457507/Iran-has-stockpiled-17-kilogram-of-20-enriched-uranium>

Biden priority is dealing with Iran's nuclear program: Sullivan

Tehran Times, 30th January, 2021

U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Friday that a critical early priority for the Biden administration is to resolve the nuclear stalemate with Iran, saying Tehran is getting closer to having enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon. "From our perspective, a critical early priority has to be to deal with what is an escalating nuclear crisis as they (Iran) move closer and closer to having enough fissile material for a weapon," Sullivan told an online program sponsored by the U.S. Institute of Peace. On Wednesday U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Iran should act first to reduce its nuclear activities. "Iran is out of compliance on a number of fronts," Blinken told a news conference in Washington, DC. "And it would take some time, should it make the decision to do so, for it to come back into compliance and time for us then to assess whether it was meeting its obligations," Blinken told a news conference.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/457535/Biden-priority-is-dealing-with-Iran-s-nuclear-program-Sullivan>

Iran's submarine fleet is in drydock

The Jerusalem Post, 1st February, 2021

According to a report at USNI News by H.I. Sutton on January 31, "Iran's best submarines have been out of the water for a month." The

3,000-ton Kilo class submarines all appear to be in dry dock, the report said, adding: "They are based at Bandar Abbas near the Strait of Hormuz at the entrance to the Persian Gulf. The Russian-built boats are armed with up to 18 torpedoes and can remain submerged for several days at a time. They are, logically, central to the Iranian Navy's ability to defend the country."

<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/irans-submarine-fleet-is-in-drydock-657395>

Zarif: U.S. has 'limited window of opportunity' to return to nuclear deal

Tehran Times, 2nd February, 2021

In an exclusive interview with CNN's Christiane Amanpour late on Monday, Zarif said the Biden administration has a "limited window of opportunity" to re-enter the 2015 nuclear agreement. "The United States has a limited window of opportunity, because President Biden does not want to portray himself as trying to take advantage of the failed policies of the former Trump administration." Asked just how swiftly Iran could scale back its uranium enrichment program to comply with the nuclear deal if the U.S. lifts sanctions, Zarif said, "8,000 pounds of enriched uranium can go back to the previous amount in less than a day." He also said the United States must stop sale of highly advanced weapons to regional countries if it wants to talk about Iran's missile program. "Is the United States prepared to reduce hundreds of billions of dollars of weapons it is selling to our region? Is the United States prepared to stop the massacre of children in Yemen if it wants to talk about the situation in Yemen?" he said.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/457670/Zarif-U-S-has-limited-window-of-opportunity-to-return-to>

Iran successfully launches new domestically-built satellite carrier

Tehran Times, 2nd February, 2021.

The Iranian Defense Ministry has launched a new satellite carrier with a powerful engine

running on solid fuel, the national TV announced late on Monday by showing films of the launch. In a televised interview on Monday, Ahmad Hosseini, spokesman for the Ministry of Defense Aerospace Organization, said the new domestically-designed satellite carrier, named Zoljenah, has been launched in a research program that employs Iran's most powerful engine consuming solid fuel. Zoljenah can carry a satellite weighing 220 kg into an orbit 500 kilometers above the Earth. According to Hosseini, Iran has now three operational satellite carriers, namely Zoljenah, Sarir, and Soroush. Sarir is capable of carrying a payload of one ton into a height of 1,000 km and is going to replace Simorgh.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/457688/Iran-successfully-launches-new-domestically-built-satellite-carrier>

Iran installs advanced centrifuges in Natanz and Fordow facilities

Tehran Times, 2nd February, 2021

Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to international organizations in Vienna, has declared Iran will accelerate its nuclear program by operating more advanced centrifuges. In a post on his Twitter account on Tuesday, he wrote, "Thanks to our diligent nuclear scientists, two cascades of 348 IR2m centrifuges with almost 4 times the capacity of IR1 are now running with UF6 successfully in Natanz. Installation of 2 cascades of IR6 centrifuges has also been started in Fordow. There's more to come soon." Nevertheless, he has highlighted that the cooperation between Iran and the IAEA is very crucial, tweeting, "The IAEA is yet able to verify and is informed of the progress as planned."

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/457702/Iran-installs-advanced-centrifuges-in-Natanz-and-Fordow-facilities>

Pentagon sends aircraft carrier Nimitz home from Middle East

Al-monitor, 3rd February, 2021

The US Navy's Nimitz carrier strike force has left the Middle East after a nine-month deployment abroad that was extended to keep pressure on Iran, the Pentagon confirmed Tuesday. Pentagon spokesman John Kirby declined to tell reporters whether any specific event had influenced Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's decision to send the carrier home, nor whether the United States' assessment of the potential for hostile Iranian activity in the region had changed. "It is a balancing act between requirements and the capabilities on hand," Kirby said, adding, "The secretary believes that we have a robust presence in the Middle East to respond." The US Air Force has dispatched six round-trip flights of nuclear-capable B-52 bombers to the Middle East since November, a trend that is likely to continue. The Navy also publicised the deployment of a guided-missile submarine, the USS Georgia, escorted by two cruisers into the Persian Gulf late last year.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/02/uss-nimitz-aircraft-iran-biden.html#ixzz6m8hhlqw8>

Rouhani: No change to JCPOA content and no new member

Tehran Times, 3rd February, 2021

Hassan Rouhani, Iran's president, says there will be no changes to the content of the JCPOA and that no other country will be added to it. Rouhani was in fact responding to Saudi Arabia which has said if the new Biden administration plans to rejoin the JCPOA its country should also be included. French President Emmanuel Macron has also called for inclusion of Saudi Arabia in the agreement. "The deal is not a thing that is easily gained. Nobody can tear the deal. If they want (the deal), they can fulfill their commitments. If they don't, they can do their

own business. We also do our own business,” Rouhani pointed out.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/457731/Rouhani-No-change-to-JCPOA-content-and-no-new-member>

General Hatami says Iran intends to upgrade its fighters

Tehran Times, 3rd February, 2021

Brigadier General Amir Hatami, Iran’s defense minister, says Iran is seeking to upgrade its fighter jets. Speaking on the sidelines of the world’s first ‘hybrid’ air show, Aero India 2021, he noted, “Due to the efforts of aviation industry experts, Iran has gained domestically built products such as Kosar light fighter and Yassin training fighter, all kinds of helicopters and UAVs, and we are looking to upgrade the technology in the sector,” according to the Mehr news agency. During his visit to India, General Hatami also praised the aviation industry of India and said, “Aero India illustrates that India has embarked on a serious and technological move in the field of the aviation industry and is using its capabilities and those of its private sector to make significant progress.”

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/457754/General-Hatami-says-Iran-intends-to-upgrade-its-fighters>

ISRAEL

Unidentified aircraft target pro-Iranian militias in eastern Syria - report

The Jerusalem Post, 31st January, 2021

Unidentified aircraft targeted sites belonging to pro-Iranian militias near Al-Bukamal in the Deir Ezzor region of eastern Syria on Saturday night, according to local news source Deir EzZor 24 and Syrian news source Step News Agency. On Friday, Iranian-made missiles were reportedly transported to the area through the Syrian-Iraqi border crossing. The strikes were aimed at dozens of warehouses and sites belonging to

pro-Iranian militias and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) throughout the area, according to Deir EzZor 24. If the strikes were in fact, carried out by Israel, this would mark the fourth alleged Israeli airstrike reported in Syria this month.

<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/unidentified-aircraft-target-pro-iranian-militias-in-eastern-syria-report-657297>

Gantz to Egyptian TV: Israel's objective is that Iran not become nuclear

The Jerusalem Post, 1st February, 2021

As tensions between Israel and Iran intensify, Defense Minister Benny Gantz on Monday said options are on the table for making sure the Islamic Republic does not become nuclear. “Israel has a clear objective: that Iran not become nuclear,” he told Egypt’s al-Ghad news channel. “The IDF and Israel’s defense establishment are holding onto the option of taking action against Iran’s nuclear project if that is what has to be done,” he added. Gantz echoed remarks made by IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Aviv Kochavi last week, saying a nuclear Iran would lead to a nuclear arms race throughout the Middle East. “The regime is fundamentalist and radical, and it ultimately wants to obtain nuclear capability not just to have it, but primarily for the leverage it would give them in nuclear deterrence,” he said.

<https://www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/gantz-to-egyptian-tv-israels-clear-objective-that-iran-not-be-nuclear-657368>

Israel sees 6-month Iran nuclear breakout, longer than Blinken projection

The Jerusalem Post, 2nd February, 2021

Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz said the Trump administration “seriously damaged Iran’s nuclear project and entire force build-up.” Israel’s energy minister said on Tuesday it would take Iran around six months to produce enough fissile material for a single nuclear weapon, a timeline almost twice as long as that

anticipated by a senior member of the Biden administration. "In terms of enrichment, [the Iranians] are in a situation of breaking out in around half a year if they do everything required," he told public broadcaster Kan. "As for nuclear weaponry, the range is around one or two years."

<https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/israel-sees-6-month-iran-nuclear-breakout-longer-than-blinken-projection-657524>

Israeli drone falls in Lebanese territory, Hezbollah claims to down it

Israelhayom, 2nd February, 2021

IDF says UAV was on operational activity along the border before it crashed. "There is no risk of breach of information," the military stresses. The Lebanon-based terrorist group Hezbollah claimed Monday that it brought down an Israeli drone that had entered Lebanese airspace. The Israeli military said one of its UAV's had fallen inside Lebanon. The drone was on operational activity along the border before it crashed. "There is no risk of breach of information," the military added. Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV said the drone was shot down after it entered Lebanon's air space and crashed in the village of Blida, near the border with Israel. "Hezbollah fighters now have the unmanned aircraft," the report said.

<https://www.israelhayom.com/2021/02/02/israeli-drone-falls-in-lebanese-territory-hezbollah-claims-to-down-it/>

SAUDI ARABIA

Coalition forces destroy Houthi-launched drone

Saudi Gazette, 30th January, 2021

The Arab Coalition forces have intercepted and destroyed on Saturday a bomb-laden drone in Yemeni airspace launched by the Iran-backed Houthi militias, targeting Saudi Arabia, the Coalition's spokesperson Brig. Gen. Turki Al-

Maliki said. In a statement on Saturday carried by the Saudi Press Agency, Brig. Gen. Al-Maliki said: "The Joint Coalition forces intercepted and destroyed this evening (Saturday) a bomb-laden UAV in Yemeni airspace, which was launched by the terrorist, Iran-backed Houthi militia toward the Kingdom to deliberately and systematically target civilians and civilian objects."

<https://www.saudigazette.com.sa/article/603070/SAUDI-ARABIA/Coalition-forces-destroy-Houthi-launched-drone>

Houthi-launched missile falls near Al-Harth General Hospital with no losses

Saudi Gazette, 31st January, 2021

The spokesman for the Civil Defense Directorate in Jazan Region, Col. Mohammed Bin Yahiya Al-Ghamdi has stated that the directorate received a report about the fall of a military projectile launched by the Iranian-backed Houthi terrorist militia from inside Yemen towards Al-Harth Governorate in Jazan Region. Col. Al-Ghamdi added that the military projectile was a Katyusha-type missile that fell in a garden adjacent to the Al-Harth General Hospital, its shrapnel scattered in several different locations, and there was no damage or injuries reported. Procedures adopted in such cases have been immediately implemented, Col. Al-Ghamdi said.

<https://www.saudigazette.com.sa/article/603079/SAUDI-ARABIA/Houthi-launched-missile-falls-near-Al-Harth-General-Hospital-with-no-losses>

Rumah Al-Nasr-1 defense exercise begins in Dhahran

Saudi Gazette, 1st February, 2021

Saudi Arabia's joint Defense Forces Exercise, titled Rumah Al-Nasr-1 or Spears of Victory, kicked off on Sunday in the Air Warfare Center (AWC) at the King Abdulaziz Air Base, Dhahran, in the Eastern Province. The military maneuvers will run through till Feb. 12 with the

participation of the defense forces, represented by the Royal Saudi Land Forces, the Royal Saudi Navy and the Royal Saudi Air Defense Forces. It is noteworthy that the Air Warfare Center at King Abdulaziz Air Base is one of the advanced air force centers as it provides a real combat environment, an advanced ability to train air crews, technical and support in a real atmosphere similar to modern warfare, and also contribute to the development and modernization of combat plans against potential threats, in addition to achieving the development and assessment of the capabilities of the air forces.

<https://www.saudigazette.com.sa/article/60312/2/SAUDI-ARABIA/Rumah-Al-Nasr-1-defense-exercise-begins-in-Dhahran>

Saudi Arabia committed to Palestinian cause, Cabinet stresses

Saudi Gazette, 3rd February, 2021

The Council of Ministers reiterated on Tuesday Saudi Arabia's commitment to peace as a strategic option while referring to the recent speech made by the Kingdom's representative at the UN Security Council session on the situation in the Middle East. In a virtual session chaired by Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman, the Cabinet stressed Saudi Arabia's consistent approach and its firm stances toward the Palestinian cause, as it comes on top of the Kingdom's priorities and concerns. Saudi Arabia stands with the Palestinian people to reach a just and comprehensive solution in accordance with the international legitimacy decisions and the Arab Peace Initiative in 2002, the Cabinet stressed.

<https://www.saudigazette.com.sa/article/60317/8/SAUDI-ARABIA/Saudi-Arabia-committed-to-Palestinian-cause-Cabinet-stresses>

Saudi, US armies hold virtual joint exercise

Saudi Gazette, 3rd February, 2021

The Royal Saudi Land Forces and the US Army Central Command have virtually conducted the

“Friendship Exercise 2021”. The exercise aims at unifying military concepts through joint work, developing the command and control process during operations, exchanging military expertise between the Royal Saudi Land Forces and the US Army Central Command, and enhancing military relations between the two friendly countries.

<https://www.saudigazette.com.sa/article/60321/2/SAUDI-ARABIA/Saudi-US-armies-hold-virtual-joint-exercise>

TURKEY

Germany rejects Greek request to freeze submarine sale to Turkey

Daily Sabah, 29th January, 2021

Defense Minister Nikos Panagiotopoulos asked his German counterpart Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer to suspend the sale of six German-made submarines to Turkey, a Greek news outlet said Thursday, only to be rejected by the German defense authority. The Greece-based Proto Thema newspaper said in an article that Panagiotopoulos made the request to the German minister on Wednesday during a teleconference. According to Proto Thema, Kramp-Karrenbauer replied, “The program to build and sell in Turkey the six type-214 submarines cannot be stopped – or even delayed – because the construction company Thyssen is bound by contracts signed since 2002.” It added that the Greek minister argued that the sale would upset the balances in the Eastern Mediterranean. The official statement on the phone call by the Greek defense ministry said that Panagiotopoulos briefed his German counterpart in detail on the Greek views concerning security and stability matters in the broader region. Germany's Foreign Minister Heiko Maas last month opposed Greece's demand to impose an arms embargo on Turkey amid the ongoing tensions.

<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/eu-affairs/germany-rejects-greek-request-to-freeze-submarine-sale-to-turkey>

Islamic State relies on money transfers from sympathizers in Turkey, Iraq: Report

Al-monitor, 1st February, 2021

The Islamic State terror group was largely crushed by coordinated international effort in 2019, but its networks appear to still have access to an estimated \$100 million in cash reserves stashed across the Middle East, the US Treasury Department said. IS 'monetary reserves are at a historic low since it took over swaths of Iraq and Syria in 2014, having since lost all of its tax-and oil-producing territory.

But the group's remnants in Syria continue to receive streams of cash from associates based in neighboring Turkey and from smugglers in Iraq, according to an unclassified Treasury Department memo released earlier this month.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/01/isis-islamic-state-turkey-iraq-treasury-1.html#ixzz6mFx5uZHN>

Turkey, US agree to increase efforts to solve S-400 row

Daily Sabah, 2nd February, 2021

Presidential Spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin and the U.S. 'new national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, had a phone call late Tuesday, a statement from the Turkish Presidency said, underlining that officials agreed to increase efforts to solve the S-400 row. The call had marked the first diplomatic dialogue between the Biden government and Ankara. The U.S. argued that the system could be used by Russia to covertly obtain classified details on the Lockheed Martin F-35 jets and is incompatible with NATO systems. Defense Minister Akar also said that the S-400 will not be integrated into NATO systems. Kalin and Sullivan also discussed other issues between the countries,

such as the U.S.' support for the YPG/PKK terrorist group.

<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkey-us-agree-to-increase-efforts-to-solve-s-400-row>

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

UAE confident F-35 jets sale will go through, says ambassador

The Jerusalem Post, 2nd February, 2021

During Donald Trump's last day in office, The UAE signed agreements to buy up to 50 F-35 jets, 18 armed drones and other defense equipment in a deal worth \$23 billion. The United Arab Emirates' ambassador to Washington said he was confident the sale of F-35 jets to his country would go through after a review by President Joe Biden's administration of some pending arms sales to US allies. "We did everything by the book – and they will discover that, once the review is complete – and it will proceed," Ambassador Yousef Al Otaiba told a virtual Washington Institute forum on Monday, describing the review as "pro forma." "If you are going to have less of a presence and less involvement in the Middle East, you can't at the same time take tools away from your partners who are expected to do more," he said.

<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/uae-confident-f-35-jets-sale-will-go-through-says-ambassador-657504>