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12.09.19

EU to debate Mideast policy as 2-state solution hopes fade

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EU to debate Mideast policy as 2-state solution hopes fade

Luxemburg FM says a two-state solution is being taken apart 'piece by piece, day after day,' and that it is time to consider recognizing Palestine as a state

Associated Press| Updated: 12.09.19 , 21:05

European Union foreign ministers will discuss next month whether the 28-nation bloc should modify its Middle East policy amid growing concern that Israeli settlement activity and U.S. diplomatic moves are undermining hopes for a two-state solution.

“If we want a two-state solution we need to help and encourage both parties to enter into a serious and credible negotiation, and this is not the case” at the moment, new EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell told reporters Monday after chairing talks between the ministers.

Ireland and Luxembourg are among a small group of countries that want the issue put on the agenda. Borrell said the ministers “will deeply discuss the situation in the Middle East” when they meet again in Brussels in January.

The EU’s long-held stance is that any peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians should be based on the notion of two states within pre-1967 borders with Jerusalem as their shared capital. The bloc also opposes settlement expansion and insists it is illegal under international law.

The U.S. announced a new American doctrine last month that does not consider Israeli settlements a violation of international law.

The Trump administration has also recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and recognized Israel’s annexation of the Golan Heights.

Some EU countries are concerned more such U.S. moves might be imminent, Borrell said. In a letter to Borrell, Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn said that hopes for a two-state solution are “being dismantled piece by piece, day after day,” and that it is time to consider recognizing Palestine as a state.

“The policy of settlement and demolition risks replacing the two-state solution with a one-state reality, marked by perpetual conflict, occupation and unequal rights,” Asselborn wrote.

He said that any EU decision to recognize Palestine “would neither be a favor, nor a blank check, but a simple recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to their own State. In no way would it be directed against Israel.”

It appears unlikely that EU policy would change much if at all. Borrell noted that EU countries are “very much divided” over how to handle Middle East peace moves.

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12.09.19

Russian fighter jets defend Iran airbase in southern Syria from Israeli airstrike

12.09.19

Report: Russian fighter jets thwarted Israeli attack in Syria

According to Russian military aviation blog, IAF airstrike was planned for last Saturday and targeted advanced weapons shipment, which included high-tech defense systems, from Iran to secret T-4 airbase

Yoav Zitun, Itay Blumenthal, Daniel Salami | Updated: 12.09.19 , 18:15

Two Russian Su-35 fighter jets on Saturday thwarted an Israeli airstrike on the T-4 airbase in southern Syria, causing the Israeli craft to return to base, the Russian military aviation blog AVIA.PRO reported on Monday.

The blog also reported that the Israeli attack had been planned against an advanced weapons shipment from Iran to the airbase, which included advanced air defense systems.

As of now, the location of these air defense systems is unknown. However, since most of the airstrikes attributed to Israel have taken place on the outskirts of Damascus (in the area of its international airport) or on the Syria-Iran border, the report said, it is undeniable that the Iranian-made system is now located within those two areas.

The report further stated that the system might have middle- to long-distance aerial capabilities.

The report comes in light of an additional shipment Sunday en route from Tehran to T-4. A day earlier, an Iranian Boeing 747 used by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps also arrived in Damascus from Tehran.

In the past, a similar aircraft, which is currently under repair, has transferred fighting equipment to Iran's Lebanon-based proxy Hezbollah. Israel has reportedly on several occasions attacked these shipments after they arrived in Syria.

According to foreign sources, the T-4 airbase stores Iranian-made parts for drones and is used as a transit point for weapons shipments to Hezbollah in Lebanon.

In recent times, the Iranians have increased their shipments and presence in the area, with a rise in the number of various militant groups in the area, from about 30,000 militiamen to 40,000 militiamen over the last year.

12.10.19

Netanyahu urges a Defense Treaty before US elections; Left think- unnecessary

12.10.19

Former IDF Chief Gadi Eisenkot: Mutual Defense Treaty with U.S. - unnecessary
Netanyahu claims such a treaty is important for Israel's security and wants to advance this agreement as well as the annexation of the Jordan Valley **before the American elections**
Yoav Zitun | Updated: **12.10.19**, 08:31

Former Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot spoke out on Monday against Prime Minister Benjamin **Netanyahu's push to sign a Mutual Defense Treaty with the United States**, calling it unnecessary.

Eisenkot said the idea is not compatible with Israel's capabilities today. "It was a valid idea in the 1950s, but today Israel is able to defend itself," he told the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) in Tel Aviv.

The former military chief said special relations with the U.S. are important and must be advanced but not by signing such an agreement.

"If nuclear weapons are introduced into the Middle East by an adversary, then Israel should reconsider this option."

In response to a question about any political aspirations Eisenkot might have, the general said he has the utmost respect for the military chiefs who have entered politics and knows they are acting out of a sense of responsibility for the country.

"A long military service teaches about serving one's country. You are working for something greater than yourself," he said.

The initiative to advance a Mutual Defense Treaty with the United States is being pushed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who claims it is important for Israel's security. Last week, Netanyahu met with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Lisbon, followed by a press briefing in which the prime minister said that **Pompeo and he discussed the issue.**

"We will ensure Israel and the IDF have complete freedom of operation," he said. Netanyahu added that this is one of the major challenges the country will be facing in the coming months, regardless of political outcomes. "We've decided to speed this along." Netanyahu told reporters and added that he had raised the subject with Blue and White leader Benny **Gantz** but the latter **opposed the idea.**

"I told him I thought he was making a mistake," he said adding that **the opportunity should be seized before the U.S. enters its election season.**

12.10.19

Dispersal Bill dissolves 22nd Knesset & holds elections Monday, March 2, 2020

12.10.19

With a day left to form government, Knesset dispersal bill submitted for approval
MKs from Israel's 2 biggest parties, Likud and Blue and White, draft the legislation
which is expected to be approved on Wednesday; the elections, likely to be held on
March 2, will be the record 3rd in less than 12 months
Ynet| Updated: 12.10.19 , 19:20

With a day left to form a new government, a bill to dissolve the Knesset has been
submitted for approval Tuesday by representatives of Israel's two biggest parties, making
an unprecedented third election in 12 months almost inevitable.

The Bill for the Dissolution of the 22st Knesset was drafted by Likud MKs Miki Zohar
and Shlomo Karai as well as Blue and White MKs Avi Nissenkorn, MK Meir Cohen and
MK Zvi Hauser. The new vote, likely to be held on March 2, 2020, will be the first time
in Israeli political history that three general elections have been held within less than 12
months.

"Due to the exceptional circumstances, and after two consecutive election campaigns
following which no government was formed, we propose to dissolve the 22nd Knesset
and hold new elections on Monday, March 2, 2020," said the bill.

The bill was submitted after neither Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu nor Blue and
White leader Benny Gantz managed to form a new government following the September
17 vote. The mandate to form government had then been handed by President Reuven
Rivlin to the Knesset that was supposed to recommend (with the support of 61 of the 120
lawmakers) a candidate for premier.

The 21-day deadline given to the Knesset is set to expire Wednesday, which is when the
vote to approve the dispersal bill is expected to be held.

12.10.19

Democrats unveil 2 articles of impeachment against Trump - sheer political madness

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Democrats unveil 2 articles of impeachment against Trump

'Abuse of power and obstruction of Congress' are the charges against the American leader
unveiled by the Judiciary chairman in Washington DC; Trump tweets that impeaching the
president with a record like his would be 'sheer political madness!'

Associated Press| Updated: 12.10.19 , 16:48

House Democrats announced two articles of impeachment Tuesday against President
Donald Trump - abuse of power and obstruction of Congress - pushing toward historic
votes over charges he corrupted the U.S. election process and endangered national
security.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi, flanked by the chairmen of the impeachment inquiry committees, stood at the Capitol in what she called a "solemn act." Voting is expected in a matter of days in the Judiciary Committee and by Christmas in the full House.

"He endangers our democracy, he endangers our national security," said Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., the Judiciary chairman announcing the charges before a portrait of George Washington. "Our next election is at risk... That is why we must act now." The charges unveiled Tuesday stem from Trump's pressure on Ukraine to announce investigations of his political rivals as he withheld aid to the country. Trump tweeted ahead of the announcement that impeaching a president with a record like his would be "sheer Political Madness!"

The outcome, though, appears increasingly set as the House prepares for voting, as it has only three times in history against a U.S. president.

In drafting the articles of impeachment, Pelosi is facing a legal and political challenge of balancing the views of her majority while hitting the Constitution's bar of "treason, bribery or other high crimes and misdemeanors."

Some liberal lawmakers wanted more expansive charges encompassing the findings from former special counsel Robert Mueller's probe of Russian interference in the 2016 election. Centrist Democrats preferred to keep the impeachment articles more focused on Trump's actions toward Ukraine. House Democrats have announced two articles of impeachment charging President Donald Trump with abuse of power and obstruction of Congress.

12.05.19

US Navy seized UN prohibited advanced missile parts from Iran to Yemen last week

12.05.19

U.S. Navy seize missile parts suspected to be linked to Iran

Arms confiscated en route to Yemen believed to be military aid for Iranian-backed Houthi rebels as part of Islamic Republic's proxy war against Saudi Arabia

Reuters| Updated: 12.05.19 , 10:00

A U.S. Navy warship seized advanced missile parts believed to be linked to Iran in the Gulf of Oman, U.S. officials said on Wednesday, as President Donald Trump's administration pressures Tehran to curb its regional activities.

The officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the guided-missile destroyer Forrest Sherman detained a small boat last week and a detachment of U.S. personnel boarded the vessel, where the missile parts were found.

The crew on the small boat have been transferred to the Yemeni Coast Guard and the missile parts are in possession of the United States, for now, the officials added. One of the officials said that, according to initial information, the weapons were bound for Iran-aligned Houthi fighters in Yemen. Over the past several years, U.S. warships have intercepted and seized Iranian arms likely bound for Houthi fighters. The official said what made this different was the advanced nature of the parts. Under a U.N. resolution, Tehran is prohibited from supplying, selling or transferring weapons outside the country unless approved by the Security Council. A separate U.N. resolution on Yemen bans the supply of weapons to Houthi leaders. The conflict in Yemen is seen in the region as a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Houthis have built their arsenal using local manufacturing, foreign expertise and parts smuggled in from Iran, their ally, and elsewhere. They also took over large swaths of Yemen's conventional military, including Scud missiles, when they seized the capital in late 2014.

12.03.19

National Security Council decided to lift hold on Lebanon 105m security aid

12.03.19

Trump administration lifts hold on Lebanon security aid

Some \$105 million in foreign military assistance, the U.S. State Department decided to withhold last October without providing an explanation, is being released after pressure from Congress and U.S. diplomats

Reuters| Updated: 12.03.19 , 09:19

U.S. President Donald Trump's administration has lifted a mysterious "hold" on more than \$100 million in security aid for Lebanon, congressional and State Department officials said, more than a month after lawmakers learned the funds were being blocked.

The U.S. State Department told Congress on October 31 that the White House budget office (OMB) and National Security Council had decided to withhold \$105 million in foreign military assistance, without providing any explanation.

As lawmakers demanded answers from the administration about why the aid had been withheld, some compared it with a similar decision from the administration to withhold nearly \$400 million in security assistance to Ukraine that also had been approved by Congress.

That decision has been at the center of an impeachment inquiry into Trump.

Members of Congress and U.S. diplomats had strongly opposed the move to withhold the aid to Beirut, saying it was **crucial to support Lebanon's military** as it grappled with instability within the country and the region.

Congressional aides said on Monday the administration had still provided **no explanation** for the decision to withhold the money, which had been approved by Congress and the State Department.

They said the OMB **released the hold last Wednesday** and the administration had begun to "obligate" it, or finalize contracts for how it should be spent.

A senior State Department official confirmed that the money had been released but declined to provide an explanation for why it was suspended or why it was released, beyond referring to recent comments by Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale.

Hale said during congressional testimony that there had been some **disagreements about the efficacy of U.S. aid to the Lebanese** armed forces.

On Monday, the senior State official said on a conference call with reporters that Lebanon's army is "an excellent partner to the United States" in fighting extremism.

12.02.19

Iranian Revolutionary Guards killed more than 100 unarmed protesters in Mahshahr November 18

12.02.19

NYT: Iranian forces shot dead up to 100 unarmed protesters

Report says **Revolutionary Guard members opened fire** with machine guns without warning as **demonstrators against regime** hid near a marsh in the predominantly Arab port city of Mahshahr

i24NEWS| Updated: **12.02.19** , 09:17

More than 100 protesters were killed by Iranian special forces on Sunday after demonstrators took refuge near a marsh in the port city of Mahshahr, according to The New York Times.

The killings would mark one of the deadliest events in decades for the Islamic Republic, as anger continues to rage over hikes in energy prices imposed by the government.

According to The Times, members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps opened fire on unarmed protesters with machine guns on November 18, killing an estimated 100 people, mostly men, as they attempted to hide in a nearby marsh.

Protests have raged across Iran over the past six weeks since the government imposed dramatic price hikes on gasoline by as much as 200% in an attempt to stave off economic catastrophe.

Testimony and evidence gathered on the day of the deadly rally shows that on November 18, the Revolutionary Guards deployed a large force to the Arab majority city of Mahshahr after demonstrators had taken control over parts of the city, including roads leading to a major petrochemical complex.

As special forces arrived to the scene, they immediately began opening fire without warning, causing demonstrators to disperse and take cover at a nearby marsh. One of the protesters armed with a rifle began shooting at IRGC members, who responded by opening machine gun fire, killing dozens. After the massacre, a gun battle erupted when local residents armed with mostly hunting rifles began firing at the special force soldiers.