

Foreign Ministry: Russian jet violated Turkish airspace

Hurriyet Daily News, 30.01.2016



The Turkish Foreign Ministry has said that a Russian fighter jet violated Turkish airspace, months after a downing that caused a big row between Ankara and Moscow. An official statement said the Russian jet -a SU-34 fighter-bomber- was repeatedly warned by Turkish air radar units in Russian and English.

“A Russian SU-34 fighter jet violated Turkish airspace yesterday (Jan. 29, 2016) at 11.46 a.m. local time in Turkey [0946 GMT],” the statement read. The Russian Ambassador to Ankara Andrei Karlov was also summoned over the incident, it added.

Speaking to reporters at Istanbul Atatürk Airport before his departure for Chile, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said the violation of Turkish airspace, which he also described as NATO airspace, was a result of Russian attempts to escalate existing tension in the region.

“Russia will have to bear the consequences if the violations continue,” he said. NATO has confirmed the airspace violation: “I call on Russia to act responsibly and to fully respect NATO airspace,” Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said. “Russia must take all necessary measures to ensure that such violations do not happen again,” he added.

However, the Russian Defense Ministry said that no Russian aircraft had violated Turkish airspace. “There were no violations of Turkish airspace by aircraft of the Russian air group in the Syrian Arab Republic. Turkish authorities’ statements of an alleged violation of Turkish airspace by a Russian Su-34 jet are naked propaganda,” spokesperson Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov was quoted as saying by Russia’s Sputnik news agency.

Erdoğan said the Turkish Foreign Ministry had made contact with Russia to arrange a meeting with President Vladimir Putin to discuss the incident, but added that Ankara had yet to receive a response.

Two Turkish F-16 fighter jets on an aerial patrol intercepted a Russian military plane within the rules of engagement when it intruded into Turkish airspace on the Turkey-Syria border. The intruding jet was warned about the violation 10 times within five minutes before it was shot down. After the incident Russia imposed a range of unilateral economic sanctions against Turkey including a ban on food imports. Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said in a joint press conference with Jens Stoltenberg on Nov. 30 that Turkey should not be asked to apologize for doing its duty in protecting its borders and airspace. Moscow had demanded an apology for the shooting down of the SU-24 over southern Turkey.

Turkish becomes sixth working language of PACE

Anadolu Agency, 29.01.2016



The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has named Turkish as its sixth working language, with the chair of PACE Turkey Delegation saying the number of Turkish lawmakers working at the European organization is expected to rise.

PACE Turkey Delegation Chair Talip Küçükcan said Turkish lawmakers would be able to speak Turkish during general assembly sessions, committee and sub-committee meetings. The first speech in Turkish was made by Turkish politician Utku Çakırözer from Turkey's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP).

"The more representative power you have, the more influential you become," said Küçükcan, highlighting that Turkey's visibility at PACE and at the Council of Europe would rise with the expected increase in the number of Turkish citizens working at the organization. Turkey is a founding member of PACE and currently has 18 lawmakers in the organization in total.

Küçükcan also touched upon issues discussed at PACE, including the status of migrants and security issues related to the migrant influx to Europe, saying the migrant issue had to be handled thoroughly and that the root cause of the problem should be taken into account as it could not be solved if the crisis in Syria is not resolved.

Touching on European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) decisions on the state of human rights and rule of law in Turkey, Küçükcan said there had been delays in the application of the decisions to Turkish codes due to Turkey's election period in late 2015, but recalled remarks made by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu during a visit to Strasbourg in which he stated that Turkey had entered another reform process, adding that this would serve as a "springboard for Turkey's relations with the Council of Europe and the EU." "There is serious confusion about refugees flocking to Europe. The EU does not have a consistent migrant policy as the Council of Europe is in a tougher situation," Küçükcan also said.

White House: US VP Biden, Erdoğan discuss regional issues, ISIL fight

Hurriyet Daily News, 25.01.2016



The White House has said President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and U.S. Vice President Joe Biden discussed regional developments and ways to deepen cooperation in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in a meeting in Istanbul.

One day after the meeting took place in Istanbul, after which an expected joint statement was not issued, the White House said in a readout “the two leaders discussed ways to further deepen the cooperation in the campaign to degrade and destroy ISIL,” adding that “other regional developments, including Syria,” were also discussed.

The White House did not mention the status of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) - over which the two countries differ - in the Syria peace talks, just as Biden did not mention the PYD during a joint press conference with Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu.

While Turkey does not make any distinctions between the PYD and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and perceives the PYD as one of the three main threats in Syria, together with ISIL and the armed forces of the PYD, the People's Defense Units (YPG), the U.S. draws a clear distinction between the PYD, whose fighters it supports, and the PKK in Turkey.

Turkey does not want or support the PYD being part of the opposition group at the peace talks with the Syrian regime, which was planned to begin in Geneva but faces delays due to international powers and the opposition not being able to agree on who will join the delegation of opposition forces in Syria to sit at the negotiations table.

While Biden reiterated that the U.S. recognized the PKK as a terror organization, he also said he was concerned about the current violence in Turkey's southeast and urged dialogue to overcome the problems.

“Recognizing [the] PKK is a terrorist organization, the vice president [Biden] expressed concern about the ongoing violence in southeastern Turkey and urged Turkish leadership to engage in dialogue with all of the country's communities who seek a peaceful resolution,” said the White House. Biden also spoke to Erdoğan over the de-escalation of tense relations between Turkey and Iraq.

“The importance of de-escalating recent tensions between Turkey and Iraq in a manner that respects Iraqi sovereignty, and the opportunity for Turkey to expand its energy partnerships in the eastern Mediterranean,” was also discussed, according to the White House.

Relations between Turkey and Iraq became tense when Turkey reinforced its troops in the Bashiqa camp located in northern Iraq. The Iraqi government demanded the withdrawal of the troops, after which Turkey withdrew some of its troops, though no certain figure was announced, to ease tensions.

Daily Hürriyet learned from sources that during Biden's visit the Turkish side proposed a project to the U.S. to calm Iraq's unease. According to the project, which found support from the U.S., NATO and the anti-ISIL coalition will jointly operate the training base in Bashiqa. Nonetheless, no logistical change will be made at the base other than a sign showing that an international force is deployed there.

The Iraqi army will be allowed to have a representative as part of the international coalition. Military officials are expected to gather in the coming days to implement the project, the same sources said. The leaders also expressed support for ongoing efforts toward a negotiated settlement in Cyprus island.

EU confident 3 billion euros will be delivered to Turkey soon

Hurriyet Daily News, 25.01.2016



The European Union assured Turkey that a package of three billion euros for Syrian refugees will soon be released, the need to further stem the influx of irregular migrants from Turkey to Europe before a key summit in Brussels.

“The talks are ongoing. I am very confident that the amount that was decided before will be there in very reasonable timing,” EU Foreign Policy Chief Mogherini said. Mogherini, European Enlargement Commissioner Johannes Hahn, Turkish FM Çavuşoğlu and EU Minister Bozırk came around the same table as part of enhanced political dialogue between Ankara and Brussels following the Nov. 29 joint statement.

The EU delegation later met with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. “Today's high-level political dialogue is an essential element of our overall framework of dialogue and cooperation. It provided us with the opportunity to discuss issues high on both of our agendas in a comprehensive manner and that will feed into the preparation of the next EU-Turkey Summit,” read a joint statement issued after the meetings.

One of the most urgent issues is the delivery of a financial aid worth 3 billion euros to Turkey to step up support for Syrian and other refugees in Turkey in exchange for the Turkish authorities cutting the illegal flow of migrants to Europe.



Italy has blocked the release of the money because of an internal disagreement within the EU. Mogherini said she wanted to play down “this dramatic approach” over the issue, emphasizing that the funds were “not pocket money.”

“We are doing the preparatory work for spending this money in an appropriate way. Because again it’s not pocket money, it’s money that goes to projects. The commission is carrying out all the assessments of the needs for the projects,” she said.

Çavuşoğlu also sought to urge calm over the delay. “We don’t take it personally ... But any delay is affecting the daily life of the refugees, their schooling and their medical needs,” he said.

The joint statement reiterated its commitment to provide the financial assistance. “The EU confirmed its commitment to expand significantly its overall financial support by creating a EUR 3 billion Refugee Facility for Turkey. The need to finalize and swiftly move forward the implementation of the Refugee Facility in cooperation with Turkey, in line with the needs assessment, was underlined,” it stated.

Turkish and EU officials also reviewed the results of recently intensified efforts to stem the number of refugees traveling from Turkey to Europe before a crucial summit between Turkey and eight like-minded countries in February.

“The need to achieve further results in stemming the influx of irregular migrants and in fighting criminal smuggling networks was underlined. Turkey and the EU agreed to step up their cooperation to reinforce the interception capacity of the Turkish Coast Guard and acknowledged the importance of maintaining a system of coordinated reporting on migration and refugee flows,” the joint statement read.

Meanwhile, Turkish and EU officials also exchanged views on the ongoing fight against the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in a number of towns in southeastern Turkey. “We had the opportunity to discuss problems in southeast Turkey. The EU condemns all sorts of terrorist attacks,” Mogherini said, calling for an “immediate ceasefire” of PKK attacks while calling for the resumption of peace talks that collapsed last summer.

“The EU also continues to be committed to fight against the presence in Europe of the PKK, which is on the official EU terrorist list, with a view to preventing PKK terrorist attacks. The EU stressed the importance of an urgent return to the solution process and attaches the utmost importance to achieving a peaceful and sustainable solution for the benefit of all the people of Turkey,” the joint statement said.

Turkish Airlines, Boeing sign long-term collaboration agreement

Hurriyet Daily News, 29.01.2016



Turkish Airlines and Boeing signed an agreement which will strengthen the Turkish carrier's long-term industry leadership, the country's aerospace and technology capabilities, while building on their 70-year relationship.

Turkish Airlines and Boeing identified several potential areas of new cooperation, expanding Boeing's already-significant investment within Turkish industry. Turkish Airlines chair Ilker Aycı and Boeing Commercial Airplanes President and CEO Ray Conner signed the Agreement during a visit by the airline's executives to Seattle for the delivery of their new Boeing 777-300ER and two next-generation 737-800s.

"Turkish Airlines is one of the world's leading carriers that established its position through strategic investment in its fleet, product and network resulting in impressive passenger growth figures. With today's signing we deepen our relationship with one of the leading brands in the aerospace industry, our long-term partner Boeing, and continue to seek new, innovative ways to grow Turkish Airlines," Aycı said. "Boeing is proud to further our strong, committed relationship with Turkish Airlines in ways that support both companies' profitable growth and Turkey's long-term development," Conner said.

"Together, Boeing and Turkish Airlines will identify and develop new, mutually beneficial business opportunities that build on and complement our mutual strengths," he added. Suppliers across Turkey currently support all five Boeing Commercial Airplanes programs delivering Turkish-made components valued at more than \$120 million annually. Building on these strong industrial ties, the new agreement between Boeing and Turkish Airlines identified several additional areas of long-term cooperation. They include development and training, activities to enable the global competitiveness of Turkey's aviation manufacturers and support for Turkey's research and technology capabilities and aerospace infrastructure.

Turkish Airlines and Boeing share a long history that dates back to 1945, with the arrival of the airline's first DC-3/C-47 airliners. Turkish Airlines entered the jet age in the late 1960s, when the airline began operating DC-9, DC-10 and Boeing 707 airplanes.

Many new airline companies established after the way was paved for the development of civil aviation have also flown the Boeing 727, 757, MD-80 and the most modern 737 and 777 airplanes. Turkish Technic, a subsidiary of the airline, is a world-class maintenance center for Boeing 737 airplanes, with certifications from regulatory authorities throughout the region and beyond.

Boeing has maintained a long-standing and mutually beneficial relationship with Turkey since the mid-1940s. In addition to providing commercial jetliners, Boeing is a supplier of defense products for the Turkish armed forces and a significant and trusted partner of the Turkish aerospace industry.

Turkish FM talks to French, US counterparts ahead of Geneva talks on Syria

Hurriyet Daily News, 25.01.2016



Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu has spoken with counterparts from France and the United States ahead of U.N.-led peace talks between the Syrian government and opposition that are slated for the near future in Geneva.

Çavuşoğlu first spoke to U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. In addition to the Geneva talks, the two also exchanged views on Russia's airstrikes in Syria, diplomatic sources said. Later in the evening, Çavuşoğlu spoke to French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius and discussed the planned talks in Geneva, said the same sources, speaking under customary condition of anonymity.

Turkey has objected to the inclusion of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syrian peace talks on the side of the opposition. Meanwhile, speaking to reporters in Laos, Kerry denied suggestions of disunity among countries that back the opposition and said U.S. support for foes of President Bashar al-Assad remains solid.

The talks were due to begin in Geneva but were set to be delayed because of disagreements with Russia and Iran, which support the Syrian government, over which groups can represent the opposition.

Ankara, Berlin in joint anti-terror mechanism

Hurriyet Daily News, 27.01.2016



Germany and Turkey have built a new mechanism for their joint fight against terrorism, as both of the governments have named figures to help coordinate joint efforts by the interior ministries of the two countries.

The decision to appoint the liaisons was made by German Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere and his Turkish counterpart, Efkân Ala, as the two met during the first ever Turkish-German intergovernmental consultations held in Berlin and co-chaired by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, German Ambassador to Turkey Martin Erdmann said.

“The first intergovernmental consultations were really very successful. In my opinion, most important of all, new dynamics have been given to relations between the two countries with this meeting,” Erdmann told the Hürriyet Daily News in an interview.

“A new chapter has been opened, ministers of foreign affairs, interior affairs, the EU affairs, defense and economy participated in this meeting and they drafted a joint working program. In the coming months, insight will be given to this program and cooperation will be intensified. Each interior ministry appointed an official called a ‘sherpa.’ These officials, one being in Ankara and the other being in Berlin, will designate agenda items on interior affairs and will lend support for cooperation between the two ministries,” Erdmann said.

“Surely, the fight against terrorism is one of the most important items on the agenda. Be it the fight against ISIL [the outlawed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant], be it the fight against the PKK [the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party], there are items at the top of the agenda. Intelligence sharing between institutions, information sharing concerning terror cells, etc. On the other side, irregular migration is also an important agenda item. Communication and cooperation between the two countries’ official departments will also be assessed within this framework,” the ambassador said.

“The sherpa of the German side is an official, a public servant personally appointed by the German interior minister and is of Turkish origin; Sinan Selen. This displays a beautiful example for the relations between the two countries. A German minister appoints a German public servant and this public servant will represent the German side as a public servant who has roots in Turkey,” Erdmann said. The Turkish Interior Ministry has appointed Interior Ministry Deputy Undersecretary Mehmet Tekinarslan as its liaison for discussions and cooperation with the German side, Turkish officials told the Hürriyet Daily News. Delegations led by the two liaisons conducted their first meeting in Ankara.



Selen has worked for the Germany's Federal Criminal Police Office, the Bundeskriminalamt (BKA), since the early 2000s. Most recently, he worked as the head of the Counter Terrorism Division at the Federal Interior Ministry. Known for his expertise on border security and foreign fighters joining ISIL, he has represented Germany at many international conferences on these issues.

The term sherpa, which comes from the eponymous Himalayan community, has emerged in diplomatic parlance in recent times for an official who makes preparations for or assists a government representative or important delegate at a summit meeting or conference.

There is no such phenomenon as Islamophobia in Germany, the veteran German diplomat also said, underlining that the activities of some right-wing extremist groups did not reflect the general environment in the entire country.

"I say this especially for Germany; I'm bored of these discourses on prejudice about Islamophobia. A phenomenon called Islamophobia in Germany is definitely out of the question," he said.

"Take a look at Germany, how many hundreds of mosques will you see? Take a look, how many millions of Muslims are able to perform worship without facing any obstacles?" Erdmann asked. "If some right-wing extremist organizations, such as Pegida, are marching and holding a demonstration in only one city, in Dresden, generalizing this for the entire Germany is not right and there is no Islamophobia in this sense," he said.

"Since Jan. 1, 2015, Germany has accepted 1.1 million refugees and the majority of them are Muslims. We are spending great amounts to support these refugees. Would German society do something like this, if a far-reaching Islamophobia which has broad impact existed? Germany is a country which is open to the world.

Looking at the last 40 years, citizens with origin from Turkey have enriched our society and our country and looking at these almost 3 million citizens, a considerable part of them are Muslims," Erdmann said.

Following the meeting, Davutoğlu and Merkel signed a joint communiqué under which "the Turkish government will do everything to reduce the number of refugees" crossing into the European Union. The two leaders also "emphasized their commitment toward meaningfully advancing the negotiations between Turkey and the EU on visa liberalization with a view to lifting the visa requirements for Turkish citizens to the Schengen area by October 2016."

"Regardless of what people think and of public's reaction, an action plan has been agreed upon and representatives of elected governments arrived at such a joint conclusion. How voters in member countries will assess the visa liberalization process is a collateral issue. What matters is that an action plan has been presented by the elected governments and this has to be accepted," Erdmann said.

Turkish PM to pay official visit to Saudi Arabia

Hurriyet Daily News, 25.01.2016



Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu is scheduled to pay a three-day official visit to Saudi Arabia later this week, the prime ministry office announced, amid ambiguity surrounding the fate of talks aimed at ending Syrian's five-year war.

During his visit that will kick off on Jan. 29, Davutoğlu will hold talks both in the capital, Riyadh, and Jeddah, anonymous sources from the prime minister's office told the state-run Anadolu Agency. Davutoğlu will discuss bilateral relations between the two countries and regional issues, the same sources told the agency without elaborating.

While in Jeddah, the prime minister will visit the headquarters of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and he is expected to proceed to Mecca as well, the sources said. Representatives of the Syrian government and opposition had been set to meet in Geneva as part of a U.N.-endorsed 18-month peace plan. But a dispute over whether armed groups should be able to sit at the table to represent the opposition appears poised to delay the talks.

Speaking in Laos, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said he hoped for "clarity" within 48 hours on the talks, noting that he had held a flurry of conversations with key parties including his French, Turkish, Russian and Saudi counterparts to try to convene the talks.

Main Syrian opposition team heads to Geneva as peace talks open

Reuters, 30.01.2016



A delegation from Syria's main opposition group flew to Geneva to assess whether to join Damascus government officials in United Nations-brokered peace talks, an opposition representative said.

The 17-strong team included the head of the Saudi-backed Higher Negotiation Committee (HNC), which includes political and militant opponents of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in the country's five-year civil war. The HNC has said it wants to discuss humanitarian issues including a stop to Russian and Syrian government bombing before engaging in the peace talks that started in Geneva.

Russian air strikes on Syria have killed nearly 1,400 civilians since Moscow started its aerial campaign nearly four months ago, a group monitoring the war said. "We are going to Geneva to put to the test the seriousness of the international community in its promises to the Syrian people and to also test the seriousness of the regime in implementing its humanitarian obligations," Agha said.

"We want to show the world our seriousness in moving towards negotiations to find a political solution," he told Reuters. French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said the Geneva talks must ensure human rights are upheld as participants work towards a political transition in Syria.

"Humanitarian law must be respected and the objective of a political transition actively pursued to enable the talks to succeed," Fabius said in a statement sent to Reuters. The HNC's demands include allowing aid convoys into rebel-held besieged areas where tens of thousands are living in dire conditions, Agha said.

The medical charity Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) said that 16 people have starved to death in the government-besieged town of Madaya since aid convoys arrived this month and blamed the authorities for blocking medical supplies shipments.

Agha said the opposition delegation, including HNC head Riad Hijab and chief negotiator Asaad al-Zoubi, would not call for a complete cessation of hostilities but would demand an end to "the indiscriminate shelling of markets, hospitals and schools by the regime and its Russian backers." Russia and Syria deny targeting civilians, saying they take great care to avoid bombing residential areas.

In separate comments before heading to Geneva, Zoubi said they would not engage in any negotiations before these goodwill measures were taken. He said U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry gave assurances by phone to the HNC's leadership, saying Washington supported a UN-backed political transition period without Assad - a bone of contention among warring parties.

Syrian opposition puts off decision on peace talks

AFP, 28.01.2016



A major Syrian opposition group postponed a decision on joining peace talks in Switzerland, as wrangling over who will go threatened to derail the biggest push yet to resolve the war.

The Saudi-backed High Negotiations Committee -- formed last month in an effort to unite Syria's fractious political and armed opposition -- met in Riyadh for a second day on whether to accept a UN invitation to the Geneva talks. Salem al-Meslet, a Committee spokesman, said the group could not make a decision until it has received a response from UN Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura.

The Committee insists it must be the sole opposition delegation at the talks and wants "clarifications" after the United Nations issued invitations to other regime opponents. "Whether we say 'yes' or 'no' depends on the reply of De Mistura," Meslet told AFP and Al-Arabiya television. But he added there was a "positive" atmosphere at the Riyadh meeting.

Meslet said the Committee also needed clarification that the international community would address humanitarian issues. The Geneva negotiations had already been delayed from Monday over the issue of who will represent the myriad forces opposing President Bashar al-Assad in Syria's nearly five-year civil war.

Instead of meeting face-to-face, Geneva delegations are expected to engage in indirect negotiations. Officials have said the talks, only the second intra-Syrian dialogue since the start of the conflict, would run over six months, with the first round expected to last between two and three weeks.

Syria's regime has designated its UN envoy Bashar al-Jaafari as its chief negotiator. Diplomats, including US Secretary of State John Kerry who met Committee members last weekend, have pressured the opposition to go to Geneva.

The United States, which sympathises with the rebels and sees the talks as the start of a transition process that would see Assad step down, urged them to take part in the talks. "We believe that the HNC delegation and the various faction of the Syrian opposition have an historic opportunity to go to Geneva and propose serious practical ways to implement a ceasefire, humanitarian access and other confidence-building measures, and that they should do so without preconditions," State Department spokesman Mark Toner said. The talks are part of a UN-backed plan, agreed by top diplomats last year in Vienna, that envisages negotiations followed by a transitional government, a new constitution, and elections within 18 months. The roadmap is the most ambitious plan yet to end the conflict which has killed more than 260,000 people and forced millions from their homes.



De Mistura's office said it had issued invitations to the talks, but refused to say who had been invited. The Committee, which earlier this month named Mohammed Alloush of the Islamist rebel group Army of Islam as its chief negotiator, confirmed it had received an invitation, but so did several other opposition figures not belonging to the body.

It was unclear whether the others had been invited as official delegates or as observers. French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said it was his understanding that only the Committee would be recognised as a negotiating delegation.

"(The Committee) is representative and it must be the negotiator, that is what was confirmed to me by Mr De Mistura, even if there can be other people" at the talks, Fabius told France Culture radio. Committee coordinator Riad Hijab said a UN Security Council resolution calling for an end to sieges in Syria and the delivery of humanitarian aid "should not be ignored".

UN aid chief Stephen O'Brien said almost 75 percent of UN requests last year to get aid into "besieged" and other difficult areas went unanswered by Syria's government. Many civilians are on the brink of starvation. The row over who will attend reflects not only internal divisions but also the interests of diplomatic powers embroiled in the Syria conflict.

Russia, a main Assad ally, has pushed for a broader range of opposition at the talks, with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov saying Tuesday that negotiations "will not achieve results" if Syria's Kurds are unrepresented. Assad's other main ally is Iran, Saudi Arabia's regional rival.

Syria's most powerful Kurdish organisation, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), said it had not yet received an invitation. Turkey, a leading backer of the opposition, considers the PYD to be an offshoot of the outlawed Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) that has waged an insurgency in southeastern Turkey.

There have been no suggestions that jihadist movements, including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group, which has seized control of large parts of Syria and neighbouring Iraq, should be invited.

Iraq's Mosul dam could face catastrophic collapse, says top US general

Reuters, 28.01.2016



The U.S. military has a contingency plan to deal with a potential collapse of Mosul dam in northern Iraq which would be catastrophic, the top U.S. general in Iraq said. U.S. Army Lieutenant General Sean MacFarland said Iraqi authorities understood “the potential” for the collapse of the hydroelectric dam, whose foundation requires constant grouting to maintain structural integrity.

He said the military was working with the government on a plan to protect Iraqi civilians from the impact of a collapse, which would send a surge of water down the heavily populated Tigris river valley.

“The likelihood of the dam collapsing is something we are trying to determine right now ... all we know is when it goes, it’s going to go fast and that’s bad,” MacFarland, head of the U.S.-led coalition bombing the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Iraq and Syria, told reporters in Baghdad.

“If this dam was in the United States, we would have drained the lake behind it. We would have taken that dam out of commission,” he added. ISIL seized Mosul dam in August 2014, raising fears they might blow it up and unleash a wall of water on Mosul and Baghdad that could kill hundreds of thousands. Kurdish Peshmerga fighters recaptured the dam two weeks later with the help of coalition airstrikes and Iraqi government forces.

While ISIL militants are no longer a clear threat to the dam, coalition spokesman U.S. Army Col. Steve Warren said they had stolen equipment and chased away technicians. “There was a steady grouting schedule that had been maintained for a long time. When that stopped, obviously the deterioration of the dam increased accordingly,” he said. An Italian company, the Trevi Group, is finalizing a contract with Baghdad to upgrade the 3.6-kilometers long dam, which has suffered from structural flaws since it was built in the 1980s.

Greece wants EU help sending migrants back to Turkey

AFP, 24.01.2016



Greece wants EU border agency Frontex to help send back to Turkey migrants deemed ineligible for asylum in Europe, FM Kotzias told. The minister's comments came after he shared this proposal with his German counterpart Steimeier in Berlin. Frontex currently operates 15 patrol boats in the Aegean Sea, whose mission is to assist Greek coastguard in their surveillance and rescue operations.

The minister said Frontex should deploy about 100 boats in the narrow stretch of water separating Greece from Turkey, the main launching pad for 850,000 refugees and migrants who reached Greece's shores last year.

Greece has repeatedly called on Frontex to help send back people deemed ineligible for asylum in Europe, such as migrants from Morocco and Pakistan. Athens also wants Ankara to be pressured into honouring repatriation agreements signed with Greece and Europe.

Kotzias' remarks came as Austria, Hungary and Slovenia put pressure on Greece to stop the flow of migrants and refugees through its territory. Athens and EU powerhouse Berlin are in talks on the migrant crisis -- Europe's worst since World War II. The focus of these talks is not to stop the flow of refugees, but rather to manage it better.

UK and Germany agree 'more work' to do on EU reform deal

AFP, 26.01.2016



British PM Cameron and German Chancellor Merkel stressed "more work" was needed to strike a deal on reforms to the EU ahead of London's in/out referendum. The leaders spoke by telephone, discussing Europe's migrant crisis, according to a statement from Cameron's Downing Street office.

Cameron has said he wants to land a deal on four key reforms with his fellow EU leaders at next month's European Council so that he can campaign to stay in the bloc ahead of a referendum on membership, which he has promised to hold by the end of 2017.

“On the UK renegotiation, they agreed that there had been progress since December’s European Council and that there was genuine good will across the EU to address the British people’s concerns in all four areas,” said the statement. “Both concluded that there was more work to do ahead of the February European Council to find the right solutions.” On the subject of migration, the pair agreed “that a strong external European border and close cooperation with Turkey are vital.”

At a tense meeting of EU interior ministers in Amsterdam on Monday, Austria and Germany urged Greece - the European gateway for thousands of migrants each day - to do more to tackle the continent’s worst migration crisis since World War II.

Japan puts military on alert for possible North Korean missile test

Hurriyet Daily News, 29.01.2016



Japan has put its military on alert for a possible North Korean ballistic missile launch after indications it is preparing for a test firing, while the United States has seen increased activity around a North Korean missile site, suggesting preparations for a possible space launch in the near future.

“Increased activity at North Korea’s missile site suggests that there may be a launch in the next few weeks,” told, both of whom declined to be identified because they are not authorized to talk to the media. Tension rose in East Asia this month after North Korea’s fourth nuclear test, this time of what it said was a hydrogen bomb.

A missile test coming so soon after the nuclear test would raise concern that North Korea plans to fit nuclear warheads on its missiles, giving it the capability to launch a strike against rival South Korea, Japan and possibly targets as far away as the U.S. West Coast. A Japanese Defense Ministry spokesman could not immediately be reached for comment.

Meanwhile, the United States has seen increased activity around a North Korean missile site, suggesting preparations for a possible space launch in the near future, U.S. officials told Reuters. The officials cited intelligence suggesting movement of components and propellant at North Korea’s Sohae satellite launch facility. A test could take place within a couple of weeks, they said. “Our concern though is ... it’s the same technology to develop ICBMs [inter-continental ballistic missiles],” one of the officials said.

“We are keeping a close eye on these activities by the North Koreans. We’re watching 24/7,” a second official said. Joe Bermudez, chief analytics officer at commercial intelligence firm AllSource Analysis, said open source imagery showed increased activity at the site in northwestern North Korea.

The finding was revealed as Washington shows growing concern that Pyongyang could use space technology to enhance its missile capability and while United Nations Security Council members discuss fresh sanctions against North Korea after it conducted its fourth nuclear test.

Trump skips debate, wins on social media

Reuters, 29.01.2016



Donald Trump was the big winner across social media during the seventh Republican presidential debate - despite the fact that he was not even there.

Trump was the most searched-for candidate on Google during the debate, according to data supplied by the search engine, which co-sponsored the event with Fox News. Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, Senator Marco Rubio of Florida, retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson and former Florida Governor Jeb Bush also gained traction on Google. Trump also dominated Twitter mentions among all candidates during the debate, according to Brandwatch.

The billionaire businessman received roughly 130,000 Twitter mentions during the debate, according to Brandwatch. This marked a roughly 40,000-tweet decline from the previous GOP debate - which he attended.

In all, Trump commanded 36 percent of the Twitter traffic during the debate, according to the social media company. Trump - who boycotted the event after Fox News refused to yield to his demand that network anchor Megyn Kelly be yanked as a moderator and after Fox News issued a sarcastic news release about the contretemps - hosted his own event in Des Moines, a fund-raiser for veterans. He was rewarded with positive social media buzz.

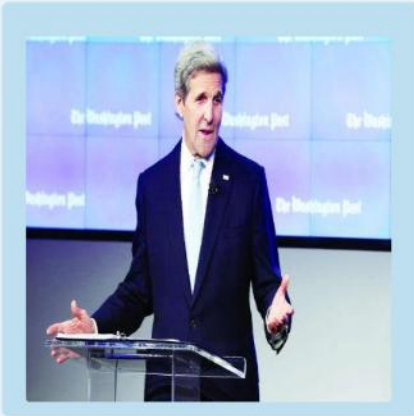
Not long after he took the stage at his event at Drake University, a group of protesters chanted loudly. Trump responded: "I love the protesters in the big arena because the cameras [don't move away from] my face."

That quip won him praise on social media, and his Twitter sentiment measured largely positive during the event, according to social media analytics firm Zoomph. At the debate, Ted Cruz came out swinging against Trump in his initial comments, mocking the tycoon's penchant for brash criticism.

"I'm a maniac, and everyone on this stage is stupid, fat and ugly," joked Cruz, in an effort to, as he put it, get "the Donald Trump portion" of the program out of the way. Cruz's joke became one of the standout moments in the first half of the debate, gaining momentum on Twitter among news outlets and average Twitter users alike. The debate moved on to discussion of substantive issues. Foreign affairs, national security, immigration, reproductive rights and healthcare were the most tweeted-about topics during the debate, according to Twitter.

US' Kerry says countries without free press have 'nothing to brag about'

Hurriyet Daily News, 29.01.2016



United States Secretary of State John Kerry stressed that a country without a free and independent press had neither anything to brag about nor the capacity to fulfill its potential.

“This begins with the recognition that no government, whatever its pretensions and whatever its accomplishments, can fairly call itself great if its citizens are not allowed to say what they believe or are denied the right to learn about events and decisions that affect their lives,” said. “So let me underscore: A country without a free and independent press has nothing to brag about, nothing to teach, and no way to fulfill its potential,” he added.

Kerry added that in addition to traditional media, “independent media – reporters, broadcasters, photographers, bloggers, even cartoonists – are under constant pressure today, whether physical or political.” “And here we are, well into the 21st century, and yet only about one person in six lives in a country where the press can truly be described as free,” Kerry said, reinforcing the critical place journalism holds in an open and democratic society.

Recently freed Washington Post reporter Jason Rezaian also attended the opening ceremony, thus marking his return to the newspaper, and the end of his imprisonment. Rezaian was released from a Tehran jail in a prisoner swap this month. He said his Iranian interrogators told him over his 18 months in prison that his newspaper didn't know of his plight and the U.S. government wouldn't lift a finger for his release. Choking up, Rezaian thanked those who helped secure his freedom, the Associated Press reported. Four other Americans were allowed out of Iran as part of a deal that Kerry helped finalize.

Announcements & Reports

► *Belarus at A Crossroads*

Source : Bruegel
Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2016/01/belarus-at-a-crossroads/>

► *Matching Research and Innovation Policies in EU Countries*

Source : Bruegel
Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2015/12/matching-research-and-innovation-policies-in-eu-countries/>

► *Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2025*

Source : CSIS
Weblink : <http://csis.org/publication/asia-pacific-rebalance-2025>

Upcoming Events

► *Central Banking After The Great Recession*

Date : 22 January 2015
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/monetary-policy-after-the-great-recession/>

► *The New Silk Road: What is in it For Europe*

Date : 22 January 2015
Place : Shanghai - China
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/the-new-silk-road-what-is-in-it-for-europe/>

► *Competitive Gains in the Economic and Monetary Union*

Date : 23 January 2015
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/534-competitive-gains-in-the-economic-and-monetary-union/>

► *The Future of Capitalist Democracy: UK-Japan Perspectives*

Date : 24 January 2015
Place : London - UK
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/future-capitalist-democracy-uk-japan-perspectives>



► *Emerging Markets and Europe: Time for Different Relationships?*

Date : 26 January 2015
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/524-emerging-markets-and-europe-time-for-different-relationships/>

► *What future for Europe's Social Models?*

Date : 27 January 2015
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/526-what-future-for-europes-social-models/>

► *Challenges for Growth in Europe*

Date : 28 January 2015
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/521-challenges-for-growth-in-europe/>

► *Global Governance of Public Goods: Asian and European Perspectives*

Date : 28 January 2015
Place : Paris - France
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/529-global-governance-of-public-goods-asian-and-european-perspectives/>

► *The Future of the Welfare State*

Date : 29 January 2015
Place : Berlin - Germany
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/541-the-future-of-the-welfare-state/>