

Kremlin says it regrets Turkey has not acted to mend ties over downed Russian jet

Reuters, 01.06.2016



Russia regrets that Turkey has not taken the necessary steps to mend ties damaged by Ankara's shooting down of a Russian warplane near the Syrian border last year, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said.

The Kremlin was still waiting for Turkey to apologize and pay compensation for the incident, Peskov, when asked to comment on remarks by President Erdogan, who said he did not understand what kind of a "first step" Moscow expected from Ankara. Erdogan said both sides should work together to better relations and he was concerned at how relations had been sacrificed over what he described as a "pilot error."

Russia and Turkey have been at loggerheads since Nov. 24, 2015, when a Turkish fighter jet downed a Russian warplane on grounds of an airspace violation on its border with Syria. While Turkey said that it had warned the warplane several times and also did not know of its country of origin, Russia has denied these claims, saying that no warnings had been made prior to the downing of the jet.

Peskov's statement came as Turkey and Russia became involved in a new row over the other's actions in Syria and Iraq. Turkey accused Russia of conducting air strikes in the rebel-held city of Idlib that killed 60 people, prompting a Russian denial and a counter demand that Turkey withdraw its troops from Iraq.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry said that heavy air strikes reported to have been carried out by Russian jets on a hospital and a mosque in Idlib had killed more than 60 civilians and injured around 200 people. The Russian Defense Ministry denied its aircraft had carried out any strikes on the city. After Ankara accused Russia of the deadly airstrikes in Idlib, Russia demanded that Turkey withdraw its troops from Iraq, the RIA news agency quoted Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov as saying.

Israel minister says Turkey deal near completion

AFP, 02.06.2016



An Israeli minister close to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that nearly all outstanding issues for a reconciliation agreement with Turkey had been finalised by both sides. “I’d say we’ve successfully finished dealing with 90 percent of the topics,” Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz said.

Steinitz’s remarks were the latest in a long series of iterations from both sides implying a deal was imminent to end the rift between the former allies. The relationship between Turkey and Israel was strained after the Gaza-bound Mavi Marmara vessel was raided by Israeli commandos in 2010, killing nine Turkish and one Turkish-American citizen on board.

Israel apologised to Turkey in 2013, in what many thought would trigger a warming in ties, but tensions soared again the following year when Israel launched a military offensive in Gaza. After years of bitter accusations and inflammatory rhetoric, the two sides held secret talks in December to seek a rapprochement, with another round taking place in February in Geneva.

Pressed by 103FM radio to say when he thought a deal might be completed, Steinitz said he hoped “in the coming weeks.” “There is a huge interest on both sides -- a strategic interest and an energy-related and economic one,” he said. The minister added that the passing in Israel of a long-debated agreement aimed at enabling the export of some of the country’s natural gas to Turkey and Europe would help speed up a deal.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that they had “made some proposals” on ways to ease the shortage of electricity and water in Gaza. “The developments look like they are going positively,” he said. Turkey has repeatedly insisted on three conditions for normalisation: the lifting of the Gaza blockade, compensation for the aid ship victims and an apology for the incident. Israel has already apologised and negotiations appear to have made progress on compensation for the victims of the raid. The Gaza blockade has been the main hurdle.

Merkel: Germany's relations with Turkey broad, strong

Hurriyet Daily News, 02.06.2016



Germany's relations with Turkey remain "broad and strong," German Chancellor Merkel has said following the approval of a resolution recognizing the WWI-era killings of Anatolian Armenians at the hands of Ottomans as "genocide."

Put forward by the ruling left-right coalition and the opposition Greens, the resolution entitled "Remembrance and commemoration of the genocide of Armenians and other Christian minorities in 1915 and 1916" carries the contentious word throughout the text. "There is a lot that binds Germany to Turkey and even if we have a difference of opinion, the breadth of our strategic ties is great," Merkel said.

The chancellor added that Germany supported dialogue between Turkey and Armenia and sought good relations with Ankara. The result of the vote received welcome from Yerevan, as the country's foreign minister praised the recognition as Germany's contribution "not only to the international recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide, but also to the universal fight for the prevention of genocides, crimes against humanity."

"Armenia welcomes the adoption of the resolution by the Bundestag," Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian said in a statement. Meanwhile, Stoltenberg said he hoped for the normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia "as soon as possible." Yerevan has long sought international recognition of the mass killings as "genocide," but Ankara rejects the use of the term to describe the World War I-era killings and argues that it was a collective tragedy in which equal numbers of Turks and Armenians died.

US, PYD hit ISIL in Syria, Turkey doesn't take part

Hurriyet Daily News, 02.06.2016



The United States has launched a major operation against the ISIL near the Turkish border with the SDF, with Turkish sources confirming that the Turkish military has not taken part in the operation.

Still, the U.S. informed Turkey ahead of an offensive to capture a crucial swathe of northern Syria known as the Manbij pocket from ISIL, Turkish military sources have stated, without detailing when the information was passed to Ankara. The operation to push jihadists out of the Manbij area was launched with the participation of the SDF, predominantly composed of the YPG, the militia forces of the PYD.

U.S. Special Forces have long been advising and assisting the local groups who have been actively involved in the offensive around the Manbij area. Turkish military sources told daily Hürriyet that the YPG forces had up to now supported the operation south of Manbij to an extent that would not be disturbing for Turkey.

“This region is 40 km from Turkey’s border and therefore it is impossible for Turkey to provide support. It is also out of the question politically for Turkey to give support to a YPG operation,” a Turkish military source told Reuters.

Ankara has urged the U.S. to give priority to the Syrian Arab forces in their fight against ISIL inside Syria, with fears that the PYD could use the opportunity to legitimize its demands to create an autonomous region in the northern part of the country, near the Turkish border. U.S. officials talking to Reuters said the operation was “overwhelmingly comprised of Syrian Arabs rather than the Kurdish YPG, who will only represent about a fifth or a sixth of the overall force.”

But the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the war, said the YPG made up the majority of the fighters taking part in the assault by the SDF alliance, with the initial target of capturing Manbij town. Turkey, a NATO member, has strongly opposed any further expansion by YPG and PYD fighters at the frontier. Ankara says the YPG and PYD have deep ideological and logistical ties to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).

The U.S. and Turkey at loggerheads of the designation of YPG and PYD, as the U.S. define these organizations as “reliable” partners in its fight against ISIL. U.S. State Department spokesman John Kirby said the U.S. would continue to work with Turkey to fight ISIL but would also continue supporting the SDF. Kirby said during a briefing that Washington would continue to talk to Turkey about doing “a better job of fighting against Daesh,” using an Arabic acronym for ISIL. “Turkey is a key partner in this fight. They’re a strong NATO ally,” he added.

However, Kirby also said the U.S. would still support the SDF, noting that the organization did not solely consist of Kurds, but included Arabs and other ethnicities. Kirby said that, for Turkey, battling Daesh was not an “esoteric discussion” as the threat was right along the Turkish border.

“It’s real. We appreciate the support that they’ve [Turkey] given to the coalition. We’re going to continue to look for ways to bolster that cooperation and to try to improve our joint efforts against Daesh,” he said. Military sources, meanwhile, said claims that Turkey had been lending support to the operation inside Syria have been “totally unfounded.”

However, the same military sources admitted that Turkish artillery had shelled ISIL positions in northern Syria through its 40-kilometer range cannons, simultaneously with the Manbij operation. Sources stressed that airplanes of the anti-ISIL coalition had also provided air support to the Turkish shelling in regions of northern Aleppo. They said 14 members of ISIL had been killed while one tank, two mortars, one headquarters, and three vehicles have been destroyed as a result of the offensive.

‘US has to make a decision between Turkey and PYD’

Hurriyet Daily News, 01.06.2016



The U.S.-led international coalition fighting the ISIL is devoid of any plan to defeat the jihadist organization, Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmu has said while reiterating Ankara’s unease over Washington’s support for the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD).

“Turkey’s priority on Syria is [protecting] its national security line. Our sensitivity toward the PYD has not been taken seriously by the U.S.,” he said. “The anti-ISIL coalition is paying the price for its weak approach. I still don’t think they have a plan to defeat ISIL,” Kurtulmu , who is also the government spokesman, told.

Kurtulmu ’s statement is the latest example of Ankara’s growing disturbance with the way the U.S. has been handling the anti-ISIL fight in northern Syria and its choice to select the PYD as its main ally, although Turkey describes the group as an affiliate of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), entailing that it is also a “terrorist” group.

“We have always talked with Americans and our other allies that the region close to Turkey to the west of Jarablus constitutes a national security line for Turkey. We have told them that if the PYD or ISIL crosses this point, it would threaten Turkey’s security. Unfortunately, this sensitivity of ours has not been seriously addressed,” Kurtulmu said. The deputy prime minister reiterated that Turkey would not remain indifferent when rockets are falling on its border towns.



Turkey has told Washington that the PYD would be crossing a red line if it attempted to cross to the west of the Euphrates to “expand its area of influence.” “At the end, it’s a decision that the U.S. will make. Meaning, will it continue its long-standing NATO alliance or will it establish new alliance with forces which are known to be against Turkey?” Kurtulmu asked.

A joint operation by Turkish and American special forces against ISIL inside Syria could take place, he said, without giving details. “A joint operation could be conducted to protect the Turkish border, only if necessary. This should not be interpreted that it will be carried out today or tomorrow.

There is a given decision but we aren’t talking about its implementation.” Kurtulmu’s statement came after a U.S. official said Washington had not received any proposal for a joint military operation against ISIL from Turkey.

Kurtulmu said the anti-ISIL coalition had failed to take a concrete and practical position on defeating the jihadist group. “The international coalition is now paying the price for its weak and characterless stance over the occupation of Mosul. The second problem is that they have no idea what to do and how to stop ISIL. They had no such plans. Let me put it bluntly, they still have no plans to defeat ISIL,” he said.

Informing media representatives over the priorities of the new government, Kurtulmu recalled that their main option was to adopt the presidential system through a comprehensive constitutional reform.

“We consider the presidential system as an efficient means of organizing the executive. There needs to be a ground for this in parliament. We will exert efforts to keep the channels of dialogue open until the last moment to have constitutional amendments discussed through a different perspective,” he said.

Undertaking a limited charter change to allow the president to restore his ties with his political party would be the last option if parliament does not endorse constitutional reforms, he said. Asked whether the government would opt for snap polls, Kurtulmu said: “We have a new parliament. The conditions for early elections could come to the agenda when the harmony between the people and the parliament is broken. Early polls are not on the agenda now.”

In the meantime, Kurtulmu corrected his words about the relationship between the president and heads of the justice as saying, “The word subordinate was not right when I said the ‘heads of the judiciary are subordinate to the president.’ It should rather be connected. I tried to recall Article 104 of the constitution.” Kurtulmu’s remarks came after strong reaction from opposition parties, which criticized the three heads of Turkey’s top courts for accompanying President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on a domestic visit.

Turkey offers US joint Syria operation, without the Kurds

Hurriyet Daily News, 25.05.2016



Turkey is offering to “join forces” with Washington for a special operation inside Syria on condition it doesn’t include a Syrian Kurdish militia blacklisted by Ankara but seen as an ally by the US, the foreign minister said.

Washington’s support of Kurdish fighters in Syria in the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) jihadists has angered Ankara, especially after pictures last week revealed US commandos wearing patches of the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) outlawed by Turkey. “If we join forces, they (the US) have their own special forces and we have our special forces,” Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu told.

“The subject we are discussing with the Americans is the closure of the Manbij pocket as soon as possible... and the opening of a second front,” he said, referring to a backdoor border route favoured by ISIL for smuggling jihadists into and out of Syria. “We say okay, a second front should be opened but not with the PYD,” he said, referring to the Democratic Union Party (PYD).

Çavuşoğlu said Syrian Arab opposition forces opposing President Bashar al-Assad could be backed up with special forces from Turkey and NATO ally Washington as well as from France, Britain and Germany. “Unfortunately, both Russia and the United States see a terrorist organisation as a partner and support it,” he said of the YPG.

The minister also said that recent deal with Washington, which would have seen American light multiple rocket launchers deployed along its border with Syria to combat ISIL, had been delayed. Under the deal, the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) was to have been deployed along the Turkish border by the end of May, but Çavuşoğlu said it would now only happen in August.

“The United States is unfortunately not keeping its promise,” he charged. “We are completely ready. Not us, but the US is responsible for the delay.” Çavuşoğlu also commented on the deal with the European Union to reduce migrant flows, warning that Ankara will abandon the deal if its citizens are not granted visa-free travel to most of the bloc.

With the two sides locked in an increasingly-bitter standoff, Çavuşoğlu said it was “impossible” for Ankara to change anti-terror laws that Brussels wants to see narrowed in exchange for the visa-free travel to the Schengen zone.

“We have told them ‘we are not threatening you’ but there’s a reality. We have signed two deals with you (the EU) and both are interlinked,” Çavuşoğlu said. “This is not a threat but what is required from an agreement,” he added.



Building on President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's words, Çavuşoğlu said Turkey would use "administrative" measures to block the deal if needed. There have been growing concerns that Turkish nationals will not be given visa-free travel by the end of June, the target date, putting the future of the migrant deal at risk.

EU leaders are insisting that Turkey meet 72 conditions before the visa exemption is approved, including narrowing its definition of terror. "Which definition are you talking about? Each country in Europe has different terror definitions," the minister said, pointing to stringent measures in France. Çavuşoğlu said Turkey was currently battling "more than one terrorist group" including the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

"In such a circumstance, it is impossible to change terror laws." Despite the increasingly-acrimonious picture, diplomatic efforts will be stepped up in the coming weeks to overcome the visa-hurdle, the minister said.

In the coming days, there will be expert-level talks between Turkey and the EU followed by a possible leaders summit involving Erdoğan, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and top EU officials, the minister said. "We'll finalise the deal and make it ready before the EU Council meeting on July 7-8. We have the determination."

The minister also said the deal -- under which migrants can be sent back to Turkey after arriving on the Greek islands -- was working "very successfully". "The number of migrants crossing to Greek islands in October was around 6,800. Now, it is around 30 daily," he explained, saying it was due to the deal rather than to naval activity by NATO.

He said Turkey has so far taken in more than 400 refugees under the deal, and that 130 Syrians from Turkish camps had been resettled in EU member states. "We have stuck to our promise," he said. European concerns over the fate of the agreement grew after the departure of prime minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, who brokered the deal with Brussels.

Çavuşoğlu brushed off concerns, saying the EU should not use government change as an "excuse" to block Turkey's three-decade effort to join the bloc, which has slowed for a number of reasons. "What is there to be concerned about with the new government?" asked Çavuşoğlu, referring to the cabinet headed by newly-appointed Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım.

"Everyone is agreed on reforms, civilian constitution and the reform of institutions, in particular the judiciary." British Prime Minister David Cameron, who is campaigning for his country to stay in the EU, has said the question of Turkey joining the bloc was not "remotely on the cards". "It's not Prime Minister Cameron's real opinion because Britain has always backed us," Çavuşoğlu said, describing his remarks as part of a domestic campaign to counter calls for Britain to leave the bloc ahead of a referendum on the matter on June 23.

Conservative re-elected Iran speaker despite reformist gains

AFP, 29.05.2016



Moderate conservative Ali Larijani retained the speakership of Iran's parliament despite major gains for reformists, benefiting from credit gained by his support for nuclear deal.

Several lawmakers from the reformist camp broke ranks to vote against the head of their own List of Hope, Mohammad Reza Aref. February's election was widely seen as a referendum on last July's nuclear deal with world powers, the signature policy of moderate President Rouhani. Larijani's support for its passage through parliament kept him out of the fierce debate that saw a string of hardline opponents of the agreement lose their seats.

Reformists took 133 of the 290 seats in parliament. That fell short of a majority but it was more than the conservatives' 125 seats. The remaining seats are held by independents and representatives of religious minorities who are expected to give Rouhani a working majority to pass key reform legislation that eluded him in the outgoing conservative-dominated parliament.

Several leading reformists broke ranks to endorse Larijani in the run-up to the speakership contest. "Larijani can better direct parliament than Aref," Gholam Hossein Karbaschi, the leader of one reformist faction, the Construction Party, told the Shargh newspaper. Reformist former health minister Massoud Pezeshkian was elected first deputy speaker.

Two other reformists were also elected to parliament's 12-member governing board. Both are Sunni, a first since the Islamic revolution of 1979 ushered in Iran's Shiite theocracy. Larijani, who turns 58 on June 3, is the scion of a famed Shiite clerical family and a regime veteran.

He was a prominent figure in the elite Revolutionary Guards during the 1980-88 war with Saddam Hussein's Iraq and served as state broadcasting chief from 1994 to 2005. He stood unsuccessfully against hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for the presidency in 2005 and two years later resigned as secretary of the Supreme National Security Council in protest at his policies which triggered an economically crippling showdown with the West. Rouhani himself praised Larijani and his support for the nuclear deal in an address to the opening session of parliament.

Syrian president denies media report of new Russian-drafted constitution

Reuters, 27.05.2016



Syrian President al-Assad denied media reports that his ally Russia had drawn up a new constitution for country and presented it to government as part of international efforts to end the long conflict.

Daily al-Akhbar had reported that Russia had finished drafting a constitution which would remove many of the president's powers and set up a more de-centralized government, both possible concessions to rebel groups fighting Assad, while also removing the "Arab" part from the country's official Syrian Arab Republic name. "No draft constitution has been shown to the Syrian Arab Republic.

Everything which has been said in the media about this subject is totally untrue," a statement on the Syrian Presidency's official Facebook page said. "Any new future constitution for Syria will not be presented from abroad, but will be entirely Syrian: discussed and agreed upon by Syrians themselves and after that put to a referendum. Anything else would be worthless and meaningless," the statement added.

Bloomberg reported last month that Russia, which supports Assad, and the United States, which mediates on behalf of the Syrian opposition, were working on a draft constitution together. A peace plan endorsed by the U.N. Security Council last December called for a Syrian-led transition process that establishes "credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance", a new constitution, and free, fair elections within 18 months.

US warns citizens of possible terrorist attacks in Europe

Reuters, 01.06.2016



The U.S. State Department warned Americans of the possible threat of terrorist attacks in Europe this summer, saying targets could include tourist sites, restaurants and large events such as the Euro Football Championship in France.

“We are alerting U.S. citizens to the risk of potential terrorist attacks throughout Europe, targeting major events, tourist sites, restaurants, commercial centers and transportation,” it said in a travel alert expiring Aug. 31. “The large number of tourists visiting Europe in the summer months will present greater targets for terrorists planning attacks in public locations, especially at large events.”

The travel alert noted that France will host the UEFA Euro 2016 Football Championship from June 10 to July 10 and that the French government had extended its state of emergency, imposed after the Nov. 13, 2015 Paris attacks that killed 130 people, through July 26 to cover the July 2-24 Tour de France bicycle race.

“Euro Cup stadiums, fan zones, and unaffiliated entertainment venues broadcasting the tournaments in France and across Europe represent potential targets for terrorists, as do other large-scale sporting events and public gathering places throughout Europe,” the department said.

It also said the Catholic Church’s World Youth Day event is expected to draw up to 2.5 million visitors to Krakow, Poland, between July 26 and July 31, saying local infrastructure may be strained by the large number of visitors to Poland.

“Poland will impose border controls at all of its national borders from July 4 to August 2, and visitors to Poland during this period should be prepared to show their passport and undergo stricter security screening throughout Poland,” it said.

EU's Juncker to visit Russia in June amid sanctions debate

Reuters, 30.05.2016



EC President Juncker will attend a high-profile economic forum in Russia in June and meet Russian President Vladimir Putin there, officials said, as the EU weighs whether to renew economic sanctions against Moscow.

While several EU leaders including German Chancellor Merkel have visited Russia since it annexed Crimea, the trip will be Juncker's first as Europe's chief executive. Commission spokesman Schinas said Juncker would "use this opportunity to convey to the Russian leadership, as well as the wider audience, the EU's perspective regarding the current state of the EU-Russian relations."

Schinas reiterated EU sanctions policy on Russia, saying that Juncker's June 16 visit was not "inconsistent" with it. EU leaders are due to decide at their June 28-29 summit on the sanctions, imposed over Russia's role in the Ukraine crisis. "The duration of sanctions is clearly linked to Russia's complete implementation of the Minsk agreements and respect for Ukraine's sovereignty," Schinas said, referring to a stalled peace accord.

He said Juncker and Putin would meet during the St. Petersburg event but declined to say whether there would be a separate face-to-face meeting. The Kremlin welcomed Juncker's visit, but said it was unlikely to lead to a breakthrough. "The most positive element to this trip is that it shows a readiness and a desire for dialogue aimed at getting consensus on those issues where we still have strong disagreements," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Juncker has been criticized by some European officials who take a hard line upholding economic sanctions imposed by the EU and United States on Russia following its annexation of Crimea and support for Ukrainian rebels. Juncker, a former Luxembourg premier, has called for a "practical relationship" with Moscow.

That echoes the stance at NATO, where European allies such as Germany and France say dialogue is critical to avoiding a worsening of ties with Russia, Europe's main energy provider and a nuclear power that is increasingly at odds with the West.

In Hiroshima, Obama honors ‘silent cry’ of bombing victims

AP, 27.05.2016



Barack Obama paid tribute to the “silent cry” of the 140,000 people killed by the world’s first atomic bomb attack and sought to renew attention in his unfulfilled vision of a world without nuclear weapons, as he became the first sitting U.S. president to visit Hiroshima.

“Death fell from the sky and the world was changed,” Obama said, after laying a wreath, closing his eyes and briefly bowing his head before an arched monument in Hiroshima’s Peace Memorial Park that honors those killed on Aug. 6, 1945, when U.S. forces dropped the bomb that ushered in the nuclear age.

The bombing, Obama said, “demonstrated that mankind possessed the means to destroy itself.” Obama did not apologize, instead offering, in a carefully choreographed display, a reflection on the horrors of war and his hope that Hiroshima would be remembered as the beginning of a “moral awakening.” As he and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stood near an iconic bombed-out domed building, Obama acknowledged the devastating toll of war and urged the world to do better.

“We stand here in the middle of this city and force ourselves to imagine the moment the bomb fell ... we listen to a silent cry,” Obama said. A second atomic bomb, dropped on Nagasaki three days after Hiroshima, killed 70,000 more.

Obama also sought to look forward to the day when there was less danger of nuclear war. He received a Nobel Peace Prize early on in his presidency for his anti-nuclear agenda but has since seen uneven progress. “We must have the courage to escape the logic of fear and pursue a world without them,” Obama said of nuclear weapons.

Following the remarks, Abe called Obama’s visit courageous and long-awaited. He said it would help the suffering of survivors and echoed the anti-nuclear sentiments. “At any place in world, this tragedy must not be repeated again,” Abe said. The visit presented a diplomatic tightrope for a U.S. president trying to make history without ripping open old wounds.

Obama’s remarks showed a careful awareness of the sensitivities. He included both South Koreans and American prisoners of war in recounting the death toll at Hiroshima - a nod to advocates for both groups that publicly warned the president not to forget their dead.

After his remarks, he met with two survivors, but his remarks to the aging men were out of ear shot of reporters. At one point, Obama could be seen laughing and smiling with 91-year-old Sunao Tsuboi, and he embraced Shigeaki Mori, 79, in a hug. But mostly, Obama just listened the men as they spoke through an interpreter.

Obama's visit came as the top seven economies of the world met in Japan for their latest meeting. A British exit from the European Union would be a serious risk to global economic growth, Group of Seven (G-7) leaders said in a summit declaration on May 27, as British Prime Minister David Cameron urged voters to "listen to our friends" on the impact of Brexit.

Brexit was not formally on the agenda at the two-day summit in Japan and despite both German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande saying the issue had not been discussed, Cameron said "one or two people" had raised it.

"A UK exit from the EU would reverse the trend towards greater global trade and investment, and the jobs they create, and is a further serious risk to growth," G7 leaders said, in the only reference to the vote in a 32-page declaration. Brexit was listed alongside geopolitical conflicts, terrorism and refugee flows as a potential shock of a "non-economic origin."

Obama announces full lifting of Vietnam arms embargo

AFP, 23.05.2016



The United States has fully lifted its ban on weapons sales to Vietnam, President Barack Obama announced on May 23 during a visit to Hanoi, unpicking a decades-old embargo on the one-time enemy.

"The United States is fully lifting the ban on the sale of military equipment to Vietnam that has been in place for some fifty years," he said. Both countries are warily eyeing China's military build-up in the disputed South China Sea. But Obama was keen to separate the decision to allow arms sales to the communist nation from shared concerns over Beijing's claims to contested waters.

"The decision to lift the ban was not based on China... but on our desire to complete what has been a lengthy process moving towards normalization with Vietnam," he said. "At this stage, both sides have developed a level of trust and cooperation including our militaries," the US leader added.

Vietnam's leader Quang welcomed the rollback of the Cold War-era ban on lethal weapons exports. Obama's three-day visit to Vietnam comes some 41 years after the North Vietnamese army and its Viet Cong allies marched into Saigon, humiliating the world's preeminent superpower.

The rollback of the arms embargo is highly symbolic of a shift in relations that has seen a surge in trade and cultural changes between the two countries that were locked in a bitter, bloody conflict just a generation ago. The United States is cosying up to Asia-Pacific countries in a strategic shift to tap the trade potential of the region and as a bulwark to the influence of regional superpower China.

Vietnam's military spending has surged in the last decade, by 130 percent since 2005, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. But much of Vietnam's arsenal is made up of ageing Russia-built equipment.

NATO urged to ward off 'serious' Russian challenge

Hurriyet Daily News, 31.05.2016



NATO's parliamentary assembly on May 30 called on members of the Western military alliance to be ready to respond to the "potential threat" of Russian aggression against them, while the alliance's secretary-general said that an upcoming "landmark summit" will enhance the alliance's defensive and deterrent presence in Poland and in the region.

The assembly issued a unanimous declaration of proposals after a three-day meeting in Tirana, ahead of a landmark NATO summit in Warsaw in July. "The challenge from Russia is real and serious," said Michael Turner, the U.S. president of the assembly, according to AFP.

The declaration expressed regret over "Russia's use of force against its neighbors and attempted intimidation of [NATO] Allies." It said this had "left NATO no choice but to consider the prospect of aggressive Russian action against an Alliance member as a potential threat, and to adopt measured, proportionate responses."

The assembly's declaration also urged NATO allies to "provide reassurance" to members who feel their security is under threat, especially on NATO's eastern and southern flanks. At the Warsaw summit, NATO leaders will formally endorse an alliance revamp putting more troops into eastern European member states as part of a "deter and dialogue" strategy.

Russia fiercely opposes the move, meant to reassure eastern allies spooked by its 2014 annexation of the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine and the pro-Moscow revolt that followed in the country's east. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg echoed the parliamentary assembly's stance during a visit to alliance member Poland.

Speaking in Warsaw, he said NATO was sending a "clear signal to any potential adversary that an attack on Poland will be considered an attack on the whole alliance." Stoltenberg also said that the upcoming summit in Warsaw would enhance the alliance's defensive and deterrent presence in Poland and in the region, but decisions as to the number still had not been finalized. He said that several battalions will be placed in Poland, the Baltic States and elsewhere in the region that will raise NATO presence in troops, equipment, prepositioning and infrastructure. The U.S. will be adding an armored brigade, the Associated Press reported.



Stoltenberg said the exact numbers and locations of the enhanced NATO troop presence are still being debated and the decisions will be made before the summit. It will be a rotational, international presence, he said. "So let me be clear: there will be more NATO troops in Poland after the Warsaw Summit," Stoltenberg said after meeting Polish President Andrzej Duda.

Along with Romania, Poland became a target for Russian ire after it agreed to host a U.S. and NATO anti-missile system that Moscow regards as a security threat. NATO, however, insists the shield is not directed against Russia, but is instead designed to counter threats from so-called "rogue states" in the Middle East. "It is directed against threats coming from outside the Euro-Atlantic area," Stoltenberg insisted.



Announcements & Reports

Defense Department PAS Positions

Source : CSIS
Weblink : <https://www.csis.org/analysis/defense-department-pas-positions-0>

Young Arab Voices: Moving Youth Policy from Debate into Action

Source : Chatham House
Weblink : <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/young-arab-voices-moving-youth-policy-debate-action>

Project on Nuclear Issues

Source : CSIS
Weblink : <https://www.csis.org/analysis/project-nuclear-issues-2>

Upcoming Events

The Search for Europe

Date : 05 June 2016
Place : Brussels - Belgium
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/the-search-for-europe/>

The UK and the EU: Managing the Euro and the Single Market

Date : 06 June 2016
Place : London - UK
Website : <https://www.chathamhouse.org/event/uk-and-eu-managing-euro-and-single-market>

Competitive Gains in the Economic and Monetary Union

Date : 06 June 2016
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 : 06 June 2016
Place : London - UK
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/future-capitalist-democracy-uk-japan-perspectives>



Emerging Markets and Europe: Time for Different Relationships?

Date : 07 June 2016
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 : 08 June 2016
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 : 09 June 2016
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 : 10 June 2016
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 : 12 June 2016
Place : Berlin - Germany
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/541-the-future-of-the-welfare-state/>