

ISIL must be cleared from Syrian border, says Turkish FM

Hurriyet Daily News, 22.08.2016



Turkey's foreign minister has said militants of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) must be totally pushed from the Syrian border region, as reports suggest that Syrian rebels are preparing to launch an attack to seize a town from the jihadists on the border with Turkey.

“Our border must be completely cleansed of Daesh,” Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said, speaking within hours of a suicide bomb attack that killed at least 54 people and wounded nearly 70 others at a Kurdish wedding party in the southeastern border province of Gaziantep.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has slammed the attack as an apparent attempt by ISIL to destabilize Turkey by exploiting ethnic and religious tensions. Çavuşoğlu's remarks delivered at a joint press conference following talks with Lithuania's Foreign Minister Linas Linkevičius came in response to a reporter's question on reports suggesting that Turkey would lend support to the Syrian opposition for its move to capture Jarablus through intelligence-sharing and Howitzer shootings on ISIL militants on the Syrian side of the border.

“It is our most natural right to support the fight at home and abroad against such a terrorist organization,” Çavuşoğlu said. “The factions are gathering in an area near the border [inside Turkey],” one of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) fighters, meanwhile, told Reuters.

Another rebel source confirmed a buildup of forces, loosely organized under the FSA umbrella, inside Turkey at a military camp near the town of Qarqamish just across the border with Jarablus. “Every day there are groups of fighters entering from inside Syria across a secret crossing to a Turkish base where they are gathering in preparation of the assault on Jarablus,” the source told the news agency.

Another source, in the hardline rebel group Ahrar al-Sham, expected the assault on Jarablus to begin within the next few days. The Arabic crew of Russia Today, the Russian state-run English-language news channel, has reported that some 600 to 700 fighters are ready to launch an assault on Jarablus. The Lebanon-based Al Mayadeen channel has, meanwhile, reported that dozens of military vehicles already have crossed from Turkey into Syria.

According to Reuters, the forces are made up of Failaq al-Sham, Sultan Murad, Ahrar al-Sham and Jabha al-Shamiya units. The assault is expected to begin over the next few days, before the SDF can retake the ISIL-held town. The U.S.-backed alliance of Kurdish and Arab fighters have also been making a push towards the border town after taking full control of Manbij by driving ISIL militants from the strategically important town, used by terrorists to smuggle weapons and goods. The SDF already controls the eastern bank of the Euphrates opposite Jarablus.

World condemns Gaziantep suicide attack, offers solidarity to Turkey

Hurriyet Daily News, 21.08.2016



The United States and the U.N. have sent strong messages of condemnation and solidarity after a suicide attack likely carried out by the ISIL killed at least 54 people, including 29 children, at an Aug. 20 wedding ceremony in the southeastern province of Gaziantep.

Calling the attack “barbaric,” U.S. Ambassador to Turkey John Bass reaffirmed Washington’s solidarity with Turkey in the joint fight against terrorism. “We stand by our ally Turkey and pledge to continue to work closely together to defeat the common threat of terrorism,” said a statement by Bass on the official Twitter account of the U.S. Embassy to Turkey.

The White House also issued a statement in which it condemned the deadly attack. “The United States condemns in the strongest possible terms yesterday’s terrorist attack in Gaziantep, Turkey. The perpetrators of this barbaric act cynically and cowardly targeted a wedding, killing dozens and leaving scores wounded.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to the families and loved ones of those killed, and we wish a speedy recovery to those injured. We stand with the people of Turkey as they defend their democracy in the face of all forms of terrorism,” read the statement from U.S. National Security Council Spokesperson Ned Price.

Russian President Vladimir Putin also strongly condemned the attack, saying the fact that a wedding was chosen as a target once again showed that “terrorism knows no ethics.” “The crime committed in the midst of a wedding celebration astonishes with its cruelty and cynicism. We have once again seen that terrorism does not recognize not only the laws of a civilized society, but also the most basic norms of human morality,” Putin said in a letter to Erdoğan.

U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon also condemned the bombing in a statement. “The secretary-general condemns yesterday’s terrorist attack on a wedding party in the city of Gaziantep, Turkey,” Ban’s office said in a statement.

“This act, reportedly carried out by a suicide bomber, killed at least 50 people and wounded dozens of others,” the U.N. chief said. “The Secretary-General expresses his deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims and to the government and people of Turkey. He wishes a speedy recovery to those injured.” “The Secretary-General hopes that the perpetrators of this act will be quickly identified and brought to justice,” the U.N. statement added. European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini and Enlargement Commissioner Johannes Hahn jointly offered their “deepest condolences” to Turkey over the attack.

The two also underlined that Brussels and Ankara are “in a common fight,” while voicing the EU’s commitment to “together to protect security, democracy and peace.” Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven has also condemned the attack saying:

“I want to express my condolences to the families of the victims of Gaziantep attack.” Pope Francis offered prayers for the attack’s victims, according to official Vatican Radio. France, Greece, Azerbaijan, Britain, Sweden, Qatar, Pakistan, Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt were among the other countries that offered their condolences and condemned the attack.

Israel, Turkey trade barbs over attacks on Gaza strip

Hurriyet Daily News, 23.08.2016



Israel and Turkey have traded barbs over the recent attacks on the Gaza strip by Israeli forces, after a rocket fired from the Palestinian enclave crashed into the Israeli city of Sderot, less than 72 hours after the Turkish parliament ratified renewed ties with the Jewish state following a six-year rift.

Israel has criticized Turkey over the latter’s condemnation to the Israeli strikes on Gaza, after Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım said that Turkey did not approve of Israel’s attacks. “The normalization of our relations with Turkey does not mean that we will remain silent in the face of its baseless condemnations,” AFP quoted the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

“Israel will continue to defend its civilians from all rocket fire on our territory, in accordance with international law and our conscience.” The Turkish parliament approved Aug. 19 a deal to normalize ties with Israel after a delay caused by the July 15 failed coup attempt, believed to have been masterminded by U.S.-based Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen.

“Turkey should think twice before criticizing the military actions of others,” the Israeli statement added, without elaborating. Israel carried out dozens of air and tank strikes in Gaza in response to a rocket fired from the Palestinian territory into a southern Israeli town.

Palestinian medical officials said four people were wounded in the strikes, launched after a rocket was fired from Gaza into the town of Sderot without causing any casualties. Later in the day, Yıldırım reacted to the Israeli rocket attack on the blockaded Gaza Strip.

In a news conference following a cabinet meeting in Ankara, Yıldırım said: “We want to clearly express that these attacks against civilians were not approved.” “The normalization of our relations with Israel will never prevent, stop our stand for Palestinians’ justified cases and our common action with them,” state-run Anadolu Agency quoted Yıldırım as saying. The Turkish Foreign Ministry condemned Israel’s “disproportionate” attacks.

“It has been learned that Israeli military forces have attacked many points in the Gaza strip on grounds of retaliation to a rocket launched from the Gaza strip on to Israel. We condemn the aforementioned disproportionate attacks,” read a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry.

Turkey recalls its ambassador from Vienna after rows

Anadolu Agency, 23.08.2016



Ankara has recalled its ambassador to Vienna, Mehmet Hasan Gö ü , “for consultations and to revise relations,” Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuş o lu said.

Çavuş o lu said the move came after the Austrian authorities did not allow Turkish citizens to hold anti-coup demonstrations in the country but allowed a march in favor of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). “That is why we called the Austrian charge d’affaires at our ministry ... Likewise, we also recalled to Ankara our ambassador to Vienna for consultations and to revise our relations,” he added.

Çavuş o lu said Ankara had complained to Austria over “trying to give us freedom of assembly lessons, while at the same time not allowing even a peaceful march [in support of Turkish democracy].” “We saw that they gave permission to demonstrate in Vienna to the PKK and its supporters. We cannot remain insensitive to this attitude supporting terrorism,” he said.

Turkey experienced a coup attempt on July 15, by a group of soldiers inside the army, who the government accuses of being the followers of the U.S.-based Islamic scholar Fethullah Gülen. The attempt to topple the government failed after President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called on citizens to take to the streets to defend democracy.

Tensions between Austria – home to around 300,000 people of Turkish origin - and Turkey were raised last month when the mayor of Wiener Neustadt, around 50 kilometers south of Vienna, called for the removal of Turkish flags hung by residents celebrating the defeat of the July 15 coup attempt.

Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz had also spoken out against “importing political conflict to Austria” following demonstrations in support of Turkish democracy. Çavuş o lu accused Austria of being “against some terror organizations” while “supporting terror organizations attacking Turkey.” “Unfortunately, the ground on which our bilateral relations and cooperation with Austria can be sustained has disappeared,” he said. “We will not remain insensitive in our bilateral relations, we will take certain steps. We cannot be two-faced like them, we are against all kinds of terror,” Çavuş o lu added.

He did not give further details on the steps to be taken, but warned: “We will approach them in the way they approach us.” Just like Turkey, the European Union and United States also designate the PKK as a terror organization.

On Aug. 3, Austrian Chancellor Christian Kern described accession talks with Turkey as a “diplomatic fiction” and said he wanted EU leaders to reconsider their approach with regard to Ankara. Later, Kern criticized anti-coup protests by Turks in Austria and called them “radical.” Çavuşoğlu had at the time slammed the Austrian chancellor’s remarks, describing Austria as the “capital of radical racism.”

German minister: EU, Turkey talks won’t stop

AFP, 26.08.2016



Negotiations between Turkey and the European Union will continue and difficulties over the visa waiver for Turkish nationals will be resolved, Michael Roth, Germany’s State Minister for EU Affairs, has vowed.

“Conditions to be fulfilled for the visa exemption have been definite for a long time. The last remaining issues must be resolved. I am of the opinion that both parties will continue to work for granting a visa exemption to Turkish nationals,” Roth told daily Hürriyet in an interview. Roth was in Ankara to pay a visit to Turkish EU Minister Ömer Çelik and to visit the Turkish Parliament.

Citing Turkey’s importance as a key ally in NATO and partner for the EU, Roth also addressed Ankara’s complaints over growing criticism from European capitals on measures taken by the Turkish government against suspected Gülenists in the aftermath of the failed July 15 coup attempt.

“Critical questions are posed in Europe. That should be understood. I feel responsible to those who defend European values in Turkey, I don’t want to close my door on them. That is why we don’t accept any halt in EU negotiations,” he said. Judicial independence, freedom of the media and protection of fundamental rights are issues that Brussels continues to raise in talks with Ankara, Roth added.

“The EU is a community of values and there will be no political concessions on these. We need dialogue in the face critical questions in order to support Turkey on its path. EU negotiations constitute a good opportunity to this end,” he said. The German official also condemned the thwarted military coup attempt. “Governments change through elections in democracies, not by force. President [Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan was elected and [Turkey] has a democratic and legitimate government,” Roth said, recalling that Turkish opposition parties and citizens rejected the coup attempt.

However, he also stressed that the reaction in the aftermath of the coup attempt should be “proportionate and within the boundaries of the rule of law.” “There are questions posed not only by politics but also by German public opinion on this issue. As the representative of a country with three million people of Turkish origin, I am responsible for protecting our relationship. That’s why I wanted to see with my own eyes the situation in Turkey after the coup attempt was thwarted,” Roth stated.

Sitrep: US commandos outside the wire; American warship opens fire in Persian gulf

Foreign Policy, 26.08.2016



Outside the wire. American and NATO special operations forces head out on missions with their Afghan counterparts nearly every night, a U.S. military official said.

“On average, we probably have somebody out every night or every other night, some place in the country,” Army Brig. Gen. Charles Cleveland told reporters at the Pentagon, adding that the partnered missions make up about 10 percent of all Afghan missions. Cleveland said the NATO forces “stop at the last safe location” before the Afghans reach their objective, but he admitted that, U.S. Army Staff, 28, was killed by a roadside bomb just such a mission in Helmand province.

Thompson became the second American special operator to die in combat in Afghanistan this year. The unfriendly Gulf. In a series of dangerous incidents over the past week, four U.S. Navy ships operating in the Persian Gulf have been harassed by Iranian fast boats defense officials said.

In one incident, the patrol ship USS Squall fired warning shots from a .50 caliber gun near an Iranian vessel as it approached at a high speed, coming within 200 meters of the American ship. The USS Tempest also saw a pair of fast boats crisscross in front of its bow. Two U.S. destroyers, the USS Nitze and USS Stout, were also approached by Tehran’s boats.

The Nitze’s close call already drew headlines after four Iranian boats — with guns uncovered — approached at high speed while ignoring warnings to back off. The boats only held up once they were within about 300 yards, U.S. officials say. The ships all belonged to Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which maintains its own navy in parallel to that of the regular armed forces in order to defend Iranian coastal waters. They’re the guys who detained a group of U.S. sailors for several hours in January. FP’s Henry Johnson writes that the IRGC boats rely on “swarming” attacks where “Iranian fast boats, typically armed with anti-ship cruise missiles and torpedoes, would set off in a dispersed fashion from hidden coves or small islands scattered across the Persian Gulf and then converge to surprise attack an enemy ship.”



China and Syria. After five years of slaughtering hundreds of thousands of its own citizens, the Syrian government doesn't have too many friends left on the international stage. But two of the biggest aren't afraid to show who they're rooting for. Russia, of course, is actively propping up the regime in Damascus with troops on the ground and aircraft bombing regime opponents and civilians in contested areas.

In a new twist, the Chinese government announced Thursday that it would kick off a new training program with the Syrian army. "The Chinese military will provide the Syrian side with medical and nursing professional training," defense ministry spokesman Wu Qian told reporters Thursday. The training will take place in China, he added, and was intended "to ease the humanitarian crisis in Syria."

Iran has angrily rejected Saudi charges that it supplied missiles to rebels in Yemen. Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif pushed back at what he said were "baseless accusations" leveled by Saudi King Salman, who reportedly showed visiting U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry photos of Iranian-supplied missiles being positioned along the Saudi-Yemen border.

The photos have not been made public. Kerry said he was "deeply troubled" by the images, leading Zarif to charge that Kerry's remarks show the U.S. government is "an accomplice in Saudi war crimes against the innocent people of Yemen." American refueling planes have flown hundreds of sorties over the past year and a half to refuel bombers from Saudi and the UAE, allowing them to hit targets in Yemen. Those bombing runs have killed hundreds of civilians.

The Saudi-led bombing runs in Yemen have again drawn the attention of the United Nations, and the organization's top human rights official on Thursday called for an international inquiry into possible war crimes.

The international community has "a legal and moral duty" to act, Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini, the U.N.'s high commissioner for human rights said in a statement that came out along with a new report which documents attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. al-Husseini added that "such a manifestly, protractedly unjust situation must no longer be tolerated by the international community." The report will be presented to the Human Rights Council next month.

In the latest indication of trouble at the top in Iraq, the country's Defense Minister Khaled al-Obeidi lost a vote of confidence in the Iraqi parliament Thursday, standing accused of corruption involving weapons contracts. According to Iraq's constitution, after a no-confidence vote from parliament the minister "is considered resigned from the date of the decision." The issue, however, "may be tabled only at that Minister's request or at the signed request of 50 (parliament) members after an inquiry discussion directed at him."

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met in Geneva Friday in another attempt to hammer out a controversial agreement on collaborating in the fight against Islamist militants in Syria. The proposal hasn't been received with open arms by the Pentagon, and the new commander of U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq, Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend, who took command on Sunday, said earlier this week that "as a soldier, I'm fairly skeptical of the Russians," adding that he's hesitant "to believe the coalition can cooperate with them."

Rebels, civilians to evacuate Syria's Daraya under deal

AFP, 26.08.2016



Ambulances and Red Crescent vehicles entered Syria's town of Daraya as thousands of rebels and civilians prepared to evacuate ahead of its takeover by government forces.

It was unclear exactly when residents and fighters would start leaving the devastated town near the capital Damascus that has been under rebel control since 2012. An estimated 8,000 people remain in the town, despite a government siege lasting four years and regular regime bombardment. Daraya is located just 15 minutes drive from Damascus and is even closer to the government's Mazzeh air base.

Syrian state news agency SANA announced a deal had been struck for the evacuation of civilians and fighters in the town. The agreement is seen as a major defeat for the opposition and has provoked anger among its supporters.

"Seven hundred armed men with their personal weapons will leave Daraya to head to the (rebel-controlled) city of Idlib, while thousands of men and women with their families will be taken to reception centres," SANA said.

The rebels would have to surrender other armaments to the army. The rebels who control the town belong to two Islamist groups: Afnar al-Sham and the Martyrs of Islam. A Syrian source on the ground said Thursday that the evacuation could take four days to complete.

A military source told AFP the army would enter Daraya, which was one of the first towns in Syria to erupt in anti-government protests in March 2011. "The civilians will go to regions under regime control around Damascus, rebels will go to Idlib "or sort out their situation with the regime", a rebel official told AFP. Most of Idlib province, in northwest Syria, is held by the powerful Army of Conquest rebel alliance. Only one humanitarian food aid convoy has entered Daraya since government forces began their siege of the town in late 2012.

The aid convoy delivered by the Red Crescent entered Daraya in June, and contained enough food for a month, officials said. A UN aid convoy carrying medicine but no food had entered Daraya earlier the same month. The arrival of the food aid was followed by heavy regime bombardment that residents said stalled distribution. The bombardment was heavily criticised by the West, including France, which accused Damascus of "extraordinary duplicity". According to the United Nations, nearly 600,000 live under siege across Syria, most surrounded by government forces, although rebels and Islamists also use the tactic. In several places, lengthy government sieges have prompted rebels to agree evacuation deals with the regime, prompting activists to accuse Damascus of using "starve or surrender" tactics.

More than 70 dead as pre-dawn quake hits central Italy

AFP, 24.08.2016



A powerful pre-dawn earthquake devastated mountain villages in central Italy, leaving at least 73 people dead, dozens more injured or trapped under the rubble and thousands temporarily homeless. Scores of buildings were reduced to dusty piles of masonry in communities close to the epicentre of the pre-dawn quake, which had a magnitude of between 6.0 and 6.2, according to monitors.

It hit a remote area straddling Umbria, Marche and Lazio, to the north of a region devastated by a quake in 2009, rousing villagers and vacationers in terrifying fashion. Italy's civil protection unit confirmed 73 fatalities.

"My sister and her husband are under the rubble, we're waiting for diggers but they can't get up here," Guido Bordo, 69, told AFP in the tiny village of Illica, near Accumoli. "There's no sound from them, we only heard their cats. I wasn't here, as soon as the quake happened I rushed here. They managed to pull my sister's children out, they're in hospital now," he added, wringing his hands in anguish.

Other victims included a nine-month-old baby girl whose parents survived. Two boys aged four and seven were saved by their quick-thinking grandmother, who ushered them under a bed as soon as the shaking began, according to reports. She also survived but lost her husband.

It was Italy's most powerful earthquake since 2009, when some 300 people died in and around the city of L'Aquila, just to the south of the area hit. "Half the village has disappeared," said Amatrice mayor Sergio Pirozzi, surveying a town centre that looked as if had been subjected to a bombing raid.

Pope Francis interrupted his weekly audience in St Peter's Square to express his shock. "To hear the mayor of Amatrice say his village no longer exists and knowing that there are children among the victims, is very upsetting for me," he said.

Civil Protection chief Fabrizio Curcio classed the quake as "severe". The shocks were strong enough to be felt 150 kilometres (90 miles) away in Rome, where authorities ordered structural tests on the Colosseum.

Some of the worst damage was suffered by Pescara del Tronto, a hamlet near Arquata in the Marche region which "just completely disintegrated" according to local mayor Aleandro Petrucci. At least 10 bodies were recovered there. Accumoli mayor Stefano Petrucci fought back tears as he described the scenes in his village as "a tragedy." "There are people under the ruins, it is not a good situation."

With residents advised not to go back into their homes, temporary campsites were being established in Amatrice and Accumoli as authorities looked to find emergency accommodation for more than 2,000 people.

Amatrice is a hilltop beauty spot famed as the home of amatriciana, one of Italy's favourite pasta sauces, and is a popular destination for Romans seeking cool mountain air at the height of the summer. It was packed with visitors when the quake struck at 3.36 a.m. (0136 GMT). Three minutes later the clock on the village's 13th-century tower stopped.

The first quake measured 6.2, according to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), which said it occurred at a shallow depth of 10 kilometres (six miles). It measured 6.0 according to Italian monitors, who put the depth at only four km. A 5.4-magnitude aftershock followed an hour later.

Italy is often shaken by earthquakes, usually centred on the mountainous spine of the boot-shaped country. In 2009, a 6.3-magnitude earthquake struck close to the university city of L'Aquila in the Abruzzo region and left more than 300 people dead.

That disaster led to lengthy recriminations over lax building controls and the failure of authorities to warn residents that a quake could be imminent. David Rothery, Professor of Planetary Geosciences at Britain's Open University, said Wednesday's quake had been similar to the 2009 one.

"Both occurred at a shallow depth, which exacerbates the shaking at the surface," he said. "Unlike the L'Aquila quake, which was preceded by swarms of smaller quakes and led to claims -- unjustified in my view -- that the eventual big quake should have been predicted, this one appears to have struck out of the blue."

'Can't beat migrant smugglers without Turkey,' says Merkel

AFP, 23.08.2016



German Chancellor Angela Merkel has said that cooperation with Turkey within the scope of the European Union's migrant deal was right and without that deal the bloc would not be able to fight human smugglers.

"The coast guard alone cannot control maritime borders; we have to still do more. The cooperation with Turkey on migrants is right, otherwise we cannot win the fight against smugglers," Merkel was quoted as saying by Italy's ANSA news agency on an Italian aircraft carrier hosting an Italian-German-French summit off the island of Ventotene on Aug. 21.



Merkel added that “Germany has changed its stance” on the migrant issue. “For many years we were against the Europeanization of this issue, now we want more European cooperation,” she said. Turkey and the EU agreed in mid-March on a deal in which Turkey would help curb the migrant flow into the bloc in exchange for visa-free travel for Turkish citizens inside the EU’s Schengen zone, accelerated membership talks and a total of 6 million euros to be used on Syrian refugees in Turkey.

The EU was paralyzed in 2015 when over 1 million refugees, mostly via Turkey, entered the bloc in hopes of a better life fleeing war, poverty and devastation. Relations between Turkey and the EU became strained after the EU insisted Turkey needed to meet all of the 72 criteria in the deal, including amendments to its anti-terror law, in order to get its citizens visa-free travel inside the bloc.

Relations worsened after the July 15 failed coup attempt in Turkey, after which Turkey accused the EU of not standing strongly enough next to it but rather more closely considering the crackdown that came in the aftermath of the failed attempt.

Merkel, French President Francois Hollande and Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi met Aug. 22 in Italy’s Ventotene for a second mini-summit of the EU’s three largest countries by population, organized with the intention of plotting a new course for the union following the U.K. referendum.

The three leaders insisted that Britain’s vote to leave the European Union, also known as Brexit, did not spell the beginning of the end for the bloc, pledging to revive it by bolstering EU security, boosting economic growth and giving the continent’s youth a future. “Many thought the EU was finished after Brexit but that is not the case,” said Renzi on the Garibaldi aircraft carrier off Ventotene.

“We respect the choice made by the citizens of Britain but we want to write a future chapter. Europe after Brexit will relaunch the powerful ideals of unity and peace, freedom and dreams.” In a meeting heavy on symbolism, the three leaders visited Ventotene to lay a wreath on the tomb of Altiero Spinelli, an Italian intellectual seen as a founding father of European unity.

The meeting was designed to lay the groundwork for an EU summit in Bratislava next month. “We won’t make decisions on behalf of other member nations but we will commit ourselves to lead,” Hollande said, adding that one of the most urgent tasks was to end economic and political uncertainty following the Brexit vote.

Hollande also stressed the need for improved security and intelligence-sharing to bolster Europe’s defenses against a wave of Islamic extremist violence. At their first round of talks in June, the leaders had called for “a new impulse” for the EU.

China launches world first quantum satellite

AFP, 17.08.2016



China launched the world's first quantum satellite, state media reported, in an effort to harness the power of particle physics to build a system of encrypted communications.

The launch took place in the Gobi Desert, the official Xinhua news service said, and comes as the US, Japan and others also seek to develop applications for the burgeoning technology. Beijing has poured enormous resources into the race, one of several cutting edge projects the world's second largest economy has pursued as part of its massive national investment in advanced scientific research, on everything from asteroid mining to gene manipulation.

The satellite -- nicknamed Micius after a 5th century BC Chinese philosopher and scientist -- will be used in experiments intended to prove the viability of quantum technology to communicate over long distances.

It will also further investigations into some of the more unusual properties of sub-atomic particles, including "quantum entanglement", Xinhua said. The term describes what Albert Einstein described as the "spooky" phenomenon of particles exerting influence on each other at a distance, including the ability for paired particles to mirror each other at faster-than-light speeds.

Unlike traditional secure communication methods, China's proposed system uses photons to send the encryption keys necessary to decode information. The data contained in the bursts of subatomic particles is impossible to intercept: any attempts at eavesdropping will cause them to self-destruct, Xinhua said, letting users know that their communications have been compromised.

Scientists have shown the trick can be used to transmit messages over relatively short distances: the current record is around 300 kilometres, according to an article in the journal Nature. But technical hurdles have kept long-range communication out of reach.

The satellite will attempt to send secure messages between Beijing and Urumqi, the regional capital of Xinjiang in the country's far west. Success will require the satellite is precisely oriented to its earth-bound receiving stations, Xinhua said.

"It will be like tossing a coin from a plane at 100,000 metres above the sea level exactly into the slot of a rotating piggy bank," it quoted the project's chief commander, Wang Jianyu, as saying. Developing the new technology is a major goal for Beijing, which included it in its most recent five-year plan, released in March.

“The newly-launched satellite marks a transition in China’s role -- from a follower in classic information technology (IT) development to one of the leaders guiding future IT achievements,” Xinhua quoted Pan Jianwei, the satellite project’s chief scientist. China “can expect a global network of quantum communications to be set up around 2030”, he said.

Beijing had previously identified the development of quantum technology as a national priority. But Edward Snowden’s revelations of spying operations by the US National Security Agency heightened China’s pursuit of spy-proof methods.

The country is also one of several working on building the world’s first quantum computer, which would use sub-atomic particles’ properties in processors that can operate at speeds far faster than current technologies allow.

Biden to the Baltics: Don’t take Trump’s NATO comments seriously

Foreign Policy, *23.08.2016*



Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has raised doubts about the American commitment to come to the defense of NATO allies, a comment that understandably spooked Baltic members of the alliance. On Tuesday, Vice President Joe Biden sought to quell those fears.

Speaking in Latvia — a country with a large Russian population that fears it could be Russian President Vladimir Putin’s next target — Biden suggested that Trump did not understand NATO’s Article 5, which states an attack against one member of the alliance is an attack against all 28 NATO members.

“I want to make it absolutely clear to all the people in Baltic states: We have pledged our sacred honor, the United States of America ... to the NATO treaty and Article 5,” Biden said in the Latvian capital Riga. He added, “I don’t think he understands what Article 5 is,” referring to Trump.

The only time NATO has invoked Article 5 was to defend Trump’s hometown after the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks. The GOP nominee has suggested that the United States would not come to the aid of NATO members who did not spend 2 percent of GDP on defense, a requirement that is only met by the United States, Greece, the United Kingdom, Estonia, and Poland.

He made this comment in June, when asked about Russia’s threatening activities, including its annexation of Crimea in Ukraine. He’s the first major U.S. presidential candidate who has suggested that aiding NATO allies could be optional. Concerns about Trump’s stance have been heightened by his budding bromance with Putin. He’s called on Russia to hack his Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton.

Trump has also praised the Russian strongman, and vice versa; Putin has called Trump “bright,” and the businessman welcomed the compliment. Some senior Trump campaign officials also have financial ties to the Kremlin.

Despite Trump’s stance on NATO and warm ties with Russia, Biden sought to reassure allies that the U.S. commitment was unwavering. “The fact that you occasionally hear something from a presidential candidate in the other party, it’s ... nothing that should be taken seriously,” he said.

US urges PYD to not cross Euphrates, lends support to Turkish ops

AFP, 24.08.2016



The United States has firmly urged Syrian Kurdish groups to return to the eastern shore of the Euphrates River if it wants to continue to receive support, in line with constant calls from Turkish officials, while also expressing Washington’s support to the ongoing Jarablus operation by the Turkish military along with moderate rebel groups.

“We have made it absolutely clear that they [pro-Kurdish forces] must go back across the [Euphrates] River. They cannot and will not, under no circumstances, get American support if they do not keep that commitment,” U.S. Vice President Joe Biden told reporters.

Biden is the highest-level U.S. official to visit Turkey since the July 15 failed coup attempt, the alleged perpetrator of which, cleric Fethullah Gülen, resides in Pennsylvania, with insistent requests from Turkey for his extradition. Biden visited the Turkish parliament, which was bombed by the coup plotters, and then held a meeting with Yıldırım and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Although the primary issue the two parties raised was Gülen’s extradition to Turkey, Biden and Yıldırım also delivered messages on the ongoing fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), as the visit coincided with the Turkish Armed Forces’ (TSK) cross-border operation into northern Syria.

In that regard, Turkey’s concern that the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the U.S.’ primary ally on the ground in Syria, has long been seeking to increase its influence and the territory it controls west of the Euphrates River was one of the major issues the two parties addressed.

For his part Yıldırım made clear that Turkey and the U.S. had come to an agreement that the PYD and its armed wing, the People’s Protection Units (YPG), should return east of the river following the successful operation to push ISIL off Manbij. Yıldırım also called on the U.S. to reassess its support for the YPG to prevent an increase in danger, recalling once again that the PYD and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) were same.



“We have a full agreement with the United States on what’s happening, which is that the PYD shouldn’t come west of [the] Euphrates or engage in activities west of the river. We assessed this in our meeting and once again see [the] determination of the U.S. about the issue, so [the] PYG will not have [a] presence in the west of the Euphrates. So our general take is that we know for a fact that they [the PYD] are working hand-in-hand with the PKK,” Yıldırım said.

The PKK is designated as a terrorist organization by the U.S. and the European Union. Underlining that Turkey’s main policy towards Syria was to keep its southern neighbor’s territorial integrity, Yıldırım vowed Turkey would not accept the creation of a new Kurdish entity inside Syria.

On Turkey’s military operation inside Syria pushing elements of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) to liberate Jarablus from ISIL, Biden hailed Turkey’s continued determinism against the jihadists in the aftermath of the July 15 failed coup attempt, which dealt a huge blow to the TSK.

Biden also commented on the July 15 failed coup attempt and underlined that he was sent to Turkey by U.S. President Barack Obama to show American support and solidarity with Turkey’s people and democracy. “Thank God you were not at your office at the parliament,” Biden told Yıldırım, while sharing his impressions about the ruined parliament.

“Don’t feel offended, but, I must say that the best friend of Turkey is the United States,” he said, adding they immediately stood with Turkey on the coup night. “Let me be clear, I want to ease any speculation, some of which I have heard, as to whether or not the U.S. had some advance warning, some fore knowledge of complicity,” he said.

On Turkey’s expectation of Gülen’s extradition, Biden said, “I understand the intense feeling your government and the people of Turkey have about him [Gülen]. We are cooperating with the Turkish authorities,” recalling ongoing technical works undertaken between the two countries’ justice ministries in Ankara.

The U.S. had “no intention of protecting a person who harms” its ally, Biden said, but made clear the decision would be given by the U.S. courts upon the evidence provided by Turkey. “We are cooperating with Turkish authorities, our legal experts are working right now with [their] Turkish counterparts on [the] production of and evaluation of material and evidence that needs to be supplied to an American court to meet requirements under our law and the extradition treaty, and we’ll continue to do so as you continue to bring forward additional information,” he stressed.

Yıldırım on the other side made clear that the strategic partnership between the two countries necessitated the U.S. to hand over Gülen to Turkey, which could turn the negative feelings towards the U.S. positive. “Our greatest expectation would be that we don’t lose any time conducting these processes and I believe the final expectation [is] clear,” he added.



Announcements & Reports

Chinese Military Organization and Reform

Source : CSIS
Weblink : <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinese-military-organization-and-reform>

The Missile Defense Agency and the Color of Money

Source : CSIS
Weblink : <https://www.csis.org/analysis/missile-defense-agency-and-color-money>

Transatlantic Rifts: Averting a Turkey/Russia Conflict

Source : Chatham House
Weblink : <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/transatlantic-rifts-averting-turkey-russia-conflict>

Upcoming Events

Congo's Political Crisis: What is The Way Forward?

Date : 15 August 2016
Place : Washington DC, USA
Website : <https://www.brookings.edu/events/congos-political-crisis-what-is-the-way-forward/>

Competitive Gains in the Economic and Monetary Union

Date : 15 September 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 : 16 September 2016
Place : London - UK
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/future-capitalist-democracy-uk-japan-perspectives>

13th Asia Europe Economic Forum (AEEF)

Date : 21 – 22 September 2016
Place : Beijing - China
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/13th-asia-europe-economic-forum/>



Emerging Markets and Europe: Time for Different Relationships?

Date : 23 September 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 : 25 September 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 : 26 September 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 : 28 September 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 : 30 September 2016
Place : Berlin - Germany
Website : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/541-the-future-of-the-welfare-state/>

Vision Europe Summit 2016

Date : 21 – 22 November 2016
Place : Lisbon - Portugal
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/vision-europe-summit-2016/>