

Turkish FM: Turkey ready to cooperate with Russia on Syrian cease-fire, aid

Hurriyet Daily News, 29.09.2016



Turkey is “more than ready” to cooperate with Russia on a new Syrian cease-fire and the delivery of humanitarian assistance if Moscow is willing to do so, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said.

“In talks with our Iranian counterpart, Mr. [Javad] Zarif, yesterday, we discussed how we can maintain the cease-fire and deliver humanitarian aid. After the normalization of our relations, we are discussing the same issues with our ally Russia,” he said. Çavuşoğlu made the comments to reporters during a joint press conference with Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics.

Diplomatic sources speaking on condition of anonymity said that during Çavuşoğlu’s meeting with Zarif, the two foreign ministers discussed ways to pave the way for a new cease-fire and the delivery of humanitarian aid in the two countries’ spheres of influence in Syria.

“We have to try harder for a cease-fire and political resolution. If Russia is prepared to cooperate with us on the cease-fire and humanitarian aid, we are more than ready,” Çavuşoğlu added. He recalled that Turkey had always supported and facilitated decisions for a cease-fire and delivery of aid, adding that those decisions were violated by “the regime and its supporters.”

On the Russian side, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that Russia’s cooperation with Turkey on Syria was increasingly constructive amid possible joint action in the future.

“Now, after nearly a year has passed since the cooling of relations, there is a tendency that cooperation with Turkey on the Syrian track will be constructive. And the concern that we have, as well as issues on which we are far from agreement, we are discussing constructively,” Zakharova said in an interview with the Russia-Greece2016.ru website, according to Russia’s Sputniknews website.

Çavuşoğlu also said an extension of the state of emergency declared following the July 15 failed coup attempt, which was blamed on the Gülenist organization, was required due to the “complexity” in their methods and the “support they have received.” The minister said the group’s “different links with new dimensions had come out of the investigation” into the group.

Meanwhile, Deputy Undersecretary Ümit Yalçın will be named the Foreign Ministry’s new undersecretary, Çavuşoğlu said. Turkey and Israel will also mutually seek to exchange ambassadors in the near future, the minister said.

The appointment was verbally notified to the ambassadors by Çavuşoğlu, but the official process will follow after being published in the Official Gazette. Yalçın was responsible for Middle East affairs, including the Syrian crisis. He has previously served in the Rotterdam consulate and the Turkish Embassy to Moscow before being appointed as Turkey's ambassador to Kuwait in 2012. After serving as undersecretary since August 2009, current Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioğlu was appointed as the permanent representative of Turkey to the United States.

Turkish FM says cooperation with YPG against ISIL risks Syria's future

Hurriyet Daily News, 27.09.2016



Cooperating with the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in any potential operation against the ISIL in Syria's Raqqa would mean "putting Syria's future at risk," said Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu.

Çavuşoğlu said the anti-ISIL coalition member countries lack a "results-oriented strategy," leading to "mistakes" such as reliance on "terror organizations." Çavuşoğlu said that more than 200 members of the YPG, the military wing of the PYD, are still west of the Euphrates River. He also criticized the U.S. for not meeting its promise of securing the withdrawal of the Syrian Kurdish fighters from the region.

"Either they cannot influence the YPG, or they don't want to send them [to the east of the Euphrates]," Çavuşoğlu said. While Çavuşoğlu expressed Turkey's satisfaction with the U.K.'s stance against terror "that does not exclude" the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), he stressed that "some European countries are engaging in double standards" in the fight against terror. He condemned those countries, naming Belgium primarily.

He particularly referred to the PYD congress recently held in Brussels, and said the group is not interested in preserving a united Syria but rather aims for a "separate canton" to be governed by itself. Çavuşoğlu said the joint congress by the PKK and YPG convened in Brussels was evidence of the link between two groups.

For his part, Johnson said his Turkish hosts had not brought up the controversy caused by the crude poem he composed mocking Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan earlier this year. He was yet to meet Erdoğan when he made the statement. When a reporter asked during the news conference whether he would apologize for the poem, Johnson simply said no one had yet brought it up. He also said he hoped for a new "jumbo" free trade deal with Turkey after the United Kingdom leaves the European Union, adding that "We are leaving the EU, but we are not leaving Europe." Johnson noted that the U.K. and Turkey have very similar positions on Syria, saw grounds for "cautious optimism" on the Cyprus issue, and vowed to continue supporting Turkey's bid for European Union membership.

He stressed that Turkey and Britain stand together against terrorism and added that Turkish officials had asked London to identify and deal with outlawed Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (FETÖ) elements in the U.K. “We’ll do our best,” he said.

Johnson, one of the most prominent public faces of the campaign for Britain to leave the European Union, previously made a strong case for Turkish membership of the bloc. He made his first visit to Turkey as Britain’s foreign secretary after leading the successful Brexit campaign that played on anti-Turkish sentiments.

Israel pays \$20 mln compensation to Turkey for flotilla raid

Hurriyet Daily News, 30.09.2016



The Israeli government paid \$20 million in compensation to Turkey over the Mavi Marmara flotilla raid in 2010, which led to the suspension of diplomatic ties between the two countries before a reconciliation deal was reached earlier this year, private broadcaster CNN Türk has reported.

The amount was paid to the bank account of the Turkish Justice Ministry, the broadcaster said. In May 2010, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) stormed the Mavi Marmara, part of the Gaza-bound “Gaza Freedom Flotilla,” which was trying to break the Israeli blockade on Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Ten Turkish activists were killed in the raid.

Under the reconciliation deal with Ankara announced in June after six years of strained relations, Tel-Aviv had accepted to pay compensation to the families of the Mavi Marmara victims, which was one of the three conditions put forward by Turkey for normalization.

After months of talks, the agreement was simultaneously announced by the Turkish and Israeli prime ministers in separate press conferences in Ankara and Rome on June 27 and signed by high-level Foreign Ministry officials from both countries one day later.

Meanwhile, a senior Turkish official said that Ankara could announce the name of the ambassador to be appointed to Israel in “one week or 10 days.” Turkey and Israel would simultaneously announce the appointment of ambassadors, said the official, who wanted to remain anonymous.

Ambassador Kemal Ökem, an advisor to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, was cited as a possible candidate, however another official noted a final decision between two or three candidates has not yet been made. In addition, Feridun Sinirlioğlu, undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry, represented Turkey at the funeral ceremony of former Israeli Prime Minister and President Shimon Peres. The body of Peres was laid to rest in Jerusalem on Sept. 30 in a funeral attended by world leaders.

Turkey proposes using Arabs in SDF and FSA for Raqqa and Manbij

Hurriyet Daily News, 30.09.2016



Turkey has proposed using a collaboration of Arab elements from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Free Syrian Army (FSA) in an offensive on Raqqa and the administration of the Manbij region in Syria, a formula which would exclude the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG).

“The Arab elements of the SDF should learn to cooperate with the Free Syrian Army. We want the Arab elements of the SDF and the FSA to establish a joint administration in Manbij. These Arabs should act together in a military offensive towards Raqqa, too,” a senior Turkish official told Hürriyet Daily News.

The official said the U.S. did not object to the proposal, but stressed the outcome of the practice should be seen on the ground. “Disintegration” within the SDF was inevitable, since Arab elements approached the group out of “desperation,” the official said. “They go towards where they feel secure, comfortable, where they can meet their needs. If they achieve these with the FSA, they will work with them,” the official added.

Meanwhile, the Mosul and Raqqa offensives were on the agenda of talks with of U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Tony Blinken in Ankara. Ankara once more told Blinken it would not be part of the operation if YPG forces took part in the offensive. Ankara told the U.S. official that Raqqa was an Arab town and an offensive with 8000 Kurdish fighters into the town carried the risk of inflaming an ethnic fight, according to the official.

As part of the visit by the U.S. delegation chaired by Blinken to Ankara, the official said the first “military-to-military” talks regarding planned military operations on Syria’s Raqqa and Iraq’s Mosul against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) were launched. Turkey had not ruled out providing aerial or land support for the Raqqa offensive, the official said, adding both Turkey and the U.S. would continue to exchange views for further coordination.

The official noted they would not “hurry up” Operation Euphrates Shield’s military action in the Syrian city of al-Bab, an ISIL stronghold 40 kilometers south of the Turkish border, adding the FSA was working to establish a hold force in areas cleared of ISIL in the region.

“The Euphrates Shield operation will continue as long as needed,” the official said. When reminded of remarks by main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) leader Kemal Kılıçdaro lu that the military intervention in Syria could continue for “seven or eight years,” the official said, “It will continue for as long as needed.” Operation plans for Mosul have not been drawn up, according to the Turkish official, who noted that Ankara would take a position on its military contribution to the upcoming Mosul offensive after those plans became clear.

In talks with the U.S., Turkey underlined that the “proper composition of Iraqi forces” during a military action on Mosul was needed to not incise the current sectorial problems in Iraq. Ankara and Washington will continue to discuss “establishing a hold force in Mosul,” the official noted.

Turkey would also watch “its local partners’ interests” during a Mosul offensive, added the Turkish official. During an unscheduled visit by Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif to Ankara, a cease-fire to deliver humanitarian aid was discussed. Iran wants a cease-fire for the delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria “since there are Shia villages that are besieged,” the official said, adding that Tehran could convince Russia and the Syrian regime to this end.

Talking presidents, politics, and peace with Shimon Peres

Foreign Policy, 29.09.2016



Shimon Peres will be buried as a hero at a funeral in Israel attended by representatives from more than 70 countries, including U.S. Presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Although at the time of his death he held no office, there is almost no office in Israel he had not held: he served as prime minister two times, foreign minister three times, defense minister twice, and he also served as minister of finance and minister of transportation.

Yet back in the 1990s, Peres was driven from the prime minister’s office as terror reigned in the wake of the Oslo Accords, and Israelis grew skeptical of his leadership. Indeed, Israelis derided Peres as an unrealistic peacemaker and in, 1996, elected a young prime minister named Benjamin Netanyahu instead.

At the time the country was yearning for an aggressive leader, one who would respond to the deluge of Palestinian suicide bombings that had devastated Israel that year. Voters had come to view Peres, who would not abandon peace negotiations, as soft, believing his pursuit of peace was risking public security while Netanyahu promised a hard line against Palestinian terror. They had forgotten Peres’s role in creating Israel’s military industrial complex. In his early days Peres had been a hawk. In his early days Peres had been a hawk.

As director general of the Ministry of Defense he had created a secret connection with the French, convincing them to sell arms to a then isolated Israel back in the late 1950s. Peres had forged another secret connection with Germany, which became Israel’s second lifeline as the Germans then also started to sell arms to the Jewish state — something the United States refused to do until many years later. Reportedly, he was the father of Israel’s nuclear program, Dimona.



In June 2012, while Shimon Peres was in Washington, D.C. to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom, I sat down with him at Blair House to interview him for The Washington Post. In a conversation that covered topics from the crisis in Syria, to Arab spring, to events in Iran, Peres was relaxed and elated after receiving the Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama.

To an aide, Peres recommended my mother's Katharine Graham's autobiography as she too had received the Medal of Freedom. "I was really taken by the combination of wisdom and sincerity," he noted, adding "and Lally has that also." Turning to the past, Peres then talked about what he saw as his first great achievement: persuading France to sell arms to a fledgling Israel way back in the 1950s when the country was virtually isolated.

Peres was the protégé of Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister and the primary founder of the state of Israel. "There was an (arms) embargo by the U.S., Great Britain, France, and Canada. It only affected Israel because the Russians did not respect it. So the Arabs got the arms, and we got nothing.

The problem was how to break this embargo. The Foreign Minister thought he could convince the Americans, that he could convince the Canadians, that he could convince the British, and I told him there was no chance. I said let me try the French. Nobody [in Israel] thought France was a serious option."

Peres had started to work for Ben-Gurion when he was just 24 years old. His former mentor, he told me, had had an enormous impact on his life. Leaning forward in a chair and gesturing, Peres said firmly, "Ben-Gurion was a great man.

He had a fantastic memory. He was a real intellectual and spoke seven or eight languages. When he gave you his word, it was his word. With all his great talents, he remained an innocent man. He didn't have a trace of cynicism or skepticism. I learned quickly there are two rules to work with him: never lie, but dare as much as you want. That fits my character. That meant if I took a daring position, I could make mistakes. Moses was born in a box. Let's move out of the box."

In the decades following his work on building up Israel's military might, Peres underwent a gradual transformation from "Peres the hawk" to "Peres the peace seeker." He was steadfast in his search for peace. When I asked him at Blair House if he still favored a two state-solution with the Palestinians, he said:

"I think all the other alternatives are unacceptable. I haven't changed my mind. I think [Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud] Abbas is a partner, and I think we can achieve peace with him. We have to try to do our best. The problem between us and the Palestinians is the following: they are not talking about negotiations.

They are talking about the opening of negotiations. You cannot negotiate without an opening. The complicated issues (of peace, borders, etc.) may take time. What can be done immediately is to open negotiations." When I asked if ending the conflict seemed like a hopeless endeavor, he gave a response I will always remember: "There are no hopeless situations, only hopeless people."



During the many times that I interviewed him over the years, Peres had always emphasized the importance of the U.S.-Israel relationship to Israel. He had met and worked closely with every U.S. President since Harry Truman.

In the grand Blair House room where we were sitting, right across from the White House, Peres reflected: “The first president I met to talk to was Kennedy. Kennedy started to question me like a machine gun. It was the day our Chief of Intelligence resigned. All of a sudden Kennedy said, ‘Do you have a nuclear bomb?’ I said, ‘Israel will not be the first to introduce a nuclear bomb in the Middle East.’”

After the meeting, the Ambassador said, ‘How dare you give such an answer?’ And then I got a cable from Prime Minister Levi Eshkol saying, ‘Why did you say this?’ Three or four weeks later, it became the official policy of Israel. So I think I said the right thing.” Then Peres turned to reminiscing about President Reagan:

“Now to tell you about a Republican president with whom I was extremely friendly — that was President Reagan. When I first met him, I didn’t know he was the president. He was so modest. He conquered my heart, and we developed a personal friendship. In every meeting Reagan told me an anti-Russian joke, and I also had to bring from Israel an anti-Russian joke.”

Then it was Bill Clinton’s turn: “When I am speaking about American presidents, I have to speak about my very special relations with President Clinton. He contributed more to peace than anybody else.”

When I asked Peres if he shared the belief of some that President Obama is not friendly toward Israel he replied: “I don’t accept it. President Obama is an exceedingly intelligent person. Don’t underrate him. I find it very easy to trust him. “

Always a fan of America, Peres summed up his love of this country by saying, “America is the only country that became powerful by giving and not by taking, the only nation that understood that generosity is a great policy.

My admiration for America is sincere. It is not passing. I came here without knowing English. I spent two years here, and I was really taken by America — by the hard work, the sense of democracy, and the friendship to Israel — it fell upon me like an unbelievable surprise. “

That June afternoon in Washington wasn’t the first time I interviewed Shimon Peres; the first time was back in 1981—and 13 more interviews with him would follow over the years. He was always interested in the life of the mind, he was a voracious reader and an optimist. Who else at age 90 would hold a conference in Jerusalem called “Tomorrow”?

Your proudest moment? I asked him once in Jerusalem. He replied quickly, “You have to build strength because it may save the use of force. I think you have to build peace, not just negotiate peace.” “You have to build strength because it may save the use of force. I think you have to build peace, not just negotiate peace.” Shimon Peres, the last of the founders of the Jewish state, was a symbol of the hope for peace and a man dedicated to the country he loved. His measured voice and wisdom will be missed in his country and in the region. Farewell, Mr. President.

Putin is playing by grozny rules in Aleppo

Foreign Policy, 29.09.2016



City blasted into rubble, its civilians fleeing, hiding, or simply dying in the ruins while a world looks on in horror. Bombs spilling from Russian warplanes and shells and rockets thundering from Russian guns and launchers. Today this is a Aleppo, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Not long ago, it was Grozny, the capital of Chechnya.

Anyone trying to understand Russia's military strategy in Syria would be wise to examine the heavy-handed methods Vladimir Putin used during his first war as Russia's commander in chief, the bloody Second Chechen War, which lasted from 1999 to 2000.

These are very different wars, fought in different ways by different forces, but they nonetheless highlight one central aspect of Putin's approach to fighting insurgents: the value of brutality. After all, from the Russians' perspective, what the Second Chechen War demonstrated was the strategic value of brutality, when applied in sufficient quantities.

"All war is terrible; sometimes the art is to be the most terrible," one Russian officer said to me with a shrug last year, talking about the Second Chechen War's battle for Grozny, which left thousands of people dead, tens of thousands homeless, and the city described by the United Nations as the most ruined one on the planet. The officer's original quote also included a cleverly macabre pun, as Grozny means "terrible" in Russian.

Like Aleppo, Grozny was battered not just by conventional artillery and air power but also the TOS-1 "Buratino," able to fire salvos of 24 rockets armed with thermobaric munitions, whose devastating blasts are second only to nuclear weapons in their capacity to level city blocks and blast houses to rubble.

Russian warfare can also be subtle and even restrained, as witnessed in the near-bloodless capture of Crimea in 2014. However, when the aim is not just to take territory but to convince insurgents, whose morale is one of their key assets, that resistance is both futile and lethal, the playbook is very different.

Of course Putin is not wholly in charge of the war, and Bashar al-Assad and even Iran also play a significant role, but on this they appear of one mind: peace on Damascus's terms depends on a striking victory and the demonstration of irresistible firepower. And Aleppo is the unlucky example.

At present, Moscow and Damascus face the anger and dismay of the international community. There is talk of further sanctions, and the U.N. Security Council called an emergency meeting in September where Samantha Power, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N., said, "What Russia is sponsoring and doing is not counterterrorism — it is barbarism." Britain's foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, has suggested that there are grounds to suspect war crimes are being committed.



All water off the bear's back. The Kremlin, rather than being chagrined, has turned to its usual playbook for managing accidents, abuses, and atrocities, a process honed in Chechnya. It flatly denies even claims that are backed by evidence.

In Chechnya, for example, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov told U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright at the time that the rebels were opening up a "second front" in the media and that the pictures of homes and hospitals bombed were simply disinformation intended to "cast a shadow on the actions of the federal authorities, to try to complicate Russia's relations with partners in the world."

At the recent U.N. session, Russia's veteran U.N. ambassador, Vitaly Churkin, echoed such rhetoric, dismissing the voluminous documentation of air and artillery strikes as an "attempt to launch a media campaign aimed at discrediting the government's measures to push terrorists out with the use of fake and old video recordings."

What cannot be denied is minimized, normalized by claiming that everyone does the same, or else deflected with furious counterclaim. In Chechnya, where admittedly the rebel regime had become increasingly dominated by Islamists, the war was presented simply as part of a global struggle against the Taliban and al Qaeda, with a Russian defense minister calling Afghanistan and Chechnya "two branches of one tree." Any attempt to question Russian methods was spun as trying to shield terrorists.

Likewise, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova has claimed that U.S. accusations regarding Aleppo are a ploy to distract attention from their recent attack on Syrian troops near Deir Ezzor and, for good measure, that "the White House is defending [the Islamic State]." Never acknowledge, always counterattack.

The point is that Moscow believes such gambits are successful because the West is at once cynical and easily distracted. Moscow believes such gambits are successful because the West is at once cynical and easily distracted.

Time and again, talking to Russians in or close to political circles, I have been struck by a genuine belief that in the West, realpolitik is all. Talk of core values and human rights is dismissed as self-justificatory rhetoric, highfalutin rationalization, or outright hypocrisy. The irony is that just as Russian policy increasingly takes an ideological turn, the more willing so many within its leadership are to assume that the West believes in nothing.

So there is an assumption that if push comes to shove, the West will swallow any brutality on Russia's part if it leads to a desirable end, like the destruction of Islamic State, with a theatrical wringing of hands and a knowing wink.

In Chechnya, after all, although there was no lack of loud dismay at Russia's brutal military assault and the vicious counterinsurgency campaign that followed, Western governments did nothing to back words with deeds. In some quarters, Moscow's claim that this was just a local theater in the "global war on terror" was accepted. In others, there was simply no appetite to challenge the newly elected President Putin when the hope was that he could be a more viable and reliable partner than his ailing and alcoholic predecessor Boris Yeltsin.

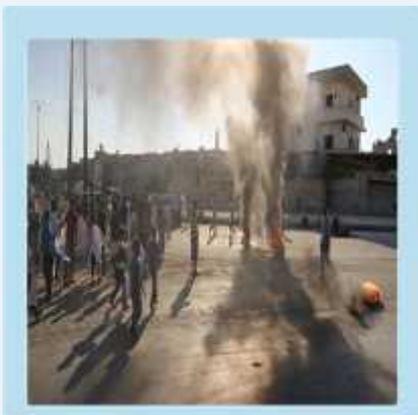
Whatever the reason, the lesson internalized in Moscow was that Western commitments to human rights could be ignored with safety. Besides, there is also a belief that the West has trouble sustaining its indignation. Chechnya was a cause célèbre for some at the height of the war but was soon forgotten. The 2008 invasion of Georgia was followed less than a year later by the ill-starred U.S. offer of a “reset” of relations.

Admittedly, Moscow’s easy assumptions in short Western attention spans have been challenged by the way sanctions imposed after Crimea have held (so far). Nonetheless, the expectation is still that, however terrible the act, all Russia has to do is weather the immediate storm of outrage, and today’s story quickly becomes tomorrow’s history.

Despite the apparent similarity of some of the tactics, Putin does not show signs of believing that the Syrian war is in any way a replay of Chechnya. The country is much larger, the rebels more powerful but also more divided, the international community more deeply engaged. However, if he does seem to have taken one lesson from his bloody triumph at home, it is that a brutal war is best won by brutal means. Poor Syria.

Hollande confirms Calais migrant camp shutdown, urges UK help

Reuters, 26.09.2016



President Francois Hollande said on Sept. 26 that France will completely shut down “the Jungle” migrant camp in Calais and called on London to help deal with the plight of thousands of people whose dream is ultimately to get to Britain.

“The situation is unacceptable and everyone here knows it,” Hollande said on a visit to the northern port city where as many as 10,000 migrants from war-torn countries such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan live in squalor. “We must dismantle the camp completely and definitively,” President Francois Hollande said.

France plans to relocate the migrants in small groups around the country but right-wing opponents of the Socialist leader are raising the heat ahead of the election in April, accusing him of mismanaging a problem that is ultimately a British one. The migrants want to enter Britain, but the government in London argues that migrants seeking asylum need to do so under European Union law in the country where they enter.

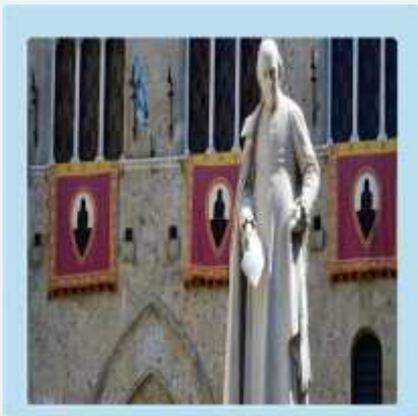
Immigration was one of the main drivers of Britain’s vote this year to leave the EU. It is also likely to be major factor in France’s presidential election. If France stopped trying to prevent migrants from entering Britain, Britain would ultimately find itself obliged to deal with the matter when asylum-seekers land on its shores a short distance by ferry or subsea train from France’s Calais coast.

Hollande bluntly reminded Britain of that, saying that he expected London to fully honor agreements on managing a flow of migrants. “I also want to restate my determination that the British authorities play their part in the humanitarian effort that France is undertaking and that they continue to do that in the future,” Hollande said.

London and Paris have struck agreements on issues such as the recently begun construction of a giant wall on the approach road to Calais port in an attempt to try to stop migrants who attempt daily to board cargo trucks bound for Britain.

US will sharpen ‘military edge’ in Asia, says Carter

AP, 30.09.2016



U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter said the U.S. will “sharpen our military edge” in Asia in order to remain dominant power in a region feeling the effects of China’s rising military might.

Carter made the pledge in a speech aboard the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson in port in San Diego. The Pentagon chief described what he called the next phase of a U.S. pivot to Asia - a rebalancing of American security commitments after years of heavy focus on the Middle East. His speech, aimed at reassuring allies unsettled by China’s behavior in the South China Sea, came three days after he made remarks about rebuilding the nuclear force.

Those comments prompted a strong reaction from the Russian foreign ministry, which issued a statement saying it had interpreted Carter’s statement as a declared intention to lower the threshold for using nuclear weapons.

He said the Pentagon will make its attack submarines more lethal and spend more to build undersea drones that can operate in shallower waters where submarines cannot. “The United States will continue to sharpen our military edge so we remain the most powerful military in the region and the security partner of choice,” he said. He added, “We’re going to have a few surprises as well,” describing them only as “leap-ahead investments.”

With a broad complaint that China is “sometimes behaving aggressively,” Carter alluded to Beijing’s building of artificial islands in disputed areas of the South China Sea. “Beijing sometimes appears to want to pick and choose which principles it wants to benefit from and which it prefers to try to undercut,” he said.

“For example, the universal right to freedom of navigation that allows China’s ships and aircraft to transit safely and peacefully is the same right that Beijing criticizes other countries for exercising in the region. But principles are not like that. They apply to everyone, and every nation, equally.”

Carter's speech was meant to set the scene for a meeting in Hawaii with his counterparts from the 10 member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, which focuses mainly on trade issues but in recent years with U.S. encouragement has sought to engage in a range of defense and military issues. The U.S. is not a member of the organization but has sought to use it as a forum for further developing security partnerships amid regional concern about China's military buildup.

Congress rejects Obama veto, Saudi Sept 11 bill becomes law

Reuters, 29.09.2016



Congress overwhelmingly rejected U.S. President Barack Obama's veto of legislation allowing relatives of the victims of the Sept. 11 attacks to sue Saudi Arabia, the first veto override of his presidency, just four months before it ends.

The House of Representatives voted 348-77 against the veto, hours after the Senate rejected it 97-1, meaning the "Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act" will become law. The vote was a blow to Obama as well as to Saudi Arabia, one of the United States' longest-standing allies in the Arab world, and some lawmakers who supported the override already plan to revisit the issue.

Obama said he thought the Congress had made a mistake, reiterating his belief that the legislation set a dangerous precedent and indicating that he thought political considerations were behind the vote.

"If you're perceived as voting against 9/11 families right before an election, not surprisingly, that's a hard vote for people to take. But it would have been the right thing to do," he said on CNN. Obama's 11 previous vetoes were all sustained. But this time almost all his strongest Democratic supporters in Congress joined Republicans to oppose him in one of their last actions before leaving Washington to campaign for the Nov. 8 election.

"Overriding a presidential veto is something we don't take lightly, but it was important in this case that the families of the victims of 9/11 be allowed to pursue justice, even if that pursuit causes some diplomatic discomforts," Senator Charles Schumer, a top Senate Democrat, said in a statement.

Schumer represents New York, site of the World Trade Center and home to many of the nearly 3,000 people killed in the 2001 attacks, survivors and families of victims. The law, known as JASTA, passed the House and Senate without objections earlier this year. Support was fueled by impatience in Congress with Saudi Arabia over its human rights record, promotion of a severe form of Islam tied to militancy and failure to do more to ease the international refugee crisis.



The law grants an exception to the legal principle of sovereign immunity in cases of terrorism on U.S. soil, clearing the way for lawsuits seeking damages from the Saudi government. Riyadh has denied longstanding suspicions that it backed the hijackers who attacked the United States in 2001. Fifteen of the 19 hijackers were Saudi nationals.

Family members had tied their last push for the bill to the 15th anniversary of the attacks this month, demonstrating outside the White House and Capitol. On Sept. 28, two fire trucks displayed a giant U.S. flag outside the Senate.

"We rejoice in this triumph and look forward to our day in court and a time when we may finally get more answers regarding who was truly behind the attacks," Terry Strada, whose husband died in the attacks, said in a statement. Obama argued that JASTA could expose U.S. companies, troops and officials to lawsuits if other countries passed reciprocal legislation, and may anger important allies.

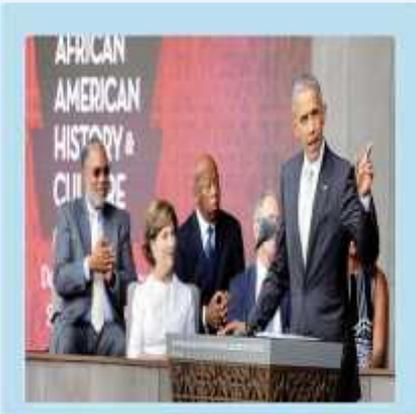
He called Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid and wrote a letter to him explaining that he strongly believed enacting JASTA into law would be detrimental to U.S. interests. Reid became the only senator to side with Obama. Some lawmakers said the White House, which has a history of poor relations with Congress, had waited too long to fight the bill.

The Sept. 11 families have received more than \$7 billion, but bill backers said their intention was to allow lawsuits to punish any government that backs terrorism on U.S. soil. "This bill was carefully negotiated over more than six years," Representative Jerrold Nadler, another New York Democrat, told the House.

The issue, however, may not be finished. At least 28 senators signed a letter to JASTA's sponsors, Schumer and Republican Senator John Cornyn, asking that they work with them to mitigate any potential unintended national security and foreign policy consequences. The Saudi government financed an extensive lobbying campaign against the legislation. U.S. corporations including General Electric Co and Dow Chemical Co also opposed it, as did the European Union and other U.S. allies.

Obama opens new African American Museum

AFP, 25.09.2016



US President Obama speaks during the dedication and grand opening of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture.

President Barack Obama hailed Sept. 24 the opening of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, a long-awaited testament to black suffering and triumph in the United States. The first black president of the United States cut the ribbon to inaugurate the striking 37,000-square-meter bronze-clad edifice before thousands of spectators gathered in the U.S. capital at a time of growing racial friction.

"African American history is not somehow separate from our larger American story. It's not the underside of the American story," said Obama. "It is central to the American story." The star-studded public ceremony, just four months before Obama leaves office, included Stevie Wonder and Oprah Winfrey.

The Smithsonian's 19th addition to its sprawling museum and research complex is the first national museum tasked with documenting the uncomfortable truths of the country's systematic oppression of black people, while also honoring the integral role of African American culture.

"A clear-eyed view of history can make us uncomfortable," Obama said. "It is precisely of that discomfort that we learn and grow and harness our collective power to make this nation more perfect. That's the American story that this museum tells."

Guests of honor on stage included four generations of the Bonner family, led by 99-year-old great-grandmother Ruth, the daughter of a slave who went on to graduate from medical school. After Obama declared the museum "open to the world," it was she -- stooped in stature but smiling broadly -- who tugged on a rope to ring an antique bell from a historic black church, sealing the inauguration.

Elected in a wave of optimism in 2008, Obama pledged to unify, often repeating that he is not the president of black Americans but of all Americans. But as his presidential mandate comes to an end, polls show that most Americans believe U.S. race relations are faring badly.

The recent fatal police shootings of black men in Tulsa, Oklahoma as well as in Charlotte, North Carolina -- and the protests that followed -- laid bare yet again the country's racial disquiet. Obama delivered his address amid these ever-heightening tensions, as national outrage grows over the spate of deaths of black men at the hands of police, prompting mass demonstrations.



The president emphasized that a museum alone cannot solve the ills of a country still struggling to overcome a dark legacy of slavery and racial prejudice, but said it “provides context for the debate of our times.” The dramatic building -- set in a prime location near the White House and the Washington Monument -- features three inverted-pyramid tiers sheathed in bronze-painted filigree panels that house more than 34,000 objects, nearly half of them donated.

It reaches 21 meters below ground, where a crypt of galleries wind from slavery to civil rights to Black Lives Matter, ascending into upper floors that include testaments to African-American cultural contributions.



Announcements & Reports

Low Long-Term Rates: Bond Bubble or Symptom of Secular Stagnation?

Source : Bruegel
Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2016/09/low-long-term-rates-bond-bubble-or-symptom-of-secular-stagnation/>

Militancy and the Arc of Instability

Source : CSIS
Weblink : <https://www.csis.org/analysis/militancy-and-arc-instability?block2>

The Evolution of US and European Monetary Policy after Bretton Woods: A Historical Overview and Lessons for the Future

Source : Chatham House
Weblink : <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/evolution-us-and-european-monetary-policy-after-bretton-woods>

Upcoming Events

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

Date : 30 September 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 : 01 October 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 : 01 October 2016
Place : London - UK
Website : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/future-capitalist-democracy-uk-japan-perspectives>

13th Asia Europe Economic Forum (AEEF)

Date : 04 October 2016
Place : Beijing - China
Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/13th-asia-europe-economic-forum/>



Emerging Markets and Europe: Time for Different Relationships?

Date : 05 October 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 : 11 October 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 : 12 October 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 : 13 October 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 : 14 October 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/>