

Turkey condemns North Korea ballistic missile launches

Hurriyet Daily News, 28.02.2017



Turkey has condemned the launches of ballistic missiles by North Korea. A Turkish Foreign Ministry statement said the ballistic missile launches by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) "constitute yet another flagrant violation of multiple U.N. Security Council Resolutions, including Resolution 2321 adopted in November 2016."

"The DPRK must fully comply with its international obligations under relevant U.N. Security Council resolutions and cease its ballistic missile launches and other activities threatening regional, as well as international security and stability," the statement said.

"We once again call upon the DPRK to cease its confrontational behavior which benefits neither the DPRK itself nor the international community and is detrimental to peace and security of the region," it added.

North Korea test-fired four missiles morning, according to South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff. Seoul is investigating what kind of ballistic projectiles were launched, with support from the United States. Acting South Korean President Hwang Kyo-ahn denounced the launches as "a grave provocation to the international community." This is the second missile challenge from North Korea since U.S. President Donald Trump was sworn in. Despite mounting international pressure, the North tested an intermediate-range ballistic missile on Feb. 12.

Turkish envoy: Security a common field of benefit for Turkey, Israel

Hurriyet Daily News, 10.03.2017



Security is an area in common in which both Turkey and Israel can benefit following a rapprochement following six years of strained ties, the Turkish envoy to Israel has said.

“With regards to political relations, there is a reciprocal bilateral will between Turkey and Israel that duly resulted in reconciliation and rapprochement. But this needs to be supported by a real common benefit on the ground. One of these common benefits is security in particular,” Turkish Ambassador to Israel Kemal Ökem told a group of Turkish journalists at his residence in Tel Aviv.

He said the two sides needed to look at the degree to which their security concerns for the region suited each other. “What are the ways in which the other’s security is not diminished but increased when we try to strengthen our own security?” he said. “We need to look into this.”

Ökem said most of the discussions between the two countries on regional security issues focused on defense and intelligence. “Defense and intelligence are important elements of security. When we say that security is being discussed, these aspects [defense and intelligence] are also being talked about, of course. If you do not talk about these things, then there would be something missing,” said Ökem.

Stating that Israel had a partnership with NATO, in which Turkey has been a member since shortly after the group’s foundation, the ambassador said most of the topics regarding defense were discussed under this scope.

“Other than that, whatever has been the topic of bilateral relations previously will be talked about when the time comes,” Ökem added. In 2016, Turkey and Israel reset ties after a hiatus of six years following an Israeli raid on a Gaza-bound flotilla that killed 10 Turkish citizens.

It is not only Turkey and Israel themselves that will benefit from the rapprochement, but also the Palestinians, Ökem said, noting that the Palestinian government had approved of the détente. “[The Palestinians] said, ‘We support it.’ Therefore, there is a convergence of thoughts here,” Ökem said.

Israel needs to ask itself what kind of state it wishes to be in the Middle East before even considering its desires for the Middle East, Ökem said. “If there will be a peace process between Palestine and Israel, then how will it be? What kind of a country will [Israel] be when sitting at that table,” said Ökem. Turkey and Israel will be the primary beneficiaries of maintaining Syria’s territorial integrity, said Ökem. “The territorial integrity and political unity [of Syria] needs to be maintained. This is not only needed for Turkey and Israel but also for the international community.

But as countries to the north and south of Syria, Turkey and Israel will be the two countries that will initially benefit from Syria staying together and preserve its political unity,” Ökem said. While Turkey supports rebels fighting against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Syria, Israel has explicitly said it has attempted to stay out of the civil war. Threats toward Turkey and Israel are likely to come from the land, not from the air or seas, the envoy said, adding that it was therefore important to determine which steps Turkey and Israel would take with regards to regional security.

“There is a Russian presence in the region which Israel is not accustomed to. Russians have been our neighbors for years, we are accustomed to them and our partnership with Russia has a certain amount of depth, but it is a new element for Israel.

Israel says that they are in coordination with Russia. [Israeli PM Benjamin] Netanyahu has gone and is going to Moscow. A meeting [scheduled for March 9] will be the sixth [between Netanyahu and Russian President Vladimir Putin] in one year. This openly shows that they are aware that Russia’s presence here will be permanent,” said Ökem. “They say they are in coordination. Coordination is also a method of cooperation,” he added.

Turkey urges US, Russia to cut support to YPG

Reuters, 09.03.2017



Turkey has reiterated its desire to remove the Syrian Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed wing, the People’s Protection Units (YPG), from Manbij, urging both the United States and Russia not to support “terrorist groups” in Syria, just after the top soldiers of the three countries discussed the security situation in the war-torn country in a surprise meeting.

“What is important for us is to clear Manbij of YPG elements. Why did the YPG come there? To establish its terrorist canton and to gain more territory,” FM Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said March 9.

“That’s why it wants to join the Raqqa operation. It won’t return after the DAESH [an Arabic acronym of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] is kicked out of Raqqa,” Çavuşoğlu told Ankara bureau chiefs of media outlets.

“The YPG is using the fight against the DAESH as an opportunity,” Çavuşoğlu said, reiterating that Turkey would not permit the PYD to link its Kobane and Afrin cantons in northern Syria. Following its victory in al-Bab, Turkey said its next target would be Manbij to push the YPG forces to the east of the Euphrates River; Russia, however, forced the Syrian Kurdish group to transfer control of the region to the Syrian government while the United States deployed more forces to the same area in a bid to halt a potential Turkish operation.



“If the Russians move to protect the YPG in Manbij or elsewhere, that would be a problem for us. We would oppose this. But if they move to clear the YPG then we would support it,” Çavuşoğlu said. The foreign minister, however, recalled that the YPG’s deployment in Manbij was an issue between Turkey and the U.S. and not with Russia, underlining Turkey’s sensitivity with regard to the existence of a “terrorist group” right on the other side of its border. “For us, the priority is the YPG. It’s our sensitive issue,” he said.

As two allies, it is only natural that Turkey and the U.S. cooperate with each other and not with “terror organizations,” Çavuşoğlu said, adding that Ankara attached importance to working with Washington on all regional issues.

Turkey’s top diplomat recalled that the Obama administration did not keep its promises to force the YPG to withdraw from Manbij area and denied Ankara’s proposal to conduct the Raqqa operation with ostensibly moderate opposition groups on the grounds that preparing such a force would take too much time. “As long as the YPG will continue to stay there, it will be inevitable to see fights between different [ethnic] groups,” he added.

Although there is a new administration in the U.S., key figures in coordinating the fight against ISIL are from the previous administration who chosen to work with the PYD instead of Turkey and “moderate opposition groups,” Çavuşoğlu said, noting that there were differences of views on Syria among U.S. institutions, especially on the eve of the Raqqa operation.

“There has been no decision given on the Raqqa operation [in the U.S.]. The U.S. is confused. There are different groups in the U.S.,” he said, noting that Ankara has long warned that the involvement of the YPG would be risky.

Asked whether Turkey would continue to let the U.S. use the Incirlik base for its operation on Raqqa if YPG forces participated, the minister said it was not an issue he could decide alone but recalled that this was a base built by NATO even though it was overseen by the Turkish government.

Turkey’s policy with regard to the region is based on maintaining the territorial integrity of Iraq and Syria, he said, adding that any new government in Damascus would decide the future of Syria, Çavuşoğlu said. “Turkey has no eye on Syrian territory, including the piece of land that it cleared from DAESH. But I will never be on the YPG side. We will be against the PKK and PYD’s control of any territory under any condition,” he said.

Turkey’s ties with Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) are good but that does not mean that Turkey supports an independent state in northern Iraq, Çavuşoğlu said, noting that Turkey wants Iraq to remain united.

In a surprise meeting between the chiefs of General Staff of Turkey, Russia and the U.S. in Antalya, Çavuşoğlu said it was a symbolically important meeting that aimed at establishing a coordination mechanism to avoid unwanted accidents. Among the issues discussed between the top soldiers were intelligence sharing, providing information about the scope and limitations of each country’s military operations and informing each other about planned aerial attacks against ISIL in Syria. “There are 65 countries in the coalition. We should all be very careful in conducting our operations,” he said.

EU minister calls for common policy against 'rising racism' in Europe

Hurriyet Daily News, 06.03.2017



A common policy should be developed against increasing racism in Europe, immigrant hostility, Islamophobic and anti-Semitic politics, Turkey's EU Minister Ömer Çelik said on his official Twitter account.

He said a common policy should also be developed for the search of missing immigrant children in Germany and in many European cities, noting that a similar incident was seen recently in Paris. He stressed that some European politicians were displaying anti-Turkey sentiments. "Some European politicians who oppose Turkey say they should produce 'common policy' in Europe against Turkey," he said.

"A common policy should be developed against municipalities that show unruly attitudes towards immigrants," he added. "Democrats of the entire world should discuss these issues in order to protect main issues," he said. Çelik stressed that common policies should be implemented against racists and governments that have isolated migrants fleeing oppression.

"A common policy should be developed towards those who remain silent towards violations of democracy and human rights in Europe. A common policy should be developed on the role of governments and institutions in raising racism in Europe," he said.

Diplomatic tensions have been rising in recent days amid Turkish plans to have ministers to address rallies in Germany and the Netherlands in support of an upcoming constitutional referendum that would give President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan extended powers.

Some European Union officials earlier stated that there may be lessons to be drawn from the spat between Turkey and Germany on campaigning by officials from outside the 28-nation bloc. Slovak Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajcak said the controversy highlights the lack of European rules and standards on allowing rallies by politicians from non-member countries. "It's about time to start discussing it. I think there should be rules. I would be rather restrictive, because as we can see it has a huge damaging potential," he said.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel's chief of staff, Peter Altmaier, has condemned remarks by Erdoğan accusing Germany of "Nazi practices," days after a local authority prevented Turkish Justice Minister Bekir Bozdağ from addressing a rally there. Altmaier called Erdoğan's remarks "absolutely unacceptable." He told German public Television ARD that "Germany cannot be outmatched regarding the rule of law, tolerance and liberality." He said the government was in contact with the Turkish government and announced that "we will make sure the significance of the problems of what happened in recent days will be recognized and understood in Ankara as well."

Turkish military: 71 militants killed in one week in northern Syria

Anadolu Agency, 10.03.2017



At least 98 militants have been killed in Turkey and northern Syria over a week, the Turkish military said March 10. Some 71 out of 98 Democratic Union Party (PYD), outlawed Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) and People's Protection Units (YPG) militants were killed in northern Syria as part of the Turkey-led Euphrates Shield operation, the military said.

The military added that efforts to clear mines and explosives were ongoing in the regions of al-Bab, Qabasin and Bzaghah. Since the operation began last August, the Turkish military has neutralized 3,060 Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) militants and 462 PKK, PYD and YPG militants.

Turkish authorities use the word "neutralized" in their statements to imply the militants in question were either killed, captured or surrounded. Turkish jets also destroyed 2,325 targets, with the military taking control over 243 residential areas and 2,015 square kilometers (778 square miles) of territory between the cities of Azaz and Jarabulus.

According to another statement by the military on March 10, Turkish jets destroyed three PKK targets in the Avasin-Basyan and Zap regions in northern Iraq late on March 9. The Turkish General Staff said in a statement that 27 of the militants were killed in anti-PKK operations in the southeastern provinces of Diyarbakır, Bingöl, Siirt, Mardin, Bitlis, Batman and Kars between March 2 and March 9.

During the operations, 24 shelters used by the PKK were destroyed and five vehicles were seized, while 80 improvised explosives and 25 infantry rifles were recovered. A Turkish soldier was also killed during security efforts at the border, during which 3,547 people were captured while trying to cross illegally. Security forces also seized 908 kilograms (2,002 pounds) of cannabis and 7,000 packets of smuggled cigarettes.

Questions linger on who controls Syrian town of Manbij

Reuters, 06.03.2017



Manbij in Syria's north is under the protection of the U.S.-led coalition against Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a Kurdish-allied militia that controls the city said, raising fresh questions over who controls the border town, which is described as "critical" by Turkey.

Manbij has come into renewed focus since Turkey declared it the next target of the campaign it is waging with Syrian rebels in northern Syria to keep both ISIL and Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) forces and its armed wing the People's Protection Unit (YPG) away from its border.

Ankara says the PYD and the YPG are extensions of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The Manbij Military Council is part of the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a militia alliance dominated by the YPG. The Turkish government says the YPG remains in Manbij, though the YPG says it withdrew last year after the city was captured from ISIL in an SDF assault backed by the U.S.-led coalition.

In a statement released late on March 5, the Manbij Military Council said the U.S.-led coalition had increased its presence in Manbij and the surrounding countryside "after the increase in Turkish threats to occupy the city."

"We in the Manbij Military Council confirm again that Manbij and its rural areas are under the protection of the Manbij Military Council and under the care of the international coalition and its protection," the Manbij Military Council said.

After clashing with Turkey-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA) rebels west of Manbij last week, the council declared a deal with Russia to hand villages at the frontline with Turkish forces to Syrian government control.

Syrian regime forces will take over Manbij, which has been under the control of YPG forces, Russia stated on March 3, amid repeated calls from Turkey for the YPG Kurdish forces to leave the town.

Rudskoy's statement came hours after Turkish Defense Minister Fikri Ilık said Turkey expected PKK and PYD elements in northern Syria to withdraw to the east bank of the Euphrates River, which he described as a "red line" for Turkey. "We expect the coalition forces, especially the U.S., to keep promises given to Turkey in this regard," Ilık told reporters, adding that Turkey's priority is the city of Manbij. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu on March 2 said Turkey would strike the YPG if it did not withdraw from Manbij.

May hears hard truths about Brexit as EU prepares for talks

Bloomberg, 10.03.2017



PM May was served a series of reminders about how tough the EU plans to be in the looming Brexit negotiations. From Berlin to Brussels, interviews and leaked documents showed EU leaders vowing to unite in the talks, and to ensure the U.K. loses more than it gains from quitting the bloc.

Germany said the EU won't splinter or grant too many concessions to the British, while Denmark warned May's hoped-for trade deal with the EU could take as long as 15 years to seal. Even traditional ally Ireland sided with EU in pushing Britain to pay an exit fee, while also seeking to lure banks from London.

The messages came as May prepares this month to trigger two years of discussions, and underscore just how hard it will be for the U.K. to deliver the successful Brexit that May is promising voters. EU leaders were continuing talks in Brussels on Friday after May spent Thursday among them. She flew home late Thursday after pledging to build the "independent, self-governing global Britain the British have called for."

As May sounded optimistic, Europe's approach was laid bare in a memo circulating within the German government and obtained by Bloomberg News. It urged EU governments to "not let ourselves be divided," as the "foremost priority" must be to protect the bloc's cohesion. It also stressed there should be a difference between life inside the bloc and outside it.

"Brexit will mean less cooperation and economic integration compared to EU membership," and the U.K. will be treated as a "third country," the document said. "Brexit thus becomes a step backward which will have an effect on Britain."

In another blow to Britain, Germany sided with European Commission negotiator Michel Barnier in saying the divorce should be arranged before a new trading relationship is discussed. Britain would prefer to hold the talks in parallel.

May's hopes of sealing a fresh trade deal by 2019 were also undermined by Danish Foreign Minister Anders Samuelsen, who said such a pact could take 15 years to agree. May said in Brussels that she's still aiming for a "good and comprehensive" accord and working to a two-year deadline -- although she hinted that she wasn't necessarily talking about the trade deal being fully concluded in that time, only its "framework." Meantime, Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny warned May will need to face up to paying for Britain's previous commitments to the EU. "When you sign on for contracts you commit yourself to participation and obviously the extent of that level of money will be determined," Kenny told reporters.

In an interview with the BBC, U.K. Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said it wouldn't be "reasonable" to expect Britain to accept a "vast" bill to settle its liabilities, suggesting his government would fight any demand for payment.

For all the threats, Guy Verhofstadt, the European Parliament's Brexit negotiator, told the BBC that British citizens should be able to apply on an individual basis to keep some benefits of EU membership including freedom of movement.

Luxembourg Prime Minister Xavier Bettel also held out hope that the split may still not go through. "Maybe during the procedure of divorce they will say 'we love you that much that we are not able to conclude that divorce,'" he told the Independent digital newspaper.

Defiant Fillon says 'no one' can stop France election bid

AFP, 06.03.2017



Embattled French presidential hopeful Francois Fillon vowed that "no one" could force him to quit as he dug in despite calls to withdraw over an expenses scandal.

The conservative was in a defiant mood after holding a rally in Paris attended by tens of thousands of flag-waving supporters. "No one today can prevent me being a candidate," Fillon said, ahead of a party leaders meeting. Gillon repeated that an investigation into allegations he gave his wife a highly paid fake parliamentary job was "politically motivated." "Of course it is aimed at stopping me being a candidate," said Fillon, who is to be charged on March 15.

Former prime minister Alain Juppe has been tipped as a likely replacement, with leaders of their Republicans party meeting Monday evening and Juppe also to make an announcement. Fillon however dismissed suggestions the party could remove him.

"If the voters of the right and the centre wanted Alain Juppe, they would have voted for Alain Juppe," he said. He was criticized on social media after saying he was "not autistic" and saw the problems in his campaign.

Fillon, a devout Catholic, beat Juppe in the Republicans' primary in November, pulling off a surprise victory by campaigning as a "clean" candidate. He was the frontrunner in the presidential race until Le Canard Enchaîné newspaper alleged in mid-January that he paid his wife Penelope and two of their children nearly 900,000 euros (\$950,000) as his parliamentary assistants. Senior members of Fillon's party have called for the 63-year-old to step aside, with a poll released Sunday confirming he was hemorrhaging support and would be eliminated in the first round of the election on April 23.

Most surveys show far-right leader Marine Le Pen and 39-year-old centrist Emmanuel Macron would progress to the runoff on May 7. Fillon had previously promised to quit if he were charged but has since pulled back from the pledge.

He portrays himself as a victim of injustice who intends to put his case directly to the people. Earlier, Fillon gave a speech to tricolor-waving supporters at the Trocadero Square on the opposite bank of the Seine to the Eiffel Tower.

He apologized for the expenses scandal but said he was sure he would be proved innocent. His team claimed 200,000 people attended the rally but AFP reporters put the turnout in the tens of thousands. Police said the maximum capacity of the square was about 40,000.

Fillon's British-born wife Penelope, who accompanied him at the rally, broke her silence earlier Sunday, telling *Le Journal du Dimanche* she had carried out "a lot of different tasks" for her husband during his lengthy career.

She had also urged him to "keep going to the end" but said only he could make the final decision. Police raided the Fillons' country manor house near Le Mans on March 3 and their Paris apartment was searched a day earlier. Despite Fillon's defiance, there were fresh calls for him to stand aside.

Trump's ramped-up bombing in Yemen signals more aggressive use of military

Foreign Policy, 09.03.2017



After a week of punishing airstrikes loosed on al Qaeda in Yemen that saw 40 targets go up in flames and smoke, American pilots took a breather the past two nights, watching the dust settle.

The weeklong blitz in Yemen eclipsed the annual bombing total for any year during Barack Obama's presidency. Under the previous administration, approval for strikes came only after slow-moving policy discussions, with senior officials required to sign off on any action. The President Trump administration has proven much quicker at green-lighting attacks.

More broadly, the expanded bombing in Yemen signals a more aggressive use of military force by the Trump administration against Islamist militants, from Syria to Afghanistan. The White House already has approved the deployment of Marines and special operations forces to Syria and a large-scale commando raid in Yemen. On Thursday, a top commander suggested more troops are headed to Afghanistan. President Donald Trump's readiness to order military action stands in contrast to the previous administration.



When Obama's national security advisor Susan Rice ran the policymaking process, "stuff moved like molasses through the National Security Council," much to the frustration of military planners at U.S. Central Command, a former senior defense official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told Foreign Policy. The interagency discussions allowed plans to languish for weeks while debates swirled over when and how to act.

Throughout 2016, the Pentagon continually briefed the White House on ways to get more aggressive with al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, or AQAP, as they watched the group gain strength in their Yemeni strongholds. Those strikes didn't happen, "but just because the clock ran out," the official said.

The Obama administration handed over plans for a stepped-up campaign to the incoming Trump team in January. There has been an immediate change in the tempo of operations. This reflects the new administration's apparent preference for prompt military action over policy deliberations, and a more dominant role for the military in decision-making.

That's due in part to the stripped-down staffs at the White House, State Department, and Pentagon, where dozens of key posts remain empty or held on a temporary basis by more junior civil servants. Those empty desks have allowed commanders to secure a prompt green light for military operations in Yemen, former officials said.

"By default, everything is going to be quicker from flash to bang than it was during the Obama presidency," another former Pentagon official said. "By default, everything is going to be quicker from flash to bang than it was during the Obama presidency," another former Pentagon official said.

But bolder military action without a clear diplomatic plan can bring unintended consequences. Focusing narrowly on the military objective of counterterrorism strikes without a strategy to resolve the stalemated Yemeni civil war — and address Saudi and Iranian involvement there — will do little to bring stability to the country, or solve the underlying ethnic and religious tensions that have allowed al Qaeda's branch there to flourish, experts said.

While the Islamic State has dominated public discussion of terrorism, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has gained strength and territory by exploiting the chaos and sectarianism of the country's 2-year-old civil war, which pits supporters of President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi, backed by a Saudi-led military coalition, against Houthi rebels supported by Iran.

The apparent urgency of the latest round of strikes underscores how concerned senior military and intelligence officers are about the threat of AQAP carrying out attacks in the West. The Yemeni branch of al Qaeda "is stronger than it has ever been," according to a report last month from the International Crisis Group. AQAP has thrived on the civil war, taking advantage of wartime smuggling, a growing security vacuum, and sectarian fears between the Shiite Houthis and the Sunni supporters of Hadi, it said.

The group "remains a potent and dangerous enemy," said a U.S. intelligence official, who was not authorized to be quoted by name. "Internal turmoil in Yemen has not distracted AQAP from its longstanding interest in attacking the West."



The challenge for the new administration is trying to counter AQAP even as the devilishly complicated civil war rages amid a growing humanitarian crisis. The Obama administration tried to help broker a peace settlement in Yemen but got nowhere, as both sides in the conflict appeared to be gambling on winning on the battlefield. Much of the policy discussions in the Obama White House on Yemen were consumed by questions about humanitarian relief, former officials said.

The debates frustrated some military planners who felt that gains had to be made in the counterterrorism fight before more humanitarian aid could begin to flow into the country. But opening up a wider bombing campaign against AQAP while ignoring what one Pentagon official called Saudi Arabia's "incompetently run and tragic campaign against the Houthis" carries its own set of risks.

More airstrikes, which could cause more civilian casualties, may fuel the resentment of local groups that have forged alliances of convenience with AQAP or other armed groups and harden grievances that have fed the violence.

In a sign the administration could be ready to bolster support for the Saudi-led war effort, the State Department has approved the sale of precision-guided munitions to Riyadh, officials said. The White House has yet to make a final decision on the sale. The proposal, first reported by the Washington Post, would reverse the previous administration's policy that had suspended the sales amid concerns about a rising civilian death toll from coalition air raids.

If the new administration further expands the U.S. military's role, including bolstering assistance to Saudi Arabia's coalition, which has faced widespread condemnation for its bombing of civilian targets, analysts and former officials said it could find itself drawn into a quagmire.

"This is not a place where we can have a glorious little war. If we have a war in Yemen, it will be nasty and it will be bloody," a former Pentagon official said. The latest round of U.S. strikes was presaged by a Jan. 29 assault by a Navy SEAL team fighting alongside commandos from the United Arab Emirates on an AQAP compound, during which a furious counterattack by the terrorist group left one SEAL dead, several injured, and led to claims of multiple civilians killed.

The Pentagon says it is investigating the reports of civilian casualties. While the raid picked up valuable intelligence on the group, Defense officials have said they're still poring over the data, and it has not yet informed their operations in any significant way.

The precision airstrikes have taken out several key AQAP leaders, including former Guantánamo Bay detainee Yasir al-Silmi, who was repatriated to Yemen in 2009. The pace of the attacks also indicate that they had been in the works for some time.

Pentagon spokesman Capt. Jeff Davis told reporters last week, "This goes to a plan and a thought process that is developed over many months that goes well back into last year where our commanders on the ground began to develop this proposal to do this." The United States has some help on the ground as well. One major blow for AQAP came last April, when government troops and forces from the United Arab Emirates pushed the militants out of the port city of Mukalla. The group had been making millions of dollars a month controlling the port and taxing citizens.



Since then, Emirati commandos have taken the lead in the counterterrorism effort in the country. Forces backed by the United Arab Emirates have pushed forward along the coastline, where they have taken control of the Balhaf natural gas facility. Experts say they could eventually move north in an attempt to push AQAP from areas it controls.

That would start to roll back some of the gains AQAP has made since the war began, gains fueled by Saudi Arabia's intervention. The Saudi-led coalition's "almost single-minded focus" on defeating the Houthi rebels has been a boon to AQAP, which has gotten its hands on weapons supplied by the Saudi coalition and cash from robbing banks, the International Crisis Group's report said.



Announcements & Reports

Institutional investors and home bias in Europe's Capital Markets Union

Source : Bruegel

Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2017/03/institutional-investors-and-home-bias-in-europes-capital-markets-union/>

Defence and security after Brexit

Source : Rand

Weblink : http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1786.html

Fundamental uncertainty and unconventional monetary policy: an info-gap approach

Source : Bruegel

Weblink : <http://bruegel.org/2017/02/fundamental-uncertainty-and-unconventional-monetary-policy-an-info-gap-approach/>

Upcoming Events

India – Middle East Relations in the Asian Century

Date : 12 March 2017

Place : Doha - Qatar

Website : <https://www.brookings.edu/events/india-middle-east-relations-in-the-asian-century/>

Repeal, Replace, Repair, or Improve? The Future of the ACA

Date : 17 March 2017

Place : Washington DC – United States

Website : <http://www.rand.org/congress/activities/2017/03/17.html>

Conversations On The Future Of Europe

Date : 22 March 2017

Place : Brussels - Belgium

Website : <http://bruegel.org/events/conversations-on-europe/>

The Challenges Facing The Euro Area

Date : 31 March 2017

Place : Brussels - Belgium

Website : [http://bruegel.org/events/the-challenges-facing-the-](http://bruegel.org/events/the-challenges-facing-the-euro-area/)

[euro-area/](http://bruegel.org/events/the-challenges-facing-the-euro-area/)



China's governance puzzle: Transparency and participation in a one-party state

Date : 22 March 2017
Place : Washington DC – United States
Website : [https://www.brookings.edu/events/chinas-](https://www.brookings.edu/events/chinas-governance-puzzle-transparency-and-participation-in-a-one-party-state/)

[governance-puzzle-transparency-and-participation-in-a-one-party-state/](https://www.brookings.edu/events/chinas-governance-puzzle-transparency-and-participation-in-a-one-party-state/)