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Top U.S. general warns of 'nasty' Korea conflict, stresses diplomacy

February 8, 2018 SpaceDaily.com reported: "The US military's top officer warned Tuesday that any war with North Korea would be 'nasty' and said America still hopes to find a peaceful solution to the ongoing crisis.

General Joe Dunford, who is the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the Pentagon's role is to bolster diplomatic efforts by providing a clear message about US warfighting capabilities.

'Right now, the military dimension of the problem is reinforcing Secretary (of State Rex) Tillerson's economic and diplomatic pressure campaign,' Dunford told reporters travelling with him after he visited US Marines temporarily deployed to an Australian air force base in Darwin.

'His diplomatic efforts are underwritten by a credible military strength.'

Dunford stressed the US seeks a peaceful outcome to the crisis over North Korea's push to develop intercontinental ballistic missiles that have the capability of reaching the US mainland. Still, he said, President Donald Trump has asked him and Defence Secretary Jim Mattis for a 'full range' of military options..."

Abbas, Putin to discuss new peace talks mechanism sidelining US

February 7, 2018 timesofisrael.com reported: "When they meet on February 12, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Russian President Vladimir Putin will discuss a new proposed peace negotiations mechanism meant to sideline the United States, a Palestinian diplomat in Russia told the Russian Interfax news agency on Wednesday. The two men are scheduled to meet in the Black Sea beach resort of Sochi.

Interfax reported the new mechanism would seek to replace the Middle East Quartet, established in Madrid in 2002, which is composed of the US, the UN, the EU and Russia. The announcement comes as the Palestinian Authority is trying to convince Russia to play a much more prominent role in the peace talks, having declared the US unqualified to act as an 'honest broker' due to President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

At the Sochi meeting, Abbas is expected to tell Putin that the Palestinians do not believe the Trump administration is capable of playing any 'constructive' or 'positive' role in efforts to achieve peace with Israel, a PA official in Ramallah said last week. The PA president has also been seeking greater European involvement in the peace process..."



Western Balkans: A new start for Europe

February 6, 2018 EUObserver.com reported: "The European Commission is rarely praised for bold action these days. But the EU Strategy for the Western Balkans published Tuesday (6th February) deserves applause. Long neglected by the West, the Western Balkans region is an easy prey for other geopolitical powers that see instability as their opportunity.

The EU's wavering political commitment to future membership of the six Balkan countries has caused many people in the region to lose hope. The EU strategy aims to turn the tide and push the region towards EU membership and deep transformation.

The commission has proposed bold measures; particularly important are progressive opening of EU funds, inclusion of the Balkan six governments in EU policy-making processes even before membership, lifting of visible and invisible barriers for trade and travel. The mention of 2025 and other target dates for progress in negotiations are especially valuable as a powerful incentive for the region's politicians to work to meet the criteria for membership.

These incentives for reform now need to be matched by clear standards for the region's governments to work towards. The European commission must follow the strategy document with an overhaul of its instruments to monitor of progress in the region. Otherwise, the more sceptical member states would be right to fear that mention of dates would favour speed over quality of reforms.

Many citizens in the region also see the EU membership not as an end in itself but as an opportunity to improve governance so that they can live in orderly, prosperous and open societies..."

Canadian PM: Sharia law is compatible with democracy

February 6, 2018 Arutz Sheva 7 reported: "Canada continues to support and implement Sharia Law. The American Center for Democracy (ACD) quotes Imam Aasim Rashid of Vancouver, British Columbia, who spoke in October 2017 at Thompson Rivers University, explaining why the Canadian government wants to implement Sharia Law.

'I'll tell you who wants to bring Sharia Law,' Thompson said then. 'The Canadian government wants to bring Sharia Law and this is not a joke. Why? Because Sharia Law is simply the way Muslims are doing things.'

'The Canadian government wanted the Muslims to be able to regulate their own issues...to solve their problems amongst themselves [according] to Sharia Law, so it is not a burden on the court system which is already so bogged down.

'The government told us – we would like you to have this system, and we would like to work on these initiatives with you.'

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told CBC in January 2016 that 'Islam is not incompatible with Western secular democracy.'

ACD, however, has challenged this assumption with various facts on Islam and Islamists: For example, the Quran states that 'Men are caretakers of women... As for women of whom you fear rebellion, convince them, and leave them apart in beds, and beat them (lightly without causing injury)...' (Quran 4:34)

In his book, *Human Rights in Islam and Common Misconceptions*, Abdul-Rahman al-Sheha writes that ‘the non-Muslim residents of an Islamic state are required to pay a minimal tax called ‘Jizyah.’

He also notes that ‘Allah set the penalty of cutting the hand as a penalty for theft,’ and says that ‘if the robber kills and seizes the money, the punishment may be killing and crucifixion. If he takes money and threatens but does not kill or assault, the punishment may be amputation of his hand and leg. If he kills the victim but does not take his money, he may be executed as in murder.’...”

Report: China Moves 300,000 Troops Closer to North Korean Border

February 5, 2018 Breitbart.com reported: “China is reportedly moving missile defense batteries and troops closer to its border with North Korea, a potential sign that Beijing anticipates either a large refugee wave north or a military disturbance triggered by the belligerence of communist dictator Kim Jong-un.

The South Korean newspaper Chosun Ilbo cited Radio Free Asia (RFA) in a report Monday, stating that RFA had compiled evidence that China had “late last year deployed another missile defense battery at an armored division in Helong, west of Longjing in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture.”

The “North Korean source in China” speaking to RFA also noted that Pyongyang had observed the movement of 300,000 troops closer to the North Korean border and “missile defense batteries near North Korean reservoirs by the Apnok and Duman rivers.” The batteries would prevent the violent outpouring of those reservoirs into China in the event of an airstrike.

On Friday, China’s state-run People’s Daily newspaper reported that Beijing was also investing in establishing nuclear monitoring stations throughout the world, but especially near North Korea, to more rapidly gather information about a potential airstrike. While carefully noting that “detection is not targeted at any particular country,” the newspaper noted that the planned 11 nuclear monitoring stations “are responsible for detecting nuclear activities in neighboring countries, including North Korea...”

‘Jerusalem will be the capital of the Islamic Caliphate’

February 5, 2018 Arutz Sheva 7 reported: “Sheikh Kamal al-Khatib, Deputy Head of the illegal Islamic Movement in Israel, published an article expressing his opinion what Jerusalem’s status should be.

The article, published in the Gaza newspaper Falestin, slams those who talk a lot about their love and connection to Al-Aqsa Mosque and notes that those who really love Al-Aqsa are the ones ‘who are active on the ground, hold Islamic activities in the mosque, renovate Muslims’ homes in the Old City of Jerusalem, and were arrested or forced to pay a fine for their activities.’

According to al-Khatib, the Palestinian Authority is ‘competing with us in their love for Jerusalem’ but they are also the ones who negotiated Jerusalem during the Oslo Accords and were willing to negotiate regarding Jerusalem. Today, when Jerusalem is becoming more Jewish, they cry crocodile tears.

‘The city of Al-Quds is the capital city of the Islamic Caliphate, which is run properly,’ al-Khatib wrote. ‘With the help of Allah, this will soon become reality.’...”

IDF Chief of Staff: War with Gaza likely in 2018

February 5, 2018 Arutz Sheva 7 reported: “In what has been the direct and pointed warning to date, IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot predicted at Sunday’s cabinet meeting that a new conflict between Israel and the Hamas terror organization in Gaza was likely in 2018 resulting from Hamas’ mismanagement of the Gaza Strip and the correspondingly difficult humanitarian conditions.

According to Eizenkot, a severe shortage of electricity and food during the cold winter makes it increasingly likely that Hamas will seek an escalation with Israel as a way of distracting the populace from its lack of basic services.

The warning follows a report in the Israeli media on Saturday night which claimed that Israel is considering sending direct humanitarian aid to Gaza in order to avert another round of bloodshed. If accurate, this would be the first time that Israel has sent direct aid to Gaza, likely pointing to the seriousness in which Israel sees the situation.

On Sunday, the Arabic-language Al Quds Al Arabi reported that Hamas believes that there is a 95% chance that war will break out within the next few days, pointing to the massive Paratroop Brigade drill that is set to take place in the near future. The report said that Hamas has declared a state of high alert and has been massing forces near the border...”

U.S., Russia Face Deadline for Nuclear Arsenal Reduction

February 5, 2018 voanews.com reported: “The United States believes that Russia will honor its commitments under the bilateral Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) by the Monday deadline.

‘The United States has met the central limits of the New Start treaty in August 2017. We assess at this time that Russia has also progressed toward meeting those limits. We have no reason to believe that the Russian government will not meet those limits as well,’ U.S. State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert said.

The State Department said in a release late Sunday that both countries will exchange data on their respective nuclear arsenals ‘within the next month, as we have done twice per year over the last seven years in accordance with the Treaty.’

The New START Treaty was signed in Prague on April 8, 2010 and came into force on February 5, 2011. It limits the U.S. and Russia to no more than 1,550 nuclear warheads and also limits deployed and non-deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles, heavy bombers and submarine-launched ballistic missiles...”

