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SYLLOGE ON WEST ASIA

**FOCUS, NUCLEAR, MISSILES & OTHER
SECURITY ISSUES IN WEST ASIA**

BY KUSHAL AGRAWAL

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मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

IRAN

Iranian commander threatens to 'destroy' US ships

Al-monitor, 26th January, 2021

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Gen. Rahim Noei-Aghdam said the military has the capability to destroy US Navy ships that are close to Iranian territory. "If once the US presence in the international waters near Iran was considered as a threat to the country, today thanks to our deterrent power and surface-to-surface, surface-to-air, surface-to-coast, coast-to-coast, coast-to-sea and sea-to-sea missiles, we have the ability to destroy American ships," said Noei-Aghdam, according to the state-run Mehr News Agency. The general's remarks are significant because of their timing. US President Joe Biden, who took office last week, has repeatedly said he wants to engage Iran diplomatically and re-enter the Iran nuclear deal. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has also voiced a willingness to re-enter the agreement, which removed sanctions on Tehran in exchange for compliance with its nuclear program.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/01/iran-irgc-general-destroy-us-navy-ships.html#ixzz6lJ9FILt>

Iran to restrict nuclear inspections unless sanctions lifted

Al-monitor, 26th January, 2021

Government spokesperson Ali Rabiei said Iran would start restricting short-notice inspections of its nuclear facilities beginning next month. The IAEA, the UN's nuclear watchdog agency, currently carries out regular inspections as well as the more intrusive inspections called for under the Additional Protocol. But in a televised news conference on Tuesday, government spokesperson Ali Rabiei said Iran would start restricting the more intrusive type of access on Feb. 19. "Our law is very clear regarding this issue," Rabiei. "But it

does not mean Iran will stop other inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency."

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/01/iran-inspectors-iaea-additional-protocol-biden-sanctions.html#ixzz6lJQfJmoa>

Russian envoy says pessimist view on JCPOA should not be taken for granted

Islamic Republic News Agency, 25th January, 2021

"There is a room for pessimists, as of today. But we should not take their views on #Iran and #JCPOA for granted," Ulyanov wrote in his Twitter account on Monday. Ulyanov's message was released in response to Elijah J. Magnier Veteran War Correspondent who said "On the 21st of February, @JoeBiden will not honor the #Iran nuclear deal. This will help Iran to become stronger". Earlier, the Russian diplomat criticised the positions of France, the UK, and Germany with regard to the renovation of Iran nuclear deal. "E-3 continue to advocate for a '#JCPOA plus agreement'," Ulyanov wrote in his Twitter account on Friday.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84198619/Russian-envoy-says-pessimist-view-on-JCPOA-should-not-be-taken>

Iran's U.N. ambassador says Iran is waiting for President Biden to make the first diplomatic move

NBC News, 26th January, 2021

The Biden administration needs to lift sanctions on Iran and return to the nuclear deal that Trump ditched, the Iranian ambassador to the U.N. says. In his first interview since President Joe Biden was sworn in last week, Amb. Majid Takht Ravanchi told NBC's Chief Foreign Correspondent Richard Engel that Iran has not spoken to the new administration yet.

"No, there has not been any conversation between Iran and the U.S. after Biden came into office," Ravanchi said. Asked if there were plans to open up a direct dialogue with

Washington or indirect communication through an intermediary, perhaps via the Swiss government, Ravanchi said, "We are not planning to initiate anything."

<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/iran-s-un-ambassador-says-iran-waiting-president-biden-make-n1255608>

Iran, Russia sign information security agreement

Islamic Republic News Agency, 26th January

Iranian and Russian foreign ministers Mohammad Javad Zarif and Sergei Lavrov signed an information security agreement in Moscow on Tuesday. The agreement follows the Treaty on the Basis for Mutual Relations and the Principles of Cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation signed on 21 March 2001 to strengthen and expand regional and international collaborations. The agreement includes cooperation between the Parties in information, crimes committed by use of information and communications technology, aids in technology, international cooperation, including reconnaissance, coordination, and necessary cooperation for regional and international communities to guarantee national and international security. It also includes countering threats, exchanging information, and cooperating in following the law in order to discover, fight, and legally pursue the crimes committed by use of information technology for terror goals.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84200006/Iran-Russia-sign-information-security-agreement>

President Rouhani criticizes EU partners for lack of commitment

Islamic Republic News Agency, 27th January, 2021

Addressing the cabinet ministers meeting on Wednesday, Rouhani said that Iran's remedial action to reciprocate non-compliance from the EU partners by step-by-step reduction of

its JCPOA commitments cannot be criticized by them. All agree that the US should return to its commitments, he added. Earlier, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, referring to the US unilateral exit from the JCPOA, said that the United States must first make up for its mistake, and then Iran will respond appropriately.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84200844/President-Rouhani-criticizes-EU-partners-for-lack-of-commitment>

Russia opposed to revision of JCPOA

Islamic Republic News Agency, 28th January, 2021

Russia is opposed to any revision of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – JCPOA – or any changes in the terms of the nuclear deal, Russian Foreign Ministry official said on Wednesday night. Washington's return to JCPOA is no reason for reconsidering the deal or imposition of additional instruments on Iran and other participants in the deal, the official told TASS news agency on condition of anonymity. All of Iran's nuclear activities are under the permanent control of the International Atomic Energy Agency and being carried out under the the agency's supervision, the Russian official said.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84202026/Russia-opposed-to-revision-of-JCPOA>

Iran's 20 % uranium stockpile reached 17 kg: Official

Islamic Republic News Agency, 28th January, 2021

Spokesman for Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Behrouz Kamalvandi said on Thursday that after the implementation of the strategic law on lifting sanctions, the stockpile of 20 percent enriched uranium in the country has reached to about 17 kilograms. Paying a visit to Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP), Kamalvandi said that as a technical organisation, AEOI is obliged to fully

implement the legal approvals. Pointing to the status of installing IR-2m centrifuges, he noted that according to the parliament's resolution on the strategic plan for lifting the sanctions at the Natanz nuclear site, we will install 1,000 IR2m machines within three months.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84202613/Iran-s-20-uranium-stockpile-reached-17-kg-Official>

Iran says production of enriched uranium exceeds goals

Al-Jazeera, 28th January, 2021

Iran produced 17kg (37.5 pounds) of 20 percent enriched uranium in less than a month, state TV has reported, moving its nuclear programme closer to weapons-grade enrichment levels amid heightened tensions with the United States. Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf made the announcement in a televised speech during a visit to the country's Fordow nuclear facility on Thursday. Uranium enriched to 20 percent is a short technical step away from weapons-grade 90 percent enrichment. Iran has said it would produce 120kg of 20 percent enriched uranium per year, or 10kg per month on average, so 17kg would exceed that timetable. Roughly 250kg of 20 percent enriched uranium are needed to convert it into 25kg of the 90 percent enriched needed for a nuclear weapon.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/28/iran-says-production-of-enriched-uranium-exceeds-goals>

Construction of phases 2, 3 of Bushehr nuclear plant has started

Tehran Times, 25th January, 2021

Hadi Beiginejad, a senior member of the Parliament's Energy Committee, said on Sunday that Iran has started construction of phases 2 and 3 of the Bushehr nuclear power plant. "The second and third phases of the Bushehr power plant development have been signed with the Russians under 10-year and 8-year contracts," Fars quoted Beiginejad as saying. It started

operating in 2011 and reached its full capacity the following year. Rosatom, Russia's state atomic energy corporation, started site preparation of the two new units of the power plant with a combined capacity of 2100 MW in September 2016. On March 14, 2017, construction formally started. Phases 2 and 3 are scheduled to be completed in 2024 and 2026 respectively.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/457339/Construction-of-phases-2-3-of-Bushehr-nuclear-plant-has-started>

Iran says won't reverse nuclear measures unless U.S. implements UNSCR 2231

Tehran Times, 25th January, 2021

Iran will not back down from the nuclear steps it has taken in response to the United States withdrawal from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal unless the new U.S. administration returns to United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231, Iran's Foreign Ministry said on Monday. Responding to a question on what Iran would do if the U.S. refrained from lifting sanctions on Iran, the spokesman said nothing new has happened with respect to the JCPOA. "Our position is the same as we previously said: the U.S. and other remaining parties to the JCPOA must lift the sanctions and effectively implement the deal," he noted. Nothing will be done by Iran as long as the U.S. doesn't comply with Resolution 2231, Khatibzadeh remarked. "All of Iran's measures that were done in accordance with the JCPOA as well as the process of reducing nuclear commitments are reversible," Khatibzadeh asserted.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/457372/Iran-says-won-t-reverse-nuclear-measures-unless-U-S-implements>

Iran has started developing quantum technology, Salehi says

Tehran Times, 26th January, 2021

Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), said on

Monday night that “Iran has started to develop quantum technology, because the 21st century is the century of this technology. Speaking at the inauguration ceremony of the open space quantum communication achievement, Salehi announced, “The quantum technology is very significant and that advanced industrial countries kicked off development in this technology from the onset of 21st century”. “The Atomic Energy Organization began work on the quantum technology in 2016 and it is responsible for monitoring scientific developments throughout the world and prioritizing high tech technologies”, said Salehi, according to the IRNA.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/457400/Iran-has-started-developing-quantum-technology-Salehi-says>

Seizing power by war in Afghanistan unacceptable, Shamkhani says

Tehran Times, 27th January, 2021

Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, said on Wednesday that Iran will not “recognize” any group to seize power by war in Afghanistan. Shamkhani made the remarks during a meeting with Abdul Ghani Baradar, the head of the Taliban political delegation, who visited Iran on Tuesday. On Tuesday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh also said, “Iran wants a stable, secure, and peaceful Afghanistan so that Afghan people of all tribes can live in the light of security.” “Taliban must cooperate with the Afghan government in fighting terrorism and any insecurity and the ISIS movements in the country”. The Afghan delegation arrived in Tehran on Tuesday morning upon an invitation by the Iranian Foreign Ministry.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/457451/Seizing-power-by-war-in-Afghanistan-unacceptable-Shamkhani-says>

Biden sends B-52 bomber over Persian Gulf in first message to Iran

The Jerusalem Post, 27th January, 2021

In clear deterrent action against Iran on Wednesday, a United States Air Force B-52H “Stratofortress” bomber flew over the Gulf, before the plane was spotted in Saudi airspace heading back to its base in the US. It was the fourth mission into CENTCOM’s area of operation in the last two months and the first deployment of the heavy bomber since Joe Biden’s inauguration last week. It came on the same day that IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Aviv Kochavi openly said that Israel was redrafting attack plans against Iran’s nuclear infrastructure. According to reports, the heavy bomber departed Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana on Tuesday on a nonstop flight across Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and down the coastline near the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, before turning around and returning to the US.

<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/b-52-bomber-flies-over-persian-gulf-in-message-to-iran-656882>

Iran will ‘demolish’ Tel Aviv, Haifa if attacked by Israel, warns top IRGC commander

Alarabiya, 28th January, 2021

Iran will “demolish” the cities of Tel Aviv and Haifa if an Israeli attack happens, Iran’s top military spokesperson warned on Wednesday. It came a day after the Israeli army said new plans were being drawn up to counter Tehran’s nuclear capabilities. If Israel “makes the smallest mistake against the Islamic Republic, we will strike the missile bases that they say they would use to attack Iran from, and also raze Haifa and Tel Aviv to the ground in the shortest time possible,” Brig. Gen. Abolfazl Shekarchi, the semi-official Fars news agency quoted him as saying.

Israel does not realise Iran's military capabilities, he said, adding: "This cancerous tumour in the region (Israel) must collapse as it has caused a lot of damage to Muslims."

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2021/01/28/Iran-will-demolish-Tel-Aviv-Haifa-if-attacked-by-Israel-warns-top-IRGC-commander->

IRAQ

Iraqi Warplanes Pound ISIS Hideouts in Khanaqin

The Baghdad Post, 25th January, 2021

Iraqi warplanes on Sunday carried out multiple airstrikes on possible hideouts of the ISIS in the remote areas of Khanaqin, local police said. Hikmat Hassan, an officer of Qara Tapa intelligence police department, noted that the Iraqi fighter jets for the second day in a row shelled the mountainous areas of Qara Tapa. "There is intelligence information about the movements of Daesh in the region," he said. This comes a day after a number of weapons and explosive devices were found and destroyed in Qara Tapa.

<https://www.thebaghdadpost.com/en/Story/51487/Iraqi-Warplanes-Pound-ISIS-Hideouts-in-Khanaqin>

ISRAEL

Israeli airstrikes hit central Syria

Al-Monitor, 22nd January, 2021

Suspected Israeli airstrikes hit Syria on Friday. Israel struck Syrian targets a number of times in 2020. The Syrian state-run SANA news outlet reported Israeli airstrikes near the central city of Hama early Friday. SANA did not specify the targets and said Syrian air defense forces struck most of the missiles down. The pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that Israeli missiles destroyed the positions of

Iran-backed militia and Lebanese Hezbollah positions near Hama. Iranian forces repositioned themselves in eastern Syria in response to suspected Israeli airstrikes Jan. 13. There were numerous reports of Israeli airstrikes in Syria in 2020, including a Dec. 30 strike on a Syrian air defense unit. Friday's airstrikes apparently mark the first time Israel has carried out a military operation in Syria since US President Joe Biden took office Wednesday.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/01/israel-syria-airstrikes-air-defense-hama-central-iran.html#ixzz6lraeXD62>

IDF says it shot down drone that crossed into Israeli airspace from Lebanon

Times of Israel, 22nd January, 2021

Military claims it identified UAV as it approached border and took it out; incident comes hours after predawn strikes in Syria attributed to Israel. The IDF shot down a drone that was crossing into Israeli airspace from Lebanon, the military said Friday. The drone was identified as it approached the border and "monitored by the IDF throughout the incident," the IDF said. There were no reports of injuries or damage. Last month, the Lebanese terror group Hezbollah claimed to have flown a drone into Israel and filmed two military bases near the border. "The IDF will continue to act to prevent any violation of the sovereignty of the State of Israel," the military added in a statement.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-says-it-shot-down-drone-that-crossed-into-israeli-airspace-from-lebanon/>

Biden security adviser vows to consult Israel on regional issues

Al-Jazeera, 24th January, 2021

US President Joe Biden's national security adviser has promised his Israeli counterpart that the United States "will closely consult with

Israel on all matters of regional security”, the National Security Council (NSC) said on Sunday. In a brief statement, NSC Spokesperson Emily Horne said Jake Sullivan spoke to Meir Ben-Shabbat, Israel’s national security adviser, on Saturday. “Mr. Sullivan reaffirmed President Biden’s unwavering commitment to Israel’s security,” the statement reads. In its statement on Sunday, the NSC said Sullivan and Ben-Shabbat discussed ways to enhance the US-Israel partnership, “including by building on the success of Israel’s normalization arrangements”.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/24/biden-security-adviser-vows-to-consult-israel-on-regional-issues>

Intel: CENTCOM chief tours Mideast in first trip under Biden administration

Al-Monitor, 25th January, 2021

The commander of US military forces in the Middle East, Gen. Kenneth “Frank” McKenzie, arrived in the region this week with plans to stop in Israel as the Joe Biden administration seeks strategic dialogue regarding Iran. The Israeli press reported that McKenzie would meet with officials this coming Thursday. McKenzie’s arrival will mark the first US official visit to the Jewish State under the Biden administration and the general’s first since the Pentagon announced Israel would be incorporated into the US Central Command’s geographic region of responsibility. The general hinted at the Pentagon’s latest regional priorities in comments to Defense One on Sunday, calling the former administration’s efforts to convince Arab leaders to normalize ties with Israel “a good thing” and saying the United States was entering a “period of opportunity” to reorient its stance toward Tehran.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/01/biden-israel-centcom-visit-iran.html#ixzz6lrc4uwuo>

Israeli military draws up new plans against Iran, top commander says

Al-Monitor, 27th January, 2021.

Israel’s top military commander said Iran’s recent nuclear activity has prompted Israel to redraw its attack plans against the country, adding that military action needs to “be on the table.” Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi, chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces, warned Tuesday that Iran may be “only weeks” away from developing a nuclear bomb. “In light of this fundamental analysis, I have instructed the Israel Defense Forces to prepare a number of operational plans, in addition to those already in place,” Kochavi said in an address to Tel Aviv University’s Institute for National Security Studies.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/01/aviv-kochavi-israel-iran-nuclear-deal-revise-attack-plans.html#ixzz6lrfxYWvt>

Thomas-Greenfield: We'll work to ensure Iran doesn't obtain nuclear bomb

The Jerusalem Post, 27th January, 2021

“It goes without saying that Israel has no closer friend than the United States, and I will reflect that in my actions at the United Nations,” the veteran diplomat added. UN Ambassador-designate Linda Thomas-Greenfield testified at a Senate Foreign Relations Committee confirmation hearing on Wednesday and said that, if confirmed, she will be “standing with Israel, standing against the unfair targeting of Israel, the relentless resolutions that are proposed against Israel unfairly.” She added that she is looking forward “to work closely with the Israeli Embassy, with the Israeli ambassador, to work to bolster Israel’s security and to expand economic opportunities for Israelis and Americans alike and widen the circle of peace.” Addressing the threat of nuclear-armed Iran, the ambassador-designate said: “We will work and make every effort to

ensure that the Iranians do not gain access to a nuclear weapon.

<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/thomas-greenfield-well-work-to-ensure-iran-doesnt-obtain-nuclear-bomb-656931>

LEBANON

Israeli Warplanes Overfly Most Lebanese Regions

Naharnet, 24th January, 2021

Over the capital, two fighter jets were heard and seen flying at medium and high altitudes. The National News Agency meanwhile reported that Israeli warplanes overflew the southern regions of Hasbaya, al-Orqoub, Sidon and Jezzine at low altitude. The jets also overflew the heights of Mount Hermon and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. TV networks also reported that the warplanes overflew Lebanon's eastern and western mountain ranges at medium altitude. An intensification of Israeli overflights in Lebanon's airspace usually precedes Israeli airstrikes on neighboring Syria.

<http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/278826-israeli-warplanes-overfly-most-lebanese-regions>

Foreign Ministry Condemns Attempted Missile Attack on Riyadh

Naharnet, 25th January, 2021

Lebanon's Foreign Ministry on Monday deplored that attempted missile attack that targeted the Saudi capital Riyadh on Saturday. In a statement, the Ministry condemned "any targeting of innocent civilians," describing such attempts as "a violation of international laws that ban attacks on civilians." And as it denounced "any attack by any side on the sovereignty of the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," the Ministry expressed its "full solidarity with the kingdom against any attempts to threaten its stability and security."

<http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/278855-foreign-ministry-condemns-attempted-missile-attack-on-riyadh>

Hariri Voices 'Solidarity' with Saudi Arabia

Naharnet, 26th January, 2021

Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri condemned on Tuesday the constant attacks by Yemeni Huthi rebels at the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. "The Huthi attacks on Riyadh are condemned Iranian messages that aim to sabotage peaceful solutions for the crisis in Yemen," said Hariri in a tweet. He voiced "solidarity with the Kingdom and with its leadership as it faces the challenges and dangers." Saudi Arabia state media said on Saturday that a "hostile target" over Riyadh was intercepted.

<http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/278879-hariri-voices-solidarity-with-saudi-arabia>

SAUDI ARABIA

Arab Coalition thwarts two attacks by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis

Alarabiya, 22nd January, 2021

The Arab Coalition fighting against Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi movement said had it thwarted two attacks by the Houthis on Friday morning, including destroying an explosive-laden boat in the southern Red Sea, Saudi state TV said on Twitter. The coalition also intercepted and destroyed an explosive-laden drone launched by the Houthis towards Saudi Arabia, state TV channel Ekhbariya said on Twitter. The Saudi-led coalition since 2015 has fought the Iran-aligned Houthi movement, which has launched cross-border missile and drone attacks on Saudi cities.

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2021/01/22/Arab-Coalition-thwarts-two-attacks-by-Yemen-s-Iran-backed-Houthis>

Blast heard in Riyadh as Saudi Arabia intercepts 'hostile target'

Al-Jazeera, 23rd January, 2021

Saudi Arabia intercepted an apparent missile or drone attack over Riyadh on Saturday, said state media in the kingdom. The incident came at about 11am (08:00 GMT). The Saudi Arabia-led coalition, which backs Yemen's internationally recognised government against the Houthis, said it "intercepted and destroyed a hostile air target going towards Riyadh", without elaborating, according to state-run Al Ekhbariya television station. The Houthis did not immediately acknowledge launching a missile or a drone towards Riyadh on Saturday.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/23/blast-heard-in-riyadh-as-saudi-arabia-intercepts-hostile-target>

Arab League hails passing of Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

Business Standard, 23rd January, 2021

The Arab League has welcomed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, commonly known as the Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty's coming into force and urged for intensifying international efforts to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. In a statement on Friday, AL Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul-Gheit described the move as an important step towards the disarmament and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in the world, reports Xinhua news agency. "It is time to intensify efforts to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, which is fully consistent with the objectives of this treaty," the AL chief said.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/arab-league-hails-passing-of-treaty-on-prohibition-of-nuclear-weapons-121012300306_1.html

SYRIA

Nebenzia: Russia to oppose any closed-door discussions on chemical file in Syria at Security Council

Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), 25th January, 2021

Russia's permanent representative to the United Nations, Vassily Nebenzia has affirmed that his country will oppose any attempts to return to closed-door discussions on the chemical file in Syria at the International Security Council. "The United Kingdom, as President of the International Security Council, proposes to return next February to discussing this issue behind closed doors, i.e. without video conference and also without the participation of the representative of Syria, but we'll oppose that," Nebenzia told TASS Agency. On Jan. 5th, Syria condemned Western pressures which aim to force the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and its member states to adopt a French-Western draft resolution that falsely claims its "Syria's non-abidance" by the obligations according to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

<http://www.sana.sy/en/?p=219282>

TURKEY

Greece, France sign fighter jet deal amid tensions with Turkey

Al-Monitor, 25th January, 2021

Greece's defence minister signed a \$3 billion deal to buy 18 Dassault Rafale fighter jets from France during a ceremony with his French counterpart in Athens on Monday. Six of the fighters will be new, while 12 are used. The agreement is the latest sign of Greece's growing defence ties with Paris as the Hellenic Armed Forces seek to modernise amid heightened tensions with neighbouring Turkey.

Greek Defense Minister Nikolaos Panagiotopoulos called the deal a “milestone,” saying it “sends a clear message.”

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/01/greece-france-fighter-jet-turkey.html#ixzz6lsKyXF7>

Greece, Turkey launch Mediterranean crisis talks after 5 years

Al-Jazeera, 25th January, 2021

On Monday, neighbours Greece and Turkey will begin exploratory talks in Istanbul – after a five-year hiatus – that aim to settle maritime boundaries, a source of alarming friction during the past year. Last week, Greece doubled its western territorial waters in the Ionian Sea to 12 nautical miles (22 kilometres) – the maximum allowed under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, or UNCLOS. “The extension of territorial waters westward inevitably sends a message to the East,” said Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis in parliament on Wednesday. Greece and Turkey were on the verge of military confrontation last August, after Turkey launched its seismic survey ship Oruc Reis accompanied by a small naval fleet to explore for undersea oil and gas in Eastern Mediterranean waters which Greece claims as part of its continental shelf and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) but which Turkey disputes. “In talks with Greece, we hope that issues will be dealt with within the framework of rights, law and equity, and that solutions are found,” Turkey’s Defence Minister Hulusi Akar said on Saturday.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/25/greece-and-turkey-resume-maritime-talks>

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Biden Freezes F-35 Sale to UAE, Munitions Sales to Saudi Arabia

Haaretz, 28th January, 2021

The Biden administration has reportedly temporarily frozen U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the sale of F-35 fighter jets to the United Arab Emirates as it reviews billions of dollars in weapons transactions approved by the Trump administration. According to the Wall Street Journal and Bloomberg, citing U.S. officials, the United States is specifically reviewing the sale of Lockheed Martin F-35 jets to the UAE and munitions to Saudi Arabia. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during his confirmation hearings last week that the Biden administration would “take a hard look” at the UAE sale. Blinken reiterated his praise of the Abraham Accords, noting that he hopes there is an opportunity to build on them in the months and years ahead, while also trying to ensure the U.S. has “a full understanding of any commitments that may have been made in securing those agreements.”

<https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-report-biden-freezes-f-35-sale-to-uae-munitions-sales-to-saudi-arabia-1.9488780>