

LARGEST MILITARY AID PACKAGE IN US HISTORY

US signs deal to give Israel \$38b

REUTERS, Washington

The United States will give Israel \$38 billion in military assistance over the next decade, the largest such aid package in US history, under a landmark agreement signed on Wednesday.

The deal, whose details were reported by Reuters earlier, will allow Washington's chief Middle East ally to upgrade most of its fighter aircraft, improve its ground forces' mobility and strengthen its missile defense systems, a senior U.S. official said.

While the package constitutes the most U.S. military aid ever given to any country, it entails concessions by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, according to officials on both sides. Those include Israel's promise not to seek additional funds from Congress beyond what will be guaranteed annually in the new package, and to phase out a special arrangement that has allowed Israel to spend part of its U.S. aid on its own defense industry instead of on American-made weapons, the officials said.

Nearly 10 months of drawn-out aid negotiations underscored continuing friction between President Barack Obama and Netanyahu over last year's U.S.-led nuclear deal with Israel's arch-foe Iran, an accord the Israeli leader opposed. The United States and Israel have also been at odds over the Palestinians.

But the right-wing Netanyahu decided it would be best to forge a new arrangement with Obama, who leaves office in January, rather than hoping for better terms from the next U.S. administration, according to officials on both sides.



A protester throws a projectile during a demonstration against the controversial labour reforms of the French government in Paris yesterday. Inset: Riot police react to a fire bomb thrown at them. Protesters took to the streets for the 14th time in six months yesterday in a last-ditch bid to quash the measures that became law in July.



Graft charges filed against Lula in Brazil

AFP, Brasilia

Federal prosecutors in Brazil on Wednesday filed corruption charges against former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, describing the popular leftist as leader of a massive embezzlement ring at state oil company Petrobras.

The charges allege that Lula received the equivalent of 3.7 million reais (\$1.1 million) in bribes.

Among the allegations are that Lula and his wife received a beachside apartment and upgrades to the property from a major construction company, OAS, which was one of the players in the Petrobras scheme.

The allegations are not new but they now go before Judge Sergio Moro, head of the Petrobras investigation, who will decide whether to accept them, forcing Lula's case to trial.

Prosecutors singled out Lula -- who was president during much of the time that Petrobras was being systematically fleeced by a network of corrupt executives and politicians -- as the scheme's mastermind.

Prosecutor Delton Dallagnol called Lula, 70, the "supreme commander."

Lula has repeatedly declared his innocence and says that the prosecution is politically motivated. His attorney called the allegations "farfetched."

Polls show the founder of the leftist Workers' Party to be a favorite for returning to power in the next presidential elections in 2018. He presided over an economic boom and was hailed internationally for social welfare policies that helped lift millions of people out of poverty.

In the scheme, Petrobras, Brazil's biggest state company, gave over-inflated contracts to other big firms, such as OAS and construction rival Odebrecht.

Syria ceasefire extended

AFP, Aleppo

The United Nations yesterday urged Syria's government to allow immediate aid deliveries to hunger-stricken civilians after a fragile ceasefire was extended for 48 hours by Russia and the United States.

In a sign of renewed tensions between the two powers, who back opposing sides in the conflict, key regime ally Moscow accused Washington of failing to meet its obligations under the truce.

The UN said 20 trucks loaded with aid had crossed into a buffer zone between Turkey and Syria, voicing hope the supplies could be delivered to besieged rebel-held districts of Aleppo city today.

The ceasefire deal calls for the demilitarisation of the key Castello Road into the city, and Russia yesterday said that Syrian armed forces were "fulfilling their obligations and have started a gradual withdrawal" from the route.

Washington said late Wednesday that US Secretary of State John Kerry and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov had spoken and agreed to prolong the ceasefire which began on Monday.

But hours later Russian military spokesman Igor Konashenkov slammed the US for what he called "rhetorical fog" intended "to hide the fact that it is not fulfilling its part of the obligations".

"As of the third day (of the truce), only the

Syrian army is observing the regime of silence. At the same time, the 'moderate opposition' led by the US is increasing the amount of attacks on residential districts," Konashenkov said.

Moscow accused rebels of violating the truce 60 times since it came into force.

The UN's Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura yesterday said that the truce was holding "by and large".

But promised authorisation from Damascus

President Bashar al-Assad's forces and rebel factions, but does not include jihadists like the Islamic State group (IS).

The deal calls for the truce to be renewed every 48 hours, and for Washington and Moscow to begin unprecedented joint targeting of jihadists like IS and former al-Qaeda affiliate Fateh al-Sham Front if it lasts a week.

There remains deep scepticism about whether the truce will hold.

The opposition has yet to officially sign the deal, and hours before the ceasefire began Assad said he was committed to recovering all of Syria.

If the deal does hold, it could open the door to new peace talks to resolve the conflict, with Russia saying the UN envoy could invite government and opposition representatives to new talks "at the very beginning of October".

Meanwhile, Russia's top army general was yesterday holding talks with his Turkish counterpart on the conflict in Syria.

Turkish chief of staff Hulusi Akar welcomed his Russian counterpart General Valery Gerasimov to Ankara in a ceremony with full military protocol, Turkish television pictures showed.

Gerasimov's presence in Ankara is also a significant symbol of healing ties between the two countries, after they agreed to normalise relations in June following a months-long crisis over the shooting down of a Russian war plane.

DEVELOPMENTS

- UN says regime must allow aid deliveries 'immediately'
- Russia accuses rebels of violating ceasefire
- Russian army chief in Turkey to discuss war

TENSION IN GERMANY OVER MIGRANTS

Clashes reported in German town

AGENCIES

Clashes broke out between dozens of asylum-seekers and far-right extremists in an eastern German city, forcing police to call in reinforcements to quell the violence, police said yesterday.

Around 20 migrant youths sparked the violence Wednesday night in the city of Bautzen, police chief Uwe Kilz said, when they flung bottles and wooden slats at around 80 young German men and women from the far-right scene.

The right-wing extremists, many of whom were drunk, returned the abuse with stones and bottles, he added, in the latest incident to hit the small former communist town, which has been the scene of several eruptions of hostility toward refugees.

The arrival of around one million asylum-seekers in 2015 has deeply polarised Germany. It recorded nearly 1,000 far-right offences targeting refugee shelters last year.

Illustrating the tensions, a restaurant owner in northern Germany sparked a heated social media debate when he told a woman wearing a niqab to leave after she refused to remove the face veil.

In France, Police arrested three teenagers linked to Islamic State group around Paris in the past week as investigators probe the use of an encrypted messaging app to plot attacks in France, judicial sources said Wednesday.

All the arrests are linked to an investigation into the network of French extremist Rachid Kassim who is fighting for IS in Syria or Iraq.



A partially capsized fishing ship is seen after Typhoon Meranti made landfall, in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, yesterday. It battered southeastern China with heavy winds and torrential rain yesterday, cutting power, ripping up trees and smashing windows, a day after lashing Taiwan.

UK nods to £18b nuke power plant

AFP, London

Britain yesterday gave the go-ahead for the Hinkley Point power station, its first nuclear plant in a generation, but set conditions to address concerns about China's role in a landmark European project.

China has a one-third stake in the project which was sealed last year on a state visit to Britain by President Xi Jinping. The announcement, welcomed by French and Chinese backers, came two months after Prime Minister Theresa May caused shockwaves by ordering a review of the £18 billion deal brokered under her predecessor, David Cameron.

Obama joins world leaders to create ocean sanctuaries

REUTERS, Washington

The United States yesterday joined more than 20 countries in creating 40 new marine sanctuaries around the world to protect oceans from the threat of climate change and pollution.

The sanctuaries, unveiled at a high-level conference in Washington, limit commercial fishing, oil and gas drilling, and other human activity that affects ocean ecosystems.

Altogether, countries at the oceans conference will announce new sanctuaries covering nearly 460,000 square miles (1.19 million sq km) of ocean, an area around the size of South Africa.

President Barack Obama designated the first U.S. marine reserve in the Atlantic Ocean: 4,913 square miles (12,724 sq km) known for their underwater mountains and canyons off the coast of New England.

Obama, who recalled body-surfing in the Pacific Ocean while he was growing up in Hawaii, called the pledges a "pretty good down payment" but said bolder international action was needed.

Last month, Obama expanded a massive reserve off the coast of Hawaii - the world's largest such protected area - as he works to cement his environmental legacy before his time in the White House ends in January.

Opponents of the new Atlantic reserve have complained that it threatens the commercial seafood industry in the region. But Obama said it was designed to respect the fishing industry's role in the region's economy and history.

The conference will emphasize the urgent need to combat illegal fishing, pollution from plastic debris, and the acidification of the ocean, which is destroying coral reefs and shellfish, said Catherine Novelli, the US undersecretary for economic growth, energy, and the environment at the State Department.

Powell reveals disgust with Trump, distaste for Clinton

REUTERS, Washington

Former Secretary of State Colin Powell revealed distaste for both US presidential candidates, but leveled his most pointed criticism at Republican Donald Trump in hacked emails leaked by a group American intelligence officials suspect is linked to Russia.

In an email to Reuters on Wednesday, Powell confirmed the authenticity of the thousands of hacked messages but declined further comment.

In one of the leaked emails, Powell, a Republican, called Trump "a national disgrace" and an "international pariah" who allied himself with racists questioning whether President Barack Obama was born in the United States.

"When Trump couldn't keep that up," Powell wrote in the hacked message, "he said he also wanted to see if the (birth) certificate noted that he was a Muslim. As I have said before, 'What if he was?' Muslims



Rivals in virtual tie in nat'l poll

AGENCIES

Less than two weeks before their first debate, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton are in a very tight race for the White House, a national poll showed Wednesday.

The report came as Clinton hits the campaign trail once again after trying to put aside a badly handled health scare that rattled her bid for the US presidency.

The CBS News/New York Times survey found Clinton had just a two-point edge (46 to 44 percent) over her Republican rival in a two-way matchup among likely voters.

Among registered voters, the Democratic nominee was five points ahead, at 46 to 41 percent.

When third party candidates Gary Johnson and Jill Stein were included, the race was tied among likely voters -- at 42 percent each -- while Clinton had a slight edge (41 to 39 percent) among registered voters.

The CBS/NYT poll also found diminished voter enthusiasm, with Democrats less enthusiastic about voting now than a month ago, while Republicans have kept a steady level of enthusiasm.

And a gender gap is still apparent between the two candidates, with Trump securing a double-digit lead ahead of Clinton among men, while she has a similar margin over him among women.

According to separate polls, Trump has a significant lead over rival Clinton in the crucial battleground states of Ohio and Florida.

A Bloomberg poll, which surveyed 802 Ohio residents between 9 and 12 September, found that Trump won 48 per cent to Clinton's 43 per cent in a two-way contest.

A separate poll from JMC Analytics this week found that the Republican also has a four-point lead over Clinton in the swing state of Florida.

The numbers are a blow to the Clinton campaign which normally enjoys an advantage nationally and in swing states.

Yesterday, the Democratic candidate had events planned in North Carolina and Washington as she resumed campaigning after a three day break prompted by a bout of pneumonia.

US PRESIDENTIAL POLLS

Trump ahead in 2 key swing states

Clinton heads back to campaign trail after pneumonia scare

Nearly half of Americans 'very concerned' about Clinton emails

Clinton, 68, fell ill during a 9/11 memorial ceremony in New York on Sunday and was forced to leave. She was seen stumbling limp-legged into her vehicle.

On Wednesday, Clinton released new medical records that purported to show she is fit to serve as president and is recovering from mild pneumonia.

The disclosure came as her Republican rival Donald Trump, 70, released health data of his own during the taping of a nationally televised medical chat show set to air yesterday.

According to a Reuters/Ipsos opinion poll released on Wednesday, nearly half of American adults are "very concerned" about two issues that have hounded Clinton's presidential campaign this year: her use of a private email server to conduct government business and donations to her family's charitable foundation.

The Sept 2-11 online poll found that 46 percent of American adults said they were "very concerned" about Clinton's use of a personal email account, while 47 percent said the same about donations from foreign governments or corporations to the Clinton Foundation.

