



Jerusalem belongs to Palestinians too

EU vows to push for two-state solution, says US move risks return to 'darker times'

REUTERS, Brussels



Mogherini

The EU's top diplomat yesterday pledged to reinvigorate diplomacy with Russia, the United States, Jordan and others to ensure Palestinians have a capital in Jerusalem after US President Donald Trump recognised the city as Israel's capital.

The European Union, a member of the Middle East Quartet along with the United States, the United Nations and Russia, believes it has a duty to make its voice heard as the Palestinians' biggest aid donor and Israel's top trade partner.

"The European Union has a clear and unified position. We believe the only realistic solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine is based on two states and with Jerusalem as the capital of both," EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini told a news conference.

She said she would meet Jordan's foreign minister on Friday, while she and EU foreign ministers would discuss Jerusalem with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Brussels on Monday.

"The European Union will engage even more with the parties and with our regional and international partners. We will keep working with the Middle East Quartet, possibly in an enlarged format," said Mogherini, citing Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, as well as Norway. "We remain convinced that the role of the United States... is crucial," she said.

Trump's decision stirred outrage across the Arab and Muslim world and alarm among US allies and Russia because of Jerusalem's internationally disputed status, and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas urged Palestinians to abandon peace efforts and launch a new uprising against Israel.

Mogherini stressed all 28 EU governments were united on the issue of Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said that President Donald Trump was obeying the will of the American people by shifting US embassy to Jerusalem.

(From top right, anti-clockwise) Israeli forces clash with Palestinian protesters in the West Bank city of Bethlehem; Palestinian protesters hurl back a tear gas canister fired by Israeli troops during clashes; protesters burn an effigy of US President Donald Trump following his decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, in the West Bank city of Nablus; and anti-Trump demonstrations supporting Palestinians in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. Photos were taken yesterday. PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

PROBE ON ALLEGED RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE IN US ELECTION

Trump Jr grilled in Congress

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump Jr was grilled behind closed doors in Congress Wednesday about his contacts with Russia as pressure builds on his father over alleged collusion with Moscow in last year's election.

His June 2016 meeting with Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya at the height of the presidential campaign has made him a key figure in investigations into the Trump campaign's possible ties to the Kremlin.

A separate 2016 meeting with Alexander Torshin, a senior Russian politician and central banker close to President Vladimir Putin, has added to the scrutiny of President Trump's eldest son.

He entered and exited the House Intelligence Committee hearing from

a back door, avoiding the media, and nothing was immediately released about the discussions.

In May last year Trump Jr also met Torshin at a US National Rifle Association event.



US lawmakers deny Democrat's bid to impeach Trump

Trump Jr's lawyer Alan Futerfas said last month that there was only "small talk" between them. But emails have shown Torshin trying to arrange a meeting with then-candidate Trump, an overture that was turned down by

Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law.

Those contacts and others not previously reported publicly by the Trump campaign are important to the investigation by special prosecutor Robert Mueller, who is looking at allegations of collusion and also possible obstruction of justice by President Trump and people around him.

Mueller has charged four people so far, including two -- George Papadopoulos, a campaign foreign policy advisor who maintained Russian contacts, and former White House national security advisor Michael Flynn -- with lying to investigators.

Meanwhile, the US House of Representatives overwhelmingly rejected a congressman's motion to impeach President Trump, as Democratic Party leaders argued that now was not the time to pursue the effort.

Trump demands Saudis to allow aid into Yemen

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump took the rare step Wednesday of publicly demanding that ally Saudi Arabia immediately allow humanitarian aid into war-ravaged Yemen, as residents in the capital Sanaa scrambled for supplies.

Trump stopped short of calling for a pause in the US-backed, Saudi-led bombing of the country, which is enduring what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

But Trump said he had asked aides to contact the Saudi leadership "to request that they completely allow food, fuel, water, and medicine to reach the Yemeni people who desperately need it."

"This must be done for humanitarian reasons immediately," he said in statement.

Saudi Arabia and its allies have launched a campaign to oust Huthi rebels who control

Sanaa and have links to Riyadh's arch foe, Iran.

Seven million people are believed to be on the brink of famine and a cholera outbreak has caused more than 2,000 deaths.

Saudi Arabia imposed a blockade on Yemen's ports after a Huthi missile was fired toward Riyadh airport on November 4.

Fighting in Sanaa has spiked in recent days during a showdown between Huthi rebels and loyalists of Yemen's ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Saleh was killed at the hands of Huthi rebels Monday and clashes over the past week have seen streets blockaded by warring factions and the setting up of checkpoints.

Saleh's death came after he bypassed his Huthi allies of three years, telling the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen he was ready to negotiate if the crippling siege were lifted.

ODDLY Enough



Neapolitan pizza making wins world heritage status

REUTERS, Jeju

The art of Neapolitan pizza making won world heritage status yesterday, joining a horse-riding game from Iran and Dutch wind mills on UNESCO's culture list.

UNESCO accepted the art of Neapolitan "pizzaiuoli", or pizza makers, on the world body's list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Italy argued the practice of the "pizzaiuoli" - preparing and flipping the dough, topping it and baking it in a wood-fired oven - was part of the country's cultural and gastronomic tradition.

Tradition holds that the Margherita pizza was created in 1889 by a local chef in honour of Queen Margherita, who was visiting Naples, south of Rome on Italy's Tyrrhenian coast.

As pizza has become a favourite dish around the world, foreign innovations in toppings have often left Italians perplexed and aghast.

Matteo Martino, a customer at Fiore's pizzeria, said before the expected announcement, "I think, and I hope, that this could be the chance to make foreigners understand how pizza is made, without Nutella or pineapple."

49 nations flouted UN sanctions

CNN ONLINE

President Trump has been tightening the screw on North Korea, ramping up sanctions and urging other countries to sever trade links with Kim Jong Un's regime.

But dozens of countries have violated international sanctions on Pyongyang in recent years, according to a new report by a think tank.

A total of 49 countries violated United Nations sanctions on North Korea to varying degrees between March 2014 and September 2017, the Institute for Science and International Security said. That includes China, as well as Germany, Brazil, India and France.

RUSSIA ON FIGHT AGAINST IS

Mission in Syria 'accomplished'

AFP, Moscow

Russia's defence ministry yesterday said its mission to oust Islamic State jihadists from Syria had been "accomplished" with the country "completely liberated" from the extremist group.

"The Russian armed forces' goal to defeat armed groups of the ISIL terrorist organisation in Syria has been accomplished," said senior military officer Sergei Rudskoi, using an alternative acronym for the group.

"There is not a single village or district in Syria under the control of ISIL. The territory of Syria has been completely liberated from fighters of this terrorist organisation," he told reporters.

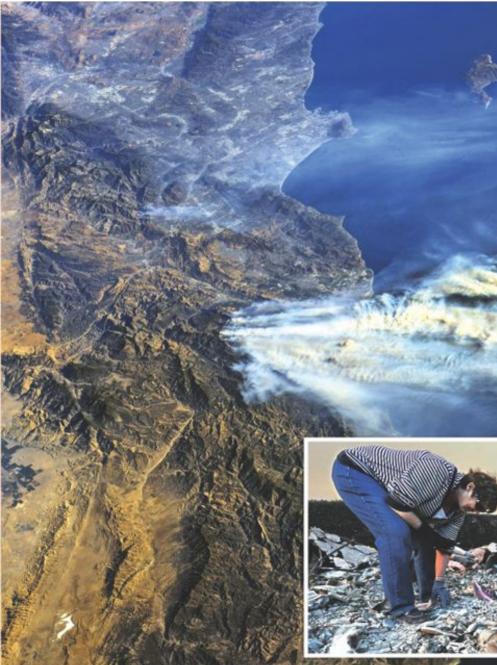
There has been an "unprecedented" involvement by Russia's airforce in recent days, he said, with warplanes making 100 sorties and staging up to 250 strikes daily.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the conflict, yesterday said that IS still holds about eight percent of Deir Ezzor province.

Rudskoi said "separate sabotage bands of ISIL" could still be operating but would be fought by Syrian government troops, indicating that Russia's involvement would be scaled down.



People wave a giant Catalan pro-independence 'Estelada' flag during a demonstration yesterday in Brussels. Organised by pro-independence civil society organisations, protesters marched across Brussels calling for more democratic elections in Europe after Catalan separatists failed to secede from Spain. PHOTO: REUTERS



CALIFORNIA WILDFIRE

A photo taken Wednesday from the International Space Station shows smoke rising from wildfire burning in Southern California, US. Inset: A couple look for essentials in their burnt family home.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS



UK will 'destroy and eliminate' IS citizens

AFP, London

British citizens fighting for Islamic State should be located and killed and not allowed back into the country, new defence minister Gavin Williamson told the Daily Mail yesterday.

"Quite simply, my view is a dead terrorist can't cause any harm to Britain," he told the tabloid.

"We should do everything we can to destroy and eliminate that threat," he added.

An estimated 800 British passport holders travelled to fight in Iraq and Syria, with 130 killed and around 400 returning, leaving 270 still in the Middle East.

The issue came into sharp focus in 2014 when British citizen Mohammed Emwazi -- also known as "Jihadi John" -- appeared in IS propaganda videos showing the beheading of a number of captives.

Williamson, who became defence chief last month after Michael Fallon resigned over allegations of misconduct, vowed that fighters who fled to other countries would also be tracked and refused passage back to Britain.

"We have got to make sure that as (they) splinter and as they disperse across Iraq and Syria and other areas, we continue to hunt them down," he told the Mail.

"Make sure there is no safe space for them, that they can't go to other countries preaching their hate, preaching their cult of death."

193 nations vow to curb plastic, chem pollution

AFP, Nairobi

The world's nations vowed Wednesday to curb plastic and chemical contamination of the air, soil, rivers and oceans, requiring a complete overhaul in the way goods are produced and consumed.

Changing the behaviour of producers and buyers would be key to achieving the vision of a "pollution-free planet" outlined in a political declaration adopted at the third UN Environment Assembly (UNEA).

"Pollution is cutting short the lives of millions of people every year," said the call to action issued by government ministers in Nairobi at the world's highest-level decision-making forum on environmental issues.

"Every day, nine out of 10 of us breathe air that exceeds WHO (World Health Organization) guidelines for air quality and more than 17,000 people will die prematurely because of it," the declaration added.

All 193 UN states are members of the UNEA.

"Every year we dump 4.8 to 12.7 million tonnes of plastic in our oceans and generate over 40 million tonnes of electronic waste," the ministerial declaration said.

The assembly heard this week that pollution has become the biggest killer of humans, claiming nine million human lives every year.

Of the annual tally, nearly seven million people succumb from inhaling toxins in the air -- from car exhaust fumes, factory emissions and indoor cooking with wood and coal, according to a recent report by The Lancet medical journal.

The assembly adopted a dozen pollution-curbing resolutions -- urging governments to ban the use of lead in paint, step up "actions" to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds by 2025, and urging member states to set ambitious air quality standards.

