

# Sold to allies, lost to foes

## CNN investigation finds S Arabia, UAE gave US arms to militants

CNN ONLINE

Saudi Arabia and its coalition partner in Yemen, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) transferred US-made weapons to al-Qaeda-linked groups and a Salafi militia whose commander who once "served with" the Yemeni branch of IS, a CNN investigation has found.

The CNN investigation said that the weapons had also made their way into the hands of Houthi rebels who are battling against the coalition for control of the country.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE entered Yemen's war in 2015 leading a military coalition to try and restore the internationally recognised government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi.

But according to CNN, the coalition was using US-manufactured weapons "as a form of currency to buy the loyalties of militias or tribes, bolster chosen armed actors, and influence the complex political landscape," local commanders and analysts said.

According to the Pentagon, the Gulf monarchies were breaking the terms of their arms deal with Washington. A US defence official told CNN that there was an ongoing investigation into the issue.

Citing the situation in the flashpoint city of Taiz, CNN said that al-Qaeda had forged "advantageous alliances with the pro-Saudi militias they fought alongside".

It said the Abu al-Abbas Brigade, linked to IS and IS, possessed US-made Oshkosh armoured vehicles that were paraded through the city in a 2015 show of force.



And there are deadlier forms of weaponry that have made their way into the city. In October 2015, military forces loyal to the government boasted on Saudi- and UAE-backed media that the Saudis had airdropped American-made TOW anti-tank missiles on the same frontline where al-Qaeda had been known to operate at the time.

According to the report, US-made weapons also ended up in the hands of Houthi rebels.

In September 2017, a Houthi-run TV channel broadcast images of a senior Houthi leader sitting behind the wheel of a captured US-made Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle (MRAP) in the capital Sanaa.

The member of the Houthi force, speaking to CNN anonymously out of fear for his safety, revealed that Iranian and Hezbollah advisers have already gotten their hands on the armoured vehicles and other US military hardware.

The developments also come as Congress, outraged with Riyadh over the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi last year, considers whether to force an end to the Trump administration's support for the Saudi-UAE coalition.



Christian worshippers attend a mass, led by Pope Francis, at the Zayed Sports City Stadium, yesterday. Inset, Pope Francis (L) and Egypt's Azhar Grand Imam Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb greet each other. Pope Francis ended the first ever papal visit to the Gulf with a public mass for an estimated 170,000 Catholics, a day after signing a document on "human fraternity for world peace", hailed by the Vatican as an "important step forward in the dialogue between Christians and Muslims". PHOTO: AFP

# 'Still time' to find solution

## Says Merkel; UK PM May to meet EU leaders today

AFP, Tokyo

There is still time to find a solution to Britain's exit from the EU, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said yesterday, voicing optimism on a political deal over the tricky "backstop" that has stymied progress.

Meanwhile, EU yesterdays said its President Jean-Claude Juncker will meet Britain's Prime Minister Theresa May today to find a way to save the Brexit deal.

Plans for Britain to leave the bloc on March 29 under a withdrawal agreement signed last year were thrown into doubt when British lawmakers rejected the accord.

Brussels is now waiting for May to formally request renewed talks, while warning that the agreement itself can not at this stage be reopened for discussion.

"While the commission's position is clear, we are waiting to see what the prime minister has to say," Juncker's spokesman Margaritis Schinas told reporters at his daily briefing Tuesday.

The House of Commons last month overwhelmingly rejected the Brexit deal that May had negotiated with the EU over almost two years.

In a subsequent vote, a majority of MPs urged her to renegotiate the most controversial part of the agreement, the "backstop" arrangement intended to keep open the border between British Northern Ireland and EU member Ireland.

### BREXIT IMPASSE



Speaking to Japanese and German business leaders in Tokyo, Merkel stressed that "on the one hand, time is pressing" and businesses using "just-in-time" delivery processes could not afford lengthy customs procedures.

However, she added: "From a political point of view, there is still time. Two months is not a long time but there is still time, and this should be used by all sides."

Merkel acknowledged the issue of Northern Ireland backstop provision was "complicating" Brexit talks. She said the issue with the backstop was a "problem that is precisely defined and therefore one should be able to find a precisely defined solution".

## US'S PLANNED EXIT FROM INF TREATY

# Russia aims two new missile systems by 2021

REUTERS, Moscow

Russia will race to develop two new land-based missile launch systems before 2021 to respond to Washington's planned exit from a landmark nuclear arms control pact, it said yesterday.

President Vladimir Putin said at the weekend that Russia had suspended the Cold War-era Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), which bans both nations from stationing short- and intermediate-range land-based missiles in Europe.

Moscow and Washington accuse each other of violating the treaty and Putin said Russia had acted after the United States announced it was withdrawing from the pact.

Washington had made clear it planned to start research, development and design work on new missile systems and Moscow would do the same, Putin said.

The Russian military should start

work on creating land-based launch systems for an existing ship-launched cruise missile, the Kalibr, and for longer-range hypersonic missiles which travel at least five times the speed of sound, he said.

Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu yesterday ordered work to begin on developing the new systems.

Moscow denies flouting the 1987 pact. It says Washington is the one violating it and has accused the United States of inventing a false pretext to exit a treaty it wanted to leave anyway in order to develop new missiles. Washington denies that.

US disarmament ambassador Robert Wood told a UN-sponsored Conference on Disarmament in Geneva yesterday that the US would reconsider its withdrawal from the INF treaty "should Russia return to full and verifiable compliance."

"This is Russia's final opportunity to return to compliance," Wood said.

# Tehran blasts EU criticism of Iranian missile tests

REUTERS, London

Iran dismissed European Union criticism of its missile programme, regional policies and rights record yesterday, highlighting their increasingly testy relationship as both sides seek to salvage a troubled nuclear deal.

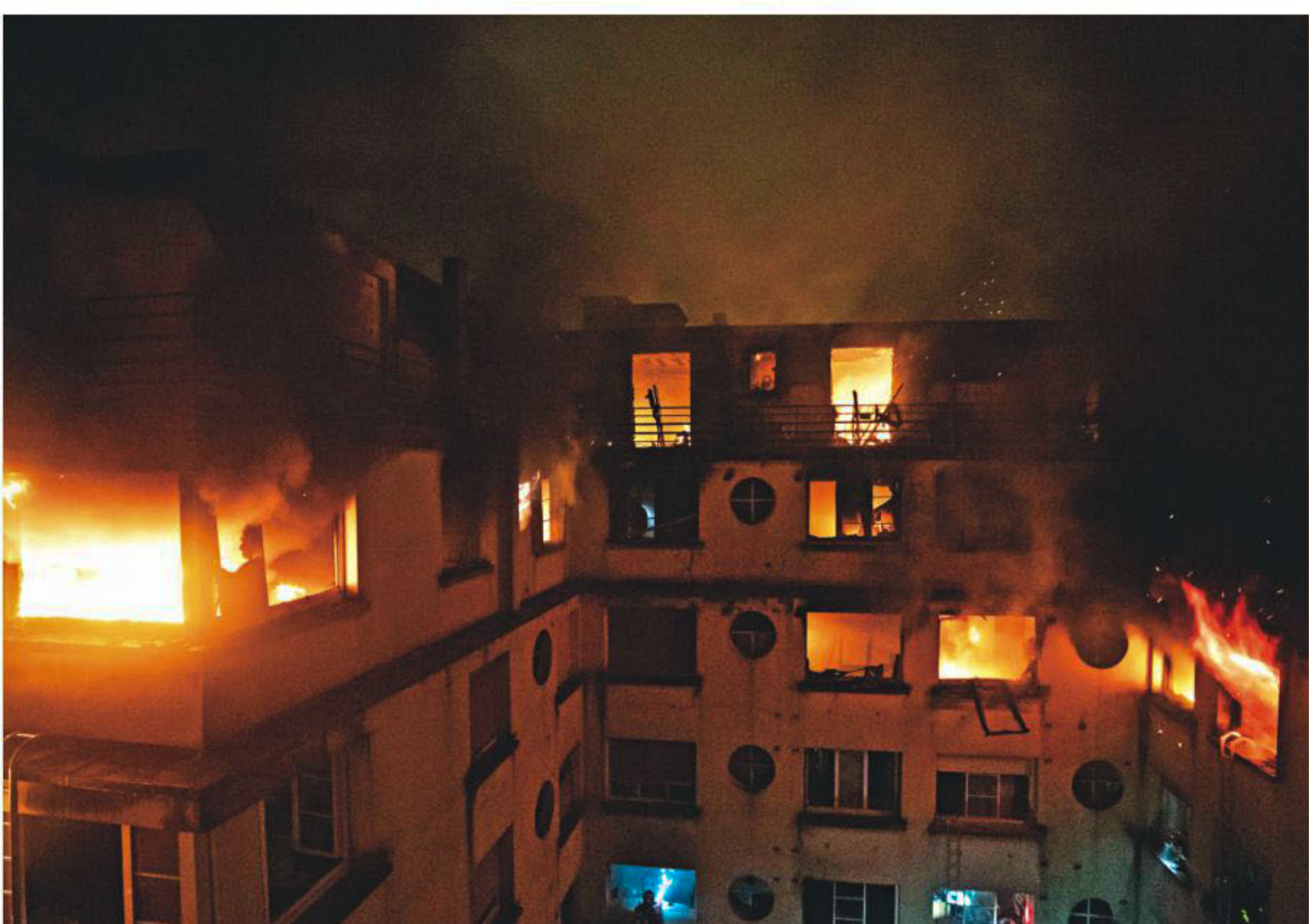
Iran's comments came a day after the bloc criticised the Islamic Republic's ballistic missile tests and expressed concern at Iran's role in growing Middle East tensions.

The European Union has promised to abide by a 2015 nuclear deal under which Iran agreed to limit its atomic work in exchange for sanctions relief, even after US President Donald Trump abandoned the accord because it did not cover Iranian military activities.

The EU has stepped up criticism of Iran's ballistic missiles programme and its regional policies in a dual-track approach analysts say is designed to show Washington it is possible to contain Tehran while remaining inside the nuclear pact.

The Iranian foreign ministry yesterday said Iran would never negotiate over its missile programme, which it said was defensive and designed as a deterrent. Iran has expanded its missile programme in the last two decades, particularly its ballistic missiles, in defiance of the United States and concern by European countries, especially France.

As part of EU efforts to sustain the nuclear pact, Britain, France and Germany last week launched the Instrument In Support Of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX), a system to facilitate non-dollar trade with Iran and avoid U.S. sanctions. Iran's foreign ministry welcomed the new channel, but said it was "late and inadequate".



A building burns in Erlanger street in the 16th arrondissement in Paris, early yesterday. At least 10 people died and 30 were injured in an overnight blaze at an apartment block in Paris that police suspect was deliberately started by a female resident.

PHOTO: AFP

# 'Where is democracy?'

## Erdogan accuses EU of seeking Maduro's ouster; Lima group calls for regime change without force

AFP, Ankara

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Tuesday accused the European Union of seeking to overthrow embattled Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro in defiance of "democracy."

"On one side you will say 'democracy, democracy, democracy' and 'ballot box, ballot box, ballot box' and later you will dare to topple the government by violence and ruse," Erdogan told his ruling party lawmakers in parliament, referring to the European Union.

Major European powers including Britain, France, Germany and Spain on Monday recognised opposition leader Juan Guaido as interim president until new elections are held after Maduro rejected a European ultimatum to call fresh polls.

The United States welcomed the recognition, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo urging others to follow suit.

Meanwhile, the Lima Group of Latin American countries and Canada called

Monday for a peaceful change in government in Venezuela, without military intervention.

They also urged Venezuela's military to support opposition leader Juan Guaido as interim president and "not to impede the entry and transit of humanitarian assistance to Venezuelans."

Erdogan, whose government survived a coup bid in July 2016, has given support to Maduro in the wake of the crisis and told him in a phone call to "stand tall."

On Tuesday, Erdogan called what happened in Venezuela as an "international coup attempt to remove the country's elected leader from power."

He said: "Is Venezuela one of your states?", in a veiled reference to the United States.

"How dare you tell an elected person to leave and deliver the head of state to the one who did not even run in the elections," he added.

"Where is democracy? ... Is it possible for us to accept that?"



# Women's brains appear 'years younger' than men's: study

AFP, Washington

Women tend to outlive men and stay mentally sharp longer, and a new study out Monday could explain why: female brains appear on average about three years younger.

The study enrolled 121 women and 84 men, who underwent PET scans to measure brain metabolism, or the flow of oxygen and glucose in their brains.

Like other organs in the body, the brain uses sugar as fuel. But just how it metabolizes glucose can reveal a lot about the brain's metabolic age.

Subjects ranged from their 20s to 80s, and across those age spans, women's brains appeared metabolically younger than men's, said the findings in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, a peer-reviewed US journal.

A machine-learned algorithm showed that women's brains were on average about 3.8 years younger than their chronological ages.

And when compared to men, male

brains were about were 2.4 years older than their true ages.

"It's not that men's brains age faster," said senior author Manu Goyal, assistant professor of radiology at Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis.

"They start adulthood about three years older than women, and that persists throughout life," said Goyal.

But why? One theory is that hormones might begin shaping brain metabolism at a young age, setting females on a pattern that is more youthful throughout their lives, compared to men.

Scientists hope to find out if metabolic differences in the brain may play a protective role for women, who tend to score better than men on cognitive tests of reason, memory and problem solving in old age.

It "could mean that the reason women don't experience as much cognitive decline in later years is because their brains are effectively younger," said Goyal.

## SYRIA, AFGHANISTAN TROOPS WITHDRAWAL

# US Senate rebukes Trump

AGENCIES

The Republican-led US Senate backed largely symbolic legislation on Monday that broke with President Donald Trump by opposing plans for any abrupt withdrawal of troops from Syria and Afghanistan.

The Senate voted 70-26 in favor of a non-binding amendment, drafted by Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, saying it was the sense of the Senate that Islamist militant groups in both countries still pose a "serious threat" to the United States.

The amendment acknowledged progress against Islamic State and al-Qaeda in Syria and Afghanistan but warned that "a precipitous withdrawal" could destabilise the region and create a vacuum that could be filled by Iran or Russia.

It called on the Trump administration to certify conditions had been met for the groups' "enduring defeat" before any significant withdrawal from Syria or Afghanistan.

In another development, US urged other countries Monday to bring home hundreds of Islamic State fighters captured in Syria, a delicate issue for allies such as France and Britain as Trump withdraws troops.

Washington drew a line on the jihadists two days before foreign min-

istry by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, who have warned that they may not be able to guard their jails once US troops leave.

Meanwhile, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said he had not yet seen an acceptable plan from the United States for the creation of a safe

US asks nations to repatriate jihadists as it leaves Syria

Erdogan says no satisfactory plan yet on north Syria safe zone



isters from Europe and the Middle East gather in the US capital for talks on how to fight the Islamic State group, also known as IS, once the US military presence ends.

US allies have been grappling for weeks with what to do with foreign fighters detained in the war-ravaged

zone in northeastern Syria, three weeks after President Donald Trump suggested establishing the zone.

Turkey wants to set up the safe zone with logistical support from allies and says it should be cleared of the US-backed Kurdish YPG militia which Ankara considers a terrorist group.