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A Fortnightly Newsletter from the Indian Pugwash Society

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A. India

India committed to goal of non-discriminatory, verifiable nuclear disarmament, says Shringla

The Hindu, February 22, 2021

India, as a responsible nuclear weapon state, is committed to maintaining credible minimum deterrence with the posture of no-first use and non-use against non-nuclear weapon states, Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla said on Monday. Addressing the high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament, Mr. Shringla said India is also committed to the goal of universal, non-discriminatory and verifiable nuclear disarmament.

“We need to rise above our differences, and demonstrate political will and genuine intent to find consensus to deliver on our collective mandate. Those resorting to politicisation only weaken the mandate of this body,” he said. As the world’s single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, as mandated by the Special Session on Disarmament (SSOD)-1, the Conference on Disarmament’s agenda deals with critical challenges of disarmament and international security facing the international community, he noted.

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-committed-to-goal-of-non-discriminatory-verifiable-nuclear-disarmament-says-shringla/article33903959.ece>

Small modular nuclear reactors are now beautiful for plant makers

Energy World, February 25, 2021

For global nuclear power plant makers, small is now beautiful and they are looking at populating their small modular reactors across the world, said industry experts. With lesser gestation time, higher power generation period and lower risks, nuclear power plant manufacturers are now of the view that small is beautiful and are in favour of small modular reactors, experts told IANS.

India is also looking at designing and developing such small modular reactors. Small modular reactors are the ones which

are factory-made compact with less than 300 MW capacity. Nuclear power equipment manufacturers like Russia’s Rosatom, French company EDF and the US based NuScale Energy are now looking at the small modular reactor segment.

<https://energy.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/power/small-modular-nuclear-reactors-are-now-beautiful-for-plant-makers/81209735>

B. China

Chinese astronauts start intensive training for space station missions

China Military Online, February 18, 2021

Recently, the first crew of Chinese astronauts to carry out manned flight missions during the construction process of China’s space station has entered the intensive training phase, with focus on extravehicular activities. Based on the plan, China is to implement 11 missions from 2021 to 2022 and to complete the in-orbit construction of the space station around 2022, achieving the third-step goal of China’s three-step strategic development plan for the manned space program.

At present, China’s manned space program has entered the preparation phase for the construction of space station in an all-out manner. The development of the station’s core module is progressing smoothly, with the assembly of combined sections and the deployment of ground equipment proceeding in order. The first crew of astronauts for manned flight mission have completed the arduous training for a year and entered the homestretch with intensive training.

http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-02/18/content_9987117.htm

Chinese weapons shine at Mideast expo

Liu Xuanzun

Global Times, February 23, 2021

China’s arms industry has brought a broad selection of weapons and equipment

to an ongoing major large-scale international arms expo in the Middle East, attracting wide interest, with analysts saying on Tuesday that Chinese arms have prospects in the defense market in the region despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Multiple Chinese arms firms joined the 15th International Defense Exhibition and Conference (IDEX) in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates, under the unified brand of "China Defense" on Sunday, China Central Television (CCTV) reported.

The HJ-12 portable anti-tank missile, SR-5 multiple launch rocket system, CM-501GA multipurpose tactical strike missile system, WS-43 loitering munitions system, L-15 advanced training jet, CH series drones and Wing Loong II armed reconnaissance drone are among key Chinese items at IDEX 2021, the report said, noting that they garnered wide interest. These products are carefully selected to meet the demands of countries in the Middle East, Wei Dongxu, a Beijing-based military expert, told the Global Times.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202102/1216343.shtml>

Tianwen 1 probe enters preset parking orbit

Zhao Lei

China Daily, February 24, 2021

China's Tianwen 1 robotic probe entered its preset parking orbit above Mars and will fly in this orbit for about three months before releasing its landing capsule, said the China National Space Administration. The spacecraft, which has entered a crucial stage in China's first interplanetary exploration mission after seven months of lengthy space voyage, conducted its third near-Mars deceleration maneuver at 6:29 am and then moved into an orbit with a perigee of about 280 kilometers, the administration said in a brief statement.

All of the seven mission payloads on the probe's orbiter will be gradually activated during the probe's three-month stay in the orbit to carry out scientific tasks and also to observe and analyze the landforms and weathers of the optimal landing site, it noted. Tianwen 1, the country's first independent

Mars mission, was launched by a Long March 5 heavy-lift carrier rocket on July 23 from the Wenchang Space Launch Center in Hainan province, kicking off the nation's planetary exploration program. The 5-metric ton probe, which consists of two major parts - the orbiter and the landing capsule- has flown for 215 days and about 475 million km on its journey to Mars. The average flight speed was about 100,000 km per hour. Currently, it is about 212 million km away from Earth, the space administration said.

<https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202102/24/WS6035a607a31024ad0baaa9f0.html>

C. USA

USA urged to adopt global strategy on advanced nuclear power

World Nuclear News, February 16, 2021

The Nuclear Innovation Alliance (NIA) and Partnership for Global Security (PGS), two US think tanks, today released a joint report defining a comprehensive strategy for the USA to become the global leader in advanced nuclear power. They said the strategy outlines the domestic and international activities that will be required to ensure the USA can lead in the development and deployment of next generation nuclear technologies through collaboration between government, industry, civil society, and other nations.

At the domestic level, the strategy explores how public-private partnerships can drive innovation to commercialise advanced reactor technologies, they said, adding that the Biden Administration and Congress have critical roles to play in leading government innovation efforts and funding demonstration projects. Internationally, the strategy highlights how advanced nuclear energy "can be imbued into US foreign policy and international relations", they added. Organisations that generally endorse the strategy and the importance of advanced reactors include, they said: American Nuclear Society, Bipartisan Policy Center, Center for Climate and Energy Solutions, ClearPath, Energy Innovation Reform

Project, Good Energy Collective, Nuclear Engineering Department Heads Organization, and Third Way.

<https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/USA-urged-to-adopt-global-strategy-on-advanced-nuc>

USA to hold inquiry into cold-weather operations

World Nuclear News, February 18, 2021

An arctic air mass has brought snow, ice, and extreme cold temperatures from the Canadian border as far south as Texas, causing record winter power demand and impacting power generation, the US Department of Energy (DOE) said. Austin, in Texas, has experienced its heaviest snowfall in 72 years.

“As temperatures dropped in Texas over the weekend, demand for electricity spiked,” Patricia Hoffman, acting assistant secretary for the DOE’s Office of Electricity and Office of Cybersecurity, Energy Security and Emergency Response, said. “At the same time, extreme weather conditions reduced the state’s ability to generate power. Nearly 40% of Texas’s electricity generation capacity has gone off line, largely driven by cold weather impacts on natural gas, coal and even nuclear facilities.” There had also been “limited impacts” from iced-over wind facilities, she added. As well as outages that left over 4.5 million homes and businesses in Texas without power, states including Louisiana and Oklahoma have also experienced power outages.

<https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/US-organisations-to-hold-joint-inquiry-into-cold-w>

ANS task force calls for boost in federal R&D funding

World Nuclear News, February 18, 2021

The ANS Task Force on Public Investment in Nuclear Research and Development brought together over 20 technical experts - from US Department of Energy (DOE) national laboratories, universities, private developers, utilities, suppliers and professional divisions within ANS. The Task Force is co-chaired by Mark Peters, executive

vice president for Laboratory Operations at Battelle, and Christina Back, vice president of the Nuclear Technologies and Materials Division at General Atomics.

The group has spent the past six months assessing current nuclear R&D funding levels and determining the federal investment levels required to enable a commercial scale-up of US-designed advanced reactors, starting in 2030. It also considered maximising nuclear energy for decarbonisation, economic growth through high-paying nuclear jobs, and preservation of US influence in global nuclear safety and standards.

<https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/ANS-task-force-calls-for-boost-in-federal-R-D-fund>

E3, USA reopen door to diplomacy with Iran

World Nuclear News, February 19, 2021

The E3 - France, Germany and the UK - has welcomed the prospect of a US and Iranian return to compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The E3 foreign ministers and the US secretary of state held a virtual meeting yesterday to discuss Iran and other pressing issues. It was the second time in this format since Secretary Antony Blinken took office.

Iran, earlier this week, had informed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that it will stop implementing ‘voluntary transparency measures’ under the 2015 nuclear deal. Specifically, Tehran says it will halt snap nuclear inspections outside of its declared sites as of 23 February. The transparency measures include the Additional Protocol, which permits IAEA inspectors to visit undeclared sites in Iran at short notice. In a joint statement yesterday, the E3 and US foreign ministers expressed their “shared fundamental security interest” in upholding the nuclear non-proliferation regime, and ensuring that Iran can never develop a nuclear weapon. They said the conclusion of the JCPOA was “a key achievement of multilateral diplomacy”.

The E3 welcomed the new US administration's stated intention "to return to diplomacy with Iran".

<https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/E3,-USA-reopen-door-to-diplomacy-with-Iran>

Perseverance starts exploration of Mars

World Nuclear News, February 19, 2021

The successful touchdown was announced in mission control at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Southern California at 3:55pm EST. The rover - described by NASA as a "robotic geologist and astrobiologist" - will undergo several weeks of testing before it begins its two-year science investigation of the crater, where it will investigate the rock and sediment of the ancient lakebed and river delta to characterise the region's geology and past climate. The Mars Sample Return campaign, which is being planned by NASA and ESA (the European Space Agency), aims to return samples collected by Perseverance to Earth where they will be studied for definitive signs of past life.

"This landing is one of those pivotal moments for NASA, the United States, and space exploration globally - when we know we are on the cusp of discovery and sharpening our pencils, so to speak, to rewrite the textbooks," acting NASA Administrator Steve Jurczyk said. The Mars 2020 Perseverance mission "personifies the human ideal of persevering toward the future and will help us prepare for human exploration of the Red Planet," he added.

<https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/Perseverance-begins-exploring-on-Mars>

FERC to review grid preparedness after terminating resilience inquiry

World Nuclear News, February 23, 2021

Days after terminating a three-year investigation into the resilience of the USA's bulk power system, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has announced it will examine the threats to electric reliability posed by extreme weather and climate change. It is also investigating US wholesale natural gas and electricity market activity during last week's extreme

cold weather to determine whether any market participants engaged in market manipulation or other violations.

"The effects of climate change are already apparent and we must do everything we can within our statutory authority to ensure that the electric grid is capable of keeping the lights on in the face of extreme weather," FERC Chairman Richard Glick said. The new proceeding, which FERC announced yesterday, will examine how grid operators prepare for and respond to extreme weather events, including, but not limited to, droughts, extreme cold, wildfires, hurricanes, and prolonged heat waves. It will include a technical conference with an opportunity for parties to submit comments in advance of that conference, the regulator said.

<https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/FERC-to-re-look-at-grid-preparedness-after-termina>

U.S. urges Iran again to cooperate with IAEA on nuclear deal

Reuters, February 24, 2021

The United States urged Iran again on Tuesday to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), saying that Tehran is moving further away from compliance under its nuclear constraints, State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

Speaking at a press briefing, Price said Washington will be in close consultation with the U.N. nuclear watchdog to discuss appropriate action in support of the agency's dealings with Tehran.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/iran-nuclear-usa-int/us-urges-iran-again-to-cooperate-with-iaea-on-nuclear-deal-idUSKBN2AN299>

Virginia issues strategic plan for nuclear energy

World Nuclear News, February 25, 2021

The Commonwealth of Virginia aims to achieve 100% carbon-free electricity generation by 2045. State legislation signed last year directed the state to work with nuclear energy stakeholders to develop the

plan to leverage nuclear energy to promote economic development, protect the environment, and support national security. The result is Virginia is Nuclear: 2020-2024 Strategic Plan, which has been prepared by the Virginia Nuclear Energy Consortium Authority (VNECA) and Virginia Nuclear Energy Consortium (VNEC) in coordination with the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the Virginia Secretary of Commerce and Trade and the Virginia Secretary of Education.

<https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/Virginia-issues-strategic-plan-for-nuclear-energy>

U.S., allies respond to Iranian 'provocations' with studied calm

Arshad Mohammed, John Irish

Reuters, February 25, 2021

In the week since Washington offered to talk with Tehran about reviving the 2015 nuclear deal, Iran has curbed U.N. monitoring, threatened to boost uranium enrichment and its suspected proxies have twice rocketed Iraqi bases with U.S. soldiers. In return, the United States and three allies, Britain, France and Germany, have responded with a studied calm.

The response - or lack of one - reflects a desire not to disrupt the diplomatic overture in hopes Iran will return to the table and, if not, that the pressure of U.S. sanctions will keep taking its toll, U.S. and European officials said. Iran has repeatedly demanded the United States first ease the U.S. sanctions imposed after former President Donald Trump abandoned the deal in 2018. It would then wind down its own violations of the pact, which began a year after Trump's withdrawal.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-usa-idUSKBN2AP0F3>

U.S. patience with Iran on renewing nuclear talks 'not unlimited': State Department

Reuters, February 25, 2021

The United States' patience with Iran on returning to discussions over the 2015

nuclear deal is "not unlimited," State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Wednesday. Iran has not formally responded to a U.S. offer last week to talk with Iran in a joint meeting with the countries that negotiated the deal.

Asked at a news briefing whether there was an expiration date on the offer, Price said Iran's moves away from compliance with the 2015 agreement's restrictions on its nuclear activities made the issue an "urgent challenge" for the United States.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-usa-idUSKBN2AO2QA>

Exelon splits utility and generation units

World Nuclear News, February 25, 2021

Exelon's electricity and gas utilities, which serve some 10 million customers in Delaware, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, will become part of the future RemainCo. The parent company for Exelon's generation assets, including over 18,700 MW of capacity from 21 reactors at facilities in Illinois, Maryland, New York and Pennsylvania, will be called SpinCo. "Our industry is changing at a rapid pace and our customers expect us to continuously innovate to stay ahead of growing demand for clean energy, evolving business conditions and changing technology," Exelon President and CEO Christopher Crane said. "Now is the right time to take this step to best serve our customers, employees, community partners and shareholders. These are two strong, distinct businesses that will benefit from the strategic flexibility to focus on their unique customer, market and community priorities."

SpinCo will be the largest supplier of clean energy and sustainable solutions across the continental USA, Exelon said, producing about 12% of the country's carbon-free energy. As well as operating the nation's largest fleet of nuclear power plants, it also operates some 12,000 MWE of hydroelectric, wind, solar, natural gas and oil generation assets, providing a mix

of baseload, intermediate and peak power generation. “These characteristics make SpinCo uniquely positioned to advance the nation’s clean energy strategy and priorities,” Exelon said.

<https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/Exelon-to-separate-utility-and-generation-business>

Granholm becomes US energy secretary

World Nuclear News, February 26, 2021

“When President Biden asked if I would take the helm at the Department of Energy (DOE), I couldn’t get the word ‘yes’ out fast enough. I’m an energy policy wonk who has long been in awe of the groundbreaking research and innovation that goes on at DOE, and I spent the couple of months after my nomination doing a deep dive into all that our agency has accomplished in their relatively short history,” Granholm said in an article published by the department yesterday. The climate emergency is intensifying, “ravaging” the planet with “cataclysmic” storms, wildfires, droughts and floods that cost billions to clean up, and putting national security at risk, she said.

“We’re going to have to fix this. It’s on this generation, this administration, you and me, to get climate change under control so that we can protect this planet for our children. That’s why President Biden has laid out the boldest climate agenda in our nation’s history, one that will require robust collaboration across the federal government, the 50 states, and the private sector. And it will rely on the power of science and innovation at a scale the world has never seen before,” she said.

<https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/Granholm-becomes-US-Energy-Secretary>

Democrats Want Biden to Relinquish Sole Authority for Nuclear Launches

Steve Herman

Voice of America, February 26, 2021

The president of the United States, always accompanied by a military aide carrying a

satchel containing nuclear launch codes, has sole authority to order nuclear warfare or respond in kind to such an enemy attack. Now, lawmakers of the current president’s own party are asking President Joe Biden to surrender that unilateral power.

Giving one person such authority “entails real risks,” according to a letter endorsed by 31 Democratic members of the House. “Past presidents have threatened to attack other countries with nuclear weapons or exhibited behavior that causes other officials to express concerns about the president’s judgment.” The letter, led by Representatives Jimmy Panetta and Ted Lieu, both from California, calls for officials, such as the vice president and speaker of the House, to concur with a launch order before it can be issued.

<https://www.voanews.com/usa/us-politics/democrats-want-biden-relinquish-sole-authority-nuclear-launches>

D. Europe

UK says Iran must come back into compliance with nuclear deal

Reuters, February 19, 2021

Britain said on Friday that Iran must come back into compliance with the nuclear deal and that the West should not send signals that it is prepared to overlook Tehran’s breaches of the accord. “I don’t think that we should be sending a signal that we are going to overlook this non-compliance or just brush it under the carpet,” James Cleverly, Britain’s junior foreign minister who covers the Middle East and North Africa, told the BBC. “This is in Iran’s hands, they are the ones breaching the conditions of the JCPOA, they are the ones that can do something about this, and they should come back into compliance,” he said.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN2AJ0TS>

EU aims for meeting on Iran nuclear deal with U.S., official says

Reuters, February 19, 2021

The European Union is working on organising an informal meeting with all participants of the Iran nuclear deal and the United States, which has already signalled willingness to join any gathering, a senior EU official said. Iran's foreign minister said earlier this month he was open to the EU, which helped negotiate the 2015 accord, playing a role to help bring Washington back into the deal it quit under former President Donald Trump.

No invitations have been sent and there is no time frame for the meeting, but world powers want to revive the nuclear deal as quickly as possible, the official said.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN2AJ1M4>

Germany urges Iran to comply with nuclear pact

Reuters, February 22, 2021

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas called on Monday for salvaging the 2015 nuclear pact between Iran and world powers which he said was in Tehran's interest. Addressing the U.N.-sponsored Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, he noted the Biden's administration's stated readiness to rejoin the pact, adding: "It is in Iran's best interest to change course now, before the agreement is damaged beyond repair." Maas said that Germany expected "full compliance, full transparency and full cooperation" from Iran with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), whose chief Rafael Grossi returned on Sunday from a trip to Tehran.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN2AM11J>

Iran's nuclear programme is "worrying" topic - French foreign minister

Reuters, February 22, 2021

The situation regarding Iran's nuclear programme is "worrying", French Foreign

Affairs Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told his EU colleagues during a meeting in Brussels, his ministry said. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said earlier on Monday that Iran might enrich uranium up to 60% purity if the country needed it and would never yield to U.S. pressure over its nuclear activity, state television reported.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN2AM27C>

Iran must cooperate with IAEA, reverse steps that reduce transparency - UK, France, Germany

Reuters, February 23, 2021

Iran should fully cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency and reverse steps that reduce transparency, the governments of France, Britain and Germany said. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Iran might enrich uranium up to 60% purity if the country needed it and would never yield to U.S. pressure over its nuclear programme, state television reported. "We... deeply regret that Iran has started, as of today, to suspend the Additional Protocol and the transparency measures under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)," the foreign ministers of France, Germany and Britain said. "We urge Iran to stop and reverse all measures that reduce transparency and to ensure full and timely cooperation with the IAEA."

<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN2AN1TU>

E. Russia

Metal blanks completed for Russian NPPs in India and China

Nuclear Engineering, February 18, 2021

OMZ-Spetsstal (part of Russia's OMZ Group) on 16 February shipped to AEM-Technologies (part of Rosatom) a batch of blanks for the reactor baffles for India's Kudankulam NPP, and China's Tianwan and Xudabao NPPs. The reactor baffle is a cylindrical structure 3845 mm in

diameter and 4070 mm in height, consisting of five forged rings 980 mm in height and a faceted belt of the baffle with a height of 150 mm, fastened together. The baffle forms the reactor core and serves as a neutron shield. According to the contract, OMZ-Special Steels manufactured and dispatched to the customer four metallurgical billets with a total weight of about 90 tons: two for the sixth power unit of the Kudankulam NPP, one for the eighth power unit of the Tianwan NPP and one for the third power unit of the Xudabao NPP. The baffle assembly based on metallurgical billets produced by OMZ-Spetsstal will be carried out at the Volgodonsk branch of AEM-technologies - Atomash.

OMZ-Spetsstal is the only Russian manufacturer of metallurgical blanks for nuclear vessel equipment. The enterprise has more than half a century of experience in the manufacture of such products. At present, OMZ-Special Steels are at various stages of production with blanks for the Tianwan, Xudabao and Kudankulam NPPs as well as the Akkuyu NPP under construction in Turkey.

<https://www.neimagazine.com/news/newsmetal-blanks-completed-for-russian-npps-in-india-and-china-8532086>

TVEL announces manufacturing contracts for fast reactor

World Nuclear News, February 19, 2021

Siberian Chemical Combine (SCC) has signed a contract with CKBM for the manufacture and supply of equipment for the refuelling of the BREST-OD-300 fast reactor demonstration plant. The production, supply and installation supervision of steam generators for the reactor facility will be provided by ZiO-Podolsk Machine-Building Plant. Both CKBM and ZiO-Podolsk are part of the machine-building division of Russia's Rosatom.

BREST-OD-300 is part of Rosatom's 'Proryv', or Breakthrough, project to enable a closed nuclear fuel cycle. The 300 MWe unit will

be the main facility of the Pilot Demonstration Energy Complex at the SCC site in Seversk. It will be the world's first experimental demonstration power unit featuring a lead-cooled fast neutron reactor. Russian nuclear regulator Rostechnadzor earlier this month issued SCC a licence for construction of the Brest-OD-300. Unlike light-water VVER reactors, where refuelling is conducted on a cooled reactor, the operations at the Brest-OD-300 must be carried out at the temperature of the primary circuit's liquid-lead coolant, which is higher than 400 degrees Celsius, TVEL, Rosatom's nuclear fuel manufacturer subsidiary said. Before loading into the core, the fuel assemblies will be heated up in a special chamber and then placed into the core filled with a melt of lead coolant, it added.

<https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/TVEL-announces-manufacturing-contracts-for-fast-re>

Iran cannot be suspected of covert nuclear weapons program, senior Russian diplomat says

TASS News Agency, February 19, 2021

Iran as a state, which has been committed to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) for a long time, cannot be suspected of carrying out a covert nuclear weapons program, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov told TASS on Friday.

"We have always said and are saying now that a state, which has an agreement on comprehensive guarantees with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and which has been committed to this deal - and Iran has such an agreement, and a state, which has been fully observing the JCPOA for a long time, cannot be suspected of carrying out a covert program on weaponization in the nuclear field," Ryabkov said.

<https://tass.com/world/1258525>

Kremlin backs revival of JCPOA, emphasizes Iran deal's restoration as 'important'

TASS News Agency, February 19, 2021

The Kremlin views Washington's intention to abandon sanctions against Iran in a positive light but highlights the particular importance of returning to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Russian Presidential Spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Friday. "Abandoning calls for sanctions is a good thing in itself," he said, explaining that the sanctions were not conducive to resolving the Iranian nuclear issue and led nowhere.

"However, it is precisely the restoration of the JCPOA that is important," the Kremlin spokesman stressed. "We are a country that has repeatedly reaffirmed its commitment to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action for Iran, and we have always expressed our regret over the fact that the United States had pulled out of the JCPOA," Peskov specified.

<https://tass.com/politics/1258459>

IAEA inspections at Iran's nuclear facilities to not be stopped totally – Russian envoy

TASS News Agency, February 19, 2021

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will not stop its inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities after February 23, when a law on the suspension of the additional protocol to Iran's safeguards agreement with the IAEA comes into effect, Russia's Permanent Representative to the Vienna-based international organizations Mikhail Ulyanov said on Friday ahead of IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi's visit to Tehran on February 20.

Ulyanov recalled that the Iranian parliament had passed a law in December 2020 to suspend the additional protocol in Iran from February 23. "Apart from that, a number of transparency measures under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on the Iranian nuclear program will be terminated," he said.

<https://tass.com/politics/1258581>

US yet to respond to Russian proposal on nuclear war inadmissibility statement – envoy

TASS News Agency, February 20, 2021

Russia hopes that the United States will respond to an idea of adopting a joint statement at the highest level on inadmissibility of a nuclear war, Russia's Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov said at an online conference of the Council on Foreign Relations, a US non-profit think tank. "One of the most pressing issues remains ensuring predictability and transparency taking into account the demise of the INF Treaty," he said in the speech published by the Russian embassy on Facebook on Friday.

"We also expect that Washington will respond to the initiative of adopting a joint statement at the highest level on the inadmissibility of a nuclear war (relevant Russian draft was handed over to the US Side on October 22, 2018). In our view, it would be reasonable to also include into this document not only the idea of the inadmissibility of a nuclear war as such but of any armed conflict between nuclear powers," he said.

<https://tass.com/politics/1258761>

Russia stays ready for talks with US on new military technology – ambassador

TASS News Agency, February 20, 2021

Russia is poised for negotiations with the United States on a wide range of strategic stability issues, including new military technology, in order to work out "a security equation," which would meet the present-day realities, Russia's Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov said on Friday at an online session of the Council on Foreign Relations, a US nonprofit think tank.

"The Russian Side is ready to negotiate on a broader agenda. The essence of our proposals is to develop a security equation that would take into account the emergence of new military technologies

and other factors affecting strategic stability," the diplomat stressed.

<https://tass.com/politics/1258779>

Russia invites US to discuss all strategic stability issues – Lavrov

TASS News Agency, February 20, 2021

Russia has invited the United States to discuss all issues of strategic stability without exception, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in an interview with RBC on Friday. "We suggested taking to the negotiating table all topics that affect strategic stability and legitimate interests of negotiating parties," the minister said.

Lavrov also pointed at the importance of Moscow and Washington's intentions to promote strategic stability talks in the context of new reality. "The situation has changed drastically since 2010: both the United States and Russia obtained new weapons, and some of them fall under the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START). We spoke about it last year, saying they must be taken into account. Other weapons do not fall under the treaty's provisions due to their physical characteristics, as they are based on totally different principles," the minister said.

<https://tass.com/politics/1258789>

IAEA Director General flies to Iran, Russian envoy says

TASS News Agency, February 20, 2021

Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi flew to Tehran on Saturday to conduct talks on further verification activity at Iranian nuclear objects, Russian Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov reported.

"Today IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi flew to Tehran to specify parameters of the agency's inspection activity in Iran in light of a new Iranian law which substantially restricts it. We wish successful negotiations

to both sides," he wrote on his Twitter page.

<https://tass.com/world/1259055>

Russia to launch 29 space rockets in 2021, says Roscosmos chief

TASS News Agency, February 20, 2021

Nearly 30 launches of space rockets are due this year, Roscosmos corporation CEO Dmitry Rogozin, told President Vladimir Putin on Saturday. "On our timetable there are 29 space rocket launches," Rogozin said.

In 2020, he went on to say, there were 17 launches of space rockets and seven launches of military missiles were carried out. "Moreover, we are to implement some very important projects. For the first time in 45 years, we are to resume exploration of the Moon. In October, the first descent module will be launched from the spaceport Vostochny. More automatic lunar probes will follow. Lastly, a manned program will begin," Rogozin said.

<https://tass.com/science/1259053>

Russia, China seek to comply with nuclear deal, Europe does not – Iran's foreign minister

TASS News Agency, February 21, 2021

Russia and China, unlike European countries, seek to fulfill their obligations under the Iran nuclear deal, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif stated on Press TV channel on Sunday. "Some 120 Chinese residents and companies have been placed on sanctions lists (for contacts with the Iranian side). <...> Also the restrictions were imposed on a large number of Russian companies. It shows who is at least trying to fulfill their obligations and who is not," Zarif said.

Iran's top diplomat noted that US President Joe Biden should remove not only the sanctions imposed the Islamic Republic but also the restrictions against Russian and Chinese companies and residents for contacts with the Iranian side.

<https://tass.com/world/1259261>

Russian diplomat hopes inspection deal will help resume JCPOA's implementation

TASS News Agency, February 23, 2021

New agreements between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on further inspections create a favorable environment for political efforts on resuming full implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on the Iranian nuclear program, Russian Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov said.

"The agreements between Iran and the IAEA on February 21 were a significant achievement. They allow to ensure a sufficient level of verification even after suspending an additional protocol on February 23 and create a more favorable environment for political efforts on restoring the full implementation of the JCPOA," Ulyanov wrote on his Twitter account.

<https://tass.com/politics/1259451>

New START Treaty extension guarantees predictability in Russia-US relations, says Lavrov

TASS News Agency, February 24, 2021

The prolongation of the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (the New START Treaty) guaranteed predictability in the Russia-US relations, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in his video address to participants in the Geneva disarmament conference on Wednesday.

"Certain encouraging moments have emerged this year. First of all, I mean the recent extension of the Strategic Offensive Arms Treaty, which remains a fundamental element of maintaining strategic stability and international security," Russia's top diplomat pointed out.

<https://tass.com/politics/1259729>

BN-800 fast reactor has first full refuelling with MOX fuel

World Nuclear News, February 24, 2021

Distinct from traditional nuclear fuel with enriched uranium, mixed oxide (MOX) fuel pellets are based on the mix of nuclear fuel cycle derivatives, such as oxide of plutonium bred in commercial reactors, and oxide of depleted uranium which comes from defluorination of depleted uranium hexafluoride (UF₆), the so-called secondary tailings of uranium enrichment facilities.

The first batch of 18 MOX fuel assemblies was loaded into the BN-800 reactor core in January 2020, and now 160 assemblies more with fresh MOX fuel have been added. These replace the fuel assemblies with enriched uranium. Thus, the BN-800 core is now one-third filled with MOX fuel. From now on, only MOX fuel will be loaded into this reactor. The development moves the Beloyarsk plant a step closer to Rosatom's strategic goal to close the nuclear fuel cycle, Ivan Sidorov, director of Beloyarsk NPP, said.

<https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/BN-800-fast-reactor-fully-loaded-with-MOX-fuel>

Rosatom's revenue from stable isotopes rises by 14%

World Nuclear News, February 26, 2021

Electrochemical Plant (ECP), a subsidiary of Rosatom's nuclear fuel manufacturer TVEL, recorded a 14% increase in revenue from the sale of stable isotopes in 2020, exceeding RUB1.5 billion (USD20.1 million) for the first time. The Zelenogorsk, Krasnoyarsk-based company's global market share of the stable isotope market remains over 40%, TVEL said.

Stable isotopes are non-radioactive forms of atoms. Although they do not emit radiation, their unique properties enable them to be used in a broad variety of applications, including water and soil

management, environmental studies, nutrition assessment studies and forensics. ECP produces 110 isotopes of 21 chemical elements for use, among other fields, in the nuclear power, medical and electronics sectors, as well as for scientific research in chemistry, physics, biotechnology, meteorology, agricultural chemistry. Its global reach extends, for example, to Canada, China, Germany, France, Kazakhstan, South Korea, Sweden, the USA and Uzbekistan. Most of ECP's export contracts for stable isotopes are signed through Isotope JSC, Rosatom's subsidiary for isotope sales and marketing.

<https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/Rosatom-revenue-from-stable-isotopes-rises-by-14>

Leningrad II-2 enters final testing phase

World Nuclear News, February 26, 2021

Unit 2 of the Leningrad II nuclear power plant in western Russia has entered the final stage of pilot operation - a 15-day programme of tests at nominal capacity. On successful completion of these tests, the VVER-1200 unit will be stopped for inspection of its equipment and, following regulatory approval, will then be put into industrial operation, which is scheduled for this spring.

"These tests are a criterion for the success of the entire stage of experimental and industrial operation, which total more than 140 days," said Alexander Belyaev, chief engineer of Leningrad II. "We started these works strictly on schedule, and this shows that the introduction of the power unit is going according to plan. During 15-day complex testing of the unit at 100% capacity, all the equipment and systems of the unit should function efficiently, reliably and safely, as stipulated by the requirements of technological regulations and in full compliance with the project. Only after that, we will be able to be sure that the new power unit of the Leningrad nuclear power plant is fully ready for industrial operation and carrying a stable load in accordance with the design life of 60 years of operation."

<https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/Leningrad-II-2-enters-final-testing-phase>

West Asia

F. Iran

Iran tells IAEA it plans to scale back cooperation in a week

Francois Murphy

Reuters, February 17, 2021

Iran has told the U.N. nuclear watchdog it will dramatically scale back cooperation with it in a week, a report by the agency to its member states showed on Tuesday, ratcheting up protests against U.S. sanctions still choking its economy. Iran has accelerated its breaches of its 2015 nuclear deal with major powers in recent months, partly as demanded by a law passed in response to the killing in November of its top nuclear scientist, which Tehran has blamed on its foe Israel.

The breaches began in 2019 in response to a U.S. withdrawal from the deal under then-President Donald Trump, and Iran is now locked in a standoff with President Joe Biden's administration over who should move first to save the accord. "Iran informed the IAEA on 15 February that the country will stop implementing voluntary transparency measures under the JCPOA as of 23 February, including the Additional Protocol," an International Atomic Energy Agency statement said. JCPOA stands for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the deal's official name.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN2AG2HM>

Iran will reverse nuclear actions when U.S. lifts sanctions - foreign minister

Reuters, February 19, 2021

Iran will "immediately reverse" actions in respect of its nuclear programme when U.S. sanctions are lifted, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Friday, reiterating Tehran's position on Washington's offer to revive talks. The Joe Biden administration said on Thursday it was ready to revive a 2015 agreement between Iran and world powers that

former president Donald Trump abandoned in 2018 before reimposing sanctions on Iran. When sanctions are lifted, “we will then immediately reverse all remedial measures. Simple,” Zarif said on Twitter.

Zarif had tweeted that Iran’s “remedial measures” were in response to violations of the accord by the U.S., Britain, France and Germany. Other signatories to the 2015 deal were China and Russia. Breaches of the deal by Iran began in 2019, about a year after Trump withdrew from it. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Thursday that the Biden administration would return to the accord if Tehran came into full compliance with it. Tehran has set a Feb. 23 deadline for Washington to begin reversing sanctions, otherwise, it says, it will take its biggest step yet to breach the deal - banning short-notice inspections by the U.N. nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL1N2KP0D2>

Iran reacts coolly to U.S. talk offer, demands lifting of sanctions

Parisa Hafezi

Reuters, February 19, 2021

Iran will “immediately reverse” actions in its nuclear programme once U.S. sanctions are lifted, its foreign minister said on Friday, reacting coolly to Washington’s initial offer to revive talks with Tehran aimed at restoring the 2015 nuclear deal.

President Joe Biden’s administration said on Thursday it was ready to talk to Iran about both nations returning to the accord, which aimed to prevent Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons while lifting most international sanctions. Former President Donald Trump left the accord in 2018 and reimposed sanctions on Iran. Tehran said Washington’s move was not enough to persuade Iran to fully respect the accord. When sanctions are lifted, “we will then immediately reverse all remedial measures. Simple,” Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Twitter.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN2AJ0P6>

Iran says studies EU-proposed informal meeting with U.S.

Reuters, February 20, 2021

Iran is studying a European Union proposal for an informal meeting between current members of Tehran’s 2015 nuclear deal and the United States, but has yet to respond to it, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said. Iran and the United States have been at odds over who should take the first step to revive the 2015 accord. Iran insists the United States must first lift former President Donald Trump’s sanctions while Washington says Tehran must first return to compliance with the deal. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif suggested earlier this month a way to overcome the U.S.-Iranian impasse over who goes first in returning to the nuclear deal, saying EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell could “synchronize” or “choreograph” the moves.

“We are studying Josep Borrell’s proposal to hold an informal meeting of the 4 + 1 (nuclear deal members) with the United States and Iran, and we are consulting with our partners, including Russia and China, and we will respond to this proposal in the future,” Araqchi said in an interview with state TV. “However, we believe a U.S. return to the nuclear accord does not require a meeting and the only way for it is to lift the sanctions,” Araqchi said.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN2AK0AK>

Zarif raps Western hypocrisy over Israeli nuclear bomb factory

Tehran Times, February 21, 2021

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has criticized several Western leaders and the UN nuclear watchdog over their silence on Israeli nuclear activities. Zarif mentioned U.S. President Joe Biden, French President Emmanuel Macron, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and the International Atomic Energy Agency. “Israel is expanding Dimona, the region’s only nuclear bomb

factory. @POTUS @iaeaorg @BorisJohnson @EmmanuelMacron Angela Merkel. Gravely concerned? Concerned? A little? Care to comment? I thought so," the Iranian chief diplomat said in a tweet. The tweet came after Western news organizations reported that Israel is expanding its Dimona nuclear plant, where Israel has made material for nuclear bombs.

"Israel is carrying out a major expansion of its Dimona nuclear facility in the Negev desert, where it has historically made the fissile material for its nuclear arsenal," The Guardian reported, citing Satellite images that show significant expansion of the desert site over the past few years. According to the British newspaper, construction work is evident in new satellite images published on Thursday by the International Panel on Fissile Material (IPFM), an independent expert group. The area being worked on is a few hundred meters across to the south and west of the domed reactor and reprocessing point at the Shimon Peres Negev Nuclear Research Center, near the desert town of Dimona, the newspaper continued.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/458392/Zarif-raps-Western-hypocrisy-over-Israeli-nuclear-bomb-factory>

IAEA chief holds talks in Tehran

Tehran Times, February 21, 2021

Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency Rafael Grossi held talks with Iranian officials to discuss the latest issues related to the cooperation between Iran and the UN body. Grossi, who had requested to visit Iran ahead of the cessation of the implementation of the Additional Protocol to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), arrived in Iran on Saturday night. He met with Ali Akbar Salehi, head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI). The AEOI said in a statement on Sunday that the UN nuclear watchdog chief held negotiations with Iranian officials on coordinating the simultaneous implementation of the Iranian nuclear law adopted in December and the Agency's safeguards activities.

The nuclear law, officially called "Strategic Action to Lift Sanctions and Protect the

Nation's Rights," stipulates that the Iranian government should take certain nuclear measures such as raising the level of uranium enrichment to 20% and suspending the voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol in few months if the Western parties failed to honor their obligations under the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, formally called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The sixth article of the law clearly stipulates that if the remaining parties to the JCPOA - Germany, France, China, Russia and the UK- failed to facilitate Iran's oil exports and the return of Iranian oil revenues in two months, the Iranian government would be obligated to stop inspections beyond the IAEA safeguards, including the voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol, which allows unannounced and intensive inspections of nuclear sites.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/458393/IAEA-chief-holds-talks-in-Tehran>

IAEA strikes deal with Iran to cushion coming blow of slashed access

Francois Murphy

Reuters, February 22, 2021

The U.N. nuclear watchdog said it had struck a deal with Iran to cushion the blow of steps Tehran plans to take this week that include ending snap inspections, with both sides agreeing to keep "necessary" monitoring for up to three months. The announcement by International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi, made at Vienna airport after a weekend trip to Iran, confirmed that Tehran would go ahead with its plan to slash cooperation with the agency.

Iran has been gradually breaching terms of a 2015 nuclear pact with world powers since the United States, under former President Donald Trump, withdrew in 2018 and reimposed sanctions. The pact aims to keep Iran at arm's length from being able to make nuclear arms, which Tehran says it has never wanted to build.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN2AL0L9>

Ayatollah Khamenei says Parliament's nuclear law must be implemented

Tehran Times, February 22, 2021

In a meeting with the members of Iran's Assembly of Experts on Monday, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, said the nuclear law passed by the Parliament concerning the removal of sanctions must be exactly implemented, according to Fars news agency. Regarding the disagreement between the Rouhani Government and the parliament over the law- formally known as Strategic Action to Lift Sanctions and Protect the Nation's Rights -, Ayatollah Khamenei underlined, "the government and the parliament need to resolve their differences." Underlining that the government considers itself to be obligated to implement the law, the Leader pointed out, "This law, which is a good law, must be implemented precisely."

The Leader also said that Iran will go beyond the limit of 20 percent uranium enrichment depending on the country's needs. "We are determined to acquire nuclear capabilities commensurate with the needs of the country, and therefore, Iran's enrichment limit will not be 20%, and it will act [to raise the level of uranium enrichment] whenever the country needs, for example, we may even raise the [uranium] enrichment [level] to 60% for nuclear propulsion or other work."

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/458452/Ayatollah-Khamenei-says-Parliament-s-nuclear-law-must-be-implemented>

Iranian lawmakers criticise Tehran's deal with IAEA on snap inspections

Parisa Hafezi

Reuters, February 22, 2021

Iranian lawmakers protested on Monday against Tehran's decision to permit "necessary" monitoring by the U.N. nuclear watchdog for up to three months, saying the move broke a law mandating an end to the agency's snap inspections this week. "The government has no right to decide and act arbitrarily," said Mojtaba Zolnour, chairman

of the parliament's national security committee, according to Iranian state media. "This arrangement is an insult to the parliament."

Iran has been gradually breaching terms of a 2015 nuclear pact with world powers since then U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew from it in 2018 and reimposed sanctions. The pact aims to keep Iran at arm's length from being able to make nuclear arms, which Tehran says it has never wanted to build. Under the deal, Tehran agreed to implement the Additional Protocol, which allows the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to carry out short-notice inspections at locations not declared to it. But to pressure President Joe Biden's administration to lift sanctions, Iran's hardline-dominated parliament passed a law last year obliging the government to end implementation of the Protocol from Tuesday if U.S. sanctions are not lifted.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN2AM1A9>

Iran making 20% enriched uranium in line with plan, IAEA report shows

Reuters, February 23, 2021

Iran has produced 17.6 kg of uranium enriched to up to 20% - the point at which it is highly enriched - roughly in line with the 10 kg a month required by a law that made it start that process in January, a U.N. nuclear watchdog report showed. International Atomic Energy Agency issued an extra report, alongside its regular quarterly one to member states, on Iran's nuclear activities, both seen by Reuters. The second report said Iran had not yet answered questions on uranium particles found at two sites inspected last year.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN2AN20K>

Iran producing highly enriched uranium faster than law requires

Reuters, February 23, 2021

Iran is producing highly-enriched uranium faster than called for by the law

under which it started the process of enriching to 20% fissile purity last month, diplomats and a report by the U.N. nuclear watchdog said. As part of a recent acceleration of its breaches of its 2015 nuclear deal with major powers, Iran has begun refining uranium to 20% at Fordow, a site that was built in secret inside a mountain where the deal says Iran cannot enrich at all. Until last month Iran had not enriched beyond 4.5% purity - above the deal's limit of 3.67% but still far below the 20% it achieved before the deal, or the 90% that is weapons-grade. Uranium is considered highly enriched as of 20%.

"They are producing 15 kg a month of uranium enriched to 20%. That is their production rate," a senior diplomat said. Recent legislation that required Iran to start enriching to 20% stipulated that at least 120 kg (265 pounds) of uranium refined to that level be produced each year, which amounts to 10 kg a month. A second diplomat said Iran was "slightly above" the target of 10 kg a month. A quarterly report on Iran's nuclear activities by the U.N. nuclear watchdog on Tuesday obtained by Reuters said that as of Feb. 16 Iran had produced 17.6 kg of uranium enriched up to 20%, with the next level down being enriched between 2%-5%. Iran's overall stockpile of enriched uranium grew by 524.9 kg to 2,967.8 kg in the quarter, far above the 2015 deal's 202.8 kg stockpile limit though still a fraction of the more than eight tonnes Iran had prior to the deal.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN2AN20I>

Iran threatens to end deal with IAEA over U.S.-led push to criticize it

Francois Murphy

Reuters, February 26, 2021

Iran is threatening to end a deal struck with the U.N. nuclear watchdog last weekend temporarily salvaging much monitoring of its activities if the agency's board endorses a U.S.-led push to criticize Tehran next week, an Iranian position paper shows. Tehran this week scaled back cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency,

ending extra inspection measures introduced by its 2015 nuclear accord with major powers. It was the latest of many steps retaliating for U.S. sanctions reimposed after the United States pulled out of that agreement in 2018.

Iran and U.S. President Joe Biden's administration are now locked in a standoff over who should move first to save the unravelling 2015 deal. Tehran says Washington should lift sanctions first. Biden wants Iran to undo its many retaliatory breaches of the deal's nuclear restrictions first. In its own paper sent to other IAEA member states ahead of next week's quarterly meeting of the U.N. watchdog's 35-nation Board of Governors, the United States said it wants a resolution to "express the Board's deepening concern with respect to Iran's cooperation with the IAEA". The U.S. paper obtained by Reuters said the board should call on Iran to reverse its breaches of the deal and cooperate with the IAEA to explain how uranium particles were found at old, undeclared sites - finds first reported by Reuters and confirmed in an IAEA report this week.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN2AQ1B6>

Iran to delete IAEA cameras' data if U.S. sanctions not lifted: Salehi

February 27, 2021

The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) says recordings from monitoring equipment that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) installed at the country's nuclear sites will be deleted if the United States does not lift its unilateral sanctions within the next three months. Ali-Akbar Salehi said, "Now, the IAEA does not have the right to access surveillance cameras for up to 3 months, and if the sanctions are not lifted, the information recorded by the cameras will be deleted and cameras will be uninstalled. The agency issues a report every three months, so we gave it a chance."

Salehi made the remarks on Friday, four days after Iran stopped the voluntary

implementation of the Additional Protocol to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Safeguards Treaty, which stipulates enhanced international access to nuclear sites and snap inspections by the IAEA.

The halt came under the Strategic Action Plan to Counter Sanctions, a law passed last December by the Iranian Parliament, and adds to Iran's previous steps away from the 2015 nuclear deal in response to the U.S.'s unilateral withdrawal in 2018 and the other parties' failure to fulfill their commitments. The IAEA and the AEOI reached a temporary bilateral technical understanding, under which the latter would continue to use cameras to record information at its nuclear sites for three months, but it would retain the information exclusively. If the U.S. sanctions are lifted completely within that period, Iran will provide the footage information to the UN nuclear watchdog, otherwise it will be deleted forever.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/458583/Iran-to-delete-IAEA-cameras-data-if-U-S-sanctions-not-lifted>

Iran condemns U.S. strikes in Syria, denies attacks in Iraq

Reuters, February 27, 2021

Iran condemned U.S. air strikes against Iran-backed militias in Syria, and denied responsibility for rocket attacks on U.S. targets in Iraq that prompted Friday's strikes. Washington said its strikes on positions of the Iran-backed Kataib Hezbollah paramilitary group along the Iraq border were in response to the rocket attacks on U.S. targets in Iraq. Western officials and some Iraqi officials have blamed those attacks on Iran-backed groups. However, Tehran has denied any involvement.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Saturday condemned the U.S. strikes as "illegal and a violation of Syria's sovereignty" in a meeting with his visiting Iraqi counterpart Fuad Hussein, Iran's state media reported. Zarif said some recent attacks and incidents in Iraq are suspect, and could be designed to disrupt Iran-Iraq relations and Iraq's security and stability," the media reports said. "We emphasize the

need for the Iraqi government to find the perpetrators of these incidents," Zarif was quoted as saying. Hussein gave assurances that "Baghdad will not allow incidents in this country to be used to disrupt the excellent relations between the two countries", state media reported.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN2AR0BS>

Nuclear chief: Iran will respond if IAEA board adopts negative resolution

Tehran Times, February 28, 2021

Iran will respond appropriately in case the Board of Governors at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) issues a resolution against Iran for suspending the voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) warned on Sunday. That Additional Protocol allows the IAEA to carry out short-notice inspections. "If the Board of Governors adopts a resolution against Iran, we will show an appropriate reaction," Ali Akbar Salehi said, according to Press TV. Salehi made the remarks on the sidelines of a meeting of the Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee. The statement by Salehi came just a day before the IAEA board is to convene for a session on Iran.

Salehi, a nuclear physicist and Iran's former ambassador to the IAEA, added that Tehran has sent a letter to the Vienna-based nuclear watchdog informing the international body of the issue. Iran has stopped its voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol under the Strategic Action Plan to Counter Sanctions, a law passed in December by the Parliament. According to the move, any footage recorded by cameras at Iran's nuclear sites will no longer be shared with the IAEA, but will be retained by Iran for three months, after which they will be permanently deleted if the U.S. sanctions are not lifted.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/458638/Nuclear-chief-Iran-will-respond-if-IAEA-board-adopts-negative>

G. Iraq

Iraq militia denies role in anti-U.S. attacks, welcomes pressure on Saudi

Reuters, February 23, 2021

An Iran-aligned Iraqi militia group on Tuesday denied any role in recent rocket attacks against U.S. targets in Iraq, but said an attack against Saudi Arabia last month was justified. It is a rare direct denial and the first time the Kataib Hezbollah group, one of the Iraqi factions closest to Iran, has commented on the most serious incident this year, a rocket attack in Erbil on Feb. 15 that killed a contractor working with U.S.-led forces. The attacks over the past 10 days are an escalation against U.S. sites in Iraq at a time when Washington and Tehran are looking for a way to return to the nuclear deal abandoned by former U.S. President Donald Trump.

Kataib Hezbollah, the most high-profile Iran-backed militia in Iraq, does not usually comment on specific attacks. Its direct denial of actions against U.S. interests while Washington says it is still determining who carried out the Erbil attack is a sign that Iran and its allies wish to avoid an escalation that could bring a tough U.S. response.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN2AN20S>

H. Turkey

43 more Turkish engineers complete Russian nuclear training

Daily Sabah, February 16, 2021

As it is preparing to commission the first reactor for the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) in southern Mersin province in 2023, Turkey has also been focusing on raising the quality of its workforce tailored to work in the plant. With this goal in mind, another 43 Turkish nuclear engineers graduated Tuesday from a Russian university they had been sent to in order to further their education as the country has been constructing the NPP in cooperation with Russian partners. By accelerating the work being done at Akkuyu NPP, Ankara hopes

to provide more local and renewable energy resources within the scope of its National Energy and Mining Policy.

<https://www.dailysabah.com/business/energy/43-more-turkish-engineers-complete-russian-nuclear-training>

Turkey looks to complete 27.5% of Akkuyu nuclear plant by year-end

Daily Sabah, February 23, 2021

The 2021 Performance Program of Turkey's Energy and Natural Resources Ministry has drawn a road map for the completion of the country's first nuclear power plant, the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant (NPP), which says 27.5% of the plant will be completed by the end of this year.

The program, which outlines the steps that will be taken in the energy sector this year, determined the country's targets for the development and coordination of the nuclear power plant and nuclear infrastructure for 2021. According to this year's performance program, 16.25% of the plant, including construction, permits, licenses and approvals, was completed at the end of last year. This considers very favorably with the forecast of last year's program, which estimated progress at less than half of this, at 8%.

<https://www.dailysabah.com/business/energy/turkey-looks-to-complete-275-of-akkuyu-nuclear-plant-by-year-end>

I. Israel

Israel aims to resolve Iran disputes with Biden at adviser level

Dan Williams

Reuters, February 23, 2021

Israel hopes to prevent personal tension between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. President Joe Biden over their differences on the Iranian nuclear question by delegating talks on the topic to their senior staff, an Israeli official said. Netanyahu's foreign-policy fortunes have waned since Biden succeeded Republican president Donald Trump, who

withdrew the United States from world powers' 2015 Iranian nuclear deal, deeming it too advantageous for Tehran - a view Israel shared.

Biden, a Democrat, wants to rejoin the deal. That has set the stage for possible new strains in the U.S.-Israel alliance. On Monday, Netanyahu conferred with Defence Minister Benny Gantz and Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi to present a united Israeli front on Iran - even as the conservative premier runs against the two centrists in a March election.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-israel-usa-idUSKBN2AN14Z>

Satellite images show significant new construction at Israel's Dimona reactor site

Nuclear Engineering, February 23, 2021

Commercial satellite imagery obtained by International Panel on Fissile Material (IPFM) shows significant new construction at the Dimona site in Israel, officially known as the Negev Nuclear Research Centre. IPFM said on 18 February. The imagery was acquired by the SuperView-1 (SV-1) satellite on 4 January. The construction site is located in the immediate vicinity of the buildings that house the nuclear reactor and the reprocessing plant (to the south-west from the buildings). The exact date the construction began is uncertain, said IPFM. The last satellite image available from Google Earth, which was obtained in September 2011, does not show any activity at the site. The first signs of construction are visible on an image available from the HERE WeGo service (the date of that image is unknown).

"The 2021 image shows that the construction has expanded and appears to be actively underway with multiple construction vehicles present," said IPFM. "At this stage, the construction appears to be centred around a large-scale excavation area with the size of about 140 metres by 50 metres. The purpose of this construction is unknown. Israel is a nuclear weapon state outside of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. As of the beginning of 2019, its

nuclear arsenal was estimated to include about 80 warheads. IPFM noted. The non-profit organisation Federation of American Scientists estimates that Israel currently has at least 90 nuclear warheads.

<https://www.neimagazine.com/news/newssatellite-images-show-significant-new-construction-at-israels-dimona-reactor-site-8542583>

Israel says initial assessment is Iran behind explosion on Israeli-owned ship

Maayan Lubell

Reuters, February 28, 2021

Israeli defence minister Benny Gantz said on Saturday his "initial assessment" was that Iran was responsible for an explosion on an Israeli-owned ship in the Gulf of Oman. The ship, a vehicle-carrier named MV Helios Ray, suffered an explosion between Thursday and Friday morning. A U.S. defence official in Washington said the blast left holes above the waterline in both sides of the hull. The cause was not immediately clear and no casualties were reported.

"Iran is looking to hit Israeli infrastructure and Israeli citizens," Gantz told the public broadcaster Kan. "The location of the ship in relative close proximity to Iran raises the notion, the assessment, that it is the Iranians."

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-gulf-security-ship-idUSKCN2AR0LC>

East Asia

J. North Korea

NK uranium plant indicates ongoing operations throughout winter: US monitor

Yonhap

Korea Herald, February 21, 2021

North Korea's main nuclear complex showed continued activity at its uranium enrichment facility throughout the winter, a US monitor said. In an experts' analysis

of satellite imagery from January and February this year, the think tank, 38 North, said the movement of specialized vehicles and equipment near the uranium facility at Yongbyon indicates that the Uranium Enrichment Plant (UEP) has continued operations. Satellite imagery, however, showed no signs of activity at nuclear reactors, it said.

"In contrast to the reactor area of the complex, the UEP exhibited continual signs of operation throughout the winter months," the website said. It pointed out that recent imagery shows "uniquely configured, specialized railcars" arriving and departing the UEP complex, which follows the past pattern of arriving two to three times a year at the complex, where they stay for around four weeks, possibly transferring chemical reagents. The report comes amid a prolonged stalemate in negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang aimed at dismantling the North's nuclear and ballistic missile programs in exchange for sanctions relief.

http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20210221000072&ACE_SEARCH=1

N.Korea enslaving political prisoners to fund weapons programme -S.Korea rights group

Hyonhee Shin

Reuters, February 25, 2021

North Korea has been enslaving political prisoners, including children, in coal production to boost exports and earn foreign currency as part of a system directly linked to its nuclear and missile programmes, a South Korea-based human rights group said. The Seoul-based Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights (NKHR) released a study analysing an intricate connection between North Korea's exploitation of its citizens, the production of goods for export, and its weapons programmes.

The report, titled "Blood Coal Export from North Korea: Pyramid scheme of earnings maintaining structures of power," said

Pyongyang had been operating a "pyramid fraud-like" scheme to force those held in prison camps to produce quotas of coal and other goods for export. Its findings offered a deeper look into how the camps contribute to North Korea's shady coal trade network, after the United Nations banned its commodity exports to choke off funding for Pyongyang's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, and after human rights agencies reported on gross rights violations within the camps. There was no immediate reaction from North Korea's diplomatic mission in Geneva to a request for comment.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/northkorea-missiles-rights/n-korea-enslaving-political-prisoners-to-fund-weapons-programme-s-korea-rights-group-idINL4N2KU2QT>

North Korea's Kim calls for tougher discipline in his military: KCNA

Sangmi Cha

Reuters, February 25, 2021

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un chaired a Central Military Commission meeting, state media KCNA said on Thursday, where he called for more control and discipline within the military. The meeting comes amid Kim's drive to rally his ruling Workers' Party to implement new policy goals for the next five years that were disclosed in a rare congress last month, including the ramping up of military power and greater nuclear war deterrence.

The meeting addressed a series of problems about political activities and discipline among military officials and called for tougher rules to control such matters. Kim said the establishment of revolutionary discipline within the military would decide the survival of the army and the success or failure of its activities, KCNA said.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN2AO2V1>

K. South Korea

N. Korea expands missile facilities, but no unusual signs at nuclear sites: defense ministry

Yonhap

Korea Herald, February 17, 2021

North Korea has been expanding missile development facilities, but has shown no unusual signs at its demolished nuclear testing site or its long-suspended plutonium-producing reactor, the defense ministry said. The assessment was made in a report the ministry presented to the National Assembly's defense committee for a policy briefing session. "No special movement has been spotted since May 24, 2018, when the North demolished the Punggyeri nuclear test site. The 5-megawatt nuclear reactor at the Yongbyon nuclear complex has long been suspended," the ministry said, referring to the North's main source of weapons-grade plutonium. "North Korea has been expanding facilities for missile research and development," the ministry added. Amid stalled denuclearization talks with the United States, the North has been working to beef up its missile and other conventional weapons.

Several new types of ballistic missiles have been unveiled since 2019, including its version of Russia's Iskander, and the US' Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS), as well as advanced submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). "By unveiling new ballistic missiles and new SLBMs, the North seeks to show off its defense capabilities and to raise the pride of the regime," the report read. The ministry also said that North Korea has heightened its ground and maritime defense posture near borders since late last year, and carried out regular military trainings. "To prevent accidents and curb the spread of the pandemic, troops are conducting the drills at around where they are stationed," according to the report. South Korea has been closely monitoring the North's military movements and maintains a firm readiness posture, the ministry said,

vowing to take strong measures against possible provocations.

http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20210217000796&ACE_SEARCH=1

Diplomats of S. Korea, US, Japan agree to closely cooperate on peninsula denuclearization, peace

Yonhap

Korea Herald, February 19, 2021

Diplomats of South Korea, the United States and Japan agreed to closely cooperate to achieve complete denuclearization and lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula in video talks Friday, the foreign ministry said. Seoul's top nuclear envoy, Noh Kyu-duk, Sung Kim, acting US assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, and Takehiro Funakoshi, director-general for Asian and Oceanian affairs at Tokyo's foreign ministry, held the conversation to discuss North Korea-related issues. "South Korea, the US and Japan shared their assessments on the recent situation on the Korean Peninsula and agreed to closely cooperate among the three countries to achieve complete denuclearization and lasting peace on the peninsula," the ministry said in a press release.

The ministry also said the three sides assessed the "utility" of their trilateral cooperation for peace and stability on the peninsula and in Northeast Asia and agreed to hold follow-up consultations at an appropriate time. Amid an ongoing review of its policy toward North Korea, the US has stressed the importance of close coordination with its key Asian allies, South Korea and Japan, which have been mired in protracted rows over wartime history and trade. In a separate press release, the State Department said the three countries held talks on "shared North Korea-related challenges."

http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20210219000310&ACE_SEARCH=1

Joint efforts of S. Korea, Japan critical to denuclearization of N. Korea: State Dept.

Yonhap

Korea Herald, February 20, 2021

Any US effort to denuclearize North Korea will not be as effective without the support and close cooperation of both South Korea and Japan, a US State Department official said Friday, highlighting the importance of the two US allies working together. Ned Price, press secretary at the State Department, also said three-way cooperation between the countries is important to promoting their shared values in the Indo-Pacific region. "We know that any approach to North Korea, one that puts denuclearization at the center as we plan to do, won't be effective if we are not working in tandem with our Japanese and Korean counterparts," Price told a telephonic press conference.

The US is undergoing a review of its North Korea policy that it says will lead to a new US approach toward the North Korean nuclear issue. Price, however, has said a new approach would only be as effective and important as bringing US allies, including South Korea and Japan, to the same page as the US. His latest remarks also come amid soured relations between the two US allies in Asia.

http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20210220000031&ACE_SEARCH=1

Vice FM urges N. Korea to return to nuke dialogue at UN disarmament conference

Yonhap

Korea Herald, February 23, 2021

First Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong-kun urged North Korea on Tuesday to return to denuclearization talks, saying that the peace process on the Korean Peninsula is the path that must be taken, the foreign ministry said.

Choi made the remark in a speech he delivered virtually for the high-level segment of the UN Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, as he explained Seoul's ongoing efforts to engage with Pyongyang toward

the goal of building a nuclear-free peninsula and lasting peace in the region. "We have chosen this route not because we want to, but because we have to. Building upon the hard-won momentum thus far, we will continue to work with our friends and partners to achieve our shared goal of complete denuclearization through peaceful means," Choi said, according to the ministry. "In the same vein, we ask the DPRK to respond to our call for the resumption of dialogue," he said, referring North Korea by its official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. "In the course, we count on the unwavering support of the international community," he added.

http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20210223001106&ACE_SEARCH=1

Upcoming military exercise with US should be postponed or halted: expert

Yonhap

Korea Herald, February 25, 2021

South Korea should put off or suspend its combined springtime military exercise with the United States as part of efforts to improve inter-Korean relations, a researcher at a state-run think tank said. Kim Sang-ki, a researcher at the state-run Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU), made the point in a report amid concern that the joint exercise, expected to take place next month, could provide North Korea with a pretext for provocations. "It is necessary to postpone the combined exercises in March to restart inter-Korean dialogue and to review the idea of forming a joint military committee with the North to discuss the issue of military exercise and arms buildup," the expert said.

The joint computer-simulated command post training is expected to kick off around the second week of March and last for about 10 days. But exactly when and how the exercise will be staged has not yet been announced. Suh Hoon, South Korea's national security adviser, told lawmakers that the upcoming drill would be held in an adjusted manner, involving a reduced

number of troops and without outdoor drills amid the virus situation. Seoul and Washington usually carry out major combined exercises twice a year, in spring and summer, along with smaller-scale drills throughout the year.

http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20210225000957&ACE_SEARCH=1

S. Korean top nuke envoy holds virtual talks on N. Korea with senior US diplomat

Yonhap

Korea herald, February 25, 2021

South Korea's top nuclear envoy held video talks with a senior US diplomat Thursday about North Korea's denuclearization and related issues, the foreign ministry said. The talks between Noh Kyu-duk and Sung Kim, acting US assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, came as the new US administration of President Joe Biden has been conducting a review of policy on North Korea. The US has stressed that the policy review will be carried out in close consultations with South Korea and other allies.

"The two sides noted that there has been close bilateral cooperation and coordination between the two countries in the process of the US policy review on North Korea, and exchanged in-depth opinions on ways to bring progress in the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and building lasting peace," the ministry said. The two sides also agreed to continue consultations on the issue at every level, the ministry added.

http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20210225000623&ACE_SEARCH=1

L. Japan

State again found liable for Fukushima nuclear accident

The Asahi Shimbun, February 20, 2021

Yet another high court has found the central government as liable as Tokyo Electric Power Co. for not taking steps to prevent the triple meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in 2011. The Tokyo High

Court's Feb. 19 decision was based on the issuance of a report that pointed to the possibility of a large tsunami striking the Fukushima area. It determined that the central government's failure to act on the report's findings was "illegal" and ordered it and TEPCO to pay a total of about 280 million yen (\$2.7 million) to 43 plaintiffs now living in Chiba Prefecture.

The plaintiffs moved to the prefecture next to Tokyo after they were forced to evacuate in the aftermath of the nuclear accident triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. The Chiba District Court ruled in September 2017 that only TEPCO was legally liable to pay compensation, so the plaintiffs appealed to the high court. About 30 lawsuits have been filed around Japan seeking compensation from TEPCO and the central government by plaintiffs who argue that their lives were thrown into turmoil after they were forced to evacuate due to the nuclear accident. Of the 14 rulings already handed down in district courts, there is an even split in whether the central government was liable. The Feb. 19 ruling was the third by a high court. The Sendai High Court in September 2020 found the central government liable, but another presiding judge in the Tokyo High Court handed down a ruling in January that did not recognize responsibility on the part of the central government. The Supreme Court is expected to eventually make a ruling covering all of the high court cases. At issue once again was the reliability of a long-term assessment of the probability of major earthquakes released by the science ministry's Headquarters for Earthquake Research Promotion in July 2002. The report pointed out that Fukushima Prefecture could be hit by a massive tsunami

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14206399>

Fukushima poll: 74% say nuclear disaster work not promising

Noriyoshi Ohtsuki

February 24, 2021

Only 19 percent of residents in Fukushima Prefecture believe the work to

decommission the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant is showing “promise” nearly 10 years after the triple meltdown, a survey showed. Seventy-four percent of respondents in the telephone survey said the situation was “not promising” at Tokyo Electric Power Co.’s nuclear plant. The survey, jointly conducted by The Asahi Shimbun and Fukushima Broadcasting Co. on Feb. 20 and 21, is the 11th since the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami caused the nuclear disaster in March 2011.

The first was conducted in September 2011, followed by surveys on February or March every year from 2012. The central government and TEPCO have set a goal of completing the decommissioning work “in 30 to 40 years,” but their efforts so far have been hit with various problems and delays. Although evacuation orders have been lifted, many residents who fled the disaster have not returned to their homes near the plant. Still, the government plans to entice people to move into municipalities around the nuclear plant. According to the survey, 21 percent of respondents viewed the new settlement policy as “promising” for revitalizing the area, compared with 72 percent who said it was “not promising.” One constant problem in the decommissioning work is the continual stream of contaminated water that must be stored in tanks at the site of the plant.

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14216668>

All spent fuel finally removed from reactor at Fukushima plant

The Asahi Shimbun, February 28, 2021

Hazardous work to remove all spent nuclear fuel from a reactor storage pool at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant was finally completed Feb. 28, Tokyo Electric Power Co. said. It marked the first time for any of the storage pools at the three stricken reactors to be emptied out, and came less than two weeks before the 10th anniversary of the triple meltdown at the nuclear complex in Fukushima Prefecture northeast of Tokyo. The two-year effort involved the removal of all the 566 spent fuel units left in the pool in the No. 3 reactor’s building.

Completion of the removal work at the No. 3 reactor building, severely damaged by a hydrogen explosion during the meltdown, eased concerns about the overall safety of the embattled plant. The No. 3 reactor’s storage pool is situated on an upper floor of the building, posing a danger due to fears of another powerful earthquake damaging the structure and jeopardizing TEPCO’s ability to cool them. Spent fuel needs to be kept cool as it emits high levels of radiation and decaying heat. The utility planned to move the spent fuel from the No. 3 reactor’s pool to a shared pool for storage on the grounds of the plant to ensure the spent fuel can be safely managed.

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14228330>

M. Misc

In Israel and the Gulf, Reaction to U.S. Push for Iran Talks Is Muted but Wary

Patrick Kingsley and Vivian Yee

The New York Times, February 19, 2021

When the United States last tried to negotiate a nuclear deal with Iran, the reaction from the Israeli government was blunt and fierce. In the years preceding Iran’s 2015 agreement with Washington and several other leading powers, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel repeatedly called the negotiations a “historic mistake.” But on Friday, the formal announcement that the Biden administration was seeking a return to nuclear negotiations with Iran, after the collapse of the 2015 agreement under President Trump, did not provoke a sharp backlash — not just in Jerusalem, but also in the Gulf nations of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which also oppose too generous a rapprochement with Iran.

The muted response from Iran’s regional antagonists may mask a strong undercurrent of pessimism and behind-the-scenes pushback against the Americans’ decision. Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates remain wary of Iran’s

intentions, and have signaled that they would be open to a deal only if it went well beyond the previous one – reining in Iran’s ballistic missile program, its meddling in other countries and the militias it supports in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen and elsewhere, in addition to its nuclear program. Mr. Netanyahu’s office issued a brief statement, avoiding direct comment on the American intention to negotiate, but noting that Israel was in contact with the United States. “Israel remains committed to preventing Iran from getting nuclear weapons, and its position on the nuclear agreement has not changed,” the statement said. “Israel believes that going back to the old agreement will pave Iran’s path to a nuclear arsenal.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/19/world/middleeast/israel-gulf-iran-talks-biden.html>

West concerned by closer Russia-China ties, top NATO general says

Reuters, February 23, 2021

The United States and its Western allies are increasingly concerned about growing cooperation between Russia and China in areas of common interest, NATO’s top general said on Wednesday. The Pentagon has put countering China and Russia at the centre of its strategy since 2018, even though U.S. defence spending outstrips that of Moscow and Beijing.

In 2018, China and Russia held their largest-ever joint military exercises, featuring 300,000 Russian troops. And in 2019, Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping oversaw the launch of a three-decade pipeline project to transport natural gas from Siberia to northeast China.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-russia-china-military-idUSKBN2A32KK>

Syria condemns ‘cowardly’ U.S. air strikes on Iran-backed militias

Maha El Dahan, Amina Ismail

Reuters, February 26, 2021

Syria said U.S. air strikes against Iranian-backed militias in the east of the country on Friday were a cowardly act and urged

President Joe Biden not to follow “the law of the jungle”. An Iraqi militia official close to Iran said the strikes killed one fighter and wounded four. U.S. officials said they were limited in scope to show Biden’s administration will act firmly while trying to avoid a big regional escalation. Washington and Tehran are seeking maximum leverage in attempts to save Iran’s nuclear deal reached with world powers in 2015 but abandoned in 2018 by then-President Donald Trump, after which regional tensions soared and fears of full-scale conflict grew. “Syria condemns in the strongest terms the cowardly U.S. attack on areas in Deir al-Zor near the Syrian-Iraqi border,” the Syrian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN2AQ1KW>

N. Op-ed

India

India’s relationships with its nuclear neighbours seems to be calming down

Sudhi Ranjan Sen, Ismail Dilawar and Archana Chaudhary

Business Live, February 26, 2021

After a year of some of the worst fighting on India’s frontiers with Pakistan and China, all three countries are suddenly talking peace as they wait to see how US President Joe Biden will shift policy in the region.

On Thursday, India and China’s top diplomats discussed plans to disengage troops from their Himalayan border, which, last year, saw the deadliest clashes since the 1970s. The call between Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, which stretched for more than an hour, came shortly after India and Pakistan released a rare joint statement by senior army officials announcing a halt in operations along their border.

<https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/world/asia/2021-02-26-indias-relationships-with-its-nuclear-neighbours-seems-to-be-calming-down/>

China

China explores space with self-reliance, open mind

Xinhua, February 23, 2021

Chinese President Xi Jinping met representatives of space scientists and engineers who participated in the research and development of the Chang'e-5 lunar mission in Beijing. Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, also visited an exhibition on the lunar samples brought back by the Chang'e-5 probe and the achievements of China's lunar explorations. The Chang'e-5 probe, comprising an orbiter, a lander, an ascender and a returner, was launched on Nov. 24, 2020. The return capsule landed on Dec. 17, retrieving about 1,731 grams of lunar samples. As China's most complicated space project, the Chang'e-5 mission has achieved extraterrestrial sampling and returning for the first time. It is another major achievement in overcoming difficulties by giving full play to the advantages of the new system of pooling national resources and strength, marking a great step forward in China's space industry.

With the goal of realizing the country's self-reliance and self-improvement in science and technology, Chinese scientists are doing their best to ensure core technologies are self-developed and controllable by China, while keeping the initiative for innovation and development securely in its own hands. Self-confidence can keep a nation moving forward steadily on the road to the future. Independent innovation improves such confidence remarkably. It is self-reliance that has enabled China to stand firmly among the nations of the world, and no country or force can stop China's step toward new heights in science and technology.

http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-02/23/c_139760803.htm

China has made great efforts and played a key role to bring the JCPOA back on track: FM

Global Times February 24, 2021

China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin's Regular Press Conference on February 24, 2021.

Q: Iran said on February 23 it had started to restrict some site inspections by the IAEA. The foreign ministers of France, Germany, and Britain said in a joint statement that they "deeply regret" the move by Iran. Permanent Representative of Russia to the IAEA said that Moscow hopes Iran's suspension of the Additional Protocol of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) will not last for a long period of time. Do you have any comment on this? We noted that there have been frequent interactions on the issue of U.S. return to the JCPOA in recent days. What has China done with respect to that?

A: China highly values the Iranian nuclear issue, actively advances the political and diplomatic settlement process, and upholds the international non-proliferation regime as well as peace and stability in the Middle East. China has made great efforts and played a key role in order to bring the JCPOA back on track. Besides, the principal official of the MFA's Department of Arms Control stays in close communication with all parties of the Iranian nuclear deal. China will continue to preserve the JCPOA, work for the resumption of full and effective compliance at an early date so as to better safeguard peace and stability in the Middle East. The Iranian nuclear situation is at a critical juncture, presenting both opportunities and challenges. China always holds that U.S. return to the JCPOA and lifting of sanctions on Iran holds the key to breaking the deadlock. China appreciates the reaching of a temporary bilateral technical understanding on the safeguards issue

between Iran and the IAEA and noticed that both sides have spoken highly of this result. China hopes that the relevant understanding could be faithfully implemented and urges other parties to play a constructive role in this process.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202102/1216483.shtml>

Pakistan

Shaheen-III: balancing the unbalanced

Rabia Javed

The Nation, February 16, 2021

Pakistan recently test-fired surface-to-surface ballistic missile, Shaheen III. Capable of carrying a nuclear warhead, the missile is estimated to have a maximum range of 2750 km. The missile is solid-fuelled and equipped with Post-Separation Altitude Correction (PSAC) system.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee Gen Nadeem Raza, who witnessed the test, said, "Pakistan desires peaceful co-existence in the region and its strategic capability is to deter any aggression against the sovereignty of Pakistan." The successful test launch was also warmly appreciated by the President and Prime Minister Imran Khan who congratulated the scientists and engineers on achieving another outstanding milestone.

<https://nation.com.pk/16-Feb-2021/shaheen-iii-balancing-the-unbalanced>

Significance of the nuclear weapons ban treaty

Syed Mohammad Ali

The Express Tribune, February 26, 2021

One has not seen much media attention within Pakistan to the recent ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). It is not only Pakistan, but the other eight nuclear-armed states too, which are trying to ignore the TPNW. Yet, ignoring emerging global consensus concerning a nuclear weapons ban may not

prove possible in the long run. TPNW has now become the first legally binding international agreement aiming to eliminate nuclear weapons. Advocates of nuclear disarmament have long cited the existential danger of nuclear weapons and described an international ban on them a moral imperative.

The possession and further development of nuclear weapons does indisputably pose grave dangers for humanity and the natural environment. Consider the situation in nuclearised South Asia, which is considered the most dangerous nuclear flashpoint in the world. Deterrence stability has thus far held despite several recent low-level conflicts between India and Pakistan, Yet, an escalating nuclear arms race increases fears of a nuclear conflict due to miscalculation or accident.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2286254/significance-of-the-nuclear-weapons-ban-treaty>

USA

Joe Biden Should Make a Peace Offer to North Korea

Doug Bandow

National Interest Blog, February 27, 2021

The Republic of Korea (ROK) and Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) are at war. The latter also is at war with America. And the People's Republic of China is at war with the ROK. No, hostilities did not break out overnight. Nobody pushed their nuclear button, big or small. Wikipedia has not added a listing for the Second Korean War.

Rather, the original Korean War never ended. An armistice took effect on July 27, 1953, halting the firing. But a state of war formally remains. And violence has often flared over the years, as North Korea sought to destabilize the ROK and embarrass the United States.

<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/korea-watch/joe-biden-should-make-peace-offer-north-korea-178990>

Russia

Russia and Iran: A Growing Navy Alliance?

Mark Episkopos

National Interest Blog, February 17, 2021

The Iranian Army's press office reported earlier this week that the Russian and Iranian Navies will stage joint exercises on Feb. 16. The drills will cover an area of around seventeen thousand square kilometers, involving anti-piracy and counterterrorism operations as well as maneuvers against aerial and naval targets. The drills are partially aimed at boosting the security of maritime trade in the region, according to Iranian state media. There are reports that long-range missiles, drones, and tanks will be employed throughout the course of the exercises, though details remain murky. Jamaran, the lead ship of Iran's Moudge-class frigates, took part in the drills. A source of continued pride for Iran's Navy and defense industry, Jamaran—which was commissioned in 2010—is Iran's first locally built frigate. In keeping with the asymmetrical themes of the exercises, Russian attack helicopters will reportedly provide air support. Also represented on the Russian side is the Stoikiy corvette, the fourth entry in Russia's new Steregushchiy-class line of corvettes. Of the Russian Navy's twenty-four planned Steregushchiy-class corvettes, eight have been completed.

Rear Adm. Gholamreza Tahani, the deputy commander of the Iranian Navy, added that the exercises are open to participation from third parties. "The exercise we're conducting with Russia is so flexible that not only one other country, but several others could join in later if they wish to do so," Tahani said. The invitation was promptly taken up by China, which is now expected to participate in the drills. India, too, has requested to take part in the exercises.

<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/russia-and-iran-growing-navy-alliance-178334>

West Asia

Iran

IISS: How to curb Iran's missile program

Azin Sahabi

Tehran Times, February 17, 2021

The Iranian Parliament (Majlis) passed a bill some two months ago that obliges the government to reduce commitments to the JCPOA if sanctions are not lifted within two months. A part of the approval, titled "Strategic Action to Lift Sanctions and Protect the Nation's Rights", entails halting the implementation of the Additional Protocol to the NPT if the sanctions are not lifted by February 23. Abolfazl Amouei, the spokesman for the Iranian Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, told the Tehran Times on February 14, 2021, lawmakers are very serious to enforce the law.

In this context, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), a pro-Israel think tank that is quite close to the AIPAC, has commented on Tehran's official stance towards voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol. Against this backdrop, recommendations on Iran's missile program are also worth mentioning. For instance, Mark Fitzpatrick, an expert on nuclear issues at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) has discussed Iran's missile program and how to limit it. "A double-edged sword" In a policy analysis on Feb 11, 2021, Omer Carmi, a former fellow at WINEP and West Asia expert at the IDF (Israel Defense Force), describes the "Strategic Action to Lift Sanctions and Protect the Nation's Rights" as a means to give "Washington a sense of urgency". He argues that "this approach could be a double-edged sword." Carmi believes that Iran's position towards the JCPOA is a clear message to Washington that the Iranian party will arrive at the negotiation table with a clear playbook in hand to fulfill "a unified purpose."

WINEP stresses that Tehran is not in a hurry to conclude a deal and prefers to take the "Wait-and-See" strategy since its final goal "is not a deal with Washington, but rather the removal of all sanctions." As usual, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, one of the main architects of the Iran sanctions, accuses Tehran of conducting covert nuclear military researches, holding clandestine nuclear sites and insists that "Possible Military Dimensions" of Iran's nuclear program must be addressed. While repeating constant groundless accusations against Tehran, Carmi tries to turn the opposite side of the coin of suspending more commitments under the JCPOA by Tehran. In this regard, the Israeli military expert believes that implementing the parliamentary law may induce a sense of urgency in the Oval Office, but the move indicates that "Iran is repeating its past errors with the IAEA".

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/458220/IISS-How-to-curb-Iran-s-missile-program>

Israel

For Israel, the Iran Threat Extends Far Beyond Nuclear Weapons

Seth J. Frantzman

National Interest Blog, February 25, 2021

Israel has faced Iran's threats to develop a nuclear weapon for more than a decade. Now Tehran is once again indicating it may enrich uranium upwards of sixty percent and is moving to install advanced centrifuges at Natanz and Fordow, key nuclear facilities. While Iran's posturing may be designed initially as leverage to get the United States to enter a new nuclear deal, as Washington once signed in 2015, the larger context is how Israeli strategy sees the threat.

In a conversation with a senior defense official in Israel, the key issues facing the country's regional assessment were laid out. What follows is based on the discussion with the official, underlining some key assessments of the region and the U.S. approach today. It also touches on Israel's hope that France's President Emmanuel Macron will support Israel's position and the larger regional partnerships Israel now has

in the Gulf. With a new U.S. administration, there are expected changes in how much focus will be placed on the Middle East by President Joe Biden and his team. His phone calls to world leaders bypassed Israel initially. Now he is reaching out, but expectations are that he will focus on the domestic Covid-19 crisis and also big picture issues like China's challenge.

<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/israel-iran-threat-extends-far-beyond-nuclear-weapons-178820>

East Asia

Safety measures against powerful quakes need quick shoring up

The Asahi Shimbun, February 16, 2021

For many people, the powerful quake on the night of Feb. 13 must have come as a disquieting reminder of the Great East Japan Earthquake 10 years ago. The quake, which occurred off the coast of Fukushima Prefecture, recorded a maximum intensity of upper 6 on the Japanese scale of 7, injuring many people in Fukushima and Miyagi prefectures. Many suffered injuries as they fell or were hit by falling objects. Aftershocks have continued, and heavy rain fell, as if pouring salt on the wound. To add to the misery, weather forecasts warn that it will become as cold as midwinter in the middle of this week.

The Fukushima prefectural government has decided to apply the disaster relief law to affected municipalities to provide support. Even though the novel coronavirus has been relatively under control in the Tohoku region, there is no room for complacency. Administrative authorities should make all-out efforts to prevent secondary damage from the temblor and help residents rebuild their lives while doing the best possible job of preventing the spread of infections. Multiple nuclear power facilities are located in areas shaken violently. Fortunately, none of them has suffered notable damage. But we find it hard not to worry about the Fukushima No. 1

nuclear power plant. Water is being poured into the No. 1-3 reactors to cool debris of melted nuclear fuel from the accident triggered by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, accumulating highly radioactive water. A large amount of nuclear fuel also remains in pools to store spent fuel. With decommissioning work delayed by these sticky problems, what if the crippled plant is hit by another gigantic earthquake?

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14194106>

Government is being reckless in extending lives of aging reactors

The Asahi Shimbun, February 18, 2021

The government is pushing to strip the teeth from a nuclear safety rule that imposes a 40-year limit on the operational lifespan of reactors in Japan. By doing so, it is ignoring the grim reality that its program to establish a nuclear fuel recycling system is bankrupt. Furthermore, the government is quietly supporting moves that effectively eviscerate long-established promises between utilities operating reactors and local governments of the nuclear host communities. The government is pursuing an extremely irresponsible policy of extending the lives of many aging reactors.

The process is moving forward to win the consent of local governments needed to restart three currently offline reactors in Fukui Prefecture operated by Kansai Electric Power Co. (KEPCO), which have been in service for more than four decades. They are the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors at the Takahama nuclear power plant and the No. 3 reactor at the Mihama nuclear plant, operated by the Osaka-based electric utility. After these reactors cleared the regulatory inspection by the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA), the mayors of Takahama and Mihama, the towns in the prefecture where the plants are located, and the town assemblies, respectively, agreed to KEPCO's plans to bring the reactors back on stream. All that remains is to obtain approval from Fukui Governor Tatsuji Sugimoto and the prefectural assembly.

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14198725>

Key partnership

Korea Herald, February 17, 2021

Seoul's top national security officials agreed during their meeting last week to step up efforts to improve South Korea-Japan relations that have long been strained by disputes over the history of the two countries. Their agreement follows President Moon Jae-in's suggestion last month that his government would handle pending issues with Tokyo in a more flexible manner to forge a forward-looking bilateral partnership.

Ties between the two nations have sunken to one of its lowest ebbs over issues stemming from Japan's 1910-45 colonization of the peninsula, which have spilled over to the economic and military realms in recent years. In the eyes of critics, the Moon administration was negligent in seeking to find diplomatic solutions to historical discord with Tokyo, letting them get complicated by court rulings here. Some of Moon's associates and ruling party lawmakers appeared to attempt to fuel anti-Japanese sentiment in a bid to rally voters ahead of last April's legislative elections.

Seoul's professed shift in its approach to the frayed ties with Tokyo seems prompted partly by Washington's renewed push to strengthen trilateral cooperation with its two key Asian allies to counter nuclear threats from North Korea and keep a rising China in check. US President Joe Biden's administration has named the North as one of the most serious challenges facing the US, while calling China as its largest strategic competitor in the region and world. In phone talks with his South Korean counterpart Chung Eui-yong on Friday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stressed the importance of continued cooperation among the US, South Korea and Japan, while pledging full partnership to strengthen the Washington-Seoul alliance. Seoul appears concerned that estranged ties with Tokyo would hamper smooth consultations with Washington on how to deal with Pyongyang.

http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20210216001002&ACE_SEARCH=1

Duty posture

Korea Herald, February 25, 2021

The results of a probe into the military's latest failure to promptly spot a North Korean defector have once again revealed lax discipline in South Korea's armed forces. The defector, a civilian in his 20s, was caught on military surveillance cameras on the South's eastern coast 10 times after he swam ashore last week. But soldiers on guard duty failed to notice the first eight of these scenes even though alarm bells rang on two occasions, according to the inquiry conducted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He was ultimately captured more than six hours after coming ashore some 3.2 kilometers south of the Military Demarcation Line. He moved along a road undetected for more than 5 kilometers before soldiers guarding the civilian control line noticed him on security cameras, twice, and reported the situation to their superiors.

Announcing the results of its probe Tuesday, the JCS vowed to tighten discipline among service members and supplement the surveillance system along the border. The South Korean public is all too familiar with security breaches followed by pledges by the country's military to strengthen guard duty, only to see such carelessness repeated. Three months ago a North Korean civilian was captured hours after he crossed the inter-Korean border by jumping over barbed wire fences in Goseong, Gangwon Province, in what was seen as a defection attempt. In 2019, a wooden boat carrying four North Koreans arrived at an eastern South Korean port undetected.

http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20210224000991&ACE_SEARCH=1

O. Think Tanks

Brazil's Angra 3 nuclear reactor: a political undertaking, not a common good

Carolina Basso

Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, February 16, 2021

In 2019 the Brazilian government decided to resume work at Angra 3, a nuclear reactor

where construction has been essentially dormant for more than three decades. The work was supposed to restart last year, with the reactor entering commercial service by late 2026, but COVID-19 and the quest for private partners to invest in the project have pushed back the schedule. Brazil currently has two operating nuclear power plants, Angra 1 and 2, that have generated less than three percent of the country's electricity since their commercial launch. So why does Brazil want to resume construction of a third nuclear reactor?

Angra 3 is questionable in economic and energy-related terms. Studies have shown that the country can generate electricity much more cheaply by integrating wind power with Brazil's considerable hydropower resources. Analysts suggest that this combined system could supply all the electricity the population demands, making any expansion of the nuclear industry sector unnecessary and costly.

<https://thebulletin.org/2021/02/brazils-angra-3-nuclear-reactor-a-political-undertaking-not-a-common-good/>

Strengthening international cooperation on artificial intelligence

Joshua P. Meltzer and Cameron F. Kerry

Brookings, February 17, 2021

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a potentially transformational technology that will have broad social, economic, national security, and geopolitical implications for the United States and the world. AI is not one particular technology but a general-purpose technology combining software and hardware in systems that enable technologies (machine learning, knowledge representation, and other forms of computerized approximation of human intelligence). This general-purpose nature means that AI could have wide-ranging economic impacts across manufacturing, transportation, health, education, and many other sectors. In 2018, the McKinsey Global Institute estimated that AI could add around 16 percent, or \$13 trillion, to global output

by 2030. Since then COVID-19 has further accelerated the use of AI.

While the United States is the world leader in AI, China is catching up fast (and may lead in some areas) and other governments are expanding their own AI capacity. Rather than a zero-sum game, many such efforts can be additive, benefiting global welfare. The U.S. can encourage and support AI efforts that seek to develop and compete on fair terms. Other national policies—China's above all—seek to erect barriers to free and open development of AI, appropriating the benefits for their national champions and applying AI as a geopolitical lever. Such policies could distort the development and benefits of AI for humanity, make the world less secure for the U.S. and allies, and markets less receptive to U.S. products and services.

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/strengthening-international-cooperation-on-artificial-intelligence/>

Rethinking the artificial intelligence race

Michael Depp

Observer Research Foundation, February 26, 2021

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become a buzzword in technology in both civilian and military contexts. With interest comes a radical increase in extravagant promises, wild speculation, and over-the-top fantasies, coupled with funding to attempt to make them all possible. In spite of this fervor, AI technology must overcome several hurdles: it is costly, susceptible to data poisoning and bad design, difficult for humans to understand, and tailored for specific problems. No amount of money has eradicated these challenges, yet companies and governments have plunged headlong into developing and adopting AI wherever possible. This has bred a desire to determine who is "ahead" in the AI "race," often by examining who is deploying or planning to deploy an AI system. But given the many problems AI faces as a technology its deployment is less of a clue about its quality and more of a snapshot of the culture and worldview of the deployer. Instead,

measuring the AI race is best done by not looking at AI deployment but by taking a broader view of the underlying scientific capacity to produce it in the future.

<https://www.orfonline.org/research/rethinking-the-artificial-intelligence-race/>

North Korea's economic crisis: Last chance for denuclearization?

Evans J.R. Revere

Brookings, February 26, 2021

North Korea is in trouble. The COVID-19 pandemic, self-imposed isolation and lockdowns, crop failures, sanctions, and more have put the economy in a parlous state, a fact acknowledged by Kim Jong Un himself. The state planning mechanism seems broken, foreign exchange holdings are down, state revenue is shrinking, foreign trade numbers have collapsed, and growth is declining. The measures taken thus far by the regime to deal with the crisis seem unlikely to turn things around. Indeed, they may make matters worse, especially if Pyongyang follows through on plans to divert scarce resources to expand its nuclear weapons and missile programs.

Despite its difficulties, don't count Pyongyang out. For decades, the North Korean regime has demonstrated remarkable determination, diplomatic dexterity, and uncanny survival skills. And the DPRK has the support of China, which is prepared to live with Pyongyang's nuclear status and committed to keeping the regime on "life support." North Korea is down, but hardly out.

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/north-koreas-economic-crisis-last-chance-for-denuclearization/>

Biden's decision to strike Iran's proxies is a good start

Ranj Alaaldin

Brookings, February 26, 2021

President Joe Biden's decision to strike Iran-aligned groups in Syria last night follows a spate of rocket attacks launched against

U.S. targets in Iraq this past week, including last week's attack on U.S. and coalition personnel in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The Erbil attack was President Biden's first major test with Iran, an escalation and provocation carried out by Iran-aligned militias that killed one civilian contractor and wounded nine others. It also resulted in the death of one Iraqi civilian. The 14 rockets launched by Iran's proxies constituted the first major attack by such groups to take place under the Biden administration's watch.

The U.S. strike targeting Ketaib Hezbollah and Ketaib Sayyid al-Shuhada is a welcome and measured response, one that balances the need to respond to Iranian proxy attacks while ensuring that countries like Iraq do not become engulfed in widespread violence and instability, which Iran and its allies can exploit to enhance their influence. It helps the Erbil and Baghdad governments prevent Iran's proxies from discrediting their authority. Those governments seek to avoid becoming drawn into political and military conflicts with Iran's proxies – which would play into the hands of the militias – and instead maintain their focus on addressing the economic crisis.

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/02/26/bidens-decision-to-strike-irans-proxies-is-a-good-start/>

Biden recalibrates approach towards Saudi Arabia but also warns Iran

Anchal Vohra

Observer Research Foundation, February 27, 2021

The Biden administration declassified the CIA's report on the killing of Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi in a huge embarrassment to Saudi Arabia and its Crown Prince Mohamad Bin Salman (MBS), the man first in line to be king. The report held MBS responsible for the dismemberment and disappearance of Jamal Khashoggi's body inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October 2018.

In another development Biden administration formally offered to reinjoin

talks to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action between the US and Iran, popularly known as the US-Iran nuclear deal, if Iran complies with its commitment. Iran, however, is playing hard to get. Iran's Foreign Minister Javed Zarif, the man who was Tehran's key interlocutor in the deal in 2015, said that first, the US must "unconditionally and effectively lift all sanctions," and only then will Iran fully comply to the agreement. Iran has exceeded the limit set on uranium enrichment since Trump walked out of the deal.

<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/biden-recalibrates-approach-saudi-arabia-also-warns-iran/>

The ineffectiveness of economic sanctions

Saaransh Mishra

Observer Research foundation, February 28, 2021

Economic sanctions are instruments of statecraft where there is a use or threat of use of economic capacity by a state or an international organisation against another state or group of states to alter behaviours. These behaviours range from proliferation of nuclear weapons, compromising human rights, harbouring terrorists, engagement in armed aggression and replacement of incumbent repressive governments. The economic threat is imposed mostly through means such as arms embargoes, asset freezes, trade restrictions, visa and travel bans besides others.

Barring effectiveness, precedents such as Iraq, North Korea, and Iran also bear testimony to the gargantuan humanitarian crises that such sanctions trigger. Owing to prior reliance on imports for two-thirds of its food supply, the punitive financial and trade embargo imposed on Iraq in 1990 due to the invasion of Kuwait led to a price-rise of basic commodities by an astonishing 1,000 percent between 1990-1995. This resulted in a 150 percent increase in infant mortality rate and at least 670,000 children

under-five died due to impoverished conditions. Parallely, the World Food Programme's estimates from 2019 show that approximately 43.4 percent (11 million) of the population in North Korea remains undernourished. The report states that the international trade restrictions only exacerbate the pre-existing food insecurity and malnutrition. Although Iran is cited as a sanctions-success story due to the signing of the Iran Nuclear Deal in 2015, the economic burden of these sanctions had already pushed 30 percent of the population into absolute poverty by 2017-2018. This segment of the population was estimated to be living on US \$1.08 a day. The Iranian Parliament's Research Centre also estimated that the sanctions-induced inflation will result in nearly 57 million Iranians living in poverty by March, 2020.

<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-ineffectiveness-of-economic-sanctions/>

Contribute Articles

Indian Pugwash Society welcomes research articles from students, researchers and faculties on Space, Missile, nuclear technology, WMD proliferation, arms control, disarmament, export controls and other related issues. Articles should be crisply written and should address contemporary debates in the policy arena. Manuscripts submitted for the consideration of the Indian Pugwash Society should be original contributions and should not have been submitted for consideration anywhere else. For further assistance, please contact us at : indianpugwashsociety@gmail.com

The Indian Pugwash Society aims to promote the study, discussion, and knowledge of and to stimulate general interest in, and to diffuse knowledge in regards to problems relating on WMD proliferation, arms control, disarmament, space security, export controls, nuclear technology and other related issues. This newsletter is part of the project "Emerging Nuclear Order in Asia: Implications for India" sanctioned to us by Department of Atomic Energy-Board of Research in Nuclear Sciences (DAE-BRNS).

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