

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani said the Islamic Republic is prepared to deploy its forces to Syria to maintain the security of the de-escalation zones in the war-torn country. “Iran is very serious in fighting terrorism and establishing peace and stability in Syria,” Shamkhani said in an interview with the Russian newspaper Kommersant. “If Iran is requested to perform additional actions (in Syria), such as sending troops to maintain order and security in the de-escalation zones, we are prepared to consider this issue,” he said.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- A senior commander of Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) was martyred fighting Daesh west of the Iraqi city of Mosul, the Tasnim news agency reported Saturday. “Commander Shaaban Nassiri was martyred in operations to free the area west of Mosul,” the Tasnim news agency quoted the IRGC as saying. Nassiri was martyred near Baaj, one of the last cities which remain under Daesh control, near the Syrian border. Nassiri fought in the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988 and has had a supervisory role in Syria.

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G7 Summit Ends Amid Clash With U.S.

TAORMINA, Italy (AFP) – G7 nations risked unprecedented deadlock Saturday as U.S. President Donald Trump resisted pressure to sign up to joint positions on hot-button issues such as climate change, trade and migration. The Group of Seven leading democracies began the concluding day of their annual summit in discussions with leaders from Ethiopia, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, and Tunisia. The five African states are key players in the Mediterranean migration crisis, as countries of origin or transit for hundreds of thousands of migrants attempting to reach Europe via perilous crossings of the Mediterranean. The G7’s Italian presidency placed this year’s summit in Sicily to underline the proximity of the crisis. But even that has prompted discord among the summiters as Trump, according to Italian sources, resists the hosts’ desire to issue a declaration underlining the benefits as well as pitfalls of migration. That sort of language is anathema to a White House that wants to impose a ban on travelers from six Muslim-majority countries. After starting his first presidential trip abroad wreathed in smiles, Trump is ending it with rebukes, upbraiding America’s European partners over military spending, trade and global warming. An enduring motif of the G7, which represents the lion’s share of global economic output, has been to champion free trade. At last year’s summit in Japan,

it issued a lengthy communique in support of resisting protectionism, as well as helping refugees and fighting climate change. But that was then, when Barack Obama still occupied the White House. Today, his successor is defiant about stepping out of the G7 line. “His basis for decision ultimately will be what’s best for the United States,” top economic adviser Gary Cohn said at the annual talks in Sicily’s ancient hilltop resort of Taormina. Cohn was referring to whether Trump will execute his threat to walk away from the Paris accord on combating climate change. That means the G7 is unlikely also to reprise its oft-used terminology against protectionism, after Trump in Brussels this week reportedly described the Germans as “bad, very bad” in their trade practices. It is a measure of the gulf that the Italians say they expect the final statement to come in at just six pages when it is released Saturday afternoon -- down from 32 pages last year. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said at the conclusion of the G7 summit that a debate between leaders over climate had been “very unsatisfying”, noting the United States had been totally isolated in its refusal to commit to the 2015 Paris climate agreement. “The entire discussion about climate was very difficult, if not to say very dissatisfying,” Merkel told reporters. “There are no indications whether the United States will stay in the Paris Agreement or not.”

Putin, Rouhani Vow More Efforts on Syria



Iran and Russia assist Syrian troops in their battle against foreign-backed terrorists.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iran’s Hassan Rouhani held a phone call in which they stressed the need for more joint efforts to resolve the Syria crisis and discussed economic ties, the Kremlin said Saturday. The Kremlin added that Putin congratulated Rouhani on his recent election win. It clarified that the economic issues discussed included joint projects in the oil and gas sector and peaceful nuclear projects. Rouhani said that Tehran welcomes expansion of cooperation with its neighboring countries, including Russia. “Iran is ready to bolster bilateral and regional cooperation with Russia with more determination and we will witness more close cooperation

between the two countries in the future.” He pointed to increasing economic and trade interaction between the two sides in recent years and said Tehran supports enhanced cooperation with Moscow in infrastructural and industrial projects as well as energy and banking sectors. The Iranian president further said the Islamic Republic would remain committed to its obligations under the historic nuclear deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) as long as the other side also fulfills its commitments. Rouhani also said Iran-Russia

cooperation would help promote regional peace and stability and contribute to the fight against terrorism, particularly in Syria. “The expansion of such cooperation in Syria is very important and we welcome the continuation of trilateral cooperation among Iran, Russia and Syria and are resolute to go on with it,” the Iranian president pointed out. At Damascus’ request, Iran and Russia have been lending military advisory assistance to the Syrian army in its efforts to combat Takfiri terrorists, who are wreaking havoc in the Arab country since 2011. Moscow has also been providing

Syrian troops with air power to boost their ground operations against terrorists. Rouhani said Iran welcomes interaction with Turkey and Russia to safeguard a ceasefire in Syria under the supervision of the United Nations. “Certain activities by some countries, including the new U.S. administration and Saudi Arabia, will further complicate the regional situation,” the Iranian president said. He urged all countries to make efforts for a genuine battle against terrorism and toward establishing stability in the region. Mediated by Russia and Turkey with the support of Iran, a Syria-wide cessation of hostilities took effect on December 30, 2016. The following day, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution supporting efforts to end the Syria turmoil and jump-start peace negotiations. For his part, the Russian president said his country is concerned about acts of aggression by certain countries in Syria. He added that Russia and Iran are present in Syria at the request of Syria’s legitimate government and based on the principles of international regulations, saying Tehran and Moscow would continue their cooperation to promote peace and stability in the region, particularly in Syria. Putin also said Moscow is resolute on further expanding relations with Tehran in various fields. He urged all signatories to the JCPOA to remain committed to their obligations.

Architect of Botched Tabas Invasion Dead

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- Former U.S. national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, who established himself in the Carter administration as a hardliner on foreign policy, died on Friday, his family said. He was 89. Brzezinski’s daughter Mika said on social media that her father died peacefully, but did not give the cause of his death. Brzezinski, the son of a Polish diplomat, was national security adviser for all four years of Jimmy Carter’s presidency. He helped Carter contend with several international issues including the Iranian revolution that overthrew the Shah, the taking of 52 Americans as hostages in Tehran and a failed rescue mission, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. As national security adviser, Brzezinski, who Carter plucked from the academic world, saw many of the Soviet Union’s foreign policy moves as evidence it could

not be trusted. That placed him at odds with two of Carter’s most trusted advisers: Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, who pushed for a Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT-2) with Moscow, and Defense Secretary Harold Brown, who urged a U.S.-Soviet accord to curb conventional forces in Europe. When Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan, Brzezinski strongly backed the arming of Afghan rebels in response to the invasion. His hardline stance on U.S.-Soviet relations led Pravda, the Soviet Communist Party newspaper, to denounce him as a “foe of detente”. And while he was skeptical of Soviet motives and objectives, Brzezinski nurtured a diplomatic friendship between the United States and China, which culminated in a trip to Beijing in June 1978. Six months later Carter announced a decision to re-establish diplomatic ties with China starting in 1979.

Brzezinski’s view of the Soviet Union may have been colored by his childhood experiences. Born in Warsaw, Poland, on March 28, 1928, he was taken as a youngster to Canada where his father served as a diplomat. When the communists took over Poland at the end of World War II, the family remained in the West. Brzezinski received a doctorate from Harvard University in 1953 and became an American citizen in 1958. He voiced support for U.S. policy in Vietnam in the mid-1960s, and served on the policy planning staff of President Lyndon Johnson’s State Department in that era. Along with David Rockefeller, chairman of the Chase Manhattan Bank, Brzezinski helped to found the Trilateral Commission, a private group that promoted closer ties among North America, West Europe and Japan.

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Qatar ‘Hack’ Revives Persian Gulf Tensions

DOHA (Dispatches) -- The alleged hack on Qatar’s state news agency may have lasted just four hours, but the impact on already tense ties between Persian Gulf rivals could last a lot longer. Doha launched an inquiry and went into damage control after accusing hackers of publishing false remarks attributed to Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani on state media. The stories quoted him questioning U.S. hostility toward Iran, speaking of “tensions” between Doha and Washington, commenting on Hamas and speculating that President Donald Trump might not remain in power for long. The remarks were supposedly made at a military graduation ceremony. Doha denied all the comments and said it was the victim of a “shameful cybercrime.” Analysts say the incident was far more than a security breach and appears once again to have set Qatar against rival Persian Gulf powers. Some fear it could even trigger a

repeat of the situation in 2014, when several Persian Gulf countries recalled their ambassadors from Doha, ostensibly over its support for the Muslim Brotherhood. They also clashed over political influence across the region, where Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have used their vast energy revenues to shape the new political environment amid the upheaval caused by the Arab Spring. “Much will depend on whether the issue continues to escalate or is quietly dropped,” Rice University’s Kristian Ulrichsen told AFP. “The apparent blocking of Al-Jazeera’s website and Qatar TV in Saudi Arabia and the UAE is an indication that deeper tensions may indeed be at play,” he said. “It may be the case that the Saudis and Emiratis feel emboldened by the success of their reset of ties with the Trump presidency to become more assertive in regional affairs.” Qatar has said it would publish the findings of its investigation into

the alleged hacking. But whatever the truth, the incident may point to unresolved fault lines between the Persian Gulf states following events in 2014. Durham University’s Dr. Christopher Davidson said the incident reflected a “serious fracture between the two different camps in the Persian Gulf.” “The divisions remain very deep about the vision for the region,” he said. On his recent visit to Saudi Arabia, where he met Persian Gulf leaders, Trump laid out the foundations of the new American administration’s vision for the Middle East. Trump emphasized U.S. hopes, shared by Saudi Arabia and the occupying regime of Israel, to push back against Iran while targeting groups such as Hamas. Such a vision could push Qatar, which provides a home to the exiled former leadership of Hamas, hosts a Taliban Embassy in Doha and is regularly slammed for its support of the Muslim Brotherhood, to the margins.

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