

Senate Vote on Blocking Trump's UAE Arms Sale Likely Next Week

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – A top Democrat on the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee says he expected lawmakers to vote as early as next week on resolutions seeking to block Republican President Donald Trump's \$23bn weapons sale to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). "We are gathering support for it, and I would think some time next week," Senator Bob Menendez told reporters on Thursday. Menendez and two other senators – Democrat Chris Murphy and Republican Rand Paul – announced on November 18 that they would introduce measures seeking to halt the effort to sell drones, F-35 aircraft and other weapons systems to the UAE. The sale includes products from privately held General Atomics, Lockheed Martin Corp F-35s and missiles made by Raytheon. Menendez said he hoped more Republicans would support the resolutions. It would take extensive support from members of Trump's party – who rarely break from the president – to pass the resolutions and override an expected veto from Trump. UAE ambassador to the United



Three F-35A Lightning IIs assigned to the 4th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron taxi after landing at Al Dhafra Air Base, UAE.

States says his country will be forced to turn elsewhere and acquire the weapons it needs in case Washington refuses to supply the Persian Gulf state with required munitions. "We would rather have the best U.S. equipment or we will reluctantly find it from other sources, even if less capable," Yousef al-Otaiba said in a statement on Thursday amid growing opposition and attempts to block the weapons sale to the Arab country.

Otaiba then sought to portray the multi-billion arms deal as an "investment in the U.S.," pointing out that the agreement would "support tens of thousands of U.S. jobs, sustain the U.S. defense industrial base, and lower future U.S. research and development costs." The remarks came in response to a Twitter thread published a day earlier by Democratic Senator Chris Murphy in which he pointed to the UAE's cooperation with Saudi Arabia in an atrocious

military campaign against Yemen, where they "have killed thousands of civilians with U.S.-made weapons." "In Libya, the UAE is in violation of the international arms embargo. And there's evidence the UAE has illegally transferred U.S. military equipment to extremist militias in Yemen," he wrote. "It begs the question why the U.S. would reward this behavior with a record-setting arms sale agreement. At the very least, we should receive clear, unbreakable assurances that the UAE's conduct in Libya and Yemen will change. That hasn't happened," the Democratic senator pointed out. Murphy also expressed concerns that the sale could spark an arms race in the Middle East. Murphy – together with Menendez and Republican senator Rand Paul – announced on November 18 that they would introduce measures seeking to halt the deal that would include advanced F-35 stealth fighters, drones and other weapons systems. Menendez said he hoped more Republicans would support the resolutions.

UN Urges Probe Into Zionist Regime's Use of Lethal Force Against Children

NEW YORK (Dispatches) – The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights called for a transparent investigation into the use of lethal force by Zionist troops against Palestinian children. The "UN Human Rights Office calls on Israel to promptly, transparently and independently investigate all instances of use of force (by Zionist troops) that have led to killing or injury and to hold those responsible accountable", it said in a statement. The UN body also warned Zionist troops against using disproportionate force and live ammunition against Palestinian children across the occupied lands.

The Zionist regime has a long history in wounding and killing Palestinian children, especially during anti-occupation protests. Zionist troops have used tear gas, stun grenades, rubber-coated bullets and live ammunition against demonstrators, including children. Between November 17 and 29, several Palestinian children were critically injured when Zionist troops used live ammunition and rubber-coated metal bullets. On November 29, a 16-year-old boy was shot in the chest and critically injured in al-Bireh city. On November 27, during protests in Kafr Qaddum village in the North of the West Bank, Zion-

ist troops shot a 16-year old boy in the head with a rubber-coated metal bullet. The boy fell from the impact and is hospitalized with a fractured skull. On November 17, a 15-year old boy on his way back from school lost his right eye after being hit by ricochet ammunition in Qalandia refugee camp north of al-Quds. "All injuries resulted from the use of potentially lethal force in circumstances where available information suggests the children did not pose a threat to life or serious injury of the soldiers or to anyone else," the UN body said. In March 2019, UNICEF said about 40 Palestinian children had

been killed and hundreds more wounded in a year of anti-occupation protests along the fence that separates the besieged Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories. According to figures by the Defense for Children International, between 500 and 700 Palestinian children at the age of 12-17 are arrested and tried in Israeli military courts every year. Violence against Palestinians escalated after U.S. President Donald Trump unveiled his "Deal of the Century" with the aim of legitimizing the occupying regime's occupation and re-drawing the Middle East map.

Iran Wont'... (Continued From Page One)

a bill approved by parliament that would have suspended UN inspections and boosted uranium enrichment, saying it was "harmful" to diplomatic efforts aimed at restoring the 2015 nuclear deal and easing U.S. sanctions. His Foreign Minister Muhammad Javad Zarif said on Thursday Iran will fully comply with the deal if both the United States and Europe honor their original commitments. Addressing a Rome conference via video-link, Zarif said the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) could not be renegotiated but it could be resurrected. "The United States has commitments. It is not in a position to set conditions," he said. Iran's Guardian Council oversight body approved a law on Wednesday that obliges the government to halt UN inspections of its nuclear sites and step up uranium enrichment beyond the limit set under the 2015 deal if sanctions are not eased within two months. Zarif said that although the government did not like the law, it would nonetheless implement it. "But it is not irreversible," he said. "The Europeans and USA can come back into compliance with the JCPOA and not only this law will not be implemented, but in fact the actions we have taken ... will be rescinded. We

will go back to full compliance." Zarif said economic sanctions imposed by the Trump administration had cost Iranians \$250 billion and made it impossible to buy medicines and vaccines needed to combat the coronavirus, which has taken a particularly heavy toll on his country. "It is a crime against humanity," he said, adding that the U.S. measures were preventing European companies from doing business in Iran. "Europeans say they are in full compliance (with the deal) but they simply are not. ... We don't see any European companies in Iran, we do not see any European country buying oil from Iran, we do not see any European banks send us our money," Zarif said. The foreign minister said he hoped that neighboring Arab states would seek dialogue with Tehran once Trump left office. "We are their neighbors. We will be in this region together. I do not believe that they want to allow Israel to bring the fight to Iran," Zarif said.

Europeans ... (Continued From Page One)

and that the assassination was carried out with the aim of stoking tensions and jeopardizing international peace and security. "Substantive evidence clearly indicates involvement and responsibility of Israeli regime in the terrorist attack taking also into account that this

regime's authorities have repeatedly named Dr. Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh and planned to assassinate him several times," the Iranian envoy said. "This is yet another instance of terrorism planned, organized and financed by the most heinous terrorist regime with the aim of endangering international peace and security, threatening territorial integrity, destabilizing the region, destruction of human rights and hindering the socio-economic development of independent nations," he added. Gharibabadi said the IAEA and its member states "have a dire responsibility vis-à-vis a Member who receives the highest level of inspections of the Agency and has the most transparent nuclear program through such cooperation, but its scientists are assassinated or under threat of assassination, and its nuclear facilities are sabotaged or under threat of sabotage". "The Islamic Republic of Iran strongly condemns the assassination of Dr. Fakhri-zadeh and reserves its rights, including its inherent right of self-defense, to take all necessary measures to respond to the terrorist attack and any further wrongful acts," he added.

Iran Railway... (Continued From Page One)

less than 25 km of track in the entire country. The Afghan section of the Khaf-Herat railway built with

Iran includes 114 km of track which will open a new chapter in domestic freight and passenger transportation. It will reduce the cost of moving goods across the region to a fraction of that of highway transport. The railway will stretch to Chabahar in southeast Iran, boosting Afghanistan's trade and bringing in its mining sector from the cold to exploit billions of dollars in untapped mineral reserves. High ranking officials from Iran and Afghanistan will gather at their joint border to open the line by the end of the current Iranian month in about two weeks, Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mohammad Eslami said last week. "With the opening of the railway line, easier conditions have been created for the transportation of goods, so we hope that this issue will have positive effects on trade between Iran and Afghanistan," head of Iran-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce Hussein Salimi said Tuesday. "Freight transportation by train to Afghanistan will cost exporters less than freight transportation by truck, while delays in freight transportation by truck, such as delays at customs and delays in transporting goods from Iranian trucks to Afghan trucks will decrease," he added. According to Salimi, Iran's exports to Afghanistan are estimated to reach \$2.7 billion by the end of the current Persian year in March 2021.

Afghanistan Under Occupation

Afghanistan remains one of the world's poorest countries, some 19 years after the U.S. invasion. Its main products are dried and fresh fruits, and carpets, which amount to a fraction of illegal opium estimated at some \$2 billion by the International Monetary Fund. Projects such as the railway through Iran is believed to put a major dent in the illicit opium trade and reduce Afghanistan's reliance on foreign aid which is tied to heavy deployment of troops from the US, Europe and elsewhere. According to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), the top U.S. government watchdog, billions of dollars poured into Afghanistan trickle into the hands of militants and fuel corruption in the country. The U.S. lost approximately \$19 billion to waste, fraud, and abuse in Afghanistan between 2009 and 2018, SIGAR said in a report in October. Curiously, the U.S. government is not opposed to the railway line. It has granted an exception to certain U.S. sanctions, allowing India's participation in Chabahar's development as part of the new transportation corridor designed to boost Afghanistan's economy and ship non-sanctionable goods, like food and medicines, to the country. The United States also allows Afghanistan to continue importing petroleum products from Iran, which are vital for the war-torn country's growth and humanitarian relief.

Mineral Wealth

U.S. President Donald Trump has expressed an interest in Afghanistan's massive mineral resources which India has already won the rights to exploit, including an iron mine. New Delhi seeks to use the railroad to Chabahar to export iron ore from the Hajigak mine in central Afghanistan. A United States Geological Survey study has estimated potential value of Afghanistan's mineral deposits as much as \$1 trillion. However, Afghan officials have hinted at figures three times larger, citing new geological studies. Gold, silver and platinum are some of the precious elements identified in Afghanistan but the country has also been labeled as the potential "Saudi Arabia of lithium", the raw material used in phone and electric car batteries. Furthermore, the country has significant quantities of iron ore, uranium, zinc, tantalum, bauxite, coal, natural gas and copper which is increasingly becoming rare across the globe. In August 2017, Reuters said Trump was eyeing Afghanistan's mineral wealth to help pay for the U.S. war that has cost hundreds of billions of dollars.

The U.S. is not alone in seeking a piece of the cake in Afghanistan. Former German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier had said his country was interested in Afghanistan's large deposits of lithium. China acquired a 30-year lease on the Mes Aynak copper mine for around \$3 billion in 2008 but the project has been plagued by delays due to contractual wrangling.

Iran's Reconstruction Efforts

Iran's approach to Afghanistan, however, is absolutely different. The two countries share historical and cultural ties and Iran has been hosting millions of Afghan refugees and immigrants who fled the Soviet-Afghan war, its ensuing civil war, and the U.S. war in Afghanistan. The Islamic Republic has also spent millions of dollars on development and reconstruction projects in Afghanistan. It has built hundreds of kilometers of highway, and railroad and dams over the last eight years, paving the ancient trade routes of the Silk Road. The new Silk Road is a trillion-dollar overland and maritime trade network spearheaded by the Chinese government as part of its "One Belt, One Road" initiative announced in 2013 to promote trade with Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia. Landlocked countries have always tried to access open seas. Afghanistan's neighbors have indicated an interest in linking with the Khaf-

Herat railway line to send cargoes to and from Iran's Persian Gulf ports. Uzbekistan and Afghanistan have signed an agreement to extend a railroad connecting the two countries to eventually give Uzbekistan a direct link to sea ports. Tashkent is interested in extending that line to Herat for a gateway to Iran. Tajikistan also wants to construct a railway through Afghanistan to Iran and build an "energy line" across the three countries to supply Iranian oil products and gas, as well as to link the electricity grids of the three countries.

COVID... (Continued From Page One)

North America and Latin American regions combined have more than 50% of all coronavirus deaths that have been reported. The Latin American region, the worst-affected globally in terms of fatalities, recently surpassed over 450,000 deaths.

Vaccine Hopes

On Wednesday, Britain became the first country to approve the vaccine candidate developed by Germany's BioNTech and Pfizer Inc, jumping ahead of the rest of the world in the race to begin a crucial mass inoculation program. However, supplies are expected to be very limited in the early stages which means that every country beginning the drive will have to prioritize based on risk factors. U.S. health regulators are expected to approve distribution and administration of the vaccine in mid-December. Africa aims to have 60% of its population vaccinated against COVID-19 within the next two to three years, the African Union's disease control group said on Thursday. The continent of 1.3 billion people has recorded more than 2.2 million confirmed coronavirus infections, according to a Reuters tally.

Iran... (Continued From Page 2)

most of its nuclear stockpile out of the country, to Russia. The agreement also limited enrichment to under 4 percent. A year after Trump pulled out of the nuclear accord, Iran began rebuilding the stockpile and inching up the enrichment levels. "I think the law is a clear sign that Tehran will not be taking a 'wait and see' attitude toward Biden's Iran policy," said Henry Rome, a senior Iran analyst at Eurasia Group. "Tehran wants to be at the top of the agenda for the new administration, and escalating its nuclear program is a surefire way to do it."

Ministry... (Continued From Page 2)

them into the river at gunpoint, but Tehran categorically rejected the allegation. On June 3, a bus driving from the Iranian central city of Yazd with a number of illegal Afghan refugees caught fire after it did not heed a police warning to stop. The vehicle skidded for some eight kilometers and hit the guardrail after the police had to shoot a tire of the bus. The incident was used as a pretext to attack Iran and accuse it of mistreating Afghan immigrants.

Tehran... (Continued From Page 2)

The surprisingly coincidental developments, Zarif had said, "unfortunately crystalized in the form of the cowardly terrorist act and martyrdom of one of the country's senior directors." The foreign minister had also shown how the assassination of Iran's top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh had been followed by a misinformation campaign on Twitter featuring countless fake accounts and tweets attacking Iran, something for which he still blamed the trio. Jubeir reacted by deflecting the blame for the assassination, claiming that targeted killings did not form a constituent of the Saudi policy, and tauntingly accused Zarif of "desperation."