

TEHRAN (Dispatches) – The Iranian navy on Saturday flew patrol, reconnaissance and bomber drones on the second day of large-scale Velayat-97 drills being held in the country's southern waters.

Unmanned aerial vehicles bombed various positions of the hypothetical enemy. The navy's air defense units also intercepted and annihilated intruding flying objects with homebuilt equipment, including Misaq shoulder-fired missiles. Iranian hovercrafts also launched surface-to-surface cruise missiles at their targets.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) – Iran will become fully offensive if it comes under attack, deputy head of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Brigadier General Hussein Salami said on Saturday.

"The whole world should know that when we talk about martyrdom it does not mean that we would stand still so that the enemy can attack us and kill us. If the enemy opts for a war, we will become fully offensive," he said in Kerman.

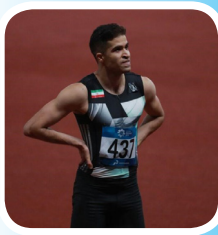
Viewpoint

Is Pakistan Willing to Extricate Itself From the Terrorist Hold?

Dubai to Host Int'l Conference on Al-Ghazali in 2021



Iran's Hassan Taftian Comes Sixth at World Indoor Tour



Hezbollah: U.S. Seeks to Prevent Displaced Syrians From Returning Home



Top National Security Official: Iran Has Plans in Place to Neutralize Sanctions

TEHRAN (Dispatches) – Iran said on Saturday it has many options to neutralize the reimposition of U.S. sanctions on its oil exports, adding that Tehran's regional influence could not be curbed as demanded by Washington.

"Apart from closing Strait of Hormuz, we have other options to stop oil flow if threatened," Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani told Tasnim news agency.

"Iran has plans in place that will neutralize the illegal U.S. sanctions against Iran's oil exports," Shamkhani said. "We have many ways to sell our oil."

Tensions between Iran and the United States increased after U.S. President Donald Trump pulled out of a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers last May, and then reimposed sanctions on the country.

The restoration of sanctions is part of a wider effort by Trump to force Iran to further curb its nuclear and missile programs as well as its support for anti-terror and anti-Zionist forces in the Middle East.

Washington had been pushing governments to cut imports of Iranian oil to zero. But, fearing a price spike, it granted waivers to eight Iranian oil buyers when the sanctions on oil imports started last November.

Iranian officials have threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf if Washington tries to strangle Tehran's oil exports.

Carrying one-third of the world's seaborne oil every day, the Strait of Hormuz links Middle East crude producers to key markets in Asia Pacific, Europe, North America and beyond.

"There are multiple ways to make that (blockage of Hormuz) happen. We hope we would not be forced to use them," Shamkhani said.

Iran has promised "surprise" measures to counter U.S. sanctions on its oil exports.

In an interview with the Swiss newspaper Basler Zeitung, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said that should the U.S. totally block Iranian oil exports, Tehran has "other options" at its disposal.

When pressed on what Iran intends to do, Zarif replied: "Trump loves the element of surprise, so we'll entertain him."

Zarif said "the international community must decide whether it is in their interest to let the U.S. go through its illegal tactics."

"Europeans must ask themselves: if they allow this precedent, what will they do if the U.S. demands an end to trade with China?" he added.

Iran has been President Bashar al-Assad's most supportive ally against foreign-backed terrorists throughout the nearly eight-year war on Syria. "We have achieved 90 percent of Iran's goals in Syria," said Shamkhani.

"There will be important developments in promoting deterrence capability of the resistance front in Syria," said Shamkhani when asked about the occupying regime of Israel's "possible future attacks" in Syria.

Iran refers to regional countries and forces opposed to the occupying regime of Israel and the United States as a "resistance axis".

The Zionist regime says it has carried out over 200 attacks against various targets in Syria in the last two years, in what is seen as a bid to prop up terrorists who are facing a total rout at the hands of the Syrian army and its allies.

Israel has also been threatening Iranian advisers in Syria with attacks if they do not leave the country. Iran says it will continue to provide military advisers to Syria for as long as necessary in support of the country's forces.

Shamkhani said Israel's claims about its military campaign against Iran in Syria are "propaganda".

"Iran is capable of confronting any military threat... Trump and Israel are well aware of Iran's military might," Shamkhani said. "They know that they cannot enter a war with Iran. That is why they publicly threaten Iran."

In July last year, Trump warned Iran that it would face consequences "the likes of which few throughout history have ever suffered."

Shamkhani said, "This is Trump's technique. Trump is not made for wars. He issues threats to avoid a war."

He also said that Iraqi government is opposed to Washington's plan to deploy U.S. troops from Syria to Iraq. "Americans face a tough job in this regard. I believe that the U.S. will have to get out of other places of the region as well by the end of 2019."

Shamkhani said, "One of the main realities in Syria and elsewhere in the region is that the U.S. allies have been defeated by the will of nations, and have therefore inflicted heavy political, (Continued on Page 7)

Bolton Cancels Visit to Oversee Venezuela Putsch



U.S.-backed rioters attack security forces during an opposition rally in Caracas, Venezuela.

CUCUTA, Colombia/URENA, Venezuela (Dispatches) – Venezuelan troops fired tear gas at U.S.-backed agitators unable to cross into Colombia on Saturday after President Nicolas Maduro closed the border to stop the opposition bringing U.S. "humanitarian aid" into the South American nation.

Rioters set up barricades and burned tires in the Venezuelan border town of Urena, as attention turned to whether National Guard troops stationed at the border crossing would confront the U.S. convoy.

Leaders of Venezuela's ruling Socialist Party call the aid effort a

veiled invasion backed by Washington, and insist that the United States should instead help Venezuela by lifting crippling financial and oil sector sanctions.

Political analysts say the border showdown is less about solving Venezuela's needs and more about testing the military's loyalty to Maduro by daring it to turn the "aid" away.

A possible showdown between the army and supporters of opposition leader Juan Guaido could trigger a deadly confrontation and lead to divisions among the army ranks and possible defections by some -- something which the U.S.

is apparently counting on. The scenario reminds of the wars in Syria and Libya where an initially small-scale unrest morphed into brutal conflicts which continue to this day.

U.S. troops entered the war in Syria in late 2015 under the pretext of fighting Daesh but ended up training Takfiri militants against the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Demonstrators in Urena who blocked roads and burned tires also threw rocks at security forces who responded with volleys of tear gas.

Guaido, recognized by the West

as Venezuela's interim president, defied court orders not to leave the country when he traveled on Friday to Cucuta, where "aid" from the U.S. and Colombian governments is stockpiled in warehouses.

Guaido was due to hold a news conference with the presidents of Colombia, Chile and Paraguay in Cucuta on Saturday morning before escorting the U.S. package toward the border on foot.

U.S. President Donald Trump's hawkish national security adviser John Bolton canceled plans to travel to South Korea to prepare for a summit addressing North Korea's nuclear program in order to focus instead on events unfolding in Venezuela, his spokesman said on Friday.

Guaido, 35, head of the opposition-run Congress, has provided few details on the transport plan. Trucks are expected to be driven by Venezuelan volunteers and some opposition figures have suggested forming human chains.

Russia warned that the U.S. is using humanitarian aid to instigate a "dangerous provocation" in Venezuela by arming the country's opposition while moving its own forces closer to Venezuelan borders in preparation for a military invasion.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said Washington and its allies were planning to supply Guaido and his supporters with a wide range of weapons.

(Continued on Page 7)

Presidential Hopeful Sen. Warren: U.S. Needs to Address 'Ugly History of Racism'

MANCHESTER, N.H. (AP) — Sen. Elizabeth Warren, who said earlier this week that she supports reparations for black Americans who have been affected by slavery, told reporters Friday that the nation needs to confront its "ugly history of racism" and "talk about the right way to address it and make change."

Warren addressed race in a speech to New Hampshire Democrats, but didn't speak specifically about reparations. She said black families in America have been disadvantaged by "structural racism" and have only \$5 in wealth for every \$100 in wealth owned by the average white family.

"Race matters and we need to say so," she said.

Warren was asked later whether she would include Native Americans in her support for reparations. She responded: "I

think it's a part of the conversation. It's an important part of the conversation."

She has been criticized for claiming Native American identity early in her career and apologized recently to the Cherokee Nation for releasing DNA test results as evidence she had Native American in her bloodline, albeit at least six generations back.

During her speech, Warren told the audience she proposed a universal child care plan because no American family should experience the desperation she did as a working mother to find safe, reliable, quality child care.

"We're the richest country in the history of the planet," Warren told a room of about 1,000 people in Manchester at the state Democratic Party's biggest (Continued on Page 7)

New Reversal: 400 U.S. Troops to Stay in Syria

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) — A senior official in the administration of President Donald Trump says the U.S. will keep approximately 400 troops in Syria after a planned pull-out, contradicting an earlier statement putting the number at 200.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told Reuters that Trump had been persuaded by advisers that about 200 U.S. troops would observe a potential safe zone in northeastern Syria, while another 200 soldiers would remain at the Al-Tanf base in Homs province near the Iraqi border.

The remarks came hours after White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders announced that only "a small peace-keeping group of about 200 will remain in Syria for a period of time."

Trump ordered the withdrawal of all 2,000 American forces from Syria in December 2018 amid preparations by Turkey to launch

an operation against U.S.-backed Kurdish militants in the Arab country.

His abrupt move sparked concern among officials in Washington, prompting Pentagon chief Jim Mattis to step down in protest.

The planned pullout also raised worries among Kurdish militants in Syria and left them feeling abandoned by Washington.

Now, with the apparent shift in Washington's Syria plan, Trump claimed on Friday, "I'm not reversing course." The remaining troops, he argued, would be "a very small, tiny fraction" of the American forces.

The American official announcing the new arrangement said when he "asked the president for a couple hundred - he said yes."

"It's not a firm number, and the president understood that when we asked him," he noted.

(Continued on Page 7)