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SYLLOGE ON WEST ASIA

**FOCUS, NUCLEAR, MISSILES & OTHER
SECURITY ISSUES IN WEST ASIA**

BY KUSHAL AGRAWAL

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IRAN

Iran tells UN it was not behind attacks on US interests in Iraq

Aljazeera, 15th March, 2021

Iran has told the United Nations that claims of its role in attacks on United States interests in Iraq are “completely baseless and lacking legal credibility”.

In a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the country’s UN envoy Majid Takht-Ravanchi said “The Islamic Republic of Iran has not had any involvement, directly or indirectly, in any armed attacks by any entities or individuals against the United States in Iraq,” according to parts of the letter’s text published by state-run IRNA news on Monday. Last month, several rockets hit a military base inside the airport in Erbil, northern Iraq, which killed one foreign civilian contractor and wounded at least nine others, including an American soldier.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/15/iran-tells-un-it-was-not-behind-attacks-on-us-interests-in-iraq>

IRGC unveils new missile city, displays cruise and ballistic missiles

Tehran Times, 15th March, 2021

In a ceremony on Monday, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Navy unveiled a new missile city hosting a broad range of cruise and ballistic missiles with various ranges. The new missiles and missile gear have advanced operational capabilities, such as accurate firing from underground launchers and civil defense sites. The new equipment in the missile city can launch mines in various ranges, allow for 360 degree and mobile firing operations, according to Tasnim. One of the items unveiled in the event was a missile system that can shift the focus on targets after launch. The military gear has been manufactured by the Defense

Ministry, local knowledge-based companies, and the IRGC Navy research organizations.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/459148/IRGC-unveils-new-missile-city-displays-cruise-and-ballistic>

Iran accuses Israel of attacking Iranian ship in the Mediterranean

Tehran Times, 15th March, 2021

Saeed Khatibzadeh, spokesman for Iran’s Foreign Ministry, said on Monday that Tehran has evidence suggesting that Israel may have been behind an attack on an Iranian container ship in the Mediterranean Sea. Speaking at a weekly press conference on Monday, the spokesman said that identifying those behind the attack was up to the General Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces but the finger of blame for the attack can be pointed at Israel, given the location of the attack, which points the finger at Israel. “The (Israeli) regime’s ferocious and aggressive nature also corroborates this,” the spokesman said, noting that Israel has always sought to stoke unrest in the region.

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/459175/Iran-accuses-Israel-of-attacking-Iranian-ship-in-the-Mediterranean>

Top general threatens Iran could ‘blow up’ Israel as rhetoric escalate

Al-Monitor, 16th March, 2021

The chief of general staff of Iran’s armed forces, Maj. Gen. Mohammad Bagheri, issued a fresh warning March 16 against Israel. “Iran has acquired what it takes to blow up the Zionist regime,” Bagheri said. He said the potential “removal of the child-killing, malicious, fake regime from the political geography of the region is no illusion, but rather a genuine power that Iranian forces have gained with resolve and faith.” The statement was in apparent response a strong threat earlier this month by Israeli Defense Minister Benny

Gantz, who told Fox News that his country was updating plans to strike Iran's nuclear facilities.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/03/iran-threat-israel-general-rhetoric-escalate.html#ixzz6qgn5M1vG>

Iran's Zarif slams UK 'hypocrisy' over nuclear warhead plan

Aljazeera, 17th March, 2021

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has criticised what he called the United Kingdom's "utter hypocrisy" over plans to boost nuclear weapons.

In a tweet on Tuesday, the top diplomat condemned the fact that British Prime Minister Boris Johnson expressed concern about Iran's nuclear programme on the same day he announced the UK will increase its stockpile of nuclear warheads by 40 percent. "Unlike the UK and allies, Iran believes nukes [nuclear] and all WMDs [Weapons of Mass Destructions] are barbaric and must be eradicated," Zarif wrote, alluding to Iran's insistence that its nuclear programme is peaceful and not aimed at making weapons.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/17/iran-zarif-slams-boris-johnson-over-nuclear-weapons-claim>

Iran operating new advanced centrifuges, nuclear watchdog finds

Al-Monitor, 17th March, 2021

Iran is now enriching uranium with a new type of advanced centrifuge at its Natanz nuclear facility, according to a UN atomic watchdog report obtained by news agencies. "On 15 March 2021, the Agency verified that Iran began feeding the cascade of 174 IR-4 centrifuges" to enrich uranium hexafluoride at its underground facility, said the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report submitted to member states on Monday. The

IR-4 centrifuges are Iran's latest violation of the nuclear deal. Under the agreement, Iran is only permitted to enrich uranium using IR-1 centrifuges, but the IAEA reported last November that Iran had begun operating the more advanced IR-2m machines at Natanz.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/03/iran-iaea-advanced-ir-4-centrifuges-nuclear-natanz-biden.html#ixzz6qgnbxXqO>

Rouhani says Iran 'awaiting action' on nuclear deal

Al-Monitor, 18th March, 2021

President Hassan Rouhani addressed the standoff between his country and the United States over reentry to the 2015 nuclear deal at a cabinet meeting yesterday. "The Americans stated numerous times that the actions of the previous administration were wrong and that they want to return to their commitments and the nuclear deal," Rouhani said. "However, these words are not enough and [we are awaiting action](#)." While Biden campaigned on returning to the JCPOA, US officials have called on Iran to negotiate on the reentry.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/03/rouhani-says-iran-awaiting-action-nuclear-deal#ixzz6qhziXPN5>

Iran says it will 'cold test' modified Arak nuclear reactor

Al-Monitor, 19th March, 2021

Iran will soon "cold test" its redesigned Arak nuclear reactor before its full commissioning later this year, a spokesperson for the country's nuclear agency said. One of the requirements of the landmark nuclear deal struck between world powers in 2015 was that Iran dismantle its Arak heavy water reactor. The original reactor, located southwest of the capital, Tehran, was able to generate the amount of plutonium

needed in a year to build two nuclear warheads. "The work for redesigning the Arak Reactor slowed down with the withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA, but the Chinese continued [the work]," Behrouz Kamalvandi told the Iranian Students News Agency on Friday. "If the United States comes back and wants to cooperate, it can, but without them, and even the Chinese, we can continue this project," Kamalvandi said.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/03/iran-says-it-will-cold-test-modified-arak-nuclear-reactor#ixzz6qi6BIRuf>

Iran's Khamenei reiterates nuclear deal stance in new year speech

Aljazeera, 21st March, 2021

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has reiterated that Iran will not give in to United States pressure in exchange for sanctions relief. In an hour-long televised address to the nation on Sunday to mark the start of the new Persian year, he said the "maximum pressure" campaign of economic sanctions – which he called a "major crime" committed by "that previous fool" President Donald Trump – has failed. "He [Trump] went away in that infamous way, bringing disgrace to his country," Khamenei said. "They must know 'maximum pressure' has failed so far, and if the current US administration wants to continue, it will also fail."

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/21/iran-khamenei-remains-steadfast-on-nuclear-deal-stance>

Iran and China sign document for comprehensive cooperation

Tehran Times, 21st March, 2021

The Managing Director of Ports and Maritime Organization of Iran (PMO) said on Sunday that an Indian company has brought new strategic

equipment to Chabahar, south-eastern Iran. Speaking to IRNA, Behrouz Aqae said the shipment sent to Shahid Beheshi Port in Chabahar includes two 100-ton cranes worth \$7.5 million. Aqae said that the shipment was sent to Chabahar within the framework of the long-term build-operate-transfer (BOT) agreement between Iran and India.

The third part of the equipment will be shipped to Chabahar by the end of the year, he said.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84271569/India-brings-strategic-equipment-to-Iran-s-Chabahar>

Iran set to equip IRGC with home-made submarines

Islamic Republic News Agency, 22nd March, 2021

Iran has plans to equip the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) with light and semi-heavy domestically-developed submarines, Head of the Marine Industries Organization of the Ministry of Defense and Logistics of the Armed Forces Rear-Admiral Amir Rastegari said on Monday. Speaking to IRNA, Rastegari said that the manufacturing of these submarines will begin this year so that the IRGC will have submarines within the next few years as like as the Iranian Navy. He said that the reliance of the Iranian armed forces on the foreign countries in the marine industry has declined from 70% to 20% today.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84272074/Iran-set-to-equip-IRGC-with-home-made-submarines>

Iran says it made five major military improvements last year

The Jerusalem Post, 24th March, 2021

Iran continues to improve its air defenses, citing the use of the Bavar-373 system and other capabilities. Iran improved the IRGC navy – "188 UAVs and combat helicopters joined the IRGC navy." In the delivery ceremony of these drones, which were from different types

of Ababil-2, Mohajer-6, Sepehr, Shahab-2 and Hudhud-4 series, a new type of use of drones was developed. IRGC fast boats equipped with Ababil-2 suicide drones was also unveiled, “which is a significant defense idea of combining two important components of Iran’s defense power – namely, drones and fast boats.” A large number of drones have been provided to the IRGC navy, including the Mohajer-6 and the use of guided bombs with drones.

<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/iran-news/iran-says-it-made-five-major-military-improvements-last-year-663035>

Iran launches simulation system for each vessel produced domestically

Islamic Republic News Agency, 25th March, 2021

Head of Defense Ministry's Marine Industries Organization Rear Admiral Amir Rastegari announced that an industrial complex has been launched for designing and manufacturing simulators for vessels being produced at national shipyard. Iran manufactures simulation system for every kind of vessels produced in the country, Rastegari told IRNA in a recently-held interview. Iran manufactures simulation system for every kind of vessels produced in the country, Rastegari told IRNA in a recently-held interview.

<https://en.irna.ir/news/84274061/Iran-launches-simulation-system-for-each-vessel-produced-domestically>

IRAQ

Iraq, US to resume new round of strategic dialogue

Al-Monitor, 24th March, 2021

Baghdad has requested a new round of strategic talks with the United States over the future of their relationship, including the topic of troop

withdrawal. The discussions will start next month. “We look forward to renewing our strategic dialogue with the government of Iraq over the month of April,” White House press secretary Jen Psaki [said March 23](#), a few hours after Iraq's request. The strategic dialogue started in June 2020 under the Trump administration. The dialogue included issues relating to security, the economy and education.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/03/iraq-us-resume-new-round-strategic-dialogue#ixzz6qi95yBi2>

ISRAEL

Israel military hits ‘ Hamas positions’ in Gaza

Aljazeera, 24th March, 2021

The Israeli military says it carried out night-time raids against Hamas positions in the Gaza Strip in response to rocket fire from the besieged Palestinian enclave. A witness in Gaza told the AFP news agency that the Israeli military hit Hamas positions in the southern parts of the Strip just after 2:30am (00:30 GMT) on Wednesday. The Israeli military said its fighter jets and attack helicopters struck a Hamas rocket manufacturing site and a military post “in response to the rocket fired from Gaza into Israel tonight”. According to local Palestinian news agency Maan, the site southwest of Gaza City was struck by five missiles. Another site east of Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip was also targeted. An Israeli military spokesperson told AFP a rocket from Gaza had hit an open field in southern Israel.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/24/explosion-over-gaza-as-israel-military-hits-hamas-positions>

With new tech, Israel' 188th Armored Brigade prepares for Hezbollah war

The Jerusalem Post, 26th March, 2021

Defending the border from Hezbollah infiltration, destroying anti-tank missile infrastructures and maneuvering inside enemy territory are just some of the skills that were exercised in the 188th Armored Brigade drill that was completed on Thursday. The brigade's drill was the culmination of a 17-week training session. The 53rd, 71st and 74th Armored Corps battalions and the 605th Engineering Corps battalion all held battalion-level drills beforehand. The 188th Armored Brigade drill included different exercises in which it was joined by other forces, including infantry, artillery and IAF helicopters, and practiced different scenarios in the Golan Heights.

<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/with-new-tech-188th-brigade-prepares-for-war-with-hezbollah-663286>

France's aircraft carrier in Gulf after Israeli ship reportedly targeted

The Jerusalem Post, 27th March, 2021

A Liberian-flagged, Israeli-owned container ship named *Lori* was struck in the Gulf of Oman on Thursday according to reports. Now the French aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* has arrived in Abu Dhabi as part of a deployment that France says is committed to "freedom of navigation." The *Charles de Gaulle* is the flagship of the French Navy and is docked at Mina Zayed Port, reports say. Three frigates and a submarine are accompanying it.

<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/frances-aircraft-carrier-in-gulf-after-israeli-ship-reportedly-targeted-663328>

LEBANON

Lebanon PM warns of 'dangerous nuclear chemicals' in oil facility

The Jerusalem Post, 27th March, 2021

Lebanon's outgoing prime minister said on Friday that experts had found "dangerous chemicals" at a warehouse at the Zahrani oil installations in the south. Hassan Diab said the country's atomic energy authority identified the substances as "nuclear" after reviewing a report by German company Combi Lift, which Lebanon had tasked with clearing hazardous material at Beirut port. The comments came nearly eight months after a stockpile of chemicals detonated in Beirut, killing nearly 200 people in one of the largest non-nuclear explosions on record. The ammonium nitrate went up in flames after being stored unsafely at the port for years.

<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/lebanon-pm-warns-of-dangerous-chemicals-in-southern-oil-facility-663365>

SAUDI ARABIA

Middle East sees biggest import of arms in last 5 years: Report

Aljazeera, 15th March, 2021

International arms sales and purchases have levelled off after years of sharp growth, with deliveries of major weapons staying at the same level between 2011-2015 and 2016-2020, according to a leading defence think-tank. The United States, France and Germany substantially increased their weapons exports in the last five years, according to a new report, released on Monday, by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). The biggest growth in arms imports was seen in the Middle East where countries imported 25 percent more weapons in the past five years than in the 2011-2015 period. SIPRI said this

reflected regional strategic competition among Gulf states. Saudi Arabia increased its arms imports by 61 percent while Qatar did so by 361 percent.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/15/global-arms-transfers-level-off-but-middle-east-imports-grow>

Houthi ballistic missiles target Saudi Arabia, says coalition

Aljazeera, 16th March, 2021

Yemen's Houthi fighters have fired two ballistic missiles at Saudi Arabia, both of which landed in uninhabited border areas in the country's south, according to the Saudi-led coalition fighting the rebels.

In a statement carried by Saudi state-run Al Ekhbariya TV, the coalition said the missiles were launched from the northern Yemeni province of Saada on Tuesday. The coalition said it responded by destroying a bunker for ballistic missiles in Saada and launchpads from which the missiles were fired. "We are taking operational measures to neutralise and destroy sources of threat to protect civilians," it added.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/16/houthi-fire-ballistic-missiles-at-saudi-arabia-coalition-says>

Fire at Saudi Arabia oil facility after drone attack

Aljazeera, 19th March, 2021

Saudi Arabia said drones struck an oil facility in the capital of Riyadh on Friday, igniting a fire at the installation. The official Saudi Press Agency quoted an official in the energy ministry as saying the dawn attack caused no injuries or damage, and did not affect oil supplies. "The Riyadh oil refinery was attacked by drones, resulting in a fire that has been brought under control," the ministry said in a statement. Earlier on Friday, Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi rebels reported they launched

six drones at a facility belonging to Saudi Aramco, the kingdom's oil giant that now has a sliver of its worth traded publicly on the stock market, in Riyadh.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/19/fire-at-saudi-arabia-oil-facility-after-drone-attack>

Saudi coalition launches air raids on Yemen's Houthi-held capital

Aljazeera, 21st March, 2021

The Saudi-led coalition battling Yemen's Houthi rebels struck military targets belonging to the Iran-aligned movement in the capital, Sanaa, in the early hours of Sunday, residents said. The raids come after the Houthis claimed responsibility for drone [attacks](#) on an oil refinery in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, on Friday, which caused a fire that was brought under control. On Saturday, the coalition said it intercepted and destroyed an explosive-laden drone launched towards the southern Saudi city of Khamis Mushait.

Residents in Sanaa told Reuters news agency that coalition warplanes bombed areas housing Houthi military camps in southern Sanaa and a military manufacturing site in the north of the city.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/21/saudi-coalition-launches-air-raids-on-yemens-houthi-held-capital>

Saudi-led coalition intensifies Yemen air raids, hits grains port

Aljazeera, 22nd March, 2021

The Saudi-led military coalition has carried out dozens of air raids against what it said were Houthi military targets in Yemen's north, including the capital Sanaa and the port of Salif on the Red Sea coast. The coalition, which intervened militarily in 2015 months after the Iran-aligned Houthi group captured large parts of northern Yemen including Sanaa, said it struck a missile and drone assembly plant in the

Yemeni capital. The United Nations said air raids also hit the Houthi-controlled Salif grains port, north of Hodeidah, and two projectiles hit a warehouse and the living quarters of a food production company.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/22/saudi-led-coalition-intensifies-yemen-air-raids-hits-grains-port>

Saudi Arabia proposes ceasefire plan to Yemen's Houthi rebels

Aljazeera, 22nd March, 2021

Saudi Arabia has announced a plan to offer its rivals in Yemen's long-running war a nationwide ceasefire under the auspices of the United Nations, the kingdom's foreign minister said. Speaking to reporters on Monday, the kingdom's foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, said the ceasefire proposed to the Houthi rebels is envisioned "for the entire conflict", including allowing for the main airport in Yemen's rebel-held capital, Sanaa, to reopen. It would take effect "as soon as the Houthis agree to it", he said in Saudi Arabia's capital, Riyadh. "It is up to the Houthis now," Prince Faisal added, stressing his country would continue to "protect" its borders, citizens and infrastructure and face the Houthi "aggression with the necessary response".

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/22/saudi-arabia-proposes-nationwide-truce-to-yemens-houthi-rebels>

Houthis launch attacks on Saudi oil facilities, military sites

Aljazeera, 26th March, 2021

Yemen's Houthi rebels say they have launched drone and ballistic missile attacks on Saudi Arabia, targeting oil facilities owned by the state-run Saudi Aramco company and military sites, coinciding with the sixth anniversary of the kingdom's military intervention into the neighbouring country. The Iran-aligned group

on Friday said they launched attacks on Thursday against King Abdulaziz military base in Dammam and military sites in Najran and Asir. The group also said they targeted Aramco facilities in Ras Tanura, Rabigh, Yanbu and Jizan. Saudi Arabia's defence ministry described the assault on Jizan as a barrage of eight bomb-carrying drones launched by the Houthi rebels. According to al-Arabiya TV, Saudi Arabia's air defences intercepted a ballistic missile over the southern province of Najran.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/26/houthis-say-launched-attacks-on-saudi-arabian-oil-military-sites>

Saudi-led coalition destroys Houthi rigged boats, drones - state media

The Jerusalem Post, 28th March, 2021

The Saudi-led coalition battling Yemen's Houthi forces has destroyed two explosive-laden boats that the Iran-aligned group planned to use in an "imminent" attack launched from the Red Sea port of Hodeidah, Saudi state media reported on Sunday. The coalition also said it intercepted and destroyed two armed drones launched towards southern Saudi Arabia.

<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/saudi-led-coalition-destroys-houthi-rigged-boats-drones-state-media-663416>

SYRIA

Russian Defense Ministry: "Jabhat-al-Nusra" Terrorists Prepare of a new chemical scenario

Syrian Arab News Agency, 20th March, 2021

Russian Defense Ministry said that terrorists of "Jabhat- al-Nusra," positioned in Idlib countryside are preparing for new provocations by using chemical weapons to accuse the Syrian Arab Army. "Jabhat-al-Nusra terrorists are

preparing for provocations by using toxic materials in the northeastern Syrian province of Idlib”, Deputy commander of the Russian Coordination Center, Colonel Alexander Karpov, said. He added that information available at the Russian Coordination Center reveal that terrorist organization of Jabhat-al-Nusra prepare for a new provocation by using toxic materials in the northeastern Idlib governorate to imitate a chemical attack and accuse the Syrian Arab Army of using chemical weapons against civilians.

<http://www.sana.sy/en/?p=226862>

Turkey and Russia increase strikes in Syria

The Jerusalem Post, 22nd March, 2021

Turkey and Russia, as well as Russian-backed Syrian regime forces, appear to have increased attacks in Syria in recent days. Turkey is hammering Kurdish positions near Ain Issa with the first airstrikes in months, and Russia, or the Syrian regime it supports, is hammering Syrians in Turkish-occupied areas of northern Syria, according to reports. The airstrikes on Ain Issa were reported by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights over the weekend. Russian jets hit a “rebel training camp,” among other sites, and trucks had been hit near the Bab al-Hawa crossing, according to reports.

<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/turkey-and-russia-increase-strikes-in-syria-662778>

TURKEY

Turkey says civilians wounded in Syrian missile raids

Aljazeera, 15th March, 2021

Missile attacks in Turkish-controlled northern Syria wounded several civilians, according to Turkey’s defence ministry and a monitoring group. The ministry said on Monday that the

ballistic missiles were fired from the Kuweires air base in Aleppo – under the control of the Syrian government – and struck al-Bab and Jarablus towns in the north of the war-torn country. In March, missile attacks on oil refineries in the same area left four dead and 24 wounded.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/15/turkey-says-civilians-wounded-in-syrian-missile-strike>

Turkey, US to hold joint military drill in East Med

Daily Sabah, 16th March, 2021

Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) and the U.S. military are expected to carry out some comprehensive training to increase interoperability in the Eastern Mediterranean. As part of that plan, Turkish frigate TCG Gemlik, affiliated with the Naval Forces Command, will meet up with an Aircraft Carrier Task Group, led by the USS Eisenhower, in the south of Rhodes on Tuesday, according to Turkish Defense Ministry sources. TCG Gemlik, which will sail for a while with the aforementioned task group, will join some extended training in the Eastern Mediterranean on March 18. Transition training will also be held in the Eastern Mediterranean with the USS Eisenhower Aircraft Carrier Task Group, with the participation of frigates from the Naval Forces Command.

<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkey-us-to-hold-joint-military-drill-in-east-med>

Greece, Turkey resume preliminary talks on Mediterranean dispute

Aljazeera, 16th March, 2021

Senior diplomats from Greece and Turkey have met in Athens in an effort to ease longstanding maritime disputes before a European Union summit later this month.

Diplomatic sources said another round of talks resumed in a central Athens hotel on Tuesday, however, no details were given on the substance of the meetings. The two neighbouring NATO allies are at odds over issues such as competing claims over their respective continental shelves, maritime rights, and air space in the Mediterranean, energy, ethnically split Cyprus, and the status of some islands in the Aegean Sea. Underlining the tensions, Turkey this week protested against a deal between Greece, Israel and Cyprus for an undersea cable linking their electricity grids. According to the state-run Anadolu news agency, Ankara believes the planned route for the cable runs through Turkey's continental shelf.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/16/greece-turkey-resume-preliminary-talks-on-mediterranean-dispute>

Saudi Arabia wants to buy Turkey's armed drones: Erdogan

Aljazeera, 16th March, 2021

Saudi Arabia is seeking to buy armed drones from Turkey, said President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Tuesday, in a move that could mark a rapprochement between the two rival regional powers.

But speaking during a press briefing, Erdogan also voiced his displeasure at the kingdom's decision to conduct joint air exercises with Turkey's longstanding rival Greece, suggesting an agreement on drones depended on Riyadh's future conduct. "Saudi Arabia is conducting joint exercises with Greece," Erdogan said.

"Yet at the same time, Saudi Arabia is asking us for armed drones. Our hope is to solve this issue calmly without getting heated."

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/16/saudi-arabia-willing-to-buy-turkeys-armed-drones-erdogan>

EU halts plans to blacklist Turkey oil execs

Aljazeera, 18th March, 2021

The European Union has frozen plans to blacklist more senior executives at Turkey's state-owned Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO), four diplomats said, in the clearest sign that a diplomatic offensive by Ankara this year is bearing fruit. European Union leaders in December had proposed asset freezes and travel bans over Turkey's "unauthorised drilling activities" for natural gas in disputed waters in the eastern Mediterranean, although they did not specify individuals. The EU had also agreed to weigh tougher economic sanctions at a summit on March 25-26, after a difficult year in which Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed publicly his hope that protests in France would topple President Emmanuel Macron.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/3/18/eu>

Kalin, Sullivan highlight mutual efforts to solve Turkey-US issues

Daily Sabah, 23rd March, 2021

Presidential Spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin and Jake Sullivan, the National Security Advisor to U.S. President Joe Biden highlighted that bilateral relations between Turkey and the U.S. need to focus on common interests and strategic priorities, according to a press release published Tuesday. Kalin and Sullivan held a phone conversation, in which they discussed bilateral ties, regional issues like the Syrian Crisis, and ongoing developments in Libya and Iraq, as well as the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. They also emphasized the need for mutual efforts to solve the ongoing issues related to the Russian-made S-400 missile defense system and the F-35s through a constructive engagement.

<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/kalin-sullivan-highlight-mutual-efforts-to-solve-turkey-us-issues>

Turkish military provides training to Azerbaijan's military

Daily Sabah, 28th March, 2021

The Turkish military provided mountaineering training to Azerbaijani military staff, the Defense Ministry said Sunday. In a statement, the ministry said the training took place in the mountaineering commando school and training center in the southern Turkish province of Isparta. Last month, Turkey and Azerbaijan carried out the Winter 2021 Drill, featuring domestically developed weaponry and equipment. Ground and air assaults, airdrops, airborne operations and logistic support were practiced by both militaries. Ankara and Baku, with the participation of the countries' air and ground forces, launched joint military drills last year in the wake of Armenian attacks on Azerbaijani border points.

<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkish-military-provides-training-to-azerbajans-military>