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'IDF MUST BE PREPARED FOR POSSIBLE WAR WITH HAMAS'

February 11, 2016 Arutz Sheva 7 reported: "Senior officers in the IDF's Southern Command have begun to express concerns that the security situation along Israel's border with Gaza is nearing the same levels of strain as during Operation Protective Edge. However, according to one officer, unlike the 2014 campaign, there is now a possibility of the Israeli army taking offensive action against Hamas' terrorist tunnels – from across the border.

'The various units should prepare for the possibility that the political echelon will lose patience or that the threat of tunnels in the Gaza Strip will not allow for restraint, and they will try to initiate treatment of the tunnels in Palestinian territory,' the officer told Walla! News. He added that all military units should maintain a high level of readiness for the possibility of deployment, and that exercises be conducted for entering Gaza, including the scenario of rockets being launched at IDF bases. Indeed, members of Security Cabinet have already suggested that Israel initiate action against the Hamas tunnels leading into Israel..."

MOSCOW WARNS US OVER MISSILE SYSTEM DEPLOYMENT TO S. KOREA

February 10, 2016 SpaceDaily.com reported: "Moscow on Wednesday warned that Washington's deployment of a US missile defence system to South Korea could spark an arms race in the region. South Korean and US defence officials said last week they would begin formal talks on the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence System (THAAD) system in response to North Korea's recent nuclear and missile tests.

"The appearance of elements of the US global missile defence system in the region -- which is characterised by a very difficult security situation -- can provoke an arms race in Northeast Asia and complicate the resolution of the nuclear problem on the Korean peninsula," said the Russian foreign ministry.

"On a more global scale, this step can increase the destructive influence of the US global missile defence system on international security and stability."

The foreign ministry reiterated that Pyongyang's nuclear and missile tests "could not but inspire strong condemnation" but accused Washington of using them to expand its missile defence system. The US insists that the defence system is a deterrent necessitated by the North's advancing ballistic missile programme. China has also argued it would undermine stability in the delicately balanced region. Pyongyang has said that the deployment of a missile defence system would be a Cold War tactic to "contain" China and Russia.

The THAAD system, in service since 2008, includes truck-mounted launchers, radars, interceptor missiles and global communications links. Five THAAD batteries are currently operational, according to the Pentagon's Missile Defense Agency, and two more were ordered in 2014.

North Korea's rocket launch last week, widely seen as a disguised long-range missile test, sparked international fury and prompted an agreement at the UN Security Council to slap new sanctions against the increasingly defiant state. The launch, which violated multiple UN resolutions, came just weeks after Pyongyang carried out its fourth nuclear test."

KHAMENEI: AMERICANS SUPPORTING 'CHILD-KILLING ISRAEL'

February 9, 2016 Arutz Sheva 7 reported: "Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, on Monday launched yet another tirade against the United States and Israel. In his latest remarks, Khamenei dismissed Washington's claim of support for human rights and democracy and, as proof of his remarks, noted its support for 'child killing' Israel as well as Saudi Arabia, Iran's longtime rival.

'The Americans don't have any answers to the easiest questions from the world community. They don't say why they support those behind the ongoing crimes against humanity in Yemen. They don't shy away from backing those behind the ongoing state terrorism against the defenseless people of Yemen,' he charged in comments quoted by the Fars news agency.

Khamenei then added, 'They (the Americans) support the child-killer Zionist regime and regional allies which aren't familiar with and don't understand elections at all.'

He advised Iranian officials to be wary of American officials who, he claimed 'commit the worst possible crimes then smile and talk to you.'

The remarks are part of Khamenei's ongoing rhetoric against the United States, to which he refers as the 'Great Satan.'

Khamenei has accused the United States of trying to "destroy" Islam. Recently he also accused the United States of using "money and sexual attractions" to wreak havoc on the Islamic Republic's way of life. Israel has also been continuously targeted by Khamenei, who several months ago went so far as to publish a new book on the topic of outwitting the United States and destroying Israel. He has in the past referred to Israel as a "cancerous tumor" and also predicted several months ago that the Jewish state will not exist in 25 years..."

HAWAII'S BIG ISLAND DECLARES EMERGENCY OVER DENGUE FEVER INFECTIONS

February 9, 2016 Reuters reported: "The mayor of Hawaii's Big Island declared a state of emergency on Monday to deal with a growing outbreak of dengue fever, spread by infected mosquitoes, with 250 cases confirmed over the past four months.

As a result of Hawaii County Mayor Billy Kenoi's order people on the Big Island will be allowed to resume disposing of old tires in landfills, since tires which are left lying around are a known breeding spot for mosquitoes.

There have been 250 confirmed cases of dengue fever on the island since Oct. 29, making it the largest outbreak in the state since the 1940s, according to the mayor's declaration and Hawaii health officials. Dengue fever causes flu-like symptoms and can develop into the



deadly dengue hemorrhagic fever.

Hawaii Governor David Ige said in a statement he supported the efforts on the Big Island but would not issue a statewide emergency declaration unless the outbreak spread to other islands or expanded to include other diseases, such as the Zika virus.

Zika is spreading rapidly in South and Central America and the Caribbean and has been linked to severe birth defects in Brazil. Last month, a baby born with brain damage at a hospital in Oahu, Hawaii, was apparently the first case of the mosquito-borne Zika virus in a birth on U.S. soil, health officials said.

Dengue is not endemic to Hawaii but has occasionally spread after being imported by infected travelers. The outbreak on the Big Island is the first cluster of locally-acquired dengue fever since a 2011 outbreak on Oahu, the Hawaii Department of Health said."

WHY A SELLOFF IN EUROPEAN BANKS IS OMINOUS

February 8, 2016 MarketWatch.com reported: "European banks have been caught in a perfect storm of market turmoil, lately. Lackluster profits and negative interest rates, have prompted investors to dump shares in the sector that was touted as one of the best investment ideas just a few months ago. The region's banking gauge, the Stoxx Europe 600 Banks Index FX7, -5.59% has logged six straight weeks of declines, its longest weekly losing stretch since 2008, when banks booked 10 weeks of losses, beginning in May, according to FactSet data.

"The current environment for European banks is very, very bad. Over a full business cycle, I think it's very questionable whether banks on average are able to cover their cost of equity. And as a result that makes it an unattractive investment for long-term investors," warned Peter Garnry, head of equity strategy at Saxo Bank. The doom-and-gloom outlook for banks comes as the stock market has had an ominous start to the year.

East or west, investors ran for the exit in a market marred by panic over tumbling oil prices CLH6, -2.53% and signs of sluggishness in China. But for Europe's banking sector, the new year has started even worse, sending the bank index down 23% year-to-date, compared with 13% for the broader Stoxx Europe 600 index SXXP, -3.54%

So what happened? At the end of last year, banks were singled out as one of the most popular sectors for 2016 because of expected benefits from higher bond yields, rising inflation expectations and improved economic growth. That outlook, however, was before the one-two punch of plunging oil and a slowdown in China sapped investor confidence world-wide.

Garnry said the slump in bank shares is "a little bit odd" given the recent growth in the European economy and aggressive easing from the European Central Bank. Normally, banks benefit from measures such as quantitative easing, but it's just not doing the trick in Europe.

"And it's worrisome, because banks are much more important for the credit mechanism in the economy here in Europe than it is in the U.S. There, you have a capital market where it's easier to issue corporate bonds and get funding outside the commercial banking system. We don't have that to the same extent in Europe, and therefore [the current weakness] is a little bit scary," he said.

N. KOREA TRIGGERS FRESH FURY WITH SPACE ROCKET LAUNCH

February 7, 2016 SpaceDaily.com reported: "North Korea said Sunday it had successfully put a satellite into orbit, with a rocket launch widely condemned as a disguised ballistic missile test for a weapons delivery system to strike the US mainland. The launch, which violated multiple UN resolutions, amounted to the North doubling down against an international community already struggling to punish Pyongyang for its nuclear test a month ago.

There was no immediate external confirmation that the final stage of the satellite-bearing rocket had successfully achieved orbit, although a US defence official said the launch vehicle "appears to have reached space."

In a special state TV broadcast, a female North Korean announcer, wearing a traditional Korean hanbok dress, hailed the "epochal" launch, personally ordered by leader Kim Jong-Un. While stressing that it represented the legitimate exercise of North Korea's right to the "peaceful and independent" use of space, she also noted that it marked a breakthrough in boosting national "defence capability."

Condemnation was swift, with US Secretary of State John Kerry calling the launch a "flagrant violation" of UN resolutions and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe saying it was "absolutely intolerable"..."

EXCLUSIVE: IRAN WANTS EURO PAYMENT FOR NEW AND OUTSTANDING OIL SALES - SOURCE

February 5, 2016 Reuters.com reported: "Iran wants to recover tens of billions of dollars it is owed by India and other buyers of its oil in euros and is billing new crude sales in euros, too, looking to reduce its dependence on the U.S. dollar following last month's sanctions relief. A source at state-owned National Iranian Oil Co (NIOC) told Reuters that Iran will charge in euros for its recently signed oil contracts with firms including French oil and gas major Total, Spanish refiner Cepsa and Litasco, the trading arm of Russia's Lukoil.



"In our invoices we mention a clause that buyers of our oil will have to pay in euros, considering the exchange rate versus the dollar around the time of delivery," the NIOC source said. Lukoil and Total declined to comment, while Cepsa did not respond to a request for comment.

Iran has also told its trading partners who owe it billions of dollars that it wants to be paid in euros rather than U.S. dollars, said the person, who has direct knowledge of the matter. Iran was allowed to recover some of the funds frozen under U.S.-led sanctions in currencies other than dollars, such as the Omani rial and UAE dhiram. Switching oil sales to euros makes sense as Europe is now one of Iran's biggest trading partners.

"Many European companies are rushing to Iran for business opportunities, so it makes sense to have revenue in euros," said Robin Mills, chief executive of Dubai-based Qamar Energy. Iran has pushed for years to have the euro replace the dollar as the currency for international oil trade. In 2007, Tehran failed to persuade OPEC members to switch away from the dollar, which its then President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called a "worthless piece of paper"..."