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US LOOKS TO FORM ARAB ALLIANCE AGAINST IRAN

February 16, 2017 timesofisrael.com reported: “The Trump administration is reportedly working to create a military alliance of Sunni Arab nations that would share intelligence with Israel and the US to counter the rising threat of Iran. A NATO-like mutual defense pact would include Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other nations, according to a report Wednesday in the Wall Street Journal.

The concern about Shiite Iran’s expansionist aspirations unites these nations, and the goal is to create a pact whereby an attack on one of them would be treated as an act of aggression against all of them, according to five unnamed sources who are involved in the ongoing discussions on behalf of those nations.

Neither the US nor Israel would be directly part of the pact, but both would provide intelligence and backing to the group.

‘They’ve been asking diplomatic missions in Washington if we’d be willing to join this force that has an Israeli component,’ according to one of the diplomats. ‘Israel’s role would likely be intelligence sharing, not training or boots on the ground. They’d provide intelligence and targets. That’s what the Israelis are good at.’...

IRAN CONTINUES TO CALL FOR ISRAEL’S DESTRUCTION DESPITE NUCLEAR DEAL

February 16, 2017 The Jerusalem Post reported: “Iranian leaders’ calls for Israel’s destruction have not abated at all in the 20 months since the Iranian nuclear deal was signed, meaning that those who claimed the deal would moderate Iranian attitudes were completely wrong, former Foreign Ministry director-general Dore Gold said on Wednesday.

Gold’s comments came as the think tank he heads, the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, put out a compilation of poisonous statements made by Iranian leaders, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, since the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was signed in July 2015.

‘There is absolutely no indication of one iota of moderation by the Iranian elite in their hostile intentions toward Israel since the conclusion of the Iran nuclear agreement. Iranian policy in this regard is driven by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps,’ Gold said.

‘In September 2015, Khamenei himself said that the nuclear agreement would not change the destruction of Israel in 25 years,’ he added. ‘Those who asserted that the Iran nuclear agreement would lead to a moderation of Iranian attitudes were completely wrong.’

Leading what could be termed a ‘greatest hits parade’ of Iranian anti-Israel comments since the regime was Khamenei himself, who in September of 2015, just three months after the deal was signed, said: ‘You [Zionist regime] will not seen 25 years from today! By Allah’s favor and grace, nothing called the ‘Zionist regime’ will exist by 25 years from now.’...

FRENCH ELECTION PUTS POSSIBILITY OF ‘FREXIT’ ON THE AGENDA

February 15, 2017 wsj.com reported: “What’s striking about the French presidential election is the extent to which the two front-runners share a basic analysis of the choice facing the country. Marine Le Pen, the leader of the right-wing National Front, and Emmanuel Macron, the 39-year-old former economy minister who quit François Hollande’s government to stand as an independent, are poles apart politically. But both agree that the defining issue is France’s membership of the eurozone.



Both point to the widening divergence between Germany and France’s economic performance during the past decade as evidence that the status quo isn’t sustainable. The National Front points to a recent International Monetary Fund study that suggested the euro is up to 15% undervalued in Germany and 6% overvalued in France as proof that France is at a competitive disadvantage. It argues that the only way France can remain a member of what one party official calls the “fixed eurozone exchange-rate regime” is to pursue an internal devaluation by cutting back on social protections and driving down wages. The alternative is to quit the eurozone.

Mr. Macron implicitly agrees. He wants France to stay in the euro and is campaigning for changes to the country’s public sector, welfare system and labor rules, which he says are needed to restore the country’s competitiveness. He advocates a more-flexible welfare system and labor market that protects individuals rather than jobs and allows employers to strike deals with workers at a company level rather than across sectors.

Ms. Le Pen, on the other hand, believes there is no appetite for cuts to welfare, which the National Front says provides an important economic as well as social safety net, helping to maintain household consumption. It argues that the only way to preserve the welfare system is to quit the eurozone and devalue the currency.

Of course, Ms. Le Pen’s program rests on a number of questionable assumptions. The first is that a French exit, or “Frexit,” can be managed in an orderly way. The National Front believes this is possible because under international law all government debts would be redenominated into the new national currency so there is no risk of national bankruptcy. As the fifth-largest economy in the world, it is confident that France has the clout to strike a good deal with its EU partners. There is little risk of capital flight, party officials say, because France’s post-devaluation economic prospects would be so favorable.”...

CHINA'S HOLDINGS OF TREASURIES DROPPED IN 2016 BY MOST ON RECORD

February 15, 2017 bloomberg.com reported: “China’s holdings of U.S. Treasuries declined by the most on record last year, as the world’s second-largest economy dipped into its foreign-exchange reserves to buttress the yuan. Japan, America’s largest foreign creditor, trimmed its holdings for a second straight year.

A monthly Treasury Department report released in Washington on Wednesday showed China held \$1.06 trillion in U.S. government bonds, notes and bills in December, up \$9.1 billion from November but down \$188 billion from a year earlier. It was the first monthly increase since May.

The People's Bank of China, owner of the world's biggest foreign-exchange reserves, has burned through a quarter of its war chest since 2014 in an effort to underpin the yuan and deter capital from fleeing the country. Chinese sales have made borrowing more costly for the U.S. government: 10-year yields rose to 2.6 percent last year, from as low as 1.3 percent.

"China is a massive player in our market, and can move the markets whether they are a buyer or seller," said Tom di Galoma, managing director of government trading and strategy at Seaport Global Holdings. "If 10-year yields are going to trade to 3 percent this year, China will be the catalyst."

China's foreign currency reserves fell for a seventh straight month in January to \$3 trillion, to the lowest in almost six years, driven by the central bank's intervention in foreign-exchange markets."..."

HAMAS HARDLINER YEHIYA SINWAR ELECTED AS GAZA LEADER

February 14, 2017 BBC News reported: "The Palestinian militant group Hamas has elected a hardline commander of its armed wing as the movement's overall leader in the Gaza Strip. Yehiya Sinwar replaces Ismail Haniyeh, a former prime minister in the territory's Hamas-run government. Mr Sinwar was jailed in Israel for murder but freed under a deal when Hamas released an Israeli in 2011.

Hamas rejects Israel's right to exist and Mr Sinwar is known to oppose any compromise with the Jewish state. Some Hamas leaders have suggested a long truce with Israel if it completely withdraws to pre-1967 ceasefire lines and lifts its blockade of Gaza. The movement's charter, however, calls for Israel's destruction and it is designated a terrorist group by Israel, the US, EU and other world powers..."

IRANIAN OFFICIAL: 'NEWCOMER' TRUMP WOULD SUFFER 'UNPRECEDENTED DEFEAT' IF HE CROSSED IRAN

February 14, 2017 Breitbart.com reported: "A senior Iranian official goaded President Donald Trump on Sunday, insisting the U.S. would suffer an 'unprecedented defeat' at the hands of an 'iron dam' like Iran.

Ali Akbar Velayati, head of the Expediency Council's Strategic Research Center, told the semi-official Tasnim news agency that a 'calculating newcomer' like Trump wouldn't dare confront Iran, which is far more powerful than other countries the U.S. has come up against.

Velayati was responding to Trump's veiled warning on Friday to Iranian President Hassan Rouhani in which he said Rouhani 'better be careful' about threatening the U.S.

'We are by no means worried about Trump's comments,' Velayati said, adding that despite Trump's public rhetoric, the president is a calculating politician. Furthermore, the Iranian official told Tasnim, the opposition Trump faces at home among the media, judiciary and influential politicians will prevent him from doing what he wants with Iran.

Velayati, who also served as Iran's foreign minister, said the Islamic Republic was not seeking war against any country, but would not waste a moment defending itself if necessary..."

BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU: JIM ROGERS PROPHEZIES DEATH OF CASH

February 14, 2017 rt.com reported: "The time will come when you won't be able to buy a cup of coffee without being traced, warns investment guru Jim Rogers. To control people, governments will increasingly seek to hunt down cash spending, he adds.



"Governments are always looking out for themselves first, and it's the same old thing that has been going on for hundreds of years. The Indians recently did the same thing. They withdrew 86 percent of the currency in circulation, and they have now made it illegal to spend more than, I think it's about \$4,000 in any cash transaction. In France you cannot use more than, I think it's a €1,000," said Rogers in an interview with MacroVoices Podcast.

"Many countries are already doing this. Some states in the US you cannot make cash transactions above a certain amount. Governments love it. Then they can control you. If you want to go and buy a cup of coffee, they know how many you drink, where you buy them, etc., if they can all put it into electronic formats and they will. The world is all going electronic," the investor said.

According to Rogers, governments will claim they are doing it for the public good, not for themselves.

"When it's done, the governments are going to be very, very happy they are going to say they're doing it for our own good, this is not them, this is for our good. That they're doing this, but it's coming, and it's going to be a whole different world in which we live. Probably we are not going to have as many freedoms as we have now even though we are already losing our freedoms at a significant pace," Rodgers told the radio.

This month, the European Commission proposed a bill targeting cash payments."..."

N. KOREA FIRES BALLISTIC MISSILE IN CHALLENGE TO TRUMP: SEOUL

February 12, 2017 spacedaily.com reported: "North Korea fired a ballistic missile on Sunday, drawing a strong rebuke from US President Donald Trump who vowed "100 percent" support for key ally Japan at a press conference with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

The missile, the first test since Trump became president, was launched around 7:55 am (2255 GMT Saturday) from Banghyon air base in the western province of North Pyongan, and flew east towards the Sea of Japan (East Sea), the South Korean defence ministry said.

It flew about 500 kilometres (310 miles) before falling into the sea, a ministry spokesman said, adding the exact type of missile had yet to be identified.'...Trump responded with an assurance to visiting Japanese Prime Minister Abe that Washington was committed to the security of its key Asian ally.

"I just want everybody to understand and fully know that the United States of America stands behind Japan, its great ally, 100 percent," Trump said, without elaborating further."..."

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