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## Yemen's warring parties agree on largest prisoner swap



REUTERS

Yemen's warring parties agreed to exchange around 1,000 prisoners, including 15 Saudis, as part of trust-building steps aimed at reviving a stalled peace process, the United Nations and sources said on Sunday.

The Houthi movement and the former Yemeni government, backed by a Saudi-led military coalition, that have been battling for over five years, signed a deal in late 2018 to swap some 15,000 detainees split between both sides but the pact has been slowly and only partially implemented.

The two sides will now free 1,081 detainees and prisoners, UN Envoy Martin Griffiths said in a joint news briefing with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) after a nearly 10-day meeting of the prisoners' exchange committee held in the Swiss village of Glion above Lake Geneva, Reuters reported.

Heads of the two sides of the committee hugged at the end of their meeting, with Griffiths telling them: "Well done, well done."

Sources familiar with the talks and Al-Masirah TV said the movement would release 400 people, including 15 Saudis and four Sudanese, while the coalition would free 681 Houthi fighters in the largest swap since peace talks in Stockholm in December 2018.

"I urge the parties to move forward immediately with the release and to spare no effort in building upon this momentum to swiftly agree to releasing more detainees," Griffiths said.

ICRC Middle East Director Fabrizio Carboni, sitting next to Griffiths, called on the two warring parties to provide "security and logistical guarantees" for swift releases. The ICRC team will interview those released and give them medical checks.

Yemen has been mired in conflict since the Western-backed coalition to intervene in March 2015 to restore a government that resigned in late 2014 and drive the Houthis out of the capital Sana'a.

# Iran calls for immediate expulsion of US from Iraq



IRNA

Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani on Sunday discussed a range of issues with visiting Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein, including the need for the US military to withdraw from Iraq.

In the meeting, the two sides exchanged views on bilateral, regional and international issues.

"Dialogue and regional cooperation are the best ways to establish lasting stability and security," Shamkhani noted.

The top security official touched upon regional countries' potential to establish

stability through talks and cooperation without the interference of ultra-regional powers, and highlighted the necessity of cooperation among all regional states.

Shamkhani referred to Israel's ongoing scheme to normalize its relations with more regional countries, and said the plan merely aims to secure full domination over the region.

"This trend, which is a major act of betrayal and a gross violation of Palestinian people's rights, will not only fuel insecurity and sow discord among regional countries, but pose serious danger to the exist-

ence of compromising countries," said Shamkhani.

He described Tehran-Baghdad agreements as strategically significant.

"By expediting the full implementation of these agreements, the two countries will not only boost reciprocal ties, but present a successful model of all-out cooperation," he said.

"Shamkhani then noted that Washington's assassination of top Iranian General Qassem Soleimani in Iraq in January is a glaring example of state terrorism.

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## Azerbaijan, Armenia on war footing after casualties in heavy fighting

Clashes erupted between Azerbaijan and Armenia on Sunday over the volatile Nagorno-Karabakh region, reigniting concern about instability in the South Caucasus, a corridor for pipelines transporting oil and gas to world markets.

Both sides, which fought a war in the 1990s, reported fatalities. Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, a breakaway region that is inside Azerbaijan but is run by ethnic Armenians, declared martial law and mobilized their male populations.

Armenia said Azerbaijan had carried out an air and artillery attack on Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan said it had responded to Armenian shelling and that it had seized control of up to seven villages, but Nagorno-Karabakh denied this.

Pipelines shipping Caspian oil and natural gas from Azerbaijan to the world pass close to Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia also warned about security risks in the South Caucasus in July after Azerbaijan threatened to attack Armenia's nuclear power plant as possible retaliation.

Nagorno-Karabakh broke away from Azerbaijan in a conflict that broke out as the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991.

Though a cease-fire was agreed upon in 1994, after thousands of people were killed and many more displaced, Azerbaijan and Armenia frequently accuse each other of attacks around Nagorno-Karabakh and along the separate Azeri-Armenian frontier.

In Sunday's clashes, Armenian right activists said an ethnic Armenian woman and child had been killed. Azerbaijan said an unspecified number of its civilians had been killed. Nagorno-Karabakh denied a report that 10 of its military were killed.

Armenia said Azeri forces had attacked civilian targets including Nagorno-Karabakh's capital, Stepanakert, and promised a "proportionate response".

"We stay strong next to our army to pro-

tect our motherland from Azeri invasion," Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan wrote on Twitter.

Azerbaijan denied an Armenian Defense Ministry statement saying Azeri helicopters and tanks had been destroyed, and accused Armenian forces of launching "deliberate and targeted" attacks along the front line.

"We defend our territory, our cause is right!" Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, said in an address to the nation.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said Sunday that Azerbaijan has declared war on his people.

Azerbaijan's "authoritarian regime has once again declared war on the Armenian



AP

people," Pashinyan said in a televised statement, adding, "We are on the brink of a full-scale war in the South Caucasus, which might have unpredictable consequences."

### Call for cease-fire

The clashes prompted a flurry of diplomacy to prevent a new flare-up of a decades-old conflict between majority Christian Armenia and mainly Muslim Azerbaijan.

Iran called on Azerbaijan and Armenia to exercise restraint and engage in negotiations.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran is closely monitoring military conflicts between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia with concern, and while inviting

both parties to show self-restraint, calls for immediate cessation of clashes and initiation of talks between the two countries," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said on Sunday.

He added that Tehran is ready to employ all its capacities to help establish a cease-fire and start peace talks between the two sides.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, whose country has mediated between former Soviet republics Armenia and Azerbaijan, spoke by phone to the Armenian, Azeri and Turkish foreign ministers.

Turkey said Armenia must immediately cease what it said was hostility towards Azerbaijan that will "throw the region into fire," and Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Twitter that Ankara would continue to show solidarity with Azerbaijan.

Erdogan urged the Armenian people to "take hold of their future against their leadership that is dragging them to catastrophe and those using it like puppets."

Germany on Sunday called for an "immediate" halt to the fighting, saying the conflict can only be resolved through dialogue.

"I call on both parties to the conflict to immediately stop all hostilities, especially the shelling of villages and towns," Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said in a statement, voicing "alarm" at reports of civilian casualties.

He urged a return to talks to resolve the dispute over the breakaway region, saying that the so-called Minsk Group "stood ready" to help.

France also urged the sides to end hostilities and immediately restart dialogue. Pope Francis appealed to Armenia and Azerbaijan to resolve their differences through negotiations, saying he was praying for peace.

Reuters, AFP and Press TV contributed to this story.

## Iran unveils military robot, naval ballistic missile

Iran's Armed Forces on Sunday unveiled eight indigenous military achievements, including a robot that can carry light to semi-heavy weaponry and a naval ballistic missile.

The robot, unveiled by Army Ground Force, has been named Caracal after a type of wildcat that can be found in parts of Iran. The automaton, which has been designed for ground warfare, has a top speed of 30 kilometers (18 miles) per hour, and has an operating range that exceeds 500 meters (0.3 mile), Press TV reported.

Caracal is equipped with an independent suspension system, smart remote control mechanism, laser range-finder and an optical system.

The ceremony also wheeled out Hadaf (Goal)-2, a new missile launcher with a canister capable of holding and firing two missiles at the same time. The launcher can be used for rapid deployment purposes and is fitted with an automatic leveler that can help it identify the best possible location for deployment.



IRNA

The Ground Force also inaugurated the Gohar (Gem) 4WD vehicle that is empowered to carry as much as 500 kilograms (1,102 lb) off-road, and travel as far as 700 kilometers (434 miles) at a maximum speed of 120 kilometers (74 miles) per hour.

Gohar can also travel across 70-grade lengthwise and 35-grade edgewise slopes and wade into waters that run 800 centimeters deep.

Chabok (Agile), an extremely fast frequency shuffling system, was another item that was put on display during the event. The apparatus provides a highly secure link among ground and airborne communication devices by changing the frequencies traveling between them at a 200,000-per-second rate, thus blocking all radar jamming attempts by the enemy.

The ceremony also featured unveiling of piston engines for drones with capacities ranging from 40 to 400 milliliters. At the former capacity, the engines can fly a 30-kilogram (66-lb) drone.

A relief and rescue robot dubbed Masih (Messiah) and a new tank carrier were also exhibited at the event. Brigadier General Kyoumars Heidari, the commander of Ground Force, hailed Masih as a remarkable helping hand for the military's medical staff, who are busy fighting the new coronavirus pandemic.

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) also put on display a naval ballistic missile named Zolfagar Basir at the National Aerospace Park which was opened in the capital Tehran earlier in the day.

The IRGC hailed the missile, with a range of more than 700 kilometers (434 miles) as its new-generation ballistic missile - after predecessors Khalij Fars and Hormuz - to be used against mobile seaborn targets.

The newest projectile is fitted with a warhead that is guided by an optical seeker head. The precursors to the naval military achievement could respectively fly as far as 300 and 250 kilometers (186 and 155 miles).

Zolfagar Basir's surface-to-surface version can also travel a 700-to-750-kilometer distance.

The IRGC has previously deployed the missile against overseas targets such as gatherings of the terror group Daesh.

Major General Hossein Salami, the IRGC's chief commander, said Iran will never stop "manufacturing power". "We have [well] understood the equations governing independence and esteem, and will never stop manufacturing power," Salami said during the inauguration ceremony.

The exhibition featured a comprehensive display of Iran's deterrence power, Salami said. "The war underway today is one of willpower. The Iranian nation continues down this path with conviction by clearly recognizing its way forward."

The commander also boasted that many of the achievements exhibited on the premises had been attained under sanctions, saying this indicated Iran has managed to turn the illegal bans into "an opportunity for expeditious advancement in the defensive areas."

The exhibition also demonstrated the IRGC's other capabilities in the areas of missiles, UAVs, satellites, defense systems, reconnaissance apparatuses, and electronic warfare, as well as some of the invading drones that have been successfully shot down by the corps in the past, including American and Israeli ones.