

WORLD IN BRIEF

Associated Press

Israel calls on Syria's Assad to 'get rid' of Iranian forces

JERUSALEM — Israel's defense minister today called on President Bashar Assad to "get rid" of Iranian forces in Syria, warning their continued presence would only cause trouble.

Iran, meanwhile, in its first official reaction to Israeli attacks on suspected Iranian targets in Syria, said Israel's attacks came "under fabricated and baseless excuses." A hard-line Iranian cleric threatened his country would retaliate if Israel "does anything foolish."

Israel attacked dozens of suspected Iranian targets in Syria in overnight strikes this week that it said were in response to an Iranian rocket barrage. It was the most serious military confrontation between the two bitter enemies to date. The cross-border exchange gave way to a war of words.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called late Thursday for an immediate halt to "all hostile acts" to avoid "a new conflagration" in the Middle East.

Guterres' comments came as a calm night followed intense attacks on parts of Syria by Israel. Israel has called on the U.N. Security Council and secretary-general to condemn Iran's attack on its positions in the Golan Heights, occupied and annexed by Israel.

The Security Council, deeply divided over Syria, is highly unlikely to issue a statement and as of this morning no council member had asked for a meeting.

Iran has advisers and experts and has backed tens of thousands of militiamen who are fighting alongside Assad's forces in the civil war. Israel has warned it will not tolerate its archenemy Iran establishing a military presence on its doorstep.

The scope of the attacks — which Israel called its largest in Syria since the 1973 Mideast war — raised the specter of a full-fledged war between Iran and Israel in Syria, a conflict that could potentially drag the militant Hezbollah and Lebanon into the mix with devastating effects, although both sides appeared to signal they wanted the confrontation to remain contained, at least for now.

1 Gazan killed, 49 wounded by Israeli fire in border protest

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip — Israeli troops fired live bullets and tear gas today across a border fence into Gaza where Palestinian protesters threw stones, burned tires and flew kites with burning rags attached. One protester was killed and 49 were wounded by Israeli fire, Gaza health officials said.

It was the seventh weekly protest aimed at shaking off a decade-old border blockade of Gaza, and a preview of what is expected to be a much larger border rally on Monday. On that day, protests are timed to coincide with the planned move of the U.S. Embassy in Israel to contested Jerusalem, where Palestinians hope to establish a future capital.

Gaza's Hamas leader, Yehiyeh Sinwawr, has said he expects tens of thousands to participate on Monday. He has raised the possibility of a mass border breach, comparing protesters to a "starving tiger," unpredictable and full of pent-up anger.

Israel has said it will prevent any border breach and has stuck to its open-fire policies, such as targeting "main instigators" and those approaching the fence, despite growing international criticism.

Since the Hamas-led marches began in late March, 41 Palestinian protesters have been killed by Israeli fire, including a 40-year-old man shot dead Friday, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. More than 1,700 Palestinians have been shot and wounded, including 49 on Friday. Seven of the injured on Friday were in serious condition, among them a 16-year-old with a shot to the head.

In Indiana, Trump urges GOP to mobilize for 2018 midterms

ELKHART, Ind. — Embracing his role as party leader, President Donald Trump issued a stern warning at a rally Thursday that Democrats would disrupt the economic progress of his administration, imploring Republicans to mobilize during the 2018 midterm elections.

Trump used one of his signature rallies in northern Indiana to paint a rosy picture of his presidency, pointing to low unemployment, "booming" job growth and optimism under his watch. Two days after Indiana wrapped up a divisive Republican Senate primary, the president praised a lengthy ticket of House and Senate candidates by name and predicted Democrats would dismantle his agenda if they regained control of Congress.

"You have to work every day between now and November to elect more Republicans so that we can continue to make America great again," Trump said, referencing his 2016 campaign slogan.

Chief among his targets: Indiana's Democratic Sen. Joe Donnelly, who faces Republican businessman Mike Braun in what is expected to be one of the nation's most competitive Senate races.

Trump assailed Donnelly for opposing the president's signature tax cuts and his attempt to end the Affordable Care Act. And he criticized Donnelly for supporting the Iran nuclear deal forged by President Barack Obama and withdrawn from by Trump this week.

After the rally, Donnelly said in a statement it was "okay" that Trump and Pence were "here today for politics, but problems only get solved when you roll up your sleeves and put in the hard work."

Trump plan for drug prices won't include direct negotiations

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is set to unveil his long-awaited plan for reducing drug prices after more than a year of bold promises to tackle pharmacy costs that are squeezing millions of Americans.

But the strategy to be outlined in a speech today will not include a key Trump campaign pledge to use the massive buying power of the federal government's Medicare program to directly negotiate lower drug prices for seniors.

Instead, administration officials are previewing a raft of old and new ideas to increase competition and improve transparency in the notoriously complex drug pricing system with the ultimate aim of wringing more savings for consumers.

It's an approach that avoids a direct confrontation with the powerful pharmaceutical lobby, but it could also overwhelm Americans seeking relief from escalating prescription costs.

A majority of Americans say passing laws to bring down prescription drug prices should be a "top priority" for Trump and Congress, according to recent polling by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

As a candidate, Trump railed against the pharmaceutical industry, accusing companies of "getting away with murder." But

as president he has shied away from major reforms and staffed his administration with appointees who have deep ties to the industry, including health secretary, Alex Azar, a former top executive at Eli Lilly.

AT&T chief lobbyist out after hiring Trump attorney Cohen

NEW YORK — The chief lobbyist for AT&T is leaving the company after overseeing a \$50,000-per-month contract for President Donald Trump's attorney Michael Cohen to serve as a political consultant.

In a memo to employees, AT&T CEO Randall Stephenson said the company made a "big mistake" in hiring Cohen as a political consultant. While everything the company did was legal, Stephenson said that the association with Cohen was "a serious misjudgment."

Stephenson noted that the company's reputation has been damaged and that the vetting process used by its team in Washington "clearly failed." The Washington team had hired Cohen under a one-year contract that paid \$50,000 a month.

Stephenson said Bob Quinn, senior executive vice president of the external and legislative affairs group, "will be retiring."

The Justice Department is seeking to block AT&T's \$85 billion purchase of Time Warner on the grounds that it would stifle competition. AT&T disagreed, sending the battle into a federal trial. U.S. District Judge Richard Leon is expected to rule next month.

AT&T said Cohen approached the company after the 2016 presidential election to offer his services.



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