

'US military will be out of Iraq by end of September'

WASHINGTON, July 15 (AP)

THE US military will leave Iraq by the end of September, American and Iraqi officials have said, following a 23-year presence that started with the 2003 invasion against Saddam Hussein and ended with much smaller operations against the Islamic State group.

President Donald Trump, standing alongside Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi at the White House on Tuesday, said "we don't think we need the military there anymore" and noted Iraq's growing relationships with oil companies. "The relationship is a whole big relationship where we don't need the military," Trump said. "We're there to help them. We're there to protect them if need be. But we don't think that's going to be necessary."

Speaking through an interpreter, al-Zaidi said "US forces will be out of Iraq" by Sept. 30, "while US companies will be inside Iraq." The Pentagon said in a subsequent statement that it was reaffirming a 2024 agreement with Iraq to end its mission against IS fighters. Many of the US troops still serving in Iraq



President Donald Trump meets with Iraq's Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi in the Oval Office of the White House on Tuesday. (AP/PTI)

at the time of the deal, which was made during the Biden administration, already have departed.

The United States has been shifting the burden for combating IS in Iraq from American and coalition forces to Iraqi troops who have been trained by the US military. American troops have been diminishing their footprint, withdrawing from areas and consolidating forces. The US invaded Iraq in March 2003 in what it called a massive "shock and awe" bombing campaign that lit up the skies, laid waste to large sections of the country and paved the way for American ground troops to converge on Baghdad.

DRDO completes military trials of secure quantum communication system

NEW DELHI, July 15 (Agencies)

THE Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has successfully completed military field trials of a scalable and practically secure, fibre-based Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) system, thereby moving ahead in providing safe and reliable strategic communication systems.

Quantum communication provides fundamentally unbreakable encryption, making it a dual-use technology with applications in securing data in strategic sectors such as defence, finance, and telecommunications, as well as in protecting national security-related communications.

"Leveraging their lab-level proof of concept and experience of previous trials, the DRDO team, along with their industry partner Taqbit Labs, Bengaluru, has successfully architected and productised this advanced system to secure critical networks,"



DRDO successfully completed military field trials of a scalable and practically secure, fiber based Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) system. (PTI)

the DRDO said in a statement. "This milestone successfully lays the foundation for large-scale, multi-hop quantum networks that is indigenously designed and can seamlessly safeguard national communication infrastructure against emerging cyber threats in the

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quantum era," it added. Last year, DRDO had successfully demonstrated an experimental advancement in quantum communication through the DRDO-Industry-Academia Centre of Excellence (DIA-CoE) at IIT Delhi. This secure communication paved the way for real-time applications in quantum cyber security, including QKD, the development of quantum networks and the future quantum internet.

These efforts align with India's broader objectives to advance quantum technologies for national development.

The project has been executed under the 'Design and

Development of Photonic Technologies for Free Space QKD' programme, sanctioned by DRDO's Directorate of Futuristic Technology Management.

Quantum entanglement-based QKD offers significant advantages over traditional prepare-and-measure method by enhancing both security and functionality. Even if communication devices are compromised or imperfect, the use of quantum entanglement ensures secure key distribution. Any attempt to measure the entangled photons disturbs their quantum state, allowing authorised users to detect the presence of an eavesdropper.

Government unveils Rs 1.9 lakh crore semiconductor, mobile manufacturing push

NEW DELHI, July 15 (PTI)

THE Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved two major manufacturing initiatives with a combined outlay of nearly Rs 1.9 lakh crore (USD 22 billion) to expand India's semiconductor ecosystem, scale up mobile phone production and strengthen its position as a global electronics manufacturing hub.

The Government approved the Rs 1.27 lakh crore Semicon 2.0 programme to accelerate semiconductor design and manufacturing capabilities, alongside the Rs 62,500 crore Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme (MPMS) aimed at increasing domestic production, boosting exports and deepening local value addition in the mobile phone industry.

The semiconductor programme builds on the first phase of the India Semiconductor Mission and will focus on six key areas - chip design, semiconductor equipment and materials, fabrication facilities, advanced packaging and testing, research and development, and talent development.

"We will be self-reliant in the production of indigenous chips by the end of this programme," Minister for Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw said at a news briefing.

The Government expects the new scheme to attract investments of around Rs 4 lakh crore and lead to semiconduc-

CABINET DECISIONS



Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw speaks during a Cabinet briefing, in New Delhi on Wednesday. (ANI)

tor production worth Rs 2 lakh crore during the scheme period.

The Union Cabinet also approved a Rs 62,500 crore Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme to provide production-linked incentives to manufacturers over five years from fiscal year 2026-27 to 2030-31, Vaishnaw said. Incentives will range from 2.25 percent to 5 percent on eligible mobile

phone sales, with additional support for domestic sourcing of key components and for Indian companies investing in product design and research.

2 highway projects for Varanasi of Rs 25,500 cr

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved two highway projects for Varanasi, entailing a total investment of nearly Rs 25,500 crore.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the development of a 43.218-kilometre link connecting NH-31 and the Varanasi Ring Road along the River Varuna to decongest Varanasi city in Uttar Pradesh.

The project comprises a 6/4-lane predominantly elevated corridor, including the main carriageway, flyovers, loops, ramps, and service roads, and will be implemented by the NHAI under the Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM) at a total capital cost of Rs 10,998.32 crore, I&B Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw informed.

The CCEA also approved the development of a corridor between National Highway-19 and the Varanasi Ring Road with riverbank connectivity along the River Ganga for the decongestion of Varanasi city, the Minister said while briefing the media about the various

Cabinet decisions.

2 railway projects covering 4 districts in Odisha, Jharkhand

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Wednesday approved two Railway Ministry projects with a total estimated cost of approximately Rs 3,907 crore.

The doubling of the Paradeep-Haridaspur section and the construction of a fourth railway line on the Rajkharsawan-Dangoaposi section are the two projects approved by the committee. "The increased line capacity will significantly enhance mobility, resulting in improved operational efficiency and service reliability for Indian Railways. These multi-tracking proposals are poised to streamline operations and alleviate congestion," a Government press note said.

National Investment Policy to add urea capacity

The Government on Wednesday announced a new National Investment Policy for Urea (NIPU-2026) to set up 8-9 new gas-based plants with a production capacity of 10 million tonne to make the country self-reliant in the most widely consumed fertiliser.

Border fence between Gibraltar, Spain removed under EU-UK deal

MADRID, July 15 (AP)

THOUSANDS of people who travel every day between the southern tip of Spain and the British territory of Gibraltar will no longer have to cross a physical border, beginning on Wednesday.

The official opening at midnight, after a border fence was fully removed, allows a new freedom of movement under a historic European Union-UK treaty that came after years of post-Brexit wrangling.

The contested British Overseas Territory of 38,000 people is perched at the southern tip of the Iberian Peninsula, strategically located mere miles from Morocco at a point where the Atlantic Ocean meets the Mediterranean Sea.

When Britain left the EU in 2020, the relationship between Gibraltar and the bloc had been left unresolved. Previous talks on a deal to ensure people and goods could keep flowing across the border had made halting progress. In 2025, the EU and UK announced an agreement on those issues, with the two sides and Gibraltar's government signing a treaty Tuesday that eases border crossings.

The UK's Foreign Office Minister Stephen Doughty said Tuesday that the agreement secured Gibraltar's long-term economic future and interests.

US reimposes blockade on Iran

Tehran threatens to halt all Mideast energy exports

7 Iran troops killed in US airstrike on Army barracks while wounding 260 others across the country in airstrikes

■ By Jon Gambrell
DUBAI, July 15 (AP)

THE US military reimposed a naval blockade on Iran and intensified its airstrike campaign early on Wednesday, hitting an Iranian Army barracks and killing at least seven troops while wounding 260 people across the country, Iranian officials said.

Days of retaliatory strikes across the Middle-East by Iran and the US, and both nations' attempts to assert control over



Ships seen near the Strait of Hormuz before US reimposed blockade on Iran.

(AP)

the Strait of Hormuz, threaten to push the region back to all-out war.

More than 30 people have been killed over "recent days," Iranian Government spokesperson Fatemeh Mohajerani said, with-

out elaborating. Seven of the dead came from the attack on the barracks in Iran's south-eastern Sistan and Baluchestan province.

On Wednesday, the US military's Central Command said, it

launched airstrikes on Greater Tunb Island in the Strait of Hormuz, targeting Iranian defence and missile sites. The island is viewed as a strategic point in the strait.

The US first imposed the blockade in mid-April and then lifted it in mid-June, a day after signing the interim deal that set a 60-day period for negotiations over issues like Iran's nuclear programme, but talks have stalled as fighting over the strait, through which a fifth of the world's oil and natural gas trade passes during peacetime, has intensified.

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard threatened to halt all energy exports from the Middle East over the blockade. "The export of oil and gas from the region will be either for everyone or for no one," it said.

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'Trump told Netanyahu to pull out troops from Syria, Lebanon'

WASHINGTON, July 15 (ANI)

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump urged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to initiate the withdrawal of Israeli military units from southern Syria and Lebanon during a telephone conversation last week, according to a report by Axios, which cited American and Israeli officials.

The report indicated that Trump cautioned that Israel's sustained military footprint within Syrian territory could trigger heightened regional volatility.

"They don't want you there. You should redeploy," Trump told Netanyahu, according to a US official cited by Axios. The official further noted that Trump delivered "the same" message concerning Israel's strategic military positioning in southern Lebanon.

The reported discussion occurred a day after Trump met with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa on the fringes of the NATO summit in Turkey. During the summit, the US administration pressed ahead with initiatives to facilitate a fresh security matrix between Israel and Syria, the report detailed.

The White House declined to comment on the specific details of the telephone conversation but did not issue a denial regarding the narrative.

'Russian crude remains India's key energy security hedge despite proposed tariffs'

NEW DELHI, July 15 (PTI)

PROPOSED US tariffs targeting countries that buy Russian crude could inject fresh volatility into global oil markets, but replacing Russian supply would be difficult given limited spare production capacity and ongoing geopolitical risks, according to a Kpler analyst.

"Russian crude has become the country's strongest energy security hedge, particularly since the Strait of Hormuz disruptions," according to Sumit Ritolia, an analyst at Kpler.

US senators on Tuesday unveiled a revised bipartisan Russia sanctions bill that would impose sanctions on Russian officials while softening proposed tariffs on countries importing Russian oil and gas.



The measure lowers the maximum tariff on the five largest buyers of Russian energy, including China and India, to 100 per cent from the 500 per cent proposed in the original bill introduced in April 2025. It also exempts countries importing less than 15 per cent of Russia's natural gas exports if they are taking significant steps to reduce those purchases.

Russia supplied around 2.6 million barrels per day (mbd)

of crude to India in June, accounting for more than half of the country's total crude imports, Ritolia said. Imports have risen steadily since March, while July arrivals are on track to match or exceed June's volumes. Russian crude has also acted as a stabilising force in global oil markets, he said, noting that earlier sanctions were designed to keep Russian oil flowing to avoid removing millions of barrels a day from the market and driving prices sharply higher.

"If secondary tariffs of 100 per cent... Were implemented in a way that materially reduced purchases of Russian crude, the market would first need to answer a simple question: where would the replacement barrels come from?" Ritolia said.

International situation wants India, Belgium to engage more deeply, says Jaishankar

BRUSSELS, July 15 (Agencies)

EXTERNAL Affairs Minister (EAM) S Jaishankar said on Wednesday that the international situation wants nations like India and Belgium, which have a close relationship, to engage more deeply.

EAM Jaishankar said that both countries have an opportunity of not just building on the current 'very substantive relationship', but can also do a lot in the field of clean energy, digital technologies, life sciences, chemical industry, logistics, manufacturing, etc. He stated that India's ties with Belgium are very much in tandem with those with the European Union (EU) which are acquiring a strategic character due to the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between both sides.

"I think both bilaterally and globally there is a strong case for us to engage more. What we are doing with Belgium is very much in tandem to what we are doing with the European Union. You are in a way the core of the European Union and I would say we can see in front of our eyes that the



(From L) Principal Scientific Adviser Ajay K Sood, Union Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Jitin Prasada, Union External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and (R) Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal during a meeting with the (2nd R) President of the European Council Antonio Costa, in New York. (PTI)

Indian relationship with European Union is acquiring a strategic character.

"So, the FTA itself, we explain to our own people, is something much bigger than just a trade agreement. But, along with the FTA, today we have a security and defence partnership. We are negotiating a security of information agreement. We have a mobility framework. We are here

for a trade and technology council with some of the major European initiatives like the global gateway or in the research side, we are trying to get involved with Horizon Europe," he said.

Jaishankar is on a two-day visit to Belgium from July 14-15 to participate in the 3rd India-EU Trade and Technology Council meeting and interact with his EU and Belgian counterparts in

Brussels. He is accompanied by Union Minister for Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal and Minister of State Jitin Prasada.

"Joined my colleagues to recognise the significant progress in our partnership since the landmark India-EU summit earlier this year. Value his guidance and warm sentiments for advancing our trade and technology cooperation," Jaishankar said in a post on X after meeting Costa.

Palestine on Wednesday warmly welcomed India's announcement to establish three major development projects for the people in Gaza, including a Speciality Hospital, an Artificial Limb Fitment Centre, and a Vocational Training Institute.

According to the Palestinian Embassy in New Delhi, India's commitment to establishing a Speciality Hospital and an Artificial Limb Fitment Centre will make a 'meaningful contribution' to strengthening health-care services and supporting the rehabilitation of those most severely affected by the ongoing conflict in Gaza.