

Korean Peninsula Becomes Theater of War Games



In this photo, U.S. Air Force B-1B bomber, F-35B stealth fighter jets and South Korean F-15K fighter jets fly over the Korean Peninsula during a joint drill, Sept. 18, 2017.

BEIJING/SEOUL (Dispatches) -- The U.S. military staged bombing drills with South Korea over the Korean peninsula and Russia and China began naval exercises ahead of a UN General Assembly meeting on Tuesday.

The flurry of military drills came after Pyongyang fired another mid-range ballistic missile over Japan on Friday and the North conducted its sixth and most powerful nuclear test on Sept. 3 in defiance of sanctions and other international pressure.

A pair of U.S. B-1B bombers and four F-35 jets flew from Guam and Japan and joined four South Korean F-15K fighters in the latest drill, South Korea's defense ministry said.

The joint drills were being conducted "two to three times a month these days," Defense Minister Song Young-moo told a parliamentary hearing on Monday.

In Beijing, the official Xinhua news

agency said China and Russia began naval drills off the Russian far eastern port of Vladivostok, not far from the Russia-North Korea border.

Those drills were being conducted between Peter the Great Bay, near Vladivostok, and the southern part of the Sea of Okhotsk, to the north of Japan, it said.

The drills are the second part of China-Russian naval exercises this year, the first part of which was staged in the Baltic in July. Xinhua did not directly link the drills to current tension over North Korea.

China and Russia have repeatedly called for a peaceful solution and talks to resolve the issue.

On Sunday, however, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley said the UN Security Council had run out of options on containing North Korea's nuclear program and the United States might have to turn the matter over to the

Pentagon.

In response, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said the most pressing task was for all parties to enforce the latest UN resolutions on North Korea fully, rather than "deliberately complicating the issue."

Military threats from various parties have not promoted a resolution to the issue, he said. "This is not beneficial to a final resolution to the peninsula nuclear issue," Lu told a daily news briefing.

U.S. President Donald Trump has vowed that North Korea will never be able to threaten the United States with a nuclear-tipped ballistic missile.

Asked about Trump's warning last month that the North Korean threat to the United States would be met with "fire and fury", Haley said: "It was not an empty threat."

Washington has also asked China to do more to rein in its neighbor and ally, while Beijing has urged the United States to refrain from making threats against the North.

The UN Security Council unanimously passed a U.S.-drafted resolution a week ago mandating tougher new sanctions against Pyongyang that included banning textile imports and capping crude and petrol supply.

North Korea on Monday called the resolution "the most vicious, unethical and inhumane act of hostility to physically exterminate" its people, system and government.

"The increased moves of the U.S. and its vassal forces to impose sanctions and pressure... will only increase our pace towards the ultimate completion of the state nuclear force," the North's foreign ministry spokesman said in a statement carried by its official KCNA news agency.

Battered Caribbean Braces for Hurricane Maria

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Hurricane Maria strengthened into a Category 2 storm on Monday and pushed toward the Leeward Islands in the eastern Caribbean, as forecasters warned it was expected to become a major hurricane by early Tuesday.

The storm was on a path that would take it near many of the islands already wrecked by Hurricane Irma and then on toward Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Maria could hit Puerto Rico on Wednesday as a Category 3 or 4 hurricane, said Ernesto Morales with the U.S. National Weather Service in San Juan.

"This storm promises to be catastrophic for our island," he said. "All of Puerto Rico will experience hurricane force winds."

The U.S. National Hurricane Center said Maria had maximum sustained winds of 110 mph Monday morning. It was centered about 120 miles east-southeast of Dominica — or 85 miles east of Martinique — and heading west-northwest at 12 mph.

Hurricane warnings were posted for Guadeloupe, Dominica, St. Kitts, Nevis, Montserrat, Martinique and St. Lucia. A tropical storm warning was issued for Antigua and Barbuda, Saba, St. Eustatius and St. Maarten.

Forecasters said hurricane conditions should begin to affect parts of the Leeward Islands by Monday



A resident walks through the debris of his home in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, Sept. 16, 2017.

night, with storm surge raising water levels by 4 to 6 feet near the storm's center. The storm was predicted to bring 6 to 12 inches of rain across the islands, with more in isolated areas.

Officials in Guadeloupe said the French Caribbean island of would experience extremely heavy flooding starting Monday afternoon, and they warned that many communities would be submerged overnight.

On Wednesday, Maria was expected to be near or over Puerto Rico, which was spared the full brunt of Irma, although much of the island had its power knocked out. Nearly 70,000

people remain without power, and Gov. Ricardo Rossello on Monday warned of another widespread outage.

"We have an extremely weak infrastructure that has already been hit by one storm," he said. "This is going to be a catastrophic event."

Farther north, long-lived Hurricane Jose continued to head northward off the U.S. East Coast, causing dangerous surf and rip currents. It wasn't expected to make landfall but tropical storm watches were posted along the coast from Delaware to Massachusetts' Cape Cod.

UK Proposes New Security Treaty With EU

LONDON (Reuters) -- Britain was to propose on Monday signing a new security treaty with the European Union after Brexit to maintain and intensify cooperation to thwart "ever-growing and increasingly cross-border threats."

In its sixth policy paper setting out its vision for ties with the EU after it quits the bloc in March 2019, the government would say the new treaty "would be underpinned by our shared principles and should make sure our partnership has the agility to respond to the ever-changing threats we face."

The proposal came just days after a blast on a packed commuter underground train injured 30 people in west London, the fifth major attack this year.

"We already have a deep level of collaboration with the EU on security matters and it is in both our interests to find ways to maintain it," Brexit minister David Davis said in a statement.

Britain has published a series of "future partnership" pol-

icy papers to try to nudge talks with the EU forward, after they have stalled over the divorce settlement, especially over the so called Brexit bill.

Security cooperation is seen by government officials as one of their strongest arguments to gain leverage in the complicated talks to unravel more than 40 years of union.

Amber Rudd, the interior minister, said Britain was one of the leading EU contributors to a range of measures, such as data and evidence sharing, extradition measures and to the EU's policy agency Europol.

"Recent events in the UK and across Europe have shown the criminal and terrorist threats we face are varied and increasingly international. The long-standing collaboration we have with our European partners allows us to jointly address these threats and keep our citizens safe," she said.

"As we prepare to leave the EU it is therefore vital that we agree a new way to ensure continued security, law enforcement and criminal justice cooperation."

Despite Displays of Outcry, No Calls for Myanmar Sanctions



Bangladeshi boatmen are ferrying Rohingya refugees this month across the Naf River, which separates Myanmar and Bangladesh.

HONG KONG (Dispatches) -- Despite international condemnation of Myanmar's campaign of violence against the Rohingya people, there have been few calls for a return to the sort of sanctions that were long a feature of the country's relationship with the West.

Myanmar's military, along with vigilante groups, have launched a crackdown in the western state of Rakhine, triggering a refugee crisis that has sent more than 412,000 Rohingya fleeing to neighboring Bangladesh.

On Monday, Boris Johnson, Britain's foreign secretary, was scheduled to lead a discussion of the Rohingya crisis among foreign ministers attending the United Nations General Assembly. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the de facto head of Myanmar's regime, last week decided not to attend the General Assembly, where she would likely face a flood of criticism.

But despite the expected criticism, analysts say the United Nations is unlikely to act against Myanmar. Myanmar's regime has said it was working with Russia and China to block any efforts to punish it over the crackdown in Rakhine State.

The Security Council did condemn the violence last week, its first such unified statement on Myanmar in nine years. But China blocked an effort by Egypt to add language calling for Rohingya refugees to be guaranteed the right to return to Myanmar from Bangladesh. The regime of Myanmar, a majority-Buddhist country, does not recognize the Rohingya, most of whom are Muslim, as citizens.

With regional powers vying to gain influence in Myanmar, China's government sees potential benefit in backing Suu Kyi and her party, while she faces international criticism, said Yun Sun, a scholar at the Stimson Center in Washington.

The state-run Myanmar News Agency quoted China's ambassador to Myanmar last week as saying his country supported the crackdown in Rakhine State.

"The stance of China regarding the terrorist attacks in Rakhine is clear, it is just an internal affair," said the ambassador, Hong Liang.

China, like Russia, holds veto power in the UN Security Council as a permanent member, meaning it can block any efforts to sanction Myanmar.

On Monday, Human Rights Watch called for targeted sanctions against Myanmar's military. It also called for new restrictions on the sale of arms to the country.

"Burmese security forces are committing ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya and disregarding the condemnation of world leaders," John Sifton, Asia advocacy director at Human Rights Watch, said in a statement. "The time has come to impose tougher measures that Burma's generals cannot ignore."

The European Union and the United States pulled back broad sanctions after elections in 2012.

The U.S. Senate majority leader, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, said last week that "publicly condemning Aung San Suu Kyi, the best hope for democratic reform in Burma, is simply not constructive."

And the Indian government claimed Monday that it had evidence there were extremists who posed a threat to the country's security among the Rohingya Muslims who have fled Myanmar and settled in many Indian cities.

India's Supreme Court was hearing a petition filed on behalf of two Rohingya refugees challenging a government decision to deport the ethnic group from India.

The lawyer representing the Rohingya said the decision was discriminatory.

Trump Aide: U.S Still Leaving Climate Pact



Trump during a rally in October 2016. The U.S. President faces a backlash against his commitment to leave the global climate change accord.

NEW YORK (Reuters) -- President Donald Trump's top economic adviser said at the United Nations on Monday the United States had not changed its plans to withdraw from the Paris climate pact without a renegotiation favorable to Washington, with little appetite for such a step in the international community.

Trump in June announced his decision to withdraw the United States from the Paris climate agreement, saying it would put U.S. industries at a disadvantage, cost U.S. jobs, weaken American national sovereignty and put the country at a permanent disadvantage to the other countries of the world.

"We made the president's position unambiguous, to where the president stands, where the administration stands on Paris," Cohn said after the informal breakfast meeting with ministers from about a dozen countries on the sidelines of the annual gathering

of world leaders at the United Nations.

In a statement issued after the meeting, a White House official said: "We are withdrawing from the Paris Agreement unless we can reengage on terms more favorable to the United States. This position was made very clear during the breakfast."

U.S. officials attended a Montreal meeting on Saturday of ministers from more than 30 of the nations that signed the climate change agreement. The Wall Street Journal reported that Trump administration officials had said Washington would not pull out of the agreement and had offered to re-engage.

"There was some confusion over the weekend and I think we removed all the confusion," Cohn, director of the National Economic Council, told reporters, adding that he was referring to the meeting in Montreal.

News in Brief

CAIRO (Reuters) -- An Egyptian court sentenced hundreds to jail for murder and illegally protesting on Monday after a mass trial criticized by rights groups.

But it acquitted an Irish student, a high-profile detainee who says he was tortured in custody.

Ibrahim Halawa was on trial with three of his sisters and nearly 500 others, all charged with, among other crimes, breaking into a mosque, killing 44 people, and illegal possession of firearms. The incidents followed the military's ouster of former president Muhammad Mursi in 2013.

The defendants were all facing the death penalty but none received it. Instead the judge sentenced hundreds to jail terms including 43 people to life in prison, which in Egypt is 25 years, and five years of parole.

Another 17 people were sentenced to 15 years in prison, 67 to 10 years, and 216 to five years. Two minors were sentenced to 10 years in absentia and six to five years. A dual Egyptian-U.S. citizen involved in the trial was also acquitted.

BERLIN (Dispatches) -- A German nationalist party called Monday for tighter security measures aimed primarily at immigrants, while again claiming that Islam is incompatible with democracy as Germany's election campaign entered its final stretch.

Alternative for Germany co-leader Alexander Gauland told reporters that "Islam is also a political doctrine" and "in this respect, it is not a part of Germany."

Alternative for Germany, known by its German acronym AfD, is on track to enter parliament for the first time in Sunday's national election with about 10-percent support in recent polls. Gauland says it wants to prevent the "Islamization of Germany."

Among other proposals, he said AfD wants a ban on minarets and public calls to prayer from mosques, a ban on headscarves for teachers and students, and for imams to lead prayers only in German.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- The Trump administration is considering closing the recently reopened United States Embassy in Havana after 21 Americans associated with the embassy experienced a host of unexplained health problems.

Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson said during an appearance on CBS's "Face the Nation" on Sunday that such a closing was "under evaluation." "It's a very serious issue with respect to the harm that certain individuals have suffered," he said. "We've brought some of those people home. It's under review."

The Trump administration has already reversed crucial pieces of what President Trump has called a "terrible and misguided deal" with Cuba that was struck during the Obama administration, but closing the embassy would be the most dramatic action yet to return the relationship to its Cold War deep freeze.

MEXICO CITY (Reuters) -- The Mexican military fought back against an armed attack in the violent southwestern state of Guerrero on Saturday night, leaving eight suspected gang members and one soldier dead, authorities said on Sunday.

At around 11 p.m., troops were making their rounds in the city of Teloloapan, about 155 miles (250 km) from Mexico City, when they came under gunfire from suspected gang members dressed in fake military uniforms, Roberto Alvarez Heredia, a spokesman for the Guerrero Coordinating Group, said in a statement.

The public prosecutor's office in Guerrero, home to the resort city of Acapulco on Mexico's Pacific coast, has begun an investigation into the attack, authorities said. Violence has spiked in Guerrero over the past decade as a growing number of criminal gangs vie for control of crops of opium poppies and for drug-trafficking routes.

LAHORE, Pakistan (AFP) -- The wife of former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was on course to win a parliamentary by-election for her husband's seat, which became vacant when he was ousted from office, according to unofficial early results.

The Supreme Court ended Sharif's tenure as prime minister and banned him from holding public office in July following an investigation into corruption allegations against him and his family, triggering the by-election for his Lahore seat. Sharif's daughter Maryam led the campaign on behalf of her mother Kalsum, the candidate, who is being treated for throat cancer in London. The seat has long been controlled by Sharif and his allies, but the by-election was seen as a test of the popularity of his party, Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz.

SAKI, Azerbaijan (Dispatches) -- A court in Azerbaijan has sentenced a journalist known for criticizing the government to nine years in prison after a trial his lawyer contends was politically motivated.

The Court for Serious Crimes in the northern city of Saki found Elcin Ismayilli guilty of extortion and abuse of office and sentenced him on September 18.

Ismayilli was arrested in February after a Culture and Tourism Department official claimed the journalist tried to extort money from him.

His lawyer, Elcin Sadiqov, says the case is politically motivated and also contends that Ismayilli should not have been charged with abuse of office because he holds no office.