

Trump Threatens to ‘Totally Destroy’ North Korea



U.S. President Donald Trump speaks during the United Nations General Assembly at UN headquarters, Sept. 19, 2017.

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) -- U.S. President Donald Trump escalated his standoff with North Korea over its nuclear challenge Tuesday, threatening to “totally destroy” the country of 26 million people if its “rocket man” leader does not abandon his drive toward nuclear weapons.

In a hard-edged speech to the UN General Assembly, Trump offered a grim portrait of a world in peril, adopted a confrontational approach to solving global challenges and gave an unabashed defense of U.S. sovereignty.

“The United States has great strength and patience, but if it is forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea,” Trump told the 193-member world body.

Trump described Kim Jong-Un in an acid tone: “Rocket man is on a suicide mission for himself and his regime.”

His remarks rattled world leaders gathered in the green-marbled UN General Assembly hall, where minutes earlier UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appealed for statesmanship, saying: “We must not sleepwalk our way into war.”

Trump’s most direct military threat to attack North Korea, in his debut appearance at the General Assembly, was his latest expression of concern about Pyongyang’s repeated launching of ballistic missiles over Japan and nuclear tests.

“It was the wrong speech, at the wrong time, to the wrong audience,” Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom later told the BBC.

Many international newspapers also hit out at Trump’s belligerent rhetoric. “Trump makes things worse by needlessly boasting of American military might,” the San Francisco Chronicle wrote.

Near the start of his UN speech, Trump reminded the world that the U.S. Senate just approved \$700 billion in additional military spending. “Our military will soon be the strongest it has ever been,” he exclaimed.

“You shouldn’t be talking about destroying a nation,” Scott Sagan, the Caroline S.G. Munro Professor of Political Science at Stanford University and senior fellow at Stanford’s Center for International Security and Cooperation said. And “why is he using this term ‘rocket man?’ Sort of a bully’s way of diminishing your adversary.”

The effect? Rather than deter Kim, Sagan said, Trump has “created increased incentives for North Korea to get even greater military capability.”

Spanish Troops Raid Catalan Offices, Arrest Officials



Demonstrators react as they try to stop the car carrying senior official Xavier Puig after he was arrested by Guardia Civil officers in Barcelona, Sept. 20, 2017.

MADRID/BARCELONA (Reuters) -- Spanish police raided Catalan government offices and arrested officials on Wednesday to halt a banned referendum on independence, an action the regional president said meant Madrid had effectively taken over his administration.

Hundreds of protesters gathered outside the regional government offices in the center of Barcelona’s tourist district, waving the red-and-yellow Catalan flag and chanting “Occupying forces out” and “Where is Europe?”

“The Spanish state has by all

rights intervened in Catalonia’s government and has established emergency rule,” Catalan President Carles Puigdemont said in a televised address.

“We condemn and reject the anti-democratic and totalitarian actions of the Spanish state,” he said, adding that Catalans should still turn out in force to vote in the Oct. 1 referendum on a split from Spain that Madrid has declared illegal.

State police arrested Catalonia’s junior economy minister Josep Maria Jove on Wednesday in their first raid of government offices in the region, Catalan government sources said. The raid targeted several regional govern-

ment departments.

A dozen high-ranking local officials were arrested, La Vanguardia newspaper said. The police confirmed they were carrying out raids connected with the banned referendum, but did not give details. The Catalan government sources could not confirm the other arrests.

Police efforts to stop the referendum, which the central government says is illegal, have intensified in recent days as the wealthy northeastern region shows no signs of halting it.

Acting under court orders, police have raided printers, newspaper offices and private delivery in a search for campaign literature, instruction manuals for manning voting stations, and ballot boxes.

On Tuesday, the Civil Guard, a national police force, seized more than 45,000 envelopes packed in cardboard boxes that the Catalan government was ready to send to notify people around the region about the referendum.

The first of hundreds of Catalan mayors were also forced to appear before the state prosecutor Tuesday after they said they would back the referendum.

Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy said on Wednesday the operations in Catalonia were the result of legal rulings and were to ensure the rule of law. Markets so far have shrugged off the increasing tension.

Planet Braces for Deadly Heat Shocks: Report

LONDON (Reuters) -- When Hurricane Harvey blasted ashore in August, drowning south Texas in a year’s worth of rain in just a few days, it left behind an estimated \$150 billion in damage to sodden homes and inundated factories, and claimed about 60 lives. Two weeks later, Hurricane Irma churned into Florida, killing at least 33 people there and causing billions more in damages – as well as brutal loss of life in the Caribbean.

But these storms may not be 2017’s deadliest U.S. disaster. Instead, that title may go to a largely unseen killer: rising temperatures.

Over the last 30 years, increasingly broiling summer heat has claimed more American lives than flooding, tornadoes or hurricanes, according to the U.S. National Weather Service.

And the problem has not been limited to the United States. More than 35,000 people died during a European heat wave in 2003, and tens of thousands perished in Russia during extreme heat in 2010.

The threat is particularly severe in already sweltering places, from South Asia to the Persian Gulf, and has been linked to a rise in migration out of hot and poor parts of

rural Pakistan.

But experts say heat remains underestimated as a threat by governments, aid agencies and individuals. That’s both because it’s an invisible, hard-to-document disaster that claims lives largely behind closed doors – and because hot weather just doesn’t strike many people as a serious threat.

“If you have a natural disaster like a cyclone or an earthquake or a flood, the impacts are immediate. Things get washed away, people drown. But heat is a silent killer,” said Sarah Perkins-Kirkpatrick, a climate change researcher at Australia’s University of New South Wales.

“In Australia, heat waves kill more people than any other natural disaster – but no one realizes the destruction they can cause. The attitude is, ‘It’s hot, suck it up, get on with it.’”

Around the world, heat is a neglected and poorly understood disaster, in part because few of the deaths it produces are directly attributed to heat waves.

Victims – many elderly, very young, poor or already unhealthy – often die at home, and not just of heat stroke but of existing health problems aggravated by heat and dehydration.

NATO Slams UN Treaty Banning Nuke Arms



NATO members attend a North Atlantic Council meeting in Brussels, Sept. 20, 2017.

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) -- NATO Wednesday hit out at a UN treaty banning nuclear arms, claiming that it risked undermining their response to North Korea’s atomic weapons program.

The United Nations adopted the treaty in July, though none of the nine countries that have nuclear weapons took part in shaping it or voting on it, and three of them – NATO members Britain, France and the United States – immediately said they had no intention of joining it.

NATO said the treaty “disregards the realities of the increasingly challenging international security environment” in the face of growing threats, particularly from Pyongyang, which recently carried out its sixth nuclear test and most powerful to date after U.S. threats.

“At a time when the world needs to remain united in the face of growing threats, in particular the grave threat posed by North Korea’s nuclear program, the treaty fails to take into account these urgent security challenges,” the 29-nation alliance said.

It added: “Seeking to ban nuclear weapons through a treaty that will not engage any state actually possessing nuclear weapons will not be effective, will not reduce nuclear arsenals, and will neither enhance any country’s security, nor international peace and stability.

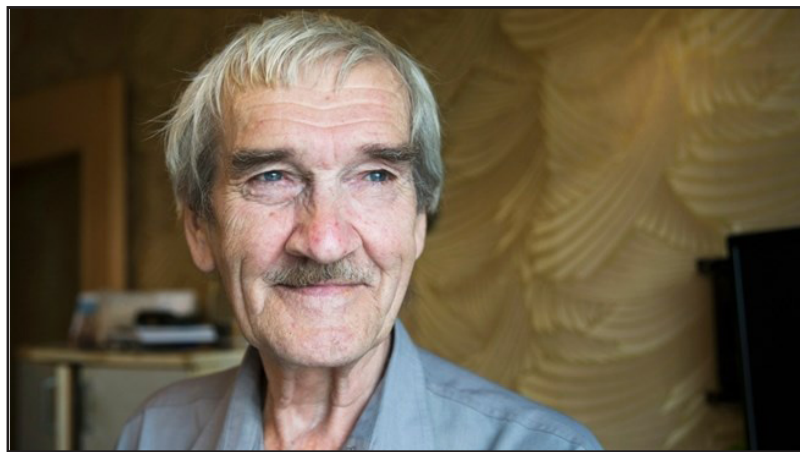
“Indeed it risks doing the opposite by creating divisions and divergences at a time when a unified approach to proliferation and security threats is required more than ever.”

The intervention from the alliance comes a day after U.S. President Donald Trump told the UN General Assembly in New York he was ready to “totally destroy” North Korea.

Disarmament campaigners hailed the treaty as an important step but most NATO members boycotted the talks to prepare the text.

Nuclear powers claim their arsenals serve as a deterrent and say they remain committed to the gradual approach to disarmament outlined in the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

‘Man Who Saved the World’ Dead at 77



In this file photo taken on Aug. 27, 2015, former Soviet missile defense forces officer Stanislav Petrov poses for a photo at his home in Fryazino, Moscow region.

MOSCOW (AFP) -- Stanislav Petrov, a Soviet military officer who is widely credited with helping prevent a nuclear war with the United States, has died aged 77, his son told AFP Tuesday. Petrov, whose extraordinary story was told in a documentary titled “The Man Who Saved the World,” received several international awards, was honored at the UN and met Hollywood superstars such as Robert De Niro and Matt Damon.

Yet Petrov lived in a small town outside Moscow and died in relative obscurity on May 19, his death making headlines in Russia and abroad only months later when a German friend wrote a blog post about it.

On Sept. 26, 1983, Petrov was an officer on duty at a secret command center south of Moscow when an alarm went off signaling that the United States had launched intercontinental ballistic missiles.

The officer – with only a few minutes to make a decision and unsure about the incoming data – dismissed the warning as a false alarm.

Had he told his commanders of an imminent U.S. nuclear strike, the Soviet leadership – locked in an arms race with Washington – might have ordered a retaliatory strike.

Instead the 44-year-old lieutenant colonel reported a system malfunction and an investigation that followed proved he was right. Petrov came home only several days later but did not tell his family about what

had happened.

“He came home knackered but did not tell us anything,” his son Dmitry said.

Several months later Petrov received an award “for services to the Fatherland” but the incident at the control center was kept secret for many years.

In 1984, he left the military and settled in the town of Fryazino some 20 kilometers northeast of Moscow.

Petrov’s story only came to light after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and over the years he became the subject of numerous media reports in Russia and abroad.

A modest, self-effacing man, Petrov never thought of himself as a hero, his son said. “My father could not have cared less. He was always surprised that people were making a hero out of him,” he said.

“He simply did his job well,” Petrov’s son said, adding that his father received some hundred letters from Europeans thanking him for averting the start of a nuclear war.

“The Man Who Saved the World,” a documentary film directed by Danish filmmaker Peter Anthony and narrated by U.S. actor Kevin Costner, was released in 2014.

Footage of the elderly Petrov is combined with re-enactments of what happened at that secret control center in 1983.

“I categorically refused to be guilty of starting World War III,” Petrov said in the film. “I felt like I was being led to an execution,” he said of those dramatic moments.

News in Brief

DHAKA (AFP) -- Bangladesh’s army was Wednesday ordered to take a bigger role in helping hundreds of thousands of Rohingya who have fled ethnic violence in Myanmar, by distributing relief aid and building shelters.

Troops would be deployed immediately in Cox’s Bazar near the border where more than 420,000 Rohingya have arrived since Aug. 25, said road transport minister Obaidul Quader, who is also deputy head of the ruling Awami League party.

Previously troops had been tasked with transporting foreign relief supplies from Chittagong airport to Cox’s Bazar.

BRASILIA (AFP) -- Brazil’s scandal-plagued former leftist president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and a tough-talking rightwing congressman lead voter intentions ahead of next year’s presidential elections, a poll said Tuesday.

Underlining the turmoil in Brazilian politics, the poll also confirmed plummeting support for the current center-right government, with 75.6% saying it is doing a bad job. Only 3.4% think the government is doing a good job, down from 10.3% in February.

More than 84% of those polled disapprove of President Michel Temer’s performance, while just 10.1% approve, the poll from the MDA research institute said.

LYON, France (AFP) -- French Cardinal Philippe Barbarin and a senior Vatican official were Tuesday ordered to stand trial for allegedly covering up for a pedophile priest accused of abusing several boy scouts in Lyon in the 1980s.

The most senior French Catholic official to be tried for failing to report a predator priest will go on trial on April 4 next year along with six co-defendants, a court in Lyon said.

Barbarin, who is archbishop of Lyon, is accused of having shielded priest Bernard Preynat from claims of abuse involving scouts in his Lyon parish. The head of the Vatican’s powerful Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Spanish Archbishop Luis Francisco Ladaria Ferrer, is accused of complicity in the alleged cover-up.

NEW YORK (Reuters) -- More than 40 million people were trapped as slaves last year in forced labor and forced marriages, almost three quarters of them women and girls, according to the first joint effort by key anti-slavery groups to count the number of victims worldwide.

The International Labor Organization (ILO), human rights group Walk Free Foundation and International Organization for Migration said 40.3 million people were victims of modern slavery in 2016 - but added this was a conservative estimate.

They estimated 24.9 million people were trapped working in factories, on construction sites, farms and fishing boats, and as domestic or sex workers, while 15.4 million people were in marriages to which they had not consented.

PARIS (AFP) -- Once a sign of the might of the French Socialists, the party’s grand headquarters in central Paris have been put up for sale following the electoral drubbing suffered by the leftwingers this year.

The party has been based on the Rue de Solferino in the chic Seventh Arrondissement of the capital since 1981 when ex-leader Francois Mitterrand was elected the first Socialist president under the current constitution.

Thirty-six years later, the party is fighting for survival after its debacle in the presidential election in May and a humiliating score in parliamentary elections in June, when President Emmanuel Macron’s centrist party swept the board.

JUBA (AFP) -- An outbreak of fighting between government and rebel forces in South Sudan’s oil-producing north left at least 25 people dead, a state official said.

The clash between rebels loyal to exiled former deputy president Riek Machar and government forces occurred early Monday in Nhialdiu, a village close to the town of Bentiu which has changed hands repeatedly since civil war began nearly four years ago.

The official said most of the dead were civilians. Tens of thousands have been killed and millions uprooted since 2013 during a conflict characterized by rape, ethnic massacres and attacks on civilians.

CANBERRA (AP) -- The first 50 refugees to be resettled in the United States under a contentious agreement with Australia will be notified within days that they will be leaving the Pacific island camps where they have languished for years, the Australian prime minister said Wednesday.

Former President Barack Obama’s administration agreed to accept up to 1,250 of Australia’s refugees - mostly from Iran, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka - in a deal some saw as repayment for Australia agreeing to accept Honduran and Salvadoran refugees under a U.S.-led resettlement program from a camp in Costa Rica.