

# U.S. B-1B Bomber Joins Drill With South Korea



Firefighters battled blazes in Ventura, Calif. On Dec. 5, 2017.

SEOUL (Dispatches) -- A U.S. B-1B bomber Wednesday joined large-scale U.S.-South Korean military exercises that North Korea has denounced as pushing the peninsula to the brink of nuclear war, as tension mounts between the North and the United States.

The bomber flew from the Pacific U.S.-administered territory of Guam and joined U.S. F-22 and F-35 stealth fighters in the annual exercises, which run until Friday.

The drills come a week after North

Korea said it had tested its most advanced intercontinental ballistic missile capable of reaching the United States.

Asked about the bomber's flight, China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told a regular news briefing in Beijing: "We hope relevant parties can maintain restraint and not do anything to add tensions on the Korean peninsula."

North Korea's official KCNA state news agency said at the weekend that U.S. President Donald Trump's administration

was "begging for nuclear war" by staging the drills.

KCNA said on Tuesday that the exercises in which the bomber took part are "simulating an all-out war", including drills to "strike the state leadership and nuclear and ballistic rocket bases, air fields, naval bases and other major objects."

U.S. Republican Senator Lindsey Graham on Sunday urged the Pentagon to start moving U.S. military dependents, such as spouses and children, out of South Korea, saying conflict with North Korea was getting close.

The U.S.-South Korea drills coincide with a rare visit to the North by UN political affairs chief Jeffrey Feltman.

North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Pak Myong Guk met Feltman on Wednesday in the North Korean capital, Pyongyang, and discussed bilateral cooperation and other issues of mutual interest, KCNA said.

Feltman, a former senior U.S. State Department official, is the highest-level UN official to visit North Korea since 2012. The State Department said on Tuesday he was not carrying any message from Washington.

China and Russia had proposed that the United States and South Korea stop major military exercises in exchange for North Korea halting its weapons programs.

## Macron Refuses to Apologize to Algeria Over Colonial Past

ALGIERS (Reuters) -- President Emmanuel Macron visited Algeria Wednesday where he pressed for a new chapter in relations and said he would not be held hostage by France's colonial past, in remarks published by a local newspaper.

The French leader was in the capital Algiers for talks with President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and senior officials as he looked to bolster social and trade ties between the countries.

It is a relationship scarred by the trauma of the 1954-1962 independence war, during which hundreds of thousands of Algerians were killed and torture was used on both sides.

Bouteflika, 80, belongs to the war veterans who fought against French occupation and has been in ill-health since suffering a stroke in 2013. Macron is widely seen as his last chance of obtaining an official apology

for the past.

But the French leader did not go any further than his predecessor, Francois Hollande, who sought a more conciliatory tone and described his country's colonization of Algeria as "brutal and unfair", but stopped short of apologizing.

"I know the history, but I am not a hostage of the past. We have a shared memory and we need to accept that, but I want, out of respect for our history, to turn to the future," Macron told El Watan newspaper.

Economic ties between the two countries have marginally progressed since 2012 and France is now behind China as the main partner. Annual trade stands at about 8 billion euros compared with 6.36 billion five years ago.

More than 400,000 Algerians are given visas for France annually, almost twice as many as in 2012.

While walking through downtown Algiers near the university on Wednesday, young Algerians came out in force, calling out: "Visas, Please! Some others called out: "Go home! We don't want you here."

Franco-Algerian relations are a sensitive subject in France. Macron angered many at home when he described France's colonial rule as a "crime against humanity" on a visit to Algeria during his presidential campaign.

"The new relationship that I want to build with Algeria and that I propose to Algerians is to build an equal partnership, built on frankness, reciprocity and ambition," he told the paper.

Some Algerians disagreed. "Excuse me but France will have to apologize for the martyrs we lost," said a woman who gave her name as Nadia.

## Russian Lawmakers Vote to Bar U.S. Media



Russian lawmakers vote at the State Duma, the Lower House of the Russian Parliament in Moscow, Nov. 15, 2017.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- Russian lawmakers on Wednesday voted to ban the U.S. media designated as "foreign agents" from accessing the lower house of parliament in the latest tit-for-tat between both the countries over government-funded media outlets.

"To impose a ban on visiting the State Duma by representatives of U.S. media outlets recognized as foreign mass media performing the functions of a foreign agent," the Russian news agency TASS reported, citing a document as saying.

The order will come into force immediately after signing by State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin.

The lower chamber also proposed regional legislative assemblies to take similar decisions.

The decision came a day after the Kremlin designated nine U.S.-funded

media outlets as "foreign agents", including Radio Free Europe and Voice of America (VOA).

Other media outlets include congressionally-funded Cold War-era outlets that partly broadcast in Russian, as well as seven outlets controlled by them that mostly focus on specific regions like Crimea and the North Caucasus, the report said.

By law, the nine media organizations listed by the Russian justice ministry will have to brand their output as the work of "foreign agents" - and disclose their source of funding.

The move is in retaliation for the U.S. justice department ordering the Russian channels RT and Sputnik to register as foreign agents there.

The U.S. has accused RT, formerly known as Russia Today, of being a propaganda outlet for the Kremlin.

## UN: Myanmar Likely Guilty of Genocide



Rohingya refugee Amina Khatun, 55, rests at the bank of the Naf river after crossing it on an improvised raft to reach Bangladesh, in Teknaf, Bangladesh.

GENEVA (Dispatches) -- Myanmar's security forces may be guilty of genocide against the Rohingya Muslim minority and more of them are fleeing despite a deal between Myanmar and Bangladesh to send them home, the top UN human rights official said.

The United Nations defines genocide as acts meant to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group in whole or in part. Such a designation is rare under international law, but has been used in contexts including Bosnia, Sudan and a Daesh campaign against the Yazidi communities in Iraq and Syria.

Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, was addressing a special session of the Human Rights Council which later adopted a resolution condemning "the very likely commission of crimes against humanity" by security forces and others against Rohingya.

Zeid, who has described the campaign in the past as a "textbook case of ethnic cleansing", said that none of the 700,000 Rohingya who have fled violence to Bangladesh since August should be repatriated to Myanmar unless there was robust monitoring on the ground.

He described reports of "acts of appalling barbarity committed against the Rohingya, including deliberately burning people to death inside their homes, murders of children and adults; indiscriminate shooting of fleeing civilians; widespread rapes of women and girls, and the burning and destruction of houses, schools, markets and mosques".

"Can anyone - can anyone - rule

out that elements of genocide may be present?" he told the 47-member state forum.

Shahriar Alam, Bangladesh's junior foreign affairs minister, told the session in Geneva that his country was hosting nearly one million "Myanmar nationals" following executions and rapes.

These crimes had been "perpetrated by Myanmar security forces and extremist Buddhist vigilantes", Alam said, calling for an end to what he called "xenophobic rhetoric... including from higher echelons of the government and the military".

Mainly Buddhist Myanmar denies the Muslim Rohingya are its citizens and considers them foreigners.

Marzuki Darusman, head of an independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar, said by video from Malaysia that his team has interviewed Rohingya refugees, including children in the Bangladeshi port city of Cox's Bazar, who recounted "acts of extreme brutality" and "displayed signs of severe trauma".

Myanmar has not granted the investigators access to Rakhine, the northern state from which the Rohingya have fled, Darusman said. "We maintain hope that it will be granted early in 2018."

Pramila Patten, special envoy of the UN Secretary-General on sexual violence in conflict, who interviewed survivors in Bangladesh in November, said she had heard accounts of "rape, gang rape by multiple soldiers, forced public nudity and humiliation, and sexual slavery in military captivity".

## Inferno Destroys Hundreds of Homes in California

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) -- Four wildfires roared through Southern California, forcing the evacuation of tens of thousands of people and destroying hundreds of homes and other buildings in the latest chapter of what has been one of the state's worst fire seasons.

The first fire, in Ventura County, started Monday evening and was still "out of control", the authorities said. Named the Thomas Fire, it began north of Santa Paula, Calif., and spread rapidly to envelop at least 50,000 acres, destroying hundreds of structures and prompting 27,000 people to evacuate, including some from the city of Ventura.

Three more fires began on Tuesday. One in Los Angeles County quickly grew to encompass more than 11,000 acres and destroyed more than 30 structures. Another, in San Bernardino County, injured three people as it burned 100 acres of vegetation. And a fourth, near Santa Clarita, tore through at least 5,000 acres, forcing the evacuation of a trailer park and several schools.

The exact causes of the fires were not immediately known.

The authorities said the fires were fed by dry conditions and fierce winds. Gov. Jerry Brown declared a state of emergency for Ventura County, where he said the flames had destroyed



James and Josie Ralstin of Ventura, Calif., carrying belongings they retrieved from the home they evacuated, pass by another home consumed by wildfires on Dec. 5, 2017.

hundreds of homes.

California has seen some of its most destructive fires ever this year. In October, even as more than a dozen fires broke out in the northern part of the state, a separate one quickly grew in the Anaheim Hills, burning through thousands of acres. The fires have collectively killed more than 40 people and destroyed thousands of homes and businesses.

A month earlier, the La Tuna Fire sent smoke billowing into the air above Los Angeles as the hills glowed red. In terms acreage, that fire was the

largest to tear through the city in 50 years.

Eric Buschow, a sergeant with the sheriff's office, said that the fire in Ventura County, which was fueled by the Santa Ana winds, was one of the worst he had seen, partly because of the number of homes that were affected.

At least 186,000 people were without power in Ventura County, many of them in the affected area. The power failures made it difficult for the 1,100 firefighters working there to battle the flames.



JAKARTA (AFP) -- A tropical cyclone that pounded Indonesia's main island of Java has killed 41 people, the country's disaster agency said Wednesday, more than double the initial toll, with tens of thousands displaced by severe flooding and landslides.

Among the victims of Cyclone Cempaka were 25 people killed by a single landslide in east Java last week, the agency said. The initial cyclone death toll was 19. Some 28,000 people have been displaced by the storm, which hit Indonesia's most populous island last week. "Almost five thousand homes have been damaged and more than three thousand others were inundated by flooding," said agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho. The destruction from the cyclone came as the rumbling Mount Agung volcano on the neighboring resort island of Bali threatened to erupt, forcing tens of thousands to flee their homes. Cempaka has moved away from Indonesia, but Nugroho warned that more flooding and landslides still could happen. Indonesia is prone to natural disasters and is often hit by floods and landslides.

\*\*\*

BRUSSELS (AFP) -- Deposed Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont said Wednesday that he will stay in Belgium "for now" despite Spain dropping European arrest warrants against him and four former ministers.

Puigdemont accused Spain of backtracking on the warrants, which are on charges of sedition and rebellion over Catalonia's illegal independence referendum, only because it was "scared of world opinion". He said that if his party wins elections in Catalonia on December 21 then "we should return" but did not give any further details of whether he would actually go back for the polls. Spain has said it will still arrest the separatists if they return. Madrid had dropped the European warrants "because it is scared", Puigdemont said. "The Spanish state is scared of world opinion," he added.

\*\*\*

TEGUCIGALPA (Reuters) -- The Honduran opposition battling President Juan Orlando Hernandez over a disputed presidential election proposed that a runoff be held if authorities would not recount the entire vote.

TV star Salvador Nasralla, who claimed victory in the Nov. 26 election after early results put him ahead of Hernandez, has been locked in a bitter row over the vote count since the process broke down and suddenly swung in the president's favor. The dispute has sparked deadly protests and a nighttime curfew in the poor, violent Central American country. Nasralla said Wednesday the electoral tribunal should review virtually all the voting cards. "If you don't agree with that, let's go to a runoff between (Hernandez) and Salvador Nasralla," he said on Twitter. Former President Manuel Zelaya, who was ousted in a 2009 coup and now backs Nasralla, said that the opposition was seeking a total recount of the vote, or legislation to permit a runoff, which is not used in Honduras.

\*\*\*

MELBOURNE (Reuters) -- China accused Australia of hysteria and paranoia on Wednesday after Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull vowed to ban foreign political donations in a move to curb external influence on its domestic politics.

Foreign powers were making "unprecedented and increasingly sophisticated attempts to influence the political process" in Australia and the world, Turnbull told reporters in Canberra on Tuesday. He had cited "disturbing reports about Chinese influence". "Some Australian media have repeatedly fabricated news stories about the so-called Chinese influence and infiltration in Australia," the Chinese Embassy in Australia said in an English-language statement on its website. "Those reports, which were made up out of thin air and filled with cold war mentality and ideological bias, reflected a typical anti-China hysteria and paranoia."

\*\*\*

KIEV (Reuters) -- Dozens of Ukrainian police in riot gear raided a protest camp outside parliament on Wednesday in a failed attempt to detain former Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili, who was freed from custody by supporters a day earlier.

Saakashvili later said police had searched the wrong tent at the camp, continuing a surreal hide-and-seek game between him and Ukrainian law enforcement ever since he barged across the border from Poland three months ago. Saakashvili was granted Ukrainian citizenship and invited by President Petro Poroshenko to become governor of the Odessa region after the "Maidan" protests ousted a pro-Russian president in early 2014, but the two later fell out. The saga threatens to embarrass the pro-Western leadership in Kiev, although Saakashvili's party, which is now seeking to unseat Poroshenko at the ballot box, does not have nationwide support, opinion polls show. Protesters defended the camp, which was set up in September, leading to clashes in which four policemen and an unknown number of civilians were wounded, Kiev police said in a statement.

\*\*\*

ATHENS (AFP) -- Masked youths on Wednesday threw stones and vandalized property in Athens during annual protests in remembrance of a teenage boy killed by police in 2008.

The small groups of youths also tore down street signs, toppled garbage bins and set fire to debris. Riot police were on the scene but generally did not interfere. School pupils, university students and left-wing organizations are holding protests in Greece's main cities in memory of 15-year-old Alexis Grigoriopoulos, who was fatally shot by a police officer in 2008. At the time, Grigoriopoulos' death sparked days of youth unrest around Greece. Greek police are already on alert over a two-day visit by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan starting on Thursday.