

Angry China Asks U.S. to Cancel Arms Sale to Taiwan



Washington remains Taipei's major supplier of weapons.

BEIJING (Dispatches) – China on Wednesday reacted with anger to the news that the United States is ready to approve a \$330 million arms sale to Taiwan.

The contract was confirmed in a Pentagon news release on Monday that detailed an inventory of spare parts and repairs to be bought from the U.S. for Taiwanese military aircraft.

At a daily press conference on Tuesday, a spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Geng Shuang, expressed anger over the deal and said China had already made its feelings clear to U.S. representatives. “We urge the U.S. side ... to immediately cancel this deal and

cut off military ties with Taiwan to avoid doing serious damage to China-U.S. relations, peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and cooperation between US and China in important areas,” Geng said.

The Pentagon’s Defense Security Cooperation Agency said in its statement that the proposed sale would “contribute to the foreign policy and national security of the United States by helping to improve the security and defensive capability of the recipient.”

Senior politicians in Beijing view Taiwan as a breakaway province that will eventually be reclaimed as part of the mainland. China has used

its growing economic power to ask nations it trades with to accept this “one China” view.

Under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, military deals with Taiwan had become less frequent as Washington attempted to improve its relationship with Beijing.

If approved by Congress, this latest sale would mark the second arms deal between Taiwan and the U.S. during the tenure of President Donald Trump.

The first, and much bigger deal, was carried out in June 2017 when the U.S. agreed to sell missiles, torpedoes and an early warning system to Taiwan for \$1.4 billion. At that time, a Chinese ambassador said the deal damaged trust between Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Relations between Trump and Xi are already under severe strain thanks to an ongoing trade war between the two countries.

On Tuesday, China released a paper that accused the U.S. of “trade bullying practices.” The Trump administration levied tariffs on an additional \$200 billion of Chinese goods on Monday, while Beijing retaliated by targeting roughly \$60 billion worth of U.S. imports.

China’s Vice Commerce Minister Wang Shouwen said at a news conference on Tuesday that on trade, the U.S. was putting a “knife to China’s neck.”

Peru Rejects Military Action Against Venezuela



Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro examines a Russian-made sniping rifle during military exercises in Caracas on January 14, 2017.

NEW YORK (Dispatches) -- Peru rejects a military solution to the crisis in Venezuela, Peru's president said in an interview.

Venezuela, which has suffered an economic collapse and mass emigration amid U.S. pressure, is likely to be a focal point of the latest UN General Assembly in New York this week.

“As a country, we must be clear to say we reject a warlike, military solution,” Peruvian President Martin Vizcarra told Reuters in New York.

Colombia’s president Ivan Duque, also in New York, told an event that he and other heads of state

would this week sign a declaration to denounce Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro’s government with the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague.

Peru and Colombia both belong to the so-called Lima Group of nations formed last year to address the crisis in Venezuela.

Venezuela has rejected criticism of the Maduro government as hostile propaganda and attempts to set the stage for an intervention by foreign powers in the country.

Last week, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the United States was preparing a “series of actions” to raise pressure on

Maduro. The U.S. Treasury went after President Maduro’s inner circle Tuesday, imposing sanctions on his wife and other close associates.

Treasury named Cilia Adela Flores de Maduro, a former attorney general and the president’s wife, as one of the figures who has helped Maduro stay in power.

The New York Times reported last month that officials from President Donald Trump’s administration met secretly with Venezuelan military officers to discuss plans to oust President Maduro.

American officials met with the renegade Venezuelan military officers several times over the last year after the Venezuelan officers made contact, the report said.

President Donald Trump has previously discussed the possibility of a military option in Venezuela.

“We have many options for Venezuela. And by the way, I am not going to rule out a military option,” Trump said last August.

Asked about the possibility of a military intervention in response to the mounting crisis in the country, the President said that is something the U.S. “certainly could pursue.”

Last month, Maduro survived an apparent assassination attempt after several drones armed with explosives flew toward him during a speech at a military parade.

Nigeria Repels Boko Haram Attempt to Overrun Base

KANO, Nigeria (AFP) -- Nigerian troops repelled another attempt by Boko Haram militants to overrun a military base in northeast Nigeria, military and civilian sources told AFP Tuesday.

Dozens of militant fighters from a Daesh-backed Boko Haram faction attacked the base Sunday in the village of Keken, near the garrison town of Monguno, in Borno state.

Recent months have seen repeated attacks on military bases in the northern part of Borno, although Nigerian commanders have strongly denied reports of heavy troop casualties.

The authorities maintain the group, whose insurgency has left more than 27,000 dead in northeast Nigeria since 2009, is on the verge of defeat, despite the ongoing violence.

Borno state capital, Maiduguri, said the takfiris were equipped with anti-aircraft guns and rocket-propelled grenades on Sunday.

But they were unable to breach defensive ditches surrounding the facility, he added on condition of anonymity, as he was not authorized to speak to the media.

Boko Haram “met stiff resistance, which led to a battle that lasted for hours,” he said.

Details of the attack were slow to emerge as telecommunications infrastructure has been destroyed by fighting and there are strict controls on movement in rural Borno state.

People from the area were only able to reach Maiduguri on Tuesday as the military shut the main road for 24 hours as they searched for rebels in the bush.

5:45 p.m. on Sunday. They came in several trucks and on motorcycles,” said bus driver Sani Madaye.

Madaye said he and other drivers were sitting in a shed near the military base at the time. He was on his way to the fishing town of Baga, on the shores of Lake Chad and was forced to stop.

“The gunmen used a herd of cattle as cover to attack the base but they were detected in nearby bushes as they approached their target,” he said.

“A truck carrying fighters attempted to break [through] the barrier but the driver was shot and the truck swerved and crashed,” added another witness, who gave his name as Abdullahi.

“Suddenly, there was heavy shooting from Boko Haram and soldiers responded with fire, and it lasted for around one hour.”

Pope: Sex Scandals Driving People Away



Pope Francis delivers his speech during the ecumenical meeting with young people in the Lutheran Charles' Church in Tallinn, Estonia, Sept. 25, 2018.

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) – Pope Francis acknowledged Tuesday that the sex abuse scandals rocking the Catholic Church were driving people away and said the church must change its ways if it wants to keep future generations.

Francis referred directly to the crisis convulsing his papacy on the fourth and final day of his Baltic pilgrimage, which coincided with the release of a devastating new report into decades of sex abuse and cover-up in Germany.

Francis considered one of the least religious countries in the world, that he knew many young people felt the church had nothing to offer them and simply doesn't understand their problems today.

Those complaints recently poured into the Vatican via surveys commissioned ahead of a big meeting of bishops starting next week on how to better minister to young Catholics.

“We know – and you have told us – that many young people do not turn to us for anything because they don't feel we have anything meaningful to say to them,” Francis told a gathering of Catholic, Lutheran and Orthodox young people. “They are upset by sexual and economic scandals that do not meet with clear condemnation, by our unpreparedness to really appreciate the lives and sensibilities of the young, and simply by the passive role we assign them.”

He said the church wants to respond to

those complaints transparently and honestly. “We ourselves need to be converted,” he said. “We have to realize that in order to stand by your side we need to change many situations that, in the end, put you off.”

It was a very public admission of the church's failures in confronting sex abuse scandals, which have roared back to the headlines recently with revelations of abuse and cover-up in the U.S., Chilean and now German church. The Germany bishop's conference Tuesday was releasing a report that found that some 3,677 people – more than half of them 13 or younger and nearly a third of them altar boys – were abused by clergy between 1946 and 2014.

The report, compiled by university researchers, found evidence that some files were manipulated or destroyed, many cases were not brought to justice, and that sometimes abusers were simply moved to other dioceses without the congregations being informed about their past, according to the results that leaked earlier in the German press.

The scandal, which erupted in Ireland in the 1990s and subsequently Australia and the U.S. in following decades, now threatens Francis' own papacy since a former Vatican ambassador accused him of rehabilitating an American cardinal who slept with seminarians.

Francis has declined to respond to the accusations, but the Vatican is expected to soon.

Swedish Parliament Ousts PM in No-Confidence Vote



Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and deputy Prime Minister Isabella Lovin are seen in Swedish parliament Riksdagen, where Löfven was ousted in a no-confidence vote Sept. 25, 2018.

STOCKHOLM (AFP) – Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven lost a mandatory confidence vote in parliament Tuesday meaning he will step down, but with neither major political bloc holding a majority it remained unclear who will form the next government.

Voters delivered a hung parliament in the Sept. 9 election with Lofven's center-left bloc garnering 144 seats, one more than the center-right opposition Alliance.

The anti-immigration Sweden Democrats, with 62 seats, also backed the vote to remove Lofven.

Analysts expect the speaker to pick Ulf Kristersson, leader of the Moderate Party – the biggest Alliance party – to try to form a new government.

But with the Alliance in a minority, he needs support either from the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats, shunned by all sides since the party entered parliament in 2010, or the center left.

Stefan Lofven's Social Democrats have ruled out backing an Alliance

government.

Sweden Democrat leader Jimmie Akesson repeated Tuesday his party would bring down any government that does not give it a say on immigration, healthcare, pensions and crime policy.

“If Ulf Kristersson wants to be prime minister it can only happen with my help,” Sweden Democrat leader Jimmie Akesson told Swedish television Tuesday.

The Alliance of the Moderates, Centre, Liberal and Christian Democrats has said it will not negotiate with them.

The speaker has four goes at finding a new government and if the situation remains deadlocked, Sweden will hold another election within three months.

With a new vote unlikely to change the situation much, some kind of compromise is likely to be thrashed out.

A number of party combinations have been suggested, but all would have a heavy political cost and a deal is could take weeks.

Lofven will lead a transition government until a new administration is installed.



BERLIN (AP) -- A top German bishop has apologized for thousands of sexual abuse cases that took place inside the Catholic Church in Germany, according to a devastating report released Tuesday that concludes at least 3,677 people were abused by clergy between 1946 and 2014. “Sexual abuse is a crime,” Cardinal Reinhard Marx, who is also the head of the German Bishops Conference, told reporters. “I’m ashamed for so many (of us) looking away, not wanting to recognize what happened and not helping the victims. That goes for me as well.” The report on sex abuse inside the German Catholic Church found that more than half of the victims were 13 or younger and most were boys. Every sixth case involved rape and at least 1,670 clergy were involved. Some 969 abuse victims were altar boys. On average, the abuses happened multiple times over a period of at least 15 months.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- The Pentagon's nominee to be the next commander of U.S. forces in South Korea said on Tuesday that a decision to suspend some joint military exercises between South Korea and the United States had caused a “slight degradation” in readiness. “I think there was certainly degradation to the readiness of the force,” U.S. Army General Robert Abrams said during his confirmation hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee. He added that he was confident that a mitigation plan was in plan to sustain readiness until the next series of exercises. Abrams also said North Korea still had significant capabilities and the United States should remain “clear-eyed” about the situation on the Korean peninsula.

ADDIS ABABA (Reuters) -- Ethiopian authorities arrested more than 1,200 people after violence erupted in and around the capital this month, a senior police official said, three times more than earlier estimates. Twenty-eight people died, the head of the capital's police commission, Degfie Bedi, said, raising the death count from 23. “The majority were beaten to death. Seven were killed by security forces,” he told journalists late Monday. Violence that raged from Sept. 12-17 and included attacks on minorities in Ethiopia's ethnic Oromo heartland outside Addis Ababa, was a blow to new reformist Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's efforts at reconciliation. The unrest escalated on the day of a rally marking the return to Ethiopia of leaders of the exiled Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which had waged a four-decade insurgency for self-determination for Ethiopia's largest ethnic group.

BERLIN (AFP) -- German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Tuesday that Britain had still not expressed a clear position on its post-Brexit relations with the EU, warning that only “six to eight weeks” remained to reach an agreement. Success in the upcoming negotiations depended “largely on what it is Britain really wants, and on this the discussion has still not been entirely clear,” Merkel told a business conference in Berlin.

MADRID (Reuters) -- Spain's Socialists (PSOE) would win 30.6 percent of the vote if an election was held today, an official poll showed Tuesday, up from a previous poll held in August which predicted the party headed by Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez would win 29.9 percent. The latest poll will buoy Sanchez in parliament, in which he holds just 84 seats in a 350-seat house, as he negotiates next year's budget and scrambles to find support while insisting he plans to take the government until the next election in 2020. It was the second poll since June's change of government following a no-confidence vote which toppled the conservative People's Party (PP) and put the PSOE in power. The PP fell in distant second in the poll by the Center for Sociological Studies (CIS) with just 20.8 percent of the vote, followed by the market-friendly Ciudadanos with 19.6 percent and the anti-austerity Podemos party with 16.1 percent.

VIENNA (Reuters) -- Austria's chancellor said Tuesday a proposal by his far-right coalition partners to shut out several newspapers was unacceptable, suggesting fresh tensions between the ruling parties. Two of Austria's three main national newspapers Tuesday published details of an email sent to police spokespeople by the Interior Ministry, which is controlled by the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ). The email suggested communications with the papers and one other be reduced to “what is absolutely necessary.” The email accused the broadsheets Kurier and Der Standard and left-wing weekly newspaper Falter of “very one-sided and negative reporting” about the ministry or the police, without providing examples or details. The Interior Ministry confirmed that the email was authentic and sent by its chief spokesman but said it was not binding and consisted of suggestions rather than instructions.