

China Refutes U.S. Officials' Warnings About China



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi makes a speech during the 56th Munich Security Conference at Bayerischer Hof Hotel in Munich, Germany on February 15, 2020.

MUNICH (CNBC) — China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi has said that U.S. criticisms of Beijing were "lies" and blamed Washington for the tumultuous relationship between the world's two largest economies. "The root cause of all these problems and issues is that the U.S. does not want to see rapid development and rejuvenation of China, still less would they want to accept the success of a socialist country, but that is not fair, China has the right to develop," Wang said during a discussion at the Munich Security Conference.

"China's drive towards modernization is an inevitable trend of history and will not be held back or stopped by any force in the world because it represents the direction of human progress," he added. Wang's comments at the Munich Security Conference followed those of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, both delivering back-to-back speeches accusing China of malign activities.

"China encroaches on the exclusive economic zones of Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia. And on that point, China has had a border or maritime dispute with nearly every nation bordering it," Pompeo told an audience at the security forum. "And let's talk for a second about the other realm, cybersecurity. Huawei and other Chinese state-backed tech companies are Trojan horses for Chinese intelligence," he added.

Esper said Beijing was caring out a "nefarious strategy" through telecommunications firm Huawei. "It is essential that we as an international community wake up to the challenges presented by Chinese manipulation of the long-standing international rules-based order," he warned.

When asked about the speeches made by Pompeo and Esper, Wang dismissed U.S. criticisms and said that Beijing would continue to seek a better relationship with Washington. "This has become a common scenario, they say basically the same thing everywhere they go about China, and I don't want to waste our time responding to each and every thing they've said. The thing I want to say is that all these accusations against China are lies and not based on facts," Wang said of Pompeo and Esper's comments.

NATO Chief Dismisses Macron Nuclear Call

MUNICH (Dispatches) — NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has dismissed Macron's call for a European "strategic dialog" about the role of France's nuclear weapons and said a "tried and tested" deterrent was already in place. NATO's chief has rejected a call by France's President Emmanuel Macron to put the country's nuclear deterrence capabilities at the center of defense strategies adopted by the European Union (EU) members. Hailing France as a "highly valued ally" whose nuclear capabilities contributed to NATO's overall security, Stoltenberg said, however, that Europe was already protected by what he called nuclear deterrence by the atomic weapons of member states Britain and the United States.

"We have to remember that we have a European nuclear deterrent today — 28 allies deliver that every day and it's not only a promise, but it's something that has been there for decades," Stoltenberg told reporters at the international conference. "It's tried and tested, we exercise it, and it's institutionalized, and it is the ultimate security guarantee for Europe." Britain's departure from the EU last month has made France the bloc's only nuclear power, but Paris has refused to put its nuclear deterrence capabilities under the auspices of the EU or NATO. In a major speech in Paris last week, Macron claimed France's nuclear arsenal now had "a European dimension" after Britain's exit from the EU. The French president also reiterated

his previous calls for Europe's defensive autonomy from the U.S. and the reduction of reliance on other world powers. "The issue is not for Europeans to know whether they must defend themselves with or without Washington," Macron said during the speech. "But our security derives also, inevitably, from a greater capacity by Europeans to act autonomously." Stoltenberg clashed with Macron last year after the French president said NATO was suffering from "brain death," and described the US-led military alliance as strategically and politically defunct. U.S. President Donald Trump has been a fierce NATO critic, mostly accusing other military alliance members of not paying their "fair share."

U.S., Europe Clash Over Washington's Global Retreat



U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo addresses the audience on the podium during the 56th Munich Security Conference (MSC) in Munich, southern Germany, on February 15, 2020.

MUNICH (Dispatches) — U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has traded barbs with European leaders over diminishing Western influence, rejecting as "grossly over-exaggerated" their claims that Washington had retreated from the global stage. Speaking at the Munich Security Conference, Pompeo sought to assuage European anxiety over the transatlantic bond under an unpredictable President Donald Trump, saying: "The West is winning and we're winning together." But he was immediately contradicted by French President Emmanuel Macron, who warned of "a weakening of the West".

The annual gathering of world leaders, generals and diplomats to discuss security challenges has been dominated by fears over the West's diminishing role in the face of a more assertive China and Russia. In his opening speech a day earlier, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier suggested that the United States rejected "even the idea of an international community" and was acting "at the expense of neighbors and partners". "Those statements don't reflect reality," Pompeo retorted. "I'm happy to report that the death of the transatlantic alliance is grossly over-exaggerated," he added, paraphrasing a famous Mark Twain quote.

Germans Hit Streets Against Deals With Far Right



Demonstrators rally for a protest themed 'Not with us! No pacts with fascists any time or anywhere!' on Saturday in Erfurt, capital of Thuringia state in Germany's former communist east, where far-right lawmakers helped installing a new state premier (AFP photo)

ERFURT, Germany (Dispatches) — Thousands of anti-fascist protesters have taken to the streets in Erfurt, capital of Thuringia state in Germany's former communist east where far-right lawmakers last week helped install a new state premier. "Not with us! No pacts with fascists any time or anywhere!" is the motto for the protest, organized by the DGB trade union federation, NGOs, artists and politicians belonging to the "Un-teilbar" (indivisible) movement. Organizers said 18,000 people, including artists, trade unionists, NGO workers and politicians took part in the demonstration. The protesters carried banners with slogans including "We don't want a Fourth Reich" or "We don't want power at any price" and chanted "no deal with the fascists". Thuringia rocked national politics on February 5, when state lawmakers from Chancellor Angela Merkel's

centre-right CDU party voted with far-right, anti-immigrant AfD representatives to elect liberal politician Thomas Kemmerich state premier. "I'm demonstrating because the AfD is gaining a lot of influence in the eastern regions," said Maria Reuter, a 74-year old Erfurt resident. "A red line was crossed when the right and far-right combined their votes," she said, adding: "This cannot stand." The Erfurt gathering was the latest of many protests that broke out spontaneously across Germany in response to the controversial electoral pact, and which have been targeted especially against the CDU and Kemmerich's Free Democrats (FDP). Barely 24 hours after accepting the vote, Kemmerich agreed to step down. But outrage at the centrist parties accepting help from the far right, a first since the founding of the Federal Republic in 1949, remains deep-seated among the protest organizers.

Twelve Detained in Germany Over Suspected Far-Right Plot

BERLIN (Reuters) - German federal prosecutors won a court order to detain 12 men arrested on suspicion of involvement in a far-right plot to overthrow the political order by means of targeted attacks. The men were arrested, four on suspicion of forming a right-wing terrorist organization last September and the rest of offering them financial support. They were planning to stage attacks on politicians, asylum seekers and Muslims, and a federal court judge ordered them detained pending further investigations on Saturday, prosecutors said. Popular support for far-right groups is growing in Germany, notably in the country's former Communist east, as part of a polarization at both ends of the political spectrum that is undermining the mainstream establishment that been in government since World War Two.



The men, aged between 20 and 50, named their group 'Der harte Kern' (The Hard Core), the Welt am Sonntag newspaper reported on Sunday, saying they had been arrested in six different states.

Venezuelan Armed Forces Stage Nationwide Drills

CARACAS (Reuters) - Venezuela's military has held exercises that deployed civilian militia and armored vehicles in the capital Caracas and around the country, an effort by President Nicolas Maduro to show strength as Washington prepares to escalate sanctions. Maduro accuses the United States of preparing an invasion of the OPEC nation, which in 2017 U.S. President Donald Trump described as a possibility. Since last year the United States has ramped up economic sanctions against his government. The exercises were launched days after Maduro formally incorporated the civilian reserve, a group of some 4 million volunteers with limited military training, into the armed forces alongside the army, navy, air force and National Guard. "We have proven the level of command and control of the Bolivarian militia, complemented by the National Bolivarian Armed Forces," said Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino in statements broadcast on state television. In one exercise seen by Reuters along a highway in eastern Caracas, a group of several hundred people including

soldiers and militia members participated in a 10-minute drill that involved blocking "invaders" from entering the capital. They were joined by civilian members of the ruling Socialist Party dressed in red shirts who served as look-outs, while soldiers drove armored vehicles. The "invaders" were represented by a group of cars that blocked the highway. Maduro's adversaries dismiss such exercises as theatrics meant to disguise the decay of the armed forces amid hyperinflation that has made Venezuelan salaries - including those of soldiers - insufficient to buy basic food. Maduro has held on to power despite the country's economic crisis in large part because of support from the military. The United States has implemented a broad sanctions program against his government and has urged the armed forces to turn against him. State Department officials this month said they plan new measures to increase the pressure on Maduro, who says the sanctions are to blame for the country's economic problems.

New China Virus Cases Drop for Third Day as Toll Passes 1,600

BEIJING (AFP) - The number of new cases of the COVID-19 coronavirus epidemic dropped for a third consecutive day on Sunday, as the World Health Organization chief warned it was "impossible" to predict how the outbreak would develop. Global concern remains high about the spread of the virus, which first emerged in China's central Hubei province in December, with the first death outside Asia reported in France this weekend. The death toll jumped to 1,665 in mainland China on Sunday after 142 more people died from the virus. More than 68,000 people have now been infected --

but the number of new cases of the COVID-19 number continued to decline. In hardest-hit Hubei, the number of new cases slowed for a third consecutive day and at 139, the number of deaths was level with Saturday's toll. The number of new cases in other parts of the country has dropped for twelve straight days. Mi Feng, National Health Commission spokesman, said Sunday that the figures were a sign that China was controlling the outbreak. "The effects of epidemic prevention and control in various parts of the country can already be seen," he told reporters.

News in Brief

KIEV (Dispatches) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has said that President Trump was wrong to call Ukraine one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Speaking with CNN at the Munich Security Conference, Zelensky said that Trump's designation of Ukraine as the "third-most corrupt country in the world" was "not true." "When I had a meeting with President Trump and he said that in previous years Ukraine was such a corrupt country, I told him very honestly and I was very open with him," Zelensky said. "I told him that we fight with corruption. We fight each day." "Please, please stop saying that Ukraine is a corrupt country," Zelensky said. "We want to change this image."

SEOUL (Reuters) - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un paid tribute to the status of former leader Kim at Pyongyang's Kumsusan Palace of the Sun, his first public appearance since he attended Lunar New Year celebrations on Jan. 25, state media Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said. North Korea has not confirmed any cases of the new coronavirus, but state media said the government was extending to 30 days the quarantine period for people showing symptoms, and all government institutions and foreigners living in the country were expected to comply "unconditionally."

BEIJING (Dispatches) - The foreign ministers of China and the Vatican have met in the first high-level encounter between the sides -- a new sign of improving relations between two states with no diplomatic ties. The talks between China's Wang Yi and Archbishop Paul Gallagher in the German city of Munich on Friday came as relations steadily improve following a landmark agreement on the appointment of bishops in 2018. "Today is the first meeting between the Chinese and Vatican foreign ministers," Wang said, according to the People's Daily newspaper, a Communist Party mouthpiece. "This is a continuation of the exchanges between China and the Vatican for a period of time. It will open up more space for the future exchanges between the two sides," he said

ABUJA (Dispatches) - Armed bandits have killed at least 30 people in raids on two villages in northwestern Nigeria. Gambo Isah, a spokesman for police in Nigeria's northwestern state of Katsina, said on Sunday that dozens of gunmen on motorcycles had attacked the villages of Tsauwa and Dankar on Friday. "The bandits killed 21 people in Tsauwa and another nine in nearby Dankar," media outlets quoted the spokesman as saying. "Most of those killed were old people and children who couldn't escape." Isah said police and military forces were deployed in the area after the attack and detained one suspect. Tukur Mu'azu, the traditional chief of Batsari, a district that straddles the two villages attacked, said the assailants burnt homes, livestock, and food supplies before fleeing.

TRIPOLI (Dispatches) - A United Nations (UN) official has warned that the situation in Libya is "deeply troubling," a fragile ceasefire in the crisis-hit country has seen dozens of violations, and a UN arms embargo imposed on the country has become a "joke." UN Deputy Special Representative to Libya Stephanie Williams made the comments at a joint press conference with German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas on the sidelines of the 56th Munich Security Conference (MSC) on Sunday and after a meeting of foreign ministers to follow up on a Berlin summit on Libya last month. "The situation on the ground remains deeply troubling. The truce is holding only by a thread. It is the Libyan people that continue to suffer the most. The economic situation continues to deteriorate, exacerbated by the oil blockade," the U.S. official said, referring to the blockade of oil facilities by rebel forces in Libya.

PORT-AU-PRINCE (AFP) - Fifteen children were killed when a fire swept through an unlicensed orphanage outside Haiti's capital Port-au-Prince, a judge told AFP, highlighting the severe shortcomings of the island nation's child welfare institutions. Two children died in the blaze and 13 others died at a hospital as a result of smoke inhalation, said magistrate Raymonde Jean Antoine. The building -- which had not been authorized to operate as an orphanage since 2013 -- housed about 66 children, she said. The fire in Kenscoff -- a town of 50,000 south of the capital -- began shortly after 9:00 pm Thursday (0200 GMT Friday), Antoine added.