

Americans: Trump Encouraging White Supremacists



President Trump waves to supporters as he kicks off his 2020 re-election campaign in Orlando, Fla., June 18, 2019.

WASHINGTON (WP) -- A mass shooting this weekend in El Paso has prompted comparisons between the shooter's apparently racist motives of preventing a "Hispanic invasion," according to a manifesto authorities think he may have posted, and President Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric.

Many are pointing to the president's words and actions for encouraging the same anti-immigrant beliefs that apparently led to the massacre in El Paso.

Trump has regularly described immigration from Latin America as an invasion and an immediate threat to the United States. He began his 2016 presidential campaign by broadly denigrating Mexi-

can immigrants as "rapists." And he even laughed a few months ago when a supporter answered his question about how to stop migrants at the southern border by yelling, "Shoot them."

Democratic presidential candidates have been especially quick to point out the similarities between the president's statements and the shooter's motives. Former congressman Beto O'Rourke, who represented El Paso, blamed the president for the shooting because "he stokes racism." Sen. Cory Booker similarly stated that the president "is responsible because he is stoking fears and hatred and bigotry."

Although other Democratic candidates stopped short of directly blaming Trump,

they still accused him of emboldening white supremacists. Julián Castro, a former housing secretary, tweeted, "When Donald Trump fans the flames of hate and division, there are real consequences."

Pete Buttigieg, the mayor of South Bend, Ind., likewise said that the president is "at best condoning and encouraging white nationalists." And Sens. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren respectively tweeted:

Mr. President: stop your racist, hateful and anti-immigrant rhetoric. Your language creates a climate which emboldens violent extremists.

We need to call out white nationalism for what it is—domestic terrorism. It is a threat to the United States, and we've seen its devastating toll this weekend. And we need to call out the president himself for advancing racism and white supremacy.

It's not just Democratic politicians who are criticizing Trump. Nor are concerns about his rhetoric simply an emotional reaction to the horrific violence in El Paso.

In fact, such concerns about Trump's rhetoric were widespread even before he became president. In a December 2016 poll by the Pew Research Center, for instance, 54 percent said that Trump has done "too little" to distance himself from "white nationalist groups, who believe that whites should be favored in the U.S. over people of other races and ethnicities."

Most Americans have also consistently said that Trump has encouraged white supremacist groups during his presidency.

South Korea, U.S. to Go Ahead With Military Drills



South Korean and U.S. soldiers observe a live fire drill at the Seungjin Fire Training Field in Pocheon northeast of Seoul, in April 2017.

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea and the United States are preparing to hold their annual joint military exercises despite warnings from North Korea that the drills could derail fragile nuclear diplomacy, Seoul's military said Monday.

Choi Hyun-soo, spokeswoman of the exercises' Defense Ministry, said the exercises will be focused on verifying Seoul's capabilities for its planned re-taking of wartime operational control of its troops from Washington. She did not confirm or deny reports that the drills, which are expected to be computer simulated and not involve actual combat troops and equipment, be-

gan on Monday.

North Korea recently has been ramping up its weapons tests, including two test firings of what it described as a new rocket artillery system last week, while expressing frustration over the continuance of U.S.-South Korea drills it sees as an invasion rehearsal and also the slow pace of nuclear negotiations with the United States.

North Korea had said it will wait to see if the August exercises actually take place to decide on the fate of its diplomacy with the United States and also whether to continue its unilateral suspension of nuclear and long-range missile tests, which leader Kim Jong

Un announced last year amid a diplomatic outreach to Washington.

The allies have scaled down their major military exercises and also stopped regional dispatches of U.S. strategic assets such as long-range bombers and aircraft carriers since the first summit between Kim and President Donald Trump in Singapore in June last year to create space for diplomacy.

The North insists even the downsized drills violate agreements between Kim and Trump, who in Singapore vowed to improve bilateral ties and issued a vague statement on a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula without describing when and how it would occur.

Nuclear negotiations have been on a standstill since the collapse of the second Trump-Kim summit in Vietnam in February over disagreements in exchanging sanctions relief and disarmament.

The North's recent weapons tests, which also included a short-range ballistic missile test on July 25 it described as a "solemn warning" to South Korea over its planned military drills with the United States, have dampened the optimism that followed the third summit between Trump and Kim on June 30 at the inter-Korean border. The leaders agreed to resume working-level nuclear talks that stalled since February, but there have been no known meetings between the two sides since then.

UN Urges Sanctions on Firms Linked to Myanmar Military

JAKARTA (Reuters) -- United Nations investigators urged world leaders on Monday to impose targeted financial sanctions on companies linked to the military in Myanmar, and said foreign firms doing business with them could be complicit in human rights crimes.

A panel of human rights experts identified scores of companies tied to the army, which controls vast swathes of Myanmar's economy through holding firms and their subsidiaries, and is accused by the UN of executing a campaign with "genocidal intent" against the Rohingya minority.

More than 730,000 Rohingya, members of a persecuted Muslim minority, fled Myanmar's Rakhine state into neighboring Bangladesh amid a military-led crackdown in August 2017 that the UN and Western countries have said included mass killings and gang-rapes.

The UN investigatory panel condemned the violence in a report last year that called for the economic isolation of the military. Investigators said the purpose of the new report was to help countries cut financial ties with all army-linked companies.

"For the first time, this report comes out with a clear picture of the involvement of specific European and Asian companies, and makes a point that in fact there is this relationship and it's a

violation of UN treaties and UN norms," panel chairman Marzuki Darusman said in an interview in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta on Sunday.

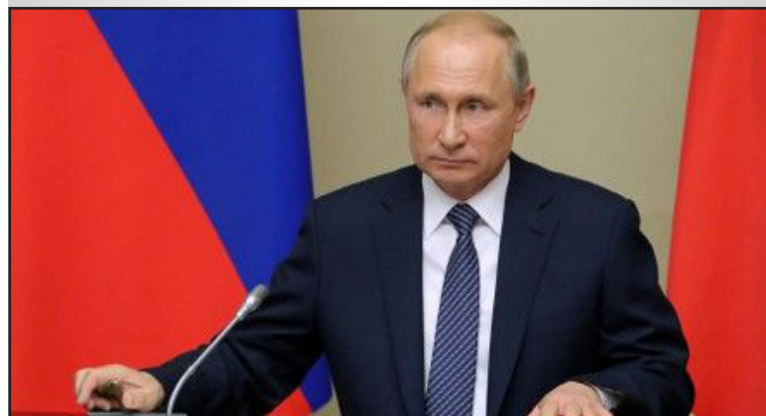
The investigators identified at least 59 foreign companies with some form of commercial ties to the Myanmar military, including firms from France, Belgium, Switzerland, Hong Kong and China. Of those, 15 operate joint ventures with the two military conglomerates or their subsidiaries, the report said.

Calling for the imposition of an arms embargo on the country, the investigators also named 14 companies that have sold weapons and related equipment to security forces in the country since 2016, including state-owned entities in Israel, India, North Korea, and China.

Any foreign business activity involving the army and its conglomerates "posts a high risk of contributing to, or being linked to, violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law," the report said.

"Corporations and individuals responsible within that corporation can be prosecuted," Darusman said, adding that the arms they provide allow the military to "continue their oppression to the Myanmar people".

Putin: Russia to Develop Missiles If U.S. Does



Russian President Vladimir Putin chairs a meeting with members of the Security Council at the Novo-Ogaryovo state residence outside Moscow, August 5, 2019.

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- Russian President Vladimir Putin warned on Monday that Moscow would be forced to start developing short and intermediate-range land-based nuclear missiles if the United States started doing so after the demise of a landmark arms control treaty.

The United States formally left the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty with Russia on Friday after saying Moscow was violating the treaty and had already deployed at least one banned type of missile, an accusation the Kremlin denies.

The pact banned land-based missiles with a range of between 310 and 3,400 miles (500-5,500 km), reducing the ability of both countries to launch a nuclear strike on short notice.

Putin on Monday held a meeting with his Security Council after which he ordered the defense and foreign ministries and Russia's SVR foreign intelligence service to closely monitor any steps the United States took to develop, produce or deploy missiles banned under the defunct treaty.

"If Russia obtains reliable information that the United States has finished developing these systems and started to produce them, Russia will have no option other than to engage in a full-scale effort to develop similar missiles," Putin said in a statement.

In the meantime, he said Russia's arsenal of air and sea-launched missiles combined with its work on developing hypersonic missiles meant it was well placed to offset any threat

emanating from the United States.

It was now essential, he added, for Moscow and Washington to resume arms control talks to prevent what he described as an "unfettered" arms race breaking out.

"In order to avoid chaos with no rules, restrictions or laws, we need to once more weigh up all the dangerous consequences and launch a serious and meaningful dialogue free from any ambiguity," Putin said.

Russia also said it would take measures to defend itself if the United States stationed missiles in Asia following the collapse of the landmark arms control treaty and that it expected Japan to deploy a new U.S. missile launch system.

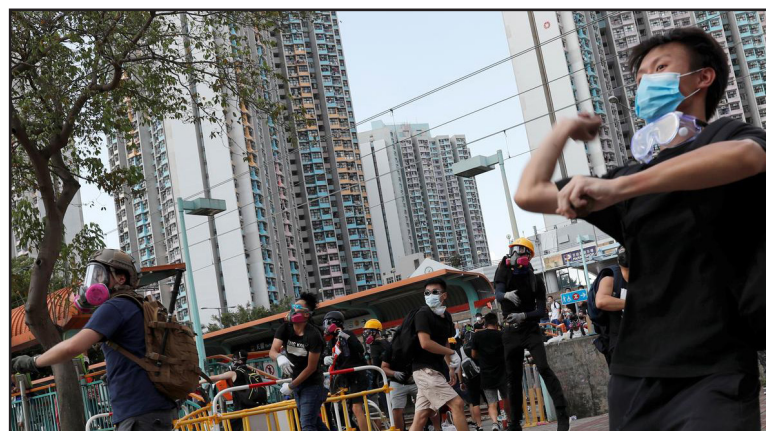
U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper said on Saturday that he was in favor of placing ground-launched, intermediate-range missiles in Asia relatively soon.

Asked about the possible U.S. missile deployment, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Russia did not plan to get sucked into an arms race with Washington, but that it would respond defensively to any threats.

"... If the deployment of new U.S. systems begins specifically in Asia then the corresponding steps to balance these actions will be taken by us in the direction of parrying these threats," Ryabkov told a news conference.

He said Moscow expected Tokyo to soon station the U.S. MK-41 missile-launching system in Japan.

Hong Kong Nearing 'Very Dangerous Situation'



Rioters hurl objects at the police during a demonstration in support of the city-wide strike at Tin Shui Wai in Hong Kong, China, August 5, 2019.

HONG KONG (Dispatches) -- Hong Kong riot police clashed Monday with U.S.-backed rioters for a third straight day, as the city's leader warned the global financial hub was nearing a "very dangerous situation" and a rare strike caused transport chaos.

Clouds of tear gas billowed across multiple locations on Monday as the city buckled under a general strike following two months of increasingly violent unrest.

In a rare public appearance since the crisis began, chief executive Carrie Lam warned protesters she would not cave to their demands.

"(They) have seriously undermined Hong Kong's law and order and are pushing our city, the city that we all love and many of us helped to build, to the verge of a very dangerous situation," Lam said.

She later referenced chants by rioters for a "revolution", describing this as a challenge to the "one country, two systems" framework under which Hong Kong has been ruled since it returned from British to Chinese rule in 1997.

"I dare say they are trying to destroy Hong Kong," said Lam. China's cabinet-level State Council said it planned to hold a press conference on Tuesday.

Rioters descended on subway stations during morning rush hour, deliberately keeping open doors to stop trains depart-

ing and paralyzing large parts of a network that millions of people use daily.

They later held simultaneous rallies at seven locations and besieged multiple police stations, stretching the resources of the force to keep order.

Tear gas was fired in four separate locations, making Monday's clashes the most widespread so far.

The most sustained clashes occurred outside the city's parliament -- where unruly rioters used giant slingshots to launch bricks -- and in the working-class district of Wong Tai Sin.

In a briefing that highlighted the longevity of the protests, police said they had fired more than 1,000 rounds of tear gas and 160 rubber bullets since riots began on June 9, with 420 people arrested and 139 officers injured so far.

The strike -- a rare occurrence in the finance hub where unions traditionally have little sway -- hit the vital aviation sector.

More than 160 flights at the city's airport, one of the world's busiest, were listed as cancelled on Monday. Many were with Cathay Pacific, Hong Kong's flag carrier.

Some key roads were also blocked and many shops across the city were shuttered, including big-name fashion outlets in the central commercial district.

The strike led to some scuffles between angry commuters and rioters at crowded subway stations.



WASHINGTON (AFP) -- Despite two deadly shootings at its stores in less than a week, American retail giant Walmart has no plans to stop selling guns and ammunition, a spokesman said Sunday. A man opened fire with an assault rifle at a Walmart in Texas on Saturday, killing 20 people, just four days after a disgruntled employee shot dead two coworkers and wounded a responding police officer at one of the massive chain's stores in Mississippi. "We are focused on supporting our associates, our customers and the entire El Paso community," spokesman Randy Hargrove said. Following the El Paso shooting, Walmart CEO Doug McMillon posted a note on Instagram saying he "can't believe" it was the second such in a week. "My heart aches for the community in El Paso, especially the associates and customers at store 2201 and the families of the victims," he wrote. "I'm praying for them and I hope you will join me." Walmart founder Sam Walton loved guns -- so much so that the American gun manufacturer Remington named a hunting rifle model after him.

SYDNEY (AFP) -- Australia on Monday ruled out hosting ground-based U.S. missiles after talks with Washington's top defense and diplomatic officials. Following an announcement that the United States plans to deploy intermediate-range missiles in Asia -- widely seen as an effort to contain China -- Australia scotched the notion of locating them Down Under. "It's not been asked of us, not being considered, not been put to us. I think I can rule a line under that," Prime Minister Scott Morrison said of the notion. His comments came hours after U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo departed Sydney following talks. Australian Defense Minister Linda Reynolds told public broadcaster ABC the issue came up in her meeting with Esper: "I asked him directly, 'was there any expectation of a request', and he said 'no'." Any formal request would put Australia in a difficult spot between long-time ally the United States and major trade partner China. Policy toward Beijing has become an increasing point of friction between Washington and Canberra -- which has tried to maintain good working relations with Chinese President Xi Jinping's government.

ALMATY (Reuters) -- After a weeks-long disappearance that sparked rumors of his death, the president of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, appeared on state television on Sunday driving a rally car to a flaming gas crater known as Hell's Gate. The 62-year-old autocratic leader disappeared from public view in late July and several foreign media outlets, citing unnamed sources, reported at the time that he had died. The government of the gas-exporting Central Asian country denied that and said he was simply on vacation. On Sunday, state television broadcast a report about Berdimukhamedov's holiday, which showed him driving a rally car to the Hell's Gate crater -- a flaming pit in the middle of the Karakum Desert. The report also showed Berdimukhamedov, wearing a military-style outfit and a backwards-facing baseball cap, score three strikes in a bowling game, prompting rounds of standing applause from underlings dressed in identical tracksuits.

JAKARTA (Reuters) -- Indonesia's state power company PLN should have had plans in place to prevent a major electricity blackout that affected 21 million customers in Jakarta and neighboring provinces, President Joko Widodo said on Monday. In the wake of the biggest power outage in 14 years on Sunday, Widodo demanded to know why the utility PT Perusahaan Listrik Negara (PLN) did not have a back-up plan given its history of blackouts. "Things that can cause this big event should not happen again in the future," Widodo told senior managers during a visit to PLN headquarters, calling for repairs to be made quickly. Jakarta, the center of government and business in Indonesia, suffers periodic blackouts that are usually short-lived and confined to certain areas. Power failed around noon on Sunday after faulty transmission circuits triggered "cascading voltage" that disconnected power plants supplying electricity to the west part of Java island, which includes the capital, PLN said.

BANGKOK (Reuters) -- Thai security forces are hunting more than 10 suspects in connection with a series of bomb attacks in Bangkok last week, Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha said on Monday. Six bombs exploded in the Thai capital on Friday as the city hosted a meeting of Southeast Asian foreign ministers, that was also attended by top diplomats from the United States, China, and other world powers. Authorities now say that six other fire-bombs also went off on Friday in central Bangkok, including two that caused fires at a shopping mall in a central shopping district popular with tourists. On Saturday, three more bombs also went off at three ATM machines in southern Pattani province on Saturday, no one was hurt or claimed responsibility for the attack. "There are more than 10 people involved that need to be arrested, charged, and investigated for the cause (of the attack)," Prayuth said.