

Russia, China Warn U.S. Over Banned Missile Test



The U.S. has tested a version of the nuclear-capable Tomahawk cruise missile, previously banned under a now-defunct pact with Russia.

MOSCOW (AFP) -- Russia and China warned Tuesday that a new U.S. missile test had heightened military tensions and risked sparking an arms race, weeks after Washington ripped up a Cold War-era weapons pact with Moscow.

The U.S. and Russia ditched the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty this month after accusing each other of violating the accord.

Washington said the agreement also tied its hands in dealing with other powers such as China.

The U.S. Department of Defense announced on Monday it had tested a type of ground-launched missile that was banned under the 1987 INF

agreement, which limited the use of nuclear and conventional medium-range weapons.

"The U.S. has obviously taken a course towards escalation of military tensions. We won't react to provocations," Russia's deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov told state news agency TASS.

"We will not allow ourselves to get drawn into a costly arms race," Ryabkov said the test showed Washington had been working on such missiles long before its official withdrawal from the deal.

In Beijing, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said: "This measure from the U.S. will trigger a new round of an arms race,

leading to an escalation of military confrontation."

He warned that the test "will have a serious negative impact on the international and regional security situation".

The U.S. should "let go of its Cold War mentality" and "do more things that are conducive to... international and regional peace and tranquility", Geng added.

The missile was launched from the U.S. Navy-controlled San Nicolas Island off the coast of California.

Speaking in France Monday before news of the U.S. test launch broke, President Vladimir Putin said Russia would only deploy medium- or shorter-range missiles in response to similar moves by the U.S.

"If the United States produces such offensive systems, we will also do so," Putin said at a press conference before meetings with French leader Emmanuel Macron.

Moscow and Washington have long criticized the treaty but Putin said it was the U.S. that made the decision to "unilaterally" withdraw.

The missile tested on Sunday was a version of the nuclear-capable Tomahawk cruise missile. The ground-launched version of the Tomahawk was removed from service after the INF was ratified.

Earlier this month Secretary of Defense Mark Esper said the U.S. had already begun work to develop "mobile, conventional, ground-launched cruise and ballistic missile systems".

Thousands Arrested in Kashmir Amid Blackout



Kashmiris attend a protest after Eid-al-Adha prayers at a mosque during restrictions following the scrapping of the special constitutional status for Kashmir by the Indian government, in Srinagar, August 12, 2019.

SRINAGAR, India (AP/Reuters) — Authorities say thousands of people, mostly young male protesters, have been arrested and detained in Indian-administered Kashmir amid an ongoing communications blackout and security lockdown imposed more than two weeks ago to curtail civil unrest after a change to Kashmir's decades-old special status.

According to three high-ranking Kashmir police officials and arrest statistics shared with The Associated Press on Tuesday, at least 2,300 people have been detained in jails and other facilities in the Himalayan valley. The officials spoke anonymously fearing punishment from superiors.

The latest crackdown began this month, just before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist-led government stripped Kashmir of its semi-autonomy and its statehood, creating two federal territories.

A Central Reserve Police Force spokesman told the AP that he didn't know how many people have been detained.

Security forces detained 30 people overnight in Indian Kashmir's main city of Srinagar, local officials said on Tuesday, seeking to keep a tight lid on protests.

Youth have pelted stones at paramilitary po-

lice deployed in Srinagar, and the latest detentions took place in parts of the city where such incidents have occurred, a police officer said.

"These arrests have been made in the areas where there has been intensifying stone pelting in the last few days," the officer said, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the situation.

A local government official confirmed the latest detentions.

The withdrawal of the special privileges of Muslim majority Kashmir means residents of all parts of India can buy property and compete for government jobs and college places, raising fears that it will be flooded with outsiders.

Modi's surprise move has also increased tensions with arch rival Pakistan which lays claim to Kashmir and has accused India of human rights violations in the territory at the heart of more than 70 years of hostility between them.

Authorities in Indian Kashmir on Monday said the protests were local and small in nature involving no more than a dozen people. Still, primary schools remained deserted on Tuesday as they were the previous day as parents worried about the safety of their children kept them at home.

News in Brief

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- Russia told an agency that verifies a ban on nuclear tests that a military test accident in the country's north this month was none of its business and that handing it any radiation data was voluntary, Interfax news agency reported on Tuesday. The Vienna-based Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) said on Monday that two Russian monitoring sites closest to the mysterious explosion went offline days after the blast, soon followed by two more, fuelling suspicions that Russia tampered with them. The CTBTO said on Tuesday the radioactive-particle sensors of at least one of the four Russian monitoring stations in question were transmitting again. Russia's state nuclear agency, Rosatom, has acknowledged that five of its nuclear workers were killed in the Aug. 8 explosion during a rocket engine test near the White Sea in far northern Russia. Two Russian military personnel were also reported to have been killed.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- The United States has not returned to the negotiation table with North Korea as quickly as it had hoped, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Tuesday, but he added that Washington knew there would be "bumps on the road" in the denuclearization talks. Speaking in an interview with CBS, Pompeo said Washington was concerned about North Korea's firing of short-range missiles. "I wish they would not," he said, referring to the tests. The latest of the missile tests by North Korea was carried out on Friday as Pyongyang fired two more short-range projectiles into the sea off its east coast. Denuclearization talks have been stalled despite a commitment to revive them that was made at a June 30 meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

LONDON/BRUSSELS (Reuters) -- Prime Minister Boris Johnson's demand that the European Union reopen the Brexit divorce deal was rebuffed on Tuesday by the bloc, which said Britain had failed to propose any realistic alternative to an agreed insurance policy for the Irish border. After more than three years of Brexit crisis, the United Kingdom is heading towards a showdown with the EU as Johnson has vowed to leave the bloc on Oct. 31 without a deal unless it agrees to renegotiate the divorce terms. The bloc has repeatedly refused to reopen the Withdrawal Agreement, which includes a protocol on the Irish border "backstop" that then-prime minister Theresa May agreed in November.

MADRID (Reuters) -- The Spanish government said on Tuesday it was sending a navy ship to the Italian island of Lampedusa to escort the Open Arms rescue ship to Spain, in a bid to bring an end to an ordeal that has seen migrants stranded in the Mediterranean for 19 days. "The Audaz will depart this afternoon at 5 p.m. and will sail for three days to Lampedusa, where it will take charge of the people hosted by the Open Arms and escort the boat ... to the port of Palma in Mallorca," the Socialist government said in a statement. The Open Arms ship, run by a Spanish charity of the same name, was still unaware of the plan. Earlier on Tuesday the charity described the situation onboard as "out of control," and said that at least ten people had jumped overboard in a "desperate" attempt to swim to Lampedusa.

JAKARTA (AFP) -- Riots broke out and a local parliament building was torched in Indonesia's restive Papua region on Monday, as thousands protested against the weekend detention of dozens of Papuan students. Demonstrators took to the streets of Manokwari, the capital of West Papua province, bringing the city of some 130,000 to a standstill as its civic buildings were nearly reduced to ashes. Some protesters set fire to shops and vehicles, knocked down street signs, and threw rocks at government buildings, according to an AFP reporter at the scene, who estimated several thousand demonstrators were present. Indonesia's security minister Wiranto, who goes by one name, appealed for calm and said there would be an investigation of the incident that triggered the unrest in Manokwari as well as protests in several other Papuan cities on Monday. "This has clearly disrupted our unity as a nation," he said. The riots marked the latest flashpoint in a region hit by a decades-old insurgency against Indonesian rule and allegations that its security forces committed widespread rights abuses against its ethnic Melanesian population.

OUAGADOUGOU (Reuters) -- The Burkina Faso military said 24 soldiers were killed in an attack by unidentified militants on an army unit on Monday, updating a previous death toll of 10. In a statement on Tuesday, the army said it was continuing a land and air operation, launched in response to the attack in northern Burkina Faso, which has been overrun by Islamist violence this year. Seven other soldiers were wounded and five are still missing, it said.

Bashir in Court, Admits Receiving Cash From Saudis



Sudan's ousted president Omar al-Bashir, center, is seen in a defendant's cage during the opening of his corruption trial in Khartoum, Aug. 19, 2019.

KHARTOUM (AFP) -- Omar al-Bashir received \$90 million in cash from Saudi royals, an investigation told a court at the opening Monday of the deposed Sudanese strongman's corruption trial.

The former president, who was forced from power by months of protests in April after 30 years in power, sat in a metal cage wearing a traditional white gown.

Bashir faces a raft of charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide from the International Criminal Court over his role in the Darfur war but Monday's trial is over graft allega-

tions.

Large amounts of cash were found at this residence after he was toppled and the investigator said the case brought forward to the court probed some of that money.

"The accused told us that the money was part of a sum of \$25 million sent to him by Prince Muhammad bin Salman to be used outside of the state budget," investigator Ahmed Ali said.

According to him Bashir had said he also received two previous payments of \$35 million and \$30 million from Saudi King Abdullah, who died in 2015.

Bashir had said the Saudi money was exchanged and spent and that he could not remember how nor did he have documents providing further details, he added.

Bashir looked calm during the nearly three-hour session, which an AFP photographer and correspondent attended. The next hearing was scheduled for August 24.

In May, Sudan's prosecutor general also said Bashir had been charged over killings during the anti-regime protests which eventually led to his ouster.

London-based rights watchdog Amnesty International has warned however that the corruption trial should not distract from his Darfur indictments.

Amnesty urged the country's new transitional institutions to ratify the ICC's Rome Statute, a move that would allow for his transfer to the international tribunal.

The Hague-based ICC has for years demanded that Bashir stand trial, and has renewed its call since his fall.

It was the sudden tripling of bread prices in December that sparked the mushrooming protests which led to the toppling of Bashir by the army in April.

The trial comes as the composition of the joint civilian and military sovereign council that will steer the country of 40 million through a 39-month transition was unveiled on Monday.

Pacific Bloc Wants 'Neo-Colonial' Australia Kicked Out



WELLINGTON (AFP) -- Influential Pacific island leaders have called for Australia to be ousted from the region's main regional grouping, criticizing Canberra's "neo-colonial" attitudes and refusal to take urgent action on climate change.

This comes after Australia was accused of muzzling leaders, who wanted to use last week's Pacific Islands Forum in Tuvalu to issue a global call for action on climate change ahead of UN-sponsored talks in New York next month.

Australia's Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack then added further insult to injury when he dismissed the islanders' concerns and said they could "come here and pick our fruit" to survive.

Tuvalu Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga labeled McCormack's comments "abusive and offensive", challenging Australia's right to a place in the 18-member Pacific Islands Forum.

"The spirit of the Pacific way is not understood by these guys, I don't think they understand anything about (it)," he told Radio New Zealand.

"And if that's the case, what is the point of these guys remaining in the Pacific Island Leaders' Forum? I don't see any merit in that."

Sopoaga's views echoed those of Fiji's Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama who over the weekend described his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison as "very insulting" and said China offered a more welcoming brand of diplomacy.

Australia has a complex relationship with its Pacific island neighbors, who receive about Aus\$1.4 billion (\$950 million) a year in aid from

Canberra.

Despite the generous handouts, Pacific islanders often bristle at Australian attitudes to a region that officials in Canberra refer to as "our backyard".

Sopoaga said the Pacific Islands Forum row on climate change reminded him of regional meetings decades ago, when "colonial masters" set the agenda.

"We are still seeing reflections and manifestations of this neo-colonialist approach to what the leaders are talking about," he told RNZ.

Canberra, alarmed at Beijing's diplomatic inroads into the region, last year launched a charm offensive labeled "the Pacific Step-up", aimed at bringing the islands closer and forestalling any chance of a Chinese military base in the region.

But the divisions over climate change, exposed at the summit, have proved deeper than expected, driving a wedge between Australia and the islands.

Pacific leaders view global warming as an existential threat to low-lying nations requiring immediate action, including a rapid transition away from coal, to save their homes.

Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison concedes climate change is real but insists it can be managed in a way that does not hurt the economy, including the lucrative coal industry.

Former Kiribati president Anote Tong, a long-time climate campaigner, said China now appeared to be a better partner in the Pacific because Australia's priority appeared to be preserving its coal industry, not helping to stop global warming.

Commander: U.S. Navy Ready to Act in Venezuela

RIO DE JANEIRO (Dispatches) -- The U.S. Navy is "ready" to act in favor of Washington's interests in Venezuela, says a top American commander.

U.S. Southern Command chief Admiral Craig Faller made the remarks here Monday as the United States kicked off its annual UNITAS maritime exercise.

"I won't speak to details of what we're planning and what we're doing, but we remain ready to implement policy decisions and we remain on the balls of our feet," Faller told reporters.

He further bragged about the U.S. military might, saying the navy is ready to do "what needs to be done".

"The United States Navy is the most powerful navy in the world. If a policy decision is made to deploy the navy, I'm convinced that we'll be able to do what needs to be done."

He further vowed that the U.S. would topple the government of Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro.

"The U.S. government focus continues to be to place focused and targeted pressure on an illegitimate regime to ensure there's a transition to a legitimate, democratic govern-

ment," Faller said.

U.S. President Donald Trump has previously asserted that his administration was considering a "blockade or quarantine" against the Latin American nation.

Faller said the UNITAS military drills would "send a message" to the rest of the world.

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Faller, nevertheless, warned against Venezuela's "formidable weapon system" and criticized Cuba, Russia and China for assisting Maduro, saying it was important to put "continuous pressure" on his government.

Faller also shared concern about the growing influence of China in Brazil. China is the South American country's largest foreign investor.

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