

EU Vows to Take Retaliatory Action Against U.S.



European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and U.S. President Donald Trump speak to the news media in the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington, July 25, 2018.

BERLIN (Dispatches) -- The European Union will take retaliatory measures in response to new U.S. tariffs on European goods, Germany's Foreign Minister Heiko Maas told newspapers in remarks published on Friday.

"The European Union now will have to react and, after obtaining the approval of the World Trade Organization, probably impose punitive tariffs as well," Maas, a member of Germany's governing Social Democrats told German newspaper group Funke.

His comments come after the WTO this week ruled that some subsidies EU states paid to planemaker Airbus were illegal, giving the United States the right to react with tariffs on EU-imported goods.

Washington announced plans for new tariffs on Wednesday.

Germany's finance minister, Olaf Scholz, also a Social Democrat, on Thursday said Europe should react prudently as trade conflicts in a globalised world were in nobody's interest.

France also reacted to Washing-

ton's measures, saying it was prepared to retaliate, but that any response must be agreed within the EU.

"If the American administration rejects the hand that has been held out by France and the European Union, we are preparing ourselves to react with sanctions," French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said on Thursday.

The EU's top trade official said earlier that the bloc was considering countermeasures, but that it prefers a negotiated settlement.

"If the U.S. decides to impose WTO authorized countermeasures, it will be pushing the EU into a situation where we will have no other option than do the same," European Commissioner for Trade Cecilia Malmstrom said in a statement.

Although the U.S. tariffs are allowed under international trade law, the latest measures are expected to increase tensions between Washington and Brussels.

This is happening at a time that the U.S. is also engaged in a trade war with China.

The U.S.-China trade war, which has dragged on for 14 months, has increased the specter of a global recession.

Trade experts and government officials say the escalation runs far deeper than tariffs and could take years to resolve.

Algerians Rally to Demand Army Quit Politics



An Algerian woman wearing the national flag as a headscarf chants during a demonstration against the ruling class in the capital, Algiers, on Sept. 27, 2019.

ALGIERS (Reuters) -- Tens of thousands of Algerian protesters chanted slogans on Friday demanding the army quit politics, a purge of the ruling elite, an end to corruption, and the freeing of opposition leaders.

The demonstrations in the capital Algiers and several other cities follow a ruling by a prominent independent cleric this week urging people to vote in a December election backed by the army but opposed by the protest movement.

The fatwa and another two weeks ago, represent the first significant comment on the months-long political crisis by major independent clerics, and may influence conservative Algerians.

The army, which has emerged as the most powerful player in Algerian politics, sees December's presidential election as the only way to quell the protests and end the constitutional limbo that has prevailed since president Abdelaziz Bouteflika stood down in April.

Demonstrators have rejected the

election, however, saying it could not be free or fair while Bouteflika's allies and military leaders maintain senior positions in the government.

Sheikh Lakhdar Zaoui, a well-known conservative cleric, published a fatwa on Wednesday, saying a Muslim country could not be leaderless.

Another cleric, Sheikh Chemseddine Bouroubi, who has a daily television show "Please Advise Me" that answers people's questions about religion, said last month it was forbidden for Algeria to have no president.

Algeria plunged into crisis in February when massive protests erupted to stop the old, sick Bouteflika running for a fifth term in an election that was scheduled for July.

He resigned on April 2, and the election was postponed. The authorities have meanwhile tried a carrot-and-stick approach to end the demonstrations, arresting Bouteflika allies on corruption charges but also increasing policing at protests.

The leaderless protesters have said the arrests so far are not enough, demanding that the rest of the ruling elite be removed including interim president Abdelkader Bensalah and Prime Minister Noureddine Bedoui.

Japan PM Determined to Meet North Korean Leader

TOKYO (Reuters) -- Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said on Friday he was determined to meet North Korea's leader to resolve the issue of Japanese nationals abducted by North Korean agents, maintaining an offer to talk despite the country's missile launches.

North Korea said this week it had successfully test-fired a new submarine-launched ballistic missile from the sea, to contain external threats and bolster self-defense, ahead of fresh nuclear talks with the United States.

"I am determined to meet with Chairman Kim Jong Un face-to-face, with no preconditions, to resolve the all-important abduction issue," Abe said in a policy speech at the beginning of a parliamentary session.

In 2002, North Korea admitted its agents had kidnapped 13 Japanese decades before. Japan says 17 of its citizens were abducted, five of whom were repatriated. North Korea has said eight are dead and another four never entered the country.

Abe has vowed to pursue the issue until all the abductees come home, despite regional tension over the North's nuclear and missile programs.

Staunch U.S. ally Japan and North Korea have been rivals for decades. During periods of tension, North Korea has threatened to rain destruction down on Japan, and North Korea has test-fired missiles into the seas near Japan and even over it.

of the reasons he's got to the position he has," said Jeff Kingston, director of Asian studies at Temple University's Japan campus.

But Abe has little leverage over Pyongyang at a time when U.S. President Donald Trump is pursuing further talks with the North Korean leader. The two sides are set to hold fresh nuclear talks on Oct. 5.

"The only role Japan will play is to bankroll whatever deal is struck," said Brad Glosserman, deputy director of the Center for Rule-making Strategies at Tama University in Tokyo.

"In the interim, North Korea has no reason to speak to Japan and will use it as a scapegoat to pull out whenever they want."

Japan condemned North Korea's latest missile test on Wednesday, with Abe saying it was a violation of United Nations sanctions.

The launch was the North's most provocative since it resumed dialogue with the United States in 2018 and a reminder from Pyongyang of the weapons capability it has been aggressively developing.

"As for the North Korean situation, we will do our utmost to secure the safety of the people, while working closely with the United States and cooperating with the international community," Abe said in his speech.

Turning to ties with South Korea, soured by a feud over wartime labor that has spilled over into trade and security matters, Abe reiterated a call for Seoul to observe a promise to Tokyo.

Putin: Russia Helping China Build Missile System



The littoral combat ship USS Gabrielle Giffords launches a Naval Strike Missile during exercise Pacific Griffin in the Philippine Sea, Oct. 1, 2019.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that Moscow is helping China build a system to warn of ballistic missile launches.

Since the cold war, only the United States and Russia have had such systems, which involve an array of ground-based radars and space satellites. The systems allow for early spotting of intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Speaking at an international affairs conference in Moscow on Thursday, Putin said Russia had been helping China develop such a system. He added that "this is a very serious thing that will radically enhance China's defense capability."

His statement signaled a new degree of defense cooperation between the two former Communist rivals that have developed increasingly close political and military ties while Beijing and Washington have sunk into a trade war.

In June, Chinese president Xi Jinping called Putin his "best and bosom friend," adding he cherished their "deep friendship."

On China's Twitter-like social media platform Weibo, some users cheered "new heights in strategic cooperation," but others questioned whether Beijing needed Russia's help with military hardware.

Earlier this week China debuted new military hardware including a "hypersonic" missile experts believe could be difficult for the U.S. to counter. The missile, known as the DF-17, can

in theory maneuver sharply at many times the speed of sound, making it extremely difficult to defend against.

In August China and Russia accused the United States of stoking a new arms race by testing a cruise missile, just weeks after Washington withdrew from a cold-war era missile control treaty that would have barred the test launch.

The ground-launched missile, a conventionally-configured version of the nuclear-capable Tomahawk cruise missile, hit its target after over 500 kilometers of flight during the test, the Pentagon said in a statement.

Ground-launched versions of the missile had been removed from service decades ago, after the intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty was signed by Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987.

The treaty's ban on missiles with ranges between 500km and 5,500km aimed to reduce the ability of both countries to launch a nuclear strike at short notice.

Russia's deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabkov, condemned the launch, but said Moscow was not looking to start a new arms race, and would not deploy any new missiles unless the U.S. did first.

Beijing also attacked the U.S., warning that the missile test could lead to "another round of the arms race," and have a "serious negative impact" on international and regional security.

U.S. Approves Sale of Javelin Missiles to Ukraine



A U.S. soldier fires a Javelin anti-tank missile at a live fire exercise during Saber Guardian 2019 near Várpalota, Hungary, on June 5, 2019.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- The U.S. State Department has approved the sale of anti-tank missiles to Ukraine in a move which is likely to anger Russia.

The State Department approved on Thursday the possible military sale to Ukraine of 150 Javelin anti-tank missiles and two additional missile launchers, worth approximately \$39.2 million.

"This proposed sale will contribute to the foreign policy and national security of the United States by improving the security of Ukraine," it said in a release.

"The Javelin system will help Ukraine build its long-term defense capacity to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity in order to meet its national defense requirements," it added.

The Pentagon also notified Congress of the possible sale on Thursday.

Russia's Foreign Ministry, however, said the missile sale will not help Ukraine's defense capabilities, but will dent the country's budget.

"What Ukraine really needs today is a settlement of the internal Ukrainian conflict, an end to the crisis in many fields, a better situation in the economy and struggle against corruption, the harmonization of internal political processes and the search for identity," said ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova.

Russia has consistently warned the U.S. against providing Ukraine with

weapons over concerns of escalation of the conflict in the east, which has so far claimed the lives of some 13,000 people since 2014.

The armed confrontation began when a wave of protests in Ukraine overthrew a democratically-elected government and replaced it with a pro-West administration.

Ukraine ordered the purchase of the weapons a couple of weeks before a controversial phone call between President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his U.S. counterpart Donald Trump.

The sale was reportedly discussed in July, but the conversation is now threatening to bog down the Trump administration.

Trump stands accused of asking Zelenskyy eight times during the phone call to work with his lawyer Rudy Giuliani to investigate government corruption involving the former United States vice president and current front-runner for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination, Joe Biden, and his son.

The president and his administration have been accused by the Democrats of blocking investigation into the case, but Trump said in a Tweet on Tuesday that what "is taking place is not an impeachment, it is a COUP."

In a five-page memorandum of the call that was released last week, Zelenskyy said his country was "almost ready to buy more Javelins from the United States for defense purposes."



QUITO (Reuters) -- Protests over fuel subsidy cuts paralyzed transportation in major Ecuadorian cities again on Friday, a day after unrest in which 275 people were arrested and 28 police officers were injured, the government said. Witnesses said bus and taxi services remained on strike after fuel prices soared on Thursday following President Lenin Moreno's fiscal measures earlier in the week. On Thursday, masked protesters hurled stones and batted police in the capital Quito during extensive damage in the worst unrest in years in the oil-producing nation of 17 million people. Moreno - putting Ecuador on a more market-friendly track after years of leftist rule and aligning policies to conform with a \$4.2 billion International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan - has scrapped decades-old fuel subsidies and announced tax reforms. That has infuriated transport unions, whose action has been joined by indigenous groups, students and other unions. By late Thursday, 275 people had been arrested and 28 police officers hurt, the Interior Ministry said.

WASHINGTON (AFP) -- The United States, Britain and Australia have called on Facebook to give authorities the ability to circumvent encryption used in its messaging services -- a measure opposed by the social media giant. Facebook has been dogged by several privacy scandals in recent years and has pledged to boost user protections by rolling out end-to-end encryption across all of its social media platforms. But that plan risks weakening the ability of law enforcement to detect criminal acts including terrorism and child pornography, according to a joint letter signed by US Attorney General William Barr, British Home Secretary Priti Patel and Australian Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton. "Facebook has not committed to address our serious concerns about the impact its proposals could have on protecting our most vulnerable citizens," said the Thursday letter, addressed to company chief Mark Zuckerberg and seen by AFP. The company already encrypts WhatsApp messages from end-to-end -- meaning only the sender and recipient can read the message -- and is working to extend the technology to other apps in its family, including Messenger and Instagram.

NEW YORK (AFP) -- U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders is recovering well after being treated for a blocked artery and plans to participate in this month's State-of-the-Union debate, his wife said Thursday. The 78-year-old put his bid for the White House on hold Wednesday after experiencing chest discomfort while on the stump in Las Vegas, Nevada. Doctors successfully inserted two stents and Sanders canceled all events and appearances until further notice. Jane Sanders said her husband would be discharged from the hospital and on a plane back to his home in Burlington, Vermont, "before the end of the weekend." "His doctors are pleased with his progress, and there has been no need for any additional procedures," she said. Jane Sanders added in the statement that he had been "cracking jokes" and discussing policies with hospital staff. "He'll take a few days to rest, but he's ready to get back out there and is looking forward to the October debate," she said. The fourth Democratic debate is scheduled for October 15 in Ohio.

DUBLIN/BRUSSELS (Reuters) -- The European Union and Ireland said on Thursday that Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Brexit proposals were unlikely to yield a deal, with Dublin bluntly warning that Britain was heading toward a no-deal exit unless it made more concessions. Just 28 days before the United Kingdom is due to leave the EU, both sides are positioning themselves to avoid blame for a delay or a disorderly no-deal Brexit. Johnson says he wants an agreement but insists there can be no further Brexit postponement. The cool reception from Brussels to Johnson's proposal indicates just how far apart the two sides are on the first departure of a sovereign state from the EU, which was forged from Europe's ruins after World War Two. Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, who is key to any possible deal, said he did not fully understand how the British proposals might work and that Dublin could not sign up to a treaty that did not safeguard an open Irish-British border.

ANNECY, France (Reuters) -- Previously-loyal lawmakers inside Emmanuel Macron's party are voicing dissent about its direction, according to interviews with party insiders, exposing new fault-lines in the political base the French president needs to deliver his reform agenda. Macron came to power promising to shake up the economy, but he needs a solid powerbase to deliver that in the face of fierce resistance from trade unions, the political opposition and the grass-roots "yellow vest" protest movement. Showing the scale of the dissent, around 20 lawmakers with Macron's La République en Marche (LaRem) party are supporting Cedric Villani, who rebelled against the party to run for mayor of Paris against the party's candidate, according to six parliamentary sources, including two who do not back Villani. In another sign of dissent, lawmaker Frederique Lardet, a former hotel executive who quit her job to join Macron's movement, said she was prepared if necessary to go against the party's wishes to mount a bid for the job of mayor in her home city of Annecy in the French Alps.