

# Macron: NATO Experiencing 'Brain Death'



President Emmanuel Macron of France at a NATO meeting last year.

PARIS (AFP) -- NATO partners argued Thursday over the alliance's worth after French President Emmanuel Macron said it was undergoing "brain death", prompting a fierce defense of the bloc from Germany, Canada and the U.S. while drawing praise from non-member Russia.

"What we are currently experiencing is the brain death of NATO," Macron told The Economist magazine in an interview published Thursday, ahead of a NATO summit next month.

But German Chancellor Angela Merkel defended the 70-year-old military alliance as "indispensable" and said Macron's "sweeping judgments" were not "necessary".

Addressing journalists by Merkel's side, NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg warned that a weakened transatlantic alliance could "divide Europe", while the U.S. Secretary of State, also in Germany, insisted NATO was "important, critical."

In the interview, Macron decried a lack of coordination between Europe and the U.S. and lamented recent unilateral action in Syria by Turkey, a key member of the 70-year-old military alliance.

"You have no coordination whatsoever of strategic decision-making between the United States and its NATO allies. None," he said.

"You have an uncoordinated aggressive action by another NATO ally, Tur-

key, in an area where our interests are at stake," Macron added according to an English transcript released by The Economist.

After talks with Stoltenberg in Berlin, Merkel said Macron "used drastic words, that is not my view of cooperation in NATO".

She added: "I don't think that such sweeping judgments are necessary, even if we have problems and need to pull together", while insisting that "the transatlantic partnership is indispensable for us".

Stoltenberg said any attempt to distance Europe from North America "risks not only to weaken the Alliance, the transatlantic bond, but also to divide Europe".

For Macron, "strategically and politically, we need to recognize that we have a problem".

"We should reassess the reality of what NATO is in light of the commitment of the United States," he warned, adding that: "In my opinion, Europe has the capacity to defend itself."

Macron said it was crucial to seek rapprochement with Moscow, which regards NATO and its expansion into ex-Communist bloc states with huge suspicion given that the alliance was set up to counter the USSR.

From Moscow, foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova hailed Macron's "brain death" observation as "golden words... a precise definition of the current state of NATO".

# China Warns U.S. Over 'Extremely Dangerous' Remarks



U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo waves as he walks past remains of the Wall at the memorial site during their visit to the village of Moedlareuth near Hof, Germany on November 7, 2019.

BEIJING (Dispatches) -- China's Foreign Ministry launched a renewed attack on U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Friday, saying that his recent criticism of the Chinese Communist Party was "extremely dangerous" and exposed his "sinister intentions."

Last month, Pompeo stepped up U.S. rhetoric against China's ruling Communist Party, saying Beijing was focused on international domination and needed to be confronted. China at the time called it a "vicious attack."

China has been consistently irritated by Pompeo, whether over his remarks on China's Belt and Road infrastructure project or allegations of Chinese rights abuses in the far western region of Xinjiang, and in many other ar-

reas. Speaking at a daily news briefing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said Pompeo's attacks on China's political system and calling China a threat were "full of ideological prejudice" that China strongly opposed.

"Pompeo is splitting apart and setting in antagonism against each other the Chinese people and the Chinese Communist Party in an attempt to provoke their relationship," Geng said.

The party has always represented and safeguarded the interests of the Chinese people and has won their deep trust and loyal support, he added.

"Attempts to separate the Chinese people and the Chinese Communist Party is a provocation against the en-

tire Chinese people and is doomed to fail," Geng said.

"It must be pointed out that Pompeo's comments are extremely dangerous and seriously inconsistent with his position as U.S. Secretary of State," he added.

"They fully expose his sinister intentions of fishing for political capital by being anti-China."

He should stop "jabbering on" with his unwarranted criticisms of China, Geng said.

Pompeo on Friday issued a stark warning against China and Russia on the eve of the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

"Western, free nations have a responsibility to deter threats to our people" from governments like China, Russia and Iran, Pompeo said, speaking just a few meters away from where the Wall ran past the German capital's world-famous Brandenburg Gate.

The U.S. and its allies should "defend what was so hard-won... in 1989" and "recognize we are in a competition of values with unfree nations," he added.

Picking at sore spots in Washington's relationship with Berlin, Pompeo said the under-construction Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia to Germany would mean "Europe's energy supplies... depend on (Russian President Vladimir) Putin's whims".

Chancellor Angela Merkel has repeatedly said the pipeline is a purely private business concern.

# Malaysia Snubs U.S. Offer to Host APEC Summit

JAKARTA (Dispatches) -- Malaysia on Thursday rejected an offer by the administration of President Donald Trump to host a Pacific Rim summit in the United States next year.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah said U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had sought his views on Malaysia's position on a possible APEC meeting in the U.S. in January during a recent regional summit in Bangkok.

Pompeo told him that "because Chile is not able to host the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit this November... the U.S. is thinking of hosting APEC somewhere in January in the U.S.", the top Malaysian diplomat said.

"I have informed the American officials while they were in Bangkok that we do not think this is a good idea," he said. The APEC summit had been scheduled for November 16-17 in Chile, but President Sebastian Pinera suddenly cancelled it because of ongoing civil unrest in the South American country.

Malaysia is at the center of talks for any replacement summit as it is next year's chair of APEC, a trade-focused grouping of 21 Pacific Rim economies stretching from China to Chile and the United States.

The sharp retort came days after most Southeast Asian leaders skipped a session with U.S. officials after President Trump decided to avoid the last week's regional annual summit in Thailand's capital.

Last Monday, just three leaders from the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) showed up at the meeting with U.S. National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien, who was leading the American delegation at the summit in the Thai capital.

Video from the event showed seven foreign ministers sitting at a table usually reserved for heads of states.

Washington sent a relatively low-level delegation to the ASEAN summit - a decision that was widely perceived as a snub, given that other top leaders were present.

The U.S. has reportedly taken issue with what it saw as ASEAN leaders' "intentional effort to embarrass" President Trump at the summit.

This was the second year in a row that Trump has skipped the summit. Vice-President Mike Pence attended last year's meeting in Singapore.

During the summit in Bangkok, member states rallied against protectionism amid fears of dragging global growth made worse by the U.S.-China trade war.

# Only Zionist Regime, Brazil Oppose Vote General Assembly Condemns U.S. Sanctions on Cuba



View of the United Nations General Assembly during a vote the U.S.-imposed on Cuba on November 7, 2019.

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) -- The United Nations General Assembly has overwhelmingly voted to condemn the U.S. economic embargo against Cuba, calling it punitive and outmoded.

The General Assembly passed the resolution on Thursday by a vote of 187 to three, marking the 28th consecutive year that the world body frowns on the embargo.

General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding and are unenforceable, but they reflect world opinion and the vote has given Cuba an annual stage to demonstrate the isolation of the U.S. on the embargo.

The United States and Cuba severed relations in 1961 during the Cold War. Cuba has been under a U.S. economic blockade for over 60 years.

In 2015, the U.S. restored diplomatic relations with Cuba under former President Barack Obama. However, his successor Donald Trump began to partially roll back the historic rapprochement as soon as he took office in early 2017.

Trump has even tightened the blockade over the past few years. Most recently, the U.S. slapped more sanctions on Havana to try preventing it from receiving oil from Venezuela -- another target of Washington's hostility.

The Thursday vote was only opposed by the occupying regime of Israel and Brazil, now led by Jair Bolsonaro, whose ultra-conservatism and alliance with Trump has

won him the title "the tropical Trump." Bolsonaro made Brazil the first in Latin America to vote against the resolution in at least five years.

Addressing the General Assembly, Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez said there had been "an escalation in aggression against Cuba" under Trump, whose government, he said, "does not hide its intention to economically asphyxiate Cuba and increase the damage, shortages, and suffering of its people."

Rodriguez accused the U.S. of exercising "its imperialist domination," increasing its military presence in Latin America, and using "interventionist and unacceptable language" against Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's government.

"Neither threat nor blackmail will ever extract the least political concession from us," the Cuban minister said. "We will not back down from our determination to achieve a civilized relationship with the U.S. government based on mutual respect."

Venezuela's Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza, who spoke before the vote, said it was time to "put an end to this imperialist madness."

Havana says the embargo has caused it \$138 billion in economic damage. Cuba said on Wednesday the country had attracted \$1.7 billion worth of foreign investment over the past year despite the tighter U.S. trade embargo.

# India on Alert Ahead of Verdict on Muslim Site



Muslims pray for peace ahead of verdict on a disputed religious site in Ayodhya, inside a mosque premises in Ahmedabad, India, November 8, 2019.

MUMBAI, India (Reuters) -- India has increased security a week before the Supreme Court rules on a disputed religious site that has been fiercely contested by majority Hindus and Muslims for decades, police and home ministry officials said on Friday.

More than 5,000 paramilitary force members and police have been deployed in the northern town of Ayodhya, where an ancient mosque was razed in 1992 by headline Hindus who believe the site is the birthplace of Lord Ram, a physical incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu.

The destruction of the mosque triggered religious riots in which about 2,000 people, most of them Muslims, were killed across the country and led to a series of court battles with various groups staking claim to the site.

The Supreme Court is expected to deliver its decision on who should control the site late next week and thousands of Hindu monks and devotees have been arriving in Ayodhya for the judgment.

At the same time, various government agencies are making their preparations to thwart any violence.

"Each and every security officer is committed to prevent minor skirmishes or large-scale riots after the court delivers its verdict," said a senior home ministry official in New Delhi. "State governments have identified several schools to set up temporary jails if the need

arises," said the official, who declined to be identified.

Hindu groups say a temple existed on the site before the mosque was built in 1528 by a Muslim ruler.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist party has long campaigned on a promise to support the construction of a Hindu temple on the site of the razed mosque. Ayodhya is in densely populated Uttar Pradesh state, home to more than 5% of India's 200 million Muslims.

Provincial police chief Om Prakash Singh told Reuters that precautionary measures were in place and social media platforms were being monitored to track inflammatory posts ahead of the verdict.

"We will not tolerate Hindus or Muslims publicly displaying their reaction to the court verdict," Singh said.

Muslim clerics in the western states of Gujarat and Maharashtra called for peace meetings with Hindu leaders in communally sensitive areas ahead of Friday prayers.

Navaid Hamid, president of the All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat, the top forum for Islamic organizations, said thousands of Muslim religious leaders had vowed to maintain peace and harmony after the court verdict.

"The land can belong to Hindus or Muslims, but there will be no repeat of the 1992 communal violence," said Hamid.



KIEV (Reuters) - Troop withdrawals in a village in the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine will begin on Saturday at 1000 GMT, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) said in a statement. Ukraine and Russian-backed separatist rebels have agreed to phased troop withdrawals as a confidence building measure that could pave the way for a four-way summit between Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany on the Donbass conflict. The Kiev government has said that the third such withdrawal, in the village of Petrivske that is due to take place on Saturday, would mean that Ukraine has fulfilled all necessary conditions from its side for such a summit to take place.

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) -- The state of North Carolina is moving away from using the phrase "race riot" to describe the violent overthrow of the Wilmington government in 1898 and is instead using the word "coup" on the highway historical marker that will commemorate the dark event. The marker, which is already in place and covered with black plastic, will be dedicated Friday in Wilmington. The heading on the marker reads "Wilmington Coup," but the originally approved text referred to a "race riot," which eventually was deleted. "You don't call it that anymore because the African Americans weren't rioting," said Ansley Herring Wegner, administrator of the North Carolina Highway Historical Marker Program. "They were being massacred." In 1898, white Democrats violently overthrew the fusion government of legitimately elected blacks and white Republicans in Wilmington. The Democrats burned and killed their way to power in what's viewed as a flash-point for the Jim Crow era of segregation and the only successful coup d'etat in American history.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- Russia has strongly rejected Western media reports that Russian private military companies linked to the Kremlin were operating in Libya in favor of one of the conflicting sides. Western media outlets Tuesday cited U.S. military sources reporting the Tuesday arrival of U.S. private sources reporting to Libya. Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, however, strongly refuted news about skilled Russians fighting in Libya. "I strongly reject this sort of speculation," Ryabkov told reporters on Thursday. The high-ranking Russian diplomat insisted that any actions ordered by the Kremlin regarding the North African country were in the framework of international agreements meant to establish peace and security.

BRASILIA (AFP) -- Brazil's Supreme Court voted Thursday to overturn a ruling requiring convicted criminals to go to jail after losing their first appeal, paving the way for leftist icon Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva to be freed. The decision means thousands of convicts could be released from prison, including Lula, who is among dozens of political and business leaders caught up in a sprawling corruption probe. They would remain free until they had exhausted their rights to appeal their conviction -- a process critics say could take years in cases involving people with deep pockets. Lula's lawyers said they would seek the "immediate release" of the former president after speaking to him on Friday. "Lula has not done anything wrong and is a victim of 'lawfare,' which in the case of the ex-president is the strategic use of the law for the purpose of political persecution," his legal team said in a statement.

JUBA (Reuters) -- South Sudan's president and a former rebel leader agreed on Thursday to delay forming a unity government for 100 days beyond the Nov. 12 deadline, Ugandan's presidency said, buying time after concerns that war could resume if the two sides were pushed. South Sudan's President Salva Kiir arrives at the Juba international airport, South Sudan, November 8, 2019. REUTERS/Jok Soudun. South Sudanese President Salva Kiir and opposition leader Riek Machar met in Uganda in a last-ditch effort to resolve outstanding disputes that were preventing the formation of a coalition government in time for the deadline. Kiir and Machar signed a peace deal in September 2018, under pressure from the United Nations, United States and regional governments to end a five-year civil war that devastated the world's youngest country. Both sides blame each other for not meeting milestones stipulated by the peace deal, especially the integration of different fighting forces.

SYDNEY (AFP) -- Australian firefighters warned they were in "uncharted territory" as they struggled to contain more than a dozen out-of-control bushfires across the east of the country on Friday. Around a hundred blazes pockmarked the New South Wales and Queensland countryside, around 17 of them remained dangerous and uncontained late Friday. "We have never seen this many fires concurrently at emergency warning level," New South Wales Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons told public broadcaster ABC. "We are in uncharted territory." Bushfires are common in Australia and firefighters had already been tackling sporadic blazes for months in the lead up to the southern hemisphere summer. But this is a dramatic start to what scientists predict will be a tough fire season ahead -- with climate change and unfavorable weather cycles helping created a tinderbox of strong winds, low humidity and high temperatures.