

# U.S. Escalates China Tensions With Taiwan Missile Plan



This file shows a Patriot missile system.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- The United States on Friday approved a request from Taiwan to modernize the self-ruled island's Patriot surface-to-air missile systems amid escalating tensions between Beijing and Washington.

The U.S. State Department said Taiwan had requested to buy an estimated \$620 million upgrade package for its Patriot missiles "in order to support an operational life of 30 years."

It said Lockheed Martin would be the main contractor. The sale, it claimed, would not only serve U.S. interests but strengthen Taiwan's military in the face of "regional threats".

"The recipient will use this capability

as a deterrent to regional threats and to strengthen homeland defense. The recipient will have no difficulty absorbing this equipment into its armed forces," the department said.

Taiwan's defense ministry confirmed the report and said the arms sale — the seventh by the U.S. administration to the island — is expected to take effect within the next month.

China has sovereignty over Taiwan, and under the "One China" policy, almost all world countries recognize that sovereignty. The U.S. recognizes Chinese sovereignty but has long courted Taiwan in an attempt to counter Beijing.

Taiwan is China's most sensitive ter-

ritorial issue, with Beijing claiming the self-ruled island as its own, to be brought under its control by force if needed. Many Taiwanese trace their ancestry to mainland China and share cultural similarities with Chinese.

Washington is the island's largest weapons supplier and an avid backer of Taiwan's secessionist president Tsai Ing-wen, causing increasing tensions with Beijing over trade and a host of other issues.

Tsai raised the ante in her brinkmanship, saying China must accept that Taiwan is already independent.

Washington almost regularly makes provocative moves around the self-governed island, particularly by sailing its warships through the sensitive and strategic Taiwan Strait, which separates Taiwan from China.

The sailings usually draw angry reaction from China, which has never ruled out the use of force to bring the island under its full control.

While Taiwan's military is well-equipped with mostly U.S.-made hardware, China has huge numerical superiority and is adding advanced equipment of its own such as stealth fighters.

Beijing is also at odds with Washington over its support for riots in the semi-autonomous Chinese city of Hong Kong, which has been the scene of unrest over the past months due to a now-revoked extradition bill and a new security law.

## WHO Team in China to Probe Origin of Coronavirus



In this Jan. 23, 2020, file photo, Dr. Gauden Galea, the World Health Organization (WHO) representative in China, speaks during an interview with The Associated Press at the WHO's offices in Beijing.

BEIJING (AP) — Two World Health Organization experts were heading to the Chinese capital on Friday to lay the groundwork for an investigation into the origins of the coronavirus pandemic.

An animal health expert and an epidemiologist will meet Chinese counterparts in Beijing to work out logistics, places to visit and the participants for a WHO-led international mission, the U.N. organization said.

A major issue will be to "look at whether or not it jumped from species to human, and what species it jumped from," WHO spokesperson Dr. Margaret Harris said at a

briefing in Geneva.

Scientists believe the virus may have originated in bats and was transmitted to another mammal such as a civet cat or an armadillo-like pangolin before being passed on to people.

A cluster of infections late last year focused initial attention on a fresh food market in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, but the discovery of earlier cases suggests the animal-to-human jump may have happened elsewhere.

In an effort to block future outbreaks, China has cracked down on the trade in wildlife and closed some markets, while enforcing

strict containment measures that appear to have virtually stopped new local infections.

The WHO mission is politically sensitive, with the U.S. — the top funder of the UN body — moving to cut ties with it over allegations it mishandled the outbreak and is biased toward China.

"China took the lead in inviting WHO experts to investigate and discuss scientific virus tracing," Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said Friday.

In contrast, he said, the U.S. "not only announced its withdrawal from the World Health Organization, but also politicized the anti-epidemic issue and played a buck-passing game to shift responsibilities."

More than 120 nations called for an investigation into the origins of the virus at the World Health Assembly in May. China has insisted that WHO lead the investigation and for it to wait until the pandemic is brought under control. The U.S., Brazil and India are continuing to see an increasing number of cases.

The last WHO coronavirus-specific mission to China was in February, after which the team's leader, Canadian doctor Bruce Aylward, praised China's containment efforts and information sharing. Canadian and American officials have since criticized him as being too lenient on China.

## North Korea: 'No Need' for Another U.S. Summit

SEOUL (Dispatches) -- The powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said Friday there was "no need" for another summit with the United States unless Washington offered a "decisive change" in approach.

Kim and U.S. President Donald Trump first met in Singapore two years ago but talks over Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal have been stalled since their Hanoi summit collapsed in early 2019 over what the North would be willing to give up in exchange for sanctions relief.

Trump said this week he would "certainly" meet with Kim again "if I thought it was going to be helpful", after speculation that he might pursue another summit if it could help his re-election chances in November.

But in a statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency, Kim Yo Jong -- who has emerged as one of her brother's closest advisers -- said: "There is no need for us to sit across with the U.S. right now."

If a summit was held, she said, "it is too obvious that it will only be used as boring boasting coming from someone's pride".

Denuclearization, she added, was "not possible at this point", and could only happen alongside parallel "irreversible simultaneous major steps" by the other side -- which she emphasized did not refer to sanctions lifting.

She did not go into specifics, but Washington stations 28,500 troops in the South which North Korea regards as a threat, and has a range of military assets in Japan and the wider Pacific region.

Pyongyang insists that it needs its nuclear arsenal to deter against a possible U.S. invasion.

Kim Jong Un declared in December an end to moratoriums on nuclear and ballistic missile tests, and Pyongyang has repeatedly said it has no intention to continue talks unless Washington drops what it describes as "hostile" policies towards the North.

Reports on Friday said Japan may still build Aegis Ashore missile defense systems to purportedly defend against attacks by North Korea and other regional rivals, including China.

Japan's defense minister, Taro Kono, last month cancelled plans to build two Aegis Ashore sites, citing cost and concerns that falling booster stages from the interceptor missiles could drop on local residents.

Japan, however, has not cancelled the \$1 billion contract for the defense system's radars, built by Lockheed Martin, and is mulling a technical assessment from the U.S. government that makes recommendations on using other sites that would eliminate the safety issues, a source told Reuters just weeks after reports that the proposal had been killed.

## South Korea in Shock After Seoul Mayor Found Dead



South Korean politicians visit a memorial altar for Park Won-soon in Seoul.

SEOUL (Reuters) -- One of South Korea's most prominent elected officials and longtime mayor of the capital, Seoul, was found dead on Friday after his daughter reported him missing amid a criminal investigation and media reports of alleged sexual harassment.

Officers using drones and sniffer dogs found Mayor Park Won-soon's body at Mt Bugak, in northern Seoul, shortly after midnight following a search involving hundreds of police, the Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency said.

There was no sign of foul play and police did not give a cause of death.

The apparent suicide came after one of Park's former secretaries filed a complaint on Wednesday alleging the 64-year-old had sexually harassed her, the Yonhap news agency reported.

Police confirmed a criminal complaint had been made against Park but did not elaborate on the nature of the allegations.

"I apologize to everyone," Park wrote in a note left on his desk and released by the city government with the permission of his family.

"I thank everyone who was with me in my lifetime. I am so sorry to my family, to whom I have only caused pain."

The note did not mention any allegations.

A representative of Park's family issued a statement on their behalf saying it was time to let him go and

urging people to avoid spreading "groundless statements".

"If acts of defaming him continue irrespective of the truth, we will sternly respond with legal action," said Moon Mi-ran, who formerly served as deputy mayor under Park.

Many residents of Seoul, a city of nearly 10 million people, expressed shock over the sudden death of the former activist, women's rights advocate and lawyer who many saw as a potential presidential candidate.

"I feel sorry, but apart from that there needed to be a clear explanation on the sexual harassment," said office worker Jeon Sung-jae.

Park's daughter reported him missing at 5:17 p.m. (0817 GMT) on Thursday, police said. He had left the mayor's official residence at around 10:40 a.m. wearing a black hat and a backpack, having cancelled meetings for the day.

His body was taken to Seoul National University Hospital, where five days of funeral events were expected to begin.

As Seoul mayor since 2011, Park was instrumental in its response to the novel coronavirus. He also played a vocal role in big candlelight demonstrations that contributed to the ousting of former President Park Geun-hye in 2017.

An outspoken advocate of women's rights and gender equality, he was seen as a potential presidential hopeful for the liberals in elections scheduled for 2022.

## India Restores Lockdowns as Virus Cases Soar



In this July 8, 2020, file photo, doctors and nurses work at a COVID-19 isolation center in Mumbai, India.

MUMBAI (Reuters) -- India reported a record 26,506 new coronavirus cases on Friday as authorities re-imposed lockdowns in its most populous state and in an industrial hub, home to automakers, drug factories and brewers.

The new cases pushed India's tally to nearly 800,000 cases, the world's third-biggest outbreak, behind only the United States and Brazil in confirmed infections.

There have been more than 21,000 deaths in India since the first case was detected there in January, federal health ministry data showed on Friday.

The capital, New Delhi, along with Maharashtra state, home to the financial capital of Mumbai, and the southern state of Tamil Nadu account for about 60% of its cases.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, anxious to jump-start an economy crippled by the epidemic and put millions of people back to work, in early June eased an initial lockdown of the 1.3 billion population imposed in March.

But rising new flare-ups of the virus

has been forcing some major industrial towns and states to impose localized restrictions.

A nine-day curfew was imposed in Aurangabad, an industrial town in Maharashtra, to contain a spike in infections that has affected operations of automakers such as Bajaj Auto.

"Employees could not go to work today due to the curfew," said Thengade Bajirao, president of the Bajaj Auto Workers' Union.

With an annual production capacity of more than 3.3 million motorbikes and other vehicles, the Waluj plant in Aurangabad accounts for more than 50% of Bajaj's manufacturing volume in India.

SKODA AUTO Volkswagen India Pvt. Ltd., small auto-part makers, pharmaceutical companies such as Ajanta Pharma have production units in Aurangabad, along with beer makers such as Carlsberg and Heineken.

India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, locked down for two days from late on Friday as cases there surged past 32,000, the state government said in a statement.

### News in Brief

BERLIN (AFP) -- A man who worked in German Chancellor Angela Merkel's press office is suspected of having spied for Egypt, a government report said Thursday. Police carried out "executive measures" against the man in December 2019 after he was found to have "worked for years for an Egyptian intelligence service", according to a report on the protection of the constitution. The investigation is ongoing. The man worked for the visitor service of the federal government press office (BPA), headed by Merkel's spokesman Steffen Seibert, according to the Bild daily. He was a mid-level employee, meaning he would have completed an exam and at least two years of vocational training. The premises of the visitor service were searched as part of the investigation, Bild reported. The main tasks of Egyptian secret service agents in Germany include gathering information about members of groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, according to the government report. They are also interested in members of the Coptic Christian community and in recruiting Egyptian nationals as spies, it said.

LA PAZ (AFP) -- Bolivia's interim president became the latest world leader to test positive for the coronavirus Thursday, as the United States notched yet another record-breaking surge of cases while global infections and fatalities continued their relentless rise. COVID-19 has now claimed more than 550,000 lives across the planet, and infected more than 12 million people since it first emerged in China in late 2019 -- among them Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and now Bolivia's Jeanine Anez. In a video on Twitter Anez said she was "fine" and would continue working from isolation. Bolsonaro said he was feeling "very well" on Thursday after announcing he had the virus earlier this week, and Johnson, who contracted the respiratory disease in March, has recovered. The United States notched up half that figure in just one day Thursday, with 65,551 new cases recorded by Baltimore-based Johns Hopkins University -- a new high.

KUALA LUMPUR (AFP) -- Malaysian police Friday questioned five Australian journalists from Al Jazeera over a documentary about the plight of migrants which authorities have denounced as inaccurate, as the broadcaster expressed shock at the probe. The investigation into the Qatar-based network's program has added to concerns about a widening media crackdown in Malaysia after a scandal-plagued party came to power earlier this year. In addition to the Al Jazeera case, the head of a leading news portal has been accused of contempt of court while a health news site's editor is being probed over an article. The documentary, "Locked Up in Malaysia's Lockdown", looked at the detention of undocumented foreigners during a coronavirus lockdown, as well as the plight of other members of the migrant community. But the government decried it as misleading and inaccurate, and police are now investigating the broadcaster for breaking laws against sedition, defamation and transmitting offensive content.

KINSHASA (AFP) -- Two protesters were shot dead and a policeman was lynched Thursday in clashes in the Democratic Republic of Congo over plans to name a new head to the country's election panel, sources said. The body of one protester was taken to a hospital morgue in the city of Lubumbashi, in southeastern DR Congo, a member of the local United Nations human rights office told AFP. The UN official deplored the use of force by military police. An employee of the hospital confirmed that the body was that of a 32-year-old man and said he had received a gunshot wound. A UN source added that in the capital Kinshasa, another protester was killed and "a policeman was lynched after firing on the demonstrators" while several other police were injured.

SYDNEY (Reuters) -- The U.S. Department of Transportation said it has revoked permission for Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) to conduct charter flights to the United States, citing Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) concerns over Pakistani pilot certifications. The information is contained in a revocation of special authorization dated July 1 provided by the department to Reuters on Friday. Pakistan last month grounded almost a third of its pilots after discovering they may have falsified their certifications. The European Union Aviation Safety Agency suspended PIA's authorization to fly to the bloc for six months in a blow to the carrier's operations. Pakistan's Geo News reported PIA had confirmed the U.S. ban and said it would address the concerns through ongoing corrective measures within the airline. Pakistan's grounding of pilots with dubious credentials followed the crash of a PIA jet in May that killed 97 people.

ATHENS (Reuters) -- Greece's parliament approved a bill on Thursday regulating street demonstrations as thousands marched through central Athens to denounce the new law. The law was introduced by Greece's conservative government in an attempt to regulate demonstrations which it says cause frequent disruptions to the public and affect commerce. About 10,000 demonstrators rallied outside parliament holding banners reading "hands off demonstrations". A group of protesters who "pelted off" the main group threw petrol bombs at police, who responded with teargas. The bill mandates the appointment of a liaison officer, restrictions on demonstrations or outright bans if authorities deem they threaten public safety. It also holds organizers accountable for harm or damage caused by protesters. The new legislation was approved by 187 lawmakers in the 300-seat parliament. Street protests occur frequently in Greece, which is still recovering from a deep socioeconomic crisis that erupted in late 2009 and led to three international bail-outs on tough austerity terms.