

# Taiwan, U.S. Ink \$62bn Jet Deal Despite China Warning



A CM-11 Brave Tiger tank fires during the live fire Han Kuang military exercise in Pingtung, Taiwan on May 30, 2019.

TAIPEI (Dispatches) -- Taiwan has signed a 62-billion-dollar deal to purchase F-16 fighter jets from the United States - the biggest arms pact between Washington and Taipei which is expected to increase tensions with China.

Under the deal, which the Pentagon announced on Friday, the U.S. agreed to sell 90 F-16 fighter jets from American aircraft manufacturer Lockheed Martin to Taiwan over a span of about 10 years.

The transaction was said to provide Taiwan with fighter jets that are equipped with state-of-the-art technologies and weapons.

The self-ruled island, which China

considers part of its territory, obtained the green light from Washington last year to buy 66 new generation F-16s to modernize its air force.

The deal marks the first time since 1992 that advanced fighter jets have been sold to Taiwan and is expected to infuriate China, which has repeatedly warned Washington against selling advanced weaponry to Taipei and any kind of interference in its internal affairs.

Last year, a spokesperson for China's Foreign Ministry called on the U.S. to "refrain" from selling the "fighter jets to Taiwan and stop arms sales to and

military contact with Taiwan."

"Otherwise, the Chinese side will surely make strong reactions, and the U.S. will have to bear all the consequences."

Although Washington has no diplomatic relations with Taipei by law, it is the island's largest weapons supplier and an avid backer of Taiwan's secessionist president Tsai Ing-wen.

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 deployments spark reproach from China, which has never ruled out the use of force to bring the island under its full control.

Relations between the United States and China have hit the lowest level in decades under U.S. President Donald Trump. The two countries are at loggerheads over a range of issues, including trade, Hong Kong, Taiwan, the South China Sea, and the coronavirus pandemic.

On Friday, the U.S. navy said in a statement that a strike group led by the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan had conducted military exercises in the South China Sea.

The statement added that the strike group had carried out flight operations as well as high-end maritime stability operations and drills at the disputed sea.

## Emperor Voices 'Deep Remorse' for Japan's Wartime Past



Visitors in protective masks pay tribute to the war dead at Yasukuni Shrine on the 75th anniversary of Japan's surrender in World War II in Tokyo, August 15, 2020.

TOKYO (Dispatches) -- Japan's Emperor Naruhito on Saturday expressed "deep remorse" for the nation's wartime past in marking the 75th anniversary of Japanese surrender in World War II without mentioning U.S. nuclear bombings of the country that killed over 200,000 people.

"I earnestly hope that the ravages of war will never again be repeated," Naruhito stated at a ceremony for war dead.

As he spoke, two Japanese cabinet ministers marked the occasion by paying respects to the war dead at a controversial war shrine in Tokyo that neighboring countries regard as a symbol of Tokyo's past militarism.

Praying for world peace, the

60-year-old Naruhito -- the grandson of Emperor Hirohito in whose name Japanese troops fought the war -- also expressed hope his country could come together to surmount the coronavirus pandemic.

The emperor, who ascended the throne last year after his father Akihito abdicated, had been largely absent from public view since Japan's COVID-19 outbreak deteriorated earlier this year.

Visiting the Yasukuni Shrine in central Tokyo for the first official visit since 2016, Japan's Education Minister Koichi Hagiuda stated that he did so along with Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi to pay tribute to the war dead.

The war shrine honors nearly 2.5

million war dead that perished during the country's wars since the late 19th century, but it also enshrines senior military and political figures accused and convicted of war crimes by a U.S.-led tribunal following the Second World War.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe also sent a ritual cash offering to the Yasukuni Shrine to mark the ceremony on Saturday but was not expected to visit in person, according to local media reports.

Abe last visited the shrine in December 2013 to mark his first year in power, triggering anger by Chinese and Korean officials and sparking a rare diplomatic reprimand from Washington -- Tokyo's closest ally -- that maintains a vast military presence in the country.

Just last week, Japan marked the 75th anniversary of the U.S. atomic bombing of its southern port city of Nagasaki, with the city's mayor demanding for a ban on nuclear weapons.

After the first bombing, Harry Truman, the then U.S. president, told the Japanese to "expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth."

The U.S., which claims to be against the weapons of mass destruction despite continuing to renovate and upgrade its nuclear arsenal, has never apologized for its most heinous crime.

U.S. leaders have even justified the bombings, claiming that they in fact helped bring the war to a stop and prevented more deaths and destruction.

## Europe Tightens Restrictions After Virus Surges

PARIS (AP) — New flare-ups of COVID-19 are disrupting the peak summer vacation season across much of Europe, where authorities in some countries are reimposing restrictions on travelers, closing nightclubs again, banning fireworks displays and expanding mask orders even in chic resort areas.

"Unfortunately, this virus doesn't play ball," British Transport Secretary Grant Shapps told Sky News.

The surges have spread alarm across Europe, which suffered heavily during the spring but appeared in recent months to have largely tamed the coronavirus in ways that the U.S., with its vaunted scientific prowess and the extra time to prepare, cannot seem to manage. The continent's hardest-hit countries, Britain, Italy, France and Spain, have recorded about 140,000 deaths in all.

In addition to clubs and alcohol-fueled street parties, large family gatherings -- usually abounding with hugs and kisses -- have been cited as a source of new outbreaks in several European countries.

In France, thousands of vacationing Britons scrambled to return home Friday to avoid having to self-quarantine for 14 days following Britain's decision to reimpose restrictions on France because of a resurgence of infections there. Ferries added extra trips back to England, and trains were running

out of space.

Some of the toughest new measures were announced in Spain, which has recorded almost 50,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases in the past 14 days.

Health Minister Salvador Illa, after an emergency meeting with regional leaders, said nightclubs nationwide were ordered to close. Visits to nursing homes will be limited to one person a day for each resident for only one hour.

In Italy, also faced with a surge of cases, seaside towns announced new restrictions, including bans on fireworks at beaches. The moves came just ahead of Italy's biggest summer holiday, Ferragosto, which millions of Italians celebrate at the seashore, in the mountains or on trips abroad.

Italy's Health Ministry said 574 new COVID-19 cases were recorded on Friday -- the highest daily number since May 28.

The outbreaks and new restrictions in Europe shouldn't come as a surprise, said Josh Michaud, associate director of global health policy with the Kaiser Family Foundation in Washington.

In France, amid growing fears of a second spike of contagion, the head of the country's national health service said Paris and Marseille have been declared at-risk zones. "The situation is deteriorating from week to week," the official, Jérôme Salomon, said on France Inter radio.

## Russia Starts Mass-Production of COVID Vaccine



A handout photo shows samples of a vaccine against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Moscow, August 6, 2020.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- Russia has produced the first batch of its new vaccine for COVID-19, the Interfax news agency quoted the health ministry as saying on Saturday, hours after the ministry reported the start of manufacturing.

"The first batch of the novel coronavirus vaccine developed by the Gamaleya research institute has been produced," the health ministry said in a statement quoted by Russian news agencies.

The vaccine, the first for the coronavirus to go into production, will be rolled out by the end of this month, the ministry said.

The vaccine has been named "Sputnik V" in homage to the world's first satellite launched by the Soviet Union. President Vladimir Putin has assured the public that it is safe, adding that one of his daughters had taken it as a volunteer and felt good afterwards.

It was developed by the Gamaleya research institute for epidemiology and microbiology in Moscow in coordination with the Russian defense ministry.

Gamaleya Institute said previously that Russia would be producing about 5 million doses a month by December-January, Interfax said.

The head of the institute, Alexander Gintsburg, told the TASS state news agency on Saturday that volunteers taking part in the final stage testing of the vaccine's safety and efficacy would have two inoculations.

Asked about the vaccine's safety, Gintsburg emphasized that the vac-

cine is based on a well-researched scientific platform dating back decades.

"The platform has been in development for 25 years for the purpose of gene therapy, but at the end of 2014 it was used to create drugs to fight the most rapidly changing viruses," he said.

"The same platform was used to develop vaccines against Ebola, MERS [Middle East Respiratory Syndrome], and a number of other diseases. It allowed the creation of an Ebola vaccine within a fairly short period of 15 months, which later was highly assessed by the WHO."

Health Minister Mikhail Murashko said this week that the vaccine would first be made available to medics and would later be available to all Russians on a voluntary basis.

With more than 917,000 confirmed infections, Russia's coronavirus caseload is currently fourth in the world after the United States, Brazil and India.

Currently Russia has 92,000 people hospitalized with the virus and 2,900 in intensive care, according to the health ministry.

Vietnam's health ministry has registered to purchase the Russian vaccine, its state television reported Friday.

More than 100 possible vaccines are being developed around the world to try to stop the COVID-19 pandemic. At least four are in the final Phase III human trials, according to data from the World Health Organization (WHO).

## Hundreds Flee Homes as Massive Fires Rage in California



Fire is seen in Azusa, California, August 14, 2020 in this picture obtained from social media.

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Bone-dry vegetation fueled three wildfires near Los Angeles amid warnings Friday that the risk of new blazes erupting was high as temperatures spike and humidity levels drop during a statewide heat wave.

A huge forest fire that prompted evacuations north of Los Angeles flared up Friday afternoon, sending up an enormous cloud of smoke as it headed down to the desert floor and the California aqueduct in the Antelope Valley. Fire crews managed to stop its movement there but additional evacuations were ordered for the western Antelope Valley.

The so-called Lake Fire was just 12% contained, and after threatening more than 5,400 homes, it had charred more than 27.3 square miles (70.7 square kilometers) of brush and trees. Fire officials said 21 buildings had been destroyed, including at least five homes.

Firefighters were struggling in steep,

rugged terrain amid scorching temperatures. The high hit 100 degrees (38 Celsius) Friday in the area, and the forecast called for continuing hot, dry weather with dangerous fire conditions because of possible gusty winds.

"The heat, the weather, that's what made this fire go," Nathan Judy of the U.S. Forest Service told KABC-TV.

Record-breaking heat is possible through the weekend, with triple-digit temperatures and unhealthy air predicted for many parts of the state. There also was a chance of isolated thunderstorms worsening the fire threat by creating dry lightning and strong downdrafts, fire officials said.

There was no containment of a blaze that blackened foothills above the Los Angeles suburb of Azusa. It churned through 2.3 square miles (5.96 square kilometers) of brush on Thursday and was moving away from homes. Evacuation orders issued to residents were lifted early Friday.

## News in Brief

MINSK/MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- The leaders of Russia and Belarus agreed on Saturday that the problems in Belarus would be resolved soon, the Kremlin said. Accused of rigging last Sunday's election, Lukashenko had earlier issued an appeal to Russian President Vladimir Putin as the Belarus leader grapples with the biggest challenge to his 26-year rule and the threat of new Western sanctions. Statements by both sides contained a pointed reference to a "union state" between the two countries. "Both sides expressed confidence that all the problems that have arisen will be resolved soon," a Kremlin statement said after Lukashenko and Putin spoke by phone. "These problems should not be exploited by destructive forces seeking to harm the mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries within the framework of the union state," it added. The European Union is gearing up to impose new sanctions on Belarus in response to a violent crackdown in which at least two protesters have been killed and thousands detained.

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WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump gave the Chinese company ByteDance 90 days to divest itself of any assets used to support the popular TikTok app in the United States. Trump's executive order said there is "credible evidence that leads me to believe that ByteDance ... might take action that threatens to impair the national security of the United States." Trump last week ordered sweeping but vague bans on dealings with the Chinese owners of TikTok and the messaging app WeChat, saying they are a threat to U.S. national security, foreign policy and the economy. It remains unclear what the TikTok orders mean for the app's 100 million U.S. users, many of them teenagers or young adults who use it to post and watch short-form videos. Trump on Friday also ordered ByteDance to divest itself of "any data obtained or derived" from TikTok users in the U.S. Microsoft is in talks to buy parts of TikTok.

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SAO PAULO (Reuters) -- Almost half of Brazilians think President Jair Bolsonaro bears "no responsibility at all" for the country's more than 100,000 dead from the coronavirus pandemic, the world's second highest death toll, according to a new Datafolha poll. The poll was published on Saturday in Brazil's Folha de Sao Paulo newspaper and says 47% of Brazilians do not assign him any blame for the body count, whereas 11% do. Brazil has the world's worst outbreak outside of the United States and Bolsonaro's response to the pandemic has been widely condemned by health experts. Right-wing Bolsonaro has pushed for the use of an unproven anti-malarial drug to fight the disease, encouraged health ministers who opposed his agenda, replaced Brazilians to oppose lockdown measures and shown indifference to the rising death toll. Results from the same polling sample released on Friday showed that Bolsonaro currently enjoys the highest popularity rating of his administration, which began in 2019. Thirty-seven percent of Brazilians rated his term as great or good, compared with 32% in June.

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NEW DELHI (Reuters) -- India is ready to mass produce COVID-19 vaccines when scientists give the go-ahead, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in his Independence Day speech on Saturday, also launching a national project to roll out health identities for each citizen.

In annual celebrations held at the 17th-century Red Fort and scaled down due to the pandemic, Modi identified health and economic self-reliance as the key priorities for his government. "Not one, not two, as many as three coronavirus vaccines are being tested in India," he said from the ramparts of the red sandstone palace in the old quarters of Delhi, wearing a flowing orange and white turban and covering his mouth and nose with a scarf of the same colours whenever anyone came close to him at the ceremony. "Along with mass-production, the roadmap for distribution of vaccine to every single Indian in the least possible time is also ready," Modi said.

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SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Thousands of anti-government protesters, armed with umbrellas and raincoats, marched through the soggy streets of South Korea's capital on Saturday, ignoring official pleas to stay home amid a surge in coronavirus infections. It appeared that at least several were detained after scuffles with police, which deployed about 6,000 officers to closely follow the protesters in streets near Seoul's presidential palace. The protests came as the government moved to impose stronger social distancing restrictions in the city and nearby towns following a spike in coronavirus infections. Municipal officials in Seoul had sought to forbid the slew of rallies planned by conservative activists and Christian groups for a holiday celebrating the 75th anniversary of the nation's liberation from Japanese colonial rule at the end of World War II.

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VATICAN CITY (Reuters) -- Pope Francis called for dialogue between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan on Saturday, urging them not to let a dispute over a dam on the Nile lead to conflict. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, which is being built some 15 km (9 miles) from Ethiopia's border with Sudan, has become a major source of discord between the three countries. Egypt, which fears the dam project could lead to water shortages upstream, has threatened to withdraw from the latest round of discussions. Sudan is concerned about the dam's safety.