

China: Five Eyes Alliance Will be ‘Poked and Blinded’



An intelligence alliance made up of the United States, Britain and three other countries has issued a statement against Beijing’s approach to the Hong Kong legislature.

BEIJING (Dispatches) -- China on Friday warned the U.S. and several of its allies over interference in Hong Kong affairs, saying they “should face up to the reality” that the city has been returned to the mainland long ago.

The U.S., the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have together made up an intelligence partnership known as the Five Eyes.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian reacted to the alliance, saying they need to face the reality that the city is an inalienable part of the

mainland.

“No matter if they have five eyes or 10 eyes, if they dare to harm China’s sovereignty, security and development interests, they should beware of their eyes being poked and blinded,” he said. Zhao said that Hong Kong officials must “be loyal to the motherland. This is a basic political ethic in every country in the world, right?”

Hong Kong has been governed under the “one-country, two-system” model since the city — a former British colony — was returned to China in 1997. Earlier this month, authorities in the

city disqualified four opposition lawmakers under a resolution authorizing the city to expel legislators deemed dangerous to national security. The resolution allows authorities to bypass the court system to unseat lawmakers.

The Five Eyes described the new resolution as “part of a concerted campaign to silence all critical voices.”

Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam, however, supported the legislation, saying that those lawmakers who did “not fulfill the requirement and the prerequisite for serving on the Legislative Council” could not be allowed to continue serving on it.

Hong Kong was rocked by riots over a bill that would have reformed its extradition law last year. Violent individuals vandalized the city, destroying public and private property and attacking anyone deemed to be pro-government. Hong Kong dropped that bill, but the acts of violence continued.

Earlier this year, the city enacted a new national security law, criminalizing sedition, secession, and subversion against the mainland.

Some opposition lawmakers openly called for Western intervention to stop the law from being enacted in the city and canvassed in favor of secession from mainland China.

The United States actively supported the protest leaders and attempted to stir up anti-China sentiments in the city.

U.S. Names First Ambassador to Venezuela in Decade



New U.S. Ambassador to Venezuela James Story

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- The United States has appointed an ambassador to Caracas, who will be following Washington’s stance against the elected government of President Nicolas Maduro.

The U.S. Senate appointed James Story as Washington’s ambassador to Venezuela. This is the first time in ten years that the U.S. is sending an ambassador to Caracas. The two sides have not exchanged ambassadors since 2010 when relations first started to fray under Venezuela’s late President Hugo Chavez.

Caracas and Washington eventually broke diplomatic ties last year after the Trump administration backed opposition figure Juan Guaido as the country’s legitimate president.

The newly appointed U.S. ambassador continued Washington’s hardline approach toward Caracas on Thursday, dashing hopes for a change in the Trump administration’s stance toward the South American country.

In a 30-minute conversation on Facebook Live called ‘Aló, embajador’ (Hello, ambassador), Story expressed his support for Guaido.

“We are going to continue with the pressure and we are going to support the democratic forces and civil society in Venezuela,” he said in the conversation.

Story also called Maduro’s government an “authoritarian regime” and criticized Venezuela’s forthcoming elections in December.

“While there are energy, gasoline,

oil production, medicine problems and the lack of a response to the pandemic, this regime wants to commit fraud in the Dec. 6 parliamentary elections,” he claimed.

“We believe in elections. But what kind of elections? We support interim President Juan Guaido, and the international community will not recognize this fraud, and neither will Venezuelans.”

The Trump administration has increased sanctions on Maduro’s government in recent years in an effort to pressure the Venezuelan leader to step down.

But critics say the heavy sanctions have failed to remove Maduro from power and made life harder for people living in Venezuela.

Story had previously led an American virtual embassy while serving as chargé d’affaires for the Venezuela Affairs Unit in Bogota, the capital of Venezuela’s neighbor, Colombia, where he would carry out the job. He said he hopes to return to Caracas to do his job.

The U.S. has imposed harsh economic sanctions on the oil-rich country and confiscated its state oil assets based in the United States, channeling the funds to Guaido.

Maduro, who has repeatedly accused Washington of openly pushing for a coup in the country, blames Washington for an economic war which has led to hyperinflation and widespread shortages of food and medicine in Venezuela.

UN Braces for 200,000 Refugees as Ethiopia War Rages

GENEVA (Reuters) – UN agencies are planning for the possible arrival of 200,000 refugees in Sudan fleeing violence in Ethiopia over a six-month period, a U.N. refugee agency official said on Friday.

“Together with all the agencies we have built a response plan for about 20,000 people and currently we are at about 31,000 so it has already surpassed that figure,” Axel Bisschop told a Geneva briefing. “The new planning figure is around 200,000.”

Forces from Ethiopia’s rebel Tigray region fired rockets on Friday at the distant capital of the neighboring Amhara region, Amhara authorities said, raising worries the conflict could spill into a wider war.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people have been killed and tens of thousands of refugees have fled from two weeks of fighting in Tigray, raising questions of whether Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed can hold his ethnically diverse nation together.

“The illegal TPLF group have launched a rocket attack around 1:40 a.m. in Bahir Dar,” the Amhara government’s communications office said on its Facebook page, referring to the Tigray People’s Liberation Front. It said the rockets caused no damage.

Bahir Dar, the lakeside Amhara regional capital, is located hundreds of miles from the fighting in Tigray. Tigrayan refugees have told Reuters the Amhara militia is fighting on the government side, and the two regions have a border dispute.

A local journalist and another resident in Bahir Dar both told Reuters they had heard two explosions and had been told by people in the area that at least one of the missiles landed near the airport.

Ethiopia, a federation of 10 ethnic regions, was dominated for decades by Tigrayans in a TPLF-led ruling coalition, until Abiy, who is of Amhara and Oromo descent, took power two years ago. He says he aims to share authority more fairly in the country; the TPLF accuses him of pursuing a vendetta against former officials and restricting regional rights.

The conflict erupted two weeks ago after what the government called a TPLF attack on army forces stationed in the region.

A week ago, Tigray forces fired rockets at two airports in Amhara. They have also fired at rockets into the neighboring nation of Eritrea, which has a long-running enmity with the TPLF leadership and made peace with Ethiopia in 2018, earning Abiy the Nobel Peace Prize.

Reports of ethnically motivated killings have emerged during the conflict. Rights group Amnesty International documented a mass killing of civilians, many of whom appeared to be Amhara, by what it says were Tigrayan forces on Nov. 9-10, which the Tigray authorities denied. Refugees fleeing the conflict into Sudan have said they were targeted for being Tigrayan.

Tigray forces accused the government of bombing a university in the Tigray capital of Mekelle on Thursday.

Russia Blasts ‘Dangerous’ U.S. Policy After Missile Test



An SM-3 Block 1B interceptor is launched from guided-missile cruiser USS Lake Erie (CG 70) during a Missile Defense Agency and U.S. Navy test in the mid-Pacific, May 15, 2013.

MOSCOW (Newsweek) -- Russia has accused the United States of lying about its missile defense intentions after a recent intercontinental interception test used technology Moscow officials say the Pentagon has assured them were not aimed at Russia’s long-range capabilities.

Two days after the U.S. military for the first time downed an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) with a missile fired from a warship, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova branded the move “a new confirmation of the dangerous and destabilizing character” of Washington’s anti-ballistic missile strategy “and its obvious anti-Russian orientation.”

She took exception at the Pentagon’s use of a Standard Missile-3 (SM-3) Block IIA missile fired by Arleigh Burke-class destroyer USS John Finn to take down the ICBM launched from the Kwajalein Atoll in the Pacific Ocean. The weapon is a part of the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense System, which Moscow has long suspected to be a major node in a U.S. global missile shield to undermine Russian military power, as opposed to the official U.S. line of countering regional threats such as

Iran and North Korea.

“For many years our American colleagues assured us that the interception of Russian ICBMs by American Standard systems—including this modification—is technically impossible,” Zakharova told journalists, “and that they need a global missile defense system exclusively to counter some limited regional threats, recall the Iranian theme.”

“The recent test directly confirms the falsity of American assurances that the U.S. global missile defense system is not directed against Russia,” Zakharova said. “This is direct evidence of a concrete example of how Washington manipulated the public opinion of its country, lied to its international partners and justified its actions in the international arena with absolutely far-fetched pretexts.”

The SM-3 Block IIA missiles can also be found even closer to Russian soil, deployed to Aegis Ashore sites in Poland and Romania.

“Naturally, we will have to take the necessary response measures,” Zakharova said, “which we have talked about many times, proceeding from the tasks of ensuring national security and maintaining strategic stability.”

Japan Plans Expanding Free Trade Pact Minus U.S.



Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga is delivering a speech via virtual meeting during the APEC CEO Dialogues 2020, ahead of APEC leaders’ summit in Kuala Lumpur, Nov. 20, 2020.

TOKYO (Dispatches) -- Japan said on Friday it plans to expand a major free trade pact that would also serve the interests of China and Britain in joining the deal, as part of efforts aimed at countering the U.S.’ protectionist policy and enhancing regional convergence in economic relations.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga made the announcement via video link at an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Malaysia, while commenting on the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) that excludes the U.S. and links 11 countries, including Canada, Australia and Japan.

“Japan will aspire for the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific through the early conclusion of the RCEP agreement and the steady implementation and expansion of the CPTPP as next year’s chair,” Suga said, referring to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

A spokesman for the Chinese commerce ministry announced on Thursday that Beijing was open to the idea of joining the CPTPP, while Britain earlier this year expressed willingness to pursue accession to the pact.

The 11 countries are set to form a trading bloc that represents 495 million consumers and 13.5% of global GDP, providing Canada with preferential access to key markets in Asia and Latin America.

Moreover, the China-backed RCEP has been hailed as the world’s largest free trade deal signed by 15 economies this month, while the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) is potentially an even larger pact that the 21-member APEC has been aspiring to.

The RCEP agreement consists of ten Southeast Asian countries, as well as China, South Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand.

Described by experts as a major win for multilateralism and free trade, despite America’s withdrawal from many international agreements, the RCEP is often compared to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) deal that U.S. President Donald Trump defiantly tore up soon after he took office.

The RCEP agreement, signed on Sunday on the sidelines of the annual meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations after nearly a decade of negotiations, is very important because of its sheer size, which covers nearly a third of global economy.

News in Brief

LONDON (Reuters) -- Heatwaves caused a record 2,556 excess deaths in Britain this summer as the country was struggling to contain the coronavirus pandemic, according to a government estimate published on Thursday. Increasingly frequent and severe heatwaves are among the deadliest impacts of climate change, mostly hitting elderly people and other vulnerable groups the hardest, scientists say. “Unless the government takes urgent action to address the climate emergency, the number of excess deaths due to heatwaves is likely to increase year on year,” said Sandy Robertson of the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change, an advocacy group of health professionals. Britain suffered a series of heatwaves here in June, July and August in which many weather stations around the country broke or matched their maximum temperature records. The estimate of 2,556 excess deaths was the highest since the government launched a plan to manage the health effects of hot temperatures after an estimated 2,234 people died in England during a pan-European heatwave in 2003.

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- Russia has sentenced a man to 13 years in prison for trying to pass military secrets about Russia’s Northern Fleet to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Security Service (FSB) said on Friday. The FSB said in a statement that a court in Bryansk, southwest of Moscow, had found Yuri Eschenko guilty of state treason on Nov. 17 and sentenced him to 13 years in a high-security facility. Eschenko pleaded guilty and said he regretted what he had done, the FSB said. Reuters could not immediately reach a lawyer for him. Eschenko, working in the town of Severomorsk, had a job servicing radio-electronic systems used by the Northern Fleet. The FSB said he had copied secret documents related to weapons systems used by the Northern Fleet. He had done the copying from 2015 to 2017 with a view to selling the information on to a third party, it said. In 2019, the FSB said he had made contact with the CIA. He was arrested in July by the FSB in the Bryansk region trying to hand over the state secrets, it said.

BERLIN (Reuters) -- Five people were injured in a stabbing attack in the western German town of Oberhausen on Thursday and a suspect was arrested in what police said appeared to be a family dispute. A spokesman for police in the nearby city of Essen said all five, including the attacker, had been treated in hospital and at least one sustained life-threatening injuries.

SHANGHAI (Reuters) -- An aggressive China-led shift to electric vehicles is expected to slash global oil demand growth by 70% by 2030 and will help bring an end to the “oil era”, according to research by the Carbon Tracker think tank published on Friday. Within 10 years, China could save more than \$80 billion in annual oil import costs as new-energy vehicles (NEVs) become increasingly competitive, Carbon Tracker said. Its calculations were based on a “conservative” scenario by the International Energy Agency projecting that electric vehicles would account for 40% of China’s total car sales by 2030, and for 20% of sales in India and other emerging markets. The cost of importing the oil required to fuel an average car is 10 times higher than the cost of solar equipment required to power an electric vehicle, Carbon Tracker said.

LONDON (Reuters) -- British former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn will be suspended as a Labour member of Parliament for three months as the party faces calls to launch a new investigation, the Telegraph reported on Thursday. Corbyn was informed that the duration of the suspension could be reviewed depending on his actions, suggesting it could be shortened or extended depending on whether he issued an apology, the report added, citing sources. Corbyn was suspended from the party in October in light of his comments after a report said the party was responsible for unlawful harassment and discrimination in its handling of allegations of anti-Semitism. Less than a month after his suspension, on Corbyn was re-admitted to the party Tuesday. However, the current Labour leader Keir Starmer refused to re-admit Corbyn to the Parliamentary Labour Party, hence Corbyn would not officially represent Labour in parliament.

BOGOTA (Reuters) -- Thousands of workers and students protested in Colombia on Thursday against the social and economic policies of President Ivan Duque, despite restrictions to control the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. Protesters marched peacefully in the country’s main cities and tried to respect requirements such as the use of face masks and maintaining social distancing. “This is a government that neither discusses nor negotiates, which means we need to maintain protests. The president is deaf, blind and mute in the face of other opinions,” Diogenes Orjuela, president of the Central Union of Workers (CUT), told Reuters in a telephone interview. Protesters’ demands include improving health coverage and education, establishing a basic income for the unemployed and those without pensions, as well as help for small businesses, the union leader said. In September the death of a man following his detention by police saw a wave of protests in Bogota and satellite city Soacha, in which 13 people died.