

# China Warns U.S.: Don't Play With Fire on Taiwan



Taiwan Navy's domestically built amphibious transport dock "Yushan" is seen during its launching ceremony in Kaosiung, Taiwan, April 13, 2021.

BEIJING (Dispatches) -- China told the United States on Tuesday to stop playing with fire over Taiwan and lodged a complaint after Washington issued guidelines that will enable U.S. officials to meet more freely with officials from the island that China claims as its own.

The U.S. State Department's Friday decision to deepen relations with the self-ruled island came amid stepped-up Chinese military activity around the island in the wake of aggressive American meddling in Taiwan's affairs.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told reporters they had lodged "stern representations" with the

United States.

China urges the United States "not to play with fire on the Taiwan issue, immediately stop any form of U.S.-Taiwan official contacts, cautiously and appropriately handle the matter, and not send wrong signals to Taiwan independence forces so as not to subversively influence and damage Sino-U.S. relations and peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait", he said.

On Sunday U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States was concerned about China's actions with regard to Taiwan.

In a written response to Reuters on Blinken's remarks, China's Foreign

Ministry said the government had the absolute determination to protect the country's sovereignty.

"Don't stand on the opposite side of 1.4 billion Chinese people," it added.

Taiwan is China's most sensitive territorial and diplomatic issue, and a regular source of Sino-U.S. friction. China has never renounced the use of force to bring the island under its sovereignty.

Former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced days before the end of former President Donald Trump's presidency in January that he was lifting restrictions on contacts between U.S. officials and their Taiwanese counterparts.

While Washington officially recognizes Beijing rather than Taipei, like most countries, the United States is Taiwan's most important supporter and arms seller.

The United States is required by its law to provide the island with the means to defend itself.

China believes the United States is colluding with Taiwan to challenge Beijing and giving support to those who want the island to declare formal independence.

On Tuesday, Taiwan unveiled a new amphibious warfare ship that can be used to land troops.

The 10,600-tonne Yu Shan, named after Taiwan's tallest mountain, is the latest part of President Tsai Ing-wen's ambitious program to purportedly modernize the armed forces.

## Japan Release of Radioactive Water Alarms Countries



An aerial view shows the storage tanks for treated water at the tsunami-crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Okuma town, Fukushima prefecture, Japan February 13, 2021, in this photo taken by Kyodo.

TOKYO (Reuters) -- Japan will release more than 1 million tonnes of contaminated water from the destroyed Fukushima nuclear plant into the sea, the government said on Tuesday, a move China called "extremely irresponsible", while South Korea summoned Tokyo's ambassador in Seoul to protest.

Japan has argued the water release is necessary to press ahead with the complex decommissioning of the plant after it was crippled by a 2011 earthquake and tsunami. It says similarly filtered water is routinely released from nuclear plants around the world.

Nearly 1.3 million tonnes of con-

taminated water, or enough to fill about 500 Olympic-sized swimming pools, is stored in huge tanks at the plant at an annual cost of about 100 billion yen (\$912.66 million) -- and space is running out.

The decision comes about three months ahead of the postponed Tokyo Olympic Games, with some events to be held as close as 60 km (35 miles) from the wrecked plant.

The United States noted that Japan has worked closely with the International Atomic Energy Agency in its handling of the site.

Japan's neighbors reacted strongly, however, with both China and South Korea calling for more consultation

on the plan.

"This action is extremely irresponsible, and will seriously damage international public health and safety, and the vital interests of people in neighboring countries," China's foreign ministry said in a statement on its website.

South Korea's government summoned Japan's ambassador to Seoul to protest at the move.

"The decision can never be accepted and would not only cause danger to the safety and maritime environment of neighboring countries," a senior official told a briefing after vice-ministers held an emergency meeting to discuss the issue.

"It was also made unilaterally without sufficient consultations with our country, which is the closest neighbor to Japan," Koo said.

At a briefing in Tokyo later in the day a government official told reporters that Japan had consulted neighbors.

Fishing unions in Fukushima have urged the government for years not to release the water, arguing it would have a "catastrophic impact" on the industry.

A Scientific American article reported in 2014 that when ingested tritium can raise cancer risks, while some experts are worried about other contaminants. The water currently contains significant amounts of harmful isotopes despite years of treatment, according to Tepco.

## Russia Tells U.S. Warships to Stay Away for 'Own Good'



U.S. Navy Arleigh-Burke class destroyer USS Roosevelt sets sail in the Bosphorus, returning from the Black Sea, in Istanbul, Turkey, Oct. 2, 2020.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- Russia on Tuesday called the United States an adversary and told U.S. warships to stay well away from Crimea "for their own good", calling their deployment in the Black Sea a provocation designed to test Russian nerves.

Crimea rejoined Russia in a referendum in 2014 and two U.S. warships are due to arrive in the Black Sea this week amid an escalation in fighting in eastern Ukraine, where government forces have battled pro-Russia separatists in a conflict Kyiv says has killed 14,000 people.

"The United States is our adversary and does everything it can to undermine Russia's position on the world stage," Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov was cited as saying by Russian news agencies.

"We do not see any other elements in their approach. Those are our conclusions," the agencies quoted him as saying.

The comment suggests that the veneer of diplomatic niceties that the former Cold War enemies have generally sought to observe in recent decades is wearing thin.

Ryabkov's remarks suggest Russia will in turn robustly push back against what it sees as unacceptable U.S. interference in its own backyard.

"We warn the United States that it will be better for them to stay far away from Crimea and our Black Sea coast. It will

be for their own good," said Ryabkov.

The West has cried foul over a build-up of Russian forces close to Ukraine's eastern border and in Crimea, which NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg on Tuesday called on Moscow to unwind.

Russia has said it moves its forces around as it sees fit, including for defensive purposes, and has regularly accused NATO of destabilizing Europe by moving its military infrastructure closer to Russia's borders.

Ryabkov was cited as shrugging off U.S. talk of consequences for any "aggressive" Russian actions and as saying that Moscow had studied U.S. tactics towards Russia and adapted accordingly.

U.S. military support to Kyiv was a serious challenge for Russia, he added, accusing Washington and NATO of turning Ukraine into a "powder keg" with increasing arms supplies.

"Any threat to us merely confirms our belief that our course is the right one," Ryabkov was quoted as saying, warning U.S. warships in the Black Sea to keep their distance, given what he said was the high risk of unspecified incidents.

"There is absolutely nothing for American ships to be doing near our shores, this is purely a provocative action. Provocative in the direct sense of the word: they are testing our strength, playing on our nerves. They will not succeed," Ryabkov said.

## U.S. to Ramp Up Forces in Germany in Major Reversal



Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin and his German counterpart Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer address a news conference at the Bendlerblock German Ministry of Defense in Berlin, Germany, April 13, 2021.

BERLIN (Dispatches) -- The United States will ramp up its forces in Germany amid the latest tensions with Russia over Ukraine, abandoning former President Donald Trump's plans to withdraw around 12,000 of the 36,000 troops from the fellow NATO country.

"I briefed the minister on our intention to permanently stage an approximately 500 additional U.S. personnel in the Wiesbaden area as early as this fall," Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin told at press conference after meeting his German counterpart, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, in Berlin.

Last June, Trump had announced his intention to cut the U.S. troop contingent in Germany by about a third, saying Berlin had been taking advantage of the United States while not meeting financial obligations to NATO.

Austin, who as a young lieutenant served in Kramp-Karrenbauer, struck a completely different tone, thanking Berlin for its contribution to NATO interventions as in Afghanistan and taking steps to increase military spending.

Austin evaded questions about whether the deployment of additional troops should be interpreted as a message to Russia amid renewed tensions over Ukraine but stressed the military value for NATO of having more boots on the ground in Europe.

"These forces will strengthen deterrence

and defense, and they will augment our existing abilities to prevent conflict and if necessary to fight and win," he said. "It will greatly improve our ability to surge forces at a moment's notice to defend our allies."

They also discussed a pending decision by President Joe Biden on whether to withdraw completely from Afghanistan by May 1, a deadline the Trump administration pledged to the Taliban militants. Germany is a key part of the U.S.-led occupation in Afghanistan.

Austin said at a joint news conference with Kramp-Karrenbauer that the extra 500 U.S. troops will be stationed permanently in Germany's Wiesbaden area as early as this fall.

Last year, President Donald Trump ordered the withdrawal of 12,000 troops from Germany as retribution for what he considered Germany's refusal to spend more on its own defense. Austin suspended that move shortly after taking office. He said decisions on troop levels would be made as part of a comprehensive review of the U.S. military presence around the world, including in Europe.

Austin's announcement on Tuesday is the first concrete indication that he may not carry out the Trump decision, which included moving U.S. European Command headquarters from Germany to Belgium.

## News in Brief

LONDON (Reuters) -- Britain's government is deeply concerned that young people have been encouraged to take part in violence in Northern Ireland, the British province's minister said on Tuesday, urging all sides to work together to uphold the peace. Saying he understood the frustration over COVID-19 restrictions and difficulties produced from part of Britain's Brexit trade deal with the European Union, Lewis told parliament: "The violence witnessed last week is totally unacceptable." "It is tragic and deeply concerning that young people have been engaged in, and encouraged into, this violence."

NEW DELHI (Reuters) -- India is fast-track emergency approvals for COVID-19 vaccines that have been authorized by Western countries and Japan, paving the way for possible imports of Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, and Moderna shots. The move, which will drop the need for companies to do small, local safety trials for their vaccines before seeking emergency approval, follows the world's biggest surge in cases in the country this month. Vaccines authorized by the World Health Organization or authorities in the United States, Europe, the United Kingdom and Japan "may be granted emergency use approval in India, mandating the requirement of post-approval parallel bridging clinical trial", the health ministry said in a statement. "The first 100 beneficiaries of such foreign vaccines shall be assessed for seven days for safety outcomes before they are rolled out."

WASHINGTON (AP) -- A student opened fire on officers responding to a report of a possible gunman at a Tennessee high school Monday, and police shot back and killed him, authorities said. The shooting wounded an officer and comes as the community reels from off-campus gun violence that has left three other students dead this year. Police found the student in a bathroom at Austin-East Magnet High School in Knoxville, a city about 180 miles (290 kilometers) east of Nashville, Tennessee Bureau of Investigation Director David B. Rausch said at a news conference. They ordered the student to come out, but he wouldn't comply, and that's when he reportedly opened fire, Rausch said. Police fired back. The student died at the school, and the officer was taken into surgery after being shot at least once in the upper leg, authorities said.

VIENNA (Reuters) -- Austrian Health Minister Rudolf Anschober of the Greens, the junior partner in the conservative-led coalition, said on Tuesday he is stepping down, exhausted and sick from battling the coronavirus pandemic and occasionally other officials. "I ... do not want to break myself," Anschober said in a short-notice statement to the media, describing blood-pressure problems that have caused him to take sick leave twice recently. "In the worst health crisis in decades the republic needs a health minister who is 100% fit. That is not currently me." Anschober, a 60-year-old former journalist and schoolteacher, is one of the country's most popular politicians, known for his long, patient explanations of the pandemic's challenges, often while holding up large print-outs of charts.

SARAJEVO (Reuters) -- Sarajevo on Tuesday mourned a Serb general who helped defend the city while it was besieged by Serb forces for nearly four years in the 1990s, becoming a symbol of the multi-ethnic defense of the Bosnian capital. Jovan Divjak was a former officer of the Yugoslav Peoples Army (JNA) who quit its ranks when the former Yugoslavia began disintegrating, and joined the Bosnian army when war began there in April 1992. He died on Thursday after long illness aged 84. Born in Belgrade, he spent most of his military career in Bosnia and identified as a Bosnian. Divjak earned popular respect when he climbed onto a retreating JNA tank in May 1992, trying to stop citizens of Sarajevo from shooting at JNA soldiers. "He was the only general who yelled: 'don't shoot!' instead of 'shoot!'", Bosnian Oscar-winning film maker Danis Tanovic said during the memorial ceremony held at the National Theatre. Divjak was the only Serb member of Bosnia's Muslim-dominated army command during the war in which 100,000 died.

PARIS (Reuters) -- France's Dassault Aviation urged politicians on Tuesday to approve a deal reached with Airbus over the future of a next-generation combat jet, with Europe's largest defense project riding on German parliamentary support. After tense negotiations, rivals Dassault and planemaker Airbus agreed this month on a share of the work on the Future Combat Air System (FCAS), an array of manned and unmanned warplanes backed by France, Germany and Spain. While political differences remain over technology rights, the industrial deal - which sees Dassault win leadership of the core fighter plane while Airbus, representing Germany and Spain, has a two-thirds overall share - is seen as a breakthrough for the project. The agreement must now be presented to governments and in particular faces tight deadlines in Germany, where the country's powerful parliamentary budget committee has a decisive say.

## UN Urges Halt to 'Slaughter' in Myanmar

NAYPYITAW (Reuters) -- Opponents of military rule in Myanmar cancelled traditional new year festivities on Tuesday and instead showed their anger with the generals who seized power through low-key displays of defiance and small protests across the country.

The United Nations human rights office said it feared that the military clampdown on protests since the Feb. 1 coup risked escalating into a civil conflict like that seen in Syria and appealed for a halt to the "slaughter".

A Myanmar activist group, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, says the security forces have killed 710 protesters since the ouster of an elected government led by Aung San Suu Kyi.

Protesters were out again on the first day of the five-day New Year holiday, known as Thingyan, which is usually celebrated with prayers, ritual cleaning of Buddha images in temples and high-spirited water-dousing on the streets.

"We do not celebrate Myanmar Thingyan this year since over 700 of our innocent brave souls have been killed," said one Twitter user named Shwe Ei.

Women wearing fine clothes for the most important holiday of the year protested in several towns holding traditional

pots containing seven flowers and sprigs that are displayed at this time, media pictures showed.

Many people painted the protesters' three-finger salute on their Thingyan pots.

"People's power, our power," women marching on a street in the main city of Yangon chanted as passersby clapped, video posted by the Myanmar Now media group showed.

In some places, the people set out dozens of Thingyan pots daubed with messages such as "Save Myanmar" in silent shows of opposition to the military.

There were no immediate reports of violence at any of the protests but information has become scarce because of the junta's curbs on broadband internet and mobile data services.

Soldiers shot and killed a man and a woman delivering milk on a motorbike in the northwestern town of Tamu, on the border with India, three media outlets reported.

Several small blasts went off in different places, including two in Yangon, but there were no reports of casualties or claims of responsibility.

The coup has plunged Myanmar into crisis with daily protests and workers in many sectors on strike, bringing the economy to a standstill.