

# Beijing Expels U.S. Destroyer From China's Territorial Waters



The guided-missile destroyer USS Benfold

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) said Wednesday it had expelled a U.S. guided-missile destroyer that trespassed in China's territorial waters near the Nansha Islands in the South China Sea.

PLA Southern Theater Command Spokesperson Tian Junli said in a statement that the U.S. military's act had seriously undermined China's sovereignty and security interests, CGTN reported.

Calling Washington "a risk mak-

er" to the security of the South China Sea and the "biggest destroyer" of the region's safety and stability, Tian warned that the theater command will "remain on high alert".

"We will resolutely safeguard national sovereignty and security, as well as peace and stability in the region," he said.

The U.S. navy, however, said that the destroyer "asserted navigation rights and freedoms" within 12 nautical miles of Mischief Reef in the Spratly Islands.

"The United States challenges excessive maritime claims without regard to the nation asserting them," it said in a statement Wednesday.

It added that another destroyer, the USS Carl Vinson, and its strike group were also training elsewhere in the region.

Back in July, the Benfold passed through the Taiwan Strait, in another move that China routinely condemns as a provocation.

Just days earlier, China imposed a law requiring foreign vessels to give notice before entering its territorial waters.

China claims the South China Sea in its entirety. Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei have overlapping claims to parts of the sea.

The U.S., however, sides with Beijing's rival claimants in the dispute.

China has always warned the US against military activities in the sea. Beijing says potential close military encounters between the air and naval forces of the two countries in the region may cause accidents.

## Protests Erupt in El Salvador as Bitcoin Crashes



Protestors fear Bitcoin's adoption may cause instability for one of Latin America's poorest countries

SAN SALVADOR (Dispatches) - Angry protests, technological glitches and a plummet in value marked the first day of El Salvador adopting Bitcoin as legal tender.

The price of Bitcoin crashed to its lowest in nearly a month, falling from \$52,000 to under \$43,000 at one point.

An opposition politician said

the fall caused one of Latin America's poorest countries to lose \$3m.

The rollout of bitcoin in El Salvador was far from what President Nayib Bukele would have envisaged when he began his bold experiment.

Platforms such as Apple and Huawei weren't offering the government-backed digital wallet, known as Chivo, and servers had to be pulled

offline after they couldn't keep up with user registrations.

The government has even given Salvadorans \$30 each of Bitcoin to encourage its adoption. It says bitcoin could save the country \$400mn a year in transaction fees on funds sent from abroad.

However, using data from the World Bank and the government, the BBC calculates this to be closer to \$170mn.

"We must break the paradigms of the past," President Bukele tweeted. "El Salvador has the right to advance towards the first world."

Ed Hernandez runs a family shop in San Salvador where customers buy essentials like rice, beans and cleaning products. He's well and truly on board.

"During the pandemic, it will be nice not to use physical cash," he told the BBC, adding that it protects him from customers paying with counterfeit notes.

What wasn't good timing for El Salvador though was the tumble Bitcoin took on its first day as legal tender, falling 20% at one point.

## Merkel Despairs as Conservatives Slump on Her Watch



German Chancellor Angela Merkel (center) and the governor of German state North Rhine-Westphalia

BERLIN (Bloomberg) - For weeks Angela Merkel has been observing from afar the leader of her once-mighty party, the Christian Democrats, fall apart. The German chancellor finally decided to step in to try and salvage a floundering campaign, but it may be too late.

At stake is not just her legacy, as a veteran who's governed Germany with a solid mandate for 16 years. As things stand, the motor of the European economy, could move from conservative hands to a Socialist government with potential policy implications for business and markets.

"It matters who runs the country," the four-term chancellor told lawmakers on Tuesday, evoking a familiar line of attack from the party's arsenal.

But the red-specter scenario isn't scaring Ger-

mans and implying that the Social Democrats will cast their lot with the anti-capitalist Left, a party that traces part of its roots to the East German communist party, might not be as effective as it might once have been.

The reason is that it's her own finance minister, Olaf Scholz, who is the public's favorite candidate. He hails from the SPD and is part of the ruling "grand coalition." In the mind of voters his temperament is similar to hers and his economic policies during the pandemic were made under her government.

As Merkel addressed parliament, the CDU/CSU bloc led by Armin Laschet was digesting another bombshell. A new survey showed support for Merkel's alliance dropped below 20 percent for the first time since polls were taken after World War II. Meanwhile, Scholz keeps gaining momentum.

## 41 Killed, Dozens Injured in Prison Fire Near Indonesian Capital

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - At least 41 people were killed and about 80 others injured as fire broke out at a prison in Tangerang town near the Indonesian capital Jakarta early Wednesday, officials said.

All the injured people were taken to nearby hospitals and health clinics, and eight prisoners were seriously injured, according to Jakarta Police Chief Inspector General Fadil Imran, Xinhua reported.

The fire occurred at 2:20 am local time and was extinguished at 3:30 am, and electrical short circuit was believed to be the cause of the fire, said Jakarta police Spokesperson Senior Commissioner Yusri Yunus.

The overcrowded block, which was designed for holding 40 prisoners, accommodates 122 people, said Rika Aprianti, a spokesperson for the prison department at Indonesia's Law and Human Rights Ministry.

Many of the prisoners held in the affected block were those involved in drug and narcotics related cases, according to her.

## U.S. Hospitals See 300% Rise in COVID Patients



The American Academy of Pediatrics reported the most coronavirus cases among children since the pandemic began. Last week, there were more than 250,000 cases.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The surge in patients comes as the highly contagious Delta variant continues to spread across the US, and coincided with a weekend that saw a spike in travel.

According to the Transportation Security Administration, more than 3.5 million people travelled across the country on Friday and Saturday for the Labor Day holiday, despite the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's recommendation for unvaccinated people to refrain from traveling.

Hospitalizations and deaths are a lagging indicator of COVID spread, so the impact of people's travels this week will not be clear right away, but the agency is continuing to advise caution.

"We have actually articulated that people who are fully vaccinated and who are wearing masks can travel," said Rochelle Walensky, director of the CDC, last week.

"Although given where we are with disease transmission right

now, we would say that people need to take their own - these risks - into their own consideration as they think about traveling," she added.

This past weekend saw 1.146mln weekly cases, compared with 287,235 last year. Despite the decline in cases in certain states including Florida, other states such as Idaho are seeing hospitals begin to ration healthcare amid patient surges.

Idaho's State Health Agency cited a "severe shortage of staffing and available beds", warning residents that they may not get the care they would normally expect if they required hospitalization.

The state's public health leaders also announced that they activated "crisis standards of care" allowing healthcare rationing for the state's Northern hospitals due to the overwhelming amount of COVID-19 patients. The move allows hospitals to distribute scant resources such as intensive care unit rooms to patients most likely to survive.

## Philippines Defense Minister Says U.S. Treaty Needs Comprehensive Review



Troops from the Philippines and the U.S. take part in the "Balikatan" exercises in May 2018. (File photo by AP)

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said on Wednesday there was a need for a comprehensive review of his country's alliance with the United States.

At an online event hosted by Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies marking the 70th anniversary of the countries' mutual defense treaty (MDT), Lorenzana said there was a need to "upgrade" and "update" the alliance and to make clear the "extent of American commitments."

"Some questions being asked in Manila are, do we still need the MDT? Should we amend it?" he said, referring to the pact signed in 1951. "What is clear is that we need a comprehensive review of our alliance."

Lorenzana said the U.S. treaty with Japan, its World War Two enemy, was more explicit than that with the Philippines when it came to determining whether it applied

in the Pacific maritime area, where the Philippines has come under increasing pressure from China over rival territorial claims in the South China Sea.

He said this explained why seven out of 10 Filipinos supported President Rodrigo Duterte's call for engagement with China rather than confrontation and more than half doubted U.S. reliability as an ally in South China Sea disputes.

Lorenzana said U.S.-Philippines relations would "have to evolve in recognition of new geopolitical realities, most especially the rise of China."

His remarks came after Duterte in July restored a pact governing the movement of U.S. troops in and out of the country, something strategically vital for American efforts to counter China.

Duterte had vowed to terminate the Visiting Forces Agreement after Washington denied a visa to a Philippine senator who is an ally of the president.



BRASILIA (Dispatches) - Dogged by an investigation as part of an inquiry into fake news and politically weakened, Brazil's far-right President Jair Bolsonaro took part in demonstrations Tuesday in favor of his administration in the federal capital, Brasilia, and in Sao Paulo, Brazil's largest city. In two inflammatory speeches on the country's Independence Day, Bolsonaro threatened institutions and a coup and even said he would only leave power when he dies, Anadolu news agency reported. In Brasilia, Bolsonaro made a direct threat to Supreme Court Chief Justice Luiz Fux.

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KYIV (Reuters) - Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's government said on Wednesday it could suspend an accord with the European Union on accepting refugees, as both sides traded blame over a build-up of migrants on the Belarusian border. Lukashenko has submitted a draft law to parliament to suspend the accord, which obliges Minsk to take back migrants who entered the EU via Belarus but who violated their conditions of stay, entry or residence. "The document was prepared in response to the unfriendly actions taken by the EU and its member states towards Belarus," Lukashenko's press service said in a statement.

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MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian Emergencies Minister Yevgeny Zinichev has died while attempting to save a person's life during training exercises in the Arctic city of Norilsk. Zinichev, 55, was in the Arctic to oversee large-scale drills and visited the construction site of a new fire station in Norilsk, as well as a search-and-rescue team in the area, the ministry said in a statement carried by Russian news agencies on Wednesday. Margarita Simonyan, chief editor of the state-funded RT news broadcaster, said Zinichev died while rescuing a cameraman who slipped and fell into the water, the Moscow Times reported.

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BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Pollution from coal-fired power stations on the European Union's southeastern border are estimated to have caused thousands of deaths in the region due to breaches of legally-binding limits on harmful emissions. The 18 coal plants operating in Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Montenegro were responsible for 19,000 deaths over the past three years, according to projections in a report by CEE Bankwatch Network and the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air. More than half of those deaths were estimated to be within the EU. The power stations produced 2.5 times as much harmful sulfur dioxide emissions as all of the 221 coal stations in the EU combined last year, the report said.

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KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Sudan's foreign ministry on Wednesday said it had summoned the Ethiopian Ambassador to Khartoum as the Sudanese authorities found 29 bodies in a border river. "On Aug 30, the Sudanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the Ambassador of Ethiopia in Khartoum after the Sudanese authorities, during July 26 and Aug 8, 2021, found 29 bodies carried by Setait River, east of the villages adjacent to Wad El Helew locality in Kassala State," the ministry said in a statement. The ministry informed the Ethiopian ambassador that the bodies belonged to Ethiopian citizens of the Tigray region, whose identities were identified by some Ethiopian individuals residing in Wad El Helew area, the statement said.