

North Korea: U.S. Drills Amount to 'Declaration of War'



North Korea has recently fired several cruise missiles after the U.S. and allied South Korea carried out military drills in the region that infuriated Pyongyang.

PYONGYANG (RT) – North Korea warned that it will soon consider U.S. military action near its borders as a “declaration of war”, issuing a harsh response after American diplomats pressed the United Nations to condemn recent weapons tests by the DPRK. Senior Foreign Ministry official Kwon Jeong-geun, who oversees U.S. affairs, issued a statement to “strongly protest” a UN Security Council meeting held earlier this week, where Washington proposed a measure to denounce Pyongyang’s latest ballistic missile launches, Korean Central News Agency reported. Such a move would be a “clear violation of our state’s right to self-

defense”, Kwon said, adding, “If the UN Security Council sincerely intends to contribute to ensuring peace and security on the Korean Peninsula, it will have to condemn acts that escalate military tension, such as the deployment of strategic assets and large-scale joint military exercises between the United States and South Korea.” The official said those actions have largely been “ignored” by the international community, warning of “strong countermeasures” should North Korea’s concerns continue to go unheeded. “It should be borne in mind that if the U.S. continues its hostile and provocative practices against the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea despite our repeated

protests and warnings, it could be regarded as a declaration of war,” he stressed. At the UN meeting on Monday, U.S. envoy Linda Thomas-Greenfield scolded the Security Council for its alleged “lack of action” in response to North Korean arms tests, calling it “dangerous” and “worse than shameful”. She pressured the body to adopt a formal ‘presidential statement’ – which does not amount to a legally-binding resolution – to condemn missile launches carried out on Saturday and Monday. The recent weapons tests prompted several rounds of military exercises by the United States, South Korea and Japan, with Washington and Seoul carrying out combined air drills on Sunday, followed by three-way naval exercises in the Sea of Japan. A tabletop simulation involving South Korean officials was also held in the U.S. capital on Wednesday, during which Pyongyang said it fired off long-range cruise missiles. The tit-for-tat military action underscores soaring tensions on the Korean Peninsula over the last year, with North Korea carrying a record number of missile tests amid a flurry of joint war games led by the Pentagon. The DPRK has repeatedly condemned the drills as rehearsals for an invasion and argues its missile program is intended for self-defense, while Washington continues to press North Korea to abandon its nuclear arsenal.

Russia: New U.S. Sanctions ‘Mindless’

MOSCOW (Dispatches) – The U.S. sanctions imposed against Russia are mindless and will not lead to Moscow abandoning its independent policy, the Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said commenting on the restrictions by Washington. “On February 24th, the world has witnessed yet another round of mindless economic and personal sanctions against Russia and its citizens. They once again want us to “suffer”. Does anyone really believe that such measures will make our country give up its independent course, divert from the chosen path towards a multipolar world based on the principle of indivisible security, international law and the UN Charter?” Antonov said as quoted by the embassy’s press service, TASS reported. According to him, the Washington administration fails to understand that “new supplies of weapons, like all the previous ones, only prolong the conflict, leading to continued bloodshed and in no way helping bring peace any closer.” He noted that the Russian army “keeps making strong progress in completing the tasks set before it to defend the Fatherland,” and “is supported by the entire country.” The European Union also approved a tenth package of sanctions

against Russia on Friday, following Washington’s announcement of imposing sweeping restrictions on the country. “Together, the EU member states have imposed the most forceful and far-reaching sanctions ever to help Ukraine win the war,” the Swedish EU presidency announced on Twitter on Friday night. “The EU stands united with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. We will keep supporting Ukraine, for as long as it takes.” The EU package includes tighter export checks regarding dual-use goods as well as sanctions against entities supporting the Russian war in Ukraine, spreading propaganda, or delivering drones used by Russia, according to Reuters. Warsaw said the suggested sanctions on EU imports of Russian rubber included such a big quota of imports exempted and such long transition periods that they would have no effect in practice. In another development, President Volodymyr Zelensky cautiously welcomed China’s peace plan to end Russia’s offensive against Ukraine but said the plan is only acceptable if it leads to the withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukrainian lands. In a press conference in Kiev on the occasion of the first anniversary of

Russia-Ukraine war, Zelensky said he wants to believe that Beijing is interested in a “fair peace”. He indicated he was willing to explore some aspects of China’s proposal. He said he planned to meet with President Xi Jinping, adding he knew the plan would be beneficial for both countries and global security. “As far as I know, China respects historical integrity,” Zelensky said. “Let’s work China on this point. Why not?” Western leaders, however, said they are not sure about the proposal and that they believed Beijing does not have enough international credibility to play a mediating role. U.S. President Joe Biden summed up the West’s stance on Friday night, saying China’s offer to negotiate an exit from the war was “just not rational”. Arizona Congressman Paul Gosar has said senior Biden administration officials have a “deeply-rooted, irrational hatred of Russia” and seek to get the U.S. involved in another world war. “Elon is correct,” Gosar wrote in a tweet on Thursday, responding to Twitter CEO Elon Musk’s comments in which he accused the U.S. Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland of “pushing this war” in Ukraine.

Daesh Claims Responsibility for Death of Dozens Soldiers in Burkina Faso

OUAGADOUGOU (AP) – The Daesh terrorist group claimed responsibility for killing more than 70 soldiers, wounding dozens and taking five hostages, in an ambush on a military convoy in northern Burkina Faso. In a statement posted by Amaq, the group’s news agency, the group said it attacked a convoy trying to advance to areas under its control near Deou, in the Sahel’s Oudalan province. It said it seized weapons and chased retreating soldiers for miles into the desert. Images released by the group show 54 slain bodies in military uniform lying in the bloodstained dirt, as well as more than 50 seized assault rifles and images of the five soldiers it said were taken prisoner. The announcement comes one week after the attack in Deou and days after another attack in Tin-Akoff

town, where locals and civil society groups say dozens more soldiers and civilians were killed when a military outpost was hit. It’s unclear how many people have been killed in the two incidents. Last week the government confirmed that 51 soldiers died in the Deou ambush but it has not responded to requests for updated numbers or commented on the attack in Tin-Akoff. Violence linked to Al-Qaeda and Daesh has wracked the country for seven years, killing thousands and displacing nearly 2 million people. Frustration at the government’s inability to stem the violence led to two coups last year, each one preceded by a major attack on the military. This is the deadliest ambush on soldiers since the new junta leader, Capt. Ibrahim Traore, seized power in September and analysts say it could threaten his grip on power.

“There’s a persistent stream of militant attacks north of the country and the public is undoubtedly taking notice of their government’s inability to provide security. Any further attacks this colossal could threaten a public scene and even threaten to unseat the junta,” said Laith Alkhouri, CEO of Intelonyx Intelligence Advisory, which provides intelligence analysis. Daesh and an Al-Qaeda linked group, known by its acronym JNIM, are not known to work together, but rather have been fighting each other for territory and influence in the country as well as in neighboring Mali where they operate. Analysts say it’s extremely unlikely they would have joined forces. Some locals say the increase of militant violence against the military is revenge for torture and extrajudicial killings by soldiers against people presumed to be militants.

G20 Fails to Reach Consensus on Ukraine War



United States Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen addresses a press conference during the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (FMCBG) meeting in Bangalore, India, 23 February 2023.

BENGALURU, India (AP/Reuters) – A meeting of finance chiefs of the Group of 20 leading economies ended on Saturday without a consensus, with Russia and China objecting to the description of the war in Ukraine in a final document. The meeting hosted by India issued the G-20 Chair’s summary and an outcome document stating that there was no agreement on the wording of the war in Ukraine. The first day of the meeting took place on the anniversary of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The Group of Seven major industrial nations announced new sanctions against Russia on Friday, just as the talks of the G-20 group wrapped up in confusion in the Indian technology hub of Bengaluru. U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen condemned the “illegal and unjustified war against Ukraine” at a session attended by Russian officials and reiterated calls for G-20 nations to do more to support Ukraine and hinder Moscow’s war effort. Russia, which is a member of the G20, refers to its actions in Ukraine as a “special military operation”, and

avoids calling it an invasion or war. Host India is also pressing the meeting to avoid using the word “war” in any communique, G20 officials have told Reuters. India, which holds the current G20 presidency, has kept a largely neutral stance on the war, declining to blame Russia for the war, seeking a diplomatic solution and sharply boosting its purchases of Russian oil. French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said there was no way the group could step back from a joint statement agreed at a G20 summit in Bali, Indonesia, last November, which said “most members strongly condemned the war in Ukraine” but also acknowledged some countries saw the conflict differently. “Either we have the same language or we do not sign on the final communique,” Le Maire told reporters. Such stand-offs have become increasingly common in the G20, a forum created over 20 years ago in response to past economic crises but which has recently been hobbled by differences between Western nations and others including China and Russia.

Nigerians Vote for New President in Tight Election Race



Nearly 10 million new voters registered this year, most of them under 34, representing an essential bloc if they come out to vote.

LAGOS (AFP) – Nigerians voted on Saturday for a successor to President Muhammadu Buhari in a tight race with three frontrunners competing for the first time in the country’s modern history. Nearly 90 million people were eligible to vote, with many Nigerians saying they hoped the new leader of Africa’s most populous democracy would tackle a security crisis, the sluggish economy and widening poverty. For the first time since the end of military rule in 1999, a third serious candidate has emerged to challenge the dominance of Buhari’s ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and main opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). “Nigeria is in a big mess. We need the right leaders,” said Pastor John Fashugba, 76, voting in Lagos. “This election will be a great opportunity for us.” Polling stations were meant to open at 0730 GMT, but election centres or materials arrived late in numerous offices visited by AFP in Lagos, southern Port Harcourt, and the northwest. Buhari, a former army commander, steps down after two terms in office, with many critics saying he failed in his promises to make Nigeria a safer and less corrupt country. Wearing a blue robe, APC’s Bola Tinubu, 70, a former Lagos governor and political kingmaker, voted in his stronghold in the city accompanied by tight security. Known as the “Godfather of Lagos” for his influence, he says “It’s my turn” for the presidency and can count on APC’s structure

and his own political network. He faces a familiar rival -- PDP candidate and former vice president Atiku Abubakar, 76, who is on his sixth bid for the top job and touts his business experience to fix the economy. “This is more credible than the previous elections,” Abubakar said, voting in his hometown in Yola, northeast Adamawa State. But both are old guard figures who have fought off corruption accusations in the past. The emergence of a surprise third candidate appealing to young voters, Labour Party’s Peter Obi, 61, has thrown the race open with his campaign for change. “I want Nigeria to move forward. We’ve been moving backward for years,” said Chibueze Otueh, voting in southeast Anambra State. “We need someone different than these old politicians. We’ve seen their faces for so long.” The success of Saturday’s election will be closely watched after West Africa’s democratic credentials took a knock from coups in Burkina Faso and Mali. Cash and fuel shortages in the run-up to the election have also left many Nigerians angry and struggling more than usual in a country already hit by more than 20 percent inflation. Presidential elections have in the past often been marked by violence, ethnic tensions, vote-buying and clashes between supporters of rival parties. Streets in Lagos and other cities were calm on Saturday as traffic was restricted.

News in Brief

CALIFORNIA (Xinhua) – More than 100,000 homes and businesses across California were left in the dark as a heavy winter storm continued lashing the most populous state in the United States. According to PowerOutage.US, a website that tracks, records and aggregates power outages across the country and updates its data every 10 minutes, about 116,000 California customers were without electricity as of 10.00 am local time Friday. The storm, which first rolled into the state on Thursday with rain, hail and snow, continued to bring unusually heavy snow as well as cold, strong winds, and it will last into weekend, the National Weather Service (NWS) said. The NWS released a blizzard warning for the Ventura County and Los Angeles County mountains from Friday to Saturday, the first blizzard warning for the Southern California mountains since from 1989. The Sierra Avalanche Centre also issued an avalanche warning for parts of the Sierra Nevada mountains from Friday morning until Saturday morning. In total, about 3 million Californians received a winter storm warning. According to social media posts from local agencies, besides of power outages, the weather resulted in multiple road and highway closures after snow and ice accumulated on the surfaces.

NEW DELHI (AFP) – German Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited India on Saturday seeking to deepen business and military ties between the two economies and jumpstart progress on an EU trade deal despite differences over Ukraine. “We want to further strengthen our bilateral relationship with India and our cooperation on global issues, such as mitigating climate change and transforming our economies in a just, green and sustainable way,” Scholz told the Times of India in an interview. “There is huge potential for intensified cooperation, in sectors such as renewables, hydrogen, mobility, pharma, digital economy, and many more.” Scholz told the paper, Siemens, met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi and was due to head to Bengaluru to visit German software firms including SAP. Officials said Scholz would press for progress towards a trade deal between the European Union and India that has long been held up by disagreements on tariffs and access for Indian workers to Europe.

WASHINGTON (AP) – Two Pakistani brothers who were held at the U.S.-controlled Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba have been set free after nearly 20 years in jail without charge. According to the Pentagon, Abdul and Mohammed Ahmed Rabhani operated an al-Qaeda safe house and organized travel and funds for the group’s leaders. Both men were approved for release in 2021, but it is unclear why they remained imprisoned. Both brothers, who have now been repatriated to Pakistan, said that they were tortured by CIA officers before being transferred to Guantanamo. The Guantanamo Bay military camp prison facility, which is based within a U.S. Navy military base, was established by then-President George W. Bush in 2002 to hold foreign terrorism suspects following the 9/11 terror attacks in New York. “The United States appreciates the willingness of the Government of Pakistan and other partners to support ongoing U.S. efforts focused on responsibly reducing the detainee population and ultimately closing the Guantanamo Bay facility,” the Pentagon said in a statement. Pakistan’s security services first detained the brothers who were captured in the city of Karachi in September 2002. After about two years they were transferred to Guantanamo prison after originally being held at a CIA black site known as “the salt pit” outside Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan.

LIMA (Al Jazeera) – Peru’s President Dina Boluarte has ordered the “definitive removal” of the country’s ambassador to Mexico after rebuking Mexico’s President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador for again voicing his support for her overthrown predecessor. The move comes after Lopez Obrador told a news conference that “Mexico will continue to support [Castillo] who was unjustly and illegally removed from office”. Lopez Obrador, who has been one of Castillo’s most fervent supporters along with leftist leaders in Bolivia, Argentina and Colombia, also referred to Boluarte as a “spurious president”. Castillo was impeached and arrested on December 7 last year after seeking to dissolve Congress. He was replaced by then-vice president Boluarte the same day. Announcing the ambassador’s withdrawal in a televised address, Boluarte said “diplomatic relations between Peru and Mexico are formally reduced to the level of charge d’affaires”. She added that Lopez Obrador has “decided to support the coup d’etat carried out by the now former president Pedro Castillo on December 7, 2022”. “I strongly reject the remarks made today by the president of Mexico on Peru’s internal affairs and his repeated unacceptably questioning of the constitutional and democratic origins of my government,” she said. Peru had already expelled the Mexican ambassador to the country at the end of December, after Mexico granted political asylum to Castillo’s wife and two sons.

NAIROBI, Kenya (AFP) – The African Union has condemned remarks by Tunisia’s president directed at migrants in his country from elsewhere on the continent and warned against “racialized hate speech” that could bring harm. President Kais Saied sparked an outcry this week after saying “hordes” of sub-Saharan African migrants were causing crime and posed a demographic threat in Tunisia. Saied later sought to reassure “legal” migrants they were welcome but doubled down on claims that those illegally in Tunisia were changing the composition of the country. In a statement, the AU Commission said it had called Tunisia’s representative for an urgent meeting to register “deep shock and concern at the form and substance” of the remarks on behalf of the continent-wide bloc. “The Chairperson of the African Union Commission H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat strongly condemns the shocking statement issued by Tunisian authorities targeting fellow Africans which go against the letter and the spirit of our Organization and founding principles,” read the statement.

LONDON (The Telegraph) – UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has been accused of a “cynical” plan to “abuse” the King’s position by using him to promote the Government’s Brexit deal with the EU on Northern Ireland. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) said that an aborted plan to get the monarch to meet Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, reflected either “naivety or desperation”. It was understood that Downing Street had planned for the King to meet Mrs Von der Leyen on Saturday as part of the choreography to unveil a deal struck with the EU on changes to the Northern Ireland Protocol. It was also understood that the pair were to meet at Windsor Castle and that the deal could even have been called the Windsor Agreement. However, the meeting did not go ahead amid concerns about dragging the monarch into political matters. Sammy Wilson, the DUP’s Brexit spokesman in the House of Commons, said that his party was “totally amazed” when it got wind of the planned meeting.