

China to Pelosi: Visit Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria to Apologize for U.S. Crimes



At least 40 civilians attending a wedding were killed by U.S. forces in Afghanistan in September 25, 2019.

BEIJING (Dispatches) – Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at a regular briefing on Friday that U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi should pay visits to Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya to apologize for the killings of civilians by U.S. troops there.

“If Pelosi cares so much about democracy and human rights, she’d better visit Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya where she could express repentance for the killings of hundreds of thousands of civilians by the U.S. military. She could also promise those countries that similar ferocities that resulted from a U.S. violation of the UN Charter and international law norms will never ever be repeated,” the Chinese diplomat said.

Wang Wenbin criticized Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan as a “major political provocation” in violation of the one-China principle and the provisions of three joint Chinese-U.S. communiques. “Her visit had nothing to do with democracy, that was a political trick

that ran counter to the will of 1.4. billion Chinese people, including our compatriots in Taiwan. The visit also challenged the one-China principle which is widely recognized by the international community,” he remarked.

Tensions escalated in the Taiwan Strait and across the Asia Pacific region following Pelosi’s visit to Taipei on August 2-3, which sparked fierce criticism from the Chinese mainland. Beijing had repeatedly warned Washington that it would retaliate if Pelosi, the third highest-ranking official in the U.S. government, made good on her plans to visit.

The Chinese military launched drills with firings of missiles in six areas around Taiwan on August 4. The drills were supposed to last till August 7, but the Chinese Defense Ministry said those had been extended for an indefinite period.

On August 10, the spokesperson for the PLA’s Eastern Theater Command said that all tasks had been successfully completed

in the recent drills, but he did not say if those had been wrapped up though.

The Chinese government blames the escalation of tensions in the Taiwan Strait and across the Asia Pacific region on U.S. policy. Chinese President Xi Jinping has said that America’s foreign policy towards China in recent years caused Beijing “serious difficulties” in their mutual relations, with clashes on issues like trade, pandemics, and regional interference.

Xi said that despite all difficulties created by the U.S., Beijing will not allow a foreign force to bully and oppress it, warning that anyone who tries to do so will “be badly battered by the Chinese nation’s perseverance.”

Xi said the “era of China being bullied is gone forever,” as he stood at the Gate of Heavenly Peace above a portrait of Mao Zedong, adding that, “No one should underestimate the Chinese nation’s will and power to fight against foreign power.”

“We will not accept sanctimonious preaching from those who feel they have the right to lecture us,” he said. “We have never bullied, oppressed, or subjugated the people of any other country, and we never will.”

“By the same token, we will never allow anyone to bully, oppress, or subjugate [China]. Anyone who tries will find them on a collision course with a steel wall forged by 1.4 billion people.”

Taiwan has been governed by its local administration since 1949 when the Kuomintang’s remaining forces headed by Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975) were defeated in the Chinese Civil War and took refuge on the island. Taiwan has preserved the flag and several other symbols of the Republic of China that had existed before the Communists took over the mainland. Beijing views the island as one of its provinces.

U.S., Indonesia, Australia Hold Live-Fire Drill Amid China Tensions



U.S. and Indonesian soldiers take their positions during joint military exercises in Baturaja, South Sumatra, Indonesia, Friday Aug. 12, 2022.

LONDON (Al-Jazeera) - Soldiers from the U.S., Indonesia and Australia joined a live-fire drill on Friday, part of annual joint combat exercises on Sumatra island amid growing Chinese maritime activity in the Indo-Pacific region.

A total of more than 5,000 personnel from the U.S., Indonesia,

Australia, Japan and Singapore are participating in this year’s Super Garuda Shield exercises, making them the largest since they began in 2009.

The expanded drills are seen by China as a threat. Chinese state media have accused the U.S. of building an Indo-Pacific alliance similar to NATO to limit China’s growing

military and diplomatic influence in the region.

The United Kingdom, Canada, France, India, Malaysia, South Korea, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and East Timor also sent observers to the exercises, which began early this month.

The U.S. Indo-Pacific commander, Adm. John C. Aquilino, said the 14 nations involved in the training are signaling their stronger ties.

Indonesia and China enjoy generally positive ties, but Jakarta has expressed concern about what it alleges as Chinese encroachment in its exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea.

Despite its official position as a non-claimant state in the contested South China Sea, Indonesia has been “dragged along” in the territorial disputes.

Indonesia sees the current exercises with the U.S. as a deterrent in defense of the Natuna Islands, while for Washington, the drills are part of efforts to forge a united front against.

Wildfires Burn, Farmers Struggle as Another Heatwave Bakes Europe

HOSTENS, France (Reuters) - European nations sent firefighting teams to help France tackle a “monster” wildfire on Thursday, while forest blazes also raged in Spain and Portugal and the head of the European Space Agency urged immediate action to combat climate change.

More than 1,000 firefighters, backed by water-bombing planes, battled for a third day a fire that has forced thousands from their homes and scorched thousands of hectares of forest in France’s southwestern Gironde region.

With a dangerous cocktail of blistering temperatures, tinder-box conditions and wind fanning the flames, emergency services were struggling to bring the fire under control.

“It’s an ogre, a monster,” said Gregory Allione from the French firefighters body FNSPF said.

Heatwaves, floods and crumbling glaciers in recent weeks have heightened concerns over climate change and the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather across the globe.

The head of the European Space Agency, Josef Aschbacher, said rising land temperatures and shrinking rivers as measured from space left no doubt about the toll on agriculture and other industries from climate change.

ESA’s Copernicus Sentinel-3 satellite series has measured “extreme” land surface temperatures of more than 45C in Britain, 50C in France and 60C in Spain in recent weeks.

“It’s pretty bad. We have seen extremes that have not been observed before,” Aschbacher told Reuters.

In Romania, where record temperatures and drought have drained rivers of water, Greenpeace activists protested on the parched banks of the Danube to draw attention to global warming and urge the government to lower emissions.

With successive heatwaves baking Europe this summer, searing temperatures and unprecedented droughts, renewed focus has been placed on climate change risks to farming, industry and livelihoods.

Severe drought is set to slash the European Union’s maize harvest by 15 percent, dropping it to a 15-year a low, just as Europeans contend with higher food prices as a result of lower-than-normal grain exports from Russia and Ukraine.

Swiss army helicopters have been drafted in to airlift water to thirsty cows, pigs and goats sweltering under a fierce sun in the country’s Alpine meadows.

In France, suffering its harshest drought on record, trucks are delivering water to dozens of villages where taps have run dry, nuclear power stations have received waivers to keep pumping hot discharge water into river, and farmers warn a fodder shortfall may lead to milk shortages.

In Germany, scant rainfall this summer has drained the water levels of the Rhine, the country’s commercial artery, hampering shipping and pushing freight costs.

However, as Europe contends with another heatwave, one group of workers has little choice but to sweat it out: gig-economy food couriers who often fall between the cracks of labor regulations.

After the mayor of Palermo on the island of Sicily in July ordered horses carrying tourists be given at least 10 liters of water per day, bicycle courier Gaetano Russo found a suitably similar treatment.

In Portugal, more than 1,500 firefighters spent a sixth day fighting a wildfire in the central Covilha region that has burned 10,500 hectares, including parts of the Serra da Estrela national park.

In Spain, electrical storms triggered new wildfires and hundreds of people were evacuated from the path of one blaze in the province of Caceres.

EU Admits to ‘Double Standards’ Towards Ukraine, Palestine



EU’s foreign-policy chief Josep Borrell

MADRID (Dispatches) - The European Union’s foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has admitted that the 27-nation bloc applies double standards when it comes to the wars in Ukraine and Zionist-occupied Palestine but says double standards permeate international relations anyway.

Borrell made the remarks during an interview with El Pais newspaper released on Thursday, when asked why Brussels is so much more willing to support the people of Ukraine than the people of Gaza.

“We are often criticized for double standards. But international politics is to a large degree about applying double standards. We do not use the same criteria for all problems,” he said.

Borrell also suggested that the United States was to blame for a lack of resolution to what he called the Middle East conflict.

“There is no solution to the Middle East conflict without a very strong commitment on the part of the U.S.,” he said, adding that many attempts have been made but at the moment there appears to be no path forwards.

In hypocritical remarks earlier in the interview, Borrell had said that supporting Kiev against Moscow’s military attacks was a “moral imperative” for Western nations.

“Resolving the situation with those peo-

ple trapped in an open-air prison, which Gaza is, is not in the hands of the EU,” the diplomat said. He called the miserable conditions of life in Gaza “scandalous” and “a shame,” but would not be drawn on the origins of the humanitarian crisis.

The United States has always been one of the main supporters of the Israeli regime and its violence against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Critics believe both the U.S. and major European powers apply double standards towards different nations, including the people of Ukraine and Palestine.

Last Friday, the Zionists launched a devastating military onslaught against the besieged Gaza Strip, killing dozens of civilians, including at least 17 children, and injuring hundreds more during airstrikes that lasted for three consecutive days.

The occupying regime in Tel Aviv brought the entire enclave under land, aerial, and naval blockade in June 2007.

As many as 1.3 million out of the 2.1 million Palestinians in Gaza (62 percent) require food assistance as well, according to the United Nations’ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Human rights activists have slammed the international community’s failure to take an action aimed at ending Zionist violations against the besieged territory, emphasizing that “Gazans’ silence will not last forever.”

Somaliland Opposition Protest Turns Deadly Amid Poll Delay Fears



Supporters hold banners of candidates during a rally of the opposition Waddani Party

PARIS (Al-Jazeera) - Clashes between security forces and protesters in the Somaliland region over an alleged attempt to delay the presidential elections have turned deadly, according to a regional leader and a senior police official in Somalia’s breakout region.

At least five people have been killed and 100 more injured, Muse Bihi Abdi, the president of Somaliland said in a Facebook post late on Thursday.

Abdi Hassan Mire, the deputy commander of the Somaliland police, said dozens of security personnel were injured during the clashes with protesters who were armed with knives, catapults and clubs. Some carried weapons and fired bullets, he said.

Property and vehicles were also destroyed, according to police.

The president’s current term ends in November but the opposition suspects Abdi wants to delay that election and accuse him of seeking an extension of his term through “Guurti”, a council of elders that acts as the de facto parliament in Somaliland.

Abdi, the president, did not say whether those killed were civilians or security personnel.

“We shall not allow chaos and demonstration in any town or in any village. They will be confronted. Unauthorised violent demonstration to destroy the nation will not be accepted.”

At least 100 people suspected of involvement in the clashes were arrested and will be charged soon, Ibrahim Abdi Haji, the head of operations in Somaliland Police,

told the Reuters news agency.

Hundreds of people took to the streets in the capital Hargeisa and the cities of Burao and Erigavo after negotiations between the government and opposition parties broke down, with the latter accusing the authorities of seeking to delay the election.

Protesters carried placards saying “Hold the election on 13th November 2022” and chanted anti-government slogans.

In a news conference late on Thursday, Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi, the leader of the main opposition Waddani party, accused the government of committing “atrocities” against the protesters.

“This was a peaceful demonstration and we have led people who carried only placards and whistles, but the government has committed violations by using excessive power, live bullets, tear gas,” he said at the press conference in Hargeisa.

“Peace can only prevail in Somaliland with the provision of fair and free elections, let those who defend democracy prevail.”

Abdirahman Cirro, a presidential hopeful and former head of Waddani, put the death toll at six, according to the Reuters news agency.

“The demos will continue and it is just the beginning until we get full democratic space and freedom from dictatorship and bad leadership,” he said.

One protest organiser, Ahmed Ismail, told the AFP news agency that three people including a woman were killed in Hargeisa, and 34 others were admitted to hospital.

News in Brief

BERLIN (Reuters) - Germany suspended its military reconnaissance mission in Mali after local authorities again withheld a flight clearance, a spokesperson for the defense ministry in Berlin said on Friday. Berlin has deployed some 1,000 troops to Mali, most of them near the northern town of Gao where their main task is to gather reconnaissance for the U.N. peacekeeping mission MINUSMA. MINUSMA - the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali - was established in 2013 to support foreign and local troops battling terrorist militants, but in recent months there have been repeated instances of tensions between the Malian authorities and the mission.

SEOUL (Al-Jazeera) - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has declared “victory” in his country’s battle against COVID-19 and ordered pandemic restrictions, imposed in May, to be lifted. Presiding over a meeting with health workers and scientists, Kim announced a “victory ... in the war against the malignant pandemic disease,” state news agency KCNA reported. His powerful sister Kim Yo Jong also spoke at the Pyongyang meeting, blaming the outbreak on anti-Pyongyang leaflets flown across the border by activists from South Korea. “We must counter it toughly,” she said. “We have already considered various counteraction plans, but our countermeasure must be a deadly retaliatory one.”

BEIJING (Reuters) - China’s foreign ministry said on Friday it had imposed sanctions on Lithuanian Deputy Transport and Communications Minister Agne Vaitukeviciute for visiting Taiwan, the latest development in a simmering diplomatic row with the European Union country. The foreign ministry said Beijing would also suspend engagement with Vaitukeviciute’s ministry and cooperation on transportation with Lithuania, a small Baltic republic.

LUCKNOW, India (Reuters) - An overloaded boat carrying dozens of passengers capsized in northern India, killing three people, including one child, while another 17 were missing and feared dead, a senior police official in Uttar Pradesh state said on Friday. Rescue workers were still scouring the rain-swollen waters of the Yamuna river for survivors almost 24 hours after the calamity struck on Thursday, but prospects of finding anyone else alive were bleak, officials said.

WARSAW (Reuters) - Tonnes of dead fish have been hauled out of the River Oder, which flows along part of Poland’s border with Germany, and officials warned people not to enter the water while the Polish government pledged to investigate possible contamination. Volunteers and anglers have removed at least 10 tonnes of dead fish from the 200-kilometer stretch of the river north of Olawa in southwest Poland, Przemyslaw Dacia, head of State Water Holding, said on Thursday. Dacia, whose agency manages Polish national waters, called the situation a gigantic ecological catastrophe. Environmental authorities said they notified prosecutors about potential contamination of the country’s second longest river. Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki vowed to punish those responsible.

NEY YORK (Reuters) - The United Nations’ humanitarian projects face a record funding gap this year, with only a third of the required \$48.7bn secured so far as global needs outpace pledges, according to the world body’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The money is needed to help about 204 million people worldwide as armed conflict and climate change emerge as key drivers of “mega crises” that threaten the livelihoods of whole communities. So far, \$15.2bn has been collected by the midyear mark, as a record, Laerke said, in a year of soaring humanitarian needs. According to OCHA’s website, the United States is the top donor, contributing just a little more than \$8bn, while the World Food Program was the largest recipient.