

U.S., Canadian Warships Sail Through Taiwan Strait



A U.S. navy warship and a Canadian frigate have carried out a provocative transit through the Taiwan Strait, prompting Chinese condemnation.

BEIJING (Dispatches) - The Chinese air force and navy tracked U.S. and Canadian warships as they transited through the Taiwan Strait, the Eastern Theatre Command of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) said on Wednesday.

The command said that it monitored the passage of the USS Higgins, an Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer, and the Canadian navy's Halifax-class frigate HMCS Vancouver in the Taiwan Strait, South China Morning Post reported.

Senior Colonel Shi Yi, spokesperson for the Eastern Theatre Command, "denounced the provocative move", according to the Chinese military.

"The troops of the PLA Eastern Theatre Command are on high alert at all times to resolutely counter any threat and provocation and safeguard China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity," the command said in a statement.

The U.S. Navy 7th Fleet said in a statement that the transit was routine and conducted beyond "the territorial sea of any coastal state".

The Canadian defense department said the transit was conducted "in full accordance with international law" as part of operations in the Indo-Pacific region aimed at pressuring North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons.

Canadian Defense Minister Anita

Anand said the mission showed the country's commitment to a "free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific" region.

The Taiwanese Defense Ministry also issued a statement confirming the U.S. and Canadian warships travelled from South to North through the Taiwan Strait on Tuesday. The ministry added the situation was "normal" as it monitored the waters and airspace around Taiwan during the transit.

It was the first American military operation in the Taiwan Strait since U.S. President Joe Biden said in a weekend interview with CBS' 60 Minutes that the United States would defend Taiwan in the event of an attack by the People's Liberation Army. The White House later said US policy toward Taiwan was unchanged.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Tuesday warned that the United States' pro-Taiwan approach might have a "subversive impact" on US-China relations during a meeting with former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

He also said Beijing may use its Anti-Secession Law to seek reunification with Taiwan. The 2005 legal framework allows Beijing to use non-peaceful means to guard against the island's possible separation from

mainland China.

Tensions in the Taiwan Strait have escalated since US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August. Beijing retaliated by conducting military drills over several days in six locations, nearly encircling the island.

At the beginning of this month, the Chinese military also sent five warships and four aircraft - including two J-10 fighter jets - to the strait after the US State Department approved a US\$1.1 billion arms sale to Taiwan.

Before Tuesday's operation, the US military's last transit through the Taiwan Strait was on August 29, when it sent two Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruisers, the USS Antietam and the USS Chancellorsville.

'U.S. Should Stop Being World's Largest Maker of War'

On Tuesday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said the U.S. should stop being the world's biggest maker of war.

He made the remarks in response to U.S. launching 251 military interventions since 1991, and 469 since 1798 according to U.S. journalist Benjamin Norton's article citing data from the Congressional Research Service, a U.S. government institution that compiles information on behalf of Congress, CGTN reported.

The U.S. side has repeatedly claimed to respect and uphold the "rules-based international system", but the data released by the U.S. Congress fully reflects the belligerent nature and hegemonic undertones of "U.S. rules", Wang said.

The U.S. was not at war for only 16 years of its 240-plus years of history, he noted, adding that after the Cold War, the U.S. launched military operations seven times more frequently than before.

He also noted that countries targeted by the U.S. military include the vast majority of the nations on earth, including almost every single county in Latin America and the Caribbean and most of the African continent.

Thousands Rally in Belgium to Protest High Energy Prices



Protestors hold banners and wave flags during a demonstration in the center of Brussels, Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2022.

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Thousands of people gathered on Wednesday in the Belgian capital Brussels for "a national day of action" to protest against skyrocketing electricity, natural gas and food prices and draw attention to the sharp hike in the cost of living.

Trade unions and city police said that around 10,000 took part. People from across the country gathered, marching behind banners reading "Life is much too expensive, we want solutions now," and "Everything is going up except our wages," or carrying placards marked "Freeze prices, not people." City traffic and public transportation was disrupted.

A Belgian media poll this week showed that 64% of people questioned are concerned that they might not be able to afford their electricity and gas bills, which have more than doubled over the last year, while 80% of respondents said they are already trying to make energy and water savings.

"When we go grocery shopping, what's in the cart costs now 20, 30 euros more, or even more depending on the shop you go to. We are reaching a point where our wallets can't keep up," said Pascal Kraeos, a protester from Brussels.

Last month, Prime Minister Alexander de Croo warned that "the next five to 10 winters will be difficult" because of high electricity and natural gas prices fueled by Russia-Ukraine war.

The European Union's 27 member countries have agreed to cut gas usage by 15%

on average this winter, and aim in particular to reduce demand during peak hours. EU energy ministers are meeting next week to discuss the crisis.

UK Bus Drivers Plan Strikes

And also, thousands of bus drivers in London and the neighboring county of Kent plan to strike in a dispute over pay, the Unite union said, threatening further disruption to a transport system already facing walkouts by railway workers early next month.

More than 2,000 drivers at bus operator Arriva will strike from Oct. 4 in London, Unite said on Wednesday, while 600 Kent-based staff employed by the same company will walk out on Sept. 30.

The plans come after railway workers from several rail operators across the country said they would strike in early October, when the governing Conservative Party's annual conference is due to take place in Birmingham.

Unite said the strike by London bus drivers would run continuously until the dispute was resolved.

A worsening cost-of-living crisis in Britain has prompted workers in industries from railways and airlines to barristers and even trade union staff to either threaten or undertake strike action in disputes over pay and conditions.

In recent days a number of unions have set out fresh dates for strikes that were postponed.

French Leftwing Parties Face Crisis Over Violence Against Women

PARIS (AFP) - Two key parties in France's left-wing alliance were Wednesday facing crises after senior figures were accused of violence against women, with a Greens party chief stepping back from his role days after a colleague from hard-left France Unbowed.

Julien Bayou was "suspended from his role" as co-president of the Greens' bloc in the National Assembly (lower house), the party said late Tuesday, after he was accused of psychologically abusing an ex-partner.

One of the most prominent MPs of France Unbowed (LFI) -- allied with the Greens in a broad left alliance against President Emmanuel Macron -- Adrien Quatennens on Sunday admitted to slapping his wife.

He stepped down from a senior role as party coordinator.

Party leader and three-time presidential candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon leapt to Quatennens' defence on Twitter, blasting

"police ill-will, media voyeurism and the social networks" while hailing his protégé's "dignity" and "courage".

It was not until hours later that Melenchon posted another message gesturing towards Quatennens' wife -- too late for many critics.

Macron's Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne said Tuesday that it was "extremely shocking to have someone playing down domestic violence".

A report about Bayou was submitted to the ecologists' panel in July, prompting allegations the probe had moved too slowly.

"These are volunteers working on cases that are sensitive by definition. Calm and time are needed to gather testimony and take the necessary decisions," said Marine Tondelier, expected to stand soon for leadership of the Greens.

Allegations that sexual harassment and even assault are rife in French politics stretch well beyond the left.

European Spyware Investigators Criticize Israel, Poland

WARSAW, Poland (AP) - European Parliament members investigating the use of surveillance spyware by European Union governments sharply criticized Israel on Wednesday for a lack of transparency in allowing the sale of powerful Israeli spyware to European governments that have used it against critics.

The European lawmakers also condemned the Polish government for refusing to meet with them during a fact-finding visit to Warsaw that ended Wednesday.

"It is regrettable and we condemn the fact that the Polish authorities did not want to cooperate with our investigation committee," Jeroen Lenaers, the head of the delegation, said at a news conference in Warsaw.

"We think it also is a telling sign of the complete lack of importance this government attaches to checks and balances, to democratic scrutiny and to dialog with elected representatives."

The committee is investigating the use by governments of Israel's Pegasus spyware and other invasive surveillance tools, viewing such technology as a threat to democracy in the 27-nation bloc.

Pegasus was developed by Israel's NSO Group and is designed to breach mobile phones and extract vast amounts of information from them, including text messages, passwords, locations and microphone and camera recordings. The company markets the technology as a tool to target criminals but many cases have been discovered worldwide of governments using it against dissidents, journalists and political opponents.



MINNEAPOLIS (AP) - United States authorities charged 48 people in Minnesota with conspiracy and other counts in what they said was the largest pandemic-related fraud scheme yet, stealing \$250 million from a federal program that provides meals to low-income children. Federal prosecutors say the defendants created companies that claimed to be offering food to tens of thousands of children across Minnesota, then sought reimbursement for those meals through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's food nutrition programs. Prosecutors say few meals were actually served, and the defendants used the money to buy luxury cars, property and jewelry.

ROME (Reuters) - Italy's right-wing bloc will easily agree on major policy priorities despite recent disagreements if it wins this weekend's national election, the alliance's de facto leader, Giorgia Meloni, said. Meloni's party, Brothers of Italy, is widely expected to top the polls on Sunday, making her the frontrunner to be Italy's next prime minister. Opponents say her conservative alliance, which also includes Matteo Salvini's League and Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia, will struggle to stay united after divisions emerged during campaigning over energy and foreign policy.

N'DJAMENA (Reuters) - At least 19 people were killed in a flare-up of fighting between nomadic herders and sedentary farmers in south Chad last week, authorities said. Deadly inter-communal conflicts are relatively frequent in Chad, mainly between herders and local farmers who accuse them of grazing animals on their farmland. Chad, a regional power and ally of the West against Islamist militants in West Africa, has been in turmoil since ex-president Idriss Deby was killed on the frontline against rebels in the north last year.

CAYEY, Puerto Rico (AP) - Hurricane Fiona strengthened into a Category 4 storm Wednesday after devastating Puerto Rico, then lashing the Dominican Republic and the Turks and Caicos Islands. It was forecast to squeeze past Bermuda later this week. The storm has been blamed for directly causing at least four deaths in its march through the Caribbean, where winds and torrential rain in Puerto Rico left a majority of people on the U.S. territory without power or running water. Hundreds of thousands of people scraped mud out of their homes following what authorities described as "historic" flooding.

TOKYO (AP) - A man set himself on fire near the Japanese prime minister's office in Tokyo on Wednesday in an apparent protest against the state funeral planned next week for former leader Shinzo Abe, officials and media reports said. The man, believed to be in his 70s, sustained burns on large parts of his body but was conscious and told police that he set himself on fire after pouring oil over himself, Kyodo News agency reported. A note was found with him that said, "Personally, I am absolutely against" Abe's funeral, Kyodo reported.

UN Chief Calls for Solidarity to Tackle Global Challenges

UNITED NATIONS (Reuters) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said that the world is in big trouble and needs collective action across the board.

Our world is in big trouble. Divides are growing deeper. Inequalities are growing wider. And challenges are spreading farther," Guterres said while addressing the UN General Assembly before the opening of the General Debate.

"We need action across the board," he said.

At the same time, he warned that the international community is gridlocked in colossal global dysfunction, saying it is "not ready or willing to tackle the big dramatic challenges of our age."

He said crises like the conflict in Ukraine, climate emergency and biodiversity loss, and the dire financial situation of developing countries threaten the very future of humanity and the fate of the planet.

Progress on all these issues and more is being held hostage to geopolitical tensions, he added.

"Geopolitical divides are undermining the work of the Security Council, undermining international law, undermining trust and people's faith in democratic institutions, undermining all forms of international cooperation."

"We cannot go on like this," he said.

Even the various groupings set up outside the multilateral system by some members of the international community have fallen into the trap of geopolitical divides, like the Group of 20 (G20), he said.

At the same time, conflicts and humanitarian crises are spreading. The funding gap for the UN Global Humanitarian Appeal stands at \$32 billion, the widest ever, he said.

Upheaval abounds - in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (front) speaks during the opening of the General Debate of the 77th session of the UN General Assembly at the UN headquarters in New York, Sept 20, 2022.

the Congo, the Horn of Africa, Haiti, Libya, Iraq, Palestine, Myanmar, the Sahel, Syria. The list goes on, he noted.

Meanwhile, nuclear saber-rattling and threats to the safety of nuclear plants are adding to global instability. Last month's review conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty failed to reach consensus and a nuclear deal with Iran remains elusive, he added.

"We need much more concerted action everywhere anchored in respect for international law and the protection of human rights. In a splintering world, we need to create mechanisms of dialogue and mediation to heal divides," said Guterres. "We are committed to make the most of every diplomatic tool for the pacific settlement of disputes, as set out in the United Nations Charter: negotiation, inquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and judicial settlement."

The climate crisis is the defining issue of our time. It must be the first priority of every government and multilateral organization. And yet climate action is being put on the back burner,

despite overwhelming public support around the world, he lamented.

Global greenhouse gas emissions need to be slashed by 45 percent by 2030 to have any hope of reaching net-zero emissions by 2050. And yet emissions are going up at record levels - on course to a 14 percent increase this decade, he noted.

He asked for a transition to renewable energy, which generates three times more jobs, is already cheaper than fossil fuels and is the pathway to energy security, stable prices and new industries.

Some 94 countries, home to 1.6 billion people - many in Africa - face a perfect storm: economic and social fallout from the pandemic, soaring food and energy prices, crushing debt burdens, spiraling inflation, and a lack of access to finance. These cascading crises are feeding on each other, compounding inequalities, creating devastating hardship, delaying the energy transition, and threatening a global financial meltdown, he said.

Guterres called for concerted action to help developing countries, which are getting hit from all sides.