

G7 Says Wants 'Stable, Constructive' Relations With China



President of the European Council Charles Michel, Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, France's President Emmanuel Macron, Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, U.S. President Joe Biden, Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen participate in a family photo with G7 leaders before their working lunch meeting on economic security during the G7 summit, at the Grand Prince Hotel in Hiroshima, Japan, May 20, 2023.

HIROSHIMA (AFP/AP) – G7 leaders on Saturday said the bloc also wanted “constructive and stable relations” with Beijing but warned China over its “militarization activities” in the Asia-Pacific region.

In a final communiqué issued at a summit in Hiroshima, the nations sought to keep the door open to co-operation and avoid further inflaming tensions between the world’s second largest economy and the grouping of

major Western powers plus Japan.

“We stand prepared to build constructive and stable relations with China, recognizing the importance of engaging candidly with and expressing our concerns directly to China,” the group said. “Our policy approaches are not designed to harm China nor do we seek to thwart China’s economic progress and development,” the statement continued, adding that the G7 countries are not “decoupling

or turning inwards”.

Still, the language made clear the bloc’s wide-ranging concerns about Beijing’s willingness to deploy trade measures in diplomatic disputes and G7 determination to untangle sensitive supply chains from Chinese influence. “Economic resilience requires de-risking and diversifying,” the communiqué said, pledging to “reduce excessive dependencies in our critical supply chains”.

China expressed “strong dissatisfaction” with a communiqué issued by G7 leaders that took aim at Beijing on issues including the South China Sea, human rights and alleged interference in their democracies.

While marking the seventh anniversary of her governance amid high tensions with China, Taiwan’s President Tsai Ing-wen vowed to “maintain the status quo of peace and stability” across the Taiwan Strait.

“War is not an option,” Tsai said in a speech in the presidential office on Saturday, vowing to defend her country’s freedom and democracy.

She also accused China of pressuring Taiwan, saying Taiwan will not “provoke and will not bow to Chinese pressure.”

“Neither side can unilaterally change the status quo with non-peaceful means,” she said.

“Maintaining the status quo of peace and stability is the consensus for both the world and Taiwan,” she added.

Report: FBI Routinely Abused Americans' Private Communications

WASHINGTON (Daily Mail) – FBI officials misused key surveillance tool when searching for Americans involved in the January 6 Capitol insurrection and the George Floyd protests of 2020, according to a new court document which outlines the latest in a string of black marks against the agency.



Agents from the FBI and other law enforcement agencies work at a 24-hour operations center at FBI headquarters in the Chelsea section of New York.

The violations were first outlined in a secret court order from April 2022 by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court. The Office of the Director of the National Intelligence (ODNI) released a redacted version of the report Friday, which found the FBI did not follow its own standards when using Section 702 to conduct warrantless searches.

Section 702 under Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) allows U.S. federal intelligence agencies to conduct targeted searches of foreigners, but sometimes Americans are improperly searched in the process.

The report details how the FBI used Section 702 to “query” - or search - names of individuals who were suspected of being on the Capitol grounds during the January 6, 2021 riot, Black Lives Matters protestors, victims of crime and their families and donors to one congressional campaign.

Due to clear violations of standard procedures on FIA, FBI agents then obtained information on Americans despite it not having any “analytical, investigative or evidentiary purpose”.

The report follows damning conclusions in Special Counsel John Durham’s final report published on Monday - including the dismantling

of the Steele dossier and “salacious” claims against former President Donald Trump. He concluded the FBI did not have any “factual evidence” to investigate Trump-Russia collusion.

The report states 13 people connected to January 6 were inappropriately queried in order to determine if they had “foreign ties”.

In addition, over 130 individuals were searched in the database who were linked to the social unrest and riots conducted by Black Lives Matter activists in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd in 2020.

The FISA search was conducted to gain information on whether they were connected to any counterterrorism plots - which DOJ wrote in the report was “reasonable”, but the high level of redactions don’t allow for a fuller explanation.

There was also a “batched inquiry” of over 19,000 donors to a congress-

sional campaign, which was unnamed.

The FBI analyst who conducted the search said the campaign was a possible target of foreign influence.

However, the Department of Justice said there were only “eight identifiers” used in the search in total that “had sufficient ties to foreign influence activities to comply with the querying standard”.

Additionally, FBI FISA searches were conducted on crime victims, including “individuals listed in police homicide reports, including victims, next-of-kin, witnesses, and suspects”.

DOJ said these queries were inappropriate because there was “no reasonable basis” to expect the individuals would be linked to foreign intelligence through those searches.

In total, the FBI misused Section 702 over 278,000 times - according to the document.

Tens of Thousands Gather in Belgrade to Protest Over Mass Shootings

BELGRADE (Reuters) – Tens of thousands have marched through Belgrade in an anti-government protest following two mass shootings that killed 18 people, blaming the deaths on a culture of violence that critics say authorities have allowed to fester unchecked.

On May 3 a teenage boy killed nine pupils and a security guard in the first school mass shooting in Serbia, and a day later a 21-year-old man killed eight outside Belgrade.

Opposition parties, which organized the demonstration, say the government led by President Aleksandar Vucic’s Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) has failed to rein in media that have promoted violence and to act against criminal elements in society.

Recent Serbian reality TV shows have featured convicted criminals including murderers and shown men beating up women.

Protesters called on Vucic, Interior Minister Bratislav Gasic and the head of Serbia’s security agency to resign.

“I came here to protest against living in this country the way it is now, against violence which is visible everywhere in public speech, in media, against this evil we are living in and against the way this country is being led,” said a university professor who gave her name as Vera.

“This number of people makes me optimistic.”

Reuters estimated the protest, the third of its kind this month, drew a crowd in the tens of thousands.

The government denies the opposition parties’ allegations and accuses them of organising the protests for political gain.

Gasic on Friday admitted in parliament that several criminal complaints had been filed against the 21-year-old shooter but were never processed.

In a counter-rally in Pancevo, a town outside Belgrade, Vucic accused the opposition of trying to use the mass shootings for self promotion. “Serbia is fed up with your revolutions,” he said.

“As of now, our defenders, control certain industrial and infrastructure facilities in this area.”

Serhiy Cherevatyi, spokesman for Ukraine’s eastern command, told The Associated Press that Prigozhin’s claim “is not true. Our units are fighting in Bakhmut.”

Fighting has raged around Bakhmut for more than 200 days.

On May 19, the Russian Defense Ministry said that Ukraine lost up to 130 military and mercenaries in the Donetsk direction, and over 70 soldiers in the Artemovsk direction in the past 24 hours.

The Russian Defense Ministry said on May 5 that a bridge near Chasov Yar, which the Ukrainian military had used in attempts to supply soldiers in Artemovsk with ammunition and deploy additional troops, has been destroyed.

Artemovsk is north of the large city of Gorlovka. The city is an important transport hub with many crossroads for Donbass and served as a vital center for supplying Ukrainian troops stationed in the region at the beginning of the military operation launched by Russia in Ukraine over a year ago.

Air Strikes Hit Khartoum's Outskirts as Sudan War Enters Sixth Week



Smoke rises above buildings after an aerial bombardment, during clashes between the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces and the army in Khartoum North, Sudan, May 19, 2023.

CAIRO (Reuters) – Air strikes hit outer areas of the Sudanese capital Khartoum overnight and on Saturday morning, as fighting that has trapped civilians and displaced more than a million entered its sixth week.

The fighting between Sudan’s army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has led to a collapse in law and order with looting that both sides blame the other for. Stocks of food, cash, and essentials are rapidly dwindling.

Air strikes were reported by eyewitnesses in southern Omdurman and northern Bahri, the two cities that lie across the Nile from Khartoum, forming Sudan’s “triple capital”. Some of the strikes took place near the state broadcaster in Omdurman, the eyewitnesses said.

“We faced heavy artillery fire early this morning, the whole house was shaking,” Sanaa Hassan, a 33-year-old living in the al-Salha neighborhood of Omdurman, told Reuters by phone.

“It was terrifying, everyone was lying under their beds. What’s happening is a nightmare,” she said.

The RSF is embedded in residential districts, drawing almost continual air strikes by the regular armed forces.

Eyewitnesses in Khartoum said that the situation was relatively calm, although sporadic gunshots could be heard.

The conflict, which began on April 15, has displaced almost 1.1 million people internally and into neighboring countries. Some 705 people have been killed and at least 5,287 injured, according

to the World Health Organization.

Talks in the Saudi city of Jeddah have not been fruitful, and the two warring sides have accused each other of violating multiple cease-fire agreements.

In recent days ground fighting has flared once again in the Darfur region, in the cities of Nyala and Zalenjei.

Both sides blamed each other in statements late on Friday for sparking the fighting in Nyala, one of the country’s largest cities, which had for weeks been relatively calm due to a locally-brokered truce.

A local activist told Reuters there were sporadic gun clashes near the city’s main market close to army headquarters on Saturday morning. Almost 30 people have died in the two previous days of fighting, according to activists.

The war broke out in Khartoum after disputes over plans for the RSF to be integrated into the army and over the future chain of command under an internationally backed deal to shift Sudan towards democracy following decades of conflict-ridden autocracy.

On Friday, army leader General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan removed RSF chief Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo as his deputy on the ruling council they lead. He replaced him with former rebel leader Malik Agar.

In a statement on Saturday, Agar said he had accepted the position in order to help secure peace and support for the upcoming agricultural season, whose failure would spell widespread hunger.

He said his message to the army was that “there is no alternative to peace but peace and no way to peace other than dialogue.”

Russian Private Army Claims Control of Bakhmut

KIEV (AP/Sputnik) – The head of the Russian private army Wagner claimed Saturday that his forces have taken control of the city of Bakhmut after the longest and most grinding battle of the Russia-Ukraine war, but Ukrainian defense officials denied it.

In a video posted on Telegram, Wagner head Yevgeny Prigozhin said the city came under complete Russian control at about midday Saturday. He spoke flanked by about half a dozen fighters, with ruined buildings in the background and explosions heard in the distance.

“On May 20, 2023, today, at noon, Artemovsk was entirely taken,” Prigozhin announced in a video posted on Telegram.

According to him, from 25 May Wagner will start withdrawing its units for rest and retraining. The group’s fighters will also create “necessary defensive lines”.

Control over the city will be handed over to the Defense Ministry, Prigozhin explained.

However, after the video appeared, Ukrainian deputy defense minister Hanna Maliar said heavy fighting was continuing.

“The situation is critical,” she said.

“As of now, our defenders, control certain industrial and infrastructure facilities in this area.”

Serhiy Cherevatyi, spokesman for Ukraine’s eastern command, told The Associated Press that Prigozhin’s claim “is not true. Our units are fighting in Bakhmut.”

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News in Brief

OTTAWA (Middle East Eye) – Muslim organizations in Canada are asking the courts to declare a provincial proclamation in Quebec that bans religious activity in schools as unconstitutional. Six groups - which include the Muslim Association of Canada, the Canadian Muslim Forum and four local organizations - filed a lawsuit this week asking the Quebec Superior Court to “declare constitutionally invalid, inapplicable, inoperative, or to annul” the order to prohibit all forms of prayer in public schools. “The plaintiffs request that a declaratory judgment concerning the interpretation to be given to the principles of laicity and religious neutrality of the state be rendered so that these principles cannot be used to order prohibitions of prayers or other religious practices in public places,” the filing reads. The groups argued that the order is discriminatory and violates the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Islamophobia is “deeply” entrenched in Canadian society, and Black hijab-wearing women are the most vulnerable, a Canadian Senate committee report said last month. Far-right and anti-Muslim hate groups are growing, along with incidents of hate, according to a report by the Senate Committee on Human Rights. The report is set to be released in its entirety in July. In 2017, Muslim and civil rights groups challenged a Quebec ban on officials or anyone receiving public services from covering their faces, arguing it infringes on women’s and Muslim religious rights.

BUDAPEST (Reuters) – Thousands of Hungarians have rallied in Budapest to protest against new legislation that would eliminate the public servant status of teachers, as well as police tear-gassing of teenagers during a previous demonstration. In power since 2010, conservative nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban has faced increasing public protests as he has clashed with the European Union over democratic standards, curbed independent media, academics and judges and cracked down on the rights of migrants. The protest came after a series of rallies and strikes for higher salaries and better working conditions for teachers. Hungary’s inflation rate - now running at 24% - has eroded teacher wages that were already below the national average and rank second to last among OECD countries according to 2021 data. Protesters on Friday marched against the new so-called Status Law that would also significantly increase teachers’ workload. Critics refer to the legislation as the “Revenge Law,” perceived as punishment for teachers’ year-long resistance. Orban’s government said the bill aimed to improve the quality of education. Almost 5,000 teachers have already said they will leave their profession if the Status Law comes into force. Street protests over the past year have been peaceful except for one early this month when police tear-gassed some teenagers in a pro-teacher rally as they tried to get closer to Orban’s offices, surrounded by construction fences since 2020.

SYDNEY (AFP) – Australian police will not release body-cam footage of an officer taser-ing a 95-year-old great-grandmother with dementia inside her nursing home, a state police chief said Saturday. The woman, Clare Nowland, is in a critical state in hospital, three days after being shot with an electronic stun gun in a confrontation that shocked Australians and made international headlines. Officers arrived at Yallambee Lodge in southern New South Wales on Wednesday after being alerted by nursing home staff that a woman was “armed with a knife,” police said. Police say they urged Nowland to drop the serrated steak knife before she moved toward them “at a slow pace” with the aid of a walking frame, prompting one officer to fire his taser at her. Asked about political calls for police body-worn video of the taser-ing to be released, New South Wales police commissioner Karen Webb said: “I am not sure why they want to see it.” The state police chief said she had only heard the audio from the recording: “I don’t see it necessary that I actually view it,” she told a news conference. Citing “legislative requirements” surrounding surveillance devices, Webb added: “We don’t intend to release it unless there is a process at the end of this that would allow it to be released.” An investigation into the firing of the taser “will take time,” she said.

PARIS (Dispatches) – Sixteen percent of French people say they did not have enough food to eat at the end of last year, according to a new study. A survey by the Research Center for the Study and Observation of Living Conditions (Crédoc) found the ratio has increased significantly in recent months, from 12 to 16 percent in the last six months. This means more than 10 million of France’s 68 million people do not get enough food. The center attributed the finding to the increase in the price of food products on the shelves and inflation of more than 10 percent in some products. The survey also shows that while the French have the means to eat their fill, nearly one in two still admits they don’t have access to all the food they like. Since the ratio of food prices to people’s incomes is not proportionate, they have no choice but to deprive themselves of meat, fish or even fruits and vegetables. According to the study, while these exclusions remained relatively marginal when inflation was kept below 2 percent, they have increased significantly in recent months as economic problems have intensified.

WASHINGTON (Xinhua) – More than 100,000 Americans died from drug overdoses in 2022, according to data released this week from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The year of 2022 was the deadliest on record for drug overdoses, which claimed the lives of an estimated 109,680 people, according to numbers posted Wednesday by the CDC. Overdose deaths in the United States surged during the COVID-19 pandemic. The death number rose from 71,000 in 2019 to over 90,000 in 2020, and surpassed 100,000 in 2021 for the first time.

SYDNEY (AFP) – One of Australia’s top television journalists has opened a bout of national soul-searching by quitting his show over the racist abuse he faces as an Indigenous man in the spotlight. An award-winning journalist with the ABC, Stan Grant said the national broadcaster had lodged a complaint with Twitter about the “relentless racial filth” he endured. But he added the media itself “lie and distort my words” and depicted him as “hate-filled” after he raised Britain’s colonial persecution of Indigenous Australians during the ABC’s coverage of King Charles III’s coronation. “I pointed out that the crown represents the invasion and theft of our land,” Grant said in an article published on ABC’s website. “Police wearing the seal of the crown took children from their families. Under the crown our people were massacred.”