

# Beijing Urges U.S. to Stop Undermining China's Sovereignty



This combo photo shows Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang (left) and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

BEIJING (Dispatches) - The United States should respect China's position on the Taiwan question, stop interfering in China's internal affairs and stop undermining China's sovereignty, security and development interests in the name of competition, Qin made the remarks in a phone conversation with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, during which Qin expounded on China's solemn positions on the Taiwan question and other core concerns.

Since the beginning of this year, Qin said, China-U.S. relations have encountered new difficulties and challenges, for which it is crystal clear who is responsible.

China always views and handles China-US relations in accordance with the prin-

principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation proposed by President Xi Jinping, he added.

Qin urged the United States to take concrete actions to implement the important consensus reached by the two heads of state at the Group of 20 Bali summit, and honor the relevant commitments it has made.

Qin told Blinken to respect China's core concerns, such as the Taiwan issue, in an effort to arrest declining relations between the superpowers, according to China's foreign ministry.

Blinken stressed the need for communication "to avoid miscalculation and conflict" and said the U.S. would continue to raise areas of concern as well as potential

cooperation with China, the State Department said in a brief summary of the call.

The top U.S. diplomat is scheduled to travel to China and Britain between June 16 and June 21, the State Department said on Wednesday, after a U.S. official last week said Blinken would be in Beijing on June 18. Chinese state media said he was due to visit China on June 18-19.

While there, Blinken will meet senior Chinese officials to "raise bilateral issues of concern" as well as other global and regional matters and "shared transnational challenges", the State Department said in a statement.

If Blinken's trip goes ahead, it will be the first visit to China by Washington's top diplomat in five years and the highest profile visit of U.S. President Joe Biden's administration, which has clashed with Beijing over issues ranging from spy allegations to a semiconductor tussle.

Blinken cancelled a planned trip to Beijing in February over a suspected Chinese spy balloon that flew over the United States. The Chinese foreign ministry has not yet revealed any other information on Blinken's upcoming trip.

Visits by U.S. officials to Taiwan, the democratically governed island that Beijing considers an integral part of China, have also magnified tensions between the world's two largest economies.

"Since the beginning of the year, Sino-U.S. relations have encountered new difficulties and challenges, and the responsibility is clear," Qin told Blinken, according to the Chinese foreign ministry's readout.

## Russia Steps Up Aerial Strikes on Ukraine as War Extends



Ukrainian artillery shoots towards Russian forces at a frontline in Kharkiv region, Ukraine..

KYIV, Ukraine (Dispatches) — Russian forces fired cruise missiles at the southern Ukrainian city of Odesa and shelled the eastern Donetsk region early Wednesday, killing at least six people and damaging dozens of homes, regional Ukrainian officials said.

Russian forces have recently stepped up aerial strikes in their nearly 16-month war, a Ukrainian military spokesman said. The country's armed forces, meanwhile, have alleged limited gains in the early stages of a counteroffensive to take back the nearly one-fifth of Ukraine's territory that is under Russian control.

Ukrainian forces can expect to make slow progress in what will be a "hugely difficult" fight as the counteroffensive gains traction, according to a Western official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence.

"Intense fighting is now ongoing in nearly all sectors of the front," the official said "This is much more than probing. These are full-scale movements of armor and heavy equipment into the Russian security zone."

The official described the Ukrainian attacks as methodical and said that, broadly speaking, "Russian forces have

put up a good defense."

Russia Concerned Over Calls to Move U.S. Nukes Closer to Border

On Tuesday, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said that her country is concerned about the recent calls to move U.S. nuclear bombs in Europe closer to the borders of Russia and Belarus.

"These calls ... cause concern against the backdrop of the destructive practice of Washington, which places its nuclear weapons outside its territory, including in countries that are non-nuclear under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," Zakharova said in a statement published on the ministry's website.

Accusing Washington of trying to mask its irresponsible behavior in the field of nuclear weapons by blaming Russia and Belarus, Zakharova said that Russia and Belarus were developing their cooperation in the military nuclear sphere in accordance with international law and their national interests.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Friday in a meeting with his Belarusian counterpart Alexander Lukashenko that Russia will deploy certain types of weapons in Belarus after July 8.

### News in Brief

Washington/New Delhi (Reuters) - Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's state visit to Washington, the Biden administration is pushing New Delhi to cut through its own red tape and advance a deal for dozens of U.S.-made armed drones, two people familiar with the matter told Reuters. India has long expressed interest in buying large armed drones in the United States. But bureaucratic stumbling blocks have hampered a hoped-for deal for SeaGuardian drones that could be worth \$2 billion to \$3 billion for years. PM Modi and President Biden are also expected to discuss co-production of munitions and ground vehicles, like armored personnel carriers, while PM Modi is in Washington, the sources said.

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FRANKFURT (Reuters) - A massive NATO exercise that kicked off on Monday is set to cause major disruptions to passenger flights in Germany, raising concerns from air travelers and also protesters. Jens Bischof, chief of Lufthansa Group's low-cost airline Eurowings, said he was concerned about the fallout of the exercise, which had led to the closure and heavy restriction of a large swath of German airspace. The military drill, known as "Air Defender 23", is the biggest ever NATO air force deployment exercise involving 10,000 military personnel and 250 combat aircraft from 25 nations including the United States. It will last until June 23.

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ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said that NATO should not bet on his country approving Sweden's application to join the Western military alliance before a July summit because the Nordic nation has not fully addressed his security concerns. Sweden and Finland applied for membership together following Russia-Ukraine conflict last year. Finland became NATO's 31st member in April after the Turkish parliament ratified its request, but Turkey has held off approving Sweden's bid.

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TOKYO (AP) — An 18-year-old army trainee shot three fellow soldiers at a firing range on a Japanese army base Wednesday, killing two of them, officials said. The suspect was arrested on suspicion of attempted murder at the scene in Gifu prefecture in central Japan, police said. The suspect fired a rifle at the soldiers during a shooting exercise at the Hino Kihon firing range, police said. The Ground Self Defense Force, Japan's army, confirmed that two of those wounded were later pronounced dead at a hospital.

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AHMEDABAD/MUMBAI (Reuters) - Roads will be flooded along parts of India's western coast, crops could be damaged and some houses destroyed when a very severe cyclonic storm makes landfall late on Thursday, the country's weather department said. On Wednesday, the storm Biparjoy was situated in the Arabian Sea about 280 km (174 miles) from Jakhau Port in the Indian state of Gujarat and 340 km from Pakistan's largest city Karachi, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. As heavy rain already began pounding coastal regions, authorities evacuated thousands of people. The cyclone is likely to cross Saurashtra, Kutch, and neighboring Pakistan coasts on Thursday noon with winds of 125-135 kmph gusting to 150 kmph.

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LEGAZPI, Philippines (AP) — A gentle eruption of the Philippines' most active volcano that has forced nearly 18,000 people to flee to emergency shelters could last for months and create a protracted crisis, officials said Wednesday. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. flew to northeastern Albay province to reassure villagers who were forced to evacuate from mostly poor farming communities within a 6-kilometer (3.7-mile) radius of the Mayon volcano's crater since volcanic activity spiked last week. Marcos distributed food packs and other aid to displaced villagers, and was expected to meet Albay town mayors later Wednesday to discuss the unfolding crisis.

## Hundreds Killed in Nigeria, Greece in Separate Boat Incidents



Survivors of a shipwreck sleep at a warehouse at the port in Kalamata town, about 240 kilometers (150 miles) southwest of Athens, Wednesday, June 14, 2023.

MAIDUGURI (Dispatches) - The death toll from an overloaded boat that capsized in a remote part of Nigeria's north central region, and a fishing boat carrying migrants trying to reach Europe capsized and sank off Greece on Wednesday have risen to more than 180, police and officials said on Wednesday, in one of the worst such disasters in recent years.

The wooden boat was ferrying people to Kwara state across a river from neighboring Niger state after a wedding ceremony when it capsized on Monday night.

Kwara state police spokesperson Ajayi Okasanmi told medics on Wednesday that 103 people had been confirmed dead.

It was not immediately clear how many people were in the boat, but some residents put the figure at more than 200.

Alhaji Bologi, the emir of Patigi district which includes the villages from

where the passengers had lived, said he had received information that 150 people had drowned while 53 had been rescued.

Fearing abductions by armed gangs on the roads, many Nigerians use boats to travel. Overcrowding and poor maintenance are responsible for most boat accidents on Nigerian waterways.

In Greece, authorities said, leaving at least 79 dead and many more missing in one of the worst disasters of its kind this year.

Coast guard, navy and merchant vessels and aircraft fanned out for a vast search-and-rescue operation set to continue overnight. It was unclear how many passengers might still be in the water or trapped in the vessel, but some initial reports suggested hundreds of people may have been on board.

Authorities said 104 people have been rescued so far after the boat sank overnight in international waters some

75 kilometers (45 miles) southwest of Greece's southern Peloponnese peninsula. The spot is close to the deepest area of the Mediterranean Sea — and such depths could hamper any effort to locate a sunken metal vessel.

Twenty-five survivors were hospitalized with symptoms of hypothermia.

At the southern port of Kalamata, around 70 exhausted survivors bedded down in sleeping bags and blankets provided by rescuers in a large warehouse, while outside paramedics set up tents for anyone who needed first aid.

Katerina Tsata, head of a Red Cross volunteer group in Kalamata, said the migrants were also given psychological support.

"They suffered a very heavy blow, both physical and mental," she said.

The Greek coast guard said 79 bodies have been recovered so far. It said the survivors included 30 people from Egypt, 10 from Pakistan, 35 from Syria and 2 Palestinians.

The Italy-bound boat is believed to have sailed from the Tobruk area in eastern Libya. That country plunged into chaos following a NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed longtime autocrat Moammar Gadhafi in 2011. Human traffickers have benefited from the ensuing instability, and made Libya one of the main departure points for people attempting to reach Europe on smuggler's boats.

The migration route from North Africa to Italy through the central Mediterranean is the deadliest in the world, according to the United Nations migration agency, known as IOM, which has recorded more than 17,000 deaths and disappearances there since 2014.

## Sudan Slides Further Into War as Diplomacy Flounders



A man walks while smoke rises above buildings after aerial bombardments during clashes between the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces and the army in Khartoum North, Sudan, May 1, 2023.

CAIRO (Reuters) - Shooting their way through truces, Sudan's warring factions have shown the limited leverage the foreign powers have in ending a two-month conflict that is driving the nation deeper into disaster.

Neither the army nor the paramilitary Rapid Response Forces (RSF) seem far enough backed into a corner to take ceasefire talks in Jeddah seriously, which diplomats partly blame on rival regional powers aligning with different sides.

Bringing more regional players to support talks, such as Egypt, which sees the army as the best bet for a stable neighbor, and the United Arab Emirates, which has backed the RSF leader in the past, may be key to progress, one U.S. official said.

For now, after almost two months of war, Africa's third biggest nation and its 49 million people - close to 2 million of whom have already fled their homes - is hurtling towards a deeper humanitarian crisis with its own farms at risk of failing and aid unable to reach all those in need after swaths of the capital and the west of Sudan became a war zone.

"Nobody will negotiate in earnest until they feel that the military balance is not moveable any more," said Rift Valley Institute analyst Magdi El Gizouli. "The internal dynamic of this war is a bit beyond what an external actor can really influence."

After the latest 24-hour truce expired on Sunday, residents in Khartoum and capi-

tal area reported fresh artillery fire and clashes. They said fighting had intensified since early June.

The United States and Saudi Arabia, which lies across the Red Sea from Sudan, have sponsored talks in the Saudi port city of Jeddah. But every temporary truce has been violated so far, even though both sides say they are committed to negotiations and despite U.S. sanctions.

Diplomats with knowledge of the talks say the Jeddah process was faltering partly because key players were absent, including Egypt, which also has a general-turned-politician at its helm, and the UAE, which has ties to RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti.

A senior U.S. State Department official told reporters existing parties to the talks had considered broader participation, adding that Cairo and Abu Dhabi "do have specific leverage that could be helpful."

A Cairo-based diplomat said a new African Union-led forum aimed to the process, including Egypt and the UAE, though it was unclear that either country was ready to exert real pressure.

Adding to the overlapping peace initiatives, Kenya's president said on Tuesday that another African grouping within the forum, IGAD, intended to meet Hemedti and army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan in the next 10 days in a bid to stop the war.

## 110mn People Forcibly Displaced as Sudan, Ukraine Wars Add to World Refugee Crisis, UN Says

NEW YORK (AP) - Some 110 million people have had to flee their homes because of conflict, persecution, or human rights violations, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees says. The war in Sudan, which has displaced nearly 2 million people since April, is but the latest in a long list of crises that has led to the record-breaking figure.

"It's quite an indictment on the state of our world," Filippo Grandi, who leads the UN refugee agency, told reporters in Geneva ahead of the publication Wednesday of UNHCR's Global Trends Report for 2022.

Last year alone, an additional 19 million people were forcibly displaced including more than 11 million who fled the war in Ukraine in what became the fastest and largest displacement of people since World War II.

"We are constantly confronted with emergencies," Grandi said. Last year the agency recorded 35 emergencies, three to four times more than in previous years. "Very few make your headlines," Grandi added, arguing that the war in Sudan fell off most front pages after Western citizens were evacuated.

Conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Myanmar were also responsible for displacing more than 1 million people within each country in 2022.

The majority of the displaced globally have sought refuge within their nation's borders. One-third of them - 35 million - have fled to other countries, making them refugees, according to the UNHCR report. Most refugees are hosted by low to middle-income countries in Asia and Africa, not rich countries in Europe or North America, Grandi said.

Turkey currently hosts the most refugees with 3.8 million people, mostly Syrians who fled the civil war, followed by Iran with 3.4 million refugees, mostly Afghans. But there are also 5.7 million Ukrainian refugees scattered across countries in Europe and beyond. The number of stateless people has also risen in 2022 to 4.4 million, according to UNHCR data, but this is believed to be an underestimate.

Regarding asylum claims, the U.S. was the country to receive the most new applications in 2022 with 730,400 claims. It's also the nation with the largest backlog in its asylum system, Grandi said.