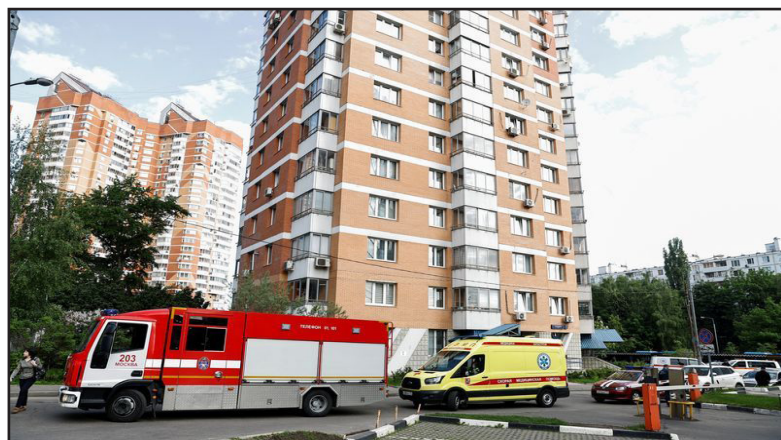


# War Intensifies as Drones Attack Moscow, Kyiv



An ambulance and firefighting vehicles are parked outside a multi-story apartment block following a reported drone attack in Moscow, May 30, 2023.

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A rare drone attack jolted Moscow early Tuesday, causing only light damage but forcing evacuations as residential buildings were struck in the Russian capital for the first time in the war against Ukraine. The Kremlin, meanwhile, pursued its relentless bombardment of Kyiv with a third assault on the city in 24 hours.

The Russian Defense Ministry said five drones were shot down in Moscow and the systems of three others were jammed, causing them to veer off course. President Vladimir Putin called it a “terrorist” act by Kyiv.

The attack, causing only what Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin called “insignificant damage” to several buildings, brought the war home to civilians in Russia’s capital.

Two people received treatment for unspecified injuries but did not need hospitalization, he said in a Telegram post, adding that residents of two high-rise buildings damaged in the attack were evacuated.

Andrei Vorobyov, governor of the wider Moscow region, said some of the drones were “shot down on the approach to Moscow.”

Ukraine made no direct comment on the attack, which would be

one of its deepest and most daring strikes into Russia since the Kremlin launched its full-scale military operation in Ukraine more than 15 months ago.

Putin said Moscow’s air defense “worked in a satisfactory way,” but added it is “clear that our task is to plug the gaps” in the system.

In Ukraine, Russia launched a pre-dawn air raid on Kyiv, killing at least one person, wounding 11 others and sending the capital’s residents again scrambling into shelters.

At least 20 drones were destroyed by air defense forces in Kyiv’s airspace in Russia’s latest attack on the Ukrainian capital. Overall, Ukraine shot down 29 of 31 drones, most of them in the Kyiv area, the air force said.

Before daylight, the buzzing of drones could be heard over the city, followed by loud explosions as they were taken down by air defense systems.

The heavier destruction in Kyiv contrasted with what was seen in Moscow in the aftermath of the strikes. In the Ukrainian capital, burned-out cars, glass and debris littered the street outside a building where apartments were wrecked; in Moscow, only a few broken windows and scorched outer walls were evident, with repairs and repainting being done quickly to the affected buildings.

## NATO Troops Injured in Clashes With Serb Protesters



Nato-led KFOR peacekeepers clash with ethnic Serbs outside the municipality in Zvecan.

ZVECAN, Kosovo (AFP) — The situation in northern Kosovo remained tense Tuesday as ethnic Serbs continued to gather in front of a town hall in Zvecan after violent clashes with NATO-led peacekeepers left 30 soldiers injured.

The NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) soldiers wearing full riot gear have put a metal barrier around the municipal building in Zvecan and are stopping several hundred Serbs from entering, an AFP journalist at the scene said.

Three armored vehicles of the ethnic Albanian Kosovo police -- whose presence always stirs controversy in Serb-majority northern areas -- remained parked in front of the town hall.

Serbs -- who account for about six percent of Kosovo’s population -- boycotted last month’s elections in northern towns where they are in a majority, allowing ethnic Albanians to take control of local councils despite a minuscule turnout of under 3.5 percent of voters.

Many Serbs are demanding the withdrawal of Kosovo police forces, as well as the ethnic Albanian mayors they do not consider their true representatives.

Tensions flared after Serbs tried to force their way into the Zvecan town hall on Monday, but were repelled as Kosovo police fired tear gas to disperse the crowd.

KFOR at first tried to separate protesters from the police, but later

started to disperse the crowd using shields and batons. Protesters responded by hurling rocks, bottles and Molotov cocktails at the soldiers.

A total of 30 peacekeepers were wounded in the clashes, including “fractures and burns from improvised explosive incendiary devices”, KFOR said in a statement.

Serbian president Aleksandar Vucic said 52 demonstrators were hurt, three of them “seriously”. Five Serbs were arrested for taking part in the clashes, according to Kosovo police.

KFOR said the soldiers responded “to the unprovoked attacks of a violent and dangerous crowd” whilst carrying out its mandate in an impartial manner.

NATO strongly condemned the “unprovoked” attacks against KFOR troops, adding that such actions were “totally unacceptable”.

Belgrade placed its army on high alert last week when tensions flared, and ordered forces towards the frontier with Kosovo.

Serbian president Aleksandar Vucic announced Tuesday meetings in Belgrade with ambassadors of the so-called Quint -- five powerful NATO members that focus on the Western Balkans -- but also with representatives of Russia and China.

Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008, and Belgrade and its key allies Beijing and Moscow have refused to recognize it, effectively preventing Kosovo from having a seat at the United Nations.

## China Snubs U.S. Call for Meeting of Defense Chiefs

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- China has declined a request from the United States for a meeting between their defense chiefs at an annual security forum in Singapore this weekend, media reported, a new sign of strain between the powers.

“Overnight, the PRC invited the U.S. that they have declined our early May invitation for Secretary (Lloyd) Austin to meet with PRC Minister of National Defense Li Shangfu in Singapore,” the Pentagon said in a statement to the Wall Street Journal, referring to China by the initials of its official name, the People’s Republic of China.

Li has been under U.S. sanctions since 2018 over the purchase of combat aircraft and equipment from Russia’s main arms exporter, Rosoboronexport.

Last week, White House spokesman John Kirby said there were discussions by the Defense Department to get talks going between Austin and his Chinese counterpart, who was named defense minister in March.

The prospect of the meeting was being closely watched given regional security tensions and trade disputes that have derailed plans for re-engagement by the world’s two largest economies.

China’s foreign ministry on Tuesday blamed the United States for its decision, claiming that Washington was “well aware” of the reasons behind the lack of military communication.

“The U.S. side should ... immediately correct its wrong practices, show sincerity, and create the necessary atmosphere and conditions for dialogue and communication between the two militaries,” foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told reporters at a briefing.

Last week, U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and Chinese U.S. Minister Wang Wentao traded barbs on trade, investment and export policies in a meeting in Washington that marked the first U.S.-China cabinet-level exchange in months.

Singapore-based security analyst Ian Storey said China’s decision to shun Austin did not bode well.

“At a time of rising U.S.-China tensions, General Li’s refusal to meet his American counterpart will fray regional nerves even further,” Storey said.

Austin and Li will be in Singapore to attend the annual Shangri-la Dialogue that opens on Friday, an informal gathering of defense officials and analysts that also plays host to a string of side meetings.

Both are expected to hold bilateral meetings with counterparts from around the region.

Li, who security scholars say is a veteran of the People’s Liberation Army modernization effort, is a member of the Central Military Commission, China’s top defense body that is commanded by President Xi Jinping.

## ‘New Era’ of Friendship as Lula Receives Maduro



President Lula receives his Venezuelan counterpart Nicolás Maduro at the Itamaraty Palace in Brasilia on Monday.

BRASÍLIA (Dispatches) — Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva met with his Venezuelan counterpart Nicolas Maduro, vowing a new era for a relationship that was severed under far-right leader Jair Bolsonaro.

Maduro was welcomed by an honor guard at the presidential palace in Brasilia, where veteran leftist Lula greeted him with a hug and a back-slap.

“Venezuela has always been an exceptional partner for Brazil. But because of the political situation and the mistakes that were made, President Maduro spent eight years without coming to Brazil,” Lula told a news conference.

Brazil cut diplomatic ties with the Maduro government under president Bolsonaro (2019-2022), joining the United States and about 50 other countries in recognizing opposition leader Juan Guaido as Venezuela’s interim president after 2018 elections which Maduro won.

Lula has restored relations with Maduro’s government since taking office in January -- part of an overhaul of Brazil’s Bolsonaro-era foreign policy.

Lula, who invited Maduro to the Brazilian capital for a South American leaders’ summit Tuesday, called his visit a “new moment” in Brazil-Venezuela ties and “the start of Maduro’s return.”

“I always thought it was absurd for people who defend democracy to deny you were Venezuela’s president, having been elected by the people,” Lula said, condemning “prejudice” against the neighboring country’s government.

Lula said he would support a bid by Venezuela to join the BRICS group of leading emerging nations, which includes his country, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

He said the group would debate requests from “several countries” wanting to join BRICS when they meet for a summit in South Africa later this year.

Maduro meanwhile hailed a “new era” in the countries’ relations. “Brazil and Venezuela must be united, from now on and always,” he said.

The two leaders assailed U.S. sanctions against Venezuela and Maduro said he hopes a regional South American summit in Brasilia will call for their removal.

Lula said the U.S. sanctions “extremely exaggerated” and criticized the United States for denying the legitimacy of Maduro.

Lula said he argued with the United States and fellow Social Democrats over Maduro’s legitimacy and the “900 sanctions” Venezuela faces. “I think it is really absurd that they deny that Maduro is president of Venezuela,” he said.

The South American presidents, all except Peru, were to discuss the launch of a cooperation bloc in place of the defunct UNASUR, created in 2008 during the previous presidency of Lula with the leftist leaders at the time of Venezuela and Argentina, Hugo Chavez and Cristina Kirchner, respectively.

The organization floundered when several South American countries elected right-wing governments, creating diplomatic fissures on the continent.

## UN: Rohingya Becoming ‘New Palestinians’



Rohingya refugees near Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh.

UNITED NATIONS (Guardian) — Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are at risk of becoming “the new Palestinians”, according to a UN head, who said they are trapped in a protracted and increasingly neglected crisis.

Olivier De Schutter, UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, said the almost 1 million people living in overcrowded camps in Cox’s Bazar should be given the right to work in their host country of Bangladesh, and that forcing them to rely on dwindling international support was not sustainable.

De Schutter, who spoke to the Guardian after a recent visit to Cox’s Bazar, said conditions were “absolutely terrible”, and that he had rarely spoken to people in “such a state of desperation”.

The refugees — most of whom fled brutal crackdowns by the Myanmar military in 2017 — are fenced off from the local community and live in squalid and cramped shelters. The violence against Rohingya provoked international outrage more than five years ago and led to a genocide case at the UN’s top court, but international donors are now increasingly distracted by crises elsewhere, said De Schutter.

The World Food Program recently announced it was forced to cut Rohingya refugees’ food allowance to just \$8

(£6.50) a month per person, due to a lack of funding.

People also face the continual threat of extreme weather events — a danger made worse by rules that ban them from building concrete structures, leaving them in bamboo and tarpaulin shelters. “These camps are in a very vulnerable situation,” said De Schutter.

De Schutter said the Bangladesh government’s fear that allowing people to work will encourage Rohingya to stay longer in the country, burdening public services and reducing job opportunities for others, was misplaced.

The Bangladesh government has criticized the international community for failing to press the Myanmar junta to let Rohingya return safely to their homeland, and has pointed to the lack of international funding to support refugees it has hosted.

“Myanmar should be held accountable for creating the conditions that will allow safe repatriation under the right conditions. For the moment, no one believes that these conditions are met,” said De Schutter.

The crisis had fallen below the radar, he said, adding that greater international attention was needed. “Otherwise, these people, in 10 years’ time, they will be the new Palestinians.”

## News in Brief

SEOUL (Reuters) — Ukraine “desperately hopes” that South Korea will provide defensive military equipment such as anti-aircraft systems to fend off Russian attacks, President Volodymyr Zelensky was cited as saying in an interview with a South Korean newspaper. Zelensky expressed gratitude over South Korea’s pledge to send demining vehicles and humanitarian aid totaling some \$230 million, but said Ukraine wanted anti-aircraft and early warning systems, the Chosun Ilbo daily reported on Tuesday. He said South Korea’s early warning system would help defend his country from Russian air raids, the report said. A U.S. ally and major arms exporter, South Korea had so far ruled out sending lethal aid to Ukraine, citing business ties with Russia and Moscow’s influence over North Korea, despite mounting pressure from Washington and Europe to supply weapons.

OTTAWA (AFP) — More than 16,000 people were forced to evacuate their homes in Canada’s eastern province of Nova Scotia, officials said, as one of hundreds of wildfires raging across the country threatened the city of Halifax. The fire, still burning out of control along the north-western edge of the city, has not grown since a state of emergency was declared late Sunday, forcing suburban residents out at a moment’s notice. Television images showed large plumes of smoke and several houses and vehicles gutted by the fire, but no injuries have been reported. Nova Scotia Premier Tim Houston described a province “on edge” while Halifax Mayor Mike Savage said the city of 430,000 was facing an “unprecedented” fire situation. On Monday, wildfires were burning in eight out of 13 Canadian provinces and territories. In recent years western Canada has been hit repeatedly by extreme weather, the intensity and frequency of which have increased due to global warming.

JIUQUAN, China (AFP) — China sent three astronauts to its Tiangong space station on Tuesday, putting a civilian into orbit for the first time as it pursues plans to send a crewed mission to the Moon by the end of the decade. The world’s second-largest economy has invested billions of dollars in its military-run space program in a push to catch up with the United States and Russia. The Shenzhou-16 crew took off atop a Long March 2F rocket from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in northwest China at 9:31 am (0131 GMT), AFP journalists saw. The launch was a “complete success” and the “astronauts are in good condition”, said Zou Lipeng, director of the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre. Leading its crew is commander Zhu Haipeng on his fourth mission, as well as engineer Zhu Yangzhu and Beihang University professor Gui Haichao, the first Chinese civilian in space.

MANILA (Reuters) — The coast guard of the United States, Japan and the Philippines will hold trilateral maritime exercise in the South China Sea this week, the first such maneuvers between them as a time of growing concern about China’s moves in the region. The June 1 to 7 exercise in waters off Bataan province was an initiative of the United States and Japan, while Australia would join as an observer, said Philippine coast guard spokesman Armando Balilo said. Four Philippine vessels and one each from the United States and Japan will participate in exercises designed to improve search and rescue collaboration and law enforcement, Balilo said.

TOKYO — An International Atomic Energy Agency team is in Tokyo for a final review before Japan begins releasing massive amounts of treated radioactive water into the sea from the wrecked Fukushima nuclear plant, a plan that has been strongly opposed by local fishing communities and neighboring countries. The team, which includes experts from 11 countries, will meet with officials from the government and the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, and visit the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant during their five-day visit, the economy and industry ministry said. Japan announced plans in April 2021 to gradually release the wastewater following further treatment and dilution to what it says are safe levels. The release is expected to begin within a few months after safety checks by Japanese nuclear regulators of the newly constructed water discharge facility and a final report by IAEA expected in late June.

SAN SALVADOR (Guardian) — The human cost of El Salvador’s controversial “war on gangs” has been laid bare in a new report which claims dozens of prisoners were tortured and killed in jail after being caught up in the year-long security crackdown. The detailed 107-page report from human rights group Cristosal said at least 153 people had died in custody before being arrested as part of President Nayib Bukele’s year long offensive against the Central American country’s notorious “pandillas”. The NGO said it had confirmed 29 of those fatalities as violent deaths and another 46 were considered. In most of those 75 cases, Cristosal said the bodies of the victims showed signs of torture, beatings or strangulation. Other dead inmates also showed signs of injuries but were classified as having died of “undetermined” or “natural” causes meaning the true number of violent deaths could be higher.