

North Korea: U.S. Soldier Wants Refuge From Mistreatment, Racism



The African American soldier Travis King crossed the border from South Korea last month to seek asylum in the North Korea.

SEOUL (Reuters) - North Korea has concluded that U.S. soldier Travis King wants refuge there or elsewhere because of “inhuman maltreatment and racial discrimination” in the U.S. and the military, state media said on Wednesday.

It was the North’s first public acknowledgement of the army private’s crossing from South Korea on July 18.

The North’s official state news

agency KCNA posted on its website that during an investigation, “Travis King confessed that he had decided to come over to the DPRK as he harbored ill feeling against inhumane maltreatment and racial discrimination within the U.S. Army.”

“He also expressed his willingness to seek refuge in the DPRK or a third country, saying that he felt disillusioned with the unequal American society.”

KCNA also said King was “kept under control by soldiers” in North Korea, and that the investigation they mentioned is still active.

U.S. officials believe King crossed the border intentionally – while on a civilian tour of the Joint Security Area between the two Koreas - and have declined so far to call him a prisoner of war.

The Pentagon said it could not verify the North’s version of King’s comments as KCNA had reported them and said it remains focused on his safe return.

King previously faced two allegations of assault in South Korea... pleading guilty to one of those allegations... as well as damaging a police car during a profanity-laced tirade against Koreans, according to court documents.

After finishing military detention in South Korea, King was taken to the airport to return to his home unit in the United States.

In August, King’s uncle, Myron Gates, told ABC News that his nephew, who is Black, was experiencing racism during his military deployment, and that after he spent time in a South Korean jail, he did not sound like himself.

Libya Clashes Leave 55 People Dead in Capital Tripoli



Members of the Security personnel affiliated with the Ministry of Interior secure the streets after yesterday’s clashes between armed factions in Tripoli, Libya, August 16, 2023.

TRIPOLI (Reuters) -The casualty toll from clashes in Libya’s capital Tripoli over Monday and Tuesday was 55 killed and 146 wounded, the emergency services said.

City elders announced late on Tuesday that they had brokered a deal to end Tripoli’s deadliest violence in years with the Special Deterrence Force handing 444 Brigade commander Mahmoud Hamza over to a third faction, the Stability Support Apparatus.

Hamza had been seized by the Special Deterrence Force, which controls Mitiga airport, as he attempted to travel on Monday.

Airlines that on Tuesday stopped using Mitiga airport, where some of the worst fighting took place, resumed flights on Wednesday, they said.

As part of the deal announced by the elders, police and other security forces that stayed neutral in the clashes moved into areas where the fighting took place.

However, the dispute remains unresolved and a source in 444 Brigade said it might resume military operations if Hamza was not returned to his own base.

Major warfare in Libya has been paused since a 2020 truce between

the main eastern and western sides, but rival factions still hold most territory and a lasting solution to the conflict that has raged since a 2011 NATO-backed uprising looks distant.

Libya has been beset by violence and chaos since the overthrow and killing of its long-serving ruler Muammar Gaddafi following a bombing campaign by the U.S.-led NATO military alliance in 2011. The resulting chaos and factional divisions then escalated into a regional proxy war fueled by foreign powers, who poured weapons and mercenaries into the country.

Since 2015, Libya has been divided between the internationally-recognized GNA in Tripoli and lawmakers in Tobruk, allied to renegade military commander Khalifa Haftar.

The Government of National Unity of Libya was supported by countries such as Qatar, Turkey, some European countries and the United Nations, and countries such as Egypt, Russia, Saudi Arabia and the UAE also supported the army of Khalifa Haftar, a retired general based in Benghazi and Tobruk.

The two rivals fought for power in the country for several years, and after a year of intense conflict that led to the advances of the government of unity to the capital city of Tripoli, they announced a ceasefire in last August.

Europe Space Chief Warns Over Political Wavering on Climate

PARIS (Reuters) - Europe’s top space official has urged wavering politicians not to abandon European leadership in combating climate change, saying record heatwaves and vegetation fires provide “really alarming” evidence of the pace of global warming.

“It is clear that climate change is very visible and is really causing enormous changes to our planet,” Josef Aschbacher, director general of the European Space Agency and a leading expert on environmental observation, told Reuters.

Greece, Italy, Spain and most recently Portugal have grappled with record-breaking temperatures and wildfires this summer.

The World Meteorological Organization said July had the highest global average temperature for any month on record.

“This is really alarming,” Aschbacher said. “It just confirms that climate change is the biggest threat to our planet, to humankind, and will remain so for the next decades and we do need to do everything we can to mitigate the effects.”

Until 2021, when he stepped up to run the 22-nation agency, Aschbacher ran ESA’s flagship Earth observation satellite activities including Copernicus, which the Paris-based agency says is the world’s largest environmental monitoring effort.

ESA last week released a Copernicus image of a wildfire that razed thousands of hectares of forest in southern Portugal - a blaze that has since been brought under control.

Scientists say climate change is making heatwaves more frequent, intense and likely to happen across seasons, not just in what were regarded as the summer months.

But pressure is growing on some governments over the cost of net-zero commitments on emissions, and analysts say looming elections in Europe could put future measures at risk.

In Britain, where general elections are scheduled within 18 months, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has warned of climate policies that “unnecessarily give people more hassle and more costs”.

Aschbacher said long-term costs were likely to be far higher unless governments respond to “crystal clear” evidence, including satellite measurements, of the recent heat emergency in southern Europe.

Aschbacher is among the most senior climate-monitoring officials to voice concerns over wavering support for measures to combat climate change - a creeping negative reaction that some climate activists have labeled “greenlash”.

After scientists declared July the world’s hottest month on record, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said “the era of global boiling has arrived”.

ESA’s Copernicus program involves six families of Sentinel satellites designed to read the planet’s “vital signs” from carbon dioxide to wave height or land and ocean temperatures.

Moscow to Boost Defense Ties With Countries in APAC Region



In this file photo dated Dec 27, 2022, warships from Chinese and Russian navies are pictured after a joint naval exercise, Joint Sea 2022, in the East China Sea.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Moscow will continue to boost military cooperation with countries in the Asia-Pacific region, said Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu.

Pointing to the increase in Western states’ military presence in Asia, Africa and Latin America with the United States continuing to improve its military bases, Shoigu said at the 11th Moscow Conference on International Security that “we will continue to strengthen military cooperation with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region ... with which we have historically established particularly privileged relations.”

The Russian defense minister noted that the emergence of a multipolar world order, mechanisms for boosting cooperation between defense agencies, and the role of these agencies in assessing security threats have regularly been discussed within the framework of the security conference.

“The West, fearing a breakdown of the unipolar world and an open confrontation with a militarily strong adversary, is provoking local conflicts around the world,” he said.

He said that Western policies were aimed at weakening competitors to gain full control over existing resources and prevent any consolidation among those that try to oppose this process.

The 11th Moscow Conference on Interna-

tional Security has brought together experts, defense officials, and diplomats from around the world to discuss regional and global security issues.

In a congratulatory message to Kim released by the Kremlin, Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un have pledged closer cooperation between the two countries as they exchanged letters marking North Korea’s National Liberation Day.

“I am sure that we will continue to build up bilateral cooperation in all areas for the benefit of our peoples, in the interests of strengthening stability and security on the Korean Peninsula and in the Northeast Asian region as a whole.

Putin further noted that groundwork was laid for close cooperation between Moscow and Pyongyang during Korea’s liberation from Japan and “harsh wartime.”

In his letter to Putin, Kim stated for this part that the two countries’ friendship was forged in World War II with victory over Japan and is now “fully demonstrating their invincibility and might in the struggle to smash the imperialists’ arbitrary practices and hegemony,” Pyongyang’s Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.

He pledged to develop Moscow-Pyongyang ties into “a long-standing strategic relationship.”

Mass Recruitment of Volunteers in Niger as It Faces Possible Regional Invasion



FILE - Mohamed Toumba, one of the soldiers who ousted Nigerian President Mohamed Bazoum, addresses supporters of Niger’s ruling junta in Niamey, Niger, Sunday, Aug. 6, 2023.

NIAMEY, Niger (Dispatches) — Nigeriens are preparing for a possible invasion by countries in the region.

Residents in the capital, Niamey, are calling for the mass recruitment of volunteers to assist the army in the face of a growing threat by the West African regional bloc, ECOWAS, which says it will use military force if the junta doesn’t reinstate deposed President Mohamed Bazoum.

ECOWAS has activated a “standby force” to restore order in Niger after the junta ignored a deadline to release and reinstate Bazoum.

The initiative, spearhead by a group of locals in Niamey, aims to recruit tens of thousands of volunteers from across the country to register for the Volunteers for the Defense of Niger.

The group would fight, assist with medical care, and provide technical and engineering logistics among other functions, in case the junta needs help, Amsarou Bako, one of the founders, told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

Regional tensions are deepening as the standoff between Niger and ECOWAS shows no signs of defusing, despite signals from both sides that they are open to resolving the crisis peacefully.

Last week the junta said it was open to dialogue with ECOWAS after rebuffing the

bloc’s multiple efforts at talks, but shortly afterwards charged Bazoum with “high treason” and recalled its ambassador from neighboring Ivory Coast.

Niger’s junta on Tuesday said that it was open to talks to resolve a regional crisis, while Russia and the United States called for a peaceful resolution.

Western powers and democratic African governments have called for the coup leaders to reinstate ousted President Mohamed Bazoum, who they have detained since July 26, but the military leaders have refused and rejected attempts at negotiation.

ECOWAS defense chiefs are expected to meet this week for the first time since the bloc announced the deployment of the “standby” force.

It’s unclear when or if the force will invade, but it would probably include several thousand troops and would have devastating consequences, conflict experts say.

“A military intervention with no end in sight risks triggering a regional war, with catastrophic consequences for the vast Sahel that is already plagued by insecurity, displacement and poverty,” said Mucahid Durmaz, senior analyst at Verisk Maplecroft, a global risk intelligence company.

News in Brief

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese and Indian military commanders pledged to “maintain the peace and tranquility” along their disputed border, China’s Defense Ministry said, in an apparent effort by the sides to stabilize the situation after a rise in tensions.

China’s Defense Ministry issued a joint statement on social media late Tuesday saying the 19th round of commander-level talks between the sides held on Sunday and Monday had produced a “positive, constructive and in-depth discussion” centered on resolving issues related to the Line of Actual Control in the border’s western sector.

The statement said they “agreed to resolve the remaining issues in an expeditious manner,” but there is no indication that either side is willing to offer concessions.

However, both appear eager to avoid the sort of clashes between their troops that have led to bloodshed in recent years.

MOSCOW (Sputnik) - Russia’s defense ministry said Wednesday it shot down three Ukrainian drones southwest of Moscow, the latest in a surge of aerial attacks near the capital.

Ukraine launched the attack at 5:00 am using “three unmanned aerial vehicles on objects in the Kaluga region”, the ministry said on Telegram.

“All UAVs were detected and destroyed in a timely manner by Russian air defense systems.”

Kaluga’s governor said the drones were shot down in the south of the region, a few hundred kilometers southwest of Moscow.

GOODHUE, Minn. (AP) — A small Minnesota town will soon be without a police department, an exodus spurred by low pay for the chief and his officers.

Goodhue Police Chief Josh Smith and one other officer are still on the force, but only until their resignations become official on Aug. 23, the Minneapolis Star Tribune reported.

Smith submitted his resignation at a City Council meeting Aug. 9, while another full-time officer and five part-time employees resigned Friday after learning that Smith was stepping down.

“This is heartbreaking to us,” Goodhue Mayor Ellen Anderson Buck said Monday night after an emergency council meeting.

Goodhue, in southeastern Minnesota, has about 1,300 residents.

The council will seek extra enforcement from the Goodhue County Sheriff’s Office while town officials work to rebuild the department.

OTTAWA (AFP) - The government of Canada’s Northwest Territories has declared a state of emergency due to wildfires that have largely destroyed one remote community and are also posing a risk to territorial capital Yellowknife.

The declaration gives authorities additional powers to respond to an emergency, and underscores the unparalleled damage wrought by blazes so far this year.

The Canadian government said on Tuesday it approved federal assistance to combat the wildfires, and deployed armed forces to help with firefighting efforts in the area.

Wildfires have engulfed parts of nearly all 13 Canadian provinces and territories this year, forcing home evacuations, disrupting energy production, and drawing in federal as well as international firefighting resources.

NEW YORK (AFP) - More than one million people have fled Sudan to neighboring states and people inside the country are running out of food and dying due to lack of healthcare after four months of war, the United Nations has warned.

Fighting between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has devastated the capital Khartoum and sparked ethnically-driven attacks in Darfur, threatening to plunge Sudan into a protracted civil war and destabilize the region.

“Time is running out for farmers to plant the crops that will feed them and their neighbours. Medical supplies are scarce. The situation is spiralling out of control,” UN agencies said in a joint statement.