

NATO, Russia Suspend Cold War-Era Security Pact



Russian officials visit the Raduga State Machine Building Construction Bureau in Moscow region, February 2, 2023.

BRUSSELS (AP) — NATO on Tuesday announced the formal suspension of a key Cold War-era security treaty in response to Russia's pullout from the deal just hours earlier. The alliance also said its members who signed the treaty are now freezing their participation in the pact.

Most of NATO's 31 allies have signed the Treaty of Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, which was aimed at preventing Cold War rivals from massing forces at or near mutual borders. It was signed in November 1990, but not fully ratified until two years later.

Earlier in the day, Moscow said it had finalized its withdrawal from the treaty, also known as CFE. The long-expected move came after both houses of the Russian parliament approved a bill proposed by President Vladimir Putin denouncing the CFE. Putin signed that bill into force in May this year.

The treaty was one of several major Cold War-era treaties involving Russia and the United States that ceased to be in force in recent years. Russia suspended its participation in 2007, and in 2015 announced its intention to completely withdraw from the

agreement. Russia's Foreign Ministry said the process of the formal withdrawal from the treaty has been completed, without elaborating what that entailed. It blamed the U.S. and its allies for the withdrawal and the West's allegedly "destructive position" on the treaty.

"We left the door open for a dialogue on ways to restore the viability of conventional arms control in Europe," it said. "However, our opponents did not take advantage of this opportunity."

The statement further said that "even the formal preservation" of the treaty has become "unacceptable from the point of view of Russia's fundamental security interests," citing developments in Ukraine and NATO's recent expansion.

In Brussels, NATO said that its allies who had signed on "intend to suspend the operation of the CFE Treaty for as long as necessary, in accordance with their rights under international law." The alliance underlined that its members remain committed "to reduce military risk, and prevent misperceptions and conflicts."

NATO said that its members will continue to "consult on and assess the implications of the current security environment and its impact on the security" of the alliance.

U.S. Sanctions on Russian LNG Plant Threatens Japan Ties



A view shows a gravity-based liquefied natural gas platform in the village of Belokamenka, Murmansk Region, Russia July 20, 2023.

TOKYO (Bloomberg) — U.S. sanctions on a major new Russian liquefied natural gas export plant threatens to pit Japan's energy-security drive against its relationship with western allies.

The U.S. on Thursday imposed the measures on Novatek PJSC's Arctic LNG 2 project, which includes Japan's government as an investor and is set to start exports in the coming months. This is the first U.S. sanction to directly target an LNG export plant in Russia, and companies are still examining the potential impact.

While Japan has slapped restrictions on Russia and banned the import of coal, its government has drawn a line at natural gas, used to generate about a third of its electricity and heat homes. The nation has few resources of its own, and stepped up efforts to secure LNG after last year's energy crisis.

Japan insists that Russian LNG is required to meet energy needs and last year urged Mitsui & Co. and Mitsubishi Corp. to hold onto investments in the Sakhalin-2 LNG facility in Russia's far east last year. In contrast, Shell Plc — the biggest foreign shareholder in the plant just north of

Japan — dropped its stake after the Ukraine war broke out.

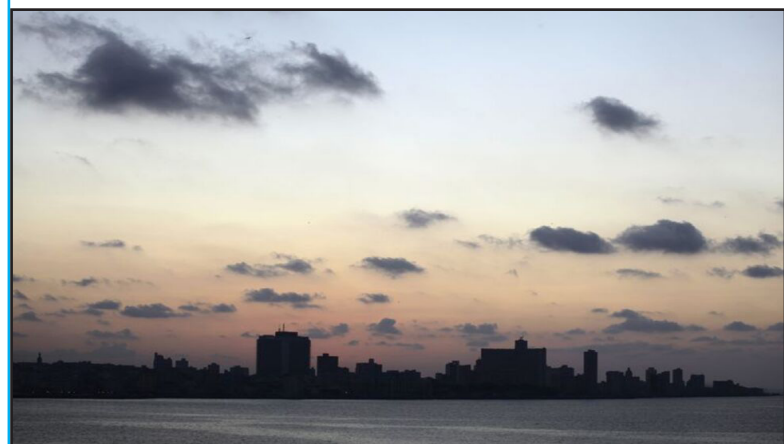
The new sanctions on Arctic LNG 2 will test Japan's relationships with other Group of Seven nations, which are taking an increasingly harder line against Russia as the war in Ukraine drags on. Sanctions so far have largely avoided Russian gas, which is still delivered to Japan and Europe.

"This could potentially have a more significant impact compared to previous sanctions," said Kaushal Ramesh, a vice president of LNG and power markets research at Rystad Energy. "This is because it directly targets the operating company rather than being indirectly related to the projects."

A consortium of Mitsui and state-owned Jorgmec have a 10% stake in Arctic LNG 2 and will receive 2 million tons per year from the facility, equal to roughly 3% of Japan's total contracted long-term supply, according to data compiled by BloombergNEF.

A Mitsui spokesperson said the firm will closely examine the impact of the new sanctions on Arctic LNG 2. Other investors include France's TotalEnergies SE, as well as China's Cnooc Ltd. and China National Petroleum Corp.

Cuba Defies U.S. Sanctions With Major Business Fair



Picture shows Havana's skyline at dusk, November 23, 2011.

HAVANA (Reuters) — Cuba hosted a business fair with over 800 companies from more than 60 countries as it lobbied for new investments, thumbing its nose at U.S. sanctions that have long spooked foreign companies from engaging with the island.

Cuba blames the Cold War-era U.S. trade embargo and the COVID pandemic for crippling tourism and domestic industry, wiping out the cash it needs to import basic goods and making foreign investment ever more important.

"Today we work ...to minimize the negative impact of the economic, financial and commercial blockade," said Cuba foreign trade minister Ricardo Cabrisas at the forum's

opening event. The U.S. has long claimed that its trade embargo is aimed at promoting "human rights and fundamental liberties in Cuba," a policy which has barely budged in decades.

Cuban president Miguel Diaz-Canel told attendees "massive" participation at the fair this year was proof of business confidence in Cuba.

"This is the largest fair with the most participation, in terms of businessmen and countries, that we have had in the last five years," said Diaz-Canel. "It means that there is support from the international business community."

The trade fair includes promotional stands from countries ranging from Spain to Russia, Iran and China.

Increasingly, it also includes small privately-held Cuban businesses that re-emerged just two years ago after being effectively banned for decades.

Jay Brickman, a vice president at the Crowley shipping and logistics company, said emphasis on private business marked a major shift.

"This year has been very different due to changes in the Cuban government's policy, depending much more on medium and small businesses and a little less on state entities," he told Reuters in an interview.

But financing for such businesses is still largely hobbled by Washington's sanctions. Foreign companies also complain that local regulations, bureaucracy and problems with the peso currency and payments also bog down business in Cuba.

In September, the Biden administration hinted it would unveil new regulatory measures in support of Cuba's fledgling private business, but those rules have yet to materialize.

A few foreign entrepreneurs, such as Cuban-born Miami businessman Hugo Cancio walk a fine line with authorizations from both the U.S. and Cuba.

Cancio told reporters he will be launching a new food industry brand in Cuba this week, DeCancio Foods, proof of what is possible during a time of "economic opening."

"It's more real than many think," he said.

Shell, Netflix Accused of Extensive Sexual Abuse in Kenya



The Kasigau wildlife corridor in Taita-Taveta, near Mombasa.

LONDON (Guardian) — Male staff at a leading Kenyan carbon-offsetting project used by Netflix, Shell and other large companies have been accused of extensive sexual abuse and harassment over more than a decade, following an investigation by two NGOs.

The Kasigau Corridor conservation project in southern Kenya, operated by the California-based firm Wildlife Works, generates carbon credits by protecting dryland forests at risk of being destroyed in key elephant, lion and wildlife habitats west of Mombasa. The scheme was the first ever forest protection scheme approved by Verra, the world's leading certifier of carbon offsets, and has also been accredited for its biodiversity and community benefits, probably generating millions of dollars in revenue in carbon-credit sales.

A new report by the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) and the Centre for Research on Multinationals and Corporations (Somo), a Dutch NGO, alleges extensive sexual abuse, harassment and exploitation between 2011 and 2023 by senior male employees of Wildlife Works, according to the testimonies of 31 current and former male and female staff as well as members of the local community.

In a statement on Friday, which was updated on Sunday, Wildlife Works' president, Mike Korchinsky, said after the company was made aware of the allegations in August, it suspended three people. An internal investigation conducted by a Kenyan law firm found evidence that

two individuals had engaged in "deeply inappropriate and harmful behavior", he said.

Korchinsky apologized for the "pain that had been caused" but denied the problem was widespread, saying that the substantiated sexual harassment misconduct had been perpetrated by one individual. He also said some of the allegations had not been substantiated.

Wildlife Works said it was in the final stages of the disciplinary process and would say more once it had finished. On Friday, Verra said it had launched an investigation into the project.

The report, based on interviews by staff from the NGOs, who are trained in dealing with gender-based violence, includes allegations of a physical assault and attempted rape on company premises.

Senior men used their positions to demand sex in return for promotions and better treatment, the report alleges. The wives of male rangers were also pursued by one perpetrator, a senior member of staff, who allegedly told them that their husbands' jobs depended on them having sex with him.

In a letter sent in August to Wildlife Works from Somo and the KHRC, the organizations alleged extensive sexual abuse at the project by multiple members of staff. They only named one alleged perpetrator but stated that the issue was extensive.

The allegations came amid widespread concerns about the environmental integrity of many forest protection offsets.

Poll: 85% of People Worried by Online Disinformation

BRUSSELS (Guardian) — More than 85% of people are worried about the impact of online disinformation and 87% believe it has already harmed their country's politics, according to a global survey, as the United Nations announced a plan to tackle the phenomenon.

Audrey Azoulay, director general of the UN's culture body, UNESCO, told reporters that false information and hate speech online — accelerated and amplified by social media platforms — posed "major risks to social cohesion, peace and stability".

Regulation was urgently needed "to protect access to information ... while at the same time protecting freedom of expression and human rights", Azoulay said as she presented a "governance blueprint" for governments, regulators and platforms.

A UNESCO-commissioned survey in 16 countries due to hold national elections next year — with a total of 2.5 billion voters — showed how pressing the need for effective regulation had become, the organization said.

The survey by pollster Ipsos of 8,000 people in countries including Austria, Croatia, the U.S., Algeria, Mexico, Ghana and India, found that 56% of internet users got their news mainly from social media, far more than from TV (44%) or media sites (29%).

Social media was the main source of news in almost every

country, despite trust in the information it provided being significantly lower than in traditional media: 50% against 66% for television, 63% for radio and 57% for media websites and apps.

Across all 16 countries, 68% of respondents said social media was where fake news was most widespread, ahead of messaging apps (38%), a belief "overwhelmingly prevalent in all countries, age groups, social backgrounds and political preferences".

Disinformation was overwhelmingly seen as a concrete threat, with 85% saying they worried about its influence. Eighty-seven per cent said disinformation had already had a major impact on national political life and would play a part in 2024's elections.

Hate speech was also seen as widespread: 67% of respondents said they had seen it online (and 74% of under-35s). Large majorities (88%) said governments and regulators must address both issues, and 90% also wanted platforms to take action.

Vigilance was seen as particularly important during election campaigns. Of those polled, 89% demanded government and regulatory intervention and 91% expected social media platforms to be even more alert when democracy was directly in play.



LAGOS (Reuters) — Canada is investigating an explosion at its embassy in Nigeria that killed two people, Foreign Minister Melanie Joly said, as Ottawa joined Washington and London in issuing a warning against non-essential travel to the West African nation. Nigerian President Bola Tinubu's spokesperson said that there were deaths and injuries in a fire on Monday at the High Commission of Canada but did not give any figures. Canada's High Commission in Nigeria, without commenting on the explosion, said on social media that it had "temporarily suspended operations until further notice." The embassy issued a travel advisory, warning against non-essential travel to Nigeria, including capital Abuja, "due to the unpredictable security situation throughout the country and the significant risk of terrorism, crime, inter-communal clashes, armed attacks and kidnappings." The United States and Britain had said on Friday there was an "elevated threat to major hotels in Nigeria's larger cities" and warned against travelling to Africa's most populous nation.

LIMA (Reuters) — Peru's foreign minister Ana Cecilia Gervasi resigned after less than a year, amid questions over how she handled President Dina Boluarte's visit last week to the United States. Gervasi made no reference to Boluarte's U.S. trip in her resignation letter. However, local news outlets reported that she was under pressure after failing to arrange a formal meeting between Boluarte and President Joe Biden. Her resignation was confirmed by Prime Minister Alberto Torales at a press conference, though he made no explicit reference to the U.S. trip. He said Gervasi's replacement could be announced on Tuesday. Peru's ambassador to the U.S., Gustavo Meza Cuadra, also quit on Monday. In his resignation letter, he cited Boluarte's trip, stating he had been "responsible for preparing" it. Instead of a bilateral meeting, Boluarte and Biden had a private conversation on the fringes of the Alliance for Economic Prosperity in the Americas summit in Washington, the foreign ministry has said.

KYIV (Guardian) — A close adviser to the commander-in-chief of Ukraine's army has been killed after a grenade amongst his birthday presents exploded, according to officials. "Under tragic circumstances, my assistant and close friend, Major Gennadiy Chastiakov, was killed ... on his birthday," Gen Valery Zaluzhny posted on Telegram, saying that an "unknown explosive device detonated in one of his gifts". Chastiakov's death was initially reported as a suspected assassination using a booby-trapped gift until further details emerged. Ukraine's interior minister, Igor Klymenko, released a statement saying Chastiakov had been showing his son a box with grenades inside that he had received as a gift. "At first, the son took the munition in his hands and began to turn the ring. Then the serviceman took the grenade away from the child and pulled the ring, causing a tragic explosion," Klymenko said. Ukrainian police said the 13-year-old son was also seriously injured.

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — Three people were arrested late on Monday in a protest against negotiations between Spain's acting government and Catalan separatist parties over a possible amnesty for thousands involved in Catalonia's independence movement. Government authorities said that the arrests took place during a gathering by over 3,000 people in front of the national headquarters of Spain's Socialist Party in Madrid. Two men were arrested for violent behavior against police, and one woman for disobedience, the representative of Spain's national government in the Madrid region said. The leader of the far-right Vox party, which holds the third-most seats in the national Parliament, was at the rally. Several protestors waved Spanish flags and pushed back against police in riot gear. There were other similar protests in other Spanish cities, but no additional arrests were reported.

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — The Kenyan government announced a surprise public holiday on Nov. 13 for a nationwide tree planting day, part of its ambitious plan to plant 15 billion trees by 2032. Interior Minister Kithure Kindiki made the announcement via a gazette notice posted on the social network X, formerly known as Twitter, following a cabinet meeting held last week and chaired by President William Ruto. Kenya's current forest cover currently stands at about 7% but the government has set aside more than \$80 million this financial year, as it bids to increase tree cover to more than 10%. Climate change is worsening droughts in the Horn of Africa, including Kenya, where rains have failed for five seasons in a row. The Kenyan environment, climate change and forestry ministry said it would provide tree seedlings for what it said was "an unprecedented show of commitment by the Government towards our climate action obligations".

SAO PAULO (Reuters) — Half a million residents of Sao Paulo remained without electricity three days after a storm knocked down power cables, leaving much of Brazil's largest city in the dark. The storm snapped branches and knocked down hundreds of trees that fell on overhead power lines in many streets of the city, initially cutting off 2.1 million customers in Metropolitan Sao Paulo, energy distribution company ENEL said. ENEL said it had restored its service to 76% of its customers but 500,000 were still without electricity. The company, which is the second largest energy distributor in Brazil and owned by Italy's energy group ENEL, said the gale-force winds that hit Sao Paulo on Friday were the strongest in recent years and caused severe damage to the power grid due to falling trees and branches.