

Using ‘Imminent China Threat’ as Excuse Pentagon Chief Pushes Asian Allies to Boost Military Spending



U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth speaking at the first plenary session on United States’ new ambitions for Indo-Pacific security at Shangri-la Dialogue 2025 on May 31.

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) – U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth warned on Saturday that the ‘threat’ from China was real and potentially imminent as he pushed allies in the Indo-Pacific to spend more on their own military needs.

Hegseth, speaking for the first time at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, Asia’s premier forum for defense leaders, militaries and diplomats, underlined that the Indo-Pacific region was a priority for the Trump administration.

“There’s no reason to sugar coat it. The threat China poses is real, and it could be imminent,” Hegseth said, in some of his strongest comments on China since he took office in January. He added that any attempt by China to conquer Taiwan “would result in devastating consequences for the Indo-Pacific and the world”, and echoed Trump’s comment that China will not invade

Taiwan on the president’s watch.

China views Taiwan as its own territory and has vowed to “reunify” with the island. It has stepped up military and political pressure to assert those claims, including increasing the intensity of war games around Taiwan.

“It has to be clear to all that Beijing is credibly preparing to potentially use military force to alter the balance of power in the Indo Pacific,” Hegseth said.

But his comments on allies needing to increase spending is likely to cause consternation amongst partners, even though experts said Hegseth would face a relatively friendly audience in Singapore. China’s Defense Minister Dong Jun has decided to skip the major Asian security forum and Beijing has sent only an academic delegation.

Hegseth has previously taken aim at allies in Europe for not spending more

on their own defense. In February, he warned Europe against treating America like a “sucker” while addressing a press conference at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

On Friday, while delivering the keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue, French President Emmanuel Macron said Hegseth was justified in asking Europe to increase its own military spending.

“It’s hard to believe, a little bit, after some trips to Europe that I’m saying this, but thanks to President Trump, Asian allies should look to countries in Europe as a new found example,” Hegseth said.

“NATO members are pledging to spend 5% of their GDP on defense, even Germany. So it doesn’t make sense for countries in Europe to do that while key allies in Asia spend less on defense in the face of an even more formidable threat.”

Dutch Defense Minister Ruben Breklemans said it was important to have Hegseth acknowledge that European countries were stepping up.

“It was for me maybe the first time or one of the first times I heard the U.S administration acknowledge this explicitly,” Breklemans said, referring to Hegseth’s comments.

U.S. Democratic Senator Tammy Duckworth, who is co-leading a bipartisan delegation to the Shangri-la Dialogue, said it was noteworthy that Hegseth emphasized that the United States was committed to the region, but his language on allies was not helpful.

“I thought it was patronizing of our friends in the Indo-Pacific in particular,” Duckworth said.

Ukraine Expands Evacuations Amid Offensive Fears

KYIV (AFP) – Ukraine ordered the evacuation of 11 more villages in its Sumy region bordering Russia on Saturday amid fears Moscow was gearing up for a fresh ground assault.

Russia claims to have captured several villages in the northeastern region in recent weeks, and has amassed more than 50,000 soldiers on the other side of the border, according to Kyiv.

The evacuations came just two days before a possible meeting between the two sides in Istanbul, as Washington called on both countries to end the three-year war.

Russia has confirmed it will send a delegation to the Turkish city, but Kyiv has yet to accept the proposal, warning the talks would not yield results unless the Kremlin provided its peace terms in advance.

On Friday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky accused Moscow of doing “everything” it could to sabotage the potential meeting by withholding its peace terms.

Authorities in Ukraine’s Sumy region said Saturday they were evacuating 11 villages within a roughly 30-kilometre (19-mile) range from the Russian border.

“The decision was made in view of the constant threat to civilian life as a result of shelling of border communities,” the regional administration said on social media.

A spokesman for Ukraine’s border guard service, Andriy Demchenko, said Thursday that Russia was poised to “attempt an attack” on Sumy.

In total, 213 settlements in the re-



Fresh Russian drone and missile attacks also hit a residential area of Sloviansk in the Donetsk region.

gion have been ordered to evacuate.

Russia’s defense ministry said Saturday that its forces had taken another Sumy region village, Vodolagy.

Moscow’s war on Ukraine, launched in February 2022, has resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and the destruction of towns and villages across parts of the east and south of the country.

The Kremlin’s army now controls around a fifth of the country and claims to have annexed five Ukrainian regions as its own, including Crimea, which it seized in 2014.

U.S. President Donald Trump has spearheaded diplomatic efforts to bring an end to the fighting, but Kyiv and Moscow have both accused each other of not wanting peace.

The Kremlin has proposed further negotiations in Istanbul on Monday, after

a May 16 round of talks that yielded little beyond a large prisoner-of-war exchange.

Kyiv has not yet said whether it will attend the Monday meeting, and said Friday it did not expect any results from the talks unless Moscow provided its peace terms in advance.

Russia says it will provide its peace memorandum in person on Monday.

But Ukraine suspects it will contain unrealistic demands that Kyiv has already rejected, including that Ukraine cede territory still under its control and abandon its NATO ambitions.

In a statement to the United Nations on Friday, Russia’s UN ambassador Vassily Nebenzia suggested the memorandum might call for Western countries to halt arm supplies to Kyiv and for Ukraine to abandon its military mobilization.

Data: France’s Prison Population Reaches All-Time High

PARIS (AFP) – France’s prison population hit a record high on May 1, with 83,681 inmates held in facilities that have a capacity of just 62,570, justice ministry data showed on Saturday.

Over the past year, France’s prison population grew by 6,000 inmates, taking the occupancy rate to 133.7 percent.

The record overcrowding has even seen 23 out of France’s 186 detention facilities operating at more than twice their capacity.

Justice Minister Gerald Darmanin, who has called the overcrowding crisis “unacceptable,” has suggested building new facilities to accommo-

date the growing prison population.

The hard-line minister announced in mid-May a plan to build a high-security prison in French Guiana — an overseas territory situated north of Brazil — for the most “dangerous” criminals, including drug kingpins.

Prison overcrowding is “bad for absolutely everyone,” said Darmanin in late April, citing the “appalling conditions” for prisoners and “the insecurity and violence” faced by prison officers.

A series of coordinated attacks on French prisons in April saw assailants torching cars, spraying the entrance of one prison with automatic gunfire, and leaving mysterious inscriptions.

The assaults embarrassed the right-leaning government, whose tough-talking ministers — Darmanin and Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau — have vowed to step up the fight against narcotics.

And in late April, lawmakers approved a major new bill to combat drug-related crime, with some of France’s most dangerous drug traffickers facing detention in high-security prison units in the coming months.

France ranks among the worst countries in Europe for prison overcrowding, placing third behind Cyprus and Romania, according to a Council of Europe study published in June 2024.

Jeffrey Sachs: U.S. in ‘Denial Stage’ Over End of Its Global Dominance



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – American economist Jeffrey Sachs says that the epoch of Washington’s global dominance has ended but the United States has not recognized it so far.

“We are living in a multipolar world. Russia is a great power; the United States is a great power; China is a great power; India is a great power,” Sachs said in an interview with TASS published on Saturday.

“The question is can we now live in peace in such an environment, will the U.S. accept the fact that it cannot call the shots anymore,” he said, adding that Washington is still in the “denial stage” and believes that they “still run the show.”

“And that is a dangerous misconception in the United States,” he further said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Sachs referred to the Western sanctions against Russia following the war in Ukraine, arguing that they have only strengthened and enhanced Russia’s economy instead of ruining it as was expected by Western governments.

The economist noted that while the sanctions did inflict some harm, they also led to

positive outcomes. Russia’s ties with China and India strengthened amid these challenges, and several industries that had relied on imports saw improvement due to growth in domestic production, he said.

“Obviously, the sanctions regime did not crush the Russian economy, despite all of the claims that the sanctions would have that effect,” he said.

“So, the sanctions regime did not work. It didn’t produce the results that the Western governments expected. It did not have enormous deleterious effects, and in some ways, it really strengthened the Russian economy.”

The U.S. and its European allies have maintained tough sanctions on Moscow and Russian officials since 2014. The anti-Russia sanctions then intensified after Moscow launched its “special military operation” in eastern Ukraine in February 2022 to stop NATO’s eastward encroachment on Russia.

Russia now holds the record as the most sanctioned country globally, exceeding the restrictions placed on Iran, Venezuela, Myanmar, and Cuba.

Cuba Slams U.S. Diplomat’s ‘Meddling, Provocative’ Conduct Amid Rising Tensions

HAVANA (Dispatches) – Cuba’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has issued a statement of protest against the head of the United States mission to the island, criticizing his “meddling” and “provocative” behavior since his arrival late last year.

In a news release published on Friday, the Cuban Foreign Ministry said Michael Hammer, a career diplomat, has been “irresponsibly” inciting Cuban citizens to act against the government.

“By inciting Cuban citizens to commit extremely serious criminal acts, attacking the constitutional order, or encouraging them to act against the authorities or demonstrate in support of the interests and objectives of a hostile foreign power, the diplomat is engaging in provocative and irresponsible conduct,” read the statement.

It added that the immunity enjoyed by an American diplomat could not be used as cover for his misconduct, contrary to the sovereignty and internal order of the country before which he is accredited.

The statement added that the U.S. official had violated the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and also the agreement to re-establish diplomatic relations signed between the two governments.

Hammer has traveled to several Cuban cities in the past weeks where he has held meetings with

anti-government opposition leaders.

During his visits, he incited the opposition to do acts of civil disobedience and violence.

At a press conference in Miami, Florida, Hammer revealed that the White House aims to apply new measures to tighten the decades-long blockade slapped on Cuba.

Miami is the stronghold of the Cuban American community in the United States and the main destination for dissidents fleeing Cuba.

Since 1958, the U.S. has imposed an embargo on Cuba, preventing U.S. businesses from conducting trade or commerce with the island.

There have been efforts to ease tensions, notably during the administrations of Presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden in the U.S.

In the waning days of his term in January, Biden removed Cuba from the U.S.’s list of “state sponsors of terrorism.”

But upon taking office for his second time on January 20, Donald Trump reversed course, putting Cuba back on the list that very same day.

In recent months, there have also been signs that Trump plans to return to the “maximum pressure” campaigns that typified foreign policy during his first term.

Hammer had also recently signaled that new sanctions were on the way for the island.

News in Brief

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) – The death toll from devastating flooding in a market town in Nigeria’s north-central state of Niger rose to at least 151 on Saturday, the local emergency service said, amid efforts to find more victims. Torrents of predawn rainfall early Thursday unleashed the devastating flood on Mokwa, nearly 380 kilometers (236 miles) west of Abuja and a major trading and transportation hub where northern Nigerian farmers sell beans, onions and other food to traders from the south. The spokesperson for the Niger State emergency service, Ibrahim Audu Hussein, confirmed the updated fatality count to The Associated Press on Saturday. In addition to the rising death toll, 11 people were injured and more than 3,000 people were displaced, the official added. At least 500 households across three communities were affected by the sudden and intense flood that built rapidly in about five hours, leaving roofs barely visible and surviving residents waist-deep in water, trying to salvage what they could and rescue others.

PYONGYANG (Dispatches) – North Korea’s state security minister has said that the U.S.’s unilateral and militaristic approach to foreign policy threatens global stability, vowing a response of “powerful might” should the US continue its current course. Ri Chang-dae made the remarks during a speech at a high-level security officials’ meeting held in Moscow from Tuesday to Thursday, Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported. “Due to the arbitrariness and abuse of power by certain forces on the international stage, the internationally recognized principles of international relations are openly being ignored,” the KCNA quoted Ri as saying. He harshly criticized the U.S. for posing a continuing threat to the foundation of global peace and security through its “unilateral and militaristic hegemonic” policies and pursuing its own power and interests against the wishes of the international community. “We will never stay silent to any kinds of hostile acts that threaten the country’s autonomy and dignity and the people’s wellbeing,” Ri also said, adding that his country will “respond with powerful might.”

WASHINGTON (AFP) – The U.S. Supreme Court handed President Donald Trump a major victory in his immigration crackdown, giving his administration the green light to revoke the legal status of half a million migrants from four Caribbean and Latin American countries. The decision puts 532,000 people who came from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela to the United States under a two-year humanitarian “parole” program launched by former president Joe Biden at risk of deportation. And it marked the second time the highest U.S. court has sided with Trump in his aggressive push to deliver on his election pledge to deport millions of non-citizens, through a series of policy moves that have prompted a flurry of lawsuits. On Calle Ocho, a historic street in Miami’s Little Havana neighborhood, Johnny Cardona, 63, was saddened by the Supreme Court’s decision. The ruling sparked a scathing dissent from two justices in the liberal minority who said the six conservatives on the bench had “plainly botched” the decision and undervalued the “devastating consequences” to those potentially affected. The revoked program had allowed entry into the United States for two years for up to 30,000 migrants a month from the four countries.

SEOUL (AFP) – Thousands of supporters of South Korea’s two leading presidential candidates rallied on Saturday in Seoul, days before a vote triggered by the ex-leader’s disastrous declaration of martial law. Tuesday’s election caps months of political turmoil sparked by Yoon Suk Yeol’s brief suspension of civilian rule in December, for which he was impeached and removed from office. All major polls have placed liberal Lee Jae-myung well ahead in the presidential race, with a recent Gallup survey showing 49 percent of respondents viewed him as the best candidate. Kim Moon-soo, from the conservative People Power Party (PPP) that Yoon left this month, trailed behind at 35 percent. Organizers from both camps told police they expected tens of thousands of supporters to rally in Seoul on Saturday. In Seochu, in the south of the capital, Lee supporters gathered holding signs condemning Yoon’s “insurrection.”

CHICAGO (NBC News) – A manhunt has been launched after seven teenagers were wounded in a drive-by shooting in the early hours of Saturday morning, police in Chicago said. The shooting happened in Chicago’s South Side neighborhood and across the street from Chicago’s St. Sabina Church and school. “An unknown vehicle drove by, and began firing shots at the crowd striking several victims,” as officers were “trying to disperse a large gathering of people,” in the city’s southeastern 6th District, the Chicago Police Department said in a statement.

WEST JAVA (Reuters) – At least 19 people have been killed after a stone quarry collapsed in Indonesia’s West Java province, with the country’s disaster agency saying search efforts are ongoing to find missing people buried beneath the rubble. The collapse took place at Gunung Kuda mining site in Cirebon, West Java. Footage from the scene of the accident shows excavators moving large rocks and emergency workers placing victims in body bags in an ambulance. Footage circulating online showed rescuers struggling to retrieve a body from the devastated area. Another showed people scrambling for safety as thick dust rose from a pile of rocks and soil that had collapsed. Indonesia’s National Agency for Disaster Countermeasure (BNPB) said at least 19 people had been killed, but gave no estimate on the number of people missing. It said heavy machinery – including three excavators – were buried and rescue operations would continue.