

US deploys nuclear-armed submarine to South Korea in show of force against N Korea



Protesters stage a rally against a meeting of Nuclear Consultative Group between South Korea and the US in front of the presidential office in Seoul, South Korea, on July 18, 2023.
● AHN YOUNG-JOON/AP

The United States deployed a nuclear-armed submarine to South Korea on Tuesday for the first time in four decades. Periodic visits by US nuclear ballistic missile-capable submarines to South Korea were one of several agreements reached by the two countries' presidents in April in response to North Korea's expanding nuclear threat. They also agreed to establish a bilateral Nuclear Consultative Group and expand military exercises.

The USS Kentucky, an Ohio-class submarine, arrived at the South Korean port of Busan on Tuesday afternoon, South Korea's Defense Ministry said. It is the first visit by a US nuclear-armed submarine to South Korea since the 1980s, it said, AP reported.

Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup called the submarine's visit a demonstration of US resolve in implementing its "extended deterrence" commitment, a pledge by the US to use its full military capabilities, including nuclear weapons, to protect its allies, the ministry said in a statement.

He said the submarine's visit "shows the allies' overwhelming capability and posture against North Korea." During the Cold War in the late 1970s, US nuclear-armed ballistic missile submarines made frequent visits to South Korea, sometimes two or three times per month, according to the Federation of American Scientists. It was a period when the US had hundreds of nuclear warheads located in South Korea. But in 1991, the United States withdrew all of its nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula.

North Korea threatened to use nuclear weapons in conflicts with its rivals and conducted about 100 missile tests since the start of last year. Last week, North Korea conducted a second test of a more mobile and powerful intercontinental ballistic missile designed to strike the mainland United States. After observing that launch, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un vowed to further strengthen his country's nuclear combat capabilities. Also on Tuesday, South Korean and US officials held the inaugural meeting of the Nuclear Consultative Group in Seoul to discuss ways to strengthen deterrence against North Korea's nuclear threats.

In a statement Monday, Kim's powerful sister and senior adviser, Kim Yo-jong, warned that US moves to reinforce its extended deterrence commitment to South Korea will make North Korea "go farther away from the negotiating table desired by (the US)" and beef up its own military capability.

"(North Korea) is ready for resolutely countering any acts of violating its sovereignty and territorial integrity," Kim Yo-jong said. "The US should stop its foolish act of provoking (North Korea) even by imperiling its security."

Wildfire burns forests north of Athens, other blazes tamed

A wildfire swept uncontrolled through forests north of Athens for a second day on Tuesday after intensifying overnight, and authorities told residents of nearby villages to leave their houses as flames approached.

The blaze raged in the area of Dervenochoria about 30 km (18.6 miles) north of Athens. An alert through the pan-European Union 112 emergency phone number urged villagers to evacuate, Ioannis Artopoios, a Greek Fire Service spokesman said in a televised briefing, Reuters reported.

Fire fighters managed to contain other blazes southeast and west of the Greek capital but the fronts were still active.

"Civil protection forces gave an all-night fight," he said, adding that about 250 firefighters assisted by 75 fire engines, 11 aircraft and nine helicopters battled the fire in Dervenochoria.

France and Italy will send four Canadair water bombers upon Greece's request for assistance, EU Crisis Management Commissioner Janez Lenarcic tweeted on Tuesday. Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis cut short his trip to Brussels for an EU-Latin America summit due to the ongoing fires, a government official said.

Another fire weakened on Tuesday, having first broken out on Monday in the village of Kouvaras, about 27 kilometres southeast of the Greek capital. Fanned by shifting winds, that fire had quickly spread to the coastal towns of Anavyssos, Lagonisi and Saronida, forcing people to flee their homes.

A mayor told Greek television that more than 7,000 acres of land was reduced to ashes along a coast, where many Athenians have holiday homes.

"(I only have) my bathing suit which I swim in, nothing else, and this shirt, I have nothing else, I don't even have other shoes. Nothing. I am finished," said Giorgos Nikolaou, 89, who saw his house in Lagonissi severely damaged by the fire.

A thick layer of white smoke was visible from Athens earlier on Tuesday as a third blaze burned near the seaside resort of Loutraki, about 80 km west of the capital. The Greek meteorological service has warned of a high risk of fire this week, just as the country is recovering from the first major heatwave of the summer. A second heatwave is forecast for later this week.

Greece still has memories of a wildfire disaster in 2018, when a blaze killed 101 people in the seaside town of Mati, east of Athens.



A firefighter tries to extinguish a wildfire burning near the village of Pournari, Greece, on July 18.
● LOUIZA VRADI/REUTERS

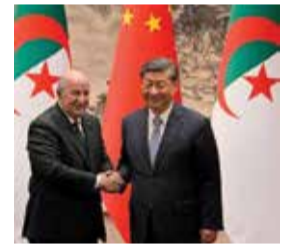
NEWS IN BRIEF

Saudi Arabia buys Turkish drones



REUTERS - Saudi Arabia agreed on Tuesday to buy Turkish drones in the biggest defence contract in Turkey's history as President Tayyip Erdogan reaped the benefits of his diplomatic push to repair ties with Persian Gulf powers and help Ankara's struggling economy. Erdogan and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman attended the signing ceremony between Turkish defence firm Baykar and the Saudi Defence Ministry, Saudi state news agency SPA reported.

Xi pledges stronger ties with Algeria



AFP - China's President Xi Jinping pledged on Tuesday stronger ties with Algeria in a meeting with the gas-exporting North African nation's President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, as Beijing looks to diversify its energy supply.

Tebboune began a five-day state visit to China on Monday, his first since assuming the presidency in late 2019.

"China is ready to work with Algeria to strengthen strategic communications, deepen exchanges and cooperation and ensure the steady and long-term development of China-Algeria comprehensive strategic partnership," Xi said.

More Brits than ever say Brexit was wrong choice: Survey

REUTERS - The proportion of Britons who say Brexit was a mistake hit a new record high this month, a survey from pollsters YouGov showed on Tuesday. With few economic benefits to show for the June 2016 vote to leave the European Union, 57% of Britons said the decision to leave the European Union in 2016 was the wrong one, compared with 32% who thought it was correct.

Russia strikes Ukraine grain port after exiting export deal

Russia struck Ukrainian ports on Tuesday, a day after pulling out of a UN-backed deal to let Kyiv export grain, and Moscow claimed gains on the ground in an area where Ukrainian officials said Russian forces were going back on the offensive.

Russia said it hit fuel storage in Odesa and a plant making seaborne drones there, as part of "mass revenge strikes" in retaliation for attacks by Ukraine that knocked out its road bridge to the Crimean Peninsula, Reuters reported.

Shortly after the bridge was hit on Monday, Moscow withdrew from a year-old UN-brokered grain export deal, a move the UN said risked creating hunger around the world. "Today's decision by the Russian Federation will strike a blow to people in need everywhere," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Monday. Falling debris and blast



waves damaged several homes and unspecified port infrastructure in one of Ukraine's main ports, Odesa, according to Ukraine's southern operational military command. Local authorities in Mykolaiv, another port, described a serious fire there.

Ukraine's air force said six Kalibr missiles and 31 out of 36 drones were shot down. Moscow, for its part, said it had foiled a Ukrainian drone strike on Crimea, with no major dam-

age on the ground, and reopened a single lane of road traffic on the Crimea bridge. Six weeks since Ukraine launched a counteroffensive in the east and south, Russia is mounting a ground offensive of its own in the northeast.

Russia's Defence Ministry said its forces had advanced 2 km in the vicinity of Kupiansk, a frontline railway hub recaptured by Ukraine in an offensive last year. Kyiv acknowledged a "complicated" situation in

the area. Since Ukraine began its counteroffensive last month, Kyiv has recaptured some villages in the south and territory around the ruined city of Bakhmut in the east, but has yet to attempt a major breakthrough across heavily defended Russian lines.

The Black Sea grain export deal brokered a year ago by Turkey and the UN was one of the only diplomatic successes of the war, lifting a de facto Russian blockade of Ukrainian ports and heading off a global food emergency.

Russia told Turkey on Tuesday that it was disbanding a coordination centre in Istanbul and lifting security guarantees for cargo ships following Moscow's exit from the deal, AFP reported.

"The implementation of grain agreements has been terminated," the Foreign Ministry said after Russia's top diplomat Sergei Lavrov spoke to his Turkish coun-

terpart Hakan Fidan.

Moscow's exit from the deal means "the dissolution of the Joint Coordination Center in Istanbul" and the lifting of "safe navigation guarantees", among other conditions, the ministry said in a statement.

Ukraine and Russia are both among the world's biggest exporters of grain and other foodstuffs. If Ukrainian grain is again blocked from the market, prices could soar around the world, hitting the poorest countries hardest.

Moscow spurned calls from Ukraine to allow shipping to resume without Russian participation, with the Kremlin openly saying ships entering the area without its guarantees would be in danger.

Russia says it could return to the grain deal, but only if its demands are met for rules to be eased for its own exports of food and fertiliser.

A part of a Russian cruise missile Kalibr is seen inside a building damaged during a Russian missile and drone strikes, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Odesa, Ukraine, on July 18, 2023.
● REUTERS