

EU slams US sanctions policy

AFP, Brussels

The EU's diplomatic chief on Friday attacked the US over its use of economic sanctions, after Washington opened the way to measures over Russia's controversial Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline.

Josep Borrell, the EU's high representative for foreign affairs, said Washington's secondary sanctions on those doing business with its foes was hitting European companies carrying out "legitimate business".

He also pointed to sanctions on Iran, Cuba and the International Criminal Court, saying the EU opposed the US policy of enforcing its measures against companies and individuals around the world.

"I am deeply concerned at the growing use of sanctions, or the threat of sanctions, by the United States against European companies and interests," Borrell said in a statement.

"Where common foreign and security policy goals are shared, there is great value in the coordination of targeted sanctions with partners.

"Where policy differences exist, the European Union is always open to dialogue. But this cannot take place against the threat of sanctions."

Borrell's statement comes just two days after President Donald Trump's administration moved to include Nord Stream 2 in tough measures that can include severing access to the US financial system.

Germany is a major player in the pipeline project, which will nearly double Russian gas shipments to Europe's largest economy.

The US move means German companies will suffer sanctions for even small investments.



An Israeli border police member fires a weapon as Palestinian demonstrators run during a protest against Jewish settlements in the town of Beita in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, yesterday. Netanyahu's government had set July 1 as the date when it could begin formally taking over Palestinian areas in West Bank seized in 1967 in line with a plan outlined in January by US President Donald Trump. The raging coronavirus pandemic has since then prevented Israel from implementing the plan.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Russia, China trying again to undermine US polls: Biden

Russia and China are trying to undermine US democracy in the run-up to November's presidential election, Joe Biden said, citing intelligence briefings he is now receiving. "The Russians are still engaged in trying to delegitimize our electoral process. Fact," the presumptive Democratic challenger said at a fundraiser on Friday according to the Washington Post. It is normal for presidential nominees of the major parties to have intelligence briefings, though it is not clear when Biden started to receive his. US intelligence found that Russia intervened in the 2016 elections to support Donald Trump.

25 million infected as Iran reimposes restrictions

President Hassan Rouhani yesterday said that 25 million Iranians have been infected with the coronavirus and that another 35 million were at risk of acquiring it as Iran reimposed restrictions in the capital and elsewhere. The figures Rouhani cited in a televised speech were far higher than Saturday's official toll of 271,606. His office said they were based on "an estimated scenario" from a report by the health ministry's deputy minister of research. He said more than 200,000 people had been hospitalised and that the ministry expected that number to double in the coming months. Authorities yesterday reimposed one-week restrictions in the capital Tehran including banning religious and cultural functions, closing boarding schools, cafes, indoor pools, amusement parks and zoos.

US civil rights pioneer John Lewis dies at 80



John Lewis, a pioneer of the civil rights movement and long-time member of the US House of Representatives, died on Friday. Lewis, a member of Congress from Atlanta who had announced in December that he had advanced pancreatic cancer, was 80. Lewis was a protégé of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., whom he met after writing to him when Lewis was just 18. He was the last surviving speaker from the 1963 March on Washington, having stood beside King when he made his "I Have a Dream" speech. Lewis kept up the fight for civil rights and human rights until the end of his life, inspiring with others with calls to make "Good Trouble." Tributes quickly began pouring in from other politicians, Lewis' fellow Democrats and Republicans. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called Lewis "a titan of the civil rights movement." "The Republican Majority Leader of the US Senate, Mitch McConnell, said Lewis has a place 'among the giants of American history'."

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

How hot could US-China 'Cold War' get?

AFP, Washington

Tensions are mounting by the day between the United States and China, leading to talk of a new Cold War. Experts see important historical differences -- but believe the two powers are entering dangerous territory.

US President Donald Trump's administration has increasingly gone global against China, pushing other nations to reject its strings-attached aid and telecom titan Huawei, and siding unreservedly with Beijing's rivals in the dispute-rife South China Sea.

Trump has made China a major campaign issue as he heads into the November election, but the relationship looks unlikely to change in more than tone if he loses to Joe Biden, who has accused the president of not being tough enough.

Stephen Walt, a professor of international affairs at Harvard University, said the world's two largest economic powers were engaged in a long-term competition over "incompatible strategic visions," including China's desire to dominate Asia.

China sees Trump as a "weak and error-prone leader" and likely believes the "disastrous" US response to the coronavirus pandemic presented opportunities to press its advantage, he said.

"It resembles the US-Soviet 'Cold War' in certain respects, but it is not yet as dangerous as that earlier rivalry," Walt said.

"One key difference is that the two states are still closely connected economically, although that relationship is now under considerable strain."

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who is taking stern warnings about Beijing around the world, did not reject the Cold War comparison in a recent radio interview.

He also noted that the United States was never as economically intertwined with the Soviet Union -- and said the West therefore needed to separate from China, especially its technology, which Washington fears will be used for espionage.

Oriana Skylar Mastro, an assistant professor at Georgetown University and resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, said it was dangerous to speak of a Cold War with China.

"The situation with China is nothing like the Cold War," she said.

"On the positive side, we have extensive engagement. On the negative, there is a real possibility of a hot war between the two sides to a degree that never existed with the Soviet Union."

She said that using a Cold War lens leads to ineffective responses, including Washington incorrectly seeing Beijing as an ideological threat.

Mastro said that China had plenty of options to alleviate US concerns, such as pulling back weapons systems in the South China Sea.

"But Beijing won't do this because it fundamentally misunderstands the drivers of US policy. It thinks the US is responding to its own decline in power -- that no matter how Beijing acts, the US will lash out," she said.

"So there is no impetus to try to moderate its ambitions and how it attempts to achieve them. This

is a mistake. And China's failure to do so, to try to assure the US, could lead us into a war."

In a shift from a few years ago, US businesses, stung by what they see as rampant theft of intellectual property, are rarely asking for de-escalation.

David Stilwell, the top State Department official for East Asia, said he learned as US defense attache in Beijing that China won't let go any chance of responding to US actions.

The United States has also pressed China over its clampdown in Hong Kong and mass incarceration of Uighur Muslims, each time triggering retaliatory measures by Beijing.

Trump has still voiced hope of preserving a trade deal with China, which promised before the coronavirus pandemic to ramp up purchases of US goods.

Shi Yinhong, a professor of international relations at Renmin University in Beijing, said both sides knew China would no longer be able to carry out the agreement in full.

Shi said he expects relations will keep deteriorating. "The old Cold War was a very fierce confrontation and competition between two great powers, driven by ideology and strategy," Shi said.

In the case of the United States and China, the two powers are selectively but rapidly "decoupling" from each other, he said.

"Using this definition, it can be said that China and the United States have begun to enter a new Cold War."



Captain Tom knighted

AFP, Windsor

A 100-year-old World War II veteran who became a coronavirus lockdown hero by raising millions for British health charities was knighted Friday in a special ceremony by Queen Elizabeth II.

Captain Tom Moore raised nearly £33 million by completing 100 laps of his garden, winning hearts across Britain and plaudits around the world.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said in May the Burma campaign veteran would be made a "Sir" in recognition of his achievement and for being a "beacon of light" in lockdown.

He had already been promoted to honorary colonel by the Yorkshire Regiment, and even got to number one in the charts in a collaboration with the singer Michael Ball.

The queen, 94, topped an extraordinary year for Moore by breaking her own enforced lockdown for a special open-air ceremony at her Windsor Castle home, west of London.

The monarch dubbed Moore a knight of the realm using a sword belonging to her father, king George VI.

"I am absolutely overawed," Moore said afterwards. "This is such a high award and to get it from Her Majesty as well -- what more can anyone wish for?"

Brazil under pressure to protect Amazon

Bolsonaro learns words are not enough as investors join leaders in call to stop harming 'Earth's lung'

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Faced with investors demanding "results" in the fight against Amazon deforestation, Brazil's government seems to be performing something of an about-face, although it will have to work to convince skeptics.

The simple fact that Vice President Hamilton Mourao committed on Wednesday to cutting deforestation and forest fires "to an acceptable minimum" was a mini-revolution in the administration of far right President Jair Bolsonaro.

Less than a year ago the international community watched in horror as the number of forest fires in the Amazon soared to their highest levels since 2013.

Ireland and France threatened to scupper a trade deal between the European Union and Mercosur -- of which Brazil is a member -- unless Bolsonaro acted to protect what French President Emmanuel Macron described as a "common interest."

Macron called the fires an "international crisis" and Bolsonaro fired back at his counterpart's "colonialist mentality."

"Europe is an environmental cult," Bolsonaro said Thursday on Facebook. "They haven't preserved their environment, almost nothing... but they hit us all the time over this, and unfairly."

"We have problems because Brazil is an agrifood business."

But at the end of June, investment funds from Europe, Asia and South America that collectively administer close to \$4



trillion in assets cranked up the pressure in an open letter to Bolsonaro, urging the end of projects that threaten to accelerate destruction of the world's largest rainforest. That seems to have hit home.

"The fact that the pressure comes from investors and not from heads of state, that gives it a different tone," Andre Perfeito, an economist at Necton consultants, told AFP.

Last week those investors held a video conference with the government, after which Mourao admitted words were not enough.

"At no time did investors commit with resources, they want to see results... to do with the reduction in deforestation," said Mourao, who heads the National Amazon

Council.

The threat from foreign investors is taken very seriously by a government that needs capital to reignite an economy ravaged by the coronavirus.

"Brazil is banking on foreign investments to emerge from the crisis. These foreign investments are important for a number of areas: sanitation, infrastructure," said Rubens Barbosa, former Brazilian ambassador to the United States and now director of an international relations and foreign trade institute.

The numbers certainly make grim reading, with record deforestation in the first half of 2020, up 25 percent from the

same period last year.

In May, the government sent the army to the Amazon to battle forest fires with the dry season fast approaching, but Mourao admitted those operations were launched "too late."

"The result was the worst June for forest fires in 13 years, with the blazes often started by farmers in deforested areas looking to create pastures for their cattle to graze on."

Agriculture Minister Tereza Cristina recently said Brazil doesn't need to deforest the Amazon to develop its huge agricultural potential. Cristina, an ardent supporter of Brazil's agribusinesses, knows her sector depends on exports to countries increasingly reticent about buying products from deforested land. A report in Science magazine Thursday claimed a fifth of beef and soybean exports to the EU was produced on illegally cleared land.

Brazil has signed the trade deal between the EU and Mercosur, which includes a chapter on sustainable development.

"The Bolsonaro government accepted, so it will have to demonstrate with results that it is fulfilling those agreements," added Barbosa.

Some remain unconvinced, though, that a leopard can change its spots. "The world has changed, the Bolsonaro government hasn't and is swimming against the tide," said Marcio Astrini, executive secretary of the Climate Observatory, a collective of NGOs fighting against global warming.



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen greets French President Emmanuel Macron with an elbow bump during a meeting on the sidelines of the first face-to-face EU summit since the coronavirus disease outbreak, in Brussels, Belgium, yesterday. EU leaders debated new proposals for a huge post-coronavirus economic recovery plan yesterday, seeking to overcome resistance from the Netherlands and Austria on the second day of the extraordinary summit.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Virus exposed 'fragility of our world'

UN chief says pandemic has busted 'the myth that we are all in the same boat'

AGENCIES

Coronavirus has revealed the "fragile skeleton" of societies and could push 100 million people into extreme poverty, United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres said yesterday.

Speaking on the 102nd birthday anniversary of the late Nelson Mandela -- South Africa's first black president -- Guterres said coronavirus was "shining a spotlight" on global injustice.

"We have been brought to our knees -- by a microscopic virus. The pandemic has demonstrated the fragility of our world."

"Entire regions that were making progress on eradicating poverty and narrowing inequality have been set back years, in a matter of months," he warned at a virtual memorial lecture organised by the Johannesburg-based Nelson Mandela Foundation.

The economic fallout of the pandemic, which has infected more than 14 million and killed close to 600,000 people worldwide, is being disproportionately felt among informal workers, small businesses and women, Guterres said.

"We face the deepest global recession since



World War II," he said. "One hundred million more people could be pushed into extreme poverty. We could see famines of historic proportions."

Coronavirus is an "x-ray" that has revealed "fractures in the fragile skeleton of the societies we have built", he added, citing unequal healthcare provision, unpaid care work, income disparity and climate change as some of the concerns.

"It is exposing fallacies and falsehoods everywhere... The delusion that we live in a post-racist world. The myth that we are all in the same boat."

Guterres pushed for a so-called New Global Deal to ensure power, wealth and opportunity are shared more broadly and fairly at the international level.

"The nations that came out on top more than seven decades ago have refused to contemplate the reforms needed to change power relations in international institutions," Guterres said. "The composition and voting rights in the United Nations Security Council and the boards of the Bretton Woods system are a case in point."

"Inequality starts at the top: in global institutions. Addressing inequality must start by reforming them," he added.

Guterres said people were running out of patience at the glaring disparities and discrimination across societies. He singled out the global anti-racism movement stoked by the death of George Floyd as simply "one more sign that people have had enough."

Coronavirus, he said, had also created an opportunity for world leaders to build a "more equal and sustainable world."

"We are at breaking point. But we know which side of history we are on."