

‘Nato-like’ alliances could lead to conflict

China warns as US flexes muscles in Asia-Pacific

AFP, Singapore

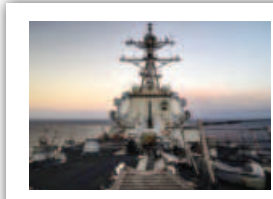
China’s defence minister yesterday warned against establishing Nato-like military alliances in the Asia-Pacific, saying they would plunge the region into a “whirlpool” of conflict.

Li Shangfu’s comments came a day after US and Chinese military vessels sailed close to each other in the flashpoint Taiwan Strait, an incident that provoked anger from both sides.

“Attempts to push for Nato-like (alliances) in the Asia-Pacific is a way of kidnapping regional countries and exaggerating conflicts and confrontations,” Li told a conference in Singapore also attended by US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

Li warned that these alliances would “plunge the Asia-Pacific into a whirlpool of disputes and conflicts”. Li’s comments echoed long-held Chinese criticism of the United States’ efforts to shore up alliances in the region and counter China’s rise.

The United States is a member of AUKUS, which groups it with Australia and Britain. Washington is also a member of the QUAD group, which includes



Australia, India and Japan.

“Today’s Asia-Pacific needs open and inclusive cooperation, not buddying up into small cliques,” Li said at the Shangri-La Dialogue security summit.

Li sought to paint the United States as the trigger of regional instability, and China as seeking to ease tensions.

“It cannot be denied that if a fierce conflict or confrontation occurs between China and the United States, it would bring unbearable pain for the world,” he said.

On Saturday, Austin called for top-level defence talks with Beijing to prevent miscalculations. “The more that we talk, the more that we can avoid the misunderstandings and miscalculations that could lead to crisis or conflict,”

Austin said.

Also on Saturday, the United States deployed a destroyer from its 7th Fleet along with a Canadian naval vessel through the Taiwan Strait.

China responded by sending one of its naval ships close to the US destroyer, the USS Chung-Hoon, according to the Pentagon. The strait is one of the world’s most tense potential military flashpoints.



Police detain a person in downtown on the 34th anniversary of the 1989 Beijing’s Tiananmen Square crackdown, near where the candlelight vigil is usually held, in Hong Kong yesterday. Hong Kong police detained several pro-democracy figures including the leader of a key opposition party.

PHOTO: REUTERS

‘They’re just out in the open’

Ex-Pak PM Imran openly accuses military of trying to destroy his party

REUTERS, Lahore

Pakistan’s embattled former prime minister Imran Khan has accused the powerful military and its intelligence agency of openly trying to destroy his political party, saying he had “no doubt” he would be tried in a military court and thrown in jail.

Khan has hinted previously at the military’s hand in a crackdown on his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party but his comments in an interview at his Lahore home on Saturday night were the most blunt yet.

“It is completely the establishment,” the former cricket hero told Reuters, when asked who was behind the crackdown. “Establishment obviously means the military establishment, because they are really now openly - I mean, it’s not even hidden now - they’re just out in the open.”

A spokesman for the military did not respond to a request for comment.

A year-long standoff between Khan and army came to a head when military property were ransacked last month, allegedly by his supporters.

Khan termed the violent protests, which erupted after he was briefly arrested, a “false flag operation” meant to target him.

“That’s the only way they are going to get me into prison,” Khan said, adding that the military wanted to stop him from returning to power in elections due by November.

Russian air strikes repelled over Kyiv

Regional airfield hit; missile attack on Dnipro kills 2-year-old, injures 22; five drones shot down in Crimea

REUTERS, Kyiv

Russia launched a fresh wave of air strikes against Ukraine early yesterday, striking an airfield in a central region but failing to hit the capital Kyiv, Ukrainian authorities said.

Air force spokesman Yuriy Ihnat told local television that four of six cruise missiles had been shot down by air defences but that two had struck an “operational airfield” near the central city of Kropyvnytskyi.

He added that two of the five Iranian-made drones launched by Russia had struck infrastructure in the northern Sumy region.

Kyiv officials said air defences had downed all projectiles that had been aimed at the capital before they reached the city.

Separately, a 2-year-old girl was killed and 22 people were wounded in an earlier Russian missile strike yesterday near the central Ukrainian city of Dnipro, the regional governor said.

Russia has stepped up regular attacks on Kyiv since May, especially at night, in what officials say is an attempt to damage morale ahead of a long expected Ukrainian counteroffensive to reclaim Russian-occupied territory.

“For the second night in a row, Kyivans are not hearing the sounds of explosions overhead,” Serhiy Popko, head of the local military administration, said on Telegram.

All of Ukraine was under air-raid alerts for nearly three hours.

Meanwhile, five drones were shot down and four were jammed and did not hit



their targets in Dzhankoi in Crimea, a Russian-installed official in the peninsula that Moscow annexed from Ukraine in 2014 said yesterday.

There were no casualties but windows were broken in several houses, Sergei Aksyonov, the Russian-backed head of Crimea’s administration, said on the Telegram messaging app.

He added that one unexploded drone was found on the territory of a residential house, forcing the temporary evacuation of about 50 people in the area.

Russia has a military air base near Dzhankoi. Ukrainian officials have long said the city and surrounding areas have been turned into Moscow’s largest military base in Crimea.

Shelling and strikes by Ukrainian forces on Russia’s Belgorod region killed two people on Saturday as hundreds of children were evacuated away from the border, Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said.

“The children of Shebekino are very worried about their hometown,” Gladkov said on the Telegram channel after escorting about 600 of them from the region’s Shebekino and Graivoron districts to Yaroslavl and Kaluga.

A senior Ukrainian government official yesterday expressed “disbelief” after learning that nearly half of Kyiv bomb shelters inspected during an initial audit were closed or unfit for use.

President Volodymyr Zelensky ordered an inspection of all Ukrainian shelters on Friday, a day after three people were killed in Kyiv when they were unable to access one during a Russian air strike.

Oleksandr Kamyshin, Ukraine’s minister of strategic industries, said that out of 1,078 shelters examined on the first day, 359 were unprepared and another 122 locked, while 597 were found to be usable.

“I greeted with disbelief that fact that half were open and considered ready,” he wrote on the Telegram messaging app.

Kamyshin said the inspections would continue.

The Kremlin said yesterday that any supply of long-range missiles to Kyiv by France and Germany would lead to a further round of “spiralling tension” in the Ukraine conflict.

Britain last month became the first country to supply Ukraine with long-range cruise missiles.

Ukraine has asked Germany for Taurus cruise missiles, which have a range of 500 km (311 miles), while President Emmanuel Macron has said France will give Ukraine missiles with a range allowing it to carry out its long-anticipated counteroffensive.

World’s spy chiefs meet in secret conclave in S’pore

REUTERS, Singapore

Senior officials from about two dozen of the world’s major intelligence agencies held a secret meeting on the fringes of the Shangri-La Dialogue security meeting in Singapore this weekend, five people told Reuters. Such meetings are organised by the Singapore government and have been discreetly held at a separate venue alongside the security summit for several years, they said. The meetings have not been previously reported. The US was represented by Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines, while China was among the other countries present.

Erdogan unveils new cabinet

AFP, Ankara

Turkey’s Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Saturday unveiled a new cabinet lineup, naming a powerful spy chief as foreign minister and market friendly Mehmet Simsek as finance minister, hours after swearing in for a third term as president. Erdogan took oath of office in parliament after winning a historic runoff election to extend his two-decade rule and promised to serve “impartially”. He also called for unity and the anger and resentment of the campaign to be set aside as he spoke during a ceremony at his presidential palace in Ankara attended by dozens of world leaders. Turkey’s transformative but divisive leader won the May 28 runoff against a powerful opposition coalition.

N Korea slams UN meeting on spy satellite launch

AFP, Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s powerful sister Kim Yo Jong slammed the UN Security Council for holding a “most unfair” meeting over Pyongyang’s recent spy satellite launch, state media reported yesterday. North Korea’s new Chollima-1 rocket lost thrust and crashed into the sea with its satellite payload on Wednesday, Pyongyang said in a rare same-day announcement, adding that another test will be conducted as soon as possible. The US, South Korea and Japan slammed the launch. The UN’s under-secretary-general for political and peacebuilding affairs, Rosemary DiCarlo, took the Security Council to task on Friday for a “lack of unity and action” on North Korea’s tests.

14 killed, 5 missing in China landslide

AFP, Beijing

Fourteen people were killed and five are missing following a landslide in southwestern China’s Sichuan province yesterday, the local government said. The “collapse took place high on a mountain” at 6:00 am (2200 GMT Saturday) at a state-owned forestry station in Jinkouhe, near the city of Leshan, the local government said in an online statement. “As of 3:30 pm, the remains of 14 victims have been recovered, while five people remain missing,” it said. Authorities sent more than 180 people and a dozen pieces of rescue and recovery equipment to the site, according to the statement.



A man bathes in the polluted waters of river Yamuna laden with foam, on the eve of World Environment Day in New Delhi, India yesterday. The theme for World Environment Day on 5 June 2023 will focus on solutions to plastic pollution under the campaign ‘Beat Plastic Pollution’.

PHOTO: AFP