

'Iran made a very big mistake by shooting down U.S. drone'

You will soon find out if the U.S. will strike Iran in retaliation, says Trump

REUTERS
DUBAI/WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday said Iran made "a very big mistake" by shooting down a U.S. military drone that Tehran said was on a spy mission over its territory, in an incident that fanned fears of wider military conflict in West Asia.

The U.S. called the event an "unprovoked attack" in international air space. It was the latest in an escalating series of incidents in the Gulf region since mid-May, including explosive strikes on six oil tankers.

"Iran made a very big mistake!" Mr. Trump said in a Twitter post. Asked if the U.S. would strike Iran in retaliation, Mr. Trump told reporters, "You'll soon find out."

Iran has denied involvement in the tanker attacks.

Tensions flared with Mr. Trump's withdrawal last year from the 2015 nuclear accord with Iran.

Spy drone brought down Iranian state media said the "spy" drone was brought down over the southern Iranian province of Hormozgan, which is on the Gulf, with a locally made "3 Khorad" missile. A U.S. official said the drone was a U.S. Navy MQ-4C Triton and that it had been downed in international air space over the Strait of Hormuz, through which about a third of the world's seaborne oil exits the Gulf.

Navy Captain Bill Urban, a spokesman for the U.S. military's Central Command, said Iran's account that the drone had been flying over

The gulf widens

Tensions between Tehran and Washington have been intensifying since last May, when the Donald Trump administration pulled the U.S. out of the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran. The situation has seen a rapid escalation this year

April 8, 2019: Washington declares as a "terrorist" group the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, an important part of the Iranian Army

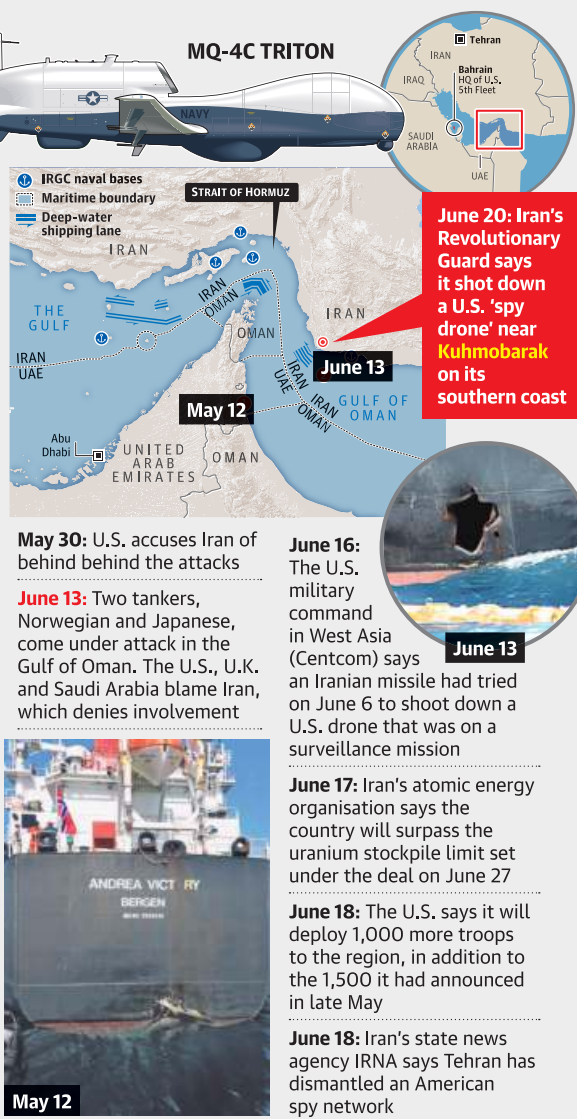
May 5: National Security Adviser John Bolton says the U.S. will send an aircraft carrier and a bomber taskforce to West Asia

May 7: The U.S. says it is deploying B-52 bombers, a Patriot missile battery and an amphibious assault ship

May 8: Iran says it is planning to stop exporting enriched uranium and increase heavy water production as part of its decision to stop some commitments made under the 2015 deal

May 8: A year after the U.S. withdrawal from the deal, Trump announces new measures against Iran's steel and mining sectors. Washington also hits Iran's largest petrochemical group PGPIC with sanctions

May 12: Four ships, including three oil tankers, are damaged in mysterious "sabotage attacks" off the UAE coast



Iranian territory was false. "This was an unprovoked attack on a U.S. surveillance asset in international air space," Captain Urban said. The drone, he added, was downed over the Strait of Hormuz at approximately 23:35 GMT – in the early morning hours of local time in the Gulf. Separately, a U.S. official said the debris field

from the drone was in international waters in the Strait and U.S. naval assets have been dispatched to the area.

Iran's Foreign Ministry said the drone had violated Iranian air space and warned of the consequences of such "illegal and provocative" measures. Independent confirmation of the drone's location was not im-

mediately available.

The Trump administration sought on Wednesday to rally global support for its pressure on Iran by displaying limpet mine fragments it said came from an oil tanker damaged in the June 13 attacks, saying the ordnance closely resembled mines publicly displayed in Iranian military parades.

U.K.'s arms sales to Saudi Arabia were unlawful, rules court

Decision imposes stay on grant of new export licences

REUTERS
LONDON

Britain broke the law by allowing arms sales to Saudi Arabia that might have been used in Yemen's war, a court ruled, after activists said there was a clear risk that the weapons could be operated in violation of human rights legislation.

While the court's decision does not mean Britain must immediately halt arms exports to Saudi Arabia, it does mean that there is a stay on the granting of new export licences to sell arms to the kingdom – Britain's biggest weapons purchaser.

Significant error

"The Court of Appeal has concluded that the process of decision-making by the government was wrong in law in one significant respect," Judge Terence Etherton said.

Handing down the ruling, he said the government made "no concluded assess-

ments of whether the Saudi-led coalition had committed violations of international humanitarian law in the past, during the Yemen conflict."

International Trade Minister Liam Fox said he disagreed with the judgment and would seek permission to appeal. "Alongside this we are carefully considering the implications of the judgment for decision making," he said.

"While we do this, we will not grant any new licences for export to Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners which might be used in the conflict in Yemen."

Britain is the world's sixth largest seller of arms, after the United States, Russia, France, Germany and China, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

Saudi Arabia accounted for 43% of Britain's global arms sales in the past decade.

Mr. Fox told lawmakers that Britain had always taken its export control obligations very seriously and would continue to do so.

Yemen war

The legal action against the British government was brought by the Campaign Against the Arms Trade, which wants to end the global arms trade and argued that British weapons were likely to have been used in Yemen in violation of human rights law.

"The decision of the court today does not mean that licences to export arms to Saudi Arabia must immediately be suspended," the British Judge said. "It does mean that the U.K. government must reconsider the matter, must make the necessary assessments about past episodes of concern, allowing for the fact that, in some cases, it will not be possible to reach a conclusion."

Malaysian PM slams MH17 charges

International investigators charged the men on Wednesday.

The Boeing 777 was travelling between Amsterdam and Kuala Lumpur when it was hit by a missile over part of eastern Ukraine held by pro-Russian rebels and 298 people were killed.

"We are very unhappy because from the very beginning it became a political issue on how to accuse Russia of wrongdoing," Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad told reporters. "It is a ridiculous thing," he added.

"As far as we are concerned we want proof of guilt. So far there is no proof. Only hearsay."

Kim gives Xi Jinping a special welcome

North Korean leader takes Chinese President to Pyongyang's Kumsusan Palace

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PYONGYANG

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un held talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Pyongyang on Thursday during a historic visit to burnish an uneasy alliance, with the two men each facing challenges of their own with U.S. President Donald Trump.

With the North's nuclear negotiations with the U.S. at a standstill, Mr. Kim told his country's key diplomatic supporter that he was "willing to be patient", Chinese state media reported, but wanted "the parties concerned" to meet him halfway.

First in 14 years

Mr. Xi is the first Chinese President to visit North Korea in 14 years, after relations between the Cold War-era allies deteriorated over Pyongyang's nuclear provocations and Beijing's subsequent backing of UN sanctions.

But Mr. Kim ensured that



Prime ally: Chinese President Xi Jinping and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Pyongyang on Thursday. •AP

Mr. Xi was the first head of state he met as he embarked on a flurry of diplomacy last year, and has now visited his ally four times in China.

China's trade negotiations with Washington hit a wall last month and analysts say Mr. Xi is now looking for leverage ahead of his meeting with Mr. Trump at next week's G20 summit in Japan.

At their formal talks, according to Chinese state

broadcaster CCTV, Mr. Kim told Mr. Xi that the North had taken "many positive measures to avoid a tense situation" over the past year, "but has not received positive responses from the relevant parties".

"This is not what the DPRK wants to see," CCTV cited him as adding.

Mr. Xi told Mr. Kim that he "positively evaluated" the North's efforts and was "will-

ing to strengthen coordination and cooperation with the DPRK and all relevant parties".

Mr. Kim met Mr. Xi at Pyongyang airport as he began the state visit with his wife Peng Liyuan, Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and other officials, television images showed. In an unprecedented move, Mr. Xi was welcomed at the Kumsusan Palace, the mausoleum where the preserved bodies of the North's founder Kim Il-sung and his successor Kim Jong-il lie in state.

The *Rodong Sinmun* newspaper, the mouthpiece of the ruling party, devoted the top half of its front page to the visit, with a colour picture of Mr. Xi, a day after it carried an article by him, also on the front page.

Authorities imposed tight restrictions on media, with international journalists in Pyongyang not allowed to cover the visit, and no non-Chinese foreign media organisations given visas.

ELSEWHERE



China's ex-Interpol chief pleads guilty to bribery

Former Interpol chief Meng Hongwei pleaded guilty at a trial in China on Thursday to accepting \$2.1 million in bribes. The Tianjin No.1 Intermediate Court said Meng "showed repentance" during the hearing, which was the culmination of a dramatic case that shook the international police organisation and put a spotlight on China's opaque judicial system. •AFP

New Zealand launches gun buyback scheme

New Zealand opened a gun buyback scheme on Thursday aimed at ridding the country of semi-automatic weapons similar to those used in the Christchurch mosque attacks. Licensed firearms owners will have six months to surrender weapons that have now been deemed illegal, with an amnesty ensuring that they will not face prosecution during that period. •AFP

Pak. to set up courts to deal with gender violence

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's top judge has vowed to set up more than 100 gender-based violence courts in the country.

Chief Justice Asif Saeed Khosa said the Supreme Court proposes to set up "116 gender-based violence courts and also child courts in every district in Pakistan".

The courts "will be designed to look entirely different both in their infrastructure and working than other courts," he told judges in Islamabad on Wednesday. He offered no further details, and Supreme Court officials

said the plan is still being discussed.

'A first step'

Setting up gender-based violence courts is a "first step", said lawyer Benazir Jatoi – though she warned that without clear mechanisms and effective implementation it was too soon to celebrate.

Ms. Jatoi cited violence against a women's centre that was briefly set up in Multan. "The present government... programmes stopped the funding for the centre," she said. "The newly-promised... courts should not meet the same fate."

CM
YK

China confirms that it hosted Taliban leader Mullah Baradar

We support internal dialogue among Afghans: spokesman

ATUL ANEJA
BEIJING

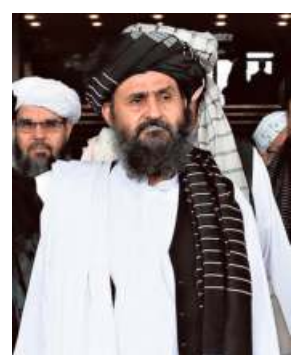
China on Thursday confirmed that it had hosted Taliban leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar as part of its bid to expand its role in Afghanistan.

In response to a question, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lu Kang said that Chinese officials exchanged views with Mr. Baradar and his aides on "peace and reconciliation process as well as the fight against terrorism".

The dialogue took place ahead of the seventh round of talks between the Taliban and the U.S. in Doha, Qatar.

Stepping up engagement

China has stepped up its engagement with Afghanistan, apprehending that the proposed U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan can result in a power vacuum, which can trigger an outflow of militants belonging to the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), destabilising the neighbouring Xinjiang region.



Taliban leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. •REUTERS

Mr. Lu stressed that China was focussing on promoting an internal dialogue between the Taliban and the Afghan government led by the President Ashraf Ghani. "We always support Afghan-led, Afghan-owned extensive and inclusive peace and reconciliation as well as the internal dialogue among the Afghans," Mr. Lu said.

"So we have made our position clear with Mr. Baradar. This is also an important part in our efforts to promote peace talks," he noted.

Mr. Lu pointed out that both the opposition and the

Afghan government appeared ready to resolve their differences. He acknowledged that China was trying to promote a dialogue among Afghan groups.

Talks in the past too

China has held talks with Taliban in the past. In mid-July 2015, an Afghan Taliban delegation led by Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai held back channel talks in China. In the same year, representatives of both the Taliban and the Afghan government reportedly met in Urumqi, capital of China's Xinjiang Province.

Observers point out that China needs a peaceful Afghanistan to draw Kabul firmly into its Belt and Road Initiative as South Asia's gateway into Central Asia. The Chinese Foreign Ministry had said that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has been extended to Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has also been a source of Chinese investments especially in the raw materials sector.

Johnson, Hunt to fight for U.K. leadership

REUTERS
LONDON

Fervent Brexit campaigner Boris Johnson and Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt emerged on Thursday as the only two candidates left in the race to become British Prime Minister, with the flamboyant Mr. Johnson odds-on favourite to win next month.

In a fifth and final ballot of Conservative lawmakers, which eliminated Environment Secretary Michael Gove, Mr. Johnson was again way out in front with 160 out of 313 votes, versus Mr. Hunt's 77. One ballot paper was rejected.

Mr. Johnson has increased his share of the vote of Con-



Boris Johnson. •REUTERS

servative lawmakers at each of the ballots so far: 114 out of 313 votes in the first ballot on June 13; 126 on June 18; 143 on Wednesday; and 157 and 160 on Thursday.

Mr. Gove was third with 75. Interior minister Sajid Javid was knocked out in the

fourth round earlier on Thursday. Betting markets gave Mr. Johnson a 92% probability of winning and Mr. Hunt just 7%.

Vote next month

Now, around 1,60,000 Conservative Party grassroots members will vote on who will be their leader – and Britain's next Prime Minister – by the end of July.

Mr. Johnson has pledged to leave the European Union (EU) on October 31 with or without a deal.

The EU has said it will not renegotiate the divorce deal that Theresa May agreed last year and the British Parliament has indicated it will block a no-deal exit.

THE HINDU GROUP

LET YOUR KIDS HAVE THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

OVER

48%

DISCOUNT

₹869

₹449

THE HINDU YOUNG WORLD + YOUNG WORLD CLUB.com

ANNUAL COMBO OFFER

Magazine Website

Gift your kids the dual benefits of an IQ enhancing newspaper reading and interactive virtual learning.

SUBSCRIBE NOW

Log on to www.youngworldclub.com or Call 1800 3000 1878