

Obama Warns China Against 'Throwing Elbows' in Sea Dispute

WASHINGTON - US President Barack Obama on Monday weighed in on territorial disputes in the South China Sea, urging regional powers, particularly China, to respect the law and stop "throwing elbows."

As several Asian regional powers face off over maritime borders, Obama warned about disregard for existing laws and a move away from established ways of resolving disputes.

"If you start losing that approach, and suddenly conflicts arise and claims are made based on how big the country is or how powerful its navy is instead of based on law, then I think Asia will be less prosperous and the Pacific region will be less prosperous," he said.



The United States does not hold any territorial claims in the South China Sea, Obama added. But as a "Pacific power" Washington has vocally called on China and other nations to end reclamation.

His administration has vowed to continue sending military aircraft and ships to the tense region to protect navigation rights.

"We think that land reclamation, aggressive actions by any party in that area are counterproductive," said Obama. Turning to China directly, Obama adopted a boxing metaphor, saying "it may be that some of their claims are legitimate, but they shouldn't just try to establish that based on throwing elbows and pushing people out of the way." (AFP)

Russia Urges US to Act in Lockstep with Syria to Crush IS

MOSCOW - Russia on Tuesday urged a US-led coalition fighting against the Islamic State group to coordinate their air raids with the Syrian government, warning that jihadists could go "very far" if not stopped. "It is absolutely clear to me it was a mistake -- still is -- not to coordinate the air strikes with the activities of the Syrian army. That's what we believe must be done," Russian Foreign Minister

Sergei Lavrov told Bloomberg Television in an interview. "And that is what unfortunately our American colleagues cannot accept for ideological considerations." Lavrov spoke as the Western coalition gathered for Paris crunch talks involving Iraq to discuss the advance of IS jihadists who have declared an Islamic caliphate in large parts of Syria and Iraq they now control. Moscow's top



diplomat whose country is among the main backers of the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, warned that the IS militants could go "very far,

very far" if not stopped. "They already make a lot of progress in Iraq, in Syria. They just took the Idlib province," he said, noting ... (More on P4)... (22)

US Accuses Syria of Backing IS Aleppo Advance

BEIRUT - The United States has accused the Syrian military of carrying out air strikes to help Islamic State fighters advance around the northern city of Aleppo, messages posted on the U.S. Embassy Syria official Twitter feed said.

Islamic State fighters pushed back rival insurgents north of Aleppo on Sunday near the Turkish border, threatening their supply route to the city, fighters and a group monitoring the war said.

Fighters from Levant Front, a northern alliance which includes Western-backed rebels and Islamist fighters, said they were worried Islamic State was heading for the Bab al-Salam crossing between

Aleppo and the Turkish province of Kilis.

"Reports indicate that the regime is making air strikes in support of ISIL's advance on Aleppo, aiding extremists against Syrian population," a post on the U.S. Embassy Syria Twitter account said late on Monday, using an acronym for Islamic State. Syrian officials have previously dismissed as nonsense allegations by Washington and Syrian opposition activists that the Syrian military has helped Islamic State's fight against rival Syrian insurgent forces.

"The Syrian army is fighting Islamic State in all areas where it is present in Syria," a military source said. (Reuters)

Israel Says U.N. Grants Hamas-Linked Group NGO Status

UNITED NATIONS - Israel on Monday accused a U.N. committee that oversees non-governmental organizations of granting U.N. accreditation to an association that it said promotes "anti-Israel propaganda in Europe" and is linked to the militant Palestinian group Hamas.

Israel's mission to the United Nations issued a statement condemning the decision, by the 19-member U.N. Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, to approve the application of the Palestinian Return Center (PRC), an organization based in Britain. The PRC denied having ties to Hamas and accused Israel of trying

to "distort and mislead the committee member states."

The Israeli statement said it banned the PRC in 2010 because of its ties to Hamas, labeling it "an organizational and a coordinating wing of Hamas in Europe" with members that include senior Hamas officials.

"Until today, the U.N. has given Hamas discounts and let it strengthen its activities," Israel's U.N. ambassador, Ron Prosor, said in the statement. "Now, the U.N. went one step further, and gave Hamas a welcoming celebration at its main entrance, allowing it to be a full participant." (Reuters)

Russian Missile Maker: MH17 Shot Down By Ukrainian Missile

MOSCOW - The Russian maker of the Buk air defense missile system said Tuesday that it has concluded that Malaysian Airlines flight 17 was downed by an older version of the missile, which is not in service with the Russian military but is in Ukrainian arsenals.

Controversy continues over who shot down the plane last summer over eastern Ukraine, killing all 298 people aboard. Ukraine and the West suspect it was destroyed by a Russian surface-to-air missile fired by Russian soldiers or Russia-backed separatist rebels fighting in the area. Russia denies that.

Mikhail Malyshevsky, an adviser to the director general of the

missile maker, state-controlled Almaz-Antei consortium, said at a news conference Tuesday that its analysis was based on photographs of the wreckage available to the public. He said the holes in the plane's parts were consistent with a specific type of Buk missile and its warhead. Each of the Buk subtypes has its warhead rigged with shrapnel of a specific shape. This variation of the missile is in the Ukrainian military arsenals, but not in the Russian, said Almaz-Antei director Yan Novikov. Novikov said that in 2005 when Ukraine contacted the consortium regarding the maintenance of its Buk systems, it had 991 such missiles. (AP)

Gaza A 'Powder Keg', Germany's Top Diplomat Warns

GAZA CITY, Palestinian Territories - The impoverished Gaza Strip is a "powder keg" at risk of exploding, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said on Monday during a visit to the war-torn territory.

The German minister, who arrived in the region on Saturday and held talks with top Israeli and Palestinian officials, called for ef-

orts to rebuild the shattered enclave which was ravaged by a 50-day war last summer, the third in six years.

But he said it would only be possible if there was a halt to Palestinian rocket fire on southern Israel.

"I came out of all my discussions yesterday in Jerusalem and in Ramallah with the hope that all parties are mindful that here we are

sitting on a powder keg here and that we must ensure that the fuse does not catch light," Steinmeier said.

"We shall only be able to decisively reduce the risks of a fresh escalation if we allow economic development in the Gaza Strip in addition to humanitarian aid and reconstruction," he said on a visit to Gaza City's fishing port. (AFP)

No Military Solution to Iran's Nuclear Program: Obama

JERUSALEM - U.S. President Barack Obama reached out to a skeptical Israeli public in an interview aired Monday saying that only an agreement, not military action, can prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons.

Obama said "I can, I think, demonstrate, not based on any hope but on facts and evidence and analysis, that the best way to prevent Iran from having a nuclear weapon is a verifiable, tough agreement." Obama's remarks come as an

end-of-June deadline for an Iranian deal is fast approaching.

"A military solution will not fix it. Even if the United States participates, it would temporarily slow down an Iranian nuclear program but it will not eliminate it," he said in excerpts from his interview with Israeli Channel 2 TV's investigative program "Uvda." The full interview will be broadcast Tuesday night.

Israel has said the emerging nuclear agreement with Iran is a bad deal and that a military option is still on the table to prevent Iran

from getting the bomb. Relations between Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have been tense at times and the Iran issue has been a source of contention between the traditionally close allies.

The proposed deal would freeze Iran's nuclear program for a decade, in return for sanctions relief. Iran insists that its nuclear program is solely for peaceful purposes, while the West fears it could allow it to build nuclear weapons. (AP)

UN Finds Growing Signs of Russian Involvement in Ukraine War

GENEVA - A separatist conflict in eastern Ukraine is revealing increasing evidence, but not yet conclusive legal proof, of Russian state involvement, senior United Nations human rights officials said on Monday. "We are speaking about increasing inflow of (unofficial) fighters and increasing evidence that there are also some (Russian) servicemen involved in fighting," Assistant

Secretary-General for Human Rights Ivan Simonovic told a news conference in Geneva.

Russia denies Western accusations that it is backing pro-Russian rebels with arms and troops. On May 21, U.N. officials interviewed two Russians captured in eastern Ukraine. The two men believe they should be treated as captured servicemen, but Russia says they are former soldiers who had left the

military. The pair were charged with terrorism by Ukrainian authorities, putting them "between a rock and a hard place", Simonovic said. "It is very difficult to prove whether they are servicemen or not. That is why mostly we are speaking about 'fighters' of the Russian federation," said Armen Harutyunyan, head of the U.N. Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine. (Reuters)

IS Suicide Attackers Slow Iraq's Ramadi Counterattack

BAGHDAD - A huge suicide bomb attack on an Iraqi police base killed at least 37 people Monday, further slowing an operation to retake the city of Ramadi from Islamic State jihadists. The blast came as US-led coalition

members carrying out air raids against IS and providing training and weapons to Iraqi forces prepared to meet in Paris for talks on a string of major battlefield gains by the jihadists in Iraq and Syria. A suicide bomber blew up his explosives-

laden vehicle at a police base in Iraq's Salaheddin province, killing at least 37 people and wounding more than 30, officers said. "They are mostly policemen," said a doctor at the main hospital in the nearby ... (More on P4)... (23)

Yemen Tribesmen Kill 18 Houthis Fighters in Ambush: Residents

SANAA - Armed tribesmen killed 18 Houthi fighters in an ambush in Yemen's central province of Ibb on Tuesday, residents said, in one of the deadliest ground attacks in over two months of war.

The attack hit a convoy of militiamen and allied army troops in the town of Qaeda while they were en route to the city of Taiz, a flashpoint of clashes between Yemen's dominant Houthis and armed backers of exiled president Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi. Farther south in Dhalea province, around 15 Houthi fighters were killed in heavy clashes with pro-Hadi fighters on Monday night.

A coalition of Arab countries led by Saudi Arabia, seeking to restore Hadi to power, has carried out over nine weeks of air strikes ... (More on P4)... (24)

Neighbour News

Arabs, West Miscalculated in Syria: Rouhani

TEHRAN - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani accused Arab and Western governments of miscalculating in their backing for Syrian rebels as the US-led coalition against the Islamic State group gathered in Paris Tuesday. Speaking at a reception for Syria's visiting parliament speaker Jihad al-Lahham, Rouhani renewed Tehran's longstanding accusation that it was those governments' support for armed insurgency against its Damascus ally that had led to the rise of the jihadists.

"Unfortunately some countries miscalculated and thought that terrorist groups would be a means for them to achieve their objectives, whereas sooner or later they were always going to be affected by the scourge of terrorism themselves," he said. "The government and nation of Iran will stand by the government and nation of Syria till the end." The head of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Admiral Ali Shamkhani, echoed the president's comments in his own talks with Lahham. (AFP)

Enemies of Pakistan Want to Divide The Nation: Sharif

QUETTA - While chairing an All Parties Conference (APC) in Quetta on Tuesday, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said that enemies of Pakistan want to divide the nation.

"There are some who wish to make us fight amongst ourselves," said the premier. PM Nawaz said that he was happy that all parties had agreed on the China-Pak Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. "I want to congratulate the Pakistani leadership for owning it." (Agencies)

PM Nawaz also heaped praise on the Pakistani leadership for moving towards mature politics.

"We made decisions about the National Action Plan (NAP) and military courts during which the country's leadership stood together. What bigger example than this of national unity?" NAP - the 21-point counter-terrorism strategy - was put in place through a strong political consensus after the Dec 16 Peshawar school tragedy. (Agencies)

China Needs to Focus on Broader Reforms, Convertible Currency Not Ultimate Goal: Bernanke

HONG KONG - China needs to focus on broader reforms which lead to longer, sustained growth and the Renminbi (RMB) internationalization is not the ultimate goal, former U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke said here on Tuesday.

"China is slowing down, first of all, because no country can grow at 10 percent per year forever. ... In the case of China, it's going through a very important change in the growth model," Bernanke said. "The RMB is to be an international currency but that's not the ultimate goal to have a stronger, reproductive economy."

China should move to diversify its economy to make it more domestic demand oriented, more entrepreneurial and more market oriented

towards services, he said.

Bernanke said from the perspective of policy makers, when it comes to create new services, high tech companies and financial services alike, the government has to try to provide a framework or a background to let the market, entrepreneurs and private sectors do that.

"So it's gonna be periods of uncertainties as China makes this transition. ... It's not gonna be variations that can be easily handled by monetary or fiscal policies," he said. He said China is making progress but still has a long way to go, especially to get households consume more and in terms of a hard landing, there are some risks, including risks of the banking sector, property and stock markets. (Xinhua)

KOICA to Provide \$58 Million in Grants to Uzbekistan

TASHKENT - The Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) in 2015-2017 will provide grants totaling US \$58 million to Uzbekistan in the framework of a bilateral cooperation program, the press service of the President of Uzbekistan said. Uzbekistan and South Korea signed a program with the Korean International Cooperation Agency for the years 2015-2017 during the visit of President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov to Seoul last week. The program provides for implementation of 11 projects with grants totaling \$58 million. In particular, the grants will be spent on projects to develop a feasibility study for modernization of the airport of Tashkent city

with the construction of a new international terminal, the creation of centers for training of highly qualified medical staff and maintenance of medical equipment for the construction of modern multidisciplinary clinics, organization of vocational training in technical professions in the Khorezm and Ferghana regions of Uzbekistan, the development of the Tashkent University of Information Technologies with the construction and equipping of a modern information and resource center, the introduction of e-learning systems and equipping of scientific and educational laboratories, the Jahon information agency reported. (TCA)