

US cites Chinese warship's unsafe maneuvers

TAIPEI/BEIJING — The US Navy has released a video of what it called an “unsafe interaction” in the Taiwan Strait, in which a Chinese warship crossed in front of a US destroyer in the sensitive waterway, a risky incident amid deteriorating Sino-US ties.

The encounter comes as both countries have traded blame for not holding military talks — with disagreements between the two over everything from trade and Taiwan to Russia's invasion of Ukraine — and raises the specter of future face-offs that could spiral out of control.

The US military said the *USS Chung-Hoon*, a destroyer, and

Canada's *HSMC Montreal*, a frigate, were conducting a “routine” transit of the strait on Saturday when the Chinese ship cut in front of the US vessel, coming within 150 yards (137 meters).

In the video released by the US Navy late Sunday, a Chinese warship could clearly be seen sailing across the path of the *Chung-Hoon* in calm waters. The *Chung-Hoon* did not change course.

A voice could be heard in English, apparently sending a radio message to the Chinese ship, warning against “attempts to limit freedom of navigation,” though the exact wording is unclear because of wind noise.

China has not commented directly on the US criticism of the encounter, and its Foreign Ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Monday.

On Saturday night, China's military rebuked the United States and Canada for “deliberately provoking risk” with the rare joint sailing.

Chinese military commentator Song Zhongping told Reuters this “point blank interception” was a demonstration of both the capabilities and “courage” of China's navy.

“The more intensified the provocation from the United

States, the stronger the countermeasures from China,” Song said.

It was the second such encounter in recent days.

On May 26, a Chinese fighter jet carried out an “unnecessarily aggressive” maneuver near a US military plane over the South China Sea in international airspace, according to the United States.

“It seems to me that Beijing has instructed its forces to respond more assertively against what it believes are encroaching US and allied forces,” said Derek Grossman, senior defense analyst at the RAND Corp., a US think tank.

“By doing so, China is only increasing the chances for miscalculation — namely ships or aircraft accidentally colliding — that could then spiral into armed conflict,” he added.

In 2001, a US spy plane made an emergency landing on China's Hainan Island after a collision with a Chinese fighter jet, whose pilot died.

Taiwan's defense ministry on Sunday called China's actions with the US and Canadian ships “provocation” and said it was the common responsibility of free and democratic countries to

maintain peace and stability in the strait.

“Any actions to increase tension and danger will not contribute to regional security,” it said in a statement.

The ministry called on China to respect the right to freedom of navigation.

China views Taiwan as its own territory, a claim the government in Taipei strongly rejects.

Beijing has been stepping up military and political pressure to try to force Taiwan to accept its sovereignty, including staging regular maneuvers near the island. — **Reuters**

Fighter jets chase small plane in Washington area before it crashes in Virginia mountains

WASHINGTON — The United States scrambled F-16 fighter jets in a supersonic chase of a light aircraft with an unresponsive pilot that violated airspace around Washington D.C. and later crashed into the mountains of Virginia, officials said.

No survivors were found at the crash site, Virginia state police said.

The jet fighters created a sonic boom over the US capital as they pursued the errant Cessna Citation, officials said, causing consternation among people in the Washington area.

Four people were onboard the Cessna, a source familiar with the matter said. A Cessna Citation can carry seven to 12 passengers.

After several hours first responders reached the crash site but found no one alive, the Virginia State Police said in a statement.

The Cessna was registered to Encore Motors of Melbourne, Florida, according to the flight-tracking website *Flight Aware*.

Encore owner John Rumpel told the *Washington Post* his daughter, a grandchild and her nanny were on board. “We know nothing about the crash,” the *Washington Post* quoted Rumpel as saying. “We are talking to the FAA now,” he added before ending the call.

The US military attempted to contact the pilot, who was unresponsive, until the Cessna

crashed near the George Washington National Forest in Virginia, North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) said in a statement.

The Cessna appeared to be flying on autopilot, another source familiar the matter said.

“The NORAD aircraft were authorized to travel at supersonic speeds and a sonic boom may have been heard by residents of the region,” according to the statement. NORAD aircraft also used flares in an attempt to call the pilot's attention.

A US official said the fighters did not cause the crash.

The Cessna took off from Elizabethton Municipal Airport in Elizabethton, Tennessee, and was bound for Long Island MacArthur Airport in New York, about 50 miles (80 km) east of Manhattan, the FAA said in a statement, adding that it and the National Transportation Safety Board would investigate the event.

According to Flight Aware, the plane appeared to reach the New York area, then made nearly a 180-degree turn.

Incidents involving unresponsive pilots are not unprecedented. Golfer Payne Stewart died in 1999 along with four others after the aircraft he was in flew thousands of miles with the pilot and passengers unresponsive. The plane eventually crashed in South Dakota with no survivors. — **Reuters**

Russia claims to have thwarted key Ukrainian offensive, killed hundreds of pro-Kyiv troops

MOSCOW — Russia said on Monday its forces had thwarted a major Ukrainian offensive at five points along the front in the southern Ukrainian region of Donetsk and killed hundreds of pro-Kyiv troops.

It was not immediately clear whether the reported attack represented the start of a Ukrainian counteroffensive that Kyiv had been promising for months to recapture territory taken by Russian forces after the invasion that started in February 2022.

Russia's Defense Ministry said Ukraine had attacked with six mechanized and two tank battalions in southern Donetsk, where Moscow had long suspected Ukraine would seek to drive a wedge through Russian-controlled territory.

“On the morning of June 4, the enemy launched a large-scale offensive in five sectors of the front in the South Donetsk direction,” the Defense Ministry said in a statement posted on Telegram at 1:30 a.m. Moscow time (10:30 p.m. GMT).

“The enemy's goal was to break through our defenses in the most vulnerable, in its opinion, sector of the front,” it said. “The enemy did not achieve its tasks; it had no success.”

Reuters was unable to immediately verify the Russian statement and the Ukrainian Defense Ministry and military did not immediately respond to written requests for comment.

The daily report from Ukraine's General Staff said only that there were 29 combat clashes in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov published a cryptic message on Twitter on Sunday, quoting Depeche Mode's track “Enjoy the Silence.”

“Words are very unnecessary, they can only do harm,” according to his tweet.

Ukraine last week published a flashy video depicting troops preparing for battle and reciting a rousing blessing, which was later aired as a recruiting clip.

Russia's Defense Ministry released video of what it said showed several Ukrainian armored vehicles in a field blowing up after being hit.

Russian forces killed 250 Ukrainian troops and destroyed 16 tanks, three infantry fighting vehicles and 21 armored combat vehicles, the ministry said.

Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, who oversees Moscow's military operation in Ukraine, was in the area of the Ukrainian attack, the ministry said.

Some prominent Russian military bloggers, including Semyon Pegov, who blogs under the name War Gonzo, reported heavy fighting early on Monday in areas controlled by Russia. Pegov said that Ukrainian forces are attacking near Velyka Novosilka in the Donetsk region.

“There is a tough fight going on.”

Other Russian military bloggers also reported heavy fighting on Monday morning near Bakhmut, nearby Soledar and Vuhledar in the Donetsk region. Reuters could not independently verify the reports.

COUNTER-OFFENSIVE

For months, Ukraine has been preparing for a counteroffensive against Russian forces which officials in Kyiv and CIA Director William Burns have said will pierce Russian President Vladimir Putin's hubris.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky told the *Wall Street Journal* in an interview published on Saturday he was ready to launch the counteroffensive but tempered a forecast of success with a warning that it could take some time and come at a heavy cost. “I don't know how long it will take,” he told the *Wall Street Journal*. “To be honest, it can go a variety of ways, completely different. But we are going to do it, and we are ready.”

After seeking tens of billions of dollars of Western weapons to fight Russian forces, the success or failure of the counteroffensive is likely to influence the shape of future Western diplomatic and military support for Ukraine.

Ukraine has in recent weeks sought to weaken Russian positions, but its specific plans have been shrouded in secrecy as it seeks to strike yet another blow against the much larger military of Russia.

Moscow was last month struck by drones which Russia said was a Ukrainian terrorist attack while pro-Ukrainian forces have repeatedly crossed into Russia proper in recent days in the Belgorod region.

After a two-month lull, Russia has launched hundreds of drones and missiles on Ukraine since early May, chiefly on Kyiv,

with Ukraine saying the targets were its military and critical infrastructure facilities.

WAR IN UKRAINE

Mr. Putin sent troops into Ukraine on February 24 last year in what the Kremlin expected to be swift operation, but its forces suffered a series of defeats and had to move back and regroup in swathes of eastern Ukraine.

Russia now controls at least 18% of what is internationally recognized to be Ukrainian territory, and has claimed four regions of Ukraine as Russian territory.

For months, tens of thousands of Russian troops have been digging in along a front line that stretched for about 600 miles (1,000km), bracing for a Ukrainian attack that is expected to try to cut Russia's so-called land bridge to the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia annexed in 2014.

Ukraine says it will not rest until it has ejected every Russian soldier from its territory, and casts the invasion as an imperial-style land grab by Russia, the world's biggest nuclear power.

Russia says the war is escalating and says the West is fighting what amounts to a hybrid war against Russia that is aimed at sowing discord and ultimately carving up Russia's vast natural resources.

The West says it wants Ukraine to defeat Russia but denies that it wants to destroy Russia. US President Joseph R. Biden said last year a direct confrontation between NATO and Russia would mean World War III. — **Reuters**



Japanese get trained in ‘Hollywood’ smiles as masks slowly come off

TOKYO — In one of Keiko Kawano's recent classes, more than a dozen Tokyo art school students held mirrors to their faces, stretching the sides of their mouths upward with their fingers — they were practicing how to smile.

It's not something most people would think to pay for but Ms. Kawano's services as a smile instructor are seeing a surge in demand in Japan, where mask-wearing was near universal during the pandemic.

Himawari Yoshida, 20, one of the students taking the class as part of her school's courses to prepare them for the job market,

says she needed to work on her smile.

“I hadn't used my facial muscles much during COVID so it's good exercise,” she said.

Ms. Kawano's company Egaoku — literally “Smile Education” — has seen a more than four-fold jump in demand from last year, with customers ranging from companies seeking more approachable salespeople and local governments looking to improve their residents' well-being. An hour-long one-on-one lesson costs 7,700 yen (\$55).

Even before the pandemic, donning a mask in Japan was normal for many during hay fever

season and around exams due to concern about getting ill for a key life event.

But while the government may have lifted its recommendation to wear masks in March, many people have still not let them go on a daily basis. A poll by public broadcaster NHK in May showed 55% of Japanese saying they were wearing them just as often as two months earlier. Only 8% said they had stopped wearing masks altogether.

Tellingly, roughly a quarter of the art school students who took the class kept their masks on during the lesson. Young people have, perhaps, become used to life with

masks, Ms. Kawano said, noting that women might find it easier to go out without makeup and men could hide that they hadn't shaved.

The former radio host who started giving lessons in 2017 has also trained 23 others as smiling coaches to spread the virtues and technique of crafting the perfect smile around Japan.

Her trademarked “Hollywood Style Smiling Technique” method comprises “crescent eyes,” “round cheeks” and shaping the edges of the mouth to bare eight pearly whites in the upper row. Students can try out their tech-

nique on a tablet to get scored on their smile.

Ms. Kawano believes that culturally, Japanese people may be less inclined to smile than Westerners because of their sense of security as an island nation and as a unitary state. To hear her tell it, the threat of guns might, ironically, encourage more smiling.

“Culturally, a smile signifies that I'm not holding a gun and I'm not a threat to you,” she said. With a surge in inbound tourists, Japanese people need to communicate with foreigners with more than just their eyes, she added.

“I think there's a growing need for people to smile. — **Reuters**

Growth,
from S1/1

A *BusinessWorld* poll of 15 analysts last week yielded a 6.1% median for May inflation, settling near the lower end of the central bank's 5.8-6.6% forecast.

May inflation could be slower than 6.6% in April but quicker than 5.4% a year earlier. It has been slowing since January.

The BSP said inflation would average by 7.2% in the first half before easing to 4.6% in the third quarter and to 3% in the last quarter.

By the first quarter of 2024, inflation may hit close to the lower end of the 2-4% target due to base effects and a likely decline in global oil and nonoil prices.

“The risks to the inflation outlook continue to be skewed toward the upside for both 2023 and 2024, warranting continued readiness to resume monetary action if

necessary,” the central bank said in its e-mail.

It flagged the impact of fare and wage increases, higher food prices and El Niño as risks to the outlook.

Potential wage hikes based on recent debates in Congress and shocks to food and energy prices from El Niño might also spur second-round effects, the BSP said.

‘SET OF TOOLS’

BSP Governor Felipe M. Medalla earlier said he expected inflation to ease back to the 2-4% target by September or October. The central bank expects inflation to average at 5.5% for this year before slowing to 2.8% in 2024.

The US central bank's aggressive monetary policy tightening has continued to influence Philippine financial markets, the BSP said.

The US Federal Reserve raised the key rate by 25 bps in May and has increased it by 500 bps since March last year, bringing the Fed fund rate to 5-5.25%.

But a pause in the Fed's policy tightening is possible amid financial stability concerns in the US after the collapse of some banks, the BSP said.

The Fed will meet on June 13-14 to discuss monetary policy.

“These developments sparked worries over potential spillovers to the international financial system, which prompted the US Fed to reevaluate the trade-offs between policy tightening to arrest elevated inflation and maintaining the policy rate to mitigate the risk of further bank fallouts,” the BSP said.

But the US banking turmoil had limited effects on Philippine financial markets be-

cause local banks had little exposure to the collapsed US banks, the central bank said.

“Structural reforms that were put in place by the BSP even prior to the onset of the banking failures played an essential role in limiting potential spillovers on the country's financial system and macroeconomy,” it added.

These banking reforms include sound governance and risk management standards, prudential limits and requirements, as well as strengthened surveillance.

“In the event of a possible further tightening of the global financial condition and serious liquidity problems, the BSP has a set of tools to provide liquidity to the banking system, if necessary, even though the current health of the domestic banking system is relatively sound,” the BSP said.

PEZA,
from S1/1

The agency aims to continue the government's export-led growth strategy by having 98% of 3,431 registered business enterprises export-oriented.

PEZA locators account for 82% of the country's total annual commodity exports and 60% of service exports.

“We vow to continuously perform our mandate to the best of our ability and help the administration in achieving its bid for the country to graduate to upper middle-income status within the term of President Marcos,” Mr. Panga said. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**