

# GALAMSEY MAFIA

## Minority Wants NPP Bigwigs Arrested By OSP



**Rashid Pelpuo, Ranking Member on Lands and Forestry Committee**

**T**he Minority in Parliament yesterday called on the government and the Office of the Special Prosecutor (OSP) to arrest government appointees and party officials who were cited in the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Illegal Mining (IMCIM) report.

This call by the minority is on the back of the recent invitation and subsequent arrest of the former chairman and author of the IMCIM report, Professor Kwabena Frimpong-Boateng by the Office of the Special Prosecutor (OSP).

In a statement read by the Ranking Member on Lands and Forestry Committee, Rashid Pelpuo, the Minority emphasized that the government's commitment to tackling illegal mining otherwise known as 'galamsey' must extend beyond the arrest of Professor

*cont. on page 3*

## The Tale Of US Spy Plane Over South China Sea

*page 10*

**Why Ghana Should Consider Joining The BRICS Organization, Natogmah Issahaku Writes** *page 5*

**NPP Footsoldiers Unhappy About Akufo-Addo's Performance, Says Kwabena Agyepong**



*page 2*  
Kwabena Agyepong and President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo

**Commemorating International Day Against Child Labour**

**Let's Tackle Child Labour Head On -- Afasi Komla**



*page 5*

# The INSIGHT

## EDITORIAL

### CLOSE THEM DOWN!

Several months after the Ghana Standards Authority in collaboration with the Criminal Investigation Department of the Ghana Police Service closed down a gas cylinder manufacturing plants in Accra and other areas for operating illegally it has now emerged the some others are operating with bravado.

This development is indeed worrying. Indeed, there are several of these gas plants littered across every nook and cranny of the country and the worry is the danger their operations pose to residents especially in residential areas apart from operating illegally.

Over the years the country has recorded a huge number of domestic fires, which had claimed several lives and property and it is upon this basis that such illegal cylinder manufacturing companies need not be allowed to operate.

Often, these stations are closed down only to be seen a couple of days later, operating brisk business, a clear indication that something has gone amidst.

There is therefore, the need for the state regulatory agencies to ensure that standards are adhered to and especially safety issues not compromised upon.

Again, the is the need for the regulators to ensure that those gas plants and filling stations that operate in residential areas and are sited close to, or sandwiched between houses are stopped from such dangerous operations.

Those that are operating illegally need to be closed down now.

## NPP Footsoldiers Unhappy About Akufo-Addo's Performance, Says Kwabena Agyepong



New Patriotic Party (NPP) flagbearer hopeful, Kwabena Agyepong has slammed the President of the Republic, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, over the way things are going in the governing party and the country at large.

The former NPP General Secretary Kennedy Agyepong, in an interview with Kwami Sefa Kayi on Peace FM's 'Kokrokoo' morning show, said a lot of things are going bad within the NPP under the leadership of President Akufo-Addo.

According to him, many of the grass roots are complaining bitterly to him about how unhappy they are with the conduct of President Nana Akufo-Addo.

He noted that the NPP is gradually turning into a party that doesn't tolerate freedom of speech, citing an instance where a party executive spoke against an MCE and has been removed for criticizing him.

Mr. Agyepong finds this act an attempt to gag people, stressing a lot of the party members are afraid to freely voice their concerns.

"It saddens my heart . . . sometimes I want to ask Mr. President who I've known very well, that in his quiet moment is he satisfied with some of these actions that have been taken? "I ask myself that, Mr. President, the things happening in this country; is he happy with it?", he queried.

"We cannot overly politicize this country to the detriment of the development of our country, Ghana," he hollered.

"This, our party, has been premised on virtues and values and principles, not human beings. So, if you are a President and you don't have people around you who can look you in the eye and call you out, you are doomed because it is important for me to stand and talk at least for generations unborn. Even if it affects my vote, it does not matter", he cautioned the President.

Source: [peacefmonline.com](http://peacefmonline.com)

## THE INSIGHT

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# GALAMSEY MAFIA

## Minority Wants NPP Bigwigs Arrested By OSP

*from front page*

Kwabena Frimpong-Boateng and include the key members of the government and New Patriotic Party (NPP) officials implicated in the IMCIM report.

"If this government wants to demonstrate seriousness in the fight against this galamsey, it must go beyond the arrest of Prof Frimpong-Boateng. It should go wider by ensuring they arrest government and Jubilee appointees at the heart of government which includes Mr Gabby Asare Otchere-Darko, the President's cousin, the Director of Operation at the Presidency, Lord Oblitey Commey, Albert Quarm who have all been cited by the committee," they said.

According to the Minority, it is unthinkable that the government which is tasked to protect the state resources turns out to be the key sponsor in the destruction of the resources in the country.

"It is our opinion with the public

enquiry on the committee report and damaged forest reserves is necessary especially with the now widening destruction of our lands and rivers by 'galamsey' operators, it is unthinkable that the state with all its reserves, lands, rivers, money, people are left to an elected government to manage, and it turns out that the government itself is a key sponsor of the destruction and misuse of these resources.

"Our cocoa farms are diminished, our people are drinking mercury polluted water, our rivers are dying, and our forest reserves are destroyed on daily bases," he noted.

### Background:

The former Chairman of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Illegal Mining, Professor Kwabena Frimpong-Boateng,

gave a detailed account of his recent arrest by the Office of the Special Prosecutor.

In an interview with 3news, the renowned surgeon provided a full account of his invitation to the OSP's office on May 15, 2023, which culminated in his arrest and subsequent bail.

"We waited at the lobby down there, and that was my first time in that building," he said.

"We arrived around 10 o'clock, waiting for my lawyer. When he came, we were taken upstairs to the 7th floor, where the office is, and then we were ushered into a room. I was given a chair, and opposite me was the Chief Investigator.

"On my right, there were my two lawyers, and then some officers from that office.

"So, as soon as I sat down, the Chief Investigator came to me. I was sitting down, and then he put his left hand on my right shoulder and said, 'Professor, you are under



arrest.'

"Why? He said they are investigating corruption and corruption-related activities of the IMCIM that I was chairman of. Any specific thing I had done? No, they are just doing their investigations, but all the same, I was under arrest," Prof. Frimpong-Boateng said.

According to him, he found the arrest "strange," considering preceding events, including some lawsuits brought against him. Prof. Frimpong-Boateng further

revealed that he was subjected to two hours of investigation at the OSP's office before being granted a GHC2 million bail.

"They did not even suggest self-recognizance bail. I needed somebody to bail me. So, a friend of mine was down there, and he came up and bailed me, and so I left, and they went with my friend to his house."

He added that he is expected to report back to the OSP for further investigation.

## Ghana's Inflation For May 2023 Increases Marginally To 42.2%



The Ghana Statistical Service has announced that the year-on-year inflation for May 2023 has

increased to 42.2%. Government statistician, Professor Samuel Kobina Annim, at a press

conference in Kumasi on Tuesday, June 13, 2023, noted that the increase was driven by the food and non-food category. According to Prof Annim, three items out of the 13 presented in the report by the GSS were the result of the spike. They were food and non-alcoholic beverages, housing, water, and electricity and gas, and transport.

He stated that the above contributed almost three quarters to the overall inflation with food and non-alcoholic beverages contributing more than

50% to the rate of inflation that was recorded in May 2023. "Specifically, food and non-alcoholic beverages contributed 52.4% to the overall inflation recorded in May 2023. This was distantly followed by housing, water, and electricity and gas that contributed 13.1% and closely followed by transport contributing 9.2% to the overall inflation that was recorded in the month of May 2023," he said. The division that

contributed the lowest was insurance and financial service that contributed 0.1 to the overall contribution for May 2023. The Consumer Price Inflation, the statistician said, measures changes in the price of a fixed basket of goods and services purchased by households. The assumption is that the basket is purchased each month, hence capturing price changes each month.



# INTERNATIONAL NEWS REPORT

## Compiled By Peoples Dispatch

# Iranian President Visits Latin American Countries In Attempt To Strengthen Multipolar World Order

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi arrived in Venezuela on Monday, June 12, on the first leg of his five-day visit to three Latin American countries. He is also slated to visit Cuba and Nicaragua. The visit is significant since these countries, like Iran, are affected by unilateral sanctions imposed by the US.

Underlining the significance of his visit, Raisi claimed before leaving for Latin America that relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and independent countries are “strategic.” He said that “our common position with these three countries is opposition to the [world's] hegemonic system and unilateralism.”

Raisi is traveling with a large delegation which includes the foreign, defense, petroleum and health ministers, along with other high officials. He is expected to sign bilateral agreements in all three

countries to increase trade and cooperation bypassing US sanctions. More than a dozen deals were signed between Iran and Venezuela with an objective of taking bilateral trade to USD 20 billion. The deals also include Iranians repairing the ailing oil refineries in Venezuela. Though Venezuela has the world's largest proven oil reserves, it has been unable to produce and export its oil in the last few years due to US sanctions that have severely affected the country's economy.

### Sharing experiences acquired while dealing with US sanctions

During his meeting with Venezuelan officials on Monday, Raisi announced that his country is ready to share its “valuable experience and achievement in the field of science and technology thanks to its resistance against the arrogant system and [ability to] overcome

the sanctions,” *Press Tv* reported.

Raisi also said that Iran is trying to contribute to the development of a multipolar world with countries that oppose an international system based on “unilateral hegemonic power.”

Iran and Venezuela signed a 20-year cooperation agreement in June last year during Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's visit to Iran and have booming bilateral trade in non-oil sectors as well. Maduro claimed that both Iran and Venezuela have been trying to reduce their dependence on oil revenues and diversify their economies and mutual trade to better face international political upheavals and global pressures. He also emphasized that a new world order is being formed against imperialism and countries fighting against the excessive

demands of arrogant powers are on the verge of victory, *Press Tv* reported.

Iran supplied oil to Venezuela when its refineries were unable to function due to US sanctions. It has also been involved in repair work on some of Venezuela's refineries and has provided crucial tools and spare parts.

Similar to Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua have been struggling to deal with the crippling sanctions imposed on them by the US. Cuba, which has been under US sanctions for decades, has already developed a vibrant cooperation mechanism with Iran. The countries cooperated on a COVID-19 vaccine in 2021.

Raisi will visit Cuba during the last leg of his current tour and is expected to deepen the cooperation agreements signed in



Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi (L) with President Nicolás Maduro. (Photo: Press TV/Twitter). Ebrahim Raisi is on a five-day state visit to Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua — Latin American countries that have been similarly affected by stringent US sanctions and hegemonic politics

### the past.

Raisi's visit to Latin America is expected to strengthen the trend of alliances among the countries of the Global South that has received a boost since the China-mediated rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Maduro was in Saudi Arabia earlier this month and according to some reports China is already planning to host an unprecedented summit between Iran and the GCC countries.

# Moroccans Protest Israeli Speaker's Visit



Moroccan people protest against the Israeli speaker's visit on June 8, 2023. (Photo: Al Mayadeen). Protesters called on the Moroccan government to cut all ties with the apartheid state immediately. The Moroccan government normalized ties with Israel in 2020 as part of the Abraham Accords

Hundreds of Moroccans have staged protests against the ongoing visit of the speaker of the Israeli parliament (Knesset), Amir Ohana. Protests held in the capital Rabat were led by pro-Palestine activists and the Moroccan Front against Normalization. Ohana arrived in Morocco on Wednesday at the invitation of the

speaker of the Moroccan parliament Rachid Talbi Al-Alami, after their respective offices reportedly established contact with one another in the preceding days. A number of Moroccan political parties have also opposed the visit by the Israeli government official. Ohana will reportedly visit the Moroccan parliament this week.

The protests against his visit were held under the banner, “Palestine is a trust, and normalization is betrayal.” Protesters in Rabat chanted slogans calling the normalization “shameful” and asked the government to cut all ties with the Israeli “apartheid state.” They also raised slogans against the speaker, calling him a

“war criminal.” They held up posters and placards which read, among other things, “No normalization with the occupier, resistance is the solution”, “From Rabat and Palestine, one people, not two”, and “Morocco is a free land, Ohana get out.” Protesters expressed their support and solidarity with Palestinians and called for a free Palestine. As per reports, an Israeli flag was also burnt at the site of the protest. Abdelhamid Amine, a member of the Moroccan Front in support of Palestine and against normalization, said while speaking to news outlets regarding the protests, “we cannot accept that the head of the Israeli Parliament can come

here with total impunity, even though the Israeli Parliament is currently an extreme right-wing parliament, dominated by fascists, and is coming here to be received by the Moroccan Parliament.”

Protesters urged all political parties to take part in the boycott if the speaker visits the parliament.

The Moroccan government, which signed the Israel-Morocco normalization agreement mediated by the Donald Trump administration in 2020, has deepened ties with the state of Israel despite widespread domestic opposition. Reports noted that the two sides are keen on

improving their military and security relations and commercial ties in the fields of tourism and bilateral trade. This was once again made clear during the speaker's visit when he endorsed the two countries strengthening their security and other relations, saying that his visit was “history being made before our eyes.” Several recent reports have noted that the current far-right extremist government in Israel is mulling extending its recognition to the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara, in contravention of international law.



# Why Ghana Should Consider Joining The BRICS Organization, Natogmah Issahaku Writes

By: **Natogmah Issahaku**

**G**hana needs to stand up and be counted among nations and should make efforts to take her rightful place in the comity of nations. BRICS, an acronym that stands for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, is a multilateral organization of countries that aim to foster unity and development, in peace, on equal-partner basis, among member nations. BRICS was formed on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2009; has its headquarters in Shanghai, China and recently established the BRICS Bank (New Development Bank), also located in the same city. Ghana's relations with other nations, particularly, those in the West, will not, and should not be affected by her BRICS membership, as no harm will be done to any nation if Ghana

joins the organization. Ghana's national interest and the future of younger generations and those yet unborn should be prioritized and rated as more important than the interest of other nations. Ghana's national interest must come first! Ghana does not belong to any similar global economic development organization, so joining BRICS will neither contradict nor conflict with any such organization. The main objectives of BRICS are: "To increase, deepen, and broaden cooperation among its member countries to promote growth that is sustainable, fair, and mutually beneficial for everyone. All the members' growth and progress are considered, to ensure that the economic strengths of each country are

used to build relations and eliminate unhealthy competition where possible, necessary" (BRICS website). Ghana needs all forms of infrastructural development and sustainable economic growth to raise the standard of living of Ghanaians to middle income status, which could be achieved through participation in BRICS. These needs, which translate into some of the objectives of our national development agenda, are congruent with, and would converge with the aims of BRICS. Once Ghana gets her finances in order and ensures a stable Ghana Cedi in the foreign exchange market by raising the amount of foreign exchange reserves and building up

massive gold reserves to prudent levels; achieving a balance of payments surplus; reducing Debt-to-GDP ratio down to around 50%-60%; and engaging in cost re-engineering to cut unnecessary financial waste, she should take steps to prepare an application to join BRICS. Ghana should apply to join the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) now, while preparations are made to join BRICS. Critically, Ghana stands to benefit enormously from a BRICS membership, in terms of rapid infrastructural and industrial development. Similarly, Ghana has a lot to offer BRICS member nations, in return, in a win-win partnership. And, because BRICS development cooperation model is based on equality and fairness,

Ghana will not engage in panyarring of her national sovereignty and dignity to creditor nations and multilateral financial institutions, which, hitherto is the case. Ghana, traditionally, a non-aligned nation, needs to leverage her good relations with countries in both the global West and the global East to optimize benefits that can be accrued for accelerated national development. Ghana, above all else, needs to adapt to the fast-changing reality in the current global multi polarity and should not stagnate in the past. A visionary President should take steps to lead Ghana into the BRICS fold, soonest, without hesitation. Source: <http://infobrics.org>

## Commemorating International Day Against Child Labour Let's Tackle Child Labour Head On, Says Afasi Komla

By **Joseph Nana Yaw Cobbina**

**T**he term child labour is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. In view of that, Mr. Afasi Komla, the Director of Engage Now Africa, End Modern Slavery wants the menace to be dealt with holistically. Speaking at the World Day Against Child Labour, Afasi Komla sensitized the general public on some key issues regarding this global menace. Speaking on Legal Narratives And Statistics of Child Labour In Ghana, Ghana Action And Intervention In Curbing The Issue Of Child Labour, including Ghana's Development And Successes In Global Lenses and ENA Programmes And Intervention, Mr Afasi Komla noted that the legal narratives and statistics of child labour in Ghana though encouraging needs more work to be done to deal with the canker.

According to him, the 1998 Children's Act, Act 587 states that no person shall engage a child in an exploitative labour. Clause (2) describes exploitative labour to be any work that deprives the child of its health, education and development. He pointed out that the Section 88 on Prohibition of child labour at night is also clear which stipulates that, "No person shall engage a child in night work. Night work constitutes work between the hours of eight o'clock in the evening and six o'clock in the morning". The Minimum age for child labour, minimum age for admission of a child to employment, he said shall be fifteen years. On Section 90, Minimum age for light work, he stressed that the minimum age for the engagement of a child in light work shall be thirteen years. Light work constitutes work which is not likely to be harmful to the health or

development of the child and does not affect the child's attendance at school or the capacity of the child to benefit from school work. "The Section 91. Minimum age for hazardous employment. The minimum age for the engagement of a person in hazardous work is eighteen years". "Mr. Afasi pointed out that work is hazardous when it poses a danger to the health, safety or morals of a person. "Hazardous work includes: going to sea; mining and quarrying; portorage of heavy loads; manufacturing industries where chemicals are produced or used; work in places where machines are used; and work in places such as bars, hotels and places of entertainment where a person may be exposed to immoral behaviour. According to National Plan of Action (NPA II) Child labour is a global canker. Over 168 million children are trapped in the menace across the world. In Ghana, 21.8% of the

children are estimated to be child labourers, and more than six in ten of them are engaged in hazardous work. The impact of child labour on the economic and social development of affected countries is clear. In particular, it affects the transition paths of youth and their eventual employment outcomes, minimizing their opportunities for decent work in adulthood while approximating them to poverty. Child labour according to him is an affront to the fundamental human rights of children and a threat to their wellbeing. GHANA ACTION AND INTERVENTION IN CURBING THE ISSUE OF CHILD LABOUR Ghana through the (NPA II) adopted the following preventive strategies against worst forms of child labour education, social protection, child development, rural economy ( including agriculture and Artisanal small scale mining) and youth employment.

Social mobilization for direct community action Proactive and preventive strategies including quality education, gender equality and poverty reduction Direct services to affected families and children Law enforcement at all levels Protection of children and their rights; Withdrawal of children below the age of 15 from child labour and the protection of working children aged 15 and above from exploitation and hazardous work;



# 'I'm Not On The Run' - Charles Bissue Reacts To OSP Declaring Him Wanted



**Charles Bissue says he is not running from the OSP**

**T**he former Secretary of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Illegal Mining (IMCIM), Charles Bissue, has said that he is not on the run.

He explained that the decision by the Office of the Special Prosecutor to declare him Wanted comes to him as a shock.

Speaking to [GhanaWeb](#) in a phone interview following the Wanted notice made by the OSP, Charles Bissue said he has nothing to hide and that he will surely present himself at the investigator's office.

"I'm shocked by it because I wasn't in Accra and I knew they had invited me and there are other issues going on, and all that, but then, you know in the past, I've been to the BNI, to the CID, and even the Special Prosecutor's Office when [Martin Amidu](#) was there, I went there.

"So, it wasn't as if I was avoiding attending that interview," he explained. Explaining why he has not been able to honour the invitation by the OSP yet, Charles Bissue said it is a simple case of not immediately being in Accra. He stressed that it comes to

him as a shock, especially when the OSP's declaration of him as Wanted paints a picture as though he is a criminal or a fugitive.

"What happened is that I was out of Accra, so my lawyers have written to them that I will come and then we heard of the arrest warrant. Basically, I haven't gone anywhere. I'm in Ghana and I'll go to the Special Prosecutor's office at some point when I return to Accra, but to declare me Wanted, I don't know why, as if I'm a fugitive... but the whole thing is making it look like I'm a criminal," he stated.

Charles Bissue stressed that he is not on the run and that he is ready to provide all the necessary information the Office of the Special Prosecutor would need to help with its work. He assured the OSP that he would definitely show up at their offices to help with their work.

"Visiting all these agencies and all that, the Ghanaian perception is that the fact that you go to these places means that you are a criminal. No. Every information I have, I'll volunteer in the interest of the country so, I haven't run away anywhere. I'm within the

country, and even when I was out of the jurisdiction last year, I have so many visas, I could have stayed out of the country if I had anything to hide.

"I am in the jurisdiction, and I'll attend the Special Prosecution's office at some point to answer their questions," he added.

## Background:

Earlier, [GhanaWeb](#) reported that the Office of the Special Prosecutor had declared the former Secretary to the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Illegal Mining (IMCIM), Charles Bissue, Wanted.

In a notice shared on social media, on Tuesday, June 13, 2023, the OSP stated that Charles Bissue is being wanted regarding issues pertaining to his work on the dissolved IMCIM.

The notice which was titled "Wanted by the OSP" has a picture of Charles Bissue and his full name Charles Cromwell Nanabayin Onuawonto Bissue.

The alleged offences he was declared wanted for include: "corruption-related offences regarding the activities and expenditure of the dissolved Inter-Ministerial Committee on Illegal Mining (IMCIM), especially in respect of the seizure and management of excavators, machinery, road vehicles, and gold nuggets; and use of public office for profit".

The OSP's declaration comes after reports it had secured a warrant for the arrest of the former secretary to the IMCIM.

Meanwhile, the former chairman of IMCIM and former Minister of Science and Technology, Prof Kwabena

Frimpong-Boateng, was arrested on May 16, 2023, in relation to some corruption allegations in the work of the IMCIM.

Prof Frimpong-Boateng was granted a GH¢2 million bail by the Office of the Special Prosecutor.

This followed an invitation from the OSP to the former minister to appear before it in an ongoing investigation into some corruption-related matters relating to a report he spearheaded on activities of small-scale mining in the country.

According to a report by [3news.com](#), the renowned heart surgeon has since been granted bail.

On May 4, 2023, [GhanaWeb](#) reported that the former Minister for Environment, Science and Technology, Prof. Kwabena Frimpong-Boateng, had been invited by the Office of the Special Prosecutor, Kissi Agyebeng, to assist with investigations following allegations raised in a report submitted to the presidency.

Prof. Frimpong had made suggestions that some elements in the New Patriotic Party and the government had made attempts to frustrate his work and sabotage him during his work as chair of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Illegal Mining (IMCIM). In the statement dated, May 4, 2023, Prof. Frimpong-Boateng noted that he had duly received the invitation and had indicated his willingness to cooperate. He noted that he was described as 'a person necessary for the investigation'.

The investigations will help bring clarity to issues of suspected corruption and corruption-related offences in respect of the activities and expenditure of the dissolved Inter-Ministerial Committee on Illegal Mining (IMCIM).

"I have formally communicated my willingness to attend the invitation and to support the OSP in its



## CHARLES CROMWELL NANABAYIN ONUAWONTO BISSUE

Corruption and corruption-related offences regarding the activities and expenditure of the dissolved Inter-Ministerial Committee on Illegal Mining (IMCIM), especially in respect of the seizure and management of excavators, machinery, road vehicles and gold nuggets; and use of public office for profit



Alias: Charles Bissue	
Date(s) of Birth Used: 1975	Sex: Male
Hair: Black	Occupation: Student (formerly a presidential staffer)
Height: Approximately 5'8"	Nationality: Ghanaian

If you have an information concerning this person, please contact the Office of the Special Prosecutor.



# Russia, China Take Holistic View Of Pamirs, Hindu Kush

By M. K. Bhadrakumar

**T**he Xi'an Declaration, issued after the First China-Central Asia Summit at Xi'an on May 18-19, takes a direct hit at the West's interference in the region, scattering the notion in Washington and Brussels that Russia and China's dominance on the Central Asian steppe is not sustainable as Russia is "overstretched" in the Ukraine conflict.

As events turned out, Russia has not only not been "defeated" in Ukraine but turned the table around in the proxy war. The US is now pleading with Europeans that Moscow should not be allowed to garner victory in the battlefields. What a fallback position!

To be sure, China's decision in the context of the Ukraine crisis to assume a leadership role in Central Asia as provider of security is a paradigm shift that profoundly undercuts the very essence of the US' Indo-Pacific strategy to isolate and contain China. Look at the map to comprehend why the West's talk of encirclement of Russia and China will remain a pipe dream so long as Inner Asia remains out of bounds. The US is working like a spider to create a web of states in southeast Asia to split and atomize the ASEAN and repeat the "regime change" in Thailand all across the Greater Mekong Region. In such a volatile setting aimed at surrounding China with a ring of unstable states, Central Asia assumes critical importance for both Russian and Chinese strategies as a region that is beyond the reach of US influence.

The relevant paragraph of the 'Xian Declaration' says: "The parties are unanimous that ensuring state security, political stability and constitutional order is of key importance, and resolutely oppose attempts to discredit legitimate state power and provoke 'colour revolutions', as well as interference in the internal affairs of other countries in any of its forms and under any

pretext. The Parties emphasise that democracy is the common aspiration and value of humanity. The independent choice of the development path and management model concerns the sovereignty of each country and is not subject to intervention."

It must be noted carefully that within a week of the Xi'an Summit, Russia received a top security official from Beijing who came on an unprecedented week-long visit to Moscow for consultations — Chen Wenqing, Member of the Political Bureau and secretary of the Commission for Political and Legal Affairs of the CPC Central Committee, who is the counterpart of Nikolay Patrushev, head of Russia's Security Council, the highest ranking security official in the Kremlin.

Receiving Chen and his delegation in Moscow, Patrushev said: "Expanding and deepening relations with friendly China are Russia's strategic course. Our country prioritizes the development of mutually beneficial cooperation with People's Republic of China in all areas, provision of mutual assistance and boosting coordination in the foreign arena for ensuring security, stability, sustainable development at the global and regional levels both in Eurasia and other parts of the world."

In concluding remarks at the end of Chen's visit to Moscow, Patrushev noted: "Not only Russia is one of the centers of the multipolar world. So is China. They (Western countries) think they can cope with Russia and as soon as they have done that, they hope, their next target will be China. They find it difficult to deal with both in parallel. What they have been doing now on the border of China, with Taiwan, we also know well enough. In general, it is difficult to disagree with their (Chinese side's) position."

Clearly, the Russia-China security talks in Moscow at the highest level are expected to give the necessary underpinnings to the joint efforts to forge regional security and stability in their common space, against the backdrop of the growing security risks they jointly

face in Eurasia and the return of terrorism in Central Asia. This strategic congruence is already evident in the close similarity in the Russian and Chinese approaches to the stabilization of Afghanistan, which is already having a positive impact despite all incipient Western attempts since the Taliban takeover to keep the Hindu Kush in a state of turmoil and civil war.

The Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang who attended the Pakistan-Afghanistan-China trilateral meeting in Islamabad on May 5 left three messages to his Pakistani hosts — China is ready to help Pakistan revive its economy; Beijing is also ready to work with Pakistan to advance high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, accelerate the development of the CPEC, and deepen cooperation; and, above all, China is ready to work with Pakistan to "strengthen communication and coordination on the Afghan issue, promote peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan, and help maintain regional stability and development." Importantly, Qin Gang called for the extension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan so as to "increase good-neighborliness and mutual trust among the three countries in the spirit of mutual respect, candidness and friendship, mutual benefit and win-win results." Qin Gang conveyed to his Pakistani and Afghan counterparts that China is ready to strengthen counter-terrorism and security cooperation and "join efforts to firmly combat terrorist forces including the East Turkestan Islamic Movement and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, so as to defend regional security and stability."

Interestingly, Qin Gang assured Acting Foreign Minister of the Afghan Interim Government Amir Khan Muttaqi at a bilateral meeting that Beijing intends to "deepen China-Afghanistan cooperation in various fields,



**A trilateral foreign minister level meeting agreed to extend China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan, Islamabad, May 5, 2023. The Xi'an Declaration, issued after the First China-Central Asia Summit at Xi'an on May 18-19, takes a direct hit at the West's interference in the region. It also contradicts the notion in Washington and Brussels that Russia and China's dominance on the Central Asian steppe is not sustainable**

and help Afghanistan realize self-reliance, peace, stability, development and prosperity at an early date."

A leading Chinese regional expert Zhu Yongbiao, director of the Centre for Afghanistan Studies at Lanzhou University, told the *Global Times* that "Over the past few years, Pakistan and Afghanistan had severe conflicts and disputes over the borderlines, and the trilateral meeting itself was a rare opportunity to promote peace and talks."

Zhu said Kabul and Islamabad have differences on the recognition of terrorism, "especially under external interference when countries like the US and India hold double standards in the matter," therefore, China has released a signal that could be seen as "a step forward in coordinating the stances of Pakistan and Afghanistan."

Besides, the Chinese expert noted that both Afghanistan and Pakistan being neighbors of China and sharing good political relations with China, are also aware of China's role in not only mediating between Saudi Arabia and Iran but also on the Ukraine crisis, so both would have expectations for China, and the trilateral meeting in Islamabad "signalled their enhanced confidence in China's diplomatic role."

Evidently, just short of according formal recognition of the Taliban government, Moscow and Beijing

have stepped up their dealings with Kabul. This increases the comfort level in the Central Asian capitals. Russia, Central Asian states and China share an existential threat perception from terrorism and religious extremism, which is a time-tested element in the US toolbox. Thus, there is an understanding amongst them to deny the US any basing facilities in the region or to allow the "Afghan Resistance" of Panjshiris to use Central Asia as sanctuary to fuel another civil war.

China and Russia have contributed significantly to the stabilization of the Taliban rule in Afghanistan. Basically, they appreciate that the Taliban rulers, under extremely difficult conditions have nonetheless acquitted themselves relatively well. This is also the perception in the Central Asian capitals.

Therefore, from a regional perspective, the extension of the CPEC to Afghanistan and its inevitable integration with Central Asia's intensifying BRI project is to be viewed as the most tangible spin-off from the China-Central Asia format. These processes will strengthen the SCO — and, hopefully, would also bring India on board at some point.

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# The Tale Of A US Spy Plane Over The South China Sea

On Wednesday, May 31, China strongly rejected the US version of an incident involving planes from the two countries over the South China sea. The previous day, the US Indo-Pacific Command had released a video and announced that a Chinese military jet had made an “unnecessarily aggressive maneuver” near a US military aircraft. The incident, which supposedly took place on May 26, comes at a time of heightened tensions between the two nations.

According to the version presented by the US military command, a Chinese J-16 “flew directly in front of the nose” of a US RC-135 over the South China Sea, forcing the US plane to “fly through its wake turbulence.” The US command insisted that the RC-135, which is a reconnaissance aircraft or more simply put a spy plane, was conducting “safe and routine operations” through international airspace in the South China Sea. The US released the video of the intercept but did

not mention its exact location or distance from the Chinese coast. It added that the US “will continue to fly, sail, and operate — safely and responsibly — wherever international law allows, and the US Indo-Pacific Joint Force will continue to fly in international airspace with due regard for the safety of all vessels and aircraft under international law.”

According to a statement released by the People's Liberation Army's Southern Theater Command on Wednesday, May 31, the RC-135 was found “intentionally intruding” into the PLA's training area while the PLA Navy's Flotilla 17 was conducting a routine exercise in the South China Sea. China also did not indicate the approximate location of the intercept.

According to a report by China's *Global Times*, Flotilla 17, an aircraft carrier, later passed through the Taiwan Straits on Saturday, according to defense officials of the government in Taiwan, indicating that the intercept had been much closer to mainland China than what the US indicated.

The report further stated that as per sources from the PLA as well as

open-source intelligence, the RC-135 was very likely flying less than 50 km away from the city of Jieyang in the southern Chinese province of Guangdong.

While Chinese officials are yet to confirm the details of the location, the PLA Southern Theater Command has accused the US of sabotaging peace in the region with its statements over the incident. “We sternly urge the US to restrict its frontal maritime and aerial forces' actions and strictly abide by related international laws and relevant agreements, so as to prevent maritime or aerial accidents from happening, or all consequences are for the US to bear,” said senior colonel Zhang Nandong, a spokesperson of the PLA Command.

Tuesday's statements by the US Indo-Pacific Command were followed by mainstream media reports that also claimed aggression by a Chinese fighter jet, but underplayed key details like the location of the intercept and the fact that the US aircraft in question was a spy plane. These were only briefly mentioned in reports, which failed to question why a US spy



**A screengrab from the video of a Chinese J-16 intercepting a US RC-135, released by the US Indo-Pacific Command. A US spy plane and a Chinese military jet had a close encounter over the South China Sea. While the US claimed the Chinese plane intercepted its reconnaissance aircraft “unprofessionally,” China demanded that the US “restrict its frontal maritime and aerial forces' actions and strictly abide by related international laws and relevant agreements”**

plane was in the South China Sea where the US has neither territory nor any territorial claims.

On the other hand, China, despite its territorial disputes with some of its neighbors in the South China Sea, holds several uncontested territories in the region. Over the past few years, the US military presence in the South China Sea, supposedly at the behest of its allies in the region, has only provoked the Chinese government and led to heightened tensions.

As per a report by the South China Sea Probing Initiative, in the year 2022, the US sent over a thousand sorties of large reconnaissance aircraft of various types to the South China Sea. The US' increasing military presence in the region has increased chances of military encounters with China.

Interestingly, parallels can be drawn between this incident and the paranoid reaction by the US over a Chinese high-altitude weather balloon that was blown into US airspace earlier this year.

## South America Is Back, And Venezuela Is Helping Lead The Way

**By William Serafino**

In general terms, it can be said that the recent summit of South American presidents in Brasilia, convened by President Lula Da Silva, was a practical reflection of the political-electoral shift towards the progressive camp that recently undergone in the region. Although this change of geopolitical orbit has yet to guarantee its horizon of possibility in the medium term, it has already produced a first image in the Brazilian capital that signals a change in the times. The meeting, on a symbolic level, also represents the official end to a cycle of fragmentation, bitter political dispute, and planned attempts to destroy the intergovernmental platforms that emerged, during the first years of the 21st century, as a power alternative to the monopoly of US “Pan-Americanism”. The result of this process was a considerable setback in the institutional dynamics of regional integration at the hands of the liberal-conservative power bloc that took over a significant amount of the governments in the last decade. Now, on top of that rubble, the leaders face the challenge of building a comeback to reposition the region on the geopolitical chessboard. This comes at a moment when the power struggle

between declining and emerging powers is becoming more acute, and the South American continent finds itself in a moment of major definitions of its geostrategic destiny. The timing of the diplomatic meeting that took place at the Itamaraty Palace is grim: the last UNASUR summit was held in 2014, which is to say, almost ten years passed for the South American leaders to meet again in the same space. Ten years, that is to say, in which international geopolitics has undergone changes in its rhythms, balances of power and economic integration schemes, changes in which the region has not played a representative role. Until yesterday?

The outcome of the meeting could call for optimism with reservations. A road map was defined with specific times to strengthen integration mechanisms and UNASUR. UNASUR was founded in 2008 that enjoyed enormous prestige and influence during its first years. Now it returns to the stage as a platform to make the efforts for a unified region viable, with its own voice and allowing for the strengthening of its members through economic and financial complementarity, a pending matter that has been postponed for years. Although the meeting has given the impression that South America has shaken off the image of irrelevance that weighed on it for years, the course of events continues to evolve along a trend

of fragility, instability and disagreement of criteria. President Gustavo Petro, who announced Colombia's return to UNASUR at the summit, today faces the foreshadowing of a coup scenario after the breakup of his government coalition. The prognosis as to whether he will come out of this battle on his feet is still reserved.

Argentina, one of the key poles of the institution due to its economic and symbolic weight, faces a presidential electoral process at the end of this year, where an unfavorable result for Peronism could delay the progress of integration. On the other hand, the institutional crisis in Peru seems far from being resolved, and it does not seem that President Gabriel Boric and President Luis Lacalle Pou are going to commit themselves to a renewed push for integration, beyond the strictly institutional, in view of their statements against Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro during the meeting. The Venezuelan president participated in the summit and, as expected, was the center of attention. The president's presence reconfirmed that the questioning of his legitimacy as president is a thing of the past and that his reinsertion in the regional

chessboard is a fait accompli. Due to the objective weight of Lula's leadership and the economic and geopolitical weight of Brazil, this new milestone of normalization of Maduro's presence in important international forums had a significant symbolic addition: he was received with honors in the same country that, until recently, during the government of Jair Bolsonaro, mobilized important political and diplomatic efforts to consolidate the isolation of the Venezuelan leader.

In this sense, the summit in Brasilia was a definitive milestone and the seal of a trajectory of decay of the narrative imposed on the alleged illegitimacy of his mandate won at the polls in 2018. If his participation in the CELAC summit in Mexico City in 2021 was the first chapter of the recovery of his international recognition, the trip to Egypt for the COP27 at the end of last year would be the intermediate one, with the meeting in Brasilia being the scenario of the denouement of that narrative driven mainly by

Washington.

The revitalization of regional integration through UNASUR must necessarily include Venezuela, due to its symbolic and economic weight and its political stability, which contrasts with other countries in the region. As the trend of instability seems to be the norm in the southern part of the continent, the Brazil-Caracas-Bogotá-La Paz axis, while waiting for the evolution of events in Colombia to be favorable to Petro and facing the uncertainty of Argentina, Ecuador, and Chile, seems to position itself as the core of mobilization of a renewed agenda to revive the decisive geopolitical role that South America is called to play.

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