

WORLD

Mourning declared as Colombia quake rescue continues

PEREIRA/CALI — Colombia on Wednesday declared three days of mourning for victims of an earthquake that demolished buildings in the west of the country, killing more than 200 people, as rescue crews continued searching collapsed buildings in western Colombia.

The 7.4 magnitude earthquake killed at least 254 people and injured more than 2,595, while more than 100 aftershocks were recorded in affected areas as of Tuesday afternoon.

The quake, the most devastating to strike Colombia this century, hit the country's coffee-growing region early Monday, bringing down apartment blocks and homes and damaging schools, hospitals and other public facilities.

In Pereira and Cali, rescuers used cranes, excavators, sniffer dogs and their bare hands to search collapsed buildings, while volunteers formed human chains to remove debris. In Cali, residents joined firefighters with picks and shovels, while in Pereira, army units combed through concrete and exposed steel.

Many residents spent the night outdoors because their homes were damaged or because they feared further aftershocks. A park in Pereira was turned into a temporary shelter with tents and mattresses, while



Patients from a clinic evacuated due to earthquake damage lie in beds at a temporary facility set up in a gymnasium at a nearby school in Cali, Colombia, on Tuesday. SANTIAGO SALDARRIAGA / AP

sports centers and other facilities were being prepared to accommodate people affected by the quake.

The earthquake also damaged hospitals and other public facilities. In Cali, part of the Hospital Universitario del Valle collapsed, forcing doctors to move patients into a parking lot and treat some people in the open air.

Thousands of families awaited safety assessments of damaged properties. Dog and cat shelters also appealed for food, medicine and volunteers, while residents brought water, food and other supplies to affected neighborhoods and lined up at blood donation centers.

Communities in Choco, close to the quake's epicenter, remained

without power or basic services. On Tuesday afternoon, three airports remained closed, while many areas, particularly Choco, still lacked gas, water and electricity. Some major highways also remained closed, Reuters reported.

Damage assessment

The National Coffee Federation was working with families to assess damage to farms and rural infrastructure, while communications remained patchy in some of the worst-hit areas. Officials said it could take days to establish the full extent of the damage and the final death toll.

Colombian President Abelardo de la EsPriella declared a state of

emergency and promised rent subsidies for affected families during a visit to Pereira on Tuesday.

International assistance was also being offered. The United States announced \$15.5 million in emergency aid and Mexico's president said she is prepared to send hundreds of search and health workers, tons of health supplies and other equipment.

China will provide assistance in an appropriate manner based on Colombia's needs, said Tang Ying, spokeswoman for the China International Development Cooperation Agency on Tuesday, while other countries also offered assistance.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

NATO-style pact signals doubts over US commitments

By LIU JIANQIAO
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The Mecca Joint Defense Agreement, signed recently by Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Pakistan, reflects the security pressures facing the three countries amid the deteriorating situation in the Middle East and their growing doubts about the reliability of US security commitments, while its practical impact and effectiveness remain uncertain, experts said.

The agreement was signed by Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Pakistani Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif during a joint defense summit held in the Saudi city of Mecca on Aug 7.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said on Aug 8 in an interview with Turkiye's Anadolu Agency that several countries have shown interest in joining the deal, voicing confidence that Egypt, which he called a "natural partner", will "be among us in the next stage". He said the agreement does not target Iran, clarifying that the deal is defensive in nature and aimed at protecting signatories from external "attacks".

The pact stipulates that an armed attack on any one of the three countries would be regarded as an attack on all. However, few details have been made public so far regarding the specific commitments of each country, and it

remains unclear to what extent the pact would require them to take concrete military action in one another's defense.

According to a joint statement issued after the summit, the agreement reflects the three countries' commitment to strengthening their collective security and safeguarding regional peace and stability.

It seeks to bolster collective deterrence against any act of aggression and deepen defense cooperation across all sectors, the statement read.

Ding Long, a professor at Shanghai International Studies University's Middle East Studies Institute, said the agreement reflects growing doubts among Gulf states about the reliability of US security commitments, as well as their efforts to seek "additional security protections" amid an increasingly uncertain regional security environment.

As the conflicts involving the US, Israel and Iran spill over into the wider region and clashes between Yemen's Houthis militants and Saudi Arabia escalate, doubts are growing over Washington's security commitments to its Gulf allies, he said.

The fact that US military bases themselves have come under attack has further exposed the limitations of Washington's ability to provide security in the region, he said.

"The new trilateral defense agreement reflects growing dissatisfaction among Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, with the

limitations of the US security umbrella, as well as increasing doubts over the reliability of US security commitments," Ding said.

He said the agreement signals a gradual shift away from the US-led security framework in the Middle East, as countries across the region increasingly seek greater security autonomy and diversify their security partnerships.

Ding also said the agreement does not signal a move toward "de-Americanization", but rather reflects efforts to reduce reliance on the US as the sole security provider.

"All three countries maintain long-standing security ties with the US, but have emphasized that the agreement will neither terminate nor replace their existing bilateral and multilateral security commitments," he said.

Regional influence

Shakeel Ahmad Ramay, CEO of the Asian Institute of Eco-Civilization Research and Development in Pakistan, said the agreement will undoubtedly influence regional dynamics, alliances and strategic alignments.

"Current trends suggest that the US and the West could face setbacks as a result of policies that have fueled perceptions of interference, prolonged conflicts, hegemonic ambitions and the extraction of benefits at the expense of regional countries," he said.

"Most importantly, there is a growing trust deficit, compounded by what many regional countries

view as Washington's excessive and unjustifiable support for Israel," Ramay said.

The agreement may face numerous practical challenges in implementation, and its future remains uncertain, experts said.

"Government officials will meet to discuss future policies and actions, while a permanent secretariat will be established to oversee the implementation of the agreement. So, we need to wait for the outcome of the committee's meeting to see how the agreement will actually be implemented," Ramay said.

At present, the three countries face primary security concerns in different geographic theaters. If intense hostilities were to erupt, it would be difficult to mount a coordinated military response, Ding said.

Meanwhile, according to a joint statement issued by the three countries, the pact is open to other members. However, further expansion could make it more difficult to coordinate joint defense efforts amid potentially divergent security interests and priorities, he added.

"At this stage, therefore, the alliance remains more political than security-oriented and, as some analysts put it, is 'more form than substance'. While it could serve as a prototype for an 'Islamic NATO', it still has a long way to go before becoming a formal and operational security alliance," Ding said.

Xinhua News Agency contributed to this story.

TikTok reversal exposes limits of security claims

Ownership and geopolitical factors underpin earlier restrictions: Experts

By LI JIAYING
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The United States' decision to lift a ban on TikTok for federal devices shows that earlier restrictions hinged largely on ownership and geopolitical factors, prompting Washington to re-examine its earlier security rationale, experts said.

Their comments came as the White House Office of Management and Budget rescinded its 2023 implementation directive in a memo dated Monday, saying the popular social media app no longer poses a national security threat and may be used on US government devices.

Chen Hong, director of East China Normal University's Asia-Pacific Studies Center, said the move carries symbolic weight beyond the limited number of federal devices directly affected.

"This is undoubtedly an important restoration of TikTok's standing in the US market," Chen told China Daily. The ban labeled TikTok as a national security risk, while its removal means that label has been removed in legal and administrative terms, he added.

"The move also reflected regulatory acceptance of the platform's operations and recognition of its compliance and security safeguards," said Pan Helin, a member of the expert committee for information and communication economy under China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

In a sense, the policy shift came as the US government no longer had a basis for maintaining the restriction after TikTok's corporate structure was adjusted, Pan added.

The view follows a legal opinion from the US Department of Justice last month, saying that the restructured US version falls outside the statutory prohibition because the new TikTok USDS Joint Venture, operating independently of Chinese tech heavyweight ByteDance, is majority-owned by US investors and has revised its recommendation algorithm and cybersecurity program.

"The policy shift suggests that Washington's earlier security concerns over TikTok were driven primarily by its ownership structure and country of origin, rather than by specific technical risks," Pan said.

Chen echoed that the sequence of events exposes a weakness in the earlier security narrative. If TikTok had presented a major technical vulnerability, he said, that vulnerability could not have disappeared solely because the equity ratio and board composition changed.

In fact, the restructuring does not settle the wider debate over privacy protection. In an analysis published while the deal was taking shape last year, Nicol Turner Lee, a senior fellow in Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution, wrote that "the absence of a comprehensive US privacy law means that even with TikTok in the hands of American investors, concerns about user protections would persist".

Policy implications

Chen noted that TikTok has withstood repeated pressure largely because it is deeply embedded in the daily activities of US users, creators and small businesses, which would bear much of the cost of a ban.

"The lesson for US digital governance is that national security should not become an ever-expanding concept," Chen said. "Nor should every commercial, technological and social issue be securitized simply because a platform's parent company comes from a particular country."

The case also offers a cautionary lesson for Chinese technology companies entering the US market, where geopolitical risk assessment and response planning should be built into their overseas expansion strategies, Chen said.

"Companies should distinguish technical issues from politically driven allegations and, when faced with security claims unsupported by evidence, call for verifiable facts and standards applied consistently to all market participants," he added.

From sea to CT



Rhossi, a critically endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtle, prepares to undergo a CT scan at the Houston Zoo in Texas, the United States, on Tuesday. EVAN GARCIA / REUTERS

Envoy urges halt to West Bank settlements, violence

By MINLU ZHANG
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A Chinese envoy to the United Nations on Tuesday called for immediate action to curb escalating violence in the occupied Palestinian territories, urging Israel to halt settlement activities and fully implement the Gaza ceasefire agreement.

Fu Cong, China's permanent representative to the United Nations, told an emergency Security Council meeting on the Palestinian question that China is "deeply concerned" about the recent escalation and mounting civilian casualties.

"The Palestinian issue must not be ignored or marginalized," Fu said, calling on the international community to act swiftly to stop violence, save innocent lives and uphold justice.



Palestinian children react on Tuesday after the upper floor of a relative's home was demolished following his death in clashes with Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank. JAAFAR ASHTIYEH / AFP

Fu said the situation in both the West Bank and Gaza has deteriorated sharply, with the Palestinian people enduring mounting suffering.

"The root cause is that the basic principles of international law have not been observed, and the Palestinian people's rights to survival and

development have long been disregarded," he said.

"Palestinian lives are as precious as those of any other people," Fu said, calling on the international community to safeguard the equal rights of the Palestinian people and uphold international fairness and justice.

'Dangerously escalating'

The situation in the West Bank is dangerously escalating, Fu said, citing settlement expansion, violations and damage to religious sites, blockades of refugee camps, mass arrests and growing settler violence.

Four Palestinians and one Israeli were killed in a recent incident in the West Bank, according to a statement by the Palestinian Health Ministry.

A total of 1,122 Palestinians have been killed in the occupied West Bank between the start of the Israel-Hamas

conflict on Oct 7, 2023, and July 2026, including 76 killed this year, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

"Protecting civilians is not an empty slogan, but an obligation of the occupying power under international law," he said.

"Israel must implement Security Council Resolution 2334, halt settlement activities, curb settler violence and ensure serious accountability," Fu said, adding that the normal functioning of the UN agency in accordance with its mandate must be respected.

He also said China is concerned over the situation in Gaza, saying that Israeli military operations had continued despite progress announced on arrangements for the second phase of the ceasefire agreement.

The ceasefire agreement has been in place for 300 days, yet a lasting ceasefire has not been achieved, Fu noted. "The fundamental problem is not the lack of a ceasefire plan,

but the lack of political will for a ceasefire," he said.

Fu called on Israel and relevant parties to "sincerely and fully" implement the Gaza ceasefire agreement and urged Israel to abide by international humanitarian law and lift restrictions on the entry of humanitarian supplies. "Countries with significant influence over the parties concerned should take concrete actions to ease the situation," he added.

Fu also reiterated China's support for the two-state solution, saying "Gaza and the West Bank are inseparable parts of the Palestinian state".

"Israel should end its illegal occupation of Palestinian territory as soon as possible and stop undermining the governance foundations of the Palestinian National Authority," he said.

China will continue to support the Palestinian people's pursuit of their legitimate national rights and work toward restoring peace and stability in the region, Fu said.