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Inside C2

Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

Southern Daily News is published by Southern News Group Daily

Monday, September 20 2021

Analysis: French break-up a blow to Biden's China-focused alliance rebuilding

WASHINGTON, Sept 18 (Reuters) - European capitals celebrated a visit by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in June, as President Joe Biden's top diplomat cracked jokes in French in Paris, posed for selfies with French youth and spoke at length about revitalizing the transatlantic relationship.

It was a breath of fresh air after four years of former President Donald Trump's brash "America First" administration, during which U.S. ties with Europe lurched from one crisis to another amid policy decisions that often blindsided European countries.

Also read: Australia made 'huge mistake' in cancelling submarine deal, says French envoy

But less than three months after Blinken's repair tour, Washington finds itself in an unprecedented diplomatic crisis with France over a trilateral deal with Britain to supply Australia with nuclear-powered submarines that sank a \$40 billion contract for French-designed vessels.

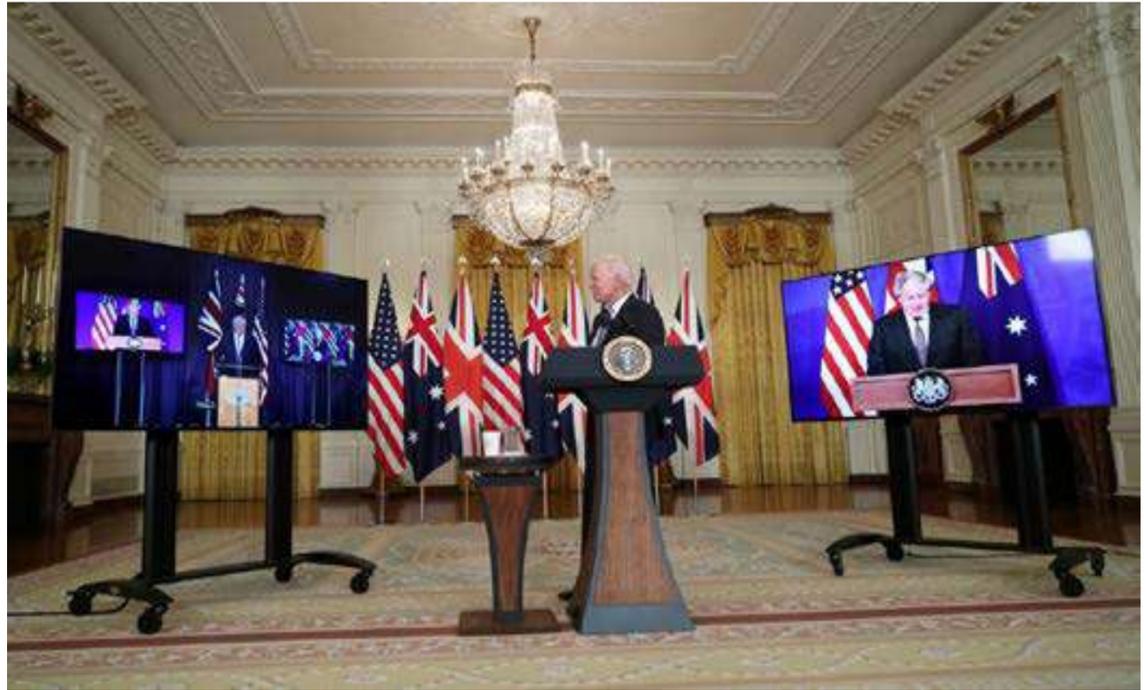
France reacted with fury, saying the new deal had been hatched behind its back and resorting to language almost unheard of in public pronouncements between allies, calling it "brutal" and a "stab in the back".

On Friday it went further, taking the extraordinary step of recalling its ambassadors to Washington and Australia and accusing the Biden administration of acting like Trump in pushing Paris aside.

Analysts say the crisis is more than commercial, and one of trust, and even if U.S. officials hope it will blow over quickly, it has the potential to do lasting damage to the alliance with France and Europe and throws into doubt the united front Washington has been seeking to forge against China's growing power.

French diplomats said they first learned of the deal when news leaked in Australian media hours before the official announcement on Wednesday, although Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison insisted he had made clear to French President Emmanuel Macron in June that he might scrap the agreement with France.

Either way, from the French perspective, the U.S. move flies in the face of what Biden's administration has pledged since the end of the Trump era: a return to



multilateralism and close cooperation with partners and allies, with Europe an important element of that.

"This makes Europeans realize that maybe some of Trump's policies, beyond the scandals and the tweets, were not an aberration but signaled a deeper shift away from Europe," said Benjamin Haddad, director of the Atlantic Council's Europe Center.

"At a time when the Biden administration wants to rally Europeans in a common transatlantic front to push back against Chinese assertiveness, why not bring in the key EU actor in the region?"

Some see further clumsy policy-making by Biden's administration hard on the heels of his chaotic end to America's two decade-long intervention in Afghanistan, about which European nations complained they had not been properly consulted.

"Just like Afghanistan, this new 'America First' opus is poorly conceived and even more poorly executed," a French diplomat said.

ATTEMPTS TO SOOTH FRENCH ANGER

Blinken has attempted to sooth French anger, calling France a vital and long-standing ally in the Indo-Pacific and beyond, and the White House and State Department quickly issued placatory statements after Paris recalled its ambassadors.

The State Department said Washington hopes to continue discussions on the issue at a senior level in coming days, including during next week's United Nations General Assembly.

David Bell, a history professor at Princeton University, said precedent indicated the crisis would blow over, eventually.

The French were clearly "very annoyed" and showed that in a "fairly dramatic" way, he said, while recalling previous moments of high tension, including France's withdrawal from NATO command in the 1960s and refusal in 2003 to join the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

But diplomatic relations have not been suspended, and at some point the ambassadors will be sent back, Bell forecast, noting that Macron's gesture comes ahead of a potentially

tight re-election race next year.

"Macron is trying to reawaken that Gaullist tradition of French independence" in foreign policy, he said.

WEAKENING INDO-PACIFIC FRONT

While the NATO allies might well find ways to recover from what some see as the worst diplomatic crisis in their history, experts warn of serious harm to Biden's broader China strategy.

The trilateral submarine deal should strengthen the hand of the United States and its allies in the face of growing Chinese power, but the damage caused by the alienation of France could outweigh this.

"China must be laughing all the way to the bank," said Francois Heisbourg, senior advisor for Europe at the International Institute for Strategic Studies. "They have the prospect of removing Europe's potential presence alongside the U.S. in the Indo-Pacific area."

Though stronger U.S.-Australia ties would concern the Chinese government, France, the EU's leading military power, has taken a strong stance in urging a tough line on China when other EU countries such as Germany have seemed more concerned about not upsetting commercial ties with Beijing.



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WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES CORONAVIRUS DIARY 09/19/2021

Portrait of Wea H. Lee with contact information: Wea H. Lee, Wealee@scdaily.com, Chairman of International District Houston Texas, Publisher Southern Daily Wea H. Lee, Southern News Group Chairman / CEO, Chairman of International Trade & Culture Center, Republic of Guiana Honorary consul at Houston Texas.

Thousands Of Migrants Under A Texas Bridge



Thousands of migrants, including families and babies, were crowded in a camp under the Del Rio International Bridge last week. They slept in the dirt without much food and water in hopes of being processed by the U.S. Border Patrol. Many of them are Haitian who have assembled in the temporary site that has grown to more than 13,000 last week. Haiti is feeling the pain from a major earthquake that left more than 2,000 people dead and thousands more injured with their president Moise having been assassinated. The southern border crossings have reached the highest level in decades with

more than 20,800 in August being reported with a total this year of 1.5 million being met. Today the Biden administration is facing another crisis again in Del Rio, Texas. Del Rio Mayor Lorano has asked the president for additional resources and manpower to process the migrants at the border. Images from the bridge show crowds of migrants at the camp. Many were carrying young children across the deep waters and looking to come to America. With the pandemic still attacking around the world, many people are fighting for survival and trying to join the crowd at the border. We really need to help these people as much as possible. Unfortunately, most of the people will still need to be sent back to their country.



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COMMUNITY

U.S. Adults To Be Offered COVID Booster Shots In Sept.



Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

The Biden administration announced a plan for U.S. adults who received either Pfizer or Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine to receive booster shots starting in late September. "Having reviewed the most current data. It is now our clinical judgment that the time to lay out a plan for COVID-19 boosters is now," said Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, MD, MBA, during a briefing of the White House COVID-19 Response Team on Wednesday. "Recent data makes clear that protection against mild and moderate disease has decreased over time." This decline in protection appears to be due both to waning immunity and to the strength and pervasiveness of the Delta variant, he said. "Even though this new data affirms that vaccine protection remains high against the worst outcomes of COVID, we are concerned that this pattern of decline we are seeing will continue in the months ahead, which could lead to reduced protection against severe disease, hospitalization, and death," Murthy said. According to a joint statement from the CDC, FDA, NIH, and National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases that laid out the details of the administration's plan, the boosters will be offered starting the week of September 20 to U.S. adults who received their second mRNA dose at least 8 months earlier. "We are not recommending that you go out and get a booster today," Murthy clarified. The first shots will be given to people vaccinated earliest in the rollout: healthcare providers, residents and staff at long-term care facilities, and other seniors. The plan is contingent on both the FDA completing an independent review of the safety and

effectiveness of a third dose of the Pfizer and Moderna mRNA vaccines and on the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommendations after review of the evidence, the joint statement explained.



CDC Director Rochelle Walensky, MD. "Our plan is to protect the American people and to stay ahead of this virus," said CDC Director Rochelle Walensky, MD. In explaining the new decision, she offered three key points: vaccine-induced protection does decline over time, effectiveness against hospitalization and death "remains relatively high," and the vaccines are generally less effective against Delta. New CDC data released in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) on Wednesday showed that in New York state, vaccine effectiveness against infection declined from 91.7% to 79.8% from the period of May 3 to July 25, as the Delta variant became dominant. Effectiveness against hospitalization, however, was stable (91.9% to 95.3%). Another MMWR of long-term care facilities in CDC's National Healthcare Safety Network reported declining effectiveness of the mRNA vaccines during Delta, dropping from an adjusted effectiveness rate of 74.7%

pre-Delta (March to May) to 53.1% during the period of Delta (June-July). "Taken together, these data confirm that while protection against infection may decrease over time, protection against severe disease and hospitalization is currently holding up pretty well," said Walensky. "Preliminary data" from two vaccine cohort effectiveness studies involving more than 4,000 healthcare personnel, first responders, and other frontline workers at eight different sites indicated "waning effectiveness against symptomatic and asymptomatic infection ... from 92% prior to Delta to 64% with Delta," Walensky added.



The effectiveness decreased against Delta, regardless of when an individual was vaccinated, she noted. "These data suggests full vaccination in the context of the Delta variant may be correlated with less protection against SARS-CoV-2 infection than against prior variants." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci, MD, presented the immunological argument for recommending a third vaccine dose. He said that "regardless of the variant," antibody levels decline over time in fully vaccinated people, highlighting a recent study in Science. Higher antibody levels, meanwhile, are associated with better protection, he said, citing a recent preprint. Importantly, boosters with the Moderna vaccine have been shown to increase antibody titers by "at least 10-fold, and likely much more," said Fauci, adding that Pfizer has shared "similar data." "So you get a dramatic increase in antibody titers when you do a third immunization dose," he said. Altogether, the current studies "support the use of a third booster mRNA immunization to increase the overall level of protection." The new guidance on boosters is restricted to recipients of Pfizer or Moderna's COVID shots, and do not apply to individuals who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, the rollout of which began later than the mRNA vaccines. "We expect more data on J&J in the coming weeks," said Murthy. "With those data in hand, we will keep the public informed with a timely plan for J&J booster shots." Murthy and other members of the response

teams continued to underscore the urgency of getting shots to unvaccinated Americans and people around the world, given that virtually all cases that have led to severe disease, hospitalization and death occurred in unvaccinated people. (Courtesy https://www.medpagetoday.com/) Related U.S. Surgeon General Urges U.S. Fight Against COVID Misinformation U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy on Thursday called for a national effort to fight misinformation about COVID-19 and vaccines, urging tech companies, health care workers, journalists and everyday Americans



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BUSINESS

'A Few Mutations Away': The Threat of a Vaccine-Proof Variant



Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

July 30, 2021 -- The CDC Director Rochelle Walensky, MD, made a dire prediction during a media briefing this week that, if we weren't already living within the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic, would sound more like a pitch for a movie about a dystopian future.

"For the amount of virus circulating in this country right now largely among unvaccinated people, the largest concern that we in public health and science are worried about is that the virus...[becomes] a very transmissible virus that has the potential to evade our vaccines in terms of how it protects us from severe disease and death," Walensky told reporters on Tuesday.

A new, more elusive variant could be "just a few mutations away," she said.

"That's a very prescient comment," Lewis Nelson, MD, professor and clinical chair of emergency medicine and chief of the Division of Medical Toxicology at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School in Newark, tells Medscape Medical News.

"We've gone through a few mutations already that have been named, and each one of them gets a little more transmissible," he says. "That's normal, natural selection and what you would expect to happen as viruses mutate from one strain to another."

"What we've mostly seen this virus do is evolve to become more infectious," says Stuart Ray, MD. "That is the remarkable feature of Delta — that it is so infectious."

He says that the SARS-CoV-2 has evolved largely as expected, at least so far. "The potential for this virus to mutate has been something that has been a concern from early on."

"The viral evolution is a bit like a ticking clock. The more we allow infections to occur, the more likely changes will occur. When we have lots of people infected, we give more chances to the virus to diversify and then adapt to selective pressures," says Ray, vice-chair of medicine for data integrity and analytics and professor in the Division of Infectious Diseases at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in Baltimore, Maryland.



"The problem is if the virus changes

in such a way that the spike protein — which the antibodies from the vaccine are directed against — are no longer effective at binding and destroying the virus, and the virus escapes immune surveillance," Nelson says.

If this occurs, he says, "we will have an ineffective vaccine, essentially. And we'll be back to where we were last March with a brand-new disease."

Technology to the Rescue?

The flexibility of mRNA vaccines is one potential solution. These vaccines could be more easily and quickly adapted to respond to a new, more vaccine-elusive variant.

"That's absolutely reassuring," Nelson says. For example, if a mutation changes the spike protein and vaccines no longer recognize it, a manufacturer could identify the new protein and incorporate that in a new mRNA vaccine.

"The problem is that some people are not taking the current vaccine," he adds. "I'm not sure what is going to make them take the next vaccine."

ple, from getting sick with it," he says. "That's why it's so important people should get immunized and wear masks."

Both Nelson and Ray point out that it is in the best interest of the virus to evolve to be more transmissible and spread to more people. In contrast, a virus that causes people to get so sick that they isolate or die, thus halting transmission, works against viruses surviving evolutionarily.

Some viruses also mutate to become milder over time, but that has not been the case with SARS-CoV-2, Ray says.

Mutations Not the Only Concern

Viruses have another mechanism that produces new strains, and it works even more quickly than mutations. Recombination, as it's known, can occur when a person is infected with two different strains of the same virus. If the two versions enter the same cell, the viruses can swap genetic material and produce a third, altogether different strain.

Recombination has already been seen with influenza strains, where H and N genetic segments are swapped to yield H1N1, H1N2, and H3N2 versions of the flu, for example.

"In the early days of SARS-CoV-2 there was so little diversity that recombination did not matter," Ray says. However, there are now distinct lineages of the virus circulating globally. If two of these lineages swap segments "this would make a very new viral sequence in one step without having to mutate to gain those differences."

"The more diverse the strains that are circulating, the bigger a possibility this is," Ray says.

Protected, for Now

Walensky's sober warning came at the same time the CDC released new guidance calling for the wearing of masks indoors in schools and in any location in the country where COVID-19 cases surpass 50 people per 100,000, also known as substantial or high transmission areas.



Nothing Appears Certain

When asked how likely a new strain of SARS-CoV-2 could emerge that gets around vaccine protection, Nelson says, "I think [what] we've learned so far there is no way to predict anything" about this pandemic.

"The best way to prevent the virus from mutating is to prevent hosts, peo-



On a positive note, Walensky says: "Right now, fortunately, we are not there. The vaccines operate really well in protecting us from severe disease and death." (Courtesy <https://www.webmd.com/v>)

SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE DELTA VARIANT?

New data show Delta is different than past versions of the virus: It is much more contagious.

- Vaccinated people can get breakthrough infections of Delta variant and may be contagious.
- Vaccinated individuals represent a very small amount of total transmission.

[cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)

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This decline in protection appears to be due both to waning immunity and to the strength and pervasiveness of the Delta variant, he said. "Even though this new data affirms that vaccine protection remains high against the worst outcomes of COVID, we are concerned that this pattern of decline we are seeing will continue in the months ahead, which could lead to reduced protection against severe disease, hospitalization, and death," Murthy said. According to a joint statement from the CDC, FDA, NIH, and National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases that laid out the details of the administration's plan, the boosters will be offered starting the week of September 20 to U.S. adults who received their second mRNA dose at least 8 months earlier.

"We are not recommending that you go out and get a booster today," Murthy clarified. The first shots will be given to people vaccinated earliest in the rollout: healthcare providers, residents and staff at long-term care facilities, and other seniors. The plan is contingent on both the FDA completing an independent review of the safety and

effectiveness of a third dose of the Pfizer and Moderna mRNA vaccines and on the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommendations after review of the evidence, the joint statement explained.



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Related U.S. Surgeon General Urges U.S. Fight Against COVID Misinformation

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to do more to address an "urgent threat" to public health. In a 22-page advisory, his first as President Joe Biden's surgeon general, Murthy wrote that bogus claims have led people to reject vaccines and public health advice on masks and social distancing, undermining efforts to end the coronavirus pandemic and putting lives at risk. The warning comes as the pace of COVID-19 vaccinations has slowed throughout the U.S., in part because of vaccine opposition fueled by unsubstantiated claims about the safety of immunizations and despite the U.S. death toll recently passing 600,000.

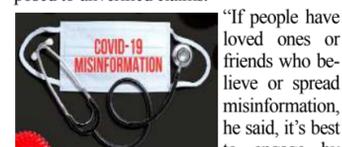


U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy Murthy, who also served as surgeon general under President Barack Obama, noted that surgeon general advisories have typically focused on physical threats to health, such as tobacco. Misinformation about COVID-19, deemed an "infodemic" by the World Health Organization, can be just as deadly, he said. "Misinformation poses an imminent and insidious threat to our nation's health," Murthy said during remarks to reporters Thursday at

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