

# Russia Open to Arms Inspections to Save Treaty



**High-ranking military officials look into an opened silo of a Russian intercontinental ballistic Topol-M missile somewhere at undisclosed location in Russia in this 2001 photo.**

MOSCOW (Dispatches) — **Russia is ready to discuss mutual inspections with the United States in order to save the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, RIA news agency cited Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs as saying Friday.**

Last week Washington said Russia must scrap its 9M729 nuclear-capable cruise missiles and launchers or modify the weapons' range to return to compliance to

the Cold War-era arms control treaty.

It gave Moscow a deadline of 60 days or it would begin to withdraw from the pact.

"If the United States really wants to come to some kind of agreement with us, then we need to sit down at the negotiating table in an inter-agency format and agree on everything in detail. We are ready for this," foreign ministry official Vladimir Yermakov was cited as saying.

Yermakov also said Russia categorically

ruled out inspections being carried out on Russia on a unilateral basis but that any serious actions on arms control "are only possible on the basis of mutually legally binding inter-government agreements."

Russian President Vladimir Putin warned last week that Moscow would be forced to respond if Washington withdrew from the nuclear arms control treaty.

Russia, Putin said, would develop missiles currently banned under the INF if the U.S. acted on its threat to abandon the accord and began developing such weapons.

The Russian head of state said the U.S. had decided long ago to pull out of the treaty and was now looking for justifications by blaming Moscow, which he said was opposed to scrapping the accord.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has Washington's persisting threats to withdraw from the INF pave the way for ruining the new START nuclear weapons pact.

"The impression is given that the ground is simply being prepared for this document (New START) also to be ruined as a result," Lavrov underlined at a press conference in Milan, Italy last week.

## Bolton: U.S. to Counter Russia, China in Africa



**Chinese People's Liberation Army personnel attend the opening ceremony of China's new military base in Djibouti, August 1, 2017.**

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- The United States plans to counter the rapidly expanding Chinese and Russian economic and political influence in Africa, U.S. national security adviser John Bolton said on Thursday, calling business practices of the two nations "corrupt" and "predatory."

Washington's No 1. priority will be developing ties with the region to create opportunities for American businesses along with U.S. national security interests, he said in a speech at the Heritage Foundation.

"Great-power competitors, namely China and Russia, are rapidly expanding their financial and political influence across Africa," Bolton said.

"They are deliberately and aggressively targeting their investments in the region to gain a competitive advantage over the

United States."

U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping, leaders of the world's two largest economies, have been trying to resolve trade disputes that have roiled markets.

Bolton accused China of using bribes, opaque agreements, and the strategic use of debt to hold states in Africa captive to Beijing's wishes and demands, claiming that its investment ventures were riddled with corruption.

Speaking in Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said China's cooperation with Africa was about helping the continent develop and had been widely praised there.

"When we talk about cooperation with Africa, what we mostly talk about is what does Africa need, like agricultural modernization," Lu told

a daily news briefing.

"But the U.S. person, apart from talking about the United States' own needs, wasn't thinking about Africa, but about China and Russia. This is very interesting."

China will continue its friendly, mutually beneficial cooperation with Africa, no matter what anyone else says, he added.

Bolton had equally harsh words for Russia.

"Across the continent, Russia advances its political and economic relationships with little regard for the rule of law or accountable and transparent governance," he said.

He accused Moscow of selling arms and energy in exchange for votes at the United Nations "that keep strongmen in power, undermine peace and security, and run counter to the best interests of the African people."

Judd Devermont, director of the Africa Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, said he was disappointed that China dominated Bolton's presentation.

In October Trump signed legislation overhauling the way the federal government lends money for foreign development, creating a \$60 billion agency intended largely to respond to China's growing influence.

Xi's "Belt and Road" initiative, unveiled in 2013, aims to build an infrastructure network connecting China by land and sea to Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa.

## Blair: UK Needs Second Referendum on Brexit

LONDON (Reuters) -- **Former Prime Minister Tony Blair said on Friday that Britain and the European Union should prepare for a second Brexit referendum because parliament will probably fail to agree on a divorce deal and the public will need to break the deadlock.**

Less than four months before Britain is due to leave the EU, Prime Minister Theresa May called off a parliamentary vote on her deal with Brussels this week after admitting it would be heavily defeated.

Addressing EU leaders meeting in Brussels, Blair said they should offer to reform the bloc to make it more attractive for Britain to remain.

"Now should be the time of preparation – parliament to make sure it can canvass the options in (a) sensible manner, one by one, to reach agreement on an option or a referendum; Europe to ensure that if Britain is ready to think again, Europe is ready also to think again," Blair, who was Labor prime minister from 1997 to 2007, will say in a speech in London.

Blair's office released extracts of the speech in advance.

An offer by the EU to reform would show "that the political leadership of Europe and Britain had listened to the underlying concerns of those who voted (for) Brexit, not disrespecting the concerns but

meeting them in a way which is not damaging".

Blair has repeatedly called for reversing Brexit since the 2016 referendum, echoing other critics, including French President Emmanuel Macron, who have suggested Britain could still change its mind.

Blair said it is perverse that the Britain and the EU are preparing for a potentially economically damaging Brexit without any deal, but not another referendum.

"We know the options for Brexit. Parliament will have to decide on one of them. If Parliament can't then it should decide to go back to the people."

## Kosovo to Create Army Despite Serbian Warning



**Pedestrians walk under United States flags displayed at the Mother Teresa square in Pristina on December 14, 2018.**

PRISTINA (Dispatches) — **Kosovo on Friday passed laws to build an army, asserting its statehood in a move that has inflamed tensions with Serbia, which does not recognize the former province's independence.**

Kosovo has been guarded by NATO-led peacekeeping troops since it broke away from Belgrade in a bloody separatist war in 1998-99.

The new laws will double the size of a small crisis-response outfit, the Kosovo Security Force, and set out a national defense mandate for a professional army of 5,000 troops.

"This vote today begins a new era for our country. From this moment we officially have the army of Kosovo," parliamentary speaker Kadri Veseli said as MPs hugged each other after the session, which was boycotted by minority Serb politicians.

While it is a mostly symbolic flaunting of Kosovo's sovereignty, Serbia – which still considers the former province a renegade territory – has castigated the move as a threat to regional stability.

Speaking after the vote, Serbia's Prime Minister Ana Brnabic said it was "a hard day," but that Serbia would "stay on its path of peace and prosperity".

Brnabic threatened Kosovo on Wednesday with a military intervention in the event of the creation of a standing army.

"I am hoping we would never have to use it (the army) but this is currently one of (the) options on the table as we do not want to watch this ... ethnic cleansing,"

she said.

In particular, Belgrade has sounded the alarm over the safety of 120,000 Serbs still living in Albanian-majority Kosovo, mainly in the north near their contested border.

Those Serb communities are loyal to Belgrade and also broadly against the army plan. "We do not want a Kosovo army here," said Marko Djusic, a Serb resident of Dren village near the border.

NATO, which has four members that do not recognize Kosovo, had warned the army move was "ill-timed" amid already strained ties between Pristina and Belgrade.

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said Friday the alliance will "re-examine" its role in Kosovo in light of the vote.

But Washington – Kosovo's pre-eminent ally – voiced public support, as did the United Kingdom.

Many Kosovo roads were adorned with U.S. flags Thursday in a sign of gratitude.

But divided allegiances were on display in the segregated city of Mitrovica, where U.S. flags were flown in the Albanian-dominated south while Serbian flags covered the mainly Serb north.

The creation of an independent Kosovar army comes amid escalating tensions between the West and Russia which is a staunch ally of Serbia.

Russia recently reacted to U.S. and European "provocations" in Ukraine by seizing two warships in the Sea of Azov, which triggered new tensions in their strained ties.

## Japan Resumes U.S. Base Plan, Sparking Protests



**Land reclamation work being conducted to build a new site for relocating a U.S. military airbase on the Henoko coastal district of Nago, Okinawa, on Dec. 14, 2018.**

TOKYO (AFP) — **Japan on Friday resumed work to relocate a controversial U.S. military airbase in Okinawa, prompting protests and "strong anger" from the local governor.**

Okinawa residents have for years called for the relocation of an American base in a populated part of the southern island, but they want it moved elsewhere in the country, rather than to the remote site on Okinawa favored by the government.

"I can't help but feel strong anger at the start of (land reclamation), which ignores the will of the Okinawan people," governor Denny Tamaki told reporters.

The recently elected governor is strongly opposed to the base being relocated within Okinawa, and raised the issue earlier this year with both Japanese government officials and on a trip to the United States.

Aerial television footage showed a mountain of soil piled up on the coast of Henoko in Okinawa's Nago city being ploughed into the sea as part of land reclamation work to build the new site.

Local media said protesters demonstrated at the site, including some who paddled out to sea to try to block the work.

Okinawa accounts for less than one

percent of Japan's total land area, but hosts more than half of the approximately 47,000 American military personnel stationed in Japan.

For decades, residents have asked for some of the bases to be moved, with resentment growing after a string of accidents and crimes committed by U.S. military personnel and base workers.

The result deals Japan Prime Minister Shinzo Abe an early setback less than two weeks after he won a third straight three-year term as LDP leader.

As a solution, Abe's government has sought to move the unpopular Futenma base to a remote site, part of which will be built through land reclamation.

But many in Okinawa feel the base should be moved to somewhere else in Japan, and say the task of hosting U.S. troops should be more fairly shared.

On Friday, government spokesman Yoshihide Suga repeated that the government regards the plan as "the only solution" to maintain an important U.S. military presence while addressing local concerns.

Okinawa is set to hold a non-binding local referendum on Feb 24 about the planned base relocation.



WASHINGTON (AFP) — **U.S. President Donald Trump knew it was wrong to order election-eve hush money paid to two women who claimed to have had affairs with him, his former lawyer Michael Cohen said in an interview to be broadcast Friday. Trump acted because he "was very concerned about how this would affect the election," Cohen told ABC News of the women's allegations, in his first comments since being sentenced to three years in prison on Thursday. Trump has said he never directed Cohen — who is due to surrender to custody by March 6 — to break the law. But Cohen, asked if Trump knew the payments to Stormy Daniels and Karen McDougal were wrong, said "of course." Cohen challenged Trump's assertion that he never told him to break the law. "I don't think there is anybody that believes that," Cohen told George Stephanopoulos on "Good Morning America." ABC released excerpts of the interview ahead of its full airing. "First of all, nothing at the Trump Organization was ever done unless it was run through Mr. Trump. He directed me to make the payments, he directed me to become involved in these matters," Cohen said. "He knows the truth. I know the truth. Others know the truth," Cohen added.**

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PARIS (AFP) — **The gunman who killed three people at a Christmas market in Strasbourg was shot dead by French police on Thursday as the Daesh group claimed him as one of its "soldiers". More than 700 French security forces had been hunting for 29-year-old Cherif Chekatt since the bloodshed on Tuesday night — the latest in a string of takfiri attacks to rock France. Interior Minister Christophe Castaner said three police tried to question Chekatt after spotting him on the street in the Neudorf area of the northeastern French city where he grew up, but he opened fire. "They immediately returned fire and neutralized the assailant," Castaner said. A source close to the investigation said a woman spotted a man fitting Chekatt's description with a wounded arm on Thursday afternoon and alerted authorities, who sealed off the area and used a helicopter with thermal cameras to hunt for the suspect.**

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SEOUL (Reuters) -- **The United States and South Korea have failed to agree on a bigger South Korean share of the cost of maintaining U.S. troops, an official said on Friday, as the U.S. military warned Korean workers they might be put on leave if no deal is reached. U.S. President Donald Trump has repeatedly said that South Korea should bear more of the burden for keeping some 28,500 U.S. troops in South Korea, where the United States has stationed forces since the 1950-53 Korean War. Senior officials from both sides held three-day talks in Seoul from Tuesday to hammer out an accord to replace a 2014 deal due to expire this year, which requires South Korea to pay about 960 billion won (\$850 million) this year. Despite 10 rounds of negotiations since March, the two sides struggled to reach an agreement after the United States demanded a sharp increase, South Korean officials said.**

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- **A 7-year-old girl from Guatemala died of dehydration and shock hours after she was taken into U.S. Border Patrol custody, the Washington Post reported on Thursday. The girl and her father had been detained by immigration authorities on Dec. 6 in New Mexico as part of a group of 163 people who approached U.S. agents to turn themselves in, the Post reported. Early on Dec. 7, the girl started having seizures, and emergency responders measured her body temperature at 105.7 degrees, the Post said. She was taken to a hospital, where she died, according to the Post.**

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WASHINGTON (AFP) -- **Donald Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner is on the short-list of potential candidates for the president's next chief of staff, U.S. media said Thursday. Kushner, an influential White House adviser and husband of Trump's daughter Ivanka, met with the Republican leader to discuss the job, according to the Huffington Post, which first reported the story. "I am not aware that he is under consideration but, as I think all of us here would recognize, he would be great in any role that the president chooses to put him in," White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said of the news, which was also reported by CBS. The president has been searching in vain for a new chief of staff after announcing that John Kelly, a retired general he had reportedly fallen out with, was to leave by the end of the year.**

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ADDIS ABABA (Reuters) — **Ethiopia will begin moving its troops away from the border with Eritrea, senior military officials said on Friday, months after the erstwhile enemies reopened it for the first time in 20 years. "Relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea are very good - there is no longer the threat of conflict," Ethiopia's Major General Asrat Denero, Commander of the Western Command, said. War broke out between the two countries in 1998 over the border and other issues, killing an estimated 80,000 people before fighting finally ended in 2000 in a contested peace deal. However, tensions simmered over the position of the frontier until this year when Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed offered to end the standoff as part of a package of reforms that have reshaped the political landscape of the Horn of Africa.**