

U.S., Allies to Send Hundreds of Armored Vehicles, Rockets to Ukraine



U.S. Bradley fighting vehicles that will be deployed in Latvia for NATO's Operation Atlantic Resolve wait for an unload in Garkalne, Latvia February 8, 2017.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States and Western allies have pledged billions of dollars in weapons and hundreds of armored vehicles plus rockets and artillery shells to Ukraine, defying Moscow's repeated warnings against supplying Kiev with heavy weaponry.

The Kremlin said supplying tanks to Ukraine would not help and the West would regret its "delusion" that Kyiv could win on the battlefield.

The U.S. has announced a new package of arms and munitions for Ukraine worth \$2.5 billion.

The package includes 59 Bradley Fighting Vehicles, 90 Stryker Armored Personnel Carriers, 53 mine-resistant ambush protected vehicles and 350 high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles, the U.S. Defense Department said in a statement.

The 59 Bradleys included in the latest U.S. package come after a previous 50 announced earlier in January. The armored Bradley has a powerful gun and has been used by the U.S. Army to carry troops around battlefields since the mid-1980s.

The latest assistance also includes additional ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), eight Avenger air-defense systems, tens of thousands of artillery rounds and about 2,000 anti-armor rockets, the Defense Department said.

In total, the United States has committed more than \$27.4 billion in security assistance to Ukraine since the war began in February last year.

Germany also said it would need agreement from allies to give the green light for the delivery of German-made tanks to Ukraine, apparently dashing

Kyiv's hopes for a quick decision.

Defense ministers from NATO and other countries were meeting in Germany.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Ukraine's backers needed to focus not only on sending new weapons, but supplying ammunition for older systems and helping maintain them.

The United States and Finland announced large new military aid packages before the gathering at Ramstein Air Base, where the focus was on whether Germany would allow countries in Europe that use its Leopard 2 tanks to re-export them to Ukraine.

German Defense Minister Pistorius said he could not say when there would be a decision on the tanks but that Germany was prepared to move fast if there was consensus among allies.

"All pros and cons must be weighed very carefully," Pistorius said, adding that the issue had been discussed on Friday but no decision had been made.

Pistorius did not say which, if any, allies were not in agreement with supplying the tanks, or give details of what he saw as the pros and cons of such a policy.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government has appeared reluctant to authorize the re-export of the tanks for fear of provoking Russia. Some Western officials have also flagged the concern that Russia might capture advanced Western weaponry and steal its technology.

Somali Army Kills 100 al-Shabab Fighters in Foiled Attack on Base



Demonstrators attend a rally against the Al-Shabab terrorists in Mogadishu on Jan 12, 2023.

MOGADISHU (Reuters) - Somali National Army (SNA) forces killed 100 al-Shabab terrorists in a foiled attack on a military base in Galcad town in central Somalia on Friday, the government said.

The Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism confirmed that seven SNA soldiers were killed in the early morning attack in the Galgaduud

region. The ministry said the soldiers who have ramped up military operations in central Somalia also destroyed five technical vehicles that terrorists were using.

Witnesses said al-Shabab struck the entrance of the military base with twin car bombs after the morning prayers and then stormed inside the com-

pound. However, the soldiers manning the base repulsed them, killing 100 al-Shabab fighters while others escaped with serious injuries.

Hassan Osman Mohamed, the deputy commander of special forces (Danab), was among the government soldiers killed in the attack.

Al-Shabab terrorists who have been fighting to overthrow the internationally-backed government claimed responsibility for the latest attack, saying its fighters killed 159 government forces.

The al-Qaida allied terror group normally inflates casualty figures during their battle with the government's security forces.

The attacks continue across Somalia despite the security forces backed by allied forces having stepped up operations against the militants in the country.

Russia, China to Hold Naval Drills Off South Africa

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — Russia and China will conduct naval drills in the Indian Ocean off the coast of South Africa next month, in another indication of their strengthening relationships with Africa's most developed country amid the war in Ukraine and global financial uncertainty.

The South African armed forces said Thursday that they and the Russian and Chinese navies will engage in "a multinational maritime exercise" from Feb. 17-27 off South Africa's east coast near the cities of Durban and Richards Bay.

The announcement comes days before Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is due to visit South Africa and hold talks with South African counterpart Naledi Pandor.

The South African government said it has a neutral stance over Ukraine and has called for dialogue and diplomacy, but the upcoming naval drills have led the country's main opposition party to accuse the government of effectively siding with Russia.

But the South African National Defense Force, which incorporates all of its armed forces, said next month's naval exercise would "strengthen the already flourishing relations between South Africa, Russia and China." The aim of the drills was "sharing operational skills and knowledge," the SANDF said.

The three countries also conducted a similar naval exercise in 2019 in Cape Town, while Russia and China held joint naval drills in the East China Sea last month.

Britain Faces New Ambulance Strike Dates in Feb, March



A view of ambulances parked along a street, as ambulance workers strike, amid a dispute with the government over pay, near the NHS London Ambulance Service, in London, Britain December 21, 2022.

LONDON (Reuters) - British labor union Unite said ambulance workers would strike on a series of new dates in February and March, in the latest sign of the deepening dispute between the government and healthcare workers over pay.

Unite said ambulance workers in England would walk-out on Feb. 6, Feb. 17, Feb. 20 and Feb. 22 and Mar. 6 and Mar. 20, with members in different regions holding walk-outs on different days.

The new dates will add to fears for the safe running of Britain's health-care service on Feb. 6, when other health-related unions including the Royal College of Nursing are also staging industrial action.

Britain has been hit by a wave of strike action over the last six months, its worst in a generation, with walk-outs by rail workers, teachers and postal staff demanding higher wages as inflation surges.

Unite, which also said it was bal-

loting more ambulance staff in different parts of the country, said the government needed to negotiate over current pay if it wanted to end the industrial action.

"The government's constant attempts to kick the can down the road and its talk about one off payments, or slightly increased pay awards in the future, is simply not sufficient to resolve this dispute," Unite lead officer Onay Kasab said in a statement on Friday.

Members from a different union, the GMB, which represents ambulance and other healthcare workers including emergency care assistants, are already planning strikes on Feb. 6, Feb. 20, March 6 and March 20.

Britain's Department of Health and Social Care said in an emailed statement it was disappointed by news of further strikes, adding discussions with unions over pay for the 2023-4 period were "constructive".

Thousands March on Peru's Capital as Unrest Spreads



Protesters are seeking immediate elections, Boluarte's resignation, the release of ousted President Pedro Castillo and justice for up to 48 protesters killed in clashes with police.

LIMA (Reuters) - Thousands of protesters in Peru, many from the country's heavily indigenous south, descended on the capital Lima on Thursday, angered by the rising death toll since unrest erupted last month and calling for sweeping changes.

Police estimated the march at about 3,500 people, but others speculated it drew more than double that.

Lines of police in riot gear faced rock-throwing protesters on some streets, and a historic building in the city's historic center caught fire late Thursday.

The building at San Martin Plaza was empty when the massive fire ignited for unknown reasons, a fire department commander told local radio.

Canada-based miner Boluarte said in a statement that protesters entered the premises of his Peruvian unit, damaging and burning vital machinery and vehicles.

Interior Minister Vicente Romero denied claims circulating on social media that the fire in Lima was caused by a police officer's tear gas grenade.

Over the past month, violent and sometimes deadly protests have fueled the worst violence Peru has seen in more than two decades, as many in poorer, rural regions vent their anger at the Lima establishment over inequality and rising prices and the copper-rich Andes the test is set by the nation's democratic institutions.

The demonstrators are demanding

Boluarte's resignation, early elections and a new constitution to replace the pro-market constitution of right-wing strongman Alberto Fujimori in the 1990s.

"We want the usurper Dina Boluarte to resign and call for new elections," said protester Jose De la Rosa, predicting that the street protests would only continue.

The protests were sparked by the dramatic ouster of leftist former President Pedro Castillo on December 7 after he tried to illegally shut down Congress and consolidate power.

Thousands traveled to Lima in buses and on foot on Thursday, carrying flags and banners blasting the government and police over deadly clashes in the southern cities of Ayacucho and Juliaca.

The rising death toll stands at 45, according to the government ombudsman, with the latest victim on Thursday from the southern Puno region, a woman who succumbed to injuries a day earlier. Another nine deaths are attributed to accidents related to protest blockades.

Police had increased surveillance on the roads leading to Lima, and political leaders called for calm.

Last week, the embattled Boluarte government extended the state of emergency in Lima and the southern regions of Puno and Cusco, cutting some civil rights

News in Brief

APTOS, Calif. (Reuters) - U.S. President Joe Biden said on Thursday he has "no regrets" about his handling of classified documents found at his home and former office and that he believes the matter will be resolved. "I think you're gonna find there's nothing there," Biden told reporters as he toured storm damage in California. "I have no regrets. I'm following what the lawyers have told me they want me to do. It's exactly what we're doing. There's no there there." A series of classified documents were discovered by Biden's attorneys on four separate occasions between November 2022, just ahead of the midterms, and last weekend.

KINSHASA, Congo (AP) - At least 145 passengers are missing and feared dead after a motorized boat overloaded with goods and animals sank at night on a river in northwestern Congo, authorities said. About 55 people survived the disaster; officials said. The boat had been traveling to neighboring Republic of Congo when it went capsized the Lulonga River late Tuesday near the town of Basankusu. Jean-Pierre Wangela, the president of civil society groups in the area, told journalists that at least 145 people were missing. He blamed overloading for the boat's demise, but said that locals have few other options.

RASILIA (Reuters) - Brazil's federal police on Friday carried out raids against people suspected of involvement in the Jan 8 storming of government buildings by supporters of far-right former President Jair Bolsonaro. A police statement said the operation was aimed at "identifying people who participated in, funded or fostered" the protests. It included 24 warrants covering five states and the capital Brasilia. On Jan 8, thousands of backers of Bolsonaro invaded and ransacked the Congress building, the presidential palace and the Supreme Court in the worst attack on state institutions since Brazil's return to democracy in the 1980s.

MOSCOW (TASS) - At least 15 Armenian servicemen were killed in a fire that broke out in the barracks that belong to a unit of the Armenian Armed Forces, Armenia's Defense Ministry said on Thursday. Three other servicemen were seriously injured and have been hospitalized, the ministry. The fire broke out at 00:30 Moscow time on Thursday (2130 GMT on Wednesday) in the barracks of the engineering and sniper company of a military unit.

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) - New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, who became a global icon of the left and exemplified a new style of leadership, said Thursday that she would leave office. Just 37 when she became leader, Ardern was praised around the world for her handling of the nation's worst-ever mass shooting and the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic. But she faced mounting political pressures at home and a level of vitriol from some that hadn't been experienced by previous New Zealand leaders.