

U.S., NATO Note Ukraine Army Gains But See War Dragging On



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the head of NATO say Ukraine's armed forces have made significant early gains against Russian troops in southern and eastern Ukraine but see the war dragging on.

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) – Ukraine's armed forces have made significant early gains in their counter-offensive against Russian troops in southern and eastern Ukraine but fighting appears set to drag on for months, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the head of NATO says.

Blinken, who was at NATO headquarters to brief the 29 U.S. allies after a trip to Kyiv, said the six-month war in Ukraine is entering a critical period. He urged the conflict-torn country's Western backers to maintain their support through the winter.

"The initial signs are positive, and we see Ukraine making real, demonstrable progress in a deliberate way," Blinken said, referring to the Ukrainian military's recent push into areas in southern Ukraine and the eastern Donbas region.

"But this is likely to go on for some significant period of time," he said. "There are a huge number of

Russian forces that are in Ukraine."

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said the operation launched in February is "entering a critical phase."

But Stoltenberg warned that allied unity will be tested in coming months, "with pressure on energy supplies and the soaring cost of living caused by Russia's war." He renewed calls for allies to supply special uniforms, generators, tents and equipment to help Ukraine's army weather the winter.

Meanwhile, Russian state media outlets say the country is sending reinforcements to Kharkiv amid reported intensification of the battle in the northeastern Ukrainian region.

The outlets broadcast footage showing columns of tanks, support vehicles, and artillery units traveling along in Kharkiv.

Kiev's forces have alleged "major gains," AFP reported.

Vitaliy Ganchev, a Russian official

based in the region, said in televised remarks that "fierce battles" were underway near the region's town of Balakliya, which Ukraine said it had recaptured on Thursday.

"We do not control Balakliya. Attempts are being made to dislodge the Ukrainian forces, but there are fierce battles, and our troops are being held back on the approaches," he said.

"Now, Russian reserves have been brought there, our troops are fighting back," Ganchev added.

Former U.S. Marine Corps intelligence officer William Scott Ritter Jr. called the current phase of the Ukraine-Russia conflict a NATO-Russian phase.

Commenting on the war's first phase, Scott Ritter said, "While Russia was busy destroying the Ukrainian military on the battlefield, Ukraine was busy reconstituting that army."

He further described the second phase, saying, "Russia faced mobilized territorial and national units, supported by reconstituted NATO-trained forces. But the bulk of the NATO trained forces were held in reserve."

In the third phase, he said Russia is now "facing a NATO-style military force that is being logistically sustained by NATO, trained by NATO, provided with NATO intelligence, and working in harmony with NATO military planners."

"The current Ukrainian counteroffensive should not be viewed as an extension of the phase two battle, but rather the initiation of a new third phase which is not a Ukrainian-Russian conflict, but a NATO-Russian conflict."

The former U.S. Marine warned that the war was being orchestrated and implemented by NATO.

UN Chief: World Paying 'Horrific Price' for Fossil Fuels

SUKKUR, Pakistan (AFP) – United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said developing nations were paying a "horrific price" for the world's reliance on fossil fuels, as he toured parts of Pakistan hit by floods blamed on climate change.

Nearly 1,400 people have died in flooding that covers a third of the country -- an area the size of the United Kingdom -- wiping out crops and destroying homes, businesses, roads and bridges.

Guterres hopes his visit will galvanize support for Pakistan, which needs at least \$10 billion to repair damaged infrastructure.

"Pakistan and other developing countries are paying a horrific price for the intransigence of big emitters that continue to bet on fossil fuels," Guterres said in a tweet, shortly before heading to see some of the most flood-affected areas.

"From Islamabad, I am issuing a global appeal: Stop the madness. Invest in renewable energy now. End the war with nature."

Pakistan receives heavy -- often destructive -- rains during its annual monsoon season, which is crucial for agriculture and water supplies.

But downpours as intense as this year's have not been seen for decades.



Victims of heavy flooding from monsoon rains take refuge at a temporary tent housing camp organized by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), in Sukkur, Pakistan, Saturday, Sept. 10, 2022.

On Friday Guterres lamented the lack of attention the world gave to climate change -- particularly the industrialized nations that scientists blame.

"This is insanity, this is collective suicide," he said.

Pakistan is responsible for less than one percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, but is eighth on a list compiled by the NGO Germanwatch of countries most vulnerable to extreme weather caused by climate change.

Guterres is touring flood-hit parts

of the south on Saturday, and will also visit Mohenjo-daro, a centuries-old UNESCO-designated world heritage site threatened by the deluge.

Some 33 million people have been affected by the floods, which have destroyed around two million homes and business premises, washed away 7,000 kilometers (4,500 miles) of roads and collapsed 500 bridges.

The effect of the torrential rain has been twofold -- destructive flash floods in rivers in the mountainous north, and a slow accumulation of water in the southern plains.

Venezuela, Colombia to Reopen Land Borders, Skies

CARACAS (AFP) – Venezuela and Colombia say they will reopen their shared land border later this month and resume commercial flights after renewing diplomatic ties severed in 2019.

The countries reestablished formal ties on August 29 under the leadership of Venezuela's socialist president Nicolas Maduro and Colombia's new leftist leader, Gustavo Petro.

Both assigned ambassadors to each other's countries, and announced they also wanted to restore military cooperation.

Venezuela severed ties with its neighbor in 2019 after Colombia under right-wing former president Ivan Duque -- along with dozens of other countries -- rejected Maduro's 2018 re-election and recognized opposition leader Juan Guaido as the 'legitimate' leader instead.

Embassies and consulates in both countries were closed, and flights between the neighbors grounded.

An exodus of international airlines from Venezuela began already in 2014 when oil prices -- then the source of 96 percent of foreign exchange -- began to collapse, causing

the government to fall into debt of some \$3.8 billion to air companies, according to the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

In 2017, Avianca, which covered more than half of Caracas-Bogota flights, suspended operations to and from Venezuela.

The countries' shared 2,000-kilometer (1,200-mile) land border -- the scene of clashes between armed and criminal groups -- was closed from 2019, and reopened in October last year but to pedestrians only.

On Friday, Maduro tweeted that on September 26, "we will jointly open the borders between Venezuela and Colombia. In addition, we will resume flights between Caracas-Bogota and Valencia-Bogota."

Petro shared the same information on Twitter, adding: "We confirm the government's commitment to re-establish fraternal relations."

The countries hope to reinvigorate trade which stood at \$7.2 billion in 2008, but has collapsed since then.

Charles III Proclaimed UK's King



Charles III is officially proclaimed king by the Accession Council during a ceremony at St James's Palace in London, September 10, 2022, where he was joined by his wife Camilla, who becomes Queen Consort, and his eldest son and heir to the throne Prince William.

LONDON (Dispatches) – King Charles III has been publicly proclaimed as the new monarch of the United Kingdom following the death of his mother Queen Elizabeth II, the longest-serving monarch in British history.

In a formal ceremony of the Accession Council, at St James's Palace in the capital London on Saturday, Charles III was officially declared king. The ceremony, attended by around 200 of the current Privy Counselors, including many former prime ministers and other senior politicians, as well as judges, bishops and senior civil servants was televised for the first time.

The coronation comes as Charles as a prince and Britain's heir to the throne was at the center of the storm for accepting questionable donations to his charitable fund.

Bakr and Shafiq bin Laden, wealthy construction magnates and half-brothers of the late Al-Qaeda terrorist leader Osama Bin Laden, reportedly donated 1.7 million dollars to a charitable fund run by the prince.

Charles allegedly green-lighted the donation after a private meeting with Bakr bin Laden at this palatial building known as Clarence House in 2013 only two years after U.S. Special Forces killed the 9/11 mastermind in the east of Pakistan.

Charles, 73, automatically be-

came king of the United Kingdom and the head of state of 14 other realms including Australia, Canada and New Zealand, following the death of her mother Queen Elizabeth at the age of 96 on Thursday.

However, it is the council's role to formally acknowledge the passing of one monarch and to then proclaim the new one on behalf of the British government.

The announcements also confirmed that the day of the Queen's state funeral would be a public holiday.

Elizabeth was the queen of Britain and more than a dozen other countries, who saw 15 British prime ministers in her record-breaking reign and earlier this year marked her 70th year on the throne.

At her death, she was head of state of Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, The Bahamas, Belize, Canada, Grenada, Jamaica, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and the UK.

At the peak, she was queen of 18 countries at the same time, between 1983 and 1987. Since then, Fiji (1987), Mauritius (1992) and Barbados (2021) have become republics.

Her last years as the monarch were marked by a slew of scandals dogging the royal family.

U.S. Backtracks, Says Seeking Diplomacy With North Korea

WASHINGTON (Anadolu) – The White House says that the U.S. is seeking to restart diplomatic talks with North Korea after Pyongyang passed a new law that raises the specter of a nuclear confrontation.

"We continue to seek diplomacy, and are prepared to meet without preconditions," spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters.

"The United States remains focused on continuing to coordinate closely with our allies and partners to address the threats posed by DPRK. And to advance our shared objective of the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. That has not changed," she added, referring to North Korea using an acronym.

The comments come after North Korea passed a new law requiring its military to carry out a preemptive nuclear attack if a nation attempts to overthrow its leader, Kim Jong-un, according to multiple reports.

The law declares North Korea a nuclear weapons state, and says Pyongyang will never relinquish the weapons, which Kim said the country needs to counter the U.S.

"The utmost significance of legitimizing nuclear-weapons policy is to draw an irretrievable line so that there can be no bargaining over our nuclear weapons," Kim told the

country's legislature, according to state media.

Two weeks ago, the United States and South Korea began their biggest joint war games in years as part of what they claimed to be countermeasures against threats from North Korea.

Seoul also called for boosting the military capability to fend off North Korean missiles, while strengthening the extended U.S. deterrence, including its nuclear umbrella.

North Korea has test-fired a record number of missiles this year amid claims by officials in Seoul and Washington that Pyongyang appears to be preparing to test a nuclear weapon for the first time in the past five years.

North Korea conducted its sixth and last nuclear test in September 2017. Following inconclusive negotiations with the U.S., it dismantled a nuclear facility and has not conducted any other nuclear tests since then.

The U.S. has warned it would push for additional sanctions if Pyongyang conducts a seventh nuclear test.

Back in July, the North Korean leader said his country was "ready to mobilize" its nuclear deterrent in any future military conflict with the United States and South Korea.

News in Brief

WARSAW (Dispatches) – The leader of Poland's ruling Law and Justice party (PiS) has denounced the EU as a "culturally alien" project led by a neo-imperialist Germany, saying it was "the sacred duty" of Polish politicians to oppose it.

Speaking at an economic forum in Karpacz this week, Jaroslaw Kaczynski said, "We had to join the EU just to exist and develop," adding, "There was no other way back then." It was something Poland had affirmed at the time of accession by passing a resolution to defend its sovereignty, Kaczynski added. The leaders of the party have recently shown intentions for an anti-EU and anti-German climate as it would face competition in next year's parliamentary elections. Kaczynski further denounced the opposition that they are being supported by Germany to rule over Europe and are kneeling to neighboring powers that will enslave Poland. "In the EU, there is a rule: who is stronger is better," he said while explaining that the essence of the EU project had been revealed.

MARYLAND (Xinhua) – Two adults and three children have been found dead at a residence in Cecil County, in the U.S. state of Maryland. The Cecil County Sheriff's Office said in a release that a male individual called 911 in the morning to report that three children and a female had been shot and were dead. Deputies arrived at the residence in the unit block of Hebron Court in Elk Mills and observed an unresponsive subject inside of the detached garage. They entered the residence where they ultimately discovered five dead people in various locations inside the residence and the detached garage, according to the release. "All of the deceased appeared to have suffered gunshot wounds," the release read. "A semi-automatic handgun was located near the dead man." "This is a tragic and terrible day for our county and our community," Cecil County Sheriff Scott Adams told reporters Friday afternoon. Investigators were on the scene executing a search and seizure warrant and actively investigating the incident.

STOCKHOLM (Anadolu) – A mosque in Sweden affiliated with Turkey's Presidency of Religious Affairs was pelted with stones in an attack on the place of worship, an official said on Friday. Mehmet Ozer, an official from the Jonkoping Mosque in southern Sweden, told Anadolu Agency that they noticed the attack when they went for Friday prayers. "The incident was reported to the police and relevant authorities," Ozer added. "This is the third attack on our mosque in the last three months. We're filing our complaint, but we aren't too hopeful, as we didn't get any results from the previous complaints." Ozer said that the kitchen window of the mosque, affiliated with the Swedish Religious Foundation, was broken in the attack, and they suspect that the attack was made with racist motivations.

CANBERRA (Al Jazeera) – Refugees in Australia are stepping up pressure on the three-month-old government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese to deliver on a promise to give them permanent protection visas that would allow them to work and study and live more normal lives. More than 1,000 refugees, advocates and activists converged on Parliament House to press their case. "We're here because we want action, we want change. We want to be acknowledged within this community," said Mostafa Faraji, a speaker at the rally in Canberra. At the moment, there are 31,000 refugees living in Australia on various temporary visas that put limits on their lives -- whether it is for work, study or family relationships. In the run-up to May's election, Albanese's Labor party promised to abolish some of the temporary visas and provide permanent protection in their place. During the protest, Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs of Australia Andrew Giles, posted a statement on social media reiterating the promise and saying it would be fulfilled "as soon as possible".

AUCKLAND (Al Jazeera) – Five people are reported to have died after a boat in New Zealand capsized, reportedly after a collision with a whale, local media reported. New Zealand's public broadcaster RNZ (Radio New Zealand) reported on Saturday that the boat capsized off Goose Bay near the South Island town of Kaikoura. Eleven people were on board the vessel when it overturned and five bodies were later recovered by emergency services workers, RNZ reported, citing local police. Six people were rescued. "Police said the boat overturned after a 'collision', but could not confirm what it collided with," the broadcaster reported. Kaikoura's Mayor Craig Mackle told The Associated Press news agency that the sea was calm at the time of the accident and the assumption was that a whale had surfaced from beneath the boat and flipped it. Mackle said there were sperm whales in the area and also some humpback whales travelling through at the time. The boat that capsized had been chartered by a group of women.

JAKARTA (AFP) – A strong 6.1-magnitude earthquake struck Indonesia's Papua region Saturday morning and was followed by a 5.8-magnitude aftershock minutes later, the U.S. Geological Survey said. Both quakes hit at a relatively shallow depth of 15 kilometers (9.3 miles), about 272 kilometers from the town of Apepura, according to the USGS. No casualties or damages were immediately reported by authorities but the Indonesian Meteorology and Geophysics Agency (BKMKG) warned of moderate shaking and light damage in a tweet. Indonesia experiences frequent earthquakes due to its position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire," an arc of intense seismic activity where tectonic plates collide, that stretches from Japan through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin. A 6.2-magnitude quake that shook Sulawesi island in January 2021 killed more than 100 people and left thousands homeless, reducing buildings to a tangled mass of twisted metal and chunks of concrete in the seaside city of Mamuju.