

\$400mn More in Military Aid

U.S. Further Stoking Tensions in Ukraine



A Ukrainian soldier looks at a civilian crossing a blown-up bridge in a village, east of the town of Brovary, on March 6, 2022.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – The U.S. Department of Defense has announced it will fund T-72 tanks sent to Ukraine, deepening its interference in the war in defiance of repeated warnings by Russia.

The refurbished T-72 tanks are part of a \$400 million military assistance package by the U.S. that also includes armored vehicles, drones and a budget to refurbish air missiles. It will bring the Biden administration's total commitment to Kiev to nearly \$19 billion.

The additional military, ground and air capabilities come as Ukrainian forces are reportedly pushing forward an offensive to retake the Moscow-controlled Kherson region in southern Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has called for NATO to supply tanks.

Zelensky tweeted that Ukraine is "thankful to [President Biden] and the people of [the United States] for another \$400 military assistance package."

Pentagon deputy press secretary Sabrina Singh said the T-72 tanks will all come from the Czech Republic. The United States will pay for 45 of them to be refurbished, while the Netherlands will pay to refurbish the other 45.

Singh said some of the tanks are expected to be delivered by the end of December.

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters on Friday that Ukraine is making "incremental progress" in the south.

"There is some incremental progress by the Ukrainians in the south and, quite frankly, up in the northeast as well, as they continue to try to push the Russian lines back even further," he said.

Kirby added that the Russian lines are "largely static and deepening".

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday announced that civilians need to be evacuated from Kherson, where Russian forces have been evacuating since mid-October.

Meanwhile, UK military-intelligence

operatives are reportedly working to create and train a covert terrorist force in Ukraine assigned to attack Russian targets in Crimea on behalf of the Kiev government.

Working through a private British intelligence services firm called Pre-vail Partners, the operatives signed an agreement with the Odessa branch of the Security Service of Ukraine (SSU) to build the so-called "partisan" terror army. The Grayzone reported, citing leaked documents detailing the plans.

In another development, the Group of Seven advanced economies has warned Russia against, what it calls, Moscow's potential use of non-conventional weapons during its ongoing war in Ukraine.

"Any use of chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons by Russia would be met with severe consequences," the group's foreign ministers said in a statement on Friday after wrapping up two days of talks in the western German city of Münster. The G7 comprises the United States, the UK, Canada, Germany, France, Italy, and Japan.

"We also reject Russia's false claims that Ukraine is preparing a radiological 'dirty bomb,'" the statement added.

Russia and Ukraine have reciprocally accused each other of plans to deploy such devices during the conflict, which began in February.

Dirty bombs, which are also known as Radiological Dispersal Devices (RDD), are not as potent as nuclear weapons but can disperse radioactive materials throughout the targeted areas upon explosion.

The G7's statement alleged that the UN's nuclear watchdog had carried out inspections across Ukraine and had found no evidence showing that Kiev was harboring any such devices.

North Korea Fires Ballistic Missiles as U.S. Puts B-1B Bomber in Drill



The U.S. Air Force, a B-1B Lancer bomber takes off from Andersen Air Force Base in Guam, a U.S. territory

PYONGYANG (Dispatches) – North Korea fired four short-range ballistic missiles into the western sea on Saturday, South Korea's military said, as Seoul and Washington ended a high-profile six-day military exercise.

This is the latest in a barrage of North Korean intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), with one landing near South Korea's territorial waters for the first time since the end of the Korean War in 1953.

North Korea's launches came as the United States and South Korea completed "Vigilant Storm", their largest-ever joint air exercises which began on Monday, which North Korea described as "aggressive and provocative".

Pak Jong-chon, secretary of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, said in a statement that extending the drills "is a very dangerous and wrong choice."

"The irresponsible decision of the U.S. and South Korea is shoving the present situation caused by provocative military acts of the allied forces to an uncontrollable phase," Pak added.

Saturday's launches came between 11:31 and 11:59 a.m. (02:31-02:59 GMT) and flew about 130 km (80 miles), reaching an altitude of about 20 km (10 miles), Seoul said.

The joint exercise involved some 240 military aircraft and two U.S.

B-1B strategic bombers, as well as four F-16 and four F-35A fighters, according to South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Pyeongyang condemned the war games as "an aggressive and provocative military drill targeting" North Korea, insisting that the United States and South Korea would "pay the most horrible price in history" if they continued with the maneuvers.

The North has particularly expressed anger in the past over the deployment of U.S. strategic weapons such as B-1Bs and aircraft carrier strike groups, which have been deployed to and near the Korean peninsula in times of high tension.

Pyeongyang, meanwhile, has also ramped up its missile launches to protest the current U.S.-led aerial military exercises. Such drills have long infuriated North Korea, which regards them as rehearsals for invading the nation.

North Korea's blitz of missile launches on Wednesday and Thursday also included an intercontinental ballistic missile and another that landed near South Korea's territorial waters for the first time since the end of the Korean War in 1953.

In recent days, North and South Korea have exchanged missile fires that landed off the coasts of the rival neighbors for the first time amid the ongoing aerial war games.

Tornadoes Leave Trail of Destruction in Texas, Oklahoma

POWDERLY, Texas (AP) – Tornadoes have torn through parts of Texas and Oklahoma, killing at least one person, injuring two dozen others and leaving dozens of homes and buildings in ruins.

Tornadoes hit hard in McCurtain County, Oklahoma, in the southeastern corner of the state. Cody McDaniel, the county's emergency manager, confirmed one death although he didn't immediately provide details.

The small town of Idabel saw a church, medical center and a school torn apart.

"There was total destruction on the south and east sides of Idabel," Steven Carter, an emergency management coordinator for McCurtain County, told the Texarkana Gazette.

Carter told the paper people were still trapped late Friday.

Gov. Kevin Stitt said search-and-rescue teams and generators were being sent to the Idabel area.

"Praying for Oklahomans impacted by today's tornadoes," Stitt tweeted.

Keli Cain of the Oklahoma Emergency Management Office said at least three other counties were also hit by storms, with flash flooding in some areas.

The National Weather Service said tornadoes also were reported in Texas and Arkansas and a storm system was heading toward Louisiana.

In Texas, authorities in Lamar County



50 homes were reported damaged or destroyed in Lamar County, Texas, where at least two dozen people are reported injured, two critically.

said at least 50 homes were damaged or destroyed and 10 people were treated at one hospital, including two with critical injuries. No deaths were immediately reported.

Judge Brandon Bell, the county's highest elected official, declared a disaster in the area, a step in getting federal assistance and funding. Bell's declaration said at least two dozen people were injured across the county.

One community hit hard was Powderly, about 45 miles west of Idabel and about 120 miles northeast of Dallas. Both Powderly and Idabel are near the Texas-Oklahoma border.

The Lamar County Sheriff's Office and Emergency Management said the tornado touched down shortly after 4 p.m. and traveled north-northeast through the communities of Hopewell, Caviness, Beaver Creek and Powderly.

Randi Johnson, chief of the Powderly Volunteer Fire Department, told The Paris News newspaper that she wasn't aware anyone had been killed but knew of injuries.

"It's going to take a long time to get this cleaned up, but the community came together," Johnson said. "It's really heart-breaking to see."

Hundreds of Migrants Still at Sea as Italy Closes Ports to Rescue Ships

ROME (AP) – Two migrant rescue ships carrying nearly 300 rescued people were waiting off the eastern coast of Sicily on Saturday, one with permission to disembark the most vulnerable migrants while the other's request for a safe port has gone unanswered despite "critical" conditions on board.

The situation describes the chaos and uncertainty resulting from the decision by Italy's far-right-led government to close its ports to humanitarian rescue ships.

More than 1,000 rescued migrants were aboard four ships run by European charity organizations stuck in the Mediterranean Sea, some with people rescued as long as two weeks ago amid deteriorating conditions on board.

Both the Humanity 1 and Rise Above, run by separate humanitarian groups, were in Italian waters: the Humanity 1 carrying 179 migrants has received permission to disembark minors and people needing medical care, but the Rise Above's request for port for its 93 rescued people has so far gone unanswered.

Two other ships, the Geo Barents with 572 migrants and the Ocean Viking with 234, also have repeatedly asked permission to access a port to disembark the rescued migrants.

Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi said Friday that the Humanity 1, run by the German organization SOS Humanitarian,

would be allowed in Italian waters only long enough to disembark minors and people in need of urgent medical care. The measure was approved after Germany and France each called on Italy to grant a safe port to the migrants, and indicated they would receive some of the migrants so Italy wouldn't bear the burden alone.

No such provisions have been offered to the other three ships.

Italy's new far-right-led government is insisting that countries whose flag the charity-run ships fly must take on the migrants. Speaking at a news conference late Friday, Piantedosi described such vessels as "islands" that are under the jurisdiction of the flag countries.

Nongovernmental organizations stridently oppose that interpretation, and say they are obligated by the law of the sea to rescue people in distress, no matter how they learn of their plight, and that coastal nations are obligated to provide a safe port as soon as feasible.

The situation on the Rise Above was particularly desperate after rescuing 95 people, two of whom have been evacuated because of medical emergencies. Spokeswoman Hermine Poschmann described a "very critical situation (Friday) that ... led to very great tensions" on board, because passengers saw land and didn't understand why they weren't docking.

Republicans Report: FBI 'Rotted at Its Core'

WASHINGTON (Daily Mail) – Republicans on the U.S. House Judiciary Committee have released a 1,000-page report stressing widespread politicization and misconduct in Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

The damning file said the bureau is "rotted at its core", manipulated domestic violent extremism statistics for political purposes and downplayed investigations and "serious allegations of wrongdoing" leveled at Hunter Biden.

Republican members of the committee also said whistleblowers have come forward with allegations of "rampant corruption, manipulation, and abuse" and have tried to purge conservative employees.

The report was created without the help of the Democrats on the committee, which are the majority party, and was released days before the midterm elections and signals that the GOP will target the bureau if they retake the majority in the House.

A large part of the report was copies of letters the committee has sent to the FBI and the Joe Biden administration detailing the allegations.

It details Republican Senator Chuck Grassley's revelation that agent Tim Thibault as part of a "scheme" to discredit derogatory information on President Joe Biden's son, and caused allegations from the laptop to be "falsely" labeled as "disinformation".

"The Federal Bureau of Investigation, under the stewardship of Director Christopher Wray and Attorney General Merrick Garland, is broken," the GOP report states, adding, "The

problem lies not with the majority of front-line agents who serve our country, but with the FBI's politicized bureaucracy."

The Republicans are calling it "the first comprehensive accounting of the FBI's problems to date, which undermine the FBI's fundamental law-enforcement mission".

The Republicans accuse the FBI of using counterterrorism resources to target parents during the highly divisive school board meetings in the pandemic and abusing foreign surveillance powers.

"Over the last year, a multitude of whistleblowers have approached Judiciary Committee Republicans with allegations of political bias by the FBI's senior leadership and misuses of the agency's federal law-enforcement powers," the report adds.

"These whistleblowers have risked their careers out of fidelity to principle and a commitment to restoring public trust in the FBI. This report begins to tell their stories," it said.

"Even at this early stage, one startling conclusion is clear: the FBI and its parent agency, the Justice Department, have become political institutions," it added.

Americans "deserve to have confidence that the enormous power and reach of federal law enforcement will be used fairly and free of any indication of politicization", the report continues.

"The FBI has the power, quite literally, to ruin a person's life - to invade their residence, to take their property and even deprive them of their liberty," it adds.



BAMAKO (Dispatches) – Thousands of people have gathered in Bamako, the capital of Mali, to protest the publication of an insulting anti-Islam video on social media. The office of Bamako's prosecutor said six people were charged with complicity in the release of a "blasphemous" video in which a man makes offensive comments against Muslims, the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Police said the demonstration was organized by the High Islamic Council of Mali (HCM) and was attended by thousands of people. But the organizers of the demonstration have estimated the number of people present at more than one million people. The protesters had written slogans such as "No to blasphemous comments" and "No more attacks on Islam and the Prophet Mohammed" on their banners. Speaking to AFP, Imam Abdoulaye Fadiga said that what happened cannot be forgiven and the authors and publishers of the offensive video should be arrested and tried. A source in the prosecutor's office said that the six people are in temporary custody for refusing to reveal the hiding place of the main suspect in the video. Nearly 95% of Mali's population is Muslim, and the affair has caused uproar in the country.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) – U.S. President Joe Biden says that Elon Musk had purchased a social media platform in Twitter that spews lies across the world. Twitter laid off half its workforce on Friday but said cuts were smaller in the team responsible for preventing the spread of misinformation, as advertisers pulled spending amid concerns about content moderation. Biden said at a fundraiser, "And now what are we all worried about: Elon Musk goes out and buys an outfit that sends - that spews lies all across the world... There's no editors anymore in America. There's no editors. How do we expect kids to be able to understand what is at stake?" White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters earlier that Biden had been clear about the need to reduce hate speech and misinformation. "That belief extends to Twitter, it extends to Facebook and any other social media platforms where users can spread misinformation," she said. Musk has promised to restore free speech while preventing Twitter from descending into a "hellscape". But major advertisers have expressed apprehension about his takeover for months.

MOSCOW (AFP) – Russian police Saturday detained a man suspected to have caused a huge fire overnight at a bar in the city of Kostroma that killed at least 15 people. Fire fighters fought through the early hours to put out the blaze at the popular Poligon bar in the city around 300 kilometers northeast of Moscow. Russian agencies earlier reported that the fire could have started after a man fired a "flare gun" on the dance floor. "Police officers identified and detained the suspect (behind) unlawful acts in an entertainment establishment in the city of Kostroma, which resulted in a fire and the death of people," Russian police said in a statement. "He has now been handed over to investigative authorities," it added, without providing any further details. Russia's Investigative Committee opened a criminal case of "causing death by negligence". State television showed images of the bar – housed in a single-storey logistical centre – engulfed in flames. Authorities said the fire started at around 2:00 am local time and was put out at around 7:30 am.

LONDON (The Guardian) – The reputation of British politicians is at a "low point", the UK's new independent parliamentary commissioner for standards said, as he pledged to be an advocate for the "vast majority" of MPs who were committed to high standards in public life. Daniel Greenberg, who takes over from Kathryn Stone when her five-year term comes to an end in January, admitted that a slew of scandals in recent years as well as the turbulence of the past 12 months had tarnished parliament's reputation. In his first interview since being appointed, the barrister and legal expert said, "It's a low point within recent decades. It's definitely a low point in the reputation of politics and politicians ... I think politicians as a class definitely have made some mistakes." However, he added, "We've had some very significant, high-profile and very serious cases of breach of standards in the past five or so years." Greenberg will be the seventh commissioner, employed by parliament rather than the government to safeguard independence, since the post was created in 1995. He pledged to conduct his new role "without fear or favor" and to investigate whoever needed to be investigated, from backbench MPs to prime ministers.

KUALA LUMPUR (AP) – Mahathir Mohamad, a 97-year-old former Malaysian prime minister, has announced his intention to extend his role in politics, as campaigning for upcoming general elections begins in a highly competitive race. Mohamad who became premier for the second time in 2018 still believes he can function soundly for the role of prime minister. "But my own supporters felt that this should be my last effort because although I am 97 years old, I am still functional, I can still move around, be active, still debate and make speeches," he said Saturday. The campaigns, which began after the leaders filed their nominations on Saturday, are set to determine whether the Barisan Nasional (BN), or National Front, coalition can make a strong comeback or if political reformers will see their leader, Anwar Ibrahim, achieve a long-held dream of becoming prime minister. The race pits Prime Minister Ismail Sabri against veteran Anwar Ibrahim and Muhyiddin Yassin. At least 21 million Malaysians are eligible to vote in the election, which is to be held on November 19.

PARIS (AP) – Jordan Bardella was elected Saturday to replace Marine Le Pen as president of France's leading far-right party, a symbolic changing of the guard that comes at a crucial time for the resurgent National Rally. Bardella, a 27-year-old member of the European Parliament, won an internal party vote with 85 percent support, according to results announced at a party congress in Paris. He becomes the first person to lead the anti-immigration party who doesn't have the Le Pen name since it was founded a half-century ago. The National Rally is seeking to capitalize on a breakthrough showing in legislative elections this year and growing support for far-right parties elsewhere in Europe, notably in neighboring Italy. It's also facing broad public anger over a racist comment this week on the National Rally member in parliament that cast doubt on years of efforts to soften the party's image. Marine Le Pen has said she wants to focus on leading the party's 89 lawmakers in the National Assembly.