

# China Tells U.S. Will 'Never Compromise' on Taiwan



After two days of military talks in Washington, China vows it will "never compromise" on Taiwan and told the United States to stop providing military aid.

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Chinese military officials told U.S. counterparts at talks this week that Beijing will "never compromise" on the issue of Taiwan and urged them to stop "provocative actions" in the South China Sea, the defense ministry said Wednesday.

China "stressed that it will never compromise or back down on the Taiwan issue", the ministry said in a readout of the talks in Washington, held Monday and Tuesday, urging the United States to "stop arming Tai-

wan". "China urged the United States to reduce its military deployment and provocative actions in the South China Sea and stop supporting violations and provocations by individual countries," the statement continued.

"The United States should fully understand the root causes of maritime and air security issues, strictly rein in its frontline troops, and stop with the exaggeration and hype," it added.

"The Chinese side also elaborated its solemn position and major con-

cerns on issues involving China's core interests and international hotspot issues," it said.

President Joe Biden and Xi Jinping agreed in November to restart military talks between the countries, put on hold for more than a year.

Top U.S. military officer General Charles "CQ" Brown then spoke with China's General Liu Zhenli in December, discussing "the importance of working together to responsibly manage competition", according to Washington.

This week's talks, held at the Pentagon, were led by U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Michael Chase and China's Major General Song Yanchao, Washington said.

"China expressed its willingness to develop healthy and stable military-to-military relations with the United States on the basis of equality and respect," the Chinese side said in its readout.

"The United States should face China's concerns squarely and take more actions that are conducive to the development of relations between the two militaries," it added.

Chinese Taipei is a key bone of contention between Washington and Beijing in the ongoing power struggle between China and the U.S. for supremacy in the Asia-Pacific region.

## Zelensky Visits Baltic Allies Amid Doubts Over Aid for Ukraine



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky and his Lithuanian counterpart Gitanas Nausėda arrive at the presidential palace in Vilnius on January 10, 2024.

PARIS (AFP) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky arrived Wednesday in Lithuania ahead of visits to Estonia and Latvia, as Ukraine seeks more help to bolster its air defenses amid Russia's intensified missile and drone onslaughts in the latest development of the 22-month war.

The focus of the Baltic trip, Zelensky said on his official Telegram channel, will be security concerns, Ukraine's hopes to join the European Union and NATO, and building partnerships in drone production and electronic warfare capacities.

The small countries on the Baltic Sea are among Ukraine's staunchest political, financial and military supporters.

They have pushed Kyiv's other Western allies to provide increasingly sophisticated weapons. Russia, Ukraine war has some in the Baltics worried that they could be Moscow's next target.

Zelensky, in his Telegram message, expressed gratitude for

their "uncompromising" support of Ukraine over the past 10 years.

Russia's recent escalation of missile and drone attacks is stretching Ukraine's air defense resources, a Ukrainian air force official said Tuesday, leaving the country vulnerable unless it can secure further weapons supplies.

Zelensky's international diplomacy during the war has been essential to maintain pressure on friendly countries to keep supplying Kyiv with billions of dollars in weaponry, from German Leopard tanks to U.S. Patriot missile systems and Storm Shadow cruise missiles from the UK.

However, material support has recently tailed off. A plan by the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden to send to Kyiv billions of dollars in further aid is stuck in Congress, and Europe's pledge in March to provide 1 million artillery shells within 12 months has come up short, with only about 300,000 delivered so far.

## Ecuador's President Declares State of 'Internal Armed Conflict' Amid Security Crisis



Soldiers stand guard outside the presidential palace following a wave of violence around the nation, prompting President Daniel Noboa to declare gangs to be terrorist organizations to be hunted by the military, in Quito, Ecuador January 10, 2024.

QUITO (Reuters) - Ecuadorean President Daniel Noboa declared the state of "internal armed conflict" in his country amid a major security crisis, caused by gang violence and prison riots.

"I have signed an executive order, declaring the state of internal armed conflict," he wrote on the X social network, formerly known as Twitter, media reported.

The document, signed by the head of the state, orders to "mobilize the armed forces and the national police on the country's territory to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity from organized transnational crime, terrorist organizations and belligerent non-state actors."

Noboa also said that 22 criminal gangs active in Ecuador will be declared terrorist organizations and belligerent non-state actors and ordered the armed forces to neutralize them.

Masked gunmen stormed into a studio of Ecuador's TC Television in the western city of Guayaquil during a live broadcast on Tuesday, taking

presenters hostage on air. The exact number of hostages and attackers is unknown.

The country's Ecuavisa TV and Vistazo magazine had to evacuate their staff following the attack on TC Television, the La Nacion newspaper reported.

Later, it was reported that the vast majority of hostages had already been released, but the operation to release the remaining few is still under way. At least four attackers were detained.

A number of key roads in Guayaquil were blocked by the police. The authorities call upon residents to stay indoors. The city's bus station was also closed for security reasons.

Gang violence erupted in Ecuador on January 7, following the prison escape of a gang leader known as Fito, who heads the Los Choneros gang. It evolved into a major security crisis when President Daniel Noboa declared a state of emergency and introduced a curfew the following day in an attempt to quell prison unrests that broke out after Fito's escape.

## News in Brief

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has called South Korea "our principal enemy" and threatened to annihilate it if provoked, as he escalates his inflammatory rhetoric in an election year in South Korea and the U.S. During tours of munitions factories this week, Kim said it's time to define South Korea "as a state most hostile" toward North Korea because of its long-running attempts to topple the North's socialist system. He said North Korea must bolster its nuclear war deterrent, the North's official Korean Central News Agency reported Wednesday. If South Korea dares to use its military force against North Korea, Kim said, "We will have no hesitation in annihilating (South Korea) by mobilizing all means and forces in our hands," according to KCNA.

PARIS (AFP) - Azerbaijan told France Wednesday not to "intervene" in its internal affairs after Baku arrested a Frenchman on espionage charges with tensions running high between the two countries. Baku has accused France of supporting Azerbaijan's arch-enemy Armenia, both diplomatically and militarily, and of seeking to fuel tensions in the South Caucasus. French national Martin Ryan was arrested on December 4 last year, according to Azerbaijan authorities, suspected of "espionage". "This baseless statement is another attempt to distort the reality, and intervene into the internal affairs of Azerbaijan," the Azerbaijan foreign ministry said in a statement.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. President Joe Biden did not learn that his defense secretary, Lloyd Austin, had prostate cancer until Tuesday, the White House said, minutes after it was disclosed to the public with an infection that was also kept under wraps. Austin, who is 70, has been hospitalized since Jan. 1 at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center - a fact that the Pentagon had kept from the public, the White House and Congress for much of last week, triggering a major political backlash. Austin's own deputy, Kathleen Hicks, was also kept in the dark for days, even after she was told during a vacation in Puerto Rico to assume some of his duties on Jan. 2.

WARSAW (Reuters) — Former Polish Interior Minister Mariusz Kaminski said he had started a hunger strike as a "political prisoner" on Wednesday, a day after he was detained by police at the presidential palace and sent to jail on abuse of power charges. The events mark a dramatic gear change in new Prime Minister Donald Tusk's efforts to undo policies of his predecessors, the nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) party, and punish those accused of wrongdoing during their time in power. PiS faced accusations of subverting rule of law during their eight-year rule. Tusk's pro-European coalition's drive to bring Poland back in line with EU democratic rules and unblock tens of billions of euros in funding pits him against PiS ally President Andrzej Duda.

MOGADISHU (Reuters) - Al Shabaab militants captured a United Nations helicopter carrying two Somali men and several foreigners when it made an emergency landing in an area controlled by the group, a military official said on Wednesday. The aircraft encountered a defect shortly after taking off from Beledweyne city in central Somalia, Major Hassan Ali told Reuters, before it landed near Hindhere village, bordering Galguduud region.

MAIDUGURI (Reuters) - At least 20 people are feared dead in an accident involving two passenger boats travelling from Andoni to Bonny island in Nigeria's coastal Rivers State, local officials said on Wednesday. Erastus Awortu, chairman of Andoni local government area, said the incident occurred on Tuesday night along the Andoni waterways. "When we learned of the tragic development, we immediately dispatched our team to join the first responders on a rescue mission at the scene of the incident," Awortu said in a statement, without providing further details about survivors.

## Deadly Storms, Tornadoes, Snow, Flooding Sweep Across U.S.



A resident checks a collapsed roof after a line of storms roared through the area of Perdido Key near Pensacola, Florida, U.S. January 9, 2024.

WASHINGTON (AP) - At least four people have died and over half a million homes are without power after a series of powerful winter storms swept through parts of the eastern U.S. and Canada.

Strong winds flipped cars and knocked over homes in Florida, where several tornadoes were reported.

More than 1,300 flights in or out of the U.S. were cancelled on Tuesday, according to data from FlightAware.

As of Tuesday evening, more than 630,000 households in the eastern U.S., from Florida to New York State were without electricity.

Gov Ron DeSantis declared a state of emergency for 49 Florida counties, where storms have blown roofs off homes and knocked down power lines.

Twelve tornadoes were reported across Florida, Alabama and Georgia by early Tuesday, causing significant damage and, in some areas, prompting search and rescue operations.

More than 22 million people were under tornado watches.

In Houston County, Alabama, an 81-year-old woman was reportedly killed after a tornado ripped through the area, destroying mobile homes and RVs.

One person was killed and two others were critically injured in Claremont, North Carolina, officials said, after a powerful storm moved through a mobile home park.

A motorist died in Clayton County, Georgia, officials said, after a tree fell across a highway and crushed the driver's car.

And one man was also crushed to death by a toppled tree in Birmingham, Alabama, on Tuesday morning, the local station WVTM reported, citing local officials.

A resident of Panama City, Florida, who lives across from a home that was toppled by the wind said it sounded like a "freight train hitting a brick wall".

A powerful rare blizzard in the Pacific Northwest region toppled trees and knocked out electricity for over 25,000 customers in Washington state, according to Poweroutages.us, as well as for thousands more people further north in Canada's British Columbia province. Snow and high winds closed mountain passages, shut down ferries and triggered avalanche warnings.

In New Jersey, a coastal flood advisory is in effect until Wednesday. The state's governor Phil Murphy declared a state of emergency and warned residents not to "underestimate" the storm.

In New York State, Governor Kathy Hochul warned the storm could be "life threatening", especially as the expected rainfall would combine with the snow already blanketing the ground, bringing about potential flash-flooding.

Around 2,000 migrants living in a city tent shelter on an airfield in Brooklyn were evacuated by authorities to high school gymnasiums until the storms pass.

A ground stop was briefly issued at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport - one of the country's busiest - due to excessive snow and ice, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said. A stop was also issued for Florida's Tampa International Airport due to a tornado warning.

Severe weather has also disrupted road travel in states like Nebraska and Kansas, where state patrol has responded to hundreds of weather-related incidents.

Flood warnings issued by the NWS remained in effect on Wednesday morning from Louisiana to Maine, encompassing at least 15 states along the U.S. Atlantic coast.

## Strikes Hit Germany, France Over Pay, Better Work Conditions

BERLIN (Dispatches) — German train drivers' union and police officers paraded on open-top buses through Paris on Wednesday to urge authorities to accelerate talks about labor conditions.

German commuters faced train cancellations across the country, as a three-day nationwide rail strike adds to travel chaos in Europe's largest nation, where ongoing farmers' protests have also snarled road traffic.

The GDL train drivers' union began its main strike in the early hours of Wednesday, following one by cargo train drivers who walked out on Tuesday evening.

The strikes will continue until Friday evening, forcing national rail operator Deutsche Bahn to run only stripped-back emergency timetables.

The company said the strike action would impact the travel plans of millions and encouraged people to cancel or postpone all non-essential travel.

The long-running row over pay and working hours has flared up again following a truce over Christmas.

GDL is demanding a reduction in working hours from 38 to 35 hours per week for shift workers, as well as a pay increase of 555

euros (\$606.62) per month and an one-off inflation compensation bonus of 3,000 euros.

The nationwide rail strikes come on top of a growing economic headache faced by Germany this year, driven by weak macro-economic data, high interest rates and mounting criticism of the coalition government.

This week's farmers' protests, sparked by anger over planned subsidy cuts, have piled further pressure on Chancellor Olaf Scholz, whose government is trying to get its 2024 budget over the finish line.

In Paris, police officers urged authorities to accelerate talks about labour conditions and pay during the 2024 Olympics to be held in the French capital.

"This is a warning shot to authorities to say that six months before the event, police forces do not know how the summer will turn out for them," Gregory Joron, head of the SGP Police FO union, told Sud Radio.

"Conditions under which police forces are being thrown into the Olympic games are not good," he added.

Joron reiterated demands for clarity about work conditions and notably for a 1,500 euros bonus for all police officers.