

# Russia Says G20 Ukraine Discussion is ‘Destructive’



*Brazil’s President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva speaks during the meeting of the opening of the G20 sherpa at the Itamaraty Palace in Brasilia, Brazil December 13, 2023.*

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia’s Foreign Ministry said on Wednesday ahead of the G20 foreign ministers meeting in Brazil that the inclusion of the topic of Ukraine at the Group of 20 meetings is destructive and the politicization of the Group is unacceptable.

Foreign ministers from the G20 major economies met in Rio de Janeiro on Wednesday at their first meeting of the year, presided over by Brazil.

According to the G20 Brazil website, the group is to discuss among others, “the situation in the Middle East and the Russia, Ukrainewar, which continue to generate global concern over the humanitarian crisis and the geopolitical and economic consequences of the conflicts.”

Russia said that the topic of Ukraine is “non-core” for the G20. “The Russian delegation intends to draw special attention of partners to the unacceptability of politicization of the G20, which, according to its mandate, is designed to focus strictly on socio-economic challenges,” the Russian foreign ministry said in a statement on its website.

“The inclusion of non-core issues, including the Ukrainian issue, on the G20 agenda at the instigation of the West is destructive.”

Russia which has since been sanctioned heavily by many of the G20 nations, blames the United States and its allies for “pumping up” Kyiv with weapons and cash.

Lavrov travelled to Brazil for the meet, which is to be attended also by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, although no meeting has been scheduled between the two.

The G20 at its last leaders summit in September did not condemn Moscow for the war in Ukraine but called on members to shun the use of force, with Lavrov praising the consensus and Kyiv’s allies saying the G20 confirmed Russia’s isolation.

Meanwhile on Wednesday, EU members approved a 13th package of Ukraine-related sanctions against Russia, banning nearly 200 entities and individuals accused of helping Moscow procure weapons.

“EU Ambassadors just agreed in principle on a 13th package of sanctions in the framework of Russia’s operation in Ukraine,” Belgium, which holds the rotating EU presidency, said on social media

platform X, calling it “one of the broadest approved by the EU”.

The new package will see 193 entities and individuals added to the list of those banned from traveling to the EU or doing business there, but no fresh measures against specific economic sectors, EU diplomatic sources said.

Across the European Union, support for Ukraine remains high, but authors of the study say politicians should focus on defining an acceptable peace.

Only one in ten Europeans believe that Ukraine can defeat Russia, according to an EU-wide poll.

Conducted across 12 EU countries - including France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Sweden - the survey found that pessimism about the war’s outcome was being fuelled by Ukraine’s failed counter-offensive, a potential U.S. policy shift and the possibility of Donald Trump getting into the White House.

Russian Ambassador to the U.S. Anatoly Antonov said that the West’s attempts to talk to Moscow from the position of strength will lead nowhere.

“There is no prospect of talking to our country from the position of strength and sanctions pressure. The persistent desire to dominate only leads to the opposite effect,” he said, TASS reported.

“The earlier America realizes this, the sooner the world will have a chance to return to a stable, sustainable and predictable path of development,” he pointed out in an op-ed for Newsweek.

According to Antonov, Washington’s strategy towards Russia “in essence is little different from military confrontation.”

“The liberation of cities, first and foremost Mariupol, Artyomovsk and Avdeevka, are clear signs of (Ukraine’s) agony and the failure of the West’s anti-Russian policy,” the Russian envoy stressed.

## Britain’s Nuclear Deterrent Missile System Misfires During Test



*Crew from HMS Vengeance, a British Royal Navy Vanguard class Trident Ballistic Missile Submarine, stand on their vessel as they return along the Clyde river to the Faslane naval base near Glasgow, Scotland December 4, 2006.*

LONDON (Reuters) – Britain’s Trident nuclear-deterrent system misfired during a test last month, sending a missile crashing into the ocean off the Florida coast near the submarine that launched it, The Sun newspaper reported on Wednesday.

The Ministry of Defense confirmed that an “anomaly” had occurred during the test but said Britain’s “nuclear deterrent remains safe, secure and effective”.

With Defense Secretary Grant Shapps on board the HMS Vanguard to witness the test, The Sun said, the first-stage boosters on the missile - equipped with dummy warheads -

failed to ignite.

The result marked the second successive test failure of a Trident missile after one was reported to have veered off course in 2016, an embarrassing outcome for a country that once boasted the largest and most powerful naval force in the world.

“It left the submarine but it just went plop, right next to them,” The Sun quoted an unspecified source as saying.

In a statement, Shapps said that the missile test had been the culmination of a Demonstration and Shakedown Operation on Vanguard to gauge the performance of its weapons and its crew, after it returned from a lengthy refit.

He said the operation reaffirmed the effectiveness of the UK’s nuclear deterrent, that the submarine and crew were “successfully certified” to be ready for operation, but an anomaly occurred that was “event-specific”.

“There are no implications for the reliability of the wider Trident missile systems and stockpiles,” he said. “Nor are there any implications for our ability to fire our nuclear weapons, should the circumstances arise in which we need to do so.”

## Gaza, Ukraine Wars Behind Record Profits at British Arms Firm BAE Systems

LONDON (Middle East Eye) - British arms manufacturer BAE Systems has posted record profits for the year 2023, the firm announced in its latest annual earnings report, published on Wednesday.

BAE reported pre-tax profits of £2.7bn (\$3.4bn) on sales of £25.3bn for the year ending December 2023.

The results come amid a big jump in the firm’s share price since the start of the war in Ukraine, with shares breaching the £1,200 threshold in February. They stood at around £600 when Russia, Ukraine war began in February 2022.

Charles Woodburn, BAE’s chief executive, cited rising

instability across the world as a reason for increased defense spending.

BAE’s products include fighter jets, drones, submarines, military computer systems and ammunition.

While the conflict in Ukraine has been the biggest driver for defense spending in recent decades, the war on Gaza is also fuelling fears of a wider global conflict.

BAE’s rivals, including U.S. firm Lockheed Martin, have also posted strong profits in 2023, close to \$7bn.

The threat of the wars in Ukraine and Gaza expanding to include western states is driving an increase in military spending in the West.

## Protesting Spanish Farmers Drive Hundreds of Tractors to Madrid



*Spanish police, right, block farmers during a protest in Madrid, Spain, Wednesday, Jan. 21, 2024.*

MADRID (AP) — Hundreds of farmers drove their tractors into central Madrid on Wednesday as part of ongoing protests against European Union and local farming policies and to demand measures to alleviate production cost hikes.

The protest, the biggest to take place in the Spanish capital after more than two weeks of daily protests across the country, will include a rally outside the Agriculture Ministry headquarters.

Many of the tractors flew Spanish flags and some farmers carried banners reading, “There is no life without farming,” and “Farmers in Extinction.”

“It is impossible to live from the rural industry, which is what we want, to live from our work. That is all we ask for,” Silvia Ruiz, 46, a livestock farmer from the north-central area of Burgos said.

The Union of Unions organizing group said they were bringing 500 tractors and many more farmers on buses. Many of the tractors may have to stay outside of the city because of government restrictions.

Similar protests have taken place across the bloc in recent weeks. Farmers complain that the 27-nation EU’s policies on the environment and other matters are a financial burden and make their products more expensive than non-EU imports.

Spain and the European Commission, the EU’s executive arm, have made some concessions in recent weeks but farmers say they are insufficient.

Besides EU policies, Spanish farmers maintain that a law aimed at guaranteeing that wholesale major supermarket buyers pay fair prices for their goods isn’t being enforced while consumer prices soar.

In neighboring France, the EU’s largest agricultural producer, the government of President Emmanuel Macron is also under intense pressure from angry farmers who held major demonstrations last month and have since continued with more scattered protests to push for better pay and other assistance.

Macron is expected to attend the opening of France’s major annual agricultural fair this weekend in Paris. Ahead of that test, Prime Minister Gabriel Attal sought Wednesday to convince the agricultural sector that he is speeding ahead with promised efforts to make farming more lucrative and simpler.

Attal promised draft legislation by the summer to strengthen the hand of French farmers in commercial negotiations with distributors over prices for their produce. He also promised measures to make it easier and cheaper for farmers to hire seasonal workers, including from abroad.

## News in Brief

**SEOUL, South Korea (AP) —** The South Korean government on Wednesday warned thousands of striking doctors to return to work immediately or face legal action after their collective walkouts caused cancellations of surgeries and disrupted other hospital operations. About 7,800 medical interns and residents in South Korea have walked off their jobs this week to protest the government’s push to recruit more medical students. Officials say they want to increase the nationwide medical school admissions cap by 2,000 from next year to brace for South Korea’s rapidly aging population. But doctors’ groups have refuted the plan, saying universities aren’t ready to offer quality education to that many students. They argue the government’s plan would lead to increased public medical expenses.

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**LONDON (AFP) –** Lawyers for the United States on Wednesday urged a UK court to block a last-ditch bid by Julian Assange to appeal his extradition to the country to face espionage charges. Washington indicted the WikiLeaks founder multiple times between 2018 and 2020 over its publication of hundreds of thousands of secret military and diplomatic files on the U.S.-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The long-running legal saga in Britain’s courts is now nearing a conclusion after Assange lost successive rulings in recent years. If he fails with this latest appeal bid, he could be extradited within weeks.

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**PARIS (AP) —** Striking workers again closed down the Eiffel Tower on Wednesday, the third day running that the landmark expected to be at the heart of celebrations for the Paris Olympics has been off-limits to visitors. A message on the tower’s website also warned of more possible disruptions Thursday, if strikers continue their push for salary hikes and other concessions. “We apologize for the inconvenience,” it said. One of the strikers’ representatives, Denis Vavassori of the CGT union, has previously warned that their protest action “could go on for several days, even weeks.”

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**GENEVA (Reuters) —** More than half the world’s countries will be at high or very high risk of measles outbreaks by the end of the year unless urgent preventative measures are taken, the World Health Organization warned. Measles cases have been increasing across most regions mainly due to missed vaccinations during the COVID-19 years when health systems were overwhelmed and fell behind on routine vaccinations for preventable diseases. “What we are worried about is this year, 2024, we’ve got these big gaps in our immunization programmes and if we don’t fill them really quickly with the vaccine, measles will just jump into that gap,” the WHO’s Natasha Crowcroft, a Senior Technical Adviser on Measles and Rubella, told a Geneva press briefing. Measles is a highly contagious, airborne virus that mostly affects children under five years old. It can be prevented by two doses of vaccine and more than 50 million deaths have been averted since 2000, according to the WHO. Cases last year were already up 79 percent to over 300,000, according to WHO data, - thought to represent just a fraction of the total.

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**TIRANA (Euro News) –** Thousands of supporters of Albania’s opposition took to the streets of the capital Tirana to protest against alleged government corruption. The demonstration, which marked the 33rd anniversary of the toppling of the main statue of the country’s late communist director, Enver Hoxha, followed months of protests from opposition lawmakers in parliament, Euronews reported. At issue is the refusal of the ruling left-wing Socialists to investigate alleged cases of corruption involving Prime Minister Edi Rama and other top officials. The cabinet was asked to create parliamentary commissions to investigate the allegations, but refused to do so.

## Police Fire Teargas as Indian Farmers Resume Protest March to New Delhi



*Police fired tear gas as farmers marched towards New Delhi, at Shambhu, a border crossing between Punjab and Haryana states.*

SHAMBHU, India (AP) — A protester died on Wednesday as thousands of Indian farmers resumed their march to the capital after talks with the government failed to end an impasse over their demands for guaranteed crop prices.

The farmers began their protest march last week but were stopped some 200 kilometers (125 miles) from New Delhi as police fired rounds of teargas.

The 21-year-old farmer, identified as Subhakaran Singh, succumbed to a head injury, medical superintendent H S Rekhi at Rajindra Hospital in nearby Punjab state, told the Press Trust of India news agency. He said two others who got injured were in stable condition. Singh died after clashes between security forces and farmers erupted in Khanauri, a town in the state of Punjab, reported PTI.

Punjab’s shared borders with the state of Haryana have become protest sites for the farmers attempting to reach New Delhi. The majority of the protesting farmers are from the two states.

Haryana police in a post on X, formerly Twitter, said 12 officers were injured after protesters attacked them with sticks and pelted them with stones. The post added that protesters used chili powder to set stubble on fire, making it difficult for the officers to breathe.

Last week, the farmers paused their protest and hunkered down near the town of Shambhu, close to the border

between Punjab and Haryana, as their unions engaged in discussions with government ministers. They rejected a proposal offering them five-year contracts of guaranteed prices on a set of certain crops, including maize, grain legumes and cotton, and decided to resume their march on Wednesday.

Authorities are set on containing the demonstration, which has renewed the movement from over two years ago when tens of thousands of farmers camped out on the outskirts of the city for over a year, forcing Prime Minister Narendra Modi to repeal new agriculture laws in a major reversal for his government.

Authorities, last week, barricaded highways leading to New Delhi with cement blocks, metal containers, barbed wire and iron spikes to prevent the farmers from entering. On Wednesday, the farmers arrived at the barricades with bulldozers and excavators to try and push through.

Jagjit Singh Dallewal, one of the farmers leading the march, said they did not want any violence, but condemned the federal government over the massive security measures.

“We want to reach New Delhi in a peaceful manner. The government should remove the barricades,” he said.

The protest organizers say the farmers are seeking new legislation that would guarantee minimum prices for 23 crops.