

Bolstered by West

Zelensky Reportedly Plotted Attacks Deep Inside Russia



President Biden escorts Volodymyr Zelensky to the Oval Office during the Ukrainian president's visit to Washington on Dec. 21.

KIEV (Dispatches) – Despite public assurance that he would limit military action to his own country's 1991 borders, Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky formed plans to conduct attacks deep inside Russia and suggested that Kiev "destroy" the industry of Hungary, the Washington Post reported on Saturday, citing leaked Pentagon documents.

Citing U.S. intelligence reports recently published on a gaming server, the Post described how Zelensky suggested at a meeting in January that his troops "conduct strikes in Russia," while moving across the border to "occupy unspecified Russian border cities" in order to "give Kiev leverage in talks with Moscow."

Less than two months later, the Ukraine-based Russian Volunteer Corps launched a cross-border raid

that left two civilians dead in Russia's Bryansk Region. A member of the group told Western media that Kiev had approved the attack, and further assaults have taken place since.

The leaked classified U.S. intelligence documents detailed his internal communications with top aides and military leaders cited by the Washington Post.

The documents were first leaked by Jack Teixeira, a young member of the Massachusetts Air National Guard.

The UK, this past week, became the first Western country to provide Ukraine with long-range missiles, the Storm Shadow.

The secret documents reveal that Ukraine's president has an aggressive sub-personality that is in sharp contrast to the public image he tries to portray of a comedian actor who

became a seasoned politician amid political turmoil in the former Soviet state.

Zelensky, according to the leaked documents, proposed Ukrainian military brass to "conduct strikes in Russia" and deploy Ukrainian ground troops into Russian territory to "occupy unspecified Russian border cities," according to one of the documents labeled "top secret."

The goal would be "to give Kiev leverage in talks with Moscow," the document said.

According to another classified document, he suggested to General Valery Zaluzhny, Ukraine's top military commander, that "Ukraine attack unspecified deployment locations in Rostov," a region in western Russia, using drones.

Zelensky had been distraught at the time of the meeting that "Ukraine does not have long-range missiles capable of reaching Russian troop deployments in Russia," the leaked documents reported.

After Russia launched its special military operation in eastern Ukraine in February 2022, Ukraine was flooded with a raft of Western weapons and armaments.

However, other classified U.S. military documents leaked on social media also indicate that Washington has serious doubts regarding Ukrainian forces' military strength to fight against Russia, according to an AFP report and documents reviewed by AFP as part of a trove of highly sensitive material that had been posted online.

Khartoum Under Bombardment as Sudan Rivals Talk

KHARTOUM (Reuters) – Shelling and air strikes pounded parts of Sudan's capital on Sunday with little sign that warring military factions were ready to back down in a conflict that has killed hundreds despite ceasefire talks in Saudi Arabia.

Khartoum and the adjoining cities of Bahri and Omdurman across the Nile's two branches have been the main theatre of conflict along with western Darfur province since the army and Rapid Support Forces paramilitary started fighting a month ago.

Shelling struck Bahri and air strikes hit Omdurman early on Sunday, according to a Reuters reporter and witnesses. Al Arabiya television reported heavy clashes in central Khartoum.

"There were heavy air strikes near us in Saliha that shook the doors of the house," said Salma Yassin, a teacher in Omdurman.

The fighting has killed hundreds of people, sent 200,000 into neighbouring countries as refugees, displaced another 700,000 inside Sudan triggering a humanitarian catastrophe and threatens to draw in outside powers and destabilise the region.



People gather in the Sudanese town of Wadi Halfa bordering Egypt on May 4, 2023.

The number of people killed in fighting on Friday and Saturday in Geneina, capital of West Darfur, reached more than 100, including the imam of the city's old mosque, the Darfur Bar Association said in a statement.

The local rights group blamed the killings, looting and arson in Geneina, where hundreds died in violence last month, on attacks by armed groups on motorbikes and the RSF. The RSF has denied responsibility for the unrest.

Army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and RSF leader Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti, had shared power after a 2021 coup that itself followed a 2019 uprising that ousted veteran Islamist autocrat Omar al-Bashir.

But they fell out over the terms and timing of a planned transition to civilian rule and neither man has shown he is ready for concessions, with the army controlling air power and the RSF dug deep into city districts.

Prisons in Britain Report Thousands of Rapes, Sexual Assaults Since 2010

LONDON (The Guardian) – Nearly 1,000 rapes were reported to have taken place in prisons since 2010, exclusive data obtained by the Observer from police forces in England and Wales revealed.

A further 2,336 sexual assaults were reported to police in the same period, and experts warned that the true figure for both crimes may be far higher because not all attacks would be reported.

In response to the Observer's findings, Andrew Neilson, director of campaigns at the Howard League for Penal Reform, said there has been "minimal research – and a worrying lack of coherent and consistently applied policies – in relation to consensual and coercive sex behind bars".

The investigation comes amid growing concern about the safety of prisons, both for those who are incarcerated and for prison staff. Prisons face continuing issues with overcrowding, staff reductions and budget cuts, fuelled by more than a decade of austerity measures from successive Conservative-led governments.

The impact of austerity has left English prisons "unable to provide safe environments for rising prison populations", according to research by Nasrul Ismail, a lecturer in criminology at Bristol University.

As of September 2022, just over half (52%) of prisons in England and Wales were overcrowded, according to a government report.

The government last year announced a £500m funding injection to create thousands of new prison places for men and women. There are just under 90,000 people in prison in the UK.

At the same time, prisons are struggling to recruit and retain staff. The government has launched an inquiry into staffing problems in the prison system after the number of prison officers and custodial managers fell by 600 in 2021-22.

Losing staff puts safety at risk. Neilson said the Howard League had called for staff to be given more training and guidance, "but we know that many experienced officers have since left the workforce and prisons have struggled to recruit and retain people to replace them".

The figures obtained by the Observer saw a notable increase in reported rapes and sexual assaults in the years after 2016, correlating with the period when austerity began to bite. Cuts to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) budgets totalled £2.4bn by 2015-16, according to contemporary analysis by the Prison Reform Trust.

Kenya Cult Death Toll Reaches 200, With Over 600 Missing



The death toll linked to a doomsday cult in Kenya passed the 200 mark Saturday after police exhumed 22 more bodies, most of them bearing signs of starvation, according to the coast regional commissioner.

NAIROBI (AP) – The death toll linked to a doomsday cult in Kenya hit 201 Saturday after police exhumed 22 more bodies, most of them bearing signs of starvation, according to the coast regional commissioner.

The bodies are believed to be those of followers of a pastor based in coastal Kenya, Paul Mackenzie. He's alleged to have ordered congregants to starve to death in order to meet Jesus.

More than 600 people are still missing.

Mackenzie, who was arrested last month, remains in custody. Police plan to charge him with terrorism-related offenses.

Hundreds of bodies have been dug up from dozens of mass graves spread across his 800-acre property, located in the coastal county of Kilifi.

Mackenzie insists that he closed his church in 2019 and moved to his property in a forested area to farm.

Autopsies conducted on more than 100 bodies last week showed the victims died of starvation, strangulation, suffocation and injuries sustained from blunt objects.

Local media outlets have been reporting cases of missing internal

body organs, quoting investigators in the case.

Mackenzie, his wife and 16 other suspects will appear in court at the end of the month.

Coast regional commissioner Rhoda Onyancha on Saturday said the total number of those arrested stood at 26, with 610 people reported as missing by their families.

It is unclear how many survivors have been rescued so far from the search and rescue operations on Mackenzie's vast property. Some of them were too weak to walk when they were found.

Cults are common in Kenya, which has a religious society.

Police across the country have been questioning other religious leaders whose teachings are believed to be misleading and contrary to basic human rights.

President William Ruto last week formed a commission of inquiry to investigate how hundreds of people were lured to their deaths at the coast and recommend action on institutions that failed to act.

Mackenzie had in the past been charged with the deaths of children in his church in a case that is ongoing in court. Residents nearby had raised the alarm after his followers moved to the forested area.

Pakistan Ex-PM Imran Khan Calls for Nationwide 'Freedom' Protests

LAHORE (AFP) – Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan has called for nationwide "freedom" protests, after his brief arrest and detention last week triggered deadly unrest.

The one-time cricket superstar -- who has been tied up in dozens of legal cases since being ousted from power in April last year -- was freed on bail on Friday after his detention was declared unlawful by the Supreme Court.

Enraged by the arrest, supporters set fire to government buildings, blocked roads and damaged property belonging to the military, which they blame for Khan's downfall.

"Freedom does not come easily. You have to snatch it. You have to sacrifice for it," he said in an address broadcast on YouTube Saturday night.

He called for his supporters to hold protests "at the end of your streets and villages" across the country, and announced a return to campaigning on Wednesday for immediate elections.

For months, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party leader has waged a campaign of defiance against the military.

His arrest on Tuesday came just hours after he was rebuked for claiming senior officials were involved in an assassination attempt against him last year.

Pakistan's powerful military has directly ruled the country off and on for nearly half of its 75-year history, and continues to wield power over the political system.

"The army chief's actions have made our military bad. It is be-

cause of him, not because of me," Khan said from his home in Lahore, although it was unclear whether he meant the serving chief, or his predecessor, whom Khan has held responsible for his ouster.

He previously told reporters that "one man, the army chief" was behind his arrest.

But Khan distanced himself from the attacks against the military's installations at the protests, denying his party workers were involved and calling for an independent investigation into the violence.

The army, which denies the accusations made by Khan, on Saturday warned against attempts to create "misperceptions" against the institution.

At least nine people died in the unrest last week, police and hospitals have said.

Hundreds of police officers were injured and more than 4,000 people detained, mostly in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces, according to authorities.

At least 10 senior PTI leaders have been arrested since the protests began, one of Khan's lawyers said.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the head of a shaky coalition, on Saturday warned that those involved in "facilitating, abetting and perpetrating" the violence should be arrested within 72 hours.

Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah has repeatedly vowed that police will re-arrest Khan, who remains wildly popular ahead of elections due in October.

News in Brief

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) – Thousands of people hunkered down Sunday in monasteries, pagodas and schools, seeking shelter from a powerful storm that slammed into the coast of Myanmar, tearing roofs off buildings and killing at least three people. The center of Cyclone Mocha made landfall Sunday afternoon in Myanmar's Rakhine state near Sittwe township wind speeds up to 209 kilometers (130 miles) per hour, Myanmar's Meteorological Department said. The storm previously passed over Bangladesh's Saint Martin's Island, causing damage and injuring people, but turned away from the country's shores before landfall. As night fell, the extent of the damage in Sittwe was not clear. Earlier in the day, high winds crumpled cell phone towers, cutting off communications in much of the area. In videos collected by local media before communications were cut off, deep water races through streets while wind lashes trees and pulls boards off roofs.

BELEDWEYNE, Somalia (AFP) – Flash flooding in central Somalia has killed 22 people and affected over 450,000, the UN's humanitarian agency OCHA said Sunday, after the Shabelle River burst its banks, forcing tens of thousands out of their homes. Heavy rainfall earlier in the week sent water gushing into homes in Beledweyne town in Hirran region, submerging roads and buildings as residents grabbed their belongings and waded through flooded streets in search of refuge. "Initial estimates indicate that the flash and riverine floods across Somalia have affected at least 460,470 people, of whom nearly 219,000 have been displaced from their homes mainly in flood-prone areas, and 22 killed," the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said. The floods "have left a trail of destruction... inundating homes and farmland, washing away livestock, temporarily closing schools and health facilities, and damaging roads," the agency said in a situation report. The disaster comes on the heels of a record drought that has left millions of Somalis on the brink of famine, with the troubled nation also battling an Islamist insurgency for decades.

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) – The president of Azerbaijan and the prime minister of Armenia separately met and held talks with the president of the European Council Charles Michel in Brussels on Sunday. Ilham Aliyev and Charles Michel hailed the restoration of the Brussels format of the process of normalization of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Aliyev expressed his gratitude to Charles Michel for his efforts in this direction, Azeri reported. In his meeting with the president of the European Council, Pashinyan discussed the "military-political and humanitarian situation in the region", according to Armen Press. The two sides also discussed the upcoming May 14 trilateral meeting with the participation of the Azerbaijani president and attached importance to holding a five-sided meeting together with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, in Chisinau on June 1, within the framework of the European Political Community Summit.

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) – Serbian authorities on Sunday displayed many of around 13,500 weapons they say people have been handed over since this month's mass shootings, including hand grenades, automatic weapons, and anti-tank rocket launchers. The authorities have declared a one-month amnesty period for citizens to hand over unregistered weapons or face prison sentences as part of a crackdown on guns following the two mass shootings that left 17 people dead, many of them children. Populist President Aleksandar Vucic accompanied top police officials on Sunday for the weapons' display near the town of Smederevo, some 50 kilometers (30 miles) south of the capital, Belgrade. Vucic said the approximately half of the weapons collected were illegal while the other half were registered weapons that citizens nonetheless handed over. He added the weapons will go to Serbia's arms and ammunition factories for potential use by the armed forces.

BANGKOK (AFP) – Officials in Thailand began counting votes Sunday in a general election, touted as a pivotal chance for change nine years after incumbent Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha first came to power in a 2014 coup. He is now running against the daughter of the politician who is the military's top nemesis. The polls closed at 5 p.m. and some results were expected in early evening, with a fuller picture coming later Sunday night. Thai elections use paper ballots that are counted publicly at polling stations. The opposition Pheu Thai Party, headed by Paoletongarn Shinawatra, is widely predicted to win at least a healthy plurality of the seats in the 500-member lower House. After casting her ballot, Paoletongarn said every vote is important for effecting change in Thailand and that she has high hopes for the final result. But who heads the next government won't be decided by Sunday's vote alone. The prime minister will be selected in July in a joint session of the House and the 250-seat Senate. The winner must secure at least 376 votes and no party is likely to do that on its own.

WASHINGTON (POLITICO) – U.S. President Joe Biden denounced white supremacy as the "most dangerous terrorist threat" to the nation in his commencement address to Howard University's graduating class. "White supremacy... is the single most dangerous terrorist threat in our homeland," Biden said, adding, "And I'm not just saying this because I'm at a Black HBCU. I say this wherever I go." Addressing the 2023 graduates of the university at the Capital One Arena in D.C., Biden depicted the U.S. as a nation roiled by internal conflict and alluded to core messages of both his 2020 and 2024 campaign platforms. Invoking the battle cry he used to galvanize voters in the 2020 election cycle, he called on his audience to "fight for the soul of the nation." "Fearless progress toward justice often means ferocious pushback from the oldest and most sinister of forces," Biden stated, noting, "That's because hate never goes away... It only hides under the rocks. And when it's given oxygen it comes out from under that rock. And that's why we know this truth as well: silence is complicity. We cannot remain silent."