

U.S.Prident Endorses F-16 Training for Ukrainians Amid Russia Warnings



An F-16 Fighting Falcon from Colorado Air National Guard's 140th Wing takes off from Buckley Air Force Base as part of a second flyover to salute COVID-19 front-line workers May 15, 2020, in Aurora, Colo.

HIROSHIMA, Japan (Dispatches) — President Joe Biden on Friday endorsed plans to train Ukrainian pilots on U.S.-made F-16 fighter jets, according to two people familiar with the matter.

Moscow has warned Washington that this elevates the risk of direct confrontation. However, the U.S. and NATO alleged that arming Kiev does not actually make them a party to the conflict.

The Group of Seven leaders were convening in Hiroshima, where President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is to join them on Sunday in his farthest trip from his country since the war began in February of last year.

The leaders heard for the first time of Biden's backing of training Ukrainian pilots on advanced fighter jets, as a precursor to sending the jets to Ukraine.

The G7 leaders also set out new sanctions on Moscow as well as plans to enhance the effectiveness of existing financial penalties meant to constrain President Vladimir Putin.

"Our support for Ukraine will not waver," the G7 leaders said in a

statement released after closed-door meetings. The vowed "to stand together against Russia's illegal, unjustifiable and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine."

The F-16 training is to be conducted in Europe and will likely begin in the coming weeks. But Biden told the leaders that decisions on when, how many, and who will provide the fourth-generation fighter jets for Ukraine to use in battle will be made in the months ahead while the training is underway.

Zelenskyy has consistently called for the supply of Western fighter jets to bolster his country's defenses against Russia, but has until now faced skepticism from the U.S. that they would turn the tide in the war.

European allies in recent weeks have warned to the notion of sending fighter jets to Ukraine, as have elements of Biden's Cabinet, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who has emerged as a staunch advocate within the administration. Under export licensing rules, the U.S. needed to sign off on any allied effort to train Ukrainian

pilots or to provide them with the jets.

The announcement Friday came as the U.S. and its allies also announced a series of actions meant to tighten restrictions on already-sanctioned people and firms involved in Russia's war effort.

On Thursday, Reuters reported the U.S. Department of Defense has discovered an accounting error that could result in more weapons, ammunition and equipment being available for Ukraine than was previously expected.

The agency cited a Senate aide and a Pentagon official — both anonymous — who said that the U.S. military had "overestimated the value" of some of its hardware that was sent to Kiev by "around \$3 billion", implying that less money has been spent on arming Ukraine than was previously calculated.

The Pentagon used the current replacement costs for equipment taken from its stocks, rather than factoring in the original purchase price and depreciation, according to the agency's source. The DOD is reportedly taking steps to notify Congress of the "accounting adjustment".

Senator Roger Wicker, the ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, told Reuters that the Pentagon made a "major mistake" that could underestimate future needs of NATO allies.

However, the accounting confusion may translate into even more supplies to the Kiev government, according to the agency. As of Monday, the U.S. was reportedly down to only \$6 billion in Ukraine aid, from the \$48 billion approved by Congress in December. Securing more funding is difficult at the moment, due to the standoff over the national debt ceiling.

China's Xi Meets Central Asian Leaders, Calls for Trade, Energy Development



BEIJING (AP) — Chinese leader Xi Jinping promised to build more railway and other trade links with Central Asia and proposed jointly developing oil and gas sources at a meeting Friday with the region's leaders that highlighted Beijing's growing influence.

The two-day China-Central Asia Summit in the western city of Xi'an came as President Joe Biden and other leaders of the Group of Seven major economies met in Japan. It reflected Beijing's efforts to develop trade and security networks centered on China, which resents U.S. domination of global affairs.

China is making economic inroads into Central Asia, including with its Belt and Road Initiative to build railways and other trade-related infrastructure. That has eroded Russian influence over former Soviet republics that look to the world's second-largest economy as an important market and source of investment.

"We need to expand economic and trade ties," Xi said in a speech to leaders from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

In a swipe at Western leaders, Xi called for the region to "resolutely oppose external interference" and "attempts to instigate 'color revolutions,'" a reference to movements that overthrew leaders in countries such as Ukraine and Georgia.

The Chinese leader promised to increase cross-border trade by developing highways and rail lines and encouraging China's trading companies to set up warehouses in Central Asia. He promised to simplify import procedures.

Xi promised Chinese help for Central Asian governments to strengthen security and defense and to fight terrorism. He promised to "jointly promote peace" in Afghanistan.

Beijing earlier announced plans for a regional anti-terrorism center to train Central Asian security forces.

Whistleblowers Expose Sexual Violence, 'Institutional Misogyny' in UK Armed Forces



Lieut Col Allen warns while sexual violence is rife in all walks of life, the armed forces is 'a closed shop' which means 'perpetrators are better able to operate with impunity'.

LONDON (The Independent) - A junior servicewoman who says she was raped is among the whistleblowers exposing a "wider culture of institutional misogyny" within the armed forces, according to a new parliamentary committee report.

The Commons Defence Committee released a series of personal testimonies, collected by a forces medical team, revealing ongoing rape and sexual abuse within the military.

In an anonymous written submission, the alleged rape victim claimed she was moved across the country against her will to separate her from her attacker, whom she was told would remain with his elite unit.

They had been in a casual relationship and, when she approached a military GP about the alleged incident, they advised her to "choose her partners more carefully". She reported the incident after speaking to a second doctor.

Another account from a young servicewoman said she woke up in her bedroom to discover a male training staff member sniffing her underwear after previously waking up to see him "watching her sleeping".

She said that, in a separate incident, the same man was "holding her against a wall" as he told her she really joined the armed forces to "get the leg over as much as possible".

When the woman reported his behaviour to the senior training lead, she was informed her training would be halted, according to the newly released testimonies.

Another account refers to a servicewoman who says a male colleague subjected her to indecent exposure, groped her and forced her to kiss him at a work Christmas party.

Upon reporting the incident, her chain of command told her she "should understand

that things get a little out of hand" and nothing had been meant by the incident.

"It was further suggested to her that she too has been drunk and raucous at work social events, so should understand", according to the report.

Few of the case studies involved women reporting incidents through an official complaints process, according to the evidence, but one who did ended up leaving the service with mental health issues while her alleged abusers "continue to serve and thrive", the written submissions said.

Committee Chair Sarah Atherton, who also chaired a major inquiry into women in the armed forces in 2021, said, "The cases outlined in this evidence are heartrending and demonstrate serious failings within the military justice system and chain of command."

"Sexual assault and rape are heinous crimes. As this document shows, when these crimes take place in the armed forces, servicewomen often feel they have no option but to 'put up and shut up,'" she added. Further measures included a review into strengthened powers to kick out those who are found to have committed sexual offences, and greater independence in the complaints process for bullying and harassment allegations.

Atherton said the MoD's response at the time was "largely positive" but added, "This damning evidence shows that serious problems persist. It reinforces our view that the complaints system is not functioning as it should be."

Atherton warned the evidence "speaks to a wider culture of institutional misogyny", as well as "looking the other way and discouraging victims from coming forward, with senior personnel hiding behind the excuse of 'boys will be boys'".

News in Brief

SEOUL (Reuters) - North Korea lashed out at intensified military exercises between the U.S. and South Korea, characterizing them as "warmongers' madness" and pledging to bolster its nuclear deterrence, state media KCNA said on Friday. U.S. and South Korean forces have been staging an intensified series of annual springtime exercises since March, including air and sea drills involving a U.S. aircraft carrier and heavy bombers. North Korea has reacted angrily to the exercises, calling them a rehearsal for invasion.

CANBERRA (Al-Jazeera) - Australian police Tasered a 95-year-old woman as she approached them with a steak knife and a walker in a nursing home. She is now fighting for her life. Clare Nowland, who suffers from dementia, was reportedly in critical condition after the incident in the town of Cooma in New South Wales state. A high-level internal police investigation has been launched. Nowland's case also sparked debate about the New South Wales state police's use of Taser-brand conducted energy devices, or stun guns. The officer who fired the Taser was off-duty pending a "level 1 critical incident investigation", a category police reserve for exceptional cases in which injuries lead to death or imminent death. The homicide squad is involved.

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — The death toll from an attack by dozens of gunmen in north central Nigeria's Plateau state has reached 80, local authorities said, with survivors still searching for bodies days after the incident. The gunmen targeted several villages in the remote Mangu district of Plateau during the attack that started Monday, according to residents. Burials continued on Thursday in parts of Mangu located 60 kilometers (37 miles) from Jos, the state capital.

BEIJING (AP) — Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin will visit Beijing next week for talks, China's Foreign Ministry said Friday, marking the latest exchange in a relationship in which Russia is becoming increasingly reliant on China for economic and diplomatic support. "During the visit, the two sides will have an in-depth exchange of views on practical cooperation in bilateral relations and issues of common concern," ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at a daily briefing.

OTTAWA (Reuters) — Canadian officials have warned more wildfires could spread in next few hot and dry days, even as firefighters make progress in tackling widespread blazes that have slowed the outflow of natural gas from Canada into the United States, spiking prices. Record-high temperatures and tinder-dry vegetation have led to an intense, early start to the wildfire season in western Canada this year and forecasters see no improvement in conditions at least until next week.

PARIS (AFP) - One billion people in 43 countries are at risk of cholera -- a "pandemic killing the poor" -- despite prevention and treatment being relatively straightforward, the United Nations warned on Friday. The UN branded the outlook bleak, saying it did not have the resources to fight the outbreaks, and the longer it took to start waging the battle, the worse the situation would get. Between the World Health Organization and the children's agency UNICEF, the UN is seeking \$640 million to fight the infectious disease, warning of a "cholera catastrophe" if action is not ramped up immediately.

Desperate Civilians Take Up Arms to Defend Themselves Against Militias in Sudan's Darfur

PARIS (AFP) - As clashes between the Sudanese Army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) continue to rock Sudan, Janjaweed fighters — affiliated with the RSF — have been spreading terror in West Darfur, particularly in the city of Geneina.

Several waves of attacks have been reported, resulting in hundreds of civilian casualties, especially among non-Arab tribes. In the absence of military protection, some of them have taken up arms to defend themselves.

Since the start of the conflict between the armed forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in mid-April, civilians in

West Darfur have been subjected to waves of devastating attacks by the Janjaweed, an Arab militia affiliated with the RSF.

The latest wave of attacks in the region's capital, Geneina, left at least 280 people dead and more than 300 wounded between May 12 and 15, according to the West Darfur Doctors Union. The Sudanese Army is not present on the ground to protect civilians, many of whom belong to non-Arab ethnic groups, in particular, the Masalit people who live primarily in Geneina.

For the past week, our Observers in Darfur have been sending us

reports that civilians have begun arming themselves with shotguns or pistols in order to defend their homes and businesses from attacks by Arab militias.

A video from April 24 shows residents of Geneina arming themselves with weapons found stockpiled in an abandoned police warehouse.

Since the beginning of the conflict, Khalil (not his real name) has been working as a volunteer in Geneina, treating the injured and burying the dead. He is not surprised to see residents resorting to self-defence. For his safety, we will keep him anonymous.

South Korean Nurses Strike After President Vetoes Bill on Pay, Working Conditions

SEOUL (Reuters) - Tens of thousands of South Korean nurses went on strike on Friday after President Yoon Suk Yeol vetoed a law to improve their pay and working conditions amid protests from doctors and nursing assistants who said the bill would hurt their jobs.

The bill passed the opposition-led parliament last month, prompting protests from some medical workers who said the new law would open the door for nurses to provide treatment without a medical license.

Nurses say that the doctors' claim is groundless, and that the country needs more care centers to cope with its rapidly aging population.

In vetoing the bill, Yoon said that the new law caused excessive conflict among medical workers, and that nursing practices outside medical institutions would cause public anxiety over the healthcare system.

The Korean Nurses Association, which led the walkout, strongly denounced Yoon, saying he abandoned



Thousands of South Korean nurses went on strike on Friday after President Yoon Suk Yeol vetoed a law to improve their pay and working conditions.

his promise as a presidential candidate to improve nurses' working conditions.

The impact of the strike was seen as limited so far, as most protesters used holiday time or shortened business hours, with major hospitals operating

normally.

South Korea's Health Minister Cho Kyoo-hong presided over an emergency response meeting on Friday and urged medical facilities to closely monitor the situation to prevent the strike from affecting patients.