

Former Russian President Warns Ukraine War Could Last for ‘Decades’



Russia’s Deputy head of the Security Council Dmitry Medvedev speaks during a news conference in Vientiane, Laos, May 23, 2023.(Photo by Reuters)

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - **Russia’s former president Dmitry Medvedev said on Friday that the conflict in Ukraine could last for decades and that negotiations with Ukraine were impossible as long as Ukraine’s Western-backed President Volodymyr Zelensky was in power.**

Speaking during his visit to Vietnam, former president Medvedev said, “This conflict will last a very long time, most likely decades.”

“As long as there is such a power in place, there will be, say, three years of truce, two years of conflict, and everything will be repeated,” he said, reiterating Moscow’s claim that Ukraine is a Nazi state.

Medvedev, who is currently serving as deputy chairman of the Russian Security Council, has warned earlier that if Russia loses, a nuclear war could break out.

“The defeat of a nuclear power in a conventional war may trigger a nuclear war,” Medvedev said in a post on Telegram, adding that “nuclear powers have never lost major conflicts on which their fate depends.”

He said Russia could not trust any truce with the current rulers of Kiev as the conflict would simply erupt again and so the very nature of the current government of Ukraine would have to be destroyed.

Negotiations, he said, with “the clown Zelensky” were impossible.

“Everything always ends in negotiations, and this is inevitable, but as long as these people are in power, the situation for Russia will not change in terms of negotiations.”

“There are irreversible laws of war. If it comes to nuclear weapons, there will have to be a pre-emptive strike,” Medvedev said.

Russia says Washington would never allow it to arm a country bordering the United States, and the Kremlin says the West is already essentially fighting an undeclared war with Russia.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said he planned to speak with President Putin “in due course” and considered the prospect of resuming contacts after the near-total breakdown in relations since the Ukraine war.

“My last telephone call was some time ago,” said Scholz. “But I plan to speak to Putin again in due course.”

In early December, the two leaders spoke by phone, during which, Scholz urged Putin to withdraw Moscow’s forces from Ukraine, while the Russian leader accused the West of pursuing “destructive” policies.

Since then, tensions between Moscow and Berlin have escalated, particularly over the Scholz government’s decision in January to send German-made heavy battle tanks to Ukraine.

Scholz insisted that his goal was to “actively support Ukraine” while “avoiding direct conflict between NATO and Russia.”

Serbia Sends Army to Kosovo Border as Protest Escalates



Several people were injured in the clashes and a police vehicle was set ablaze.

BELGRADE (AFP) - **Serbia on Friday ordered the army units to move closer to the border with Kosovo after a small group of protesters and police clashed in a majority Serb town in Kosovo.**

“An urgent movement (of troops) to the Kosovo border has been ordered,” Defense Minister Milos Vucevic said in a live TV broadcast. “It is clear that the terror against the Serb community in Kosovo is happening.”

Police used tear gas to disperse Serbs who gathered in front of municipal buildings in the Kosovan town of Zvecan, trying to prevent a newly elected ethnic Albanian mayor from entering his office, news agencies reported.

In various videos posted online, gunshots and shock bombs could be heard and several cars were set ablaze.

Around 10 people were slightly injured in the clashes, a hospital official Danica Radomirovic told local media.

Police said that five officers were injured by stun grenades and other hard objects thrown by protesters.

Tanjug news agency said several vehicles from the NATO peacekeeping mission to Kosovo arrived in the center of Zvecan.

Kosovo police did not comment on the incidents but only confirmed that officers were assisting newly elected mayors to reach their premises.

Kosovo’s snap election on April 23 was largely boycotted by ethnic Serbs, and only ethnic Albanian or other smaller minority representatives were elected to mayoral posts and assemblies.

Serbs in Kosovo’s northern region do not accept Kosovo’s 2008 declaration of independence from Serbia,

which came almost a decade after the end of the Kosovo War. They still see Belgrade as their capital.

Ethnic Albanians form more than 90% of Kosovo’s population, with some 50,000 Serbs only the majority in the northern region.

The Serbian army has been put on a heightened state of alert over tensions with Kosovo multiple times in recent years — the last time in December after Serbs erected barricades to protest the arrest of an expoliceman.

A U.S.-EU-backed plan was verbally agreed to by the Kosovo and Serbian governments in March to defuse tensions by granting local Serbs more autonomy, with the government in Pristina retaining ultimate authority.

The clashes in Kosovo overshadowed a planned pro-Serbian government protest on Friday, which saw tens of thousands of people converge on the Serbian capital, Belgrade.

President Aleksandar Vucic is facing an unprecedented revolt against his autocratic rule amid the crisis triggered by two mass shootings that stunned the nation.

Answering Kosovo’s call for what he called “the largest rally in the history of Serbia,” his supporters, many wearing identical T-shirts with his portrait, were bused to Belgrade from all over the Balkan country as well as neighboring Kosovo and Bosnia.

The country’s opposition blames Vucic for sewing division and hopelessness that they say indirectly led to the May 3 and May 4 mass shootings.

Former PM Imran Khan Placed Under Travel Ban

ISLAMABAD (Reuters) - **Ex-Pakistani prime minister Imran Khan, his wife and many of his political aides are now banned from traveling abroad. But Khan, who himself imposed travel bans on opposition leaders while in power, stays defiant.**

Pakistan’s government has slapped a travel ban on former Prime Minister Imran Khan, officials said on Friday.

His wife, Bushra Bibi, and hundreds of his political aides have also been banned from traveling abroad, the officials added.

Khan, 70, was ousted in a no-confidence vote in parliament last year and faces a number of legal challenges. His arrest on May 9 triggered a wave of violent protests — in which at least nine died — that subsided only after he was released on bail on a Supreme Court order three days later.

More than 7,000 of his supporters have been arrested in a crackdown over the past couple of weeks.

Khan reacted to the travel ban with a defiant statement on Twitter, saying he welcomed the move to put him on the so-called Exit Control List (ECL), as he had no plans to take trips abroad and would anyway rather take holidays in Pakistan.

During the period it was in power from 2018 to 2022, Khan’s government also imposed travel bans on several opposition leaders.

Members of Khan’s Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party have blamed his arrest on the army, with which Khan has been at loggerheads for many months.

Many also say the coalition government under Prime Minister Shabbaz Sharif stands to benefit if Khan is found guilty, as that would bar him from taking part in future elections, possibly forever. A general election is due this year.

The protests and controversy over Khan come as Pakistan is in the grips of a long-running economic crisis that has caused food prices to soar.

The country of 231 million is also facing an ongoing threat of attacks by Islamist militants.

The government has said those who attacked military installations in protests after Khan’s arrest will face summary trials in Pakistan’s military courts, a move that has met with wide criticism from local and international rights groups.

Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah Khan said on Friday that at least 33 people had so far been handed over to the military.

Several government ministers have said that a ban on Khan’s party is also being considered, something that might contribute to further political chaos in the country.

French Police Tear-Gas Protesters at TotalEnergies Meeting



Police used pepper spray on the environmental activists.

PARIS (AFP) - **French riot police on Friday used tear gas and pepper spray as they clashed with climate protesters who were trying to block shareholders at oil giant TotalEnergies from going to their annual meeting.**

The scuffles came as investors in the company are expected to vote on climate resolutions put forward by activist shareholders calling for faster cuts to the greenhouse gas emissions produced by TotalEnergies’ oil and gas activities.

The company’s board opposes the resolutions.

Last year, protesters succeeded in preventing some shareholders from attending the meeting.

Dozens of protesters tried at dawn to access a part of the street near the Salle Pleyel, the concert hall venue of the meeting, which was blocked off by police trucks.

Police then tear-gassed some demonstrators who managed to stage a sitting protest in front of the concert hall after they ignored three megaphone warnings to disperse.

Protesters chanted, “All we want is to knock down Total” and “One, two and three degrees, we have Total to thank.” There was also a banner reading, “The science is clear but Total is ignoring it.”

Some poured a black liquid resembling oil over their heads.

Shareholders were escorted through the group of demonstrators into the venue by police, but were required to leave bags at

the entrance and give up their smartphones for the duration of the meeting.

The CEO of TotalEnergies defended his company’s climate stance at the meeting.

“The climate is at the heart of our concerns,” Patrick Pouyanne told attendees, saying his group had gone further than others in investing in renewables.

He also expressed regret at having had to “take exceptional measures both in calling in the police and in strictly controlling access to this assembly.”

TotalEnergies has caused controversy not only by its stance on climate issues, but also for posting a record net profit of \$20.5 billion (€19 billion) for last year amid war between Russia and Ukraine and over how much taxes it pays in France.

Pouyanne’s high salary has also come under critical scrutiny, with a 10% rise on part of it to be discussed at the meeting.

The protests come as climate campaigners step up their actions against fossil-fuel companies that are widely seen as ignoring the danger posed by global warming caused by human activity.

Protesters tried to storm the stage of Shell’s shareholder meeting earlier this week and also disrupted BP’s AGM last month.

Scientists say greenhouse gas emissions need to be reduced by at least 43% from 2019 levels by 2030 if the Paris Agreement’s goal of keeping warming to less than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels is to be met.

South Korea, U.S. Hold Largest-Ever Live-Fire Drills



The United States and South Korea kicked off their largest-ever combined live-fire exercise Thursday in Pocheon, South Korea.

SEOUL (Reuters) - **The South Korean and U.S. militaries have begun their most expansive joint live-fire exercises. North Korea says it will respond with appropriate action.**

South Korean and United States forces embarked on their largest-ever joint live-fire exercises on Thursday, involving some 2,500 troops near the country’s northern border.

The exercises, called “Combined annihilation firepower drills,” have been held 11 times since they began in 1977, according to the South Korean Defense Ministry.

The South Korean ministry alleged the exercises’ goal was to secure “peace through overwhelming strength.”

They involve 2,500 troops and 610 weapons systems such as fighter jets, attack helicopters, drones, tanks and artillery from the two countries.

The increase compared with the most recent exercises in 2017 — which drew on about 2,000 soldiers and 250 weapons assets — is significant.

Pyongyang Vows to Respond in Kind

North Korean state media last Fri-

day called the drills “a typical North Korea-targeted war rehearsal.” The country views such exercises as being more focused on invasion than defense.

It said Pyongyang “cannot but take a more serious note of the fact” that the exercises were being staged so near the frontier, around which lies the Korean Demilitarized Zone.

State news outlet the Korean Central News Agency said the country would respond to the drills with unspecified “corresponding responses.”

North Korea, which declared itself an “irreversible” nuclear power last year, is seeking to diversify delivery mechanisms for its nuclear weapons. Its military conducted a firing drill late last month, simulating a nuclear attack using tactical ballistic missiles. The North’s leader, Kim Jong-un, has called on the military to be ready for war.

North Korea has been under harsh sanctions by the U.S. and the United Nations Security Council for years over its nuclear and ballistic missiles programs. It has launched an unprecedented number of missiles -- more than 100 -- since the beginning of 2022, including its most advanced intercontinental ballistic missile ever.

News in Brief

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia has declared five diplomats working at the Swedish Embassy in Moscow persona non grata in a tit-for-tat-move, the Russian Foreign Ministry. The ambassador of Sweden Malena Mard was summoned to the ministry, and was notified that Moscow had decided to expel five Swedish diplomats, including three employees working at the defense attache office at the Swedish Embassy in Moscow, the ministry said.

PARIS (AFP) - One of the most wanted suspects in Rwanda’s genocide, a police officer suspected of orchestrating the killing of more than 2,000 people at a church nearly three decades ago, has been arrested in South Africa after 22 years on the run, a special tribunal set up by the United Nations to find the perpetrators said Thursday. The International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) said Fulgence Kayishema was arrested Wednesday at a vineyard in Paarl, a small town in a wine-making region about 30 miles east of Cape Town. Kayishema, who is believed to be in his early 60s, had assumed a false identity and gone by the name Donatien Nibashumba, South African police said.

BERLIN (AP) — German police have been left red-faced after a member of the public was able to slip into a VIP convoy for Chancellor Olaf Scholz and then give him a hearty hug as he prepared to board a plane at Frankfurt Airport. Tabloid newspaper Bild reported Friday that Scholz’s bodyguards only realized their mistake later, and chased the man down. In a statement, federal police said the man was detained. Nobody was hurt but an investigation into the security breach has been launched, police said.

TOKYO (AP) — Police said they arrested a man Friday who had holed up in his father’s house armed with a rifle and a knife after allegedly killing four people, including two police officers, in central Japan. TV Asahi showed the man with his hands on his head walk out of the house and be ushered toward a police vehicle. Masanori Aoki, 31, a farmer, was arrested by police under a court warrant on suspicion of murder in Nakano, a city in Nagano prefecture.

PARIS (AFP) - The death toll from the attack on the garrison, southwest of the capital Mogadishu, has not yet been confirmed. But a Somali military commander said both sides suffered large casualties. A fighters attacked an African Union (AU) military base in Somalia on Friday, a spokesperson for the force said, adding that there were heavy casualties on both sides. “ATMIS forces are currently assessing the security situation,” the AU force, known as the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), said in a statement, without giving further details.