

Russia: Europe's F16 Donations to Ukraine to Escalate War



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen sit in a F-16 fighter jet at Skrydstrup Airbase in Vojens, Denmark, August 20, 2023.

COPENHAGEN (Reuters) -- Russia said on Monday a decision by Denmark and the Netherlands to donate the first F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine would only escalate the conflict, while Ukraine said the jets would help end Moscow's invasion. Denmark and the Netherlands on Sunday announced they would supply F-16s to Ukraine, with the initial six due to be delivered around New Year. Washington approved the delivery of the U.S.-made jets last week.

"The fact that Denmark has now decided to donate 19 F-16 aircraft to Ukraine leads to an escalation of the conflict," Russian ambassador Vladimir Barbin said in a statement cited by the Ritzau news agency. "By hiding behind a premise that Ukraine itself must determine the conditions for peace, Denmark seeks with its actions and words to leave Ukraine with no other choice but to continue the military confrontation with Russia," he said. Kyiv said the jet was vital to the

success of its bid to drive Russian forces from its territory in a counter-offensive that has proceeded slowly since its launch in early June, as it would prevent Russian fighter jets attacking advancing forces.

"Superiority in the air is key to success on the ground," air force spokesman Yuriy Ihnat was quoted as saying by Ukrainian media.

Danish Defense Minister Jakob Ellemann-Jensen said Ukraine may only use the donated F-16s within its own territory.

"We donate weapons under the condition that they are used to drive the enemy out of the territory of Ukraine. And no further than that," Ellemann-Jensen said on Monday. "Those are the conditions, whether it's tanks, fighter planes or something else," he said.

Denmark will deliver 19 jets in total. The Netherlands has 42 F-16s available in all but has yet to decide whether all of them will be donated. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has called the decision a "breakthrough agreement".

Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said on Saturday that Ukrainian pilots had begun training, but it would take at least six months and possibly longer to also train engineers and mechanics.

Kim Watches Test of Missiles as U.S.-Led Drills Begin



In this undated photo provided on Monday, Aug. 21, 2023, by the North Korean government, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, right, observes what it says the test-firing of strategic cruise missiles.

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un observed the test-firing of strategic cruise missiles, state media reported Monday, as the U.S. and South Korean militaries kicked off major annual drills that the North views as an invasion rehearsal.

The North's report on missile tests came three days after the leaders of the U.S., South Korea and Japan held their first stand-alone trilateral summit and agreed to increase their cooperation on their ballistic missile defenses to counter North Korea's evolving nuclear and missile power.

During an inspection of a navy flotilla on an unspecified date, Kim boarded a patrol ship to review its weapons and preparations for combat, according to the official Korean Central News Agency. It said Kim later watched the ship's seamen conduct a drill of launching "strategic" cruise missiles, a word implying the weapons were developed to carry nuclear warheads.

A state media photo showed him watching a soaring missile from the patrol ship from another place, not on the vessel. KCNA said the missiles hit designated targets without any errors, demonstrating the ship's readiness and attack capability.

Kim said he would bolster efforts to build powerful warships and modernize shipboard and underwater weapons systems for the North's navy. He called for the country's sailors to build "overwhelming ideological and spiritual strength," saying that is more important than numerical or technical superiority of weapons, according to KCNA.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement that the military will maintain firm readiness based on its capacity to overwhelmingly defeat potential North Korean provocations.

"North Korea's naval cruise missile may appear technologically behind but is still a real threat," Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, said. "The latest test shows Pyongyang's intention of attacking South Korea from many angles if it believes it is at risk."

Launches from North Korea's huge stockpile of ballistic missiles are prohibited by UN Security Council resolutions. Its cruise missile tests aren't banned, but they still pose a threat because they fly at a lower altitude to avoid radar detection. Analysts say North Korea aims to use cruise missiles to strike incoming U.S. warships and aircraft carriers in the event of conflict.

Correa Protégé Leads Ecuador's Election in First Round



Ecuador's presidential candidate for the Revolucion Ciudadana party, Luisa Gonzalez, delivers a speech during a political gathering with students in southern Quito on August 9, 2023.

QUITO (AFP) -- Ecuador is preparing for a presidential runoff election that will pit leftist frontrunner Luisa Gonzalez against the son of one of the country's richest men.

Daniel Noboa, 35, emerged from political obscurity with 24 percent of the vote despite not figuring as a favorite in opinion polls.

Gonzalez, a protégé of ex-president Rafael Correa, has positioned herself as a defender of the country's social legacy.

Her main competition initially appeared to be anti-corruption candidate and former journalist Fernando Villavicencio until he was mur-

dered on the campaign trail just 11 days before polls opened, marring the vote and raising questions over national security.

Once a peaceful haven, the small South American country has in recent years become a playground for foreign drug mafias seeking to export cocaine from its shores, stirring up a brutal war between local gangs.

The October 15 runoff election will choose who completes the term of unpopular conservative leader Guillermo Lasso, who called snap polls to avoid a possible impeachment trial for embezzlement.

Gonzalez, a lawyer, is the only woman to run for the presidency

and has said her main advisor is Correa, who used an oil bonanza to fund high government spending during his 2007-2017 administration.

The ex-president -- who has lived in exile in Belgium since 2017 -- was sentenced in absentia to eight years in prison for corruption over public contracts.

Gonzalez, an avid cyclist and marathon runner, previously served as an assemblywoman and advisor to Correa.

She has said her priority will be to regain security in a country where the homicide rate doubled in 2022, after reaching 26 violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants.

"We are going to rebuild that dignified homeland, that safe homeland, that homeland of peace, of love, of tranquility," she said in celebration of her first-round victory.

Noboa, the son of five-time failed candidate Alvaro Noboa, could become the youngest president in the country's modern history after shocking the electorate with his surprise performance.

Rising from political obscurity, Noboa was catapulted into the limelight after he showed up to the only televised presidential debate wearing a bulletproof vest, claiming he had received death threats.

His father, who amassed a fortune selling bananas and boats, ran against Correa in 2006.

Two U.S. Soldiers Arrested in Germany Over Murder



The gate at U.S. Air Force Spangdahlem Air Base in Germany.

BERLIN (Dispatches) -- Two U.S. soldiers have been arrested in Germany over the death of a young man at a funfair in the west of the country, German police said.

"Following the murder of a 28-year-old man, two suspects were arrested... They are American servicemen," police in the western city of Treves said in a statement.

The death occurred when an altercation broke out between several people at a funfair in the small town of Wittlich, in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate between Treves and Koblenz, on Saturday night.

During the fight the victim "was stabbed to death", and "four people, two men and two women, ran away from the scene of the crime", police said, citing witnesses.

Two members of the fleeing group were quickly identified, as a 25- and 26-year-old whom police arrested before handing them over to U.S. authorities, who will take charge of the case "in accordance with NATO statutes", the police added.

"We've never experienced anything like this here", said Wittlich mayor Joachim Rodenkirch when interviewed by the local press.

The United States has had troops stationed in Germany since World War II, but their numbers have declined since the fall of the Berlin Wall from around 200,000 soldiers in 1990 to 34,500 today.

In fact, Germany hosts the largest portion of U.S. troops in Europe. This is also more military personnel than the U.S. keeps in any other country except Japan.

Germany is home to five of the seven U.S. Army garrisons in Europe (the other two are in Belgium and Italy), and the U.S. Army Europe is headquartered at the garrison in Wiesbaden, a city close to Frankfurt in central western Germany.

These five garrisons, each consisting of various installations at different locations, currently comprise around 29,000 military personnel. This number includes the U.S. Marine Corps Forces of Europe and Africa, which are headquartered in Böblingen, southwestern Germany, as part of the U.S. Army Garrison Stuttgart.

In addition, roughly 9,600 U.S. Air Force personnel are spread across various locations in Germany, including the two U.S. Air Force bases of Ramstein and Spangdahlem.

But the extent of U.S. military presence in Germany is not limited to personnel: The U.S. also keeps planes at other non-U.S. air force bases in Germany. Additionally, an estimated 20 nuclear weapons are believed to be kept at Germany's Büchel Air Base in western Germany — something which has attracted much criticism from Germans.

Another contentious arrangement is the fact that the Ramstein Air Base is used as a control center for drone strikes in Yemen and elsewhere.

News in Brief

LONDON (Reuters) -- British police said on Monday they would not take any further action following an investigation into media reports that honors had been offered in return for donations to one of King Charles' charities. London's Metropolitan Police began investigating last year after the Sunday Times reported a Saudi businessman had received an award after paying thousands of pounds towards projects supported by Charles. Prosecutors had reviewed a file of evidence following an investigation by the police's Special Enquiry Team (SET) to see if any offences had been committed, and detectives said they had concluded no further action would be taken. "Should any new information or evidence come to light that requires further assessment, this will be carried out by the Met's SET," the police statement said. "Nobody has been arrested or charged during the course of this investigation." The allegations, which related to the Prince's Foundation, were made before Charles became king following the death of his mother Queen Elizabeth last September.

BEIJING (AFP) -- China on Monday accused a government employee of spying for the United States, the second incident of espionage it has announced in a month. The case announced Monday, which is still under investigation, involves a 39-year-old named Hao who worked for an unspecified ministry; the Ministry of State Security (MSS) said in a statement. Hao was studying in Japan when he became acquainted with a U.S. embassy employee during a visa application, and developed "a close relationship" with him, the ministry said. The man then introduced Hao to another colleague, an operative of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) who persuaded Hao to start spying for the U.S. agency as he was about to return to China, it said. Hao signed a contract and received U.S. training, before getting a job in government as per his instructions, according to the MSS. Hao "made several secret contacts with CIA personnel within the country to provide intelligence and collect espionage funds" while working there, before he was found out, the ministry said.

GUATEMALA CITY (AFP) -- Social democrat Bernardo Arevalo swept to victory in Guatemala's presidential election on Sunday, with his anti-corruption message firing up weary voters. The 64-year-old sociologist is the son of an ex-president but his win is still a massive upset, defying opinion polls, court battles and attempts to have his party disqualified. Arevalo scored 59 percent of the vote, with 95 percent of ballots counted, according to official results from the TSE national election body. His rival, former first lady Sandra Torres -- who enjoyed the backing of the incumbent as well as the elite -- came second with 36 percent of the vote. Arevalo will replace unpopular right-wing president Alejandro Giammattei, who is constitutionally limited to one term. Guatemala has some of the worst poverty, malnutrition and child mortality rates in Latin America, according to the World Bank. The murder rate is one of the highest in the world, with many killings attributed to gang violence related to drug trafficking.

LONDON (Reuters) -- British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly is due to visit China at the end of this month, two sources familiar with the matter said, a long-awaited trip seeking to stabilize a turbulent relationship that has sunk to its lowest point in decades. The foreign ministries of both countries did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Cleverly was expected in China towards the end of July, but the trip never materialized as China announced the unexpected repatriation of his counterpart. Cleverly is due to land in Beijing on Aug. 29, one of the sources said. Another source said the trip was expected around the end of the month, without specifying dates.

MOGADISHU (Reuters) -- Somalia has banned TikTok, messaging app Telegram and online-betting website 1XBet to limit the spread of indecent content and propaganda, its communications minister said. "The minister of communications orders internet companies to stop the aforementioned applications, which terrorists and immoral groups use to spread constant horrific images and misinformation to the public," the minister, Jama Hassan Khalif, said in a statement late on Sunday. Members of terrorist group Al Shabaab often post about their activities on TikTok and Telegram. The decision comes days after Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud said a military offensive against Al Shabaab aims to eliminate the Al-Qaeda-linked group in the next five months.

BENGALURU (Reuters) -- India's space agency on Monday released images its spacecraft took of the far side of the moon as it headed for an attempted landing on the lunar south pole, just days after the failure of a Russian lander. The Indian Space Research Organization's (ISRO) Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft had been in a race with Russia to be the first to land on the lunar south pole, a region whose shadowed craters are thought to contain water ice that could support a future moon settlement. As news of the failure of Russia's Luna-25 mission broke on Sunday, ISRO said that Chandrayaan-3 was on course to land on Aug. 23. Rough terrain makes a south pole landing difficult, but making a first landing would be historic. The region's water ice could supply fuel, oxygen and drinking water for future missions. The Chandrayaan-3 was launched with a budget of about 6.15 billion rupees (\$74 million), less than the cost to produce the 2013 Hollywood space thriller "Gravity".

Trump to Skip First Republican Presidential Debate

WASHINGTON (AFP) -- Donald Trump said he will skip this week's first Republican presidential debate, arguing that Americans know him well so there's no need for a public showdown with his rivals for the White House.

In a message on his platform Truth Social, Trump touted what he called a hugely successful record as president and what he described as his popularity among the American people.

"I WILL THEREFORE NOT BE DOING THE DEBATES!" he said.

The first debate in the race for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination is scheduled for Wednesday in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

In his post, Trump noted the latest in a wave of polls showing him far, far out ahead of the Republican field, this one by CBS News published Sunday.

It said 62 percent of those polled for the survey would vote for him even though he has been indicted four times this year, including on charges he tried to subvert U.S. democracy by scheming to overturn the 2020 election and stay in power despite his loss to Joe Biden.

Trump's closest contender in the CBS poll was Florida Governor Ron DeSantis at 16 percent. The rest of those in the field are polling in the single digits.

The 77-year-old former president, who is rarely out of the headlines, had been vocal about possibly skip-

ping the debate in the midwestern city of Milwaukee, wary of sharing the limelight with lower-polling rivals.

The New York Times reported Friday that Trump had told aides he was planning to upstage his rivals by skipping the event, organized by Fox News, and instead sit for an online interview with one of Fox's former hosts, Tucker Carlson.

Even in his absence, Trump will be ripe for broadsides from opponents over the four criminal and three civil trials he faces involving allegations before, during and after his scandal-plagued presidency.

"Obviously his legal issues are affecting this race," Fox News host Bret Baier, who will be moderating the debate, told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

"All these candidates have been asked non-stop about what's happening in courtrooms around the country. So he'll be a part of this debate whether he's there or not."

Seven other candidates have qualified for the debate, including state governors DeSantis and Doug Burgum, former vice president Mike Pence, and Trump's UN ambassador Nikki Haley and South Carolina Senator Tim Scott.

While Trump dominates the field, polling well above his opponents, some allies worry that a no-show could give his rivals a chance to create a viral moment and gain momentum.