

# Niger Authorizes Mali, Burkina Faso Troops to Enter Its Territory in Case of Attack



BRDM-2 of the Niger military, July 2023.

BAMAKO (Reuters) - Niger has allowed Mali and Burkina Faso's armed forces to intervene on its territory in case of an attack, the countries said in a joint statement, a possible sign the junta in Niger plans to keep resisting regional pressure to stand down.

The main West African bloc ECOWAS has been trying to negotiate with the coup leaders but warned it is ready to send troops into Niger to re-

store constitutional order if diplomatic efforts fail.

Any escalation risks further destabilizing the insurgency-torn region as Niger's junta-led neighbors, Mali and Burkina Faso, have said they would back Niger in any conflict with ECOWAS.

On Thursday, the three allies' foreign ministers said they had met in the Nigerien capital Niamey to discuss boosting cooperation on security and other joint issues.

The statement said the min-

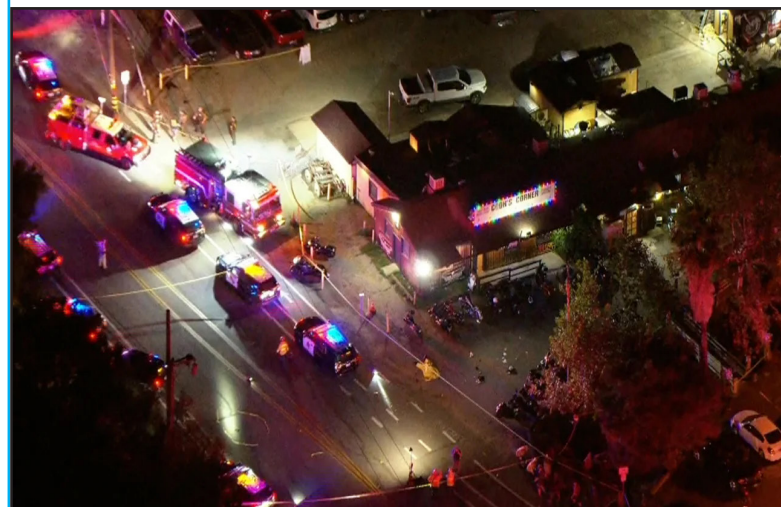
isters welcomed the signing on Thursday by Niger junta leader General Abdourahmane Tiani of two orders "authorizing the Defense and Security Forces of Burkina Faso and Mali to intervene on Nigerien territory in the event of an attack."

"The Burkinabe and Malian Ministers ... reiterated their rejection of an armed intervention against the people of Niger which will be considered as a declaration of war," it said.

On Sunday, however, Tiani said Niger was open to dialogue to avert a conflict with ECOWAS. Neither coup leaders nor "the Nigerien people want war and remain open to dialogue," he said.

The coup leader warned, though, at the same time that Niger was prepared to defend itself if needed. "If an aggression were to be undertaken against us, it would not be the walk in the park that some believe," Tiani noted.

## 4 Dead, 6 Injured in Mass Shooting at Southern California



Police respond to the shooting at a bar in Trabuco Canyon, California.

ORANGE COUNTY, Calif. (Dispatches) - A shooting at a biker bar in the western U.S. state of California has killed at least four people and wounded six others.

Police said the shooting took place at Cook's Corner, a bar and restaurant in Orange County, on Wednesday evening.

Reports said the gunman was a retired law enforcement officer and that he was shot by police on the scene.

The Orange County Sheriff's Department said the shooter was among those confirmed dead, adding that at least six people were hospitalized, five of whom had gunshot wounds.

Authorities did not disclose the circumstances leading up to the shooting, but some sources said the gunman was targeting his estranged wife.

The FBI will help with the investigation into the mass shoot-

ing. "I'm heartbroken by the news of yet another mass shooting tonight, this time at Cook's Corner, a historic bar in the heart of Orange County," California State Senator Dave Min said in a statement. "My heart breaks for the families and loved ones of the victims."

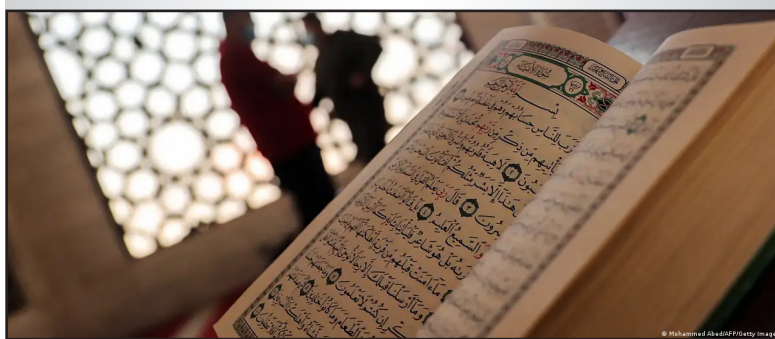
Orange County Supervisor Katrina Foley said, "It's disturbing to learn that another domestic dispute led to another mass shooting. We must do more to prevent senseless acts of gun violence and protect survivors."

The United States has been struggling with a large number of mass shootings and incidents of gun violence.

The Gun Violence Archive has recorded 465 mass shootings so far in 2023 across the country.

Last month, U.S. President Joe Biden said the "epidemic of gun violence" in the U.S. is "tearing our communities apart."

## Denmark to Ban Qur'an Desecrations, Says Justice Minister



COPENHAGEN, Denmark (Dispatches) — The Danish government on Friday said it will propose a law that would make it illegal to desecrate any holy book in Denmark, where a recent string of public desecrations of the Qur'an by a handful of anti-Islam activists has sparked angry demonstrations in Muslim countries.

Justice Minister Peter Hummelgaard said the legislation especially targets the disrespectful desecrations carried out by a few individuals at public places in the Scandinavian nation which has upset Muslims.

In the latest act of desecration of the Holy Qur'an in a neighboring Scandinavian country, a serial blasphemer burned a copy of the sacred Muslim book in front of the Iranian embassy in Stockholm.

Swedish police instead arrested a woman who tried to stop the perpetrator.

Such sacrilegious moves, which have been authorized by the Swedish police under the pretext of freedom of speech laws, have drawn the ire of the whole Muslim world, prompting the summoning or expulsion of Swedish and Danish envoys from several countries and putting the Scandinavian countries' security forces on high alert over fears of reprisal.

Denmark's Minister for Foreign Affairs Lars Lokke Rasmussen, for his part, expressed strong regret over the insults, insisting the government strongly condemns any desecration of the Holy Qur'an.

The Danish diplomat said freedom of expression was allowed by Danish law, but expressed regret that some people abuse it, "which we consider unacceptable." "These few individuals should not be considered representatives of the Danish people."

The provocative stunts, considered sinful by the Muslim world, have spurred anguish in several countries, where many have urged European governments to take stronger action and prevent the incidents.

In July, hundreds of protesters stormed the Swedish embassy in Baghdad in response to a planned Qur'an burning outside the Iraqi embassy in Stockholm, the Swedish capital.

The Swedish government recently ruled out any sweeping changes to its freedom of speech laws but repeated it would look into measures that would allow police to stop the burning of holy books in public if there is a clear threat to national security.

## India's Lunar Rover Goes Down a Ramp to the Moon's Surface, Takes a Walk



Pragyan rover is a robotic vehicle weighing 26 kilograms, equipped with various instruments.

NEW DELHI (AP) — A lunar rover slid down a ramp from the lander of India's spacecraft within hours of its historic touch-down near the moon's south pole, Indian space officials said Thursday, as the country celebrated its new scientific accomplishment.

"India took a walk on the moon," the state-run Indian Space Research Organization said, adding that the Chandrayan-3 Rover would conduct experiments over 14 days, including an analysis of the mineral composition of the lunar surface.

Residents of the world's most populous country had crowded around televisions in offices, shops, and restaurants on Wednesday and erupted into clapping, dancing, and exchanging of sweets when they saw the lander's smooth touchdown. It

landed on uncharted territory that scientists believe could hold vital reserves of frozen water.

"India Goes Where No Nation's Gone Before," read Thursday's headline in The Times of India daily, while the Indian Express newspaper exclaimed, "The moon is Indian."

Indian Space Research Organization Chairman S. Somnath said the lander had touched down close to the center of the 4.5-kilometer-wide (2.8-mile-wide) area that had been targeted for the landing. "It landed within 300 meters (985 feet) of that point," the Press Trust of India cited him as saying.

The mission began more than a month ago at an estimated cost of \$75 million. Somnath said that India would next attempt a manned lunar mission.

## Norway Gives F-16 Jets to Ukraine, Joining Denmark, Netherlands

OSLO (Dispatches) - Norway will donate U.S.-made F-16 combat aircraft to Ukraine, the Norwegian prime minister announced during a visit to Kyiv on Thursday, joining an effort led by the Netherlands and Denmark.

F-16s have been on Ukraine's wish list for a long time because of their destructive power and global availability. The fighter jet is equipped with a 20mm cannon and can carry bombs, rockets and missiles.

"We are planning to donate Norwegian F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine, and will provide further details about the donation, numbers and time frame for delivery, in due course," Norway's Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre said in a statement.

Støre met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv earlier on Thursday and announced donations of anti-aircraft missiles and other equipment.

"The donation of these F-16 jets will significantly strengthen Ukraine's military capabilities," Norway's Defense Minister Bjørn Arild Gram said in the statement.

The U.S. Defense Department will begin training Ukrainians to fly and maintain F-16 fighter jets in the coming months, Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder said.

The training is expected to begin in October at the Morris Air National Guard Base in Tucson, Arizona, and will be facilitated by the Air National Guard's 162nd Wing.

The U.S.-led training is "in support of the international effort to develop and strengthen Ukraine's long-term defenses," Ryder said.

The Netherlands and Denmark have announced their intentions to make F-16 aircraft from their fleets available to Ukraine.

Many NATO allies have F-16s - originally designed in the 1970s - making it easier to find spare parts compared with the Russian planes currently used by Ukraine.

A further 12 aircraft are due to be sold to a private company providing training for the U.S. Air Force, although this deal has yet to receive final approval and some analysts have said these jets could be suitable for a donation to Ukraine.

## News in Brief

OKUMA, Japan (AP) — The tsunami-wrecked Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant began releasing its first batch of treated radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean on Thursday — a controversial step that prompted China to ban seafood from Japan. People inside and outside the country protested the wastewater release, with Japanese fishing groups fearing it will further damage the reputation of their seafood and groups in China and South Korea raising concerns, making it a political and diplomatic issue. In response to the wastewater release, Chinese customs authorities banned seafood from Japan, customs authorities announced Thursday.

BEIJING (Reuters) - China's defense ministry on Friday urged the United States to stop "arming" Taiwan, after the U.S. State Department approved a possible \$500 million sale to the island of infrared search and track systems for F-16 fighter jets, as well as other equipment. "China urges the U.S. side to effectively fulfill its commitment not to support the independence of Taiwan, to immediately stop arming Taiwan, and to stop enhancing U.S.-Taiwan military ties," ministry spokesperson Zhang Xiaogang said in a statement.

LONODN (Middle East Eye) - Devastating wildfires ravaging Greece have fuelled mob attacks against refugees and migrants, who are being blamed for causing the fires. Many are being assaulted and/or pushed back from Greek borders by the police. The vigilante violence and spike in racist, anti-refugee rhetoric comes despite the fact 19 of 20 people who died from the fires this week are believed to be asylum seekers.

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Former U.S. president Donald Trump was arrested at a Georgia jail Thursday on racketeering and conspiracy charges and released on a \$200,000 bond after having a historic mug shot taken. Trump, who is accused of colluding with 18 other defendants to overturn the 2020 election result in the southern state, spent less than 30 minutes inside Atlanta's Fulton County Jail before leaving in a motorcade for the airport.

GENEVA (AP) - The top UN humanitarian official on Friday voiced concern about the spread of violence in Sudan and said a lasting conflict could tip the entire region into "humanitarian catastrophe". "This viral conflict and the hunger, disease and displacement left in its wake now threatens to consume the entire country," said Martin Griffiths in a statement sent to journalists on Friday, mentioning specific concerns about the safety of civilians in the country's breadbasket Gezira State. "Hundreds of thousands of children are severely malnourished and at imminent risk of death if left untreated," he added.

PARIS (AFP) - Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy will be tried in 2025 over allegations he took money from late Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi to fund one of his election campaigns, prosecutors said Friday. The trial is set to hear explosive evidence that the rightwinger, along with 12 other co-defendants, conspired to take cash from the Libyan leader to illegally fund his victorious 2007 bid for the presidency.