

# Kremlin: Russia Has Adapted to Western Sanctions



Employees pass beneath pipes leading to oil storage tanks at the central processing plant for oil and gas at the Salym Petroleum Development oil fields near the Bazhenov shale formation in Salym, Russia.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- Russia's economy has adapted well to years of Western sanctions and so it does not fear the prospect of more such measures, the Kremlin said on Tuesday.

The European Union, which has imposed 11 sanctions packages against Russia since Moscow sent its armed forces into Ukraine in February 2022, said last week it was trying to shut loopholes in existing sanctions, while Poland has proposed further measures.

EU officials have also suggest-

ed the sanctions could remain in place for years after the conflict in Ukraine ends.

Asked about such a prospect, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: "Russia has been living under a sanctions regime for quite a long time, for decades, and we have sufficiently adapted to it, so such time horizons as five-to-10 years do not scare us."

"As for new packages, yes, they are being prepared, this is quite well known and predictable ... We can only wait to see what else our

opponents will come up with," he said in a regular call with reporters.

Russia argues that the sanctions have helped to boost domestic industrial production and says they will never deter it from pursuing what it sees as its vital national interests in Ukraine.

Moscow accuses Western powers of using Ukraine to attempt to weaken and undermine Russia's own security.

Peskov on Tuesday denied claims by former president Donald Trump that Russia stole information on a "super-duper missile" from the U.S.

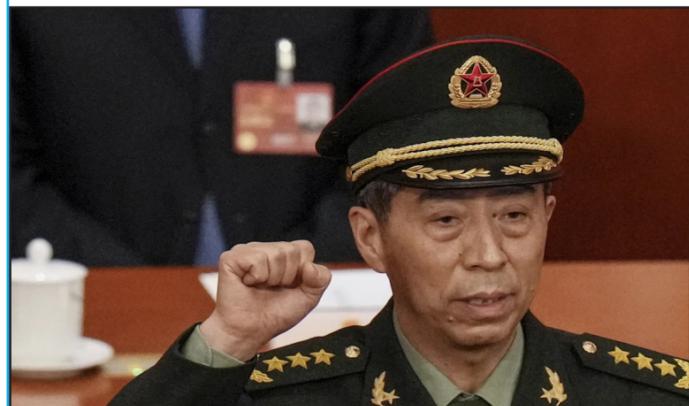
"We have our own rocket, a wonderful rocket," he said.

Peskov said that it is difficult to say whether Russia's missile fits Trump's description of a "super-duper," but that it is "a good missile that has no analogues in the world yet."

Peskov said that Russia has "more than one" of such missiles.

Earlier, Trump claimed during a campaign rally in Derry, New Hampshire that Russia stole classified plans for "a super-duper missile" during the administration of Barack Obama.

## China Announces Removal of Defense Minister



Former Chinese Defense Minister Gen. Li Shangfu takes his oath during a session of China's National People's Congress (NPC) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on March 12, 2023.

TAIPEI, Taiwan (Dispatches) — China has replaced Defense Minister Gen. Li Shangfu, who has been out of public view for almost two months, state media reported Tuesday.

Li is the second senior Chinese official to disappear this year, following former Foreign Minister Qin Gang, who was removed from office in July with no explanation offered.

Li, who became defense minister during a Cabinet reshuffle in March, hasn't been seen since giving a speech on Aug. 29. There is no indication that the disappearances of Qin and Li signal a change in China's foreign or defense policies, although they have raised questions about the resilience of president and ruling Communist Party leader Xi Jinping's circle of power.

Xi has a reputation for valuing

loyalty above all and has relentlessly attacked corruption in public and private amid rising tensions with U.S. over trade, technology and Taiwan.

Li is under U.S. sanctions related to his overseeing weapon purchases from Russia that bar him from entering the country. China has since cut off contacts with the U.S. military, mainly in protest over U.S. arm sales to Taiwan, but also strongly implying that Washington must lift the measures against Li, which Beijing refuses to publicly recognize.

The announcement from state broadcaster CCTV said that both Li and Qin had been removed from the State Council, China's Cabinet and the center of government power. That virtually assures the end of their political careers, although it remains unclear whether they will face prosecution or other legal sanctions.

CCTV also announced Lan Fo'an's new appointment as finance minister, and Yin He'jun as science and technology minister.

China's top diplomat will visit the United States on Thursday for a three-day visit, the latest move by Washington and Beijing to keep high-level talks open amid tense bilateral relations.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi is scheduled to meet with Secretary of State Antony Blinken and national security adviser Jake Sullivan over a range of issues, including the Israel-Hamas conflict, the Ukraine war and a recent vessel collision in the South China Sea, according to senior administration officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to preview the trip.

Wang's trip to Washington will come just about three weeks ahead of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in San Francisco, where it's possible that President Joe Biden and Xi will meet. The officials did not confirm the leaders' meeting, nor did they say if Wang's visit would prepare for such a meeting. Instead, Wang's trip was described as reciprocal to Blinken's visit to Beijing in June.

Wang plans to make clear China's "position and principles on the relationship with the U.S. and our legitimate concerns," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said at a daily briefing on Tuesday.

China hopes to "jointly push the bilateral relationship back to the track of sound and stable development," Mao said, reflecting a more upbeat tone than the one heard from Beijing in recent weeks.

## New Zealand Opens Inquiry Into Massacre of Muslims



Farid Ahmed, survivor of the Christchurch shootings where her wife Husna was killed, is joined in prayer with his neighbors, during his visit to offer thanks for their support, in Christchurch, New Zealand, March 24, 2019.

WELLINGTON (AFP) -- An inquest into New Zealand's 2019 mosque killings opened Tuesday, with relatives of the 51 people who died in the massacre hoping to discover if any lives could have been saved.

White supremacist Brenton Tarrant shot and killed 51 Muslim worshippers at two Christchurch mosques on March 15, 2019, in New Zealand's deadliest modern-day mass shooting.

Deputy chief coroner Brigitte Windley opened the inquiry in Christchurch, saying it would "look at what we may learn from this atrocity and speak for those who have lost their lives in an effort to protect the living".

Maha Galal, spokesperson for the "15 March Whanau Trust" representing some of the victims' relatives, said there was an "urgent need for answers".

"Our paramount concern is to comprehend the truth," Galal said in a statement before the inquiry began.

Family and friends packed the courtroom for the emotionally charged opening session, which included a moving video tribute to each of the 51 victims.

Detective Senior Sergeant Craig Farrant then gave an outline of the attacks, saying 49 people were murdered in the space of 19 minutes -- with two more later dying of their injuries in hospital.

The detective described the homicide investigation launched in the wake of the attacks as "the largest" ever undertaken by New Zealand police, "with the size and scope of the offending being unprecedented in our history".

Observers were shown a harrowing video depicting Tarrant's movements around Christchurch on the day of the attack, including footage he had filmed using a GoPro camera.

Tarrant's first attack on the Al Noor mosque would ultimately result in 44 people dying. He then drove about 10 minutes to the nearby Linwood Islamic Centre, where he would kill seven more worshippers.

The inquest will examine the response times of police and emergency services, the medical response at each of the mosques, whether Tarrant was helped in planning the attack, and whether any lives could have been saved.

"This pursuit of truth is crucial for healing and closure," said Galal.

The families of the victims "are united in their pursuit of understanding, seeking clarity on whether their loved ones could have survived", Galal added.

The killings carried out by Tarrant, an Australian former chief instructor from the rural New South Wales town of Grafton, horrified New Zealand and sparked global revulsion.

After admitting to 51 charges of murder, 40 of attempted murder and one of terrorism, he was sentenced in August 2020 to life imprisonment without parole.

In his sentencing, Judge Cameron Mander said Tarrant's "warped" ideology and "base hatred" led him to murder defenseless men, women and children.

Tarrant had livestreamed the killings on social media and published a manifesto online before carrying out the attacks.

## Spain's Socialist, Hard-Left Parties Agree to Form Gov't



Spain's acting prime minister Pedro Sanchez (center) poses with his ministers for a group picture before their first council meeting at Moncloa Palace on January 14, 2023 in Madrid

MADRID (Reuters) -- Spain's Socialist Party and the hard-left Sumar have reached an agreement in an effort to form a new government after an inconclusive election three months ago left the country with a hung parliament.

Their potential coalition would need to win the backing of other parties in parliament.

The deal, which came after acting prime minister Pedro Sanchez met with Sumar leader and acting labor minister Yolanda Diaz on Monday, includes a proposal to reduce working hours while preserving the same pay.

It would reduce the official working week to 37.5 hours from the current cap of 40 hours, Sumar's spokesperson Ernest Urtao told state broadcaster TVE.

The two parties also committed to regulate job cuts, which in Spain were made more flexible in the 2012 labor reform.

The parties said they would also revise the targets for emission reductions upwards and push for a tax reform targeting banks and large energy companies, extending the controversial windfall profit levies currently in force.

"This governing deal for a four-year legislative term will allow our country to

continue growing in a sustainable manner and with quality employment, developing policies based on social and climate justice while broadening rights, feminist conquests and freedoms," the parties said in a joint statement.

The agreement also includes plans to reduce youth unemployment, reinforce the public healthcare system, and boost public housing, the statement added.

Sanchez requires the support of Sumar's 31 lower-house lawmakers - as well as from other parties, including some advocating for Catalan and Basque independence - in his bid to renew his term as premier.

While Sumar's support is crucial, it is not enough to secure Sanchez's investiture in the lower house. He still needs the backing of Catalan separatists, who are demanding an amnesty law to mass pardon people involved in the region's failed independence bid of 2017.

If the Socialists and Catalan pro-independence parties fail to reach an agreement, the country will go to another election in January in which voters could hand a centre and far-right coalition the absolute majority it narrowly missed out on in the July vote.



MOSCOW (Reuters) -- Russian naval forces destroyed three uncrewed Ukraine-launched boats in the northern part of the Black Sea off the Crimean Peninsula, Russia's defense ministry said on Tuesday. "Anti-sabotage missiles and bombs hit the area where the unmanned boats were detected," the ministry said on the Telegram messaging app. It added that an anti-mining and "anti-sabotage" operation was being carried out off Sevastopol port, which is home to Russia's Black Sea Fleet. Ukraine has intensified its attacks on Crimea since midsummer, trying to undermine Russia's efforts in the 20-month-long war. Russia seized and annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014. In September, Kyiv said it damaged two naval vessels and struck Sevastopol's port infrastructure in what appeared to be the biggest attack of the war there. The Kremlin uses Sevastopol and the Black Sea Fleet to project power into the Middle East and Mediterranean and - during the war in Ukraine - to impose a de facto blockade on Ukraine's seaborne food exports via the Turkish straits.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- Officials from the United States and China held a two-hour long virtual meeting to discuss domestic and global macroeconomic developments, the U.S. Treasury Department said, calling the meeting "productive and substantive". Senior officials from both sides have been meeting each other in recent months to lay the ground for an expected meeting between U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping in San Francisco in November. "Today, the United States and the People's Republic of China held the first meeting of the Economic Working Group (EWG), which serves as an ongoing channel to discuss and facilitate progress on bilateral economic policy matters," the Treasury Department said. U.S. officials also raised "areas of concern," the Treasury Department said without elaborating. The meeting was led by senior officials from the U.S. Treasury Department and China's finance ministry. The EWG was launched last month following U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's trip to Beijing in July. It was launched in parallel with a financial working group, which will hold its first meeting on Wednesday.

BANGKOK (Reuters) -- The Thai government may buy a frigate instead of a submarine from China after the Chinese manufacturer was unable to include a German engine as specified in the original deal, Thailand's defense minister has said.

Thailand has already paid a 7 billion baht (\$193.7 million) instalment to China for the purchase of one of three Yuan Class S26T submarines with German-made diesel engines, but the deal was delayed when Germany forbade the use of its engines for Chinese military exports. China has proposed replacing the German engines with Chinese-made equipment several rounds of negotiations did not yield a conclusive result. The new Thai government, which was sworn in last month after a May general election, said it has suggested during Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin's visit to Beijing for the Belt and Road Summit last week that it wants to buy a frigate instead of a submarine. The defense minister said last week that procurement of submarine would be shelved for now and resume "when the country is ready".

BERLIN (Reuters) -- Several people are missing after two freighters collided near the German North Sea island of Heligoland, the central command for maritime emergencies said on Tuesday. The Polesie and Verity vessels collided at around 0300 GMT about 12 nautical miles (22 kilometers) southwest of Heligoland, likely causing the Verity to sink, central command said in a statement. One person was rescued from the water and is receiving medical treatment, while several others are still missing, it added. The rescue operation includes a rescue cruiser, police boats, a sensor aircraft and a helicopter, among other vessels. The Polesie, which was carrying 22 passengers, is still waterborne, according to the authorities. The Verity was on its way from Bremen to the English town of Immingham. The Polesie was sailing from Hamburg to La Coruna in Spain.

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- The Kremlin on Tuesday denied a report that President Vladimir Putin was ill, and laughed off persistent rumors that he used body doubles to cover for him in public appearances. "Everything is fine with him, this is absolutely another fake," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said when asked about an uncorroborated report by a Russian Telegram channel, picked up by some Western media, that the president had suffered a serious health episode on Sunday evening. The spokesman laughed in response to a further question about body doubles, and denied that Putin had any. "This belongs to the category of absurd information hoaxes that a whole series of media discuss with enviable tenacity. This evokes nothing but a smile," Peskov said. Putin, a "judo enthusiast who has long cultivated an 'action man' image, turned 71 on Oct. 7. He maintains an intensive schedule of meetings and public appearances, many of them televised. His recent program included a visit to China last week, with stop-offs in two Russian cities on the way back.

## AI 'Godfathers': Tech Development 'Utterly Reckless' Without Checks

STOCKHOLM (Guardian) -- Powerful artificial intelligence systems threaten social stability and AI companies must be made liable for harms caused by their products, a group of senior experts including two "godfathers" of the technology has warned.

Tuesday's intervention was made as international politicians, tech companies, academics and civil society figures prepare to gather at Bletchley Park next week for a summit on AI safety.

A co-author of the policy proposals from 23 experts said it was "utterly reckless" to pursue ever more powerful AI systems before understanding how to make them safe. "It's time to get serious about advanced AI systems," said Stuart Russell, professor of computer science at the University of California, Berkeley. "These are not toys. Increasing their capabilities before we understand how to make them safe is utterly reckless."

He added: "There are more regulations on sandwich shops than there are on AI companies."

The document urged governments to adopt a range of policies, including:

Other co-authors of the document include Geoffrey Hinton and Yoshua Bengio, two of the three "godfathers of AI", who won the ACM Turing award -- the computer science equivalent of the Nobel prize -- in 2018 for their work on AI.

Both are among the 100 guests invited to attend the summit. Hinton resigned from Google this year to sound a warning about what he called the "existential risk" posed by digital intelligence while Bengio, a professor of computer science at the University of Montreal, joined him and thousands of other experts in signing a letter in March calling for a moratorium in giant AI experiments.

Other co-authors of the proposals include the bestselling author of Sapiens, Yuval Noah Harari, Daniel Kahneman, a Nobel laureate in economics, and Sheila McLraith, a professor in AI at the University of Toronto, as well as award-winning Chinese computer scientist Andy Yao.