

U.S. Authorizes \$571mn in Military Aid to Taiwan



Taiwanese soldiers carrying artillery during a live-fire drill.

WASHINGTON (AFP) – U.S. President Joe Biden has approved \$571.3 million in military assistance for Taiwan, the White House said, as the Democrat prepares to leave office ahead of the January inauguration of Donald Trump.

The United States does not officially recognize Taiwan diplomatically but it is the island's strategic ally and largest supplier of weapons.

China, which has ramped up political and military pressure on Taiwan in recent years, has repeatedly called for Washington to cease sending arms and assistance to the

island, which it claims as part of its territory.

Taiwanese officials said China held its biggest maritime drills in years last week, with around 90 ships deployed from near the southern islands of Japan to the South China Sea.

Beijing did not confirm the drills.

The White House said in a brief statement that Biden had authorized the drawdown "of up to \$571.3 million in military articles and services of the Department of Defense, and military education and training, to provide assistance to Taiwan."

The statement did not provide

details of the military assistance package, which comes less than three months after a similar package worth \$567 million was authorized.

Taiwan earlier this week received 38 advanced Abrams battle tanks from the United States, reportedly its first new tanks in 30 years.

On Saturday, the Ministry of National Defense thanked the United States for "its firm security commitment to Taiwan."

"Taiwan and the United States will continue to cooperate closely on security issues to maintain peace, stability and the status quo across the Taiwan Strait," the ministry said in a statement.

It said it would not comment on the "content" of the assistance "based on the tacit agreement between Taiwan and the United States."

Beijing has regularly expressed anger at international support for Taipei and accused Washington of meddling in its affairs.

China maintains a near-daily presence of fighter jets, drones and warships around the island.

Beijing has said it will never renounce the use of force to bring Taiwan under its control and has also stepped up rhetoric about "unification" being "inevitable."

Car Ramming in Germany Kills at Least 5, Leaves Hundreds Injured

BERLIN (Dispatches) – A car attack at a Christmas market in Magdeburg, eastern Germany, has left at least five people dead and hundreds injured in what authorities have described as a terror incident.

Eyewitness accounts cited by local media described the dark BMW ploughing through the crowd near the town hall, driving directly into the packed market.

The suspected driver, identified as a Saudi citizen by unnamed government officials in the state of Saxony-Anhalt, was arrested at the scene shortly after the attack. German authorities did not clarify whether the man was also a German citizen. However, according to the German newspaper Welt, he was born in Saudi Arabia.

German news agency Deutsche Presse-Agentur, citing sources in Saxony-Anhalt's government, revealed that the suspect had rented the vehicle shortly before the assault.

The market area was swiftly evacuated by authorities, with police and emergency personnel cordoning off the scene.

The minister president of Saxony-Anhalt, Reiner Haseloff, provided further details about the suspect.

The arrested man, a 50-year-old originally from Saudi Arabia, reportedly arrived in Germany in



An injured person lies on a stretcher as police and ambulances stand near a Christmas market in Magdeburg, eastern Germany.

2006 and had been working as a physician.

The driver responsible for the Christmas market attack was quickly detained and later identified as Taleb A., a 50-year-old psychiatrist from Saudi Arabia. According to local authorities, he has been residing in Germany since 2006 and was granted refugee status in 2016.

Social media activity uncovered by reporters appeared to show the man had posted support for a number of far-right anti-Muslim politicians such as Geert Wilders and the AfD in Germany.

Witnesses at the scene captured

footage of the suspect lying on the ground next to his severely damaged car, with a police officer aiming a weapon at him. Shocked bystanders watched the tense moment unfold.

Since the 2016 attack in Berlin, where a man drove a truck into a crowd at a Christmas market, security has become a significant concern. The attack claimed 13 lives and injured many others, with the perpetrator later killed in a shootout in Italy.

Police have confirmed they are not seeking any additional suspects at this time.

France Begins Withdrawing Troops From Chad



France began withdrawing soldiers on Friday from Chad, the Chadian Defense Ministry said.

PARIS (AFP) – France has begun withdrawing soldiers from Chad, the country's defence ministry said, after N'Djamena last month abruptly ended military cooperation with the former colonial power.

A contingent of 120 soldiers left for France from a military airport in the capital, the ministry said in a statement on Facebook, 10 days after French fighter aircraft left the Sahel country for good.

Chad had been a key link in France's military presence in Africa and its last foothold in the wider Sahel region after the forced withdrawal of French troops from Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger in the wake of a series of military coups.

But it announced on November 28 its decision to end a long-standing defence accord with Paris.

"At midday, 120 French soldiers took off from the military airport of N'Djamena on board an Airbus A330 Phoenix MRTT, headed for France," the ministry said in a statement on Facebook.

The French army, which had some 1,000 personnel in the country, did not immediately comment on the announcement.

The departure on Friday of French soldiers took place in the presence of Chadian military authorities, which "testifies to the intensity of cooperation between

the two countries in the field of security," the statement said.

French soldiers and fighter aircraft have been stationed in Chad almost continuously since the country's independence in 1960, helping to train the Chadian military.

The planes provided air support that proved crucial on several occasions in stopping rebels moving to seize power.

Chad's decision to break military ties with France came only hours after a visit by French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot, whose delegation appeared not to have seen it coming.

The central African country was the last Sahel nation to host French troops.

Its decision also came shortly after Senegal's President Bassirou Diomaye Faye told AFP in an interview that France should close its military bases there.

Military equipment will leave Chad on an Antonov 124 plane planned for the coming days, the Chadian ministry statement said.

Military vehicles from three French bases are also due to be repatriated to France via the Cameroonian port of Douala, it added.

The military authorities in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have pivoted towards Russia in recent years.

Rival Protests in Seoul Over South Korea's Impeached President

SEOUL (Reuters) – Demonstrators supporting and opposing South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol held rival protests several hundred meters apart in Seoul on Saturday, a week after he was impeached over his short-lived declaration of martial law.

Yoon's presidential powers are suspended but he remains in office. He has not complied with various summonses by authorities investigating whether martial law, which he declared late on Dec. 3 and rescinded hours later, constituted insurrection.

He has also not responded to attempts to contact him by the Constitutional Court, which decides whether to remove him from office or restore his presidential powers. The court plans to hold its first preparatory hearing on Friday.

Saturday's pro- and anti-Yoon protests were held in Gwanghwamun in the heart of the capital. There were no clashes as of 4 p.m. (0700 GMT).

Tens of thousands of anti-Yoon protesters, dominated by people in their 20s and 30s, gathered

around 3 p.m., waving K-Pop light sticks and signs with sayings such as "Arrest! Imprison! Insurrection chief Yoon Suk Yeol!" to catchy K-pop tunes.

"I wanted to ask Yoon how he could do this to a democracy in the 21st century, and I think if he really has a conscience, he should step down," said 27-year-old Cho Sung-hyo.

Several thousand pro-Yoon protesters, chiefly older and more conservative people opposing Yoon's removal and supporting the restoration of his powers, had gathered since around midday.

"These rigged (parliamentary) elections eat away at this country, and at the core are socialist communist powers, so about 10 of us came together and said the same thing — we absolutely oppose impeachment," said Lee Young-su, a 62-year-old businessman.

Yoon had cited claims of election hacking and "anti-state" pro-North Korean sympathizers as justification for imposing the martial law, which the National Election Commission has denied.

Russia Takes Village Near Donetsk, Ukraine Strikes Deep Into Russia

KYIV (Dispatches) – Ukrainian drones have hit residential buildings in the Russian city of Kazan, more than 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) from the front line, bringing the war deep into the heart of Russia.

The Russian Ministry of Defence said the city, located some 800km (500 miles) east of Moscow, was attacked by three waves of drones between 7:40am and 9:20am (04:40 and 06:20 GMT) on Saturday.

Eight drones were used in the attack, according to the press service of the Tatarstan regional government. Six hit residential buildings, one hit an industrial facility and another was shot down over a river, it said in a statement.

Local authorities said there were no casualties. Ukraine did not acknowledge the attack in keeping with its security policy.

The Kazan airport temporarily halted flight arrivals and departures, Russia's aviation watchdog Rosaviatsia said via Telegram.

The incident comes amid growingly brazen attacks after Russia's President Vladimir Putin proposed a "high-tech duel" with Kyiv during his end-of-year news conference on Thursday, suggesting he would test his claims that Russia's new hypersonic ballistic missile was impervious to air defenses.

On Friday, at least one person was killed and seven were wounded after Russian hypersonic missiles hit Ukraine's capital Kyiv.

Ukraine targeted the town of Rylsk near Russia's Kursk border region on the same day, deploying United States-supplied missiles in an attack that killed six people, including a child.

Ukrainian officials said Moscow sent 113 drones into Ukraine over-

night into Saturday, 57 of which were shot down. Another 56 drones were "lost," likely having been electronically jammed.

Ukraine's air force said Russia also fired one S-400 missile at central Ukraine but that there was no damage from it.

Moscow has been launching near-daily attacks with dozens of drones at Ukraine in an effort to exhaust its air defenses.

Russia is also continuing its battle to take control of the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine. On Saturday, the defence ministry claimed its troops captured the village of Kostiantynopolske, called Ostrovsky by Russia.

The settlement lies 10km (six miles) southwest of Kurakhove, which Russian troops have stormed and are threatening to encircle, according to DeepState, a Ukrainian group mapping the fighting.

News in Brief

KARACHI (Reuters) – Twenty-five civilians were sentenced by a Pakistani military court to periods of two to 10 years of "rigorous imprisonment" in connection with attacks on military facilities in 2023, the armed forces' media wing said on Saturday. The ruling underscores concerns among supporters of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan that military courts are going to play a bigger role in cases involving the 72-year-old, who is facing multiple charges including allegedly inciting attacks against the armed forces. Thousands of Khan supporters stormed military installations and torched a general's house on May 9, 2023 to protest against the former premier's arrest by paramilitary soldiers. At least eight people were killed.

BEIJING (Anadolu) – China on Saturday called on the U.S. to close the Guantanamo detention facility and end its "illegal occupation" of Cuba. The U.S. has "long unlawfully occupied part of Guantanamo Bay, and carried out arbitrary detention and used torture to extract confessions at the detention facility there," Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian said during a press briefing in Beijing. His comments came after the U.S. recently transferred several detainees out of Guantanamo prison. "The U.S. needs to immediately stop illegally occupying Cuba's territory, stop the bullying and blockade on Cuba, close the 'black site' and pull out of the base at Guantanamo as soon as possible, give the Cuban people's land back to them, and remove Cuba from the list of 'state sponsors of terrorism'," Lin said, according to a transcript released by ministry. He said Washington has "repeatedly failed to keep its promise of closing this U.S.-run concentration camp" which "will only add another stain to the poor U.S. track record on human rights and expose the emptiness of U.S. commitment to human rights."

NEW YORK (Reuters) – More than 700 people have been killed in Al-Fashir in Sudan's North Darfur state since May, the UN human rights chief says, imploring the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) to halt a siege of the city. The siege and "the relentless fighting are devastating lives every day on a massive scale," UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk said in a statement. "This alarming situation cannot continue. The Rapid Support Forces must end this horrible siege." The UN rights office said it had documented the deaths of at least 782 civilians and more than 1,143 injured since May, citing evidence based partly on interviews of those who had fled the area. It said the casualties came amid regular and intensive shelling by the RSF of densely populated residential areas as well as recent air strikes by the Sudanese Armed Forces.

WASHINGTON (CBW News) – Workers at Starbucks stores began a five-day strike Friday to protest lack of progress in contract negotiations with the company. The strikes by baristas and other workers were scheduled to take place in Los Angeles, Chicago and Seattle and could spread to hundreds of stores across the country by Christmas Eve. Starbucks Workers United, the union organizing Starbucks' baristas, said at least 10 locations were closed down as of midday Friday. In Los Angeles, striking Starbucks barista Cassie Pritchard told CBS News Friday that workers are looking for "fair wages that are livable...you should be able to afford rent, food and healthcare." Pritchard said Starbucks' offer of a 1.5% yearly raise won't even keep up with inflation. "It's a pay cut in reality," Pritchard said, adding, "It's a nominal pay raise, but it's only in name." The walkouts came a day after the Teamsters union announced strikes at seven Amazon delivery hubs.

ISLAMABAD (AFP) – The Pakistani Taliban claimed a brazen overnight raid on an army outpost near the border with Afghanistan on Saturday, which intelligence officials said killed 16 soldiers and critically wounded five more. The siege started after midnight and lasted about two hours as around 30 militants pummeled the mountainous outpost from three sides, one senior intelligence official told AFP on condition of anonymity. "Sixteen soldiers were martyred and five were critically injured in the assault," he said. "The militants set fire to the wireless communication equipment, documents and other items present at the checkpoint." A second intelligence official also anonymously confirmed the toll of dead and wounded in the attack in the Maken area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, 40 kilometers (24 miles) from the Afghan border. Pakistan's domestic chapter of the Taliban claimed the attack in a statement, saying it was staged "in retaliation for the martyrdom of our senior commanders". The group claimed to have seized a hoard of military gear including machine guns and a night vision device.

LONDON (Reuters) – The Russian embassy in London on Saturday described Britain's planned transfer to Ukraine of more than 2 billion pounds (\$2.5 billion) backed by frozen Russian assets as a "fraudulent scheme." Britain said in October it would lend Ukraine 2.26 billion pounds as part of a much larger loan from the Group of Seven nations backed by frozen Russian central bank assets to help buy weapons and rebuild damaged infrastructure. The loans were agreed in July by leaders of the G7 — Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the U.S. — along with top officials from the European Union, where most of the Russian assets frozen as a result of the war are held. "We are closely following UK authorities' efforts aimed at implementing a fraudulent scheme of expropriating incomes from Russian state assets 'frozen' in the EU," the Russian embassy in London said on social media.