

# Moscow Warns NATO Over Drills Near Russian Border



**Servicemen fire a heavy machine gun from a warship on the river Danube during a Romanian Navy led exercise outside Mahmudia, Romania, March 30, 2023.**

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova on Wednesday said that the upcoming NATO exercises near the Russian border increase the risks of military incidents.

NATO exercises are scheduled to begin on Friday in Finland near the Russian-Finnish border.

"The alliance continues the practical military development of a once neutral state, an authoritative participant in discussions on strengthening stability and security," Zakharova said, cited by Russia's RIA Novosti news agency.

Zakharova said that the Russian government is keeping a close watch on "the aggressive actions of the collective West."

She added that Russia is prepared to take "all necessary political and military-technical measures" to counter any threats to its national defense capabilities.

Fires broke out at fuel and energy facilities in the Smolensk Region in Russia, as the Ukrainian armed forces launched a drone attack,

said the region's governor Vasily Anokhin on Wednesday.

The region is "again under attack by Ukrainian unmanned aerial vehicles," the governor said on Telegram, adding that the staff of the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations is working on site and asked residents to remain calm.

The Russian air defense forces are fighting against air targets, he continued, noting in all likelihood, the fires occurred as a result of the Ukrainian attack on civilian fuel and energy facilities in the Smolensk and Yartsevo districts.

The Kremlin said on Wednesday Russia will need to push Ukrainian forces further back and expand what it regards as a "buffer zone" if Kyiv takes delivery of advanced longer-range ATACM guided missile systems from the United States.

The White House last October said it had provided Kiev with a type of ATACMS capable of hitting targets up to 165 kilometers (102 miles) away. But a new U.S. package being prepared now after

a long-delayed aid bill was approved by Congress is expected to include a longer 300 km (186-mile) range type.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on Monday that Kiev would be receiving the long-range ATACMS and thanked Washington.

That raises the prospect of Ukraine using those missiles to strike targets deeper inside territory controlled by Russian forces, particularly in Russian-annexed Crimea.

The ATACMS (Army Tactical Missile Systems) are mounted on trucks and can travel at speeds of Mach 3, considerably faster than British and French cruise missiles currently in Ukraine's armoury.

When asked on Wednesday about the move, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia's stance, which it has set out several times, had not changed.

"Nothing changes in that regard," Peskov said.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Wednesday that Europe must continue to step up its help for Ukraine even after the approval of a big U.S. aid package, but made clear that he's sticking to his refusal to send Taurus long-range cruise missiles to Kyiv.

Scholz spoke after meeting British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in Berlin. The two countries are Europe's biggest suppliers of military assistance to Ukraine, and both vowed to keep that up "for as long as it takes."

Ukraine's cause was boosted this week by the approval in Congress of a \$61 billion U.S. military aid package that had been held up for months. Scholz described it as "an encouraging and necessary signal."

# China: U.S. Military Aid Pushing Taiwan Into 'Dangerous Situation'



**In this photo released by the Taiwan Presidential Office, U.S. Democratic Congressman Dan Kildee, left, meets with Taiwan President-elect and Vice President Lai Ching-te in Taipei, Taiwan on April 23.**

BEIJING (Dispatches) — China on Wednesday blasted the latest package of U.S. military assistance to Taiwan on Wednesday, saying that such funding was pushing the island into a "dangerous situation."

The U.S. Senate late Tuesday passed \$95 billion in war aid to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan after months of delays and contentious debate over how involved the United States should be in foreign wars.

The mainland's Taiwan Affairs Office said the aid "seriously violates" U.S. commitments to China and "sends a wrong signal to the Taiwan independence separatist forces."

China has reiterated its firm opposition to any official contact between the United States and the Chinese Taipei, urging Washington to stop sending wrong signals to separatist forces in the self-ruled island.

Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning at a regular press conference had said that "There is only one China in the world. Taiwan is

an inalienable part of China. China firmly opposes the U.S. having any form of official contact with the Taiwan region," Ning said.

China said the U.S. "needs to earnestly abide by the one-China principle and stipulations of the three China-U.S. joint communiqués, prudently and properly handle Taiwan-related issues, and stop official contact with the Taiwan region."

The package covers a wide range of parts and services aimed at maintaining and upgrading Taiwan's military hardware. Separately, Taiwan has signed billions in contracts with the U.S. for latest-generation F-16V fighter jets, M1 Abrams main battle tanks and the HIMARS rocket system, which the U.S. has also supplied to Ukraine.

Taiwan has also been expanding its own defense industry, building submarines and trainer jets. Next month, it plans to commission its third and fourth domestically designed and built stealth corvettes to counter the

## News in Brief

SEOUL (Reuters) - Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, said the country will continue to build overwhelming and the strongest military power to protect its sovereignty and regional peace, the North's KCNA news agency reported on Wednesday. Kim said a series of military exercises by the U.S. military in the region this year starting with live-fire drills conducted with the "South Korean puppet military gangsters" are driving the regional security environment into a dangerous turmoil.

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Families of the victims of two fatal Boeing 737 MAX crashes in 2018 and 2019 will press U.S. Justice Department officials Wednesday to criminally prosecute the planemaker after a January in-flight blowout exposed continuing safety and quality issues. Relatives and their lawyers are expected to argue that Boeing, opens new tab violated a 2021 deal with prosecutors to overhaul its compliance program following the crashes, which killed 346 people. Federal prosecutors agreed to ask a judge to dismiss a criminal charge against Boeing so long as it complied with the deal's terms over a three-year period.

LONDON (AP) — Just a few hours earlier the UK Parliament approved legislation allowing the government to deport to Rwanda those who enter the country illegally, five more people died in the English Channel, underscoring the risks of crossing one of the world's busiest sea lanes in over-looked inflatable boats just hours after British lawmakers approved a controversial migrant bill to stop the traffic. The migrants, including a 7-year-old girl, died when their boat got stuck on a sandbank off the coast of Pas-de-Calais in northern France. The French navy rescued 49 people, but 58 others refused to disembark and continued on toward Britain, local authorities said in a statement.

LONDON (Reuters) - A number of military horses, including one covered in blood, ran amok on the streets of central London and injured at least four people on Wednesday. The bizarre scenes unfolded in the heart of London, near Buckingham Palace and the seat of the British government, with the runaway animals galloping past bewildered Londoners going about their morning commute. "A number of military working horses became loose during a routine exercise this morning. All of the horses have now been recovered and returned to camp," a British army spokesperson said in a statement.

WELLINGTON - International scientists have been working to save the "missing piece in the puzzle" of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet melt in the Ross Sea region, which can be prevented if a low-emissions pathway is kept to. Collapse of the ice sheet represents over 5 meters of potential global sea level rise, so understanding the melting of the ice sheet is critical for forecasting how much and how fast seas will rise around the world, scientists from New Zealand's GNS Science, Victoria University of Wellington, and the U.S. Los Alamos National Laboratory said on Wednesday.

# Amnesty Denounces 'Ongoing Erosion' of Human Rights in France



**Protesters face elite French police officers during a demonstration in support of Palestinians at Place de la Republique in Paris on 19 October, 2023.**

PARIS (AFP) - French authorities in 2023 imposed excessive and illegitimate restrictions on people's right to demonstrate, the rights group Amnesty International said in a report published Wednesday.

It pointed in particular to clamp-downs on protests that saw arrests and the use of force during rallies against issues such as the government's unpopular pensions reform, plans to build "mega-basin" water reservoirs in rural France, and the war in Gaza.

Amnesty's 2023 annual report accuses the government of systemic racism and discrimination, as well as stifling civil liberties.

"French authorities repeatedly imposed excessive, disproportionate, and illegitimate restrictions on the right to demonstrate," the report said.

"In October, the Minister of the Interior sent a message to police prefects asking them to ban any demonstration organized in solidarity with Palestine, which constituted

a disproportionate and discriminatory attack on the right to peaceful assembly," the report said.

Restrictions on protests, it added, were taking place alongside persistent racial profiling and discrimination against religious minorities.

Muslim women and individuals perceived as black or Arab were identified as particular targets.

Amnesty denounced what it said were aggressive policing tactics including the arbitrary confiscation of protest equipment and the dispersion of gatherings through the use of force, including indiscriminate baton charges.

The government, it added, had failed to address racism within law enforcement agencies.

"French authorities have failed to acknowledge the systemic nature of racial profiling, discrimination against religious minorities, and excessive use of force during protests," said Nathalie Godard, director of action at Amnesty France.

The report also raises concerns about the erosion of civil liberties, citing the introduction of AI-powered surveillance and vague laws on terrorist propaganda, which it said risked infringing on freedom of expression.

# Argentina's Milei Faces Biggest Protest Yet Over Budget Cuts



**People hold signs after Argentine university students, unions and social groups gathered in front of Casa Rosada government house to protest against President Javier Milei's "chainsaw" cuts on public education, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, April 23, 2024.**

BUENOS AIRES (Reuters) - Hundreds of thousands of Argentines took to the streets of Buenos Aires on Tuesday in an anti-government march against budget cuts to public universities, the biggest protest yet against President Javier Milei's painful austerity measures.

The demonstrations are the latest example of rising tension over spending cuts that are helping undo a deep fiscal deficit but causing hardship in

the real economy.

In the union-backed marches in the capital and beyond, banners were held aloft in the southern autumn sunshine reading "Defend the public universities," "Studying is a right," and "Up with the budget, down with Milei's plan."

"I'm here to defend the public universities," said Pedro Palm, an 82-year-old architect who graduated from the prestigious University of Buenos Aires (UBA), which recently warned it might have to shut its doors after its budget was slashed.

Milei, dealing with an inherited economic crisis after years of government over-spending, is employing "chainsaw" budget cuts that helped the state post three months of fiscal surpluses at the start of the year.

But the cuts have squeezed the public sector badly. Argentina's public universities like UBA, which offer free undergraduate education, rely heavily on government funding.

"Education is one of the fundamental pillars of our ideology. We have no desire to close the universities," said presidential spokesperson Manuel Adorni, defending the government's stance and calling for a peaceful march.

# Portugal Must 'Pay Costs' of Slavery, Colonial Crimes, Says President

LISBON (Reuters) - Portugal's President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa said late on Tuesday that Portugal was responsible for crimes committed during transatlantic slavery and the colonial era, and suggested there was a need for reparations.

For over four centuries, at least 12.5 million Africans were kidnapped, forcibly transported long distances by mainly European ships and merchants, and sold into slavery.

Those who survived the voyage ended up toiling on plantations in

the Americas, mostly in Brazil and the Caribbean, while others profited from their labor.

Portugal laborer nearly 6 million Africans, more than any other European nation, but has failed so far to confront its past and little is taught about its role in transatlantic slavery in schools.

Instead, Portugal's colonial era, during which countries including Angola, Mozambique, Brazil, Cape Verde and East Timor as well as parts of India were subjected to Portuguese

rule, is often perceived as a source of pride.

Speaking at an event with foreign correspondents late on Tuesday, Rebelo de Sousa said Portugal "takes full responsibility" for the wrongs of the past and that those crimes, including colonial massacres, had "costs."

"We have to pay the costs," he said. "Are there actions that were not punished and those responsible were not arrested? Are there goods that were looted and not returned? Let's see how we can repair this."

The idea of paying reparations or making other amends for transatlantic slavery has been gaining momentum worldwide, including efforts to establish a special tribunal on the issue.

Activists have said that reparations and public policies to fight inequalities caused by Portugal's past, including systemic racism, are essential.

Rebelo de Sousa said last year that Portugal should apologize for transatlantic slavery and colonialism but stopped short of a full apology.