

Putin: Any Western Troops in Ukraine Would be Fair Targets



A photo released by Russian state media showing President Vladimir V. Putin, center, at the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok on Friday.

PARIS (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin warned on Friday that any Western troops deployed to Ukraine would be a “legitimate” target for Moscow’s army, a day after Kyiv’s Western allies said they had committed to a troop presence in the event of a peace deal.

“If some troops appear there, especially now during the fighting, we proceed from the premise that they will be legitimate targets,” Putin said at an economic forum in the far east city of Vladivostok.

He added that the deployment of a Western force was not conducive to long term peace.

Russia rejected the notion of Western security guarantees for Ukraine on Friday, after more than two dozen countries pledged to join a “reassurance” force to deploy in the wartorn country after any eventual peace deal with Moscow.

A force to deter Russia from again attacking its neighbor is a key pillar of the security backstop a coalition of mainly European countries want to offer to Ukraine if

the war ends via a peace deal or a ceasefire.

The extent of any U.S. involvement remains uncertain, even after European leaders spoke to President Donald Trump via video conference following the Paris summit at which the “coalition of the willing” pledged its force.

But on Friday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov rejected the idea of Western security guarantees for Ukraine, saying that “foreign, especially European and American” troops “definitely cannot” provide such assurances to Kyiv.

The Paris summit was hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron and attended by Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky, while others, like British premier Keir Starmer, participated remotely.

The meeting represented a new push led by Macron to show that Europe can act independently of the United States after Trump launched direct talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The United States was represented by Trump’s special envoy Steve Witkoff, who

also met with Zelensky separately.

Trump said after his call with European leaders that he would speak to Putin soon, with Peskov confirming Friday that such a call could be organized swiftly.

Europe has been under pressure to step up its response over three and a half years after Russia launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022.

“We have today 26 countries who have formally committed — some others have not yet taken a position — to deploy as a ‘reassurance force’ troops in Ukraine, or be present on the ground, in the sea, or in the air,” Macron told reporters, standing alongside Zelensky.

Zelensky hailed the move: “I think that today, for the first time in a long time, this is the first such serious concrete step.”

The troops would not be deployed “on the front line” but aim to “prevent any new major aggression,” the French president said.

Macron added that another major pillar was a “regeneration” of the Ukrainian army so that it can “not just resist a new attack but dissuade Russia from a new aggression.”

Macron said the United States was being “very clear” about its willingness to participate in security guarantees for Ukraine.

However, the US contribution remains unclear.

There are also divisions within the coalition, with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz urging more pressure but remaining cautious about the scope of involvement.

On Thursday, Russian Foreign Ministry said that the U.S. recent approval of the sale of 3,350 air-launched Extended-Range Attack Munitions system missiles to Ukraine runs counter to its claimed willingness to resolve the conflict in Ukraine by diplomatic means.

overseas accounted for about a quarter of the nation’s overall imports.

“Whether it is Russian oil or anything else, it’s our decision to buy from the place which suits our needs whether in terms of rates, logistics, anything,” Sitharaman added.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi joined Russian President Vladimir Putin at a summit in Tianjin this week that Chinese President Xi Jinping hosted as a demonstration of solidarity against the West.

Modi’s participation in the meetings, dubbed “the Axis of Upheaval” by some observers, alongside the leaders of countries like North Korea and Myanmar was viewed by some experts as a consequence of New Delhi’s falling out with Washington.

Talks between the two nations aimed at negotiating a deal to reduce the U.S. tariff burden on Indian goods have unravelled.

Last month, a planned visit by U.S. trade officials to New Delhi was cancelled, and there have since been no physical meetings between the two sides.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has accused India of profiteering by importing Russian oil at lower prices and then reselling refined fuel at a higher rate.

Trump, in a post on a social media platform Truth Social on Friday, commented on Putin and Modi’s attendance in China.

Two Venezuelan Military Aircraft Fly Over U.S. Naval Vessel as Tensions Rise



A Russian-made Venezuelan Air Force Sukhoi Su-30MKV multirole strike fighter flies over a military parade to celebrate Venezuela's Independence, in Caracas in 2017

CRACAS (Dispatches) - Two Venezuelan fighter jets have flown over a U.S. Navy destroyer in the Caribbean, a move viewed as a show of force as Washington expands its provocative military presence in the region.

According to reports, the jets buzzed over the guided-missile destroyer Jason Dunham. The U.S. ship did not respond.

The Pentagon later described the maneuver as “provocative” and said the aircraft attempted to interfere with what it called counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism operations.

It further warned Caracas not to “pursue any further effort to obstruct, deter or interfere” in U.S. military operations near Venezuelan borders.

Caracas has long rejected such allegations, arguing that Washington is exaggerating drug-related claims to justify its military presence near Venezuelan waters.

President Nicolás Maduro has repeatedly insisted that the U.S. deployment represents “the biggest threat in 100 years” to the continent and has warned that Venezuela will declare “a republic in arms” if attacked.

The flyover came just two days after a U.S. strike on a Venezuelan boat in the Caribbean killed 11 people. Washington claimed the vessel carried members of the Tren de Aragua gang and was transporting drugs.

Maduro’s government called the incident an “extrajudicial killing.” Legal experts also questioned whether the attack met international standards of necessity and proportionality, as no evidence was offered that the U.S. faced imminent danger, or even if the victims were armed.

The episode unfolded against a backdrop of growing U.S. naval activity in the region. In recent weeks, eight American ships, including

the USS San Antonio, USS Iwo Jima, and USS Fort Lauderdale, have entered the Caribbean with more than 4,500 troops and thousands of missiles.

Washington says the deployment is intended to curb Latin American drug cartels, yet critics question whether such a large-scale presence is proportionate to the stated goal. Maduro has suggested the build-up is designed to weaken or overthrow his government.

Tensions between the two countries have steadily escalated. The Trump administration doubled a reward to \$50 million in August for information leading to Maduro’s arrest on alleged drug trafficking charges. It also moved nuclear-capable submarines and surveillance aircraft into the region.

Venezuela and the U.S. severed diplomatic ties in 2019 when Washington recognized opposition leader Juan Guaidó as interim president. Sanctions followed, deepening the country’s economic crisis. Maduro, however, won the elections last year and was sworn in for a third term.

Caracas has responded to U.S. measures by mobilizing millions of reservists, boosting maritime patrols, and suspending drone flights nationwide. Maduro maintains that his government seeks peace but warns that “blackmail and threats” will not force Venezuela into submission.

While the Pentagon portrays Venezuelan maneuvers as hostile, Maduro’s administration argues that it is Washington’s military build-up—rather than Caracas’s defensive actions—that risks destabilizing the region.

Venezuela has also appealed to the United Nations to demand “the immediate cessation of the U.S. military deployment in the Caribbean.”

French Interior Minister Vows ‘Utmost Firmness’ Against Protesters’ Planned Shutdown



France’s Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau

PARIS (AFP) - France’s hardline interior minister said Friday he did not anticipate a “large-scale” response to calls for protests next week, but ordered police to “show the utmost firmness” in case of any disorder.

A viral campaign has for weeks urged French people to stage a nationwide “shutdown” next Wednesday, two days after the government of Prime Minister François Bayrou faces a confidence vote in parliament over an austerity budget standoff.

“I don’t believe there will be any large-scale movements,” Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau said, adding that hard-left forces and some unions have backed the anti-government campaign dubbed “Let’s block everything.”

“It is very clear that the movement has shifted to the left,” Retailleau said. “Given the nature of these movements and their radicalism, there may be some spectacular actions.”

Organizers of the campaign have floated tactics ranging from protests to civil disobedience action such as blocking train stations and picketing oil refineries.

Intelligence officials have warned the movement’s decentralized nature makes its scale and impact difficult to predict, with law enforcement preparing for any eventuality.

“I have sent a telegram to the prefects (top local officials) asking them to show the utmost firmness,”

Retailleau said. “Blocking everything is worse than anything else. The country doesn’t need to be blocked.”

In the telegram, dated Thursday, Retailleau ordered police to fully mobilize to “manage this crisis”.

“No damage to public buildings in general, and landmark buildings in particular, will be tolerated,” he said, adding schools and universities must also be protected.

Signs have multiplied that many French people are growing exasperated with political deadlock as well as issues including the cost of living and crime. Bayrou’s government is expected to lose Monday’s confidence vote, in a new blow to President Emmanuel Macron, now on his sixth prime minister since taking office in 2017.

Several French people who planned to take part in next week’s protests said they were frustrated with government policies, including Bayrou’s proposal to cut two public holidays, and said they wanted to have a greater say in political matters. “Taxes on the rich are never voted in, while we are asked to tighten our belts,” said 35-year-old Chloe Souske from the village of Monterfil in northwestern France.

“A gap has opened up with the political elite who work for billionaires,” added Benjamin Ball, a 41-year-old from the northwestern Paris suburb of Argenteuil.

News in Brief

BERLIN (Reuters) - The German government plans to seek parliamentary approval for around 80 defense projects by the end of the year, including the purchase of Eurofighter jets and the modernization of the Taurus cruise missile, according to a document seen by Reuters. The document outlines 81 defense projects that surpass the threshold of 25 million euros (\$29 million), beyond which purchases need approval by parliament’s budget committee. Among the items is the so-called Tranche 5 of Eurofighter jets, former Chancellor Olaf Scholz previously said would include 20 aircraft built by Airbus.

BANGKOK (Reuters) - Thailand’s Anutin Charnvirakul was elected prime minister on Friday after breezing through a parliamentary vote, trouncing the candidate of the Shinawatra family’s once-dominant ruling party to end a week of chaos and political deadlock. With decisive opposition backing, Anutin easily passed the threshold of more than half of the lower house votes required to become premier, capping off days of drama and a scramble for power during which he outmanoeuvred the most successful political party in Thailand’s history.

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - India could build its third aircraft carrier, to be nuclear-powered, as part of a 15-year defense modernization plan announced on Friday that also includes the use of Indian-made fighter jets by the navy for the first time. New Delhi is increasingly leaning on domestic defense companies to bolster capabilities and cut dependence on foreign suppliers such as Russia, France and the United States. India currently operates two aircraft carriers, one of Russian origin and the other home-built. The proposed carrier is expected to be nuclear-powered, a first for India, for longer reach and stealthier operations.

NEW DELHI/LAHORE (Reuters) - Heavy rain in the Himalayas continued to lash northern India and neighboring Pakistan on Friday with flooding of homes and highways worsening as major rivers overflowed. Pakistan has warned that rain is expected to continue until September 9. A fierce monsoon season has brought immense destruction in the region this year, killing 880 in Pakistan over the season while in India, nearly 150 people have lost their lives in August alone. Torrential rain has swollen many rivers, spurring authorities in India to release water from dams and further flooding areas on both sides of the border. The countries share rivers, which flow from India into Pakistan. New Delhi has issued seven warnings to Islamabad about opening dam gates, three in the last 24 hours, officials in Pakistan said.

MAEBASHI, Japan (AP) — Kokichi Akuzawa almost gave up during his trek to become the oldest person to summit Mount Fuji at age 102, an achievement recognized by Guinness World Records after he reached the top in early August. “I was really tempted to give up halfway through,” Akuzawa told The Associated Press in a recent interview. “Reaching the summit was tough, but my friends encouraged me, and it turned out well. I managed to get through it because so many people supported me.” Akuzawa climbed with his 70-year-old daughter Motoe, his granddaughter, her husband and four friends from a local mountain climbing club.

India Will Continue to Buy Russian Oil Despite U.S. Tariffs



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman addresses the media regarding the 56th GST Council meeting, in New Delhi.

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - India will continue to buy Russian oil as it proves economical, its finance minister said on Friday, despite the Trump administration’s decision to impose heavy import tariffs on Indian goods due, in part, to its energy purchases from Moscow.

As Europe and the U.S. have shunned Russian oil, India has taken advantage of discounts on Russian output to become the largest buyer of Russian seaborne crude.

New Delhi has said its purchases of Russian oil have kept the markets in balance.

U.S. President Donald Trump, who is seeking to broker an end to the

Ukraine conflict, has said India’s oil imports are helping fund Moscow’s war effort and imposed a 50% tariff on imports from India last month.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, speaking on local news channel CNN-News18, said India, the world’s third-biggest oil importer and consumer, had no plans to eschew Russian supplies.

“We will have to take a call which (supply source) suits us the best. So we will undoubtedly be buying it,” she said, adding that India spends most of its foreign exchange on purchases of crude oil and refined fuels.

In the fiscal year to March 2025, oil and refined fuels purchases from

from Starmer’s team, and the most damaging yet after the British leader offered her his full support when she was first accused of avoiding 40,000 pounds (\$54,000) in tax on the transaction.

Starmer has now suffered the most ministerial resignations, outside government reshuffles, of any prime minister at the beginning of their tenure in almost 50 years - more even than Boris Johnson in his chaotic period in office.

“I deeply regret my decision to not seek additional specialist tax advice... I take full responsibility for this error,” she said in her letter to Starmer.

The independent adviser on ministe-

rial standards ruled Rayner had broken the code because she had failed to heed the warning within the legal advice - which she said she had relied on - to seek expert advice on her complicated financial situation.

“It is with deep regret that I must advise you that in these circumstances, I consider the Code to have been breached,” he said, referring to rules to make sure the conduct of politicians meet the standards of public service.

Rayner had been forced to refer herself to the independent adviser on ministerial standards on Wednesday after admitting that she had made a mistake over the tax payment.

UK Deputy Prime Minister Resigns Over Tax in Damaging Blow to Starmer

BIRMINGHAM (Reuters) - British Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner resigned on Friday after saying she deeply regretted her mistake of underpaying property tax on a new home, in a damaging blow for her boss, Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

After Britain’s independent adviser ruled that she had breached the ministerial code by failing to pay the correct tax, there was little Starmer could do to protect his deputy, saying he was “very sad to be losing you from the government”, describing her as a “trusted colleague and a true friend”.

Rayner, 45, is the eighth, and the most senior, ministerial departure