

# Blinken Admits U.S. Sent Arms to Ukraine Ahead of Conflict



**A Ukrainian soldier smokes in a trench on the frontline in Zaporizhzhia region, Ukraine, Dec 31, 2024.**

WASHINGTON (Xinhua) – U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has admitted that the United States had “quietly sent a lot of weapons to Ukraine” five months ahead of the conflict.

“We saw it coming,” Blinken said in an interview with The New York Times, noting the United States made sure that “Ukraine was prepared” by sending it billions of dollars and weapons since September 2021.

“What we’ve had to look at each

and every time is not only should we give this to the Ukrainians but do they know how to use it? Can they maintain it?” he added.

When asked whether it is time to end the conflict, Blinken said a ceasefire would likely give Russia a break, and that any ceasefire must ensure Ukraine can “deter further aggression,” which, he noted, could be achieved through NATO membership.

“Russia has been talking about this

for many years,” said Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova on Saturday in response to Blinken’s remarks, noting that they underscored “the rationale behind Russia’s objective on the demilitarization of Ukraine.”

“We voiced concerns over the United States and Britain pouring arms into Ukraine, the endless NATO exercises in the Black Sea that violate Russian borders, and the dangerous proximity of Western military aircraft to civilian airliners in our airspace,” she added.

The Kremlin has repeatedly criticized Western arms shipments to Ukraine, claiming they escalate the conflict, obstruct peace efforts, and drag NATO members into direct involvement.

According to the U.S. Department of State, as of Monday, the United States has provided Ukraine with 61.4 billion U.S. dollars in military assistance since the conflict. And it has “approved” its NATO allies to deliver 12,000 anti-armor systems of all types, over 1,550 anti-air missiles, radars, night vision devices, machine guns, rifles and ammunition, and body armor.

# Honduras Threatens to Expel U.S. Military Over Trump Deportation Threat



**U.S. soldiers carry an American flag in a memorial service for five U.S. soldiers at the Soto Cano Airbase in Palmerola, north of Tegucigalpa, Dec. 14, 2002.**

TEGUCIGALPA (The Hill) – Honduran President Xiomara Castro issued President-elect Donald Trump a stark warning over his vow to pursue mass deportations when he returns to the White House, threatening to bar U.S. forces from the Latin American nation.

“With a hostile attitude of mass expulsion of our brothers, we would have to consider a change of our cooperation policies with the United States, especially in the military realm,” Castro stated during a televised speech.

U.S. troops have been present at the Soto Cano air base in the town of Comayagua — located outside the capital city of Tegucigalpa — for at least four decades. Joint Task Force Bravo has occupied the area in order to stem the transnational flow of narcotics and other contraband but has not formally purchased a space for its forces.

Republicans’ endeavor to remove Latino immigrants from the U.S. would force the amicable agreement to end, Castro said in her address. The president-elect has argued that

his plan is focused on curbing illegal immigration and closing the border, which he consistently pledged to do during his time on the campaign trail.

Both leaders received criticism over their proposals.

Trump has been scrutinized over procedural policies that would violate birthright citizenship clauses in the Constitution and perceived efforts to detain children of legal status with their undocumented parents. Still, he has repeatedly promised that “On Day 1, I will launch the largest deportation program in American history.”

Honduras Foreign Minister Enrique Reina pushed back criticisms, saying Castro has the power to dismiss troops without Congressional approval.

The Pentagon declined to comment, telling the news wire that the issue “pertains to campaign statements and not policy.”

The threat also comes after Trump announced he would place new tariffs on products imported from Mexico, Canada and China when he is inaugurated later this month.

## News in Brief

WASHINGTON (AFP) – An award-winning political cartoonist for The Washington Post has announced her resignation after a cartoon depicting the newspaper’s billionaire owner groveling before Donald Trump was rejected. Ann Telnaes posted on Substack late Friday that this was the first time she “had a cartoon killed because of who or what I chose to aim my pen at.” The cartoon — which she included in her post — depicts Amazon founder and Washington Post owner Jeff Bezos, as well as Facebook and Meta founder Mark Zuckerberg and other media and tech moguls, kneeling and holding up bags of money before a massive Trump. Also shown is a prostrated Mickey Mouse, the symbol of the Disney Company, which owns ABC News. The television network recently reached a \$15 million settlement with Trump after he sued for defamation over reporting on his sexual abuse trial in New York. Telnaes wrote that while previous sketches of hers had been rejected, this was the first time that had happened because of her “point of view.” “That’s a game changer... and dangerous for a free press,” she said.

VIENNA (Reuters) – Austria’s ruling conservatives picked Secretary-General Christian Stocker as interim successor to Chancellor Karl Nehammer. Austrian media reported on Sunday, after Nehammer quit as his attempts to form a coalition government without the far right fell apart. There was no immediate comment from the People’s Party (ÖVP), and Nehammer only told reporters after the party’s crisis leadership meeting on Sunday that “important and correct decisions” had been taken. The surprise collapse of three- and then two-party talks aimed at cobbling together a centrist coalition that could serve as a bulwark against the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) after the FPÖ came first in September’s parliamentary election leaves President Alexander Van der Bellen with few options. A snap election with support for the eurosceptic, Russia-friendly FPÖ still growing or an about-face in which Van der Bellen tasks FPÖ leader Herbert Kickl with forming a government are now the most likely options, with only limited scope for alternatives or playing for time.

WASHINGTON (AFP) – An investigation by a U.S. Senate panel has found that troubled investment bank Credit Suisse concealed information during previous inquiries into Nazi-controlled bank accounts during World War II. Tens of thousands of documents discovered during an ongoing examination have provided new proof of the existence of account holders linked to the Nazis, the Senate Budget Committee said in a statement. The bank did not reveal the existence of these accounts during previous investigations, notably in the 1990s, the committee said. Credit Suisse, now a subsidiary of investment bank UBS, agreed in 1998 to take part in a \$1.25 billion settlement of lawsuits brought by Holocaust survivors, but it has been accused of not being completely open about its past dealings with Nazis. The Senate committee said Saturday that one set of newly discovered files, including 3,600 physical documents and 40,000 microfilms, was found to have a “high relevance rate” of Nazi connections.

KHARTOUM (Xinhua) – At least eight civilians were killed and 53 others injured in artillery shelling by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in the Sudanese capital Khartoum and El Fasher city in western Sudan’s North Darfur State. “The RSF militia on Saturday continued its systematic shelling against civilians in Karari locality in Omdurman city, north of Khartoum, and Sharq Alneel (East Nile) locality, east of Khartoum, killing 4 civilians and injuring 43 others,” Khartoum State’s Health Ministry said in a statement. The injured have been transferred to receive treatment at al-No and Abu Sied Hospitals in Omdurman, and El Ban Jadid Hospital in Sharq Alneel locality, it said. Also on Saturday, the 6th Infantry Division of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) said in a statement that four civilians were killed and 10 others injured in a shelling by the RSF on residential neighborhoods in El Fasher. The RSF has yet to comment on these incidents.

NEW DELHI (AFP) – Indian security forces on Sunday battled with Maoist rebels in their forested heartland, police said, with at least four guerrillas and one policeman killed. More than 10,000 people have died in the decades-long insurgency waged by Naxalite rebels, who say they are fighting for the rights of marginalized indigenous people in India’s resource-rich central regions. Government forces stepped up efforts last year to crush the long-running armed conflict, with some 287 rebels killed in 2024, according to government figures. Clashes broke out late Saturday in Abujmehar district of Chhattisgarh state, a key battleground in the insurgency. “Four bodies of Maoists, who were in their battle uniform, have been recovered after an encounter with police forces,” police inspector general P. Sunderraj said, adding one police constable had also been killed.

PARIS (AFP) – Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy, already convicted twice in separate cases since leaving office, on Monday goes on trial charged with accepting illegal campaign financing in an alleged pact with the late Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi. The career of Sarkozy has been shadowed by legal troubles since he lost the 2012 presidential election. But he remains an influential figure for many on the right and is also known to regularly meet President Emmanuel Macron. The fiercely ambitious and energetic politician, 69, who is married to the model and singer Carla Bruni and while in power from 2007-2012 liked to be known as the “hyper-president,” has been convicted in two cases, charged in another and is being investigated in connection with two more. Sarkozy will be in the dock at the Paris court barely half a month after France’s top appeals court on December 18 rejected his appeal against a one-year prison sentence for influence peddling, which he is to serve by wearing an electronic bracelet rather than in jail.

# Britain Vulnerable to Ballistic Missile Strikes: Report

LONDON (Times) – The United Kingdom is vulnerable to ballistic missile attacks, and “holes” in the country’s air defenses are causing concerns in London and the rest of NATO, The Times daily has reported, citing defense sources.

Several members of the U.S.-led military bloc have recently expressed “frustration” over the UK not contributing enough to defensive shields to protect Europe from possible long-range strikes, the British newspaper reported.

NATO will call upon British Prime Minister Keir Starmer later this year to significantly increase spending on its surface-based air defense (SBAD) in order to defend the UK’s critical infrastructure, including nuclear power plants and military bases, the report read. The demand is contained in the bloc’s paper, called the Capability Target 2025, which was seen by The Times.

The independent panel leading the strategic defense review, commissioned by the British government, is also understood to be “deeply concerned” by the state of the country’s missile shield, and is expected to focus on the need for more investment in it, the article noted.

The paper said unnamed de-



**A grab taken from footage released by the Russian Defense Ministry on March 1, 2024 purporting to show the test firing of an intercontinental ballistic missile.**

fense officials and military experts, whom it interviewed for the story, stressed “the growing risk to Britain and its military assets overseas, as China, Russia and Iran rapidly develop ballistic missiles that can cross continents at many times the speed of sound”.

Senior military sources told The Times that the UK “is in peril now”, but in 15 years, a ballistic missile “will be able to hit Britain from anywhere in the world”.

Resistant groups in Middle Eastern countries such as Libya could

potentially target London if they are able to acquire long-range missiles, they warned.

Royal Navy warships, which are taking part in the U.S.-led operation against the Ansarullah in Yemen, are in danger of being struck by more advanced ballistic missiles provided to the group by its allies, the sources added.

They also claimed that UK’s overseas military bases, including those in Cyprus, are facing “a growing risk” from non-state actors and terrorists.

# South Korean Protesters Brave Cold to Demand Yoon Suk Yeol’s Ouster

SEOUL (AP) – Hundreds of South Koreans, bundled up against freezing temperatures and snow, rallied overnight into Sunday near the residence of impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol, calling for his ouster and arrest, as authorities prepared to renew their efforts to detain him over his short-lived martial law decree.

Dozens of anti-corruption agency investigators and police attempted to execute a detention warrant against Yoon on Friday but retreated from his residence in Seoul after a tense standoff with the presidential security service that lasted more than five hours.

The one-week warrant for his detention is valid through Monday. There were no immediate indications that anti-corruption authorities were ready to send investigators back to the residence as of Sunday afternoon. Staff from the presidential security service were seen installing barbed wire near the gate and along the hills

leading up to Yoon’s residence over the weekend, possibly in preparation for another detention attempt.

A Seoul court last Tuesday issued a warrant to detain Yoon and a separate warrant to search his residence after the embattled president repeatedly defied authorities by refusing to appear for questioning and obstructing searches of his office. But enforcing them is complicated as long as Yoon remains in his official residence.

Investigators from the country’s anti-corruption agency are weighing charges of rebellion after the conservative president, apparently frustrated that his policies were blocked by a legislature dominated by the liberal opposition, declared martial law on Dec. 3 and dispatched troops to surround the National Assembly.

The Assembly overturned the declaration within hours in a unanimous vote and impeached Yoon on Dec. 14, accusing him of rebellion, while South Korean anti-corruption authorities and public prosecutors

opened separate investigations into the events.

If the anti-corruption agency manages to detain Yoon, it will likely ask a court for permission to make a formal arrest. Otherwise, Yoon will be released after 48 hours.

The Corruption Investigation for High-Ranking Officials, which is leading a joint investigation with police and military investigators, says detaining Yoon would be “virtually impossible” as long as he is protected by the presidential security service. The agency has urged the country’s acting leader, Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok, to instruct the service to comply with their execution of the detention warrant, but Choi has yet to publicly comment on the issue.

The chiefs and deputy chiefs of the presidential security service defied summonses on Saturday from police, who planned to question them over the suspected obstruction of official duty following Friday’s events.

# Winter Storm Hammers Eastern U.S., Over 60 Million Face Blizzard

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – A severe winter storm has hammered the United States, with meteorologists warning more than 60 million people in the country’s east face blizzard conditions and some areas would see the heaviest snowfall in a decade.

The National Weather Service (NWS) on Sunday warned of ice, snow and gale-force winds in states from the central plains to the mid-Atlantic.

A state of emergency has been declared in Kentucky, Missouri and Virginia.

More than 60 million people are in the path of the dangerous storm, set to plunge the eastern half of the U.S. into a deep freeze of Arctic air through Monday, resulting in severe travel disruptions.

Winter storm warnings have been issued from western Kansas to the coastal states of Maryland, Delaware and Virginia, an unusually broad 2,400km (1,500-mile) swath under immediate threat.

“Disruptive winter storm to impact the Central Plains to the Mid-Atlantic through Monday with widespread heavy snow and damaging ice accumulations,” the NWS said in its latest report.

The agency warned that areas from northeastern Kansas to north-central Missouri would see “the heaviest snowfall in a decade”.

Scientists say extreme weather is becoming more common and more severe as a result of man-made climate change.

The first major storm of 2025 was already wreaking havoc on travel, with Kansas City International Airport announcing closure of its flight operations Saturday “due to rapid ice accumulation”.

Flight operations resumed later after airfield runways and taxiways were treated, Kansas City mayor Quinton Lucas said in a social media post.

Temperatures are expected to plunge, in some places to below zero degrees Fahrenheit (-18 Celsius) while the US capital Washington could be blanketed in five inches or more of snow.

Another major concern is freezing rain and sleet expected from Kansas eastward to Kentucky and Virginia, setting the stage for thick ice to coat roads, making travel hazardous, bringing down trees and electricity lines, and potentially leaving millions of snappers without power during a cold snap.

Conditions could prove especially perilous in the Appalachians, where a deadly hurricane in late September devastated communities and ravaged multiple southeastern states including Kentucky.

Many of those communities are still recovering from the effects of that hurricane.

The new storm “will likely cause significant disruption and dangerous conditions on our roads and could cause significant power outages just 24 hours or so before it’s going to get really cold in Kentucky”, Governor Andy Beshear told an emergency meeting.