

# UKRAINE crisis

## Poland FM labels conflict as a war

Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski yesterday described the fighting in neighbouring Ukraine as a "war." "If it looks like a war, sounds like a war and kills like a war, it is a war," Sikorski wrote on Twitter about the now four-month conflict between government troops and pro-Moscow rebels.

## Germany cries 'military intervention'

Russia's actions inside Ukraine "add up to a military intervention," German Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman said yesterday, ahead of an EU summit today that will consider fresh sanctions against Moscow. "Regarding the reports of repeated violations of the Ukrainian border, which add up to a military intervention, we expect clarification from Russia," he said. "This is a very serious and unjustifiable development."

## Romania calls on EU, Nato to arm Ukraine

Romania's president Traian Basescu yesterday said the European Union and Nato must supply weapons to Ukraine to help it fight Russian-backed insurgents. "At tomorrow's EU summit I will plead in favour of backing Ukraine with weapons to help it oppose the Russian aggression," Basescu told Romanian diplomats gathered in Bucharest for their annual meeting. EU and Nato states must "go beyond declarations of good intent", he stressed. Basescu also pleaded for a "new level of sanctions" against Russia.

# Putin defends action in Ukraine

Likens Kiev's forces to Nazis as Nato asks Moscow to halt 'illegal activities'

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The Russian president, Vladimir Putin, has hit back at accusations that he has effectively invaded Ukraine, accusing Ukrainian forces of behaving like Nazis in the conflict in the east and ominously threatening to take his standoff with the west into the disputed Arctic.

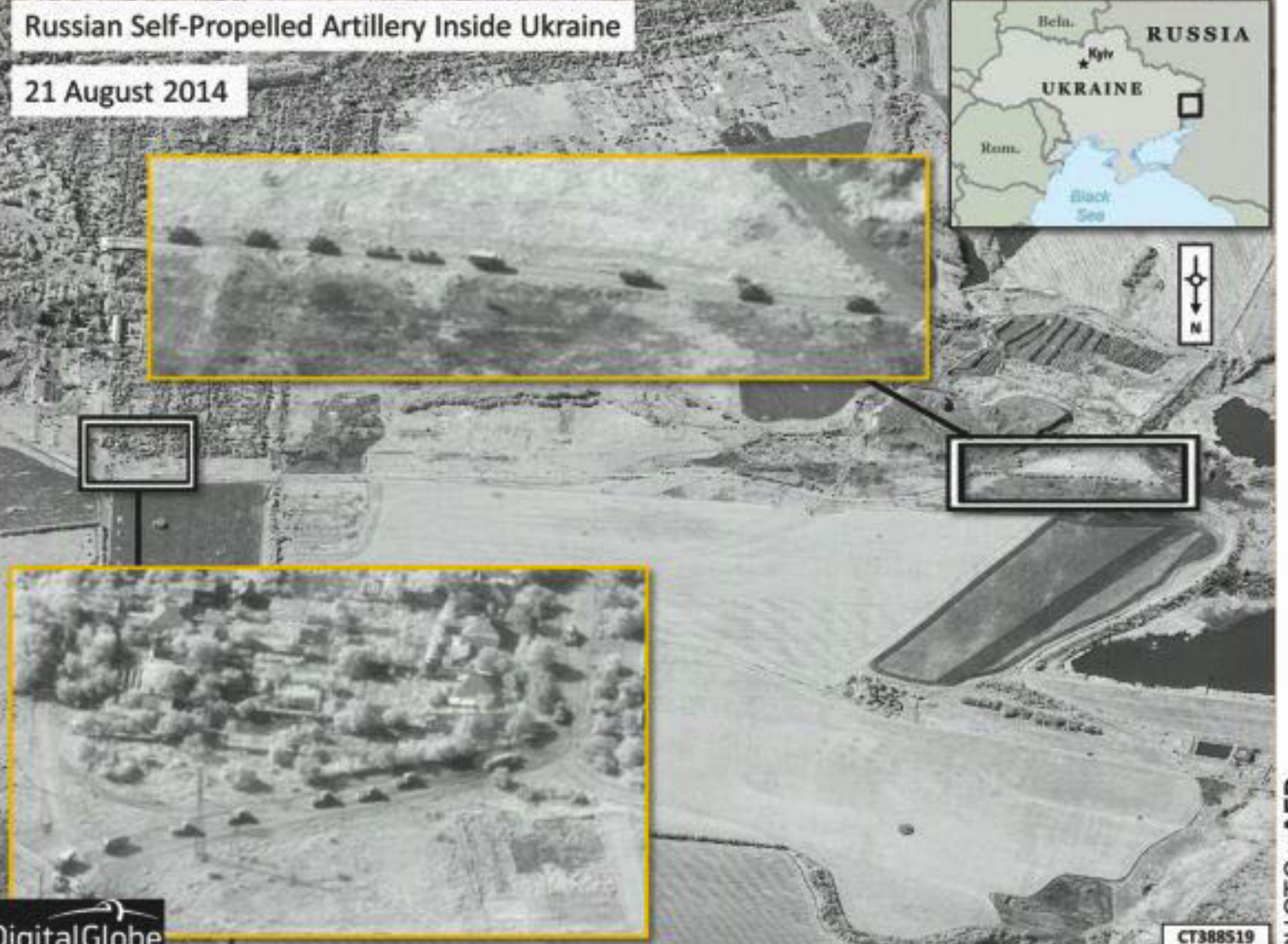
Hours after Barack Obama accused Russia of sending troops into Ukraine and fuelling an upsurge in the separatist war, Putin retorted that the Ukrainian army was the villain of the piece, targeting residential areas of towns and cities like German troops did in the former Soviet Union.

Nato ambassadors emerged from a meeting yesterday morning to accuse Russia of a "blatant violation" of Ukraine's sovereignty.

Nato told Russia to halt its "illegal" military actions in Ukraine after the West accused Moscow of direct involvement in the escalating conflict.

"This is not an isolated action, but part of a dangerous pattern over many months to destabilise Ukraine as a sovereign nation," Nato chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen said after an emergency meeting of the alliance.

Kiev and the West have accused Russian troops of being behind a lightning counter-offensive that



A handout photo provided on August 28, 2014 by DigitalGlobe via Nato allegedly shows Russian military units moving in a convoy formation with self-propelled artillery in the area of Krasnodon, Ukraine.

has seen the rebels seize swathes of southeastern territory from government forces, dramatically turning the tide in the four-month conflict.

And in a move certain to anger Kiev's former masters in Moscow, Rasmussen said Nato was not closing the door to Ukraine's possible membership of the alliance after the

government said it was taking steps to join.

Putin has repeatedly denied Moscow is fuelling the conflict or having any troops on the ground in the former Soviet state.

And yesterday, he demanded that the Ukrainian government hold "substantial" talks with the separatists who took up arms against Kiev

# Ukraine wants to seek Nato membership: PM

Ukraine's Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk yesterday said that the government is seeking to join Nato and is submitting a relevant bill to parliament to end the country's official 'non-bloc' policy.

"The government is entering a bill to Verkhovna Rada (parliament) about the cancellation of Ukraine's non-bloc status and resumption of Ukraine's course for Nato membership.

The bill, if passed, would forbid Ukraine from taking a decision on membership in "any other economic, political, or other unions" that would prevent the country from eventually joining the European Union, he said.

"The adoption of this law would mean



that Ukraine would be forbidden from membership in the Customs Union, as well as the Eurasian Union, or any other unions that are in essence nothing other than Russia's Soviet Union."

Yatsenyuk earlier this week asked Nato for "practical help" as Kiev's army is fighting an insurgency in east Ukraine and accusing Russia of sending regular army contingents that have seized key towns.

Russia vehemently opposes closer ties between Ukraine and Nato.

And concerns that Kiev could be drawn closer into the Western security alliance -- and towards Europe -- are seen as a key motivation behind Russia's actions in recent months.

## 'More than 100 Russian troops killed in battle'

REUTERS, Moscow

Moscow More than 100 Russian soldiers were killed in eastern Ukraine in a single battle this month while helping pro-Russian separatists fight Ukrainian troops, two members of the Russian presidential human rights council said on Thursday, citing accounts from eyewitnesses and relatives of the dead.

Ella Polyakova and Sergei Krivenko, both members of the council - an advisory body with no legal powers and an uneasy relationship with the Kremlin - said around 300 people were wounded in the same incident on Aug 13 near the town of Snizhnye, when a column of trucks they were driving, full of ammunition, was hit by a sustained volley of Grad missiles.

They said they had spoken to around 10 relatives of the dead and fellow soldiers who witnessed the attack, some of whom had accompanied the bodies back to Russia.

If confirmed, the deaths would support assertions by Kiev and its Western allies that Russia is directly fuelling the conflict in eastern Ukraine.



## IS JIHADISTS' THREAT IN SYRIA

# We don't have a strategy: Obama

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The US does not yet have a strategy to tackle the Islamic State (Isis) in Syria, Barack Obama has admitted after criticising that American and British failures in the country allowed group to rise.

Meanwhile, the UN yesterday said the number of refugees from the conflict in Syria has now topped three million.

The record figure is one million refugees more than a year ago, while a further 6.5 million are displaced within Syria, meaning that "almost half of all Syrians have now been forced to abandon their homes and flee for their lives," it said.

In a press briefing at the White House on Thursday, the US president rebuffed questions over intervention in Syria, saying more consultation was needed with Congress.

He approved air strikes against Isis in Iraq earlier this month following the beheading of American journalist James Foley but has not made public any plans for across the border.

"We don't have a strategy yet," he said. "I think what I've seen in some of the news reports suggests that folks are getting a little further ahead of where we're at than we currently are."

He did not rule out intervention in Syria but said the country's civil war was a political as well as military issue and defeating Isis had to involve the co-operation of neighbouring countries.

The president's statement came after reports of a massacre of more than 150 Syrian soldiers at the hands of Isis militants.

A video emerged yesterday showing the beheading of a Kurdish fighter by Isis fighters in their Iraqi stronghold of Mosul, with a warning that more Kurds will be killed if their leaders continue co-operation with the US.

The Sunni extremists control large areas Syria's north and north-east near the border with Iraq, where fighters pushed into earlier this year and gained control of several towns and cities.

The Syria war, that has killed some 191,000 since it erupted in March 2011 when the government cracked down on protesters, has taken on a new dimension as IS unleashed brutality that has shocked the world.

A UN report documented the group's reign of terror in its strongholds, holding public executions and floggings, the use of child soldiers, kidnappings, beatings and beheadings.

But the report also accused President Bashar al-Assad's forces of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including the use of chemical weapons and illegal bombs against civilians, rape and the torture and murder of prisoners in custody.

Syria refugee number tops 3 million

UN says half of all Syrians displaced

## Prototype Ebola drug clears early test hurdle

AFP, Paris

A prototype drug that has been urgently given to a handful of patients with Ebola has cleared an important test hurdle, showing that it cured lab monkeys with the disease, scientists said yesterday.

Normally, experimental drugs are tested first on animals and then on progressively larger groups of humans to ensure they are safe and effective.

But, in an exceptional move, a new drug called ZMapp that has not gone through these tests has been rushed to the outbreak in west Africa, as the lethal disease has no cure.

Reporting online in the British journal Nature, researchers at the Public Health Agency of Canada said 18 rhesus macaque monkeys given high doses of Ebola virus fully recovered after being given ZMapp, even when it was administered five days after infection.

It reversed dangerous symptoms such as bleeding, rashes and high levels of enzymes in the liver.

Three "control" monkeys that had been infected, but not treated, all died within eight days.

The 21 animals had been given the so-called Kikwit strain of Ebola, named after a location in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the country where the haemorrhagic fever was discovered in 1976.

Independent experts hailed the results as an encouraging first step in the long vetting process.

More than 1,500 people have died in Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone since the disease emerged in West Africa last December.



This photo shows Mount Tavorvur erupting in eastern Papua New Guinea, spewing rocks and ash into the air. Mount Tavorvur, which destroyed the town of Rabaul when it erupted simultaneously with nearby Mount Vulcan in 1994, rumbled to life early in the morning on the tip of the remote island of New Britain.

PHOTO: AFP

## Beauty queen 'runs off with crown'

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's first international beauty queen has absconded with her \$100,000 crown after being stripped of her title for being rude and dishonest, organizers said yesterday.

May Myat Noe's photograph was blacked out on the Miss Asia Pacific World website, the word "dethroned" stamped alongside her name.

"She thinks as long as she keeps this crown she's the winner," said David Kim, director of media for the South Korea-based pageant. "She's not."

Organizers said Noe had "lied" and proved to be untrustworthy, but provided few details. Noe was not immediately available for comment. She planned to hold a news conference at a later time, according to Eleven Media, a Myanmar newspaper.



## PAK INTERIOR MINISTER ON MILITARY'S INTERVENTION

# 'Had no option but army role to end Pak crisis'

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's interior minister yesterday said the intransigence of anti-government protest movements had left no alternative but mediation by the army to end a two-week political crisis that has shaken the nuclear-armed nation.

The country's powerful army chief General Raheel Sharif was named mediator on Thursday in the standoff between the government and protesters led by populist cleric Tahir-ul-Qadri and cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan.

The move has raised fears of increased military dominance over the civilian government in a country ruled for more than half its life by the army.

Interior Minister Chaudhry Ali Nisar Khan told parliament the protesters' unwillingness to trust anyone had left no alternative but army mediation.

"Again and again they said they only trust the army and will only have talks

through the army," he said. "When a group or two parties has no faith in the judiciary, the opposition, lawyers or civil society and has no confidence in anybody, what option remains for the government?"

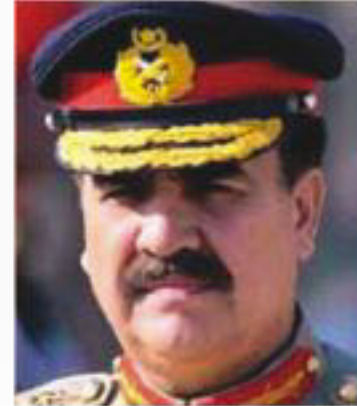
The interior minister and PM told parliament the request for military help had come from the camps of Khan and Qadri.

Sharif said he had not asked for the intervention, but was told by a military officer that Khan and Qadri had said they wanted to meet the army chief.

"I... told him that if they wanted to meet and if they have requested to meet, then the army chief must meet them," he told parliament.

Qadri, who is usually based in Canada, hotly denied this and demanded Sharif resign.

Meanwhile, chief military spokesman Major General Asim Bajwa on his official Twitter account said: "The Chief of Army Staff was asked by the government to play a facilitative role for resolution of the current impasse, in yesterday's meeting at PM House."



## HAMAS'S REFUSAL TO DISARMAMENT

# Truce future looks shaky

AFP, Gaza City

Thousands of militants paraded in the besieged Gaza Strip yesterday, defiantly saying they would rearm as the prospects of a final deal on a long-term Israel-Hamas truce looked shaky.

Calm was restored to the war-hit coastal enclave in a Tuesday ceasefire, and Gazans were gradually starting to rebuild their lives after a bloody and destructive 50-day war, the deadliest for years.

But the chances of long-term peace hung in the balance after Hamas leader Khaled Meshal on Thursday ruled out Israeli demands to disarm, and as Israel said it would not budge on key Hamas demands in further negotiations.

Thousands of Islamic Jihad fighters paraded through Gaza City on Friday in a show of force, marching with light weapons and holding aloft rockets similar to those fired at Israel during the conflict.

The spokesman for Islamic Jihad's armed wing, the Al-Quds Brigades, delivered a speech praising

backers Iran and allies Hezbollah and declaring that the group would "redouble efforts" to rearm.

Israel "cannot win in Gaza", said the spokesman known as Abu Hamza. Israel has consistently linked the reconstruction of the Gaza enclave, devastated during the war, to its demilitarisation.

"It has become abundantly clear that unless Hamas is disarmed and its

tools of control removed, there can be no peace and security for either Israelis or Palestinians," Israel's Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman warned, quoted on his ministry's website.

Israeli officials have said they will not accede to the port and airport demands, and hinted they will not suddenly begin letting in large amounts of construction materials which Israel says could be used to make weapons.

The seven-week conflict claimed the lives of 2,143 Palestinians, more than 70 percent of them civilians according to the UN, and 65 soldiers and six civilians on the Israeli side.



## NEWSIN brief

### Modi heads to Japan

AFP, New Delhi

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi heads to Japan today seeking to capitalise on a close relationship with his like-minded counterpart Shinzo Abe to boost trade between Asia's second and third largest economies. It will be Modi's first bilateral visit outside South Asia since taking office, signalling the importance of a nation he said offered "immense scope for cooperation".

### Malaysia Airlines to cut 6,000 staff

AP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia Airlines will cut 6,000 workers as part of an overhaul announced yesterday to revive its damaged brand after being hit by double passenger jet disasters. The staff reduction represents about 30% of its current workforce of 20,000. Khazanah Nasional, the state investment company that owns 69% of the airline, said the overhaul includes the establishment of a new company that will take over the existing Malaysia Airlines business and its reduced staff.

### Scottish Referendum: 'Yes' gains momentum

REUTERS, London

Support for Scottish independence has risen by 4 percent after the final TV debate before a breakaway referendum in less than three weeks' time, one opinion poll showed yesterday, halving the anti-independence campaign's lead. A poll for the Scottish Daily Mail newspaper published on Friday, the first survey since the Aug 5 debate, showed support for the pro-independence side had risen to 47 percent from 43 percent since a similar Survation poll was released on Aug 9 after the first such TV duel.