



A satellite image shows fires and damage at Antonov Airport, in Hostomel, Ukraine. The picture was taken on Friday. PHOTO: REUTERS

## ‘Risk worth taking’ US rushes MANPADS to Ukraine despite proliferation concerns

REUTERS

The United States and Nato are shipping weapons into Ukraine at break-neck speed, including highly sensitive items such as shoulder-fired missiles called Man-Portable Air-Defense Systems (MANPADS) that can take down aircraft.

The Western arms deliveries have been vital to enabling Ukrainians to fight the invading Russians forces far more effectively and fiercely than US intelligence expected. But moving those amounts of weaponry into the largest conflict in Europe since World War Two carries with it risks that some could fall into the wrong hands – a possibility the West has considered.

“Frankly, we believe that risk is worth taking right now,” a senior US defense official said on Friday when asked about that danger.

Highly portable missiles such as Stinger surface-to-air missiles – which are a type of MANPAD – can help win wars, but in the past they have also been lost, sold, or wound up in the arsenals of extremist groups.

For example, hundreds of Stingers supplied by the US were seen as key to helping mujahideen rebels drive Soviet forces out of Afghanistan. But the US subsequently spent years trying to recover unused MANPADS from that country.

In a Pentagon-financed study in 2019, the RAND Corp. think-tank estimated that upwards of 60 civilian aircraft have been hit by MANPADS since the 1970s, killing more than 1,000 civilians. As of 2019, 57 non-state armed groups were confirmed to possess or suspected to possess MANPADS.

So far, Russia has not targeted Western weapons convoys headed into Ukraine. But that could change.

At a Friday meeting of Russia’s Security Council, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu talked about potential future seizures of Western-made Javelin anti-tank weapons and Stingers. They should be handed to Russian-backed forces in the breakaway Donbass region of eastern Ukraine, he said. And Putin backed the idea.



## Sustainability, inclusivity

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This has continued. Right now, we are also supporting Bangladesh in responding to the Rohingya crisis. Over time, Switzerland has supported many innovative programmes in the areas of democratic governance, agriculture, income and economic development or labour migration. Now, we are focusing on trade and investment. There is a massive prospect of expanding our economic ties even further and I can see only positive developments if and when we can effectively combine the Swiss excellence in technology with the resilient entrepreneurial spirit of Bangladesh.

**DS:** What is the amount of bilateral trade and development cooperation?

**Chuard:** Over the last 50 years, Switzerland has invested over \$1 billion in development assistance and we just passed the symbolic threshold of \$1 billion in annual bilateral trade of goods. Major Swiss companies here have invested hundreds of millions so far. They provide critical goods, services, technologies, innovations and employment. Be it in

terms of trade, investment, development cooperation or humanitarian aid, if you look at Switzerland’s contributions per capita, we are among the top partners of Bangladesh. I am confident that this engagement will continue and prosper in the years ahead.

**DS:** What are the potential areas of cooperation in the coming years?

**Chuard:** Bangladesh has embraced the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development, and its graduation from the LDC category by 2026 is an important milestone. It recognises Bangladesh’s impressive socio-economic achievements. Now, the country is at a crossroads. There is a need to prepare for the post-graduation era, where certain market access preferences may cease to exist, as well as address various structural reforms to enhance predictability in the market and demonstrate strong economic governance. This preparation is even more important now that our entire world has turned upside down with the Covid-19 pandemic; and with its consequences, the sustainability of your

achievements – especially in the areas of poverty alleviation and social development – can be challenged.

Therefore, maintaining the economic growth momentum while making it more inclusive, greener and more climate- and shock-resilient is at the core of the Swiss engagement for the years to come.

**DS:** Do you see any challenges in the bilateral relationship?

**Chuard:** The whole planet is facing daunting challenges today: Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, the never-ending struggle for peace, democracy, social justice and human rights – just to name a few. This is why we need to work together and engage in an open and honest dialogue, where we can learn from each other and find common pathways towards sustainable development. The Agenda 2030 is the right framework for our bilateral and global cooperation. In particular, SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions is a crucial one, one that I hope both our countries will work more closely on in the future. Switzerland strongly believes that global crises

can be better dealt with when we come together as one. Especially in view of what is happening in the world today, multilateralism matters more than ever. Switzerland is a candidate for a seat on the UN Security Council for 2023-2024, and I am looking forward to working with your government to pursue our actions in favour of peace, international law, sustainable development and human rights.

**DS:** As a development partner, what are your suggestions for Bangladesh?

**Chuard:** There are three words that come to my mind: sustainability, inclusivity and climate change. The recipes that have brought Bangladesh so far are probably not enough to take the next big steps ahead. Inclusivity is certainly at the core of Agenda 2030. Finally, your delta country is particularly affected by climate change, with millions of people and livelihoods at risk. These are big challenges but they also come with opportunities. It has always been a strength of Bangladesh to rettool fast. Retooling and rethinking will be crucial in the years to come.

## Russian forces

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Meanwhile, an AFP reporter in the southern city of Mykolaiv said a hospital in the northern district of Ingulski came under fire, while heating is out in the area, forcing many residents to flee.

“They shot at the civilian areas, without any military objective,” said the hospital’s head, Dmytro Lagochev, adding: “There’s a hospital here, an orphanage and an ophthalmological clinic.”

Mykolaiv, which lies on the road to the strategic port city of Odessa, has been under attack for days.

The United Nations estimates that 2.6 million people had fled Ukraine since the invasion, most of them to Poland, in the worst refugee crisis since World War II.

As Russia widens its bombardment and talks between Moscow and Kyiv seemingly go nowhere, Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky’s pleas for Nato to intervene have grown increasingly desperate.

Washington and its EU allies have sent funds and military aid to Ukraine, taken action against its economy and oligarchs, and a cultural and sporting boycott has squeezed Russia’s soft power.

## Saudi frees, slaps travel ban on blogger Badawi

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia yesterday confirmed a 10-year travel ban for freed blogger and human rights activist Raif Badawi, who has become a symbol of freedom of expression around the world. “The sentence handed down to Raif was 10 years in

prison followed by a travel ban for the same length of time. The court ruling holds up and is final,” an interior ministry official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told AFP. “Therefore, he cannot leave the kingdom for another 10 years unless a (royal) pardon is issued,” the official said, a day after Badawi was released from detention. Badawi, now 38, was arrested and detained in Saudi Arabia in 2012 on charges of “insulting Islam”. At the end of 2014, he was sentenced to 10 years in prison and 50 lashes a week for twenty weeks. His first flogging in the kingdom’s Jeddah square shocked the world and was described by the United Nations as “cruel and inhuman.” After the outcry, he was not lashed again.



## West: Russia can torpedo Iran deal

REUTERS, Paris

France, Britain and Germany yesterday warned Russia that its demands to have its trade guaranteed with Iran risked the collapse of an almost-completed nuclear deal. Last Saturday Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov unexpectedly demanded sweeping guarantees that Russian trade with Iran would not be affected by sanctions imposed on Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine. Washington has already insisted it will not agree to Russia’s demands. The 11-month-old international talks seek to bring Iran back into compliance with the deal’s restrictions on its rapidly advancing nuclear activities and bring the United States back into the accord it left in 2018 under former President Donald Trump.

## 47 children killed, maimed in Yemen in 2 months: UN

AFP, Dubai

Forty-seven children were “killed or maimed” in Yemen’s civil war in January and February following a surge in violence, the United Nations children’s fund said yesterday. Children are the “first and most to suffer”, Unicef said, adding

that a total of at least over 10,000 minors have been killed or injured in a war that has raged since 2015. “Just over the first two months of this year, 47 children were reportedly killed or maimed in several locations across Yemen,” Philippe Duamelle, Unicef representative to

Yemen, said in a statement. “Since the conflict escalated in Yemen nearly seven years ago, the UN verified that more than 10,200 children have been killed or injured. The actual number is likely much higher.”





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