



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.



## Biden vows no WWII

Warns Moscow on use of chemical weapons; UN dismisses Russian claim of Ukraine-US biological weapons program



AFP, Washington

US President Joe Biden has vowed that Russia would pay a “severe price” if it used chemical weapons in Ukraine, while also pledging to avoid provoking Moscow into “World War III.”

Biden reacted after Russia accused Ukraine and the United States of developing biological and chemical weapons – in what Western nations says is a ruse to lay the ground for Moscow’s own possible use of them in the conflict.

“I’m not going to speak about the intelligence, but Russia would play a severe price if they used chemicals,” Biden said as he announced a raft of new sanctions against Moscow.

Biden also moved Friday to end normal trade relations with Russia, further ratcheting up pressure on President Vladimir Putin after the bloody invasion of Ukraine.

The United States, like other Western nations, is sending millions of dollars of weapons such as anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles to Ukraine, as well as sharing intelligence.

But Biden again underlined that US forces would not fight in Ukraine, despite the desperate pleas of many Ukrainians.

“We will not fight a war against Russia in

Ukraine. Direct confrontation between Nato and Russia is World War III – something we must strive to prevent,” Biden said.

Meanwhile, western countries accused Russia of spreading “wild” conspiracy theories at the United Nations after Moscow’s envoy told diplomats that America and Ukraine had researched using bats to conduct biological warfare.

Moscow called a meeting of the 15-member Security Council to repeat its previously made, unsubstantiated claims that Washington had funded biological weapons research in Ukraine.

Russia’s ambassador to the UN, Vassily Nebenzia, said Kyiv had operated a network of 30 laboratories carrying out “very dangerous biological experiments” aimed at spreading “viral pathogens” from bats to people.

The pathogens included the plague, anthrax, cholera and other lethal diseases, Nebenzia said in Russian, without providing any evidence.

“Experiments were being conducted to study this spread of dangerous diseases using active parasites such as lice and fleas,” he told diplomats.

Izumi Nakamitsu, the UN’s Under-Secretary-General of Disarmament Affairs, told the meeting the UN “was not aware of any biological weapons program in Ukraine.”

## 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.”

### INDIAN STATE POLLS

## True scale of Congress’s loss

AGENCIES

The Congress’s disastrous showing in the assembly elections to five states has added to a series of poor results, raising serious questions about the road ahead for India’s oldest party.

With the results out, Congress, which has ruled most of the time since India’s independence, now directly rules only two states – Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh – out of 28 states. It also has state governments supported by it in Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Tamilnadu.

On the other hand BJP rules in 12 states – Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Goa, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Tripura. In addition to those it is coalition partner in 6 states – Bihar, Puducherry, Sikkim, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram.

In the worst show since independence, the congress managed to win only 52 seats in the last general election in 2019. Leadership crisis, failing to get the vibe of present day India, rise of populism, Narendra Modi’s bigger than party personality – reasons are many for the poor show



of Congress. And ahead of the coming 2024 election, the picture doesn’t look bright either. BJP has managed to win public support even after a pandemic that raised more questions in people’s mind than answers.

However, the latest state polls show the regional parties, not BJP, have won the biggest vote shares lost by Congress. That might not be a good news for BJP, but Congress has nothing to cheer on.

In the latest polls, the Congress not only lost Punjab but was decimated in all states, reported NDTV in a special story yesterday.

In Punjab, one of the last big states that it ruled, the Congress witnessed a huge 15 per cent

swing against it. The Aam Aadmi Party, which swept the elections, emerged as the biggest gainer in votes with a huge 19% swing in its favour. The BJP had a much smaller swing of +2%.

The AAP primarily benefited (19%) from the combined enormous 21% drop in votes of the Congress, Akali Dal and smaller parties, leading to a landslide for the party.

The assembly elections in Goa also proved to be disastrous for the Congress; it registered a huge 6% swing against it. The newly-formed RGP saw a 10% rise in votes, leaving the AAP, Trinamool Congress, and Maharashtra Gomantak Party (MGP) behind.

In Uttar Pradesh, India’s most politically vital state, the Congress failed to make any impact despite a high-voltage campaign led by Priyanka Gandhi Vadra.

It saw a swing of 4% against it; Mayawati’s Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) saw the biggest drop in votes with a 9% swing against it. The votes of the non-Samajwadi Party opposition – the Congress, BSP and others – went down by 16%. While 3% of those votes went to the BJP, 13% went to the Samajwadi Party.

Uttarakhand was the only state where the Congress saw a rise in its vote share. The party emerged as the biggest gainer in votes – with a substantial 5% swing in its favour – but since only 2% of this came from BJP the Congress could not overtake the BJP in votes – and remained the second largest party.

The election in Manipur also turned out to be catastrophic for India’s oldest party as it lost 19% of its vote share, reducing the party to less than half its size in 2017.

The huge swing against the Congress did not go to the BJP – instead it went to other parties opposing the BJP: 12% to the NPP and 11% to the JDU – making JDU the new second (joint) largest party in the state.



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