



A person mourns next to a wrapped body near a residential building which was hit by the debris from a downed rocket in Kyiv, Ukraine, yesterday. Inset, The damaged apartment block.

PHOTO: AFP

## WASHINGTON’S NEW ARMS FOR UKRAINE

AFP, Washington

Ukraine’s leader Volodymyr Zelensky made a desperate appeal for help against Russia to the US Congress on Wednesday, and within hours of the speech, President Joe Biden responded by promising \$1 billion in new weapons to fight “war criminal” Vladimir Putin’s invading army. The new arms and equipment includes: S-300 MISSILE DEFENSE: Ukraine has had the ability to shoot down Russian aircraft and cruise missiles at relatively close quarters. Washington is arranging for it to acquire systems that can strike attacking aircraft much further away. According to a military source, the systems are the Soviet/Russian-made S-300, which like the US-made Patriot system, is a fully automated, ground-based radar-and-missile launcher unit that can detect, track and fire at multiple incoming aerial threats at long distances.

‘KAMIKAZE DRONES’: Washington will send Ukraine 100 Switchblade drones, essentially camera-equipped, remote-controlled flying bombs that can be directed by an operator to find and then, when ready, plunge onto a target, exploding on contact. Dubbed “kamikaze drones,” Switchblades can extend the range of attack on Russian vehicles and units to beyond the sight of the user.

‘SAINT JAVELIN’: Western allies have already provided the Ukrainian army with some 17,000 lightweight, shoulder-launched self-guided missiles which have become the weapon of choice in the ground war. Among those, the US-made Javelin, with dual charges designed to defeat Russian tanks’ anti-missile defenses, has become legendary in its effectiveness. Biden said Washington will send 2,000 more Javelin missiles.

ANTI-AIRCRAFT STINGERS: The United States is also giving 800 more Stingers, which are shoulder-mounted infrared anti-aircraft missiles. Ukrainians have used them effectively against Russian helicopters and slower, lower-flying fixed-wing attack aircraft.

GUNS, AMMUNITION, BODY ARMOR: The new US arms provisions also include 7,000 other anti-armor weapons, thousands of machine guns, rifles, and grenade launchers, 20 million rounds of small arms ammunition fitting both Russian and Nato standards, and 25,000 sets of body armor and helmets.



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Of course they (the West) will try to bet on the so-called fifth column, on traitors - on those who earn their money here, but live over there. ... And there is one aim - the destruction of Russia.

Russian President Vladimir Putin vows to cleanse country of traitors and scums

## COST OF MOSCOW’S INVASION OF UKRAINE Russians feeling the pinch



AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Russians are starting to feel the economic pinch after Western countries imposed an unprecedented set of sanctions over Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine.

Following weeks of mounting tensions, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a land, sea and air invasion on February 24, triggering a wave of financial restrictions that have plunged the value of the rouble, skyrocketed inflation and left many jobless.

The official Rosstat statistics agency said on Wednesday inflation was 2.1 percent between March 5-11, the second-highest weekly figure in more than 20 years. According to the ministry of economics, annual inflation jumped to 12.5 percent as of March 11 from 10.4 percent the previous week.

The business newspaper Kommersant reported a 10.4 percent increase in food prices from February 26 to March 4 – the highest rise since 1998.

The Russian currency has lost an estimated 20 percent of its value over the past three weeks, triggering many retailers to raise their prices.

One of these is Procter & Gamble, which raised its prices by an average of 40 percent, Kommersant reported, because of higher costs in logistics, materials and the drop in the rouble. Female hygiene products now cost as much as 30 percent more.

To contrast cost increases, retailers committed to a five percent markup of basic goods, including dairy products and some vegetables, TASS news

agency reported.

Sasha, a woman living in Saint Petersburg, who asked to remain anonymous, described an “endless queue” in front of pharmacies with prices of medicine increasing. Two of her friends, she said, were considering going to Finland to get needed medication.

While sales of drugs are not subjected to sanctions, prices are expected to increase, though not as much as other goods, after major shipping companies halted their services to Russia. Local media reported drug prices in the Saratov region increased by 2.3-6.7 percent.

After some hesitation, Western nations agreed to remove some Russian banks from the SWIFT international payment system, meaning companies like Visa, Mastercard and others would greatly limit their services.

Such a move, coupled with other sanctions, could cause Russia’s economy to contract by 10 percent, according to Elina Ribakova, an economist at the Institute of International Finance.

While official numbers are not yet available, the closure or departure of a large number of multinational companies such as Apple and IKEA are expected to have a significant effect on employment figures. US fast-food franchise McDonald’s lamented the fallout for about 62,000 people employed at 850 restaurants in Russia before halting its operations on March 8.

An analyst quoted by Kommersant estimated an “inevitable” fall in wages and an increase in unemployment of about seven percent by the end of 2022.

## WAR IN UKRAINE Developments

AGENCIES

### NEGOTIATIONS ON

After days of cautious optimism about peace talks between Russia and Ukraine, Zelensky reiterates his demands: an end to the war, security guarantees and a return to sovereignty and territorial integrity. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia would announce progress when there was progress to report.

### BIDEN TO SPEAK WITH XI

US President Joe Biden will speak today with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping about issues including Russia’s war in Ukraine, the White House said. China is under intense diplomatic pressure from the United States and its European allies to pull its lifeline from an isolated Russia. But three weeks after the invasion of Ukraine, Beijing has shown few signs of abandoning its friends in the Kremlin.

### RUSSIA THREATENS US, TRAITORS

Former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev yesterday warned the United States that Moscow had the might to put the world’s pre-eminent superpower in its place and accused the West of stoking a wild Russophobic plot to tear Russia apart. The Kremlin said that many people in Russia were showing themselves to be “traitors” and pointed to those who were resigning from their jobs and leaving the country.

### PUTIN ‘WAR CRIMINAL’

President Joe Biden brands Vladimir Putin a “war criminal” for the first time. The Kremlin quickly punches back, calling the comment “unacceptable and unforgivable”.

### MARIUPOL SHELTER BOMBED

Authorities in the besieged port city of Mariupol say Russian forces bombed a theatre where “hundreds” of civilians were taking shelter and share a photo showing the middle part of the building completely destroyed. The pavement outside the building was clearly marked “children” according to aerial photos. No death toll has yet been given.

### NEW ‘WALL’ IN EUROPE

A day after pleading with the US Congress to send more help to Ukraine, President Volodymyr Zelensky addresses Germany’s parliament by video link. He warns that Russia is building a new “wall” in Europe and calls on Chancellor Olaf Scholz to tear it down, echoing US President Ronald Reagan’s Cold War appeal to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

### GLOBAL GROWTH HIT

The fallout from the war in Ukraine could cut global growth by over one percentage point over the coming year, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) says.

### NO DEBT DEFAULT

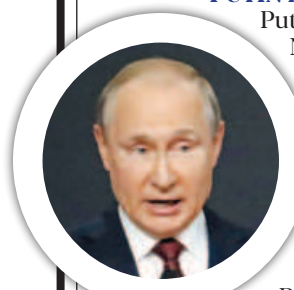
Russia’s finance ministry says it has carried out interest payments on two foreign bonds, quashing fears of a debt default as the country reels from unprecedented Western sanctions. Putin says the West’s “economic blitzkrieg” against Moscow has failed, but admits the situation is “not easy” for Russians and announces an increase in all social payments.

### PUTIN DOUBLES DOWN

Putin repeats claims that the “pro-Nazi Kyiv regime” is carrying out “genocide” and trying to obtain “weapons of mass destruction”, including developing “military biological programmes” with the “financial support of the Pentagon.”

### RUSSIA BLOCKS BBC

Russia’s media watchdog Roskomnadzor on Wednesday blocked access to the BBC’s main news website, with Moscow’s foreign ministry warning of more retaliatory measures against the media. The website of the BBC’s Russian service was also blocked. The service posted a video instructing Russians how to keep accessing the media via a VPN and on apps.



## TALIBAN-RULED AFGHANISTAN

## UN establishes formal ties

AFP, United Nations

The UN Security Council yesterday voted to establish formal ties with Taliban-run Afghanistan, which has yet to win widespread international recognition.

It did so in approving a resolution that does not use the word Taliban and spells out the new one-year mandate of the UN political mission in Afghanistan, which it said was “crucial” to peace in the country.

The vote was 14 in favor, with one abstention, by Russia. The resolution includes several strands of cooperation, on the humanitarian, political and human rights fronts, including those of women, children and journalists.

“This new mandate for UNAMA (the UN mission to Afghanistan) is crucial not only to respond to the immediate humanitarian and economic crisis, but also to reach our overarching goal of peace and stability in Afghanistan,” Norwegian UN ambassador Mona Juul, whose country drafted the resolution, told AFP after the vote.

The Taliban seized power on August 15 amid a hasty withdrawal of US-led foreign forces, and since then the country’s humanitarian crisis has deepened.



A man walks in front of his damaged restaurant in Shiroishi, Miyagi prefecture yesterday, after a 7.3-magnitude earthquake jolted east Japan the night before. The tremor left thousands of homes without water and power. At least two people died and 161 were injured.

PHOTO: AFP

## Global Covid cases up by 8pc: WHO

AFP, Geneva

The World Health Organization voiced alarm Wednesday that registered Covid cases are once again rising globally, despite testing levels having dropped significantly.

After falling for weeks, reported Covid cases rose globally by eight percent last week, with more than 11 million cases and over 43,000 new deaths registered, WHO said.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that the lack of visibility due to reduced testing meant “the cases we are seeing are just the tip of the iceberg.”

“And we know that when cases increase, so do deaths,” he said. “We call on all countries to remain vigilant,” he said, stressing “the pandemic is not over”.