

Shift S-400 missile systems to Ukraine

US informally asked Turkey

REUTERS, Washington

The United States has informally raised with Turkey the unlikely possibility of sending its Russian-made S-400 missile defense systems to Ukraine to help it fight invading Russian forces, according to three sources familiar with the matter.

US officials have floated the suggestion over the past month with their Turkish counterparts but no specific or formal request was made, the sources told Reuters. They said it also came up briefly during Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman's visit to Turkey earlier this month.

The Biden administration has been asking allies who have been using Russian-made equipment and systems including S-300s and S-400s to consider transferring them to Ukraine as it tries to fend off a Russian invasion that began on Feb. 24. [Read full story](#)

The idea, which analysts said was sure to be shot down by Turkey, was part of a wider discussion between Sherman and Turkish officials about how the United States and its allies can do more to support Ukraine and on how to improve bilateral ties.

The Turkish authorities have not commented on any US suggestion or proposal relating to the transfer to Ukraine of Ankara's S-400 systems, which have been a point of long-standing contention between the two Nato allies.

Turkish foreign ministry officials were not immediately available for comment.

Turkish sources and analysts said any such suggestion would be a non-starter for Turkey, citing issues ranging from technical hurdles related to installing and operating the S-400s in Ukraine, to political concerns such as the blowback Ankara would likely face from Moscow.



Participants with the lights of their smartphones illuminate the Ernst Happel Stadium in Vienna Saturday, during the charity concert 'We Stand With Ukraine'. More than 3.3 million refugees have now fled Ukraine since the Russian invasion, the United Nations said, while nearly 6.5 million are thought to be internally displaced within the country.

PHOTO: AFP

WAR IN UKRAINE

Developments

AFP, Kyiv

HYPERSONIC WEAPONS

Russia says for a second day in a row it has fired its newest hypersonic missiles in Ukraine, destroying a fuel storage site in Mykolaiv region. Hypersonic missiles travel faster than the speed of sound and can manoeuvre mid-flight, making them hard to track and intercept.

ART SCHOOL BOMBED

Ukrainian authorities accuse Russian forces of bombing an art school in the besieged city of Mariupol where some 400 people, including women and children, had been sheltering. They also accuse the forces of deporting around 1,000 residents to Russia and stripping them of their Ukrainian passports. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky says the siege of Mariupol will go down in history as a war crime.

HOSPITAL HIT

In the encircled northern city of Chernigiv, the mayor says dozens of civilians have been killed by "indiscriminate artillery shelling", and that a hospital has been hit.

AUSTRALIA UPS ANTE

Australia bans all exports of alumina and bauxite to Russia while pledging more weapons and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. The export ban aims to impact aluminium production in Russia, which relies on Australia for 20 percent of its alumina.

ZELENSKY TO ADDRESS ISRAELI LAWMAKERS

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who has emphasised was due to address Israel's parliament. In an international tour via videoconference, Zelensky has spoken to several foreign legislatures since the invasion launched on February 24, including the United States Congress, Britain's House of Commons and Germany's Bundestag.

10 MILLIONS DISPLACED

Ten million people -- more than a quarter of the population -- have now fled their homes in Ukraine due to Russia's "devastating" war, the United Nations refugee chief said. Some 90 percent of those who have fled are women and children. Ukrainian men aged 18 to 60 are eligible for military call-up and cannot leave. UNICEF said more than 1.5 million children are among those who have fled abroad, warning that the risks they face of human trafficking and exploitation are "real, and growing".

Beijing on the right side of history

Says Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi over Ukraine war



REUTERS, Shanghai

China stands on the right side of history over the Ukraine crisis as time will tell, and its position is in line with the wishes of most countries, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said.

"China will never accept any external coercion or pressure, and opposes any unfounded accusations and suspicions against China," Wang told reporters on Saturday evening, according to a statement published by his ministry yesterday.

Wang's comments came after US President Joe Biden warned his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, on Friday of "consequences" if Beijing gave material support to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

During the video call, Xi told Biden the war in Ukraine must end as soon as possible and called on Nato nations to hold a dialogue with Moscow. He did not, however, assign blame to Russia, according to Beijing's statements about the call.

Wang said the most important message Xi sent was that China has always been a force for maintaining world peace.

"We have always stood for maintaining peace and opposing war," Wang said, reiterating that China will make independent judgements.

"China's position is objective and fair, and is in line with the wishes of most countries. Time will

prove that China's claims are on the right side of history."

Also on Saturday, Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng said that sanctions imposed by Western nations on Russia over Ukraine were increasingly "outrageous".

Yesterday, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson urged China to join Western nations in condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Ukraine on Saturday called on China to condemn "Russian barbarism" after dozens were killed in new strikes.

Ukraine and the United States are concerned about Chinese potentially sending military aid to Russia or helping Moscow circumvent Western sanctions.

The United States and its European and Asian allies have imposed sweeping sanctions on Russia for the Feb. 24 invasion of its neighbour, which they call a war of aggression by President Vladimir Putin. He says he launched a "special operation" to demilitarise and "denazify" Ukraine.

While saying it recognises Ukraine's sovereignty, Beijing has repeatedly said that Russia has legitimate security concerns that should be addressed and urged a diplomatic solution to the conflict.



Women react after a vehicle drove into a group of Belgian carnival performers who were preparing for a parade in the village of Strepy-Bracquegnies, Belgium, yesterday. The tragedy, which injured dozens, took place just after 5:00am at the carnival of Strepy-Bracquegnies, a district of the former industrial town of La Louviere. The main suspects were arrested, police said, adding that terrorism was not at this stage considered a motive.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Rivals nearing deal on 'critical' issues: Turkey

REUTERS, Istanbul

Turkey's foreign minister said in an interview published yesterday that Russia and Ukraine were nearing agreement on "critical" issues and he was hopeful for a ceasefire if the two sides did not backtrack from progress achieved so far.

Foreign ministers Sergei Lavrov of Russia and Dmytro Kuleba of Ukraine met in the Turkish resort town of Antalya earlier this month with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu also attending. The discussions did not yield concrete results.

But Cavusoglu, who also travelled to Russia and Ukraine last week for talks with Lavrov and Kuleba, told Turkish daily Hurriyet that there had been "rapprochement in the positions of both sides on important subjects, critical subjects".

"We can say we are hopeful for a ceasefire if the sides do not take a step back from the current positions," he said, without elaborating on the issues.

Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin, speaking to al Jazeera television, said the two sides were getting closer on four key issues. He cited Russia's demand for Ukraine to renounce ambitions to join Nato, demilitarisation, what Russia has referred to as "de-nazification", and the protection of the Russian language in Ukraine.

Mercury hits record high in Antarctica

AFP, Paris

Eastern Antarctica has recorded exceptionally high temperatures this week, more than 30 degrees Celsius above normal, say experts.

The Concordia research base at Dome C of the Antarctic, which is at an altitude of 3,000 metres, on Friday registered a record -11.5 degrees Celsius (11.3 Fahrenheit), Etienne Kapikian, a meteorologist from France-Meteo tweeted.

Normally, temperatures fall with the end of the southern summer, but the Dumont d'Urville station on Antarctica registered record temperatures for March with 4.9C (40.82F), at a time of year when normally temperatures are already sub-zero.

Gaetan Heymes of France-Meteo described the unseasonably mild weather as a "historic event".

And geoscientist Jonathan Wille wrote on Twitter: "And there it is, Concordia broke its all time record temperature by 1.5°C.



"This is when temperatures should be rapidly falling since the summer solstice in December.

"This is a Pacific Northwest 2021 heat wave kind of event," he added. "Never supposed to happen."

The unprecedented temperatures come after the National Snow and Ice Data Center in the United States said Antarctica's sea ice fell below two million square kilometres (772,204 sq miles) in late February for the first time since 1979.

Covid: China locks down millions more

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday imposed stay-at-home orders on millions more people in the country's northeast as it battles its biggest Covid-19 outbreak in two years. Jilin, the second-biggest city in Jilin province, will lock down about 4.5 million inhabitants for three days from Monday night, local authorities announced.

More than 4,000 new infections were reported across China yesterday -- with two-thirds in Jilin province, which borders Russia and North Korea. Changchun, Jilin province's capital, said Saturday it would also tighten restrictions for three days. Tens of millions of people are currently in lockdown in other regions and authorities are rushing to create hospital beds, fearing the outbreak could put the healthcare system under strain.

Houthi attack Saudi energy facilities

REUTERS, Riyadh

Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi group fired missiles and drones at Saudi energy and water desalination facilities, causing a temporary drop in output at a refinery but no casualties, the Saudi energy ministry said yesterday. Drone strikes hit a petroleum products distribution terminal in the southern Jizan region, a natural gas plant and the Yasref refinery in the Red Sea port of Yanbu, the ministry said in a statement. Aramco CEO Amin Nasser told a call about the firm's earnings there was no impact from the attacks on its supply to customers.