



US-China war in 2025!

AFP, Washington
A four-star US Air Force general has warned of a conflict with China as early as 2025 — most likely over Taiwan — and urged his commanders to push their units to achieve maximum operational battle readiness this year.

In an internal memorandum that first emerged on social media on Friday, and was later confirmed as genuine by the Pentagon, the head of the Air Mobility Command, General Mike Minihan, said the main goal should be to deter "and, if required, defeat" China.

"I hope I am wrong. My gut tells me we will fight in 2025," Minihan said.

Laying out his reasoning, Minihan said Taiwan's presidential elections next year would offer Chinese President Xi Jinping an excuse for military aggression, while the United States would be distracted by its own contest for the White House.

"Xi's team, reason, and opportunity are all aligned for 2025," he added.

The memorandum also calls on all Mobile Command personnel to go to the firing range, "fire a clip" into a target and "aim for the head."

A Pentagon spokesperson responded to an AFP email query about the memo saying, "Yes, it's factual that he sent that out."

AFTERMATH OF WEST'S TANK PLEDGES
Fighting rages in Ukraine



Local resident Serhii stands next to his car destroyed by a Russian missile strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Kostiantynivka, Donetsk region, Ukraine, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

AFP, Near Bakhmut

Ukrainian troops were locked in a "fierce" confrontation with Russian fighters for control of the town of Vugledar southwest of Donetsk as the two sides battle along the southern front.

Both sides claimed success in the small administrative centre of apartment blocks surrounded by flat fields, a short distance from the strategic prize of the village of Pavlivka.

The renewed push by Russian troops and increased artillery bombardments came after Western allies promised the Kyiv government it would send them tanks to repel the invaders.

After weeks of wrangling, Germany and the United States this week said they would send Ukraine dozens of modern tanks to help push back Russian forces, opening the way for other countries to follow suit.

Poland gave Ukraine a further boost on Friday by promising an additional 60 tanks on top of 14 German-made Leopard 2 tanks it

had already pledged.

A total of 321 heavy tanks have been promised to Ukraine by several countries, Ukraine's ambassador to France, Vadym Omelchenko, said on BFM television on Friday.

Meanwhile, Russia's defence ministry yesterday accused the Ukrainian army of striking a hospital in the eastern Lugansk region, leaving 14 dead and injuring 24 others.

"The encirclement and subsequent liberation of this city solves many problems," said Denis Pushilin, the Moscow-appointed leader of the Donetsk region.

"Soon, Vugledar may become a new, very important success for us," he was quoted as saying by Russian news agencies.

But Kyiv said the town, which had a pre-invasion population of around 15,000 people, remained contested.

Moscow's push for Vugledar is part of its effort to seize control of the entire Donetsk region, which it has already declared a part of Russia.

Ukraine said this week that Russian troops had stepped up

their attacks in the east, particularly on Vugledar and Bakhmut.

And Moscow was preparing for a new offensive on February 24, the first anniversary of the Russian invasion, said Oleksiy Danilov, secretary of Ukraine's national security and defence council.

According to the US based Institute for the Study of War, Russian forces may be engaging in a series of spoiling attacks "to disperse and distract Ukrainian forces and set conditions to launch a decisive offensive operation".

Russian President Vladimir Putin used International Holocaust Remembrance Day on Friday to lash out at Ukraine, calling those in the country "neo-Nazis" to justify the 11-month invasion.

"Forgetting the lessons of history leads to the repetition of terrible tragedies," Putin said.

"It is against that evil that our soldiers are bravely fighting."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky marked Holocaust Remembrance Day by urging the world to unite against "indifference" and "hatred".

Cold snap kills 166 in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

At least 166 people have died in a wave of bitterly cold weather sweeping Afghanistan, an official said yesterday, as extreme conditions heaped misery on the poverty-stricken nation.

Afghanistan has been frozen by temperatures as low as 33 degrees Celsius (-27 degrees Fahrenheit) since January 10, combined with widespread snowfall, icy gales and regular electricity outages.

Aid agencies had warned before the cold snap that more than half of Afghanistan's 38 million people were facing hunger, while nearly four million children were suffering from malnutrition.

The disaster management ministry yesterday said the death toll had risen by 88 over the past week and now stood at 166.

The deaths were caused by floods, fires and leaks from gas heaters that Afghan families use to heat their homes, a ministry official said.

'Stop the hate' online: UN chief

AFP, United Nations

The UN secretary-general warned of social media's role in spreading violent extremism around the globe as he marked Holocaust Remembrance Day on Friday, urging policy makers to help stop online hate.

Antonio Guterres said parts of the internet were turning into "toxic waste dumps for hate and vicious lies" that were driving "extremism from the margins to the mainstream."

"Today, I am issuing an urgent appeal to everyone with influence across the information ecosystem," Guterres said at a commemoration ceremony at the UN. "Stop the hate. Set up guardrails. And enforce them."

He accused social media platforms and advertisers of profiting off the spread of hateful content.

"By using algorithms that amplify hate to keep users glued to their screens, social media platforms are complicit," added Guterres. "And so are the advertisers subsidizing this business model."

Guterres drew parallels with the rise of Nazism in 1930s Germany, when people didn't pay attention or protest. "Today, we can hear echoes of those same siren songs to hate. From an economic crisis that is breeding discontent to populist demagogues using the crisis to seduce voters to runaway misinformation, paranoid conspiracy theories and unchecked hate speech."

He lamented the rise of anti-Semitism. "And what is true for anti-Semitism is true for other forms of hate. Racism. Anti-Muslim bigotry. Xenophobia. Homophobia. Misogyny"



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Two Indian military jets crash, one pilot killed

AFP, New Delhi

Two Indian Air Force fighter jets crashed yesterday, killing one pilot and injuring two others, in an apparent mid-air collision while on exercises south of the capital New Delhi.

The crash is the latest in a string of military aircraft accidents at a time when the government is trying to modernise its armed forces and meet India's complex security challenges.

It involved a Russian-made Sukhoi Su 30, carrying two pilots, and a French-built Mirage 2000, operated by a third, and was reported by witnesses to police at around 10:00 am.

Both aircraft took off from the Gwalior air base, around 50 kilometres (30 miles) east of where they came down.

"The aircraft were on routine operational flying training mission," the country's air force said in a statement, adding that one of the three pilots was fatally injured.

An investigation was underway to determine the cause of the crash, it added.

The first plane hit the ground in the forests of Pahadgarh in central Madhya Pradesh state, around 300 kilometres south of New Delhi.

Police found both the pilots near the crash site. Both of them are out of danger.

The second jet crashed some distance away in Rajasthan state, and images from local rescue authorities showed military officials inspecting mechanical wreckage strewn across the ground.