

# U.S. HOSTS WEAPONS SUMMIT AS MOSCOW WARNS OF WORLD WAR

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Top U.S. officials hosted emergency talks with allies in Germany on Tuesday on supplying Kyiv with more weapons to fend off Russia's assault, as the UN's chief headed to Moscow in a bid to avert further escalation of the conflict.

The meeting of 40 countries at the U.S. Ramstein Air Base in Germany comes after Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused Ukraine of only "pretending" to negotiate a cease-fire and warned of a "real" risk of a new world war.

Moscow's invasion of its neighbour, now in its eighth week, has triggered widespread outrage among Western nations who have provided weapons and other assistance to Ukraine's embattled President Volodymyr Zelensky.

"We believe that they can win if they have the right equipment, the right support," U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said following his visit to Kyiv on Sunday with Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The two officials promised \$700 million in new aid to Ukraine, after months of pleas by Mr. Zelensky for heavier firepower.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was asked on state TV about the prospect of World War Three and whether the current situation was comparable to the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis that nearly caused nuclear war. "The risks now are considerable," he said, according to the Ministry's transcript of the interview.

"The danger is serious, real. And we must not underestimate it," Mr. Lavrov said. "NATO, in essence, is engaged in a war with Russia through a proxy and is arming that proxy. War means war." And Germany said it would begin supplying anti-aircraft tanks, a clear shift after refusing for weeks to provide more advanced equipment, and a sign that Berlin was abandoning its cautious approach towards Moscow.

Military specialists said Western allies wanted to equip Ukrainian forces to halt the long-range bombings by Russia in the eastern Donbas region.

Attack drones, anti-aircraft missiles and sophisticated intelligence from Western agencies could prove vital for slowing the advance of Russia's military might, they said.

But stoking fears of a wider conflict, several blasts were reported on Tuesday in the neighbouring ex-Soviet state of Moldova, in the Russian-backed separatist region of Transnistria.

## In-person talks

In Moscow, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was to hold his first in-person talks with Mr. Putin since the fighting began on February 24.

“We are extremely interested in finding ways in order to create the conditions for effective dialogue, create the conditions for a ceasefire as soon as possible, create the conditions for a peaceful solution,” Mr. Guterres said at the start of talks with Mr. Lavrov. The UN’s refugee agency said on Tuesday it now expects more than eight million Ukrainians will eventually flee their country, up from 5.2 million already.

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