US and NATO intensify “economic warfare” measures against Russia, weapons transfers to Ukraine

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The United States and its NATO allies intensified their economic warfare against Russia through sanctions and restrictions Monday, accompanied by an increased inflow of anti-tank and anti-aircraft arms into Ukraine.

The measures come as Russian forces continue to approach the Ukrainian capital of Kiev and amid widespread reports in the US and European press of intensified shelling of urban areas.

French economic minister Bruno Le Maire declared, “We’re waging an all-out economic and financial war on Russia,” pledging, “We will cause the collapse of the Russian economy.”

“The economic and financial balance of power is totally in favor of the European Union, which is in the process of discovering its economic power,” he added.

Le Maire later told French news agency AFP he had misspoken, claiming it was inappropriate to use the term “war” to describe NATO’s actions.

Meanwhile, in a speech before the National Assembly, French Prime Minister Jean Castex declared his country would “take the lead of a multinational battalion which will be deployed this week in Romania.”

Ahead of Biden’s first State of the Union address Tuesday night, the United States announced that Russian aircraft would be banned from overflying the United States.

Earlier on Tuesday, Maersk, MSC, and CMA CGM, the three largest global container shipping companies, announced that they are suspending deliveries to Russia, with the exception of humanitarian supplies.

Britain and Canada also announced that that they are closing their ports to Russian ships. The UK added that the ban applies to any ship with Russian connections, while Canada said its action included fishing vessels operating in its territorial waters.

“We’ve just become the first nation to pass a law involving a total ban of all ships with any Russian connection whatsoever from entering British ports,” British Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said on Twitter.

Also Tuesday, Ford and ExxonMobil announced they would be ending business activities in Russia, while Apple announced that it would shut down all operations in the country, including the end of Apple Pay and suspending all sales of its electronics.

These actions were accompanied by the expansion of weapons shipments to Ukraine. On Monday, Finland announced it would send 2,500 assault rifles and ammunition to Ukraine, along with 1,500 anti-tank weapons. Sweden also announced the imminent arrival of 5,000 anti-tank-weapons.

Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly is heading to Poland today, according to *Politico*, “to coordinate the shipment of 100 Carl Gustaf anti-armor rocket launchers, along with 2,000 munitions and other aid.”

On Monday, “the European Union’s high representative, Josep Borrell, said numerous countries were prepared to provide Ukraine with fighter jets. And Ukraine’s parliament said Monday that Poland was among the countries ready to provide Soviet-era MiG-29 fighters,” *Stars and Stripes* reported.

Polish President Andrzej Duda claimed the aircraft would not arrive by air, saying, “We are not going to send any jets into Ukrainian airspace,” meaning the aircraft would be delivered by land.

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On Friday, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg announced the deployment, for the first time, of the alliance's 40,000-troop–strong rapid response force, created in 2003.

"Yesterday, NATO Allies activated our defense plans," Stoltenberg said, adding that the alliance's forces would be positioned "on land, at sea, and in the air."

"The United States, Canada and European Allies have deployed thousands more troops to the eastern part of the Alliance," Stoltenberg continued. "We have over 100 jets at high alert operating in over 30 different locations. And over 120 ships from the High North to the Mediterranean. Including three strike carrier groups."

On Tuesday, Finland's parliament launched a debate about whether the country should officially join NATO.

As part of the effort to flood Ukraine with weapons, the Biden administration has approved the immediate transfer of $350 million of weapons to Ukraine, including anti-tank weapons and anti-aircraft systems.

"We believe it is getting into the right hands, that they are actively using these systems," a senior defense official said Tuesday.

Among the 5,500 US troops that have been sent to Poland, a significant number are deployed at the Polish–Ukrainian border, working to funnel arms into Ukraine.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that "In Poland, for days, convoys of military transport trucks, escorted by police vehicles, have been headed over land to the Polish border with Ukraine, passing young Ukrainian men hitchhiking to join the fight. These shipments haven't been hidden; rather, the Polish government has openly boasted of sending lethal aid to Ukraine."

The *Journal* continued, "More arms and ammunition are expected to flow through Poland's overland routes, or those of neighboring countries, as Western governments shell out hundreds of millions of dollars to send Ukraine's army fresh equipment."

The *Journal* noted that "The U.S. government authorized the export to Ukraine of $287 million in defense articles from 2015 through 2019…including $129 million in ammunition and ordnance, $56 million in fire control, laser, imaging, and guidance equipment, and $54 million in firearms and related articles."

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