

Finland NATO membership 'an assault on our security': *Kremlin*

International Desk

The Kremlin on Tuesday described Finland's NATO membership as an "assault on its security" and said it represented "the latest aggravation of the situation". "The expansion of NATO is an assault on our security and Russia's national interests," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters, AFP reported.

Finland formally joined the NATO military alliance on Tuesday in a historic policy shift, drawing a threat from Moscow of "countermeasures".

Finland's accession roughly doubles the length of the border that NATO shares with Russia, adding 1,340 kilometres, and bolsters its eastern flank as the war in Ukraine grinds on with no resolution in sight, Reuters reported.

Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto completed the accession process by handing over an official document to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken

at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, welcomed Finland to its ranks, noting that Russian President Vladimir Putin "is getting exactly the opposite...Finland today, and soon also Sweden will become a full-fledged member of the alliance," Stoltenberg said in Brussels.

The Kremlin said Russia would be forced to take "countermeasures" to Finland's accession.

Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said the move raised the prospect of the conflict in Ukraine escalating further. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday also hailed Finland joining NATO as a "historic day", and said the shift was because of Russia's war on Ukraine.

Congratulating Finland, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak urged the military grouping to admit Sweden next, after its entry was blocked by Hungary and Turkey.

Finland's formal accession



as the 31st member of NATO "has made our Alliance stronger and every one of us safer", Sunak said. Russia also said on Monday

it would strengthen its military capacity in its western and northwestern regions in response to Finland joining NATO.

 Finnish and Nato flags flutter at the courtyard of the Foreign Ministry, ahead of Finland's accession to NATO, in Helsinki, Finland, on April 4, 2023.  LEHTIKUVA/ANTTI HAMALAINEN VIA REUTERS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Scholz faces possible parliamentary tax fraud probe



AFP – German lawmakers said Tuesday that they would seek to open an investigation into Chancellor Olaf Scholz's possible involvement as mayor of Hamburg in a tax fraud scam that cost the government millions of euros. The probe would look at whether political figures helped the private bank M.M. Warburg to avoid paying back falsely claimed tax rebates in Hamburg, MPs from the conservative CDU and CSU parties said at a press conference.

Avalanche in Indian Himalayas kills seven



AP – An avalanche swept away a group of tourists in the Himalayas in north-eastern India on Tuesday, killing at least seven and injuring 11, officials said. Army spokesperson Lt. Col Mahendra Rawat said rescuers pulled out at least 23 tourists from the snow and took them to a hospital for treatment.

Paris garbage workers to strike again

A union representing Paris garbage workers announced another rolling strike is set to begin next week, just as piles of uncollected rubbish were disappearing from the streets of the capital.

A three-week stoppage by refuse collectors last month to protest pension reforms left the city strewn with 10,000 tonnes of

rubbish, with some trash heaps rising to more than two metres (six feet) high, AFP reported.

The hard-left CGT, the largest public sector union, called on its members late Monday to begin another strike from Thursday April 13.

The industrial action is to demand "the withdrawal of the pension reforms", said

a statement from the CGT's refuse workers branch.

It called on members to "to take part actively and in large numbers in the union and sector-specific days of action".

Refuse collectors can currently retire at 57, as long as they have the required number of years of social security contributions, but this would be increased to

59 under reforms being pushed through by President Emmanuel Macron.

Another national day of strikes and protests – the 11th since the start of the year – has been announced for Thursday, with unions and leftist opponents of the changes hoping to regain ebbing momentum.

All eyes are on France's constitutional court which

is reviewing the pension legislation set to raise the minimum retirement age for most people from 62 to 64, bringing France more into line with its European neighbours.

The court will announce on April 14 whether the legislation is legally sound.

If it gives the go-ahead, Macron would be free to sign it into law, meaning it

would enter force later this year.

The public sector garbage workers' strike is set to affect half of the French capital's districts – the other half is managed by private companies.

But blockades of the city's three incinerator plants during last month's strike also affected private collections.

Israel fears Iran's growing influence in Palestine



Javad Mohammad Ali
Staff writer

EXCLUSIVE

For decades, Iran has been a vocal supporter

 of the

Palestinian cause. Its support for Hamas, the resistance group that governs Gaza, is widely known. Besides Hamas, Iran has been offering aid to other Palestinian groups, such as Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Iran's unwavering support for these groups has been crucial in the ongoing resistance of Palestinians against Israeli occupation. The Palestinian people have been fighting for their freedom and their right to self-determination for several decades. They have been the victims of systematic oppression and violence at the hands of the Israeli regime and subjected to human rights violations regularly.

Israel has attempted to silence Palestinian resistance through the use of military force and the construction of illegal settlements in the West Bank. But despite these efforts, the Palestinian people have persisted with the support of Iran and others.

Israel's apprehension over Iran's influence in the region is not without reason. Iran's growing support for Palestinian resistance groups has provided the Palestinian people with the strength and resources they need to continue their fight. In contrast, Israel has become increasingly isolated, with its continued occupation of Palestinian territories drawing international condemnation. Israel's vulnerability in the face of Palestinian resistance has been exposed repeatedly. Its military might has failed to quell the Palestinian people's desire for freedom, and its attempts to silence them through violence have only wors-

ened the situation. The continued construction of illegal settlements in the West Bank has only added to the conflict, demonstrating that Israel has no intention of ending its occupation of Palestinian territories.

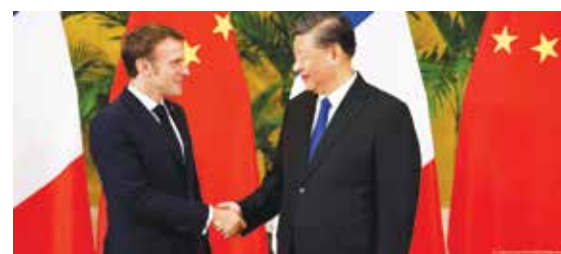
On the other hand, Iran's support for Palestinian resistance has been unwavering. Iran has consistently called for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Furthermore, the Palestinian armed struggle has now reached Israeli cities, as the conflict continues to escalate. Despite Israel's attempts to paint Iran as a threat to regional stability, it is clear that Iran's support for Palestinian resistance is founded on a deep sense of justice and solidarity. Iran understands the struggles faced by the Palestinian people and has made it evident that it will continue to support them in their fight for freedom.

What is Macron looking for in Beijing?

Needless to say, the intensification of US-China competition and the

 war in Ukraine have complicated the relations between the EU and China. However, the Europeans and Chinese have always tried to ensure that their bilateral relations are not overshadowed by the Washington-Beijing competition and the likely pressures of the United States.

Apart from the bilateral talks on trade between China and the EU as well as China and France, what makes Macron's visit to Beijing important includes the situation of the war in Ukraine and Beijing's influence on the outcome of the war. China has the capacity to help the two warring sides reach a solution to the war. However, it is still not imaginable that Beijing would be able to establish peace between Russia and Ukraine. Therefore, what is important for Macron and the EU is that China would not side with Russia in the



Ukraine war and would pay attention to the positions and interests of the Europeans as well. It seems that Macron will try to prevent Beijing from completely siding with Russia during his talks with Xi Jinping. Macron hopes to ensure that China maintains its current distance from Russia.

So far, China has adopted a cautious policy towards the war in Ukraine and has not entered the war militarily. This is important for Europe because China's military intervention could change the situation of the war and double the concerns of Europeans. Therefore, Macron will attempt to persuade Beijing to take the same cautious positions and maintain its distance from Russia.

EXCLUSIVE

19 troops seized in Central African Republic released

AFP – Nineteen troops who were abducted by rebels in northern Central African Republic in February have been released, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said on Tuesday. Out of 20 soldiers seized in the raid in Vakaga region on February 14, 19 have been released and will arrive shortly in Bira, "and will remain there until their return to Bangui can be organised," deputy mission chief Yves Van Loo told AFP, referring to the CAR capital.