



Western Europe & The United States

Washington (US). President Joe Biden has spoken of plans to designate Qatar as a major non-NATO ally. Such a designation means that Qatar will be eligible for defence loans and equipment for research and development, as well as priority delivery of excess US defence products. It will also allow the US to store its war reserves in Qatar, outside of its bases. Qatar has become a key partner on several issues impacting the US. The Gulf state was a key player during the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, still has communications with the Taliban and hosts thousands of refugees who still have to be processed before they move to America.

Berlin (Germany). Germany has declined to join allies such as the US and UK in shipping weapons to Ukraine. According to the Wall Street Journal, Germany has refused to permit Estonia from transferring artillery that originated in Germany. It all comes as Europe and the US fear that Moscow is preparing for an invasion of Ukraine, after it gathered 100,000 troops on the border. Russia has denied it is planning an attack but says it could take unspecified military action if a list of its demands is not met. German government officials have expressed concern that transferring weapons could exacerbate tensions and make diplomacy more difficult.

Russia & South-Eastern Europe

Kiev (Ukraine). The US has threatened to halt the opening of a key pipeline that would send Russian gas to Western Europe, if Russia invades Ukraine. Nord Stream 2 is the second natural gas pipeline running under the Baltic Sea from western Russia to north-eastern Germany, with officials in Berlin warning the project could face sanctions if Russia attacks. Western allies say they will target Russia's economy if it invades, and the latest comments signal a hardening of their stance on the lucrative pipeline.

Minsk (Belarus). Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko said on Friday that Minsk had absolutely no interest in a war and that conflict would only break out if Belarus or its close ally Russia were directly attacked. In the meantime, the country's military forces are stationed alongside Russian troops along the border with Ukraine. Moscow and Minsk are set to hold joint drills in Belarus next month that have put the West on edge amid a wider Russian military build-up. The Belarusian leader said the drills would help Minsk understand where it needed to concentrate forces and that Belarus had to protect its southern flank with Ukraine.



Middle East

Beirut (Lebanon). Druze leader Walid Jumblatt claimed that Iran had gained influence in Lebanon because Arab states had abandoned the country, and that nobody could replace Sunni leader Saad al-Hariri after his decision to step away from politics. In an interview with broadcaster MTV, Jumblatt also stepped up his criticism of the Iran-backed Lebanese Shia group Hezbollah, the country's dominant party, saying Lebanon was not a rocket-launching platform, in reference to its vast arsenal.

Abu Dhabi (UAE). The UAE has called on the US to provide it with better anti-missile and anti-drone capabilities to continue defending itself against Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi attacks, Emirati diplomats wrote in a Wall Street Journal opinion piece after the militia attacked Abu Dhabi three times this month. All of the attacks targeted civilian sites and infrastructure, and led to the death of three civilians. Referring to the attacks, the Houthis claimed they were in retaliation for the UAE's continuing role in the civil war in Yemen, where Abu Dhabi is backing militias loyal to Yemen's internationally-recognised government.

