

Russia says it won't start a war in Ukraine

BY VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV
Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russia's top diplomat said Friday, Jan. 28, that Moscow will not start a war in Ukraine but warned that it wouldn't allow the West to trample on its security interests, amid fears it is planning to invade its neighbor.

U.S. President Joe Biden warned Ukraine's leader a day earlier that there is a "distinct possibility" that Russia could take military action against the former Soviet state in February.

"There won't be a war as far as it depends on the Russian Federation, we don't want a war," Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in a live interview with Russian radio stations. "But we won't let our interests be rudely trampled on and ignored."

Tensions have soared in recent weeks, and the United States and its NATO allies warily eyed a buildup of more than 100,000 Russian troops near Ukraine, worrying that Moscow was preparing to attack. Russia has repeatedly denied having any such plans, but has demanded that NATO promise Ukraine will never be allowed to join and that the alliance roll back deployments of troops and military equipment in Eastern Europe.

The U.S. and NATO formally rejected those demands this week, though Washington outlined areas where discussions are possible, offering hope that there could be a way to avoid war.

Russia's official response to those proposals will come from President Vladimir Putin, but the Kremlin has said



A Ukrainian Military Forces serviceman walks in the Donetsk region village of Peski, close to the front-line with Russia-backed separatists on Jan. 25, 2022.

Anatolii Stepanov/AFP

there was "little ground for optimism."

Lavrov echoed that grim note Friday, Jan. 28.

"While they say they won't change their positions, we won't change ours," he said. "I don't see any room for compromise here."

Putin opened the weekly meeting of his Security Council on Friday, saying only that it would address foreign policy issues.

Later, in a video call with French President Emmanuel Macron, the Kremlin said he emphasized that the U.S. and NATO failed to consider Russia's key demands: precluding NATO's expansion, stopping the deployment of alliance weapons near Russian borders and rolling back its forces from Eastern Europe.

At the same time, Putin

spoke in favor of continuing talks about a stalled peace agreement for eastern Ukraine, where Russia-backed rebels are fighting Ukrainian forces. Those talks are among Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany, and presidential envoys from the four countries met in Paris on Wednesday and agreed to have another meeting in Berlin in two weeks.

Following the 2014 ouster of a Kremlin-friendly president in Kyiv, Moscow annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and began backing the insurgency in the country's eastern industrial heartland.

Earlier, Lavrov noted that the U.S. suggested the two sides could talk about limits on the deployment of intermediate-range missiles, restrictions on military drills and rules to prevent accidents

between warships and aircraft. He said that Russia proposed discussing those issues years ago — but Washington and its allies never took them up on it until now.

While he described the U.S. offers as reasonable, he also emphasized Russia's main concerns on NATO. He noted that international agreements say that the security of one nation must not come at the expense of others' — and that he would send letters to ask his Western counterparts to address that obligation.

"It will be hard for them to wiggle out from answering why they aren't fulfilling the obligations sealed by their leaders not to strengthen their security at the expense of others," he said.

As tensions build, Washington warned Moscow of

devastating sanctions if it invades Ukraine, including penalties targeting top Russian officials and key economic sectors. Several senior U.S. officials also said Thursday that Germany would not allow a newly constructed pipeline — which is meant to bring gas directly from Russia — to begin operations if Russia invades Ukraine.

Asked about possible sanctions, Lavrov said that Moscow had warned Washington that their introduction would amount to a complete severing of ties.

While Moscow and the West are mulling their next steps, NATO said it was bolstering its deterrence in the Baltic Sea region, and the U.S. ordered 8,500 troops on higher alert for potential deployment to Europe.

Russia has launched a series of military drills involving motorized infantry and artillery units in southwestern Russia, warplanes in Kaliningrad on the Baltic Sea, and dozens of warships in the Black Sea and the Arctic. Russian troops have also headed to Belarus for sweeping joint drills, raising Western fears that Moscow could stage an attack on Ukraine from the north. The Ukrainian capital is just 75 kilometers (50 miles) from the border with Belarus.

Despite the alarming rhetoric, Ukrainian officials have repeatedly tried to project calm.

Ukraine's Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov told parliament Friday that the total number of Russian troops near Ukraine — about 130,000 — is comparable to Moscow's military buildup in the spring of 2021, when Moscow eventually pulled its forces back after massive military exercises.

"We haven't observed any events or actions of military character that significantly differ from what was going on last spring," with the exception of the deployment to Belarus, Reznikov said.

But that has so far not reassured many in the West. Biden warned Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Thursday's call that the U.S. believed there was a high degree of likelihood that Russia could invade when the ground freezes and Russian forces could attack Ukrainian territory from north of Kyiv, according to two people familiar with the conversation who were not authorized to comment publicly.

'Super immunity' against COVID-19 more widely possible, new OHSU research finds

BY FEDOR ZARKIN
The Oregonian

Getting a COVID-19 infection before or after the COVID-19 vaccine can create "super immunity," researchers in Oregon found, complementing previous research that could point to an eventual path to co-existence with the virus.

"These results, together with our previous work, point to a time when SARS-CoV-2

may become a mostly mild endemic infection like a seasonal respiratory tract infection, instead of a worldwide pandemic," one of the Oregon Health & Science University study's co-authors, Marcel Curlin, said in a statement.

More immediately, the research indicates people who have had COVID-19 should get vaccinated, senior co-author Fikadu Tafesse said.

"The combination is the best," Tafesse said in an interview.

The OHSU research team previously found that the blood of those who had an infection after being vaccinated — called a breakthrough infection — produced a dramatic antibody response when exposed to the virus, as compared to blood from people who were vaccinated but didn't get sick.

Now, the research shows that getting a shot after recovering from COVID-19 provides similarly strong protections, dubbed "super immunity." In both cases, antibodies in the blood were found to be 10 times or more as potent as the antibodies in people who have been vaccinated but never had the disease, the researchers found.

People with this "super immunity" should be better

protected from both infection and severe illness, the researchers said.

Tafesse was cautious about how the public should interpret the results, warning that it is not worth intentionally getting a COVID-19 infection, especially with the risk of long-term consequences.

"Trust me," Tafesse said. "I get that question almost every day."

But the question could be moot because the omicron variant is so incredibly transmissible that health officials have said they believe most Oregonians will come in contact with it.

The "end game" could be that a combination of vaccinations, booster shots and infection-derived immunity make infections from the virus less and less severe, Tafesse said.

Court affirms ruling against bakery, wants fine revisited

PORTLAND (AP) — The Oregon Court of Appeals for a second time has upheld a ruling by the state civil rights division that found that an Oregon bakery illegally discriminated against a same-sex couple by refusing to sell them a wedding cake in 2013.

The Oregonian/OregonLive reports, however, the court on Wednesday, Jan. 26, also found the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries did not exhibit religious neutrality in issuing a \$135,000 fine to Sweet Cakes by Melissa for illegal discrimination and returned the case to the civil rights division to reassess its fine.

The case began nine years ago, when Laurel and Rachel Bowman-Cryer filed a complaint against Sweet Cakes by Melissa owners Melissa and Aaron Klein, saying the bakery refused to bake them a wedding cake.

The Bureau of Labor and Industries found in their investigation that the bakery had violated the couple's civil rights. The Kleins appealed that decision, contending that baking a cake for a same-sex wedding went against their Christian beliefs.

The Oregon Court of Appeals affirmed the civil rights division's ruling in 2015, but the U.S. Supreme Court vacated the ruling four years later. It directed the state appellate court to review its decision in the context of the

Supreme Court's 2018 ruling in a similar case in Colorado.

In the Colorado case, the Supreme Court ruled on narrow grounds in favor of a baker who refused to sell a wedding cake to a gay couple, finding that a Colorado Civil Rights commissioner was openly hostile to religion in violation of the First Amendment's requirement for governmental religious neutrality.

In its ruling Wednesday, the Oregon Court of Appeals found the state civil rights division issued the fine to Sweet Cakes by Melissa partly based on a statement Aaron Klein made to Rachel Bowman-Cryer's mother, in which he quoted a Biblical verse. The court found the statement had been incorrectly relayed to the couple and could have led to bias in the fine amount.

An attorney who represented the Kleins did not respond to a message from Oregon Public Broadcasting requesting comment. The media outlet reported that the couple has moved their bakery to Montana, according to state business registration records.

"The court was right five years ago and is still right today," attorney Jennifer Pizer, who represented the Bowman-Cryers, said in a statement. "The Kleins' faith does not give them a pass to ignore Oregon's Public Accommodation Law."

Ruined lives prompted Kristof's run for Oregon governorship

BY ANDREW SELSKY
Associated Press

YAMHILL — Former New York Times journalist Nicholas Kristof traded the concrete canyons of Manhattan and the ritzy New York suburb of Scarsdale for his old family home, located on a dirt road in Oregon, to run for governor.

But Kristof, who won two Pulitzer Prizes, including for reporting on China's failed 1989 pro-democracy movement, was declared ineligible for the seemingly simplest of reasons: He hadn't lived in Oregon long enough.

Kristof has gone to the state Supreme Court to fight the Jan. 6 decision. The justices begin deliberating the matter Thursday.

During an interview at his farm on the outskirts of Yamhill (population 1,000), Kristof spoke with concern about the plight of neighbors he had grown up with after moving here when he was 12. Some are barely hanging on financially. Some have died from drugs, suicide and obesity. One froze to death while homeless.

"At The New York Times, I had a very good toolbox to call attention to problems, but it wasn't a toolbox to fix them," Kristof said of his decision to trade journalism for politics.

Three dogs gamboled about as Kristof, whose curly hair is graying, spoke during the interview in a shed. Several acres of pinot noir and chardonnay grapevines soaked up the wintry sunshine, with the first harvest expected this year.

Kristof and his wife, Sheryl WuDunn — who shared the Pulitzer for the China reporting — wrote a book, "Tightrope," about the despair of so many in Oregon and beyond

as blue-collar jobs disappeared and hourly wages kept falling when adjusted for inflation. Easy access to opioids compounded problems, causing addiction and overdoses.

He's also written about the issues as a columnist for The New York Times, a position he resigned from last year to run for governor. He lives once again in the family house with his wife and his 89-year-old mother.

He says he saw the coronavirus pandemic make things worse — some old friends relapsed and resumed using drugs, some became homeless, some kids doing remote learning didn't have cell phone or internet access.

COVID-19 was the tipping point that made him run as a Democratic candidate for the state's highest office, he said.

But the fact that Kristof voted in New York state in 2020 was the main evidence Oregon election officials cited behind their decision that he hadn't been "a resident within" Oregon for three years before the November 2022 election, as the state Constitution requires.

"For 20 years living, working, raising his kids, holding a driver's license, filing taxes and voting as a New York resident until a year ago just doesn't pass the smell test," Secretary of State Shemia Fagan said.

Kristof's candidacy, meanwhile, has raised questions about what makes a true Oregonian.

His attorneys told the Supreme Court that Fagan's broad interpretation of the Constitution's requirements for governor may disfavor candidates like Kristof who frequently travel and maintain multiple residences. Kristof regularly visited his Oregon property, which

he expanded over the years after moving away to attend Harvard and Oxford before joining the Times.

"There are many peripatetic Oregonians who, for various reasons, live in more than one place and may prefer candidates who understand the experience of living in multiple places or changing residences often," the lawyers wrote, citing "seasonal migrant workers," university students, soldiers and others.

Reyna Lopez, executive director of Oregon's farmworkers union, PCUN, and the daughter of Mexican immigrant farm workers, objected to the comparison.

"For a wealthy white man to compare the fact that he owns property in Oregon while living in New York to the lives and experiences of migrant workers is deeply shocking. Farmworkers are forced into an itinerant and difficult life ... to survive and support their families," Lopez said in a brief filed with the court in support of Fagan's decision.

Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum, who is defending Fagan's decision at the Supreme Court, referenced concerns that are as old as Oregon that outsiders would seek political office here.

Delegates to Oregon's Constitutional Convention of 1857 expressed the "holy horror of your California graceless, godless school of politicians" coming to Oregon in search of office, Rosenblum said.

Kristof's attorneys insisted "he has been a resident of the state for many years, his ties to Oregon are deep and abiding, and voters — not elections officials — should decide his suitability to be governor."

Fagan on Jan. 6 told reporters

that according to Oregon law, "if a person casts a ballot in another state, they are no longer a resident of Oregon."

But former Secretaries of State Bill Bradbury and Jeanne Atkins pointed out to the court that the provision concerns the right to cast a ballot, not "the right to be on the ballot."

"So, even while saying that voting elsewhere costs you the right to vote here, the Legislature has not said that it also costs you the right to run for office here," they said.

Kristof has raised \$2.7 million in campaign donations. That figure includes large donations from out of state, but also contributions from every county in Oregon. If the court upholds Kristof's disqualification, he won't have to return the money. He could use it for a different campaign.

Yamhill County Commissioner Casey Kulla, who was also running for governor before going for state labor commissioner instead, said he has encouraged Kristof to run for the state House, Congress or the county commission.

If the court overturns Fagan, Kristof will face leading candidates Tina Kotek, who recently resigned as Oregon House Speaker, and state Treasurer Tobias Read for the Democratic nomination in the May primary.

Kristof won't say what he'll do with the campaign contributions if the court rules against him.

"I have great confidence in the Oregon Supreme Court," he said. "So I'll be on the ballot and we will need those donations."

Kristof and WuDunn still own their house in Scarsdale. A campaign spokeswoman said they intend to sell it.