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Washington Insider

ABOUT US

Transatlantic Today delighted to present the Washington Insider Magazine, a product that we present to our readers in Washington DC and beyond. Our magazine publishes unique and independent coverage on transatlantic relations with a Washington perspective. Transatlantic Today covers policymaking, politics and business related to the transatlantic relationship.

Our magazine strives to be become a key news analysis source for news on politics and policymakers in the US with particular focus on DC. Our coverage is designed with nonpartisan journalism and real-time tools create, inform and engage a those seeking timely and concise news.

We believe in providing our audience with indepen-

dent journalism throughout expert writers, analysts and journalists. Our culture is distinguished by unwavering grit, honesty, and a focus on innovation.

Our work is designed by relentless grit, integrity and a prioritization of urgent and newsworthy topics.

In both of our website and and this magazine we cover topics about Diplomacy, Security, Defence, Counter Terrorism, foreign policy and international affairs. Indeed our reporting, OPeds, interviews with various stakeholders provide unique insights and analysis as well as the tools to arm you with the intel you need to make informed decisions.

Here I wish to commend.

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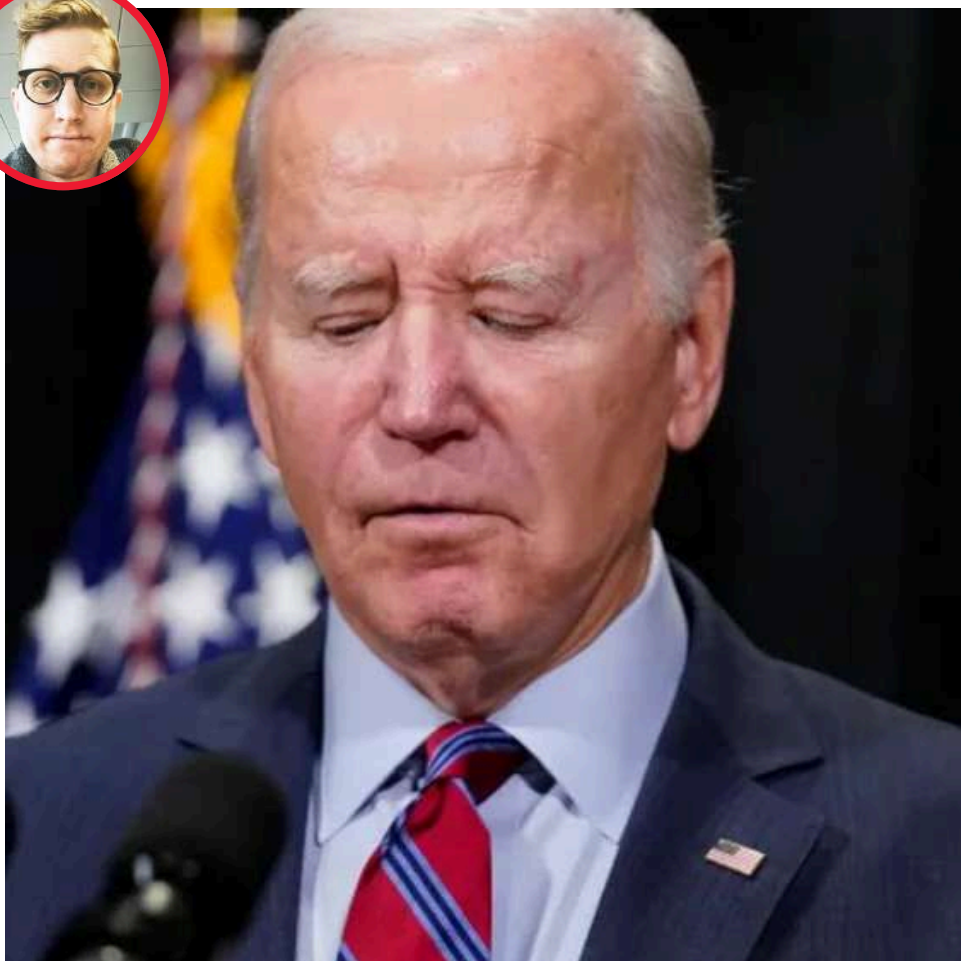


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US MUSLIMS PLEDGE TO ABANDON BIDEN IN 2024 OVER ISRAEL-GAZA STANCE

BY HENRY NICHOLAS



Growing frustration among US Muslim and Arab American communities is creating a strong anti-Biden sentiment as the 2024 election nears, spurred by President Biden's support for Israel in the ongoing Gaza conflict. Muslims in key states like Michigan, Arizona, Pennsylvania, and Florida have launched the #AbandonBiden campaign, demanding Biden advocate for a ceasefire in Gaza.

The campaign, rooted in Minnesota, gained traction when local leaders set an October 31 deadline for Biden to call for a ceasefire, which he failed to meet. The coalition of Muslim organizers emphasizes that Biden's stance could affect his reelection chances, particularly in states where small voter shifts could determine the outcome.

The United States' two-party system typically limits the

impact of independent candidates, but influential figures like Cornel West, running as an independent, and Green Party candidate Jill Stein, are voicing strong support for a Gaza ceasefire. This has sparked interest among voters seeking alternatives, despite the challenges independents face due to limited funding.

US and Israeli officials, including Vice President Kamala Harris, continue to assert Israel's right to defend itself, yet mounting civilian casualties in Gaza — with over 15,000 Palestinians killed — have intensified public outcry for intervention. Biden's diminishing support among Arab Americans reflects this shift, with recent polls showing only 17% backing compared to a strong majority in 2020.

This #AbandonBiden movement, while not endorsing Trump, seeks to push US policy toward a stance more aligned with peace in Gaza. Organizers hope to influence the election by highlighting the gravity of the humanitarian crisis in Palestine. As the campaign unfolds, Muslim voters in swing states could play a decisive role in shaping the election's outcome.

Trump Disqualified in Colorado, Sparking Fresh Legal Battle Over 2024 Run

By JanFrazier

In a bold and unprecedented ruling, the Colorado Supreme Court disqualified former President Donald Trump from the Republican primary ballot, sparking a fresh legal confrontation that could have implications for the 2024 presidential race. The court's decision has created a divide between supporters and critics, with Trump's legal team vowing to appeal to the US Supreme Court, where a six-to-three conservative majority may ultimately decide his fate.

The Colorado case, brought by a coalition of anti-Trump Republicans, independents, and liberal activists, leveraged the 14th Amendment's "insurrection clause" to argue Trump's role in the January 6 Capitol attack renders him unfit for office. Colorado Secretary of State Jena Griswold, however, has remained cautious in her response, signaling that an appeal could alter the final outcome before ballots are certified.

While Democrats have largely stayed silent on the issue, some party leaders worry that the decision could play into Trump's narrative that the "political elite" is working to silence him. Many Republicans, including Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and GOP candidate



Vivek Ramaswamy, have rallied behind Trump, condemning the Colorado ruling as judicial overreach. Ramaswamy even pledged to remove his name from Colorado's primary ballot in solidarity.

Despite the ruling, Trump's 2024 campaign remains undeterred, using the decision as a rallying point for supporters and framing it as evidence of the establishment's fear of his return. Trump's spokesperson dismissed the ruling as "flawed," asserting that

it reflects Democratic anxiety over the upcoming election.

The Colorado decision may ultimately end up before the US Supreme Court, which could either uphold or overturn the ruling. For now, it serves as a striking symbol of the challenges Trump faces and the legal complexities surrounding his 2024 campaign, one in which judicial decisions might influence rather than impede his path back to the White House.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen Visits Beijing to Ease Tensions with China

By Eric Gahagan

udy Woodruff, dives into the intense political and cultural divisions tearing at America's social fabric. The program, airing December 19, captures the thoughts and concerns of everyday Americans as Woodruff travels across the nation to explore why Americans seem more divided than ever.

Launched in early 2023, the project spans 11 months of reporting across 14 states, capturing moments of both unity and polarization among American citizens. Woodruff notes that these divisions often go beyond policy disagreements; they're fueled by what she describes as "negative partisanship," where Americans increasingly label those with opposing views as ignorant or immoral.

The documentary spotlights examples of division in communities like Saegertown, Pennsylvania, where debates over banning certain books and restricting classroom discussions on race have fractured long-standing relationships. One parent, Teresa Barickman, shared that national political rhetoric has emboldened community members to express divisive and often hostile opinions.



Woodruff's work also considers the role of the news media in fueling division. In conversations with Americans, many attributed the intense partisanship to the influence of sensationalist media coverage that stokes anger and mistrust. In Cleveland, Woodruff met with members of the nonpartisan group Braver Angels, where participants expressed dismay over how political affiliation has become a basis for judgment. Republican Mark Nieberding explained, "If you tell me who you voted for, I can discount you as a person right away, which is antithetical to what this country should be."

The documentary also delves into the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and the dangers of extreme anti-government

ideologies, suggesting that unchecked partisanship could lead to even deeper societal rifts. Survivor Dennis Purifoy reflects on the event and warns of rising extremism, underlining the urgency of dialogue and understanding.

Woodruff's journey reveals a desire among many Americans for a return to healthy, democratic debate where differing opinions are tolerated without scorn. As the country heads into the divisive 2024 election year, America at a Crossroads poses the question: Can Americans rebuild trust in one another and in their leaders? Woodruff, determined to keep searching for answers, remains hopeful that change is possible, one conversation at a time.

Poll Reveals Voter Disapproval of Biden's Gaza Conflict Approach

By Christina Levandowski

A recent New York Times/Siena College poll reveals widespread disapproval of President Biden's handling of the Israel-Gaza conflict, particularly among younger voters. As the conflict stretches on, voters aged 18 to 29, a traditionally Democratic group, express deep dissatisfaction with Biden's approach. Nearly 75% of this demographic disapproves of his response to the Gaza crisis, while many indicate they would vote for former President Trump over Biden if the election were held today.



The findings are also significant for U.S.-Israel relations, with Americans' views on Israel's actions in Gaza fractured by age. A majority of younger voters believe Israel is not taking enough precautions to prevent civilian casualties, while the broader electorate remains more supportive of Israel. This dissonance illustrates a complex diplomatic and political terrain for Biden as he approaches the 2024 election year.

Economic concerns remain a strong factor, with 34% of voters citing economic issues as their top priority. Despite Biden's recent economic gains, younger voters remain skeptical, complicating his path to securing their support. This shifting voter sentiment signals the Biden administration's challenge of balancing diplomatic commitments with domestic priorities as election season approaches.

Young Voters Waver on Biden Support in 2024 Amid Key Issues

By Irene Taschek

As the 2024 election looms, young voters across the U.S. are expressing skepticism about re-electing President Joe Biden, including Jayden Camarena in Northern California, who's

questioning his participation, and Evan McKenzie in Wisconsin, seeking alternatives. Former Biden supporters feel their expectations remain unmet in areas like climate

action, student loan reform, and reproductive rights.

A poll from NBC News highlights Biden's decline among voters under 35, especially concerning

his handling of the Israel-Hamas conflict. McKenzie, a young union organizer, now feels disillusioned, remarking, “I couldn’t live with myself if I supported someone with Biden’s record.” His frustrations echo those of others, including Pru Carmichael of Philadelphia, who doubts Biden’s policies will meaningfully affect her future.

Political analysts, such as Ashley Aylward of HIT Strategies, note that Biden’s waning appeal among younger voters indicates the Democratic Party’s need to engage them substantively. While polling is only a snapshot, it signals that Biden’s campaign must intensify outreach to bridge the gap with this crucial voter base.



Youth support has historically been decisive. In 2020, Biden carried this demographic by over 20 points against Trump, largely based on promises that many young voters feel are

unfulfilled. McKenzie, who rallied his peers to vote Biden in 2020, now urges the Democratic Party to “earn our vote,” warning that overlooking young voters could have lasting consequences.

Americans Overwhelmingly Disapprove of U.S. Leaders’ Response to Modern Crises

By Irene Taschek

A recent U.S. News – Harris Poll reveals deep dissatisfaction among Americans with current U.S. leaders, who are seen as unprepared to address today’s major crises. According to the survey, 86% of respondents are “largely disappointed” in U.S. leadership, with 47% expressing strong discontent. The findings highlight the public’s perception that leaders at both national and corporate levels fail to reflect the values and priorities of everyday Americans.

The poll, conducted among 2,100 adults, shows particularly strong disapproval

of political leaders, with 84% stating there is a “leadership crisis” in U.S. government. Nearly three-quarters of respondents believe politicians prioritize power over serving their constituents, and 72% say most political figures are untrustworthy. The data further reveals a generational divide, with older Americans (94% of those 70 and older) expressing even greater disappointment than younger people (76% of those 18-29).

Local leaders, however, fare better, with 65% of respondents saying they are more effective at addressing societal issues

than national leaders. Trust in local leaders also runs higher, as 72% of respondents feel they are more reliable compared to those on the national stage.

Diversity in leadership remains a critical issue, with 81% of Americans agreeing that more diverse representation is needed to better reflect the populace. Over half (55%) believe racial and ethnic diversity is lacking in government, and 65% feel similarly about corporate leadership.

The qualities Americans most desire in their leaders are

“trustworthiness” and “honesty,” followed by being “hard-working” and “ethical.” While 89% believe leaders should be more collaborative, a significant portion (71%) think society should evolve beyond the traditional view of leadership, welcoming diverse backgrounds and fresh perspectives to meet new challenges.

This survey highlights the growing call for a new generation of leaders who can navigate pressing issues such as economic disparities, climate change, and technological advancements with integrity and accountability.



U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Expands Opportunities for F-1 Visa Students

BY JAN FRAZIER

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has issued new guidance for international students on F-1 visas, marking a historic change. For the first time, these students can directly apply for immigrant visas under the Employment-Based (EB) category, opening up new possibilities for their careers in the United States.



F-1 Visa Students Now Eligible for Immigrant Visas

According to the USCIS, F-1 visa students may now become beneficiaries of permanent labor certification applications or immigrant visa petitions while still demonstrating an intent to depart after a temporary stay. This change provides F-1 students greater flexibility, allowing them to plan their career paths with more stability and broader options.

Policy Expansion for STEM Graduates Working with Startups

USCIS's policy revision also creates opportunities for F-1 students who have completed degrees in STEM fields. These graduates are now able to use their 36-month Optional Practical Training (OPT) period

to work for early-stage startups, provided the startups follow training plan requirements, maintain E-Verify compliance, and offer fair compensation comparable to that provided to U.S. workers in similar roles.

Distinctions Between F-1 and M-1 Visa Students

- **F-1 Visa:** This visa is designated for international students attending accredited academic institutions such as universities, high schools, and language training programs in the U.S. F-1 students are permitted to work within certain limits and may now apply for immigrant visas under the new guidance.

- **M-1 Visa:** M-1 visa holders, in contrast, attend vocational or non-academic training programs. These students face tighter work restrictions and are typically admitted for the duration of their program, with limited employment options.

Enhanced Clarity in Policy for F and M Student Visas

The updated USCIS guidance addresses the employment authorization process, procedures for status changes, and requirements for extensions and reinstatements. This policy update reflects USCIS's effort to support international students, particularly those with a STEM

background, in their U.S. educational and professional pursuits.

This landmark update aims to balance workforce needs with immigration policies, enhancing

both career growth for international students and contributions to the U.S. startup ecosystem.

DHS Staff Condemn Department's Response to Gaza Crisis in Open Letter to Mayorkas

By Eric Gahagan

More than a hundred U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) employees have signed an open letter condemning the agency's handling of the Gaza crisis. Addressed to Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, the letter criticizes DHS's silence on the escalating humanitarian crisis, citing a lack of public acknowledgment and empathy for the civilian casualties in Gaza.

The letter, obtained by Al Jazeera, highlights the stark absence of "recognition, support, and mourning" for the more than 18,000 Palestinians who have lost their lives since the war began on October 7. The staff members, representing agencies under DHS like Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), expressed dismay at what they described as the agency's selective approach in responding to humanitarian issues.

The letter reveals internal dissent within DHS, mirroring broader discontent across the Biden administration. Last month, letters from over 500



government officials and 1,000 USAID employees called for President Biden to advocate for an immediate ceasefire. However, Biden's administration has maintained a stance of "unwavering support" for Israel, focusing on condemning

DHS staff members cited profound disappointment with Mayorkas' internal messages, which condemned the October 7 Hamas attacks without mentioning the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Staff members who signed the letter anonymously expressed fear of professional repercussions, with one official describing how DHS's inaction has exacerbated the mental health toll on employees with relatives in Gaza.

The letter urges DHS to implement temporary protected status (TPS) for Palestinians, a policy that would grant employment authorization to those already in the U.S. Similar programs have been offered to other conflict-affected populations, including Ukrainians. However, political roadblocks and the U.S.'s non-recognition of Palestine have hindered such relief measures, leaving staff frustrated.

As DHS leadership remains largely silent, employees feel increasingly disillusioned. "We have the ability to do something, but we're not," one senior official lamented, capturing a sentiment of disillusionment that pervades the agency.

US Pushes Israel for Targeted Operations in Gaza Amid Growing Criticism

By Christina Levandowski

The United States has set a new diplomatic objective in the Gaza conflict: urging Israel to scale back its military operations. This goal represents a significant test of President Joe Biden's administration, with both the conflict's trajectory and Biden's political standing at stake.

Since the outset of the war, the Biden administration has offered Israel steadfast support for its right to defend itself, highlighting that any campaign not removing Hamas would lead to future attacks. However, officials like Secretary of State Antony Blinken have started stressing the importance of protecting civilians, warning that Israel risks a "strategic defeat" if it fails to limit civilian casualties. Yet, the conflict's death toll and widespread destruction raise global concerns that the U.S. influence has been ineffective in tempering Israel's response.

The U.S. strategy, though criticized as inadequate by many, has achieved limited successes, such as facilitating humanitarian aid into Gaza and negotiating brief pauses in hostilities for aid deliveries. Diplomacy has seen constant American presence, with senior officials regularly in the region to maintain dialogue with Israeli leaders and regional allies.



For Biden, navigating this conflict is becoming increasingly complex. His approach has drawn criticism from young and Arab Americans, some Democratic Party members, and international partners, resulting in greater isolation on the world stage. Polls indicate declining domestic approval of Biden's handling of the conflict, particularly among younger voters sympathetic to Palestinian issues.

The administration's stance has also created internal dissent. Over 800 U.S. officials have

anonymously signed a letter pushing for a ceasefire. Meanwhile, some Democrats are demanding a reassessment of American military aid to Israel, and several high-profile figures, including Senator Bernie Sanders, have called Israeli tactics "reckless and immoral."

As the calendar approaches 2024, Biden faces mounting pressure to adjust his approach. Striking a balance between backing Israel and addressing international and domestic concerns may prove pivotal, particularly with the U.S. presidential election looming.

US Agricultural Groups Urge Reopening Texas Rail Crossings Amid Export Losses

By Eric Gahagan



Dozens of major U.S. agricultural groups are calling on the government to reopen two key rail crossings at the Texas-Mexico border, which were recently closed to manage an increased flow of migrants. The closures, at Eagle Pass and El Paso, are disrupting vital export routes, and the agricultural sector warns of steep economic losses if the situation continues.

In a letter to Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, growers representing products from corn to soybeans emphasized that an estimated one million bushels of grain exports are at risk daily. These losses, they argue, threaten not only U.S. agricultural profitability but also Mexican food security, as blocked exports could drive inflation.

Organizations including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce have urged Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to act, noting that even minimal staffing could reopen the crossings. CBP redirected personnel to manage migrant intake, with daily migrant apprehensions near record highs. However, agricultural leaders insist this closure is hurting both economies without achieving the intended security improvements.

The Biden administration has responded, noting close work with Mexican authorities and attempts to boost border staffing. But for companies like Union Pacific and BNSF Railway, the closures have meant a halt to critical shipments, from grains and metals to automotive parts. These disruptions are projected to cost over \$200 million per day, raising fears of supply chain issues during the holiday season.

U.S. Ambassador David Cohen Optimistic About Future NAFTA Negotiations

By Jan Frazier

After two years in Ottawa, U.S. Ambassador to Canada David Cohen expresses optimism about the evolving mood surrounding the North American trade agreement. In a recent interview with CBC News, Cohen noted that informal discussions are underway in

preparation for future negotiations as mandated by the new North American trade deal, marking the approach of its six-year review milestone.

Reflecting on past NAFTA renegotiations, which were marked by tension and

uncertainty, Cohen reassured stakeholders that the current climate is markedly different. He emphasized that the Biden administration is taking a more collaborative approach, avoiding phrases like “sunset clause” that had fueled apprehension during the Trump

era. Instead, they prefer the term “joint review,” which promotes a sense of partnership among the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.

Cohen highlighted that discussions have just begun on the U.S. side about potential topics for dialogue with its North American partners. With the halfway point in the trade agreement’s timeline now reached, the focus is on constructive engagement rather than the existential drama that characterized the previous negotiations.



Ambassador Cohen’s insights signal a hopeful outlook for the future of trade relations between the U.S. and Canada,

suggesting that this next chapter in NAFTA’s evolution could pave the way for positive developments in North American trade.

Migrant Crossings at U.S. Southern Border Reach Record Monthly High in December

By Irene Taschek

The U.S. Border Patrol has recorded a staggering influx of migrants in December 2023, processing over 225,000 individuals who entered the country illegally within the first 27 days of the month. This unprecedented figure, derived from internal federal statistics obtained by CBS News, underscores the significant migration crisis currently confronting the Biden administration.

The December total surpasses the previous monthly record of 224,000 apprehensions set in May 2022. It excludes the approximately 50,000 migrants processed monthly through legal entry points, primarily via a

smartphone app utilized by the Biden administration.

The surge in crossings peaked before Christmas, particularly during the week of December 14-20, when Border Patrol averaged nearly 9,800 daily apprehensions, with some days exceeding 10,000. Although crossings have decreased slightly in the following week, the numbers remain historically high, with 7,759 migrants processed on Wednesday.

Experts warn that the current levels of migration are unsustainable. Theresa Cardinal Brown, a former U.S. immigration official, emphasized the overwhelming challenge of

managing such high numbers, stating, “We can’t keep funding the system for more and more people.”

Approximately 60% of December’s migrant crossings occurred in the Tucson, Arizona, and Del Rio, Texas, sectors, where Border Patrol has reported daily unlawful crossings of 2,000 to 3,000. The surge has forced many migrants to sleep outdoors due to insufficient processing capacity.

In response, Customs and Border Protection has deployed additional personnel and resources to these overwhelmed sectors, aiming to address the influx and ensure

the safety of both migrants and border communities.

The Biden administration faces immense political pressure as it navigates the complexities of immigration policy leading up to the 2024 election. Public opinion has consistently reflected dissatisfaction with the administration's handling of border issues, amplifying criticisms from both Republicans and concerned Democrats.

Border towns like Eagle Pass, Texas, and larger cities such as Chicago and New York City have become critical hubs for migrants, straining local resources. Mayors from these cities have issued urgent pleas for increased federal support, warning they may soon be unable to accommodate new arrivals.

The administration has taken steps to assist migrants, including helping 10,000 individuals apply for work permits and expediting their processing. However, negotiations continue in Congress regarding proposed restrictions on asylum and deportation authority, with Republican lawmakers linking military aid to Ukraine with tougher border policies.



The crisis reached a turning point as top U.S. officials, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, met with Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez

Obrador to address migration challenges. While Mexico has implemented new enforcement actions, further details remain undisclosed, and both countries plan to meet again in January to evaluate progress and explore additional solutions.

U.S. Must Leverage Existing Maritime Task Force to Counter Houthi Attacks in the Red Sea

BY CHRISTINA LEVANDOWSK



The Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen launched missile attacks on three commercial vessels in the southern Red Sea on December 3, according to U.S. Central Command. In light of these escalating threats, the Biden administration is looking to form a maritime task force aimed at ensuring the safety of international shipping in the region. However, instead of starting anew, the U.S. should utilize the existing Combined Task Force 153 (CTF 153) to build an international coalition to protect maritime commerce and counter Iranian arms smuggling.

The context surrounding the recent attacks underscores the urgency of this approach. The U.S. Navy destroyer Carney responded to distress signals from the commercial vessels,

identified as Unity Explorer, M/V Number 9, and M/V Sophie II, which were struck by missiles from Houthi-controlled territories. During this operation, the Carney was also forced to destroy three drones targeting the ships. U.S. officials have described these attacks as direct threats to international commerce and maritime security.

This recent aggression is not isolated; it follows a pattern of Houthi threats against commercial shipping. On November 16, the International Maritime Security Construct warned of potential attacks in the Bab el-Mandeb strait and the Red Sea, which came to fruition just days later with the hijacking of the Galaxy Leader, a

Bahamian-flagged vessel. The ship, manned by a multinational crew, highlights the broader implications of Houthi hostility, which impacts multiple nations.

CENTCOM believes that while the Houthis are the ones executing these attacks, Iran plays a critical role in enabling their operations. U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan pointed out that the weapons used in the December 3 strikes were supplied by Iran, underlining Tehran's ongoing support for Houthi forces.

To address this growing maritime threat, Sullivan suggested forming a coalition of partner nations to secure safe passage for vessels in the Red Sea. Fortunately, the U.S. already has a framework to build upon with CTF 153, which focuses on maritime security in the region. Established in 2022, CTF 153 comprises 15 member nations, including Egypt, which previously led the task force. By enlisting the participation of countries like Saudi Arabia, Israel, and members of the G-7, the U.S. can enhance regional security and safeguard critical trade routes.

As tensions rise, a collaborative international effort is essential to deter further Houthi aggression and uphold the freedom of navigation in one of

the world's most vital maritime corridors. Leveraging existing resources will not only streamline operations but also

bolster efforts to maintain global trade security against the backdrop of escalating threats in the region.

Zelenskyy Urges U.S. Congress for Air Defense Support Amid Partisan Gridlock

By Jan Frazier

WASHINGTON — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made a last-minute trip to Washington on Tuesday to advocate for additional air defense support amid ongoing challenges in Congress. The fate of a \$61 billion supplemental package, crucial for unlocking this assistance, remains uncertain as partisan gridlock continues.

During a press conference, Zelenskyy emphasized the importance of achieving air superiority against Russia, stating, "Who controls the skies controls the war's duration." He highlighted the need for advanced air defense systems to enhance Ukraine's ground offensive in 2024 and discussed strategies with U.S. defense industry leaders to expedite defense production.

Zelenskyy's visit came as he returned from the inauguration of Argentinean President Javier Milei, aiming to sway increasingly skeptical Republican lawmakers regarding further aid for Ukraine. While he addressed the full Senate and engaged with House Democrats, his attempt to meet with the



entire House was hindered by House Speaker Mike Johnson's scheduling decisions. Zelenskyy described his discussion with Johnson as "positive," yet he acknowledged the need for concrete results.

As the end of the year approaches, it appears increasingly unlikely that Congress will pass the Ukraine aid package. Johnson plans to recess the House for the holidays, despite Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's appeals to remain in session to expedite the defense spending request, which includes funds for Ukraine, Israel, and other priorities.

Although bipartisan support for Ukraine aid exists, some House Republicans, previously in favor of military assistance, now express skepticism after the U.S. allocated over \$113 billion last year. Johnson has insisted on pairing Ukraine aid with strict immigration measures, complicating negotiations.

The Biden administration currently has less than \$5 billion available for weapon transfers to Ukraine and around \$1 billion to replenish U.S. stockpiles. Senate Appropriations Chairwoman Patty Murray warned that failing to renew aid could bolster Russian President Vladimir Putin's chances of victory in the conflict.

Zelenskyy has previously stressed that without additional support, Ukraine risks losing the war. The Senate Democrats' aid bill aligns closely with Biden's \$106 billion request, proposing \$61 billion for Ukraine, which includes \$44 billion for military support and increased authority for transferring weapons from U.S. stockpiles.

Senate Armed Services Chairman Jack Reed and Senator Mitt Romney noted Zelenskyy's emphasis on securing advanced air defense systems, particularly the Patriot missile system and longer-range Army Tactical Missile Systems, as essential to countering recent Russian attacks, including a barrage of missiles

on Kyiv that wounded four people.

As the situation develops, the urgency for Congress to act on Ukraine aid remains critical, both for the security of Ukraine and for maintaining U.S. commitments in the face of Russian aggression.

U.S. Considers Naval Task Force to Protect Red Sea Shipping

By Irene Taschek

In response to recent missile strikes by Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, the White House announced plans to potentially establish a naval task force to escort commercial ships in the Red Sea. National security adviser Jake Sullivan indicated that discussions with allies are underway, though no final decisions have been made. He characterized the initiative as a "natural" reaction to the growing maritime threats.



On Sunday, three commercial vessels were targeted by Houthi ballistic missiles, prompting a U.S. warship to intercept three drones in self-defense amid an extended assault. This escalation is part of a troubling trend of maritime attacks linked to the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict.

Sullivan stated, "We are in talks with other countries about a maritime task force involving ships from partner nations alongside the United States to ensure safe passage." Similar

protective measures have been implemented in regions like Somalia, highlighting the necessity of securing vital shipping routes.

The Red Sea, particularly the Bab al-Mandab strait, is crucial for global trade, with approximately 8.8 million barrels of oil transported daily through this region. This chokepoint not only carries oil and natural gas from the Gulf to Europe, the U.S., and China but also facilitates the movement of millions of tons of agricultural products and goods each year.

Sullivan emphasized the direct link between the Houthis' actions and Iranian support, asserting that "the weapons here are being supplied by Iran," thereby implicating them as responsible for the unrest. Notably, he clarified that not all vessels targeted were connected to Israel, underscoring the indiscriminate nature of Houthi aggression.

The proposed naval task force aims to enhance maritime security in one of the world's most important shipping lanes.

Pentagon Plans to Strengthen Guam Defense in 2024

By Jan Frazier



WASHINGTON — Pentagon leaders view China as a growing threat and believe that 2024 will be crucial for the Army to strengthen defenses around Guam, a strategically vital island in the Indo-Pacific. This year, the Army plans to establish a foundational capability to deter potential attacks.

The Missile Defense Agency and

the Army are requesting a combined \$1.5 billion in the fiscal 2024 budget to enhance the island's defenses by repositioning assets and integrating advanced capabilities. This initiative represents a significant test for the Army, which has often been overshadowed by air and naval power considerations in the region.

Earlier this year, the Pentagon designated the Army as the lead service responsible for the acquisition and execution of Guam's defense strategy. A successful defense initiative in Guam could solidify the Army's role in air and missile defense throughout the Indo-Pacific. However, experts caution that the timeline for implementation might be overly ambitious.

Mark Montgomery, a defense expert at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, noted that the Army proactively sought the lead role when other services hesitated. Still, he warned that the Army might struggle to meet its commitments. "We're talking about something that needs to be delivered fairly rapidly by a program executive that is not known for delivering fairly rapidly," Montgomery said.

Urgent Pentagon Warning: Delays in Key Defense Programs Without Full-Year Budget

By Athena Nagel

SIMI VALLEY, Calif. — Pentagon leaders have issued a stark warning to Congress: without a full-year budget, critical defense programs—ranging from uncrewed aircraft to hypersonics—face significant delays, jeopardizing the U.S. position in a technological race against China.

Air Force Secretary Frank

Kendall emphasized the urgency during a panel at the Reagan National Defense Forum, stating, "We cannot waste time." He highlighted the Air Force's recent strategic goals aimed at outpacing China's military capabilities, including the Collaborative Combat Aircraft (CCA), designed to operate alongside F-35s later this decade. Kendall noted that while

the CCA is vital, it symbolizes a broader objective: to develop faster, more cost-effective defense systems.

Reflecting on the time lost since the concept's inception, he pointed out, "The loss of time just from when we started this concept is two years. If we don't secure a 2024 budget, we may lose another year."

Heidi Shyu, the Pentagon's head of research and engineering, echoed these concerns, explaining that inconsistent funding has hindered testing of hypersonic technologies, another key area of competition. The Defense Department's Test Resource Management Center has requested additional funding for these initiatives for FY24, but progress hinges on congressional appropriations. Shyu plans to present Congress with a list detailing which systems could be affected by a year-long continuing resolution (CR).

"China spends an enormous amount on test assets," Shyu remarked, highlighting the growing gap in military capabilities.

For the past two months, the U.S. government has relied on CRs, which maintain spending at previous levels and prevent the initiation of new programs. The current short-term funding bill is set to expire in mid-January and early February, raising alarms about potential delays if a new spending deal isn't reached.



Because of the frequent delays in passing budget bills, the Pentagon has adapted its budgeting approach, anticipating potential contract delays in the first quarter. Army acquisition chief Doug Bush noted that while the effects of the last two CRs have been manageable, a failure to secure a budget by January could result in significant setbacks for the Army's plans for the upcoming fiscal year.

Bush highlighted the importance of several programs, such as air defense, long-range strike, and the new TITAN targeting system, which are either in development or nearing production.

Adding to the urgency, a provision from a recently passed debt ceiling bill mandates a 1% cut in all government spending if Congress fails to pass all 12 appropriations bills by January. This creates further complications for Pentagon officials trying to plan for future budgets. Bill LaPlante, the Defense Department's chief acquisition officer, remarked, "What we told everybody is... remember, this is not like previous years. There are going to be some hard choices."

The Pentagon's plea for a full-year budget reflects the critical need for timely funding to maintain America's defense.

Congress Approves \$874.2 Billion Defense Bill to Address Global Security Challenges

By Athena Nagel

Congress has passed the \$874.2 billion National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for fiscal year 2024, sending it to the White House for President Biden's signature. This defense

policy bill, which received bipartisan support, aims to bolster U.S. defense capabilities amid heightened global threats and ensure continued support for allies.

Following a 310-118 vote in the Republican-controlled House and an 87-13 vote in the Democratic-held Senate, the NDAA's approval underscores the urgency of national security.

Germany have access to modern air-to-air munitions is crucial.

“Enacting the NDAA has never been more vital,”

stated House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mike Rogers, citing challenges from China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, and global terrorism.

The bill aligns closely with President Biden’s defense budget request, following a bipartisan agreement to cap defense spending as part of the May debt ceiling compromise. Although authorized, the full release of funds depends on separate appropriations legislation that Congress has yet to pass, with temporary funding expiring early next year.

Key NDAA Provisions and Defense Initiatives

To keep military programs active, the NDAA provides interim funding, including \$100 million for new Air Force initiatives until a comprehensive budget is passed. Notably, the bill permits the Air Force to retire certain aging aircraft, such as some F-15 Eagles and A-10 Warthogs, though it blocks the retirement of 32 older F-22 Raptors.

The NDAA also advances munitions aid, expanding the list of eligible weapons for rapid procurement. Israel, Taiwan, and Ukraine are now prioritized for

expedited delivery, with multiyear contracts for six critical munitions, including Tomahawk Cruise Missiles and Mark 48 Torpedoes.

To address global challenges, the NDAA includes \$1 billion to complete a San Antonio-class amphibious ship, supporting the Marine Corps’ defense needs despite initial Navy hesitation. It also institutionalizes a nuclear-capable sea-launched cruise missile program, allocating funds to modernize warheads for Virginia-class submarines.

AUKUS and Indo-Pacific Defense Strengthening

The NDAA includes four provisions to support the AUKUS alliance with Australia and the UK, including the authorization to transfer three Virginia-class submarines to Australia.

Support for European Allies and Ukraine Aid

The NDAA reaffirms U.S. support for NATO by requiring Senate approval for any withdrawal from the alliance. Additionally, it allocates \$300 million for Ukraine’s defense in both FY24 and FY25, maintaining a focus on oversight with Pentagon Inspector General Robert Storch appointed as a special inspector to monitor Ukraine aid.

Delays for Space Command Headquarters

The bill postpones construction of the Space Command headquarters in Colorado until July, pending reviews of the decision to locate the base in Colorado rather than Alabama, where House Armed Services Chairman Mike Rogers advocates.



Romania and Bulgaria Set to Join Schengen by March 2024

BY ERIC GAHAGAN

Romania and Bulgaria are on track to join the Schengen Area, the European Union's passport-free travel zone, by March 2024, with initial access limited to air and sea borders. This marks a major milestone for the two Balkan nations, which joined the EU in 2007 and have been pushing for full Schengen entry for over a decade.

After years of stalled negotiations, Romanian and Bulgarian leaders recently announced a breakthrough, with both governments confirming an agreement reached on December 23. Romania's Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu celebrated the milestone, stating, "After 13 years, finally Romania will join Schengen! We have a political agreement on this!" Bulgaria's Prime Minister Nikolai Denkov also affirmed the news in a recent government session.

Austria had previously blocked the expansion of the Schengen zone, citing concerns over illegal immigration. However, under pressure and facing potential steps by Brussels to reinforce the EU's external borders, Vienna recently agreed to allow "Air Schengen" as a first step, with

the potential for land border integration later. Austria's conservative People's Party, under the influence from the far-right Freedom Party, has taken a stringent stance on immigration, complicating Schengen enlargement talks.

Currently, the Schengen Area consists of 27 countries, granting free movement to over 400 million people within Europe. Romania and Bulgaria's upcoming entry leaves only Ireland and Cyprus as EU members outside Schengen. For many Romanians and Bulgarians, inclusion in Schengen symbolizes deeper

integration into Europe and greater ease of travel, while also benefiting trade and tourism in both countries.

This phased integration will allow Romania and Bulgaria to strengthen their positions in Europe while easing migration concerns voiced by other member states. As negotiations continue, officials will evaluate expanding access to land borders, potentially by late 2024. The agreement represents a long-awaited victory for the Balkan states and a shift in EU border policies, emphasizing both internal unity and external security.



Health and Social Support for Migrants Using Drugs

By Christina Levandowsk



The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) launched a new miniguide on International Migrants Day, exploring the health and social responses needed for migrants who use drugs. This resource is part of a series aimed at understanding the consequences of drug use in diverse communities and presenting strategies to close gaps in service provision for migrants.

Migrants and Drug Use: A Unique Challenge

Migrants generally have lower substance use rates than host populations; however, some may have used drugs before arrival and may need medical support, while others might become vulnerable to drug problems over time. Various risk factors—trauma, social exclusion, family separation, unemployment, and poverty—can increase the likelihood of drug-related issues

in migrant communities.

Limited Services, Significant Barriers

The miniguide highlights that while there are health initiatives for migrants in Europe, few focus specifically on drug-related needs. Barriers to accessing drug services for migrants include limited awareness of treatment options, fear of legal repercussions, and concerns over residency rights or custody of children. These challenges underscore the need for culturally informed support to ensure equitable access to care.

Growing Range of Targeted Interventions

Despite limited service options, some European countries are expanding drug-related support targeted at migrants. Examples include:

- **Translation and interpretation** for accessible care.
- **Cultural mediation** to bridge language and cultural gaps.
- **Cultural competency training** to empower health professionals.
- **Peer-led support** involving migrants in program development.
- **Gender-responsive and trauma-informed** approaches that address unique needs and aim to create a sense of safety.

These targeted interventions reflect a commitment to inclusive, accessible health support for all communities, including migrant populations.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The EU Drugs Strategy 2021–2025 emphasizes the need for comprehensive health care that addresses migrants' specific needs, such as:

- Screening and needs assessment upon arrival.
- Brief interventions in international protection facilities.
- Continuous care for opioid or antiretroviral treatment.
- Integrated mental health and substance use services to aid social reintegration.

The EMCDDA guide serves as a vital tool for policymakers and practitioners developing migrant-focused health

responses. By understanding the unique challenges and needs of migrant communities,

professionals can help ensure that services are inclusive, sensitive, and effective.

Asylum Requests in Europe Soar, Driven by Global Instability

By Eric Gahagan



Asylum applications in Europe are on track to exceed 1 million in 2023, a number not seen since the peak in 2016. The majority of applicants are from Syria and Afghanistan, submitting over 100,000 and 86,000 requests respectively from January to September, as reported by the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA). This trend underscores ongoing crises in these countries, marked by conflict, economic hardship, and political repression.

The past year has also seen a substantial increase in migration from North African nations, including Tunisia, Libya, and Algeria. In total, 213,896 African migrants crossed to Europe via Mediterranean routes, a 60% rise over the same

period in 2022. This influx reflects both deteriorating conditions in their home countries and the continued appeal of Europe as a safe haven.

A Growing Humanitarian Challenge

European nations are also hosting over 4 million Ukrainians who sought refuge following the 2022 Russian invasion. Despite the rise in asylum numbers, Catherine Woollard, director of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, asserts that these numbers remain manageable. Woollard noted that Europe's response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis has shown its capacity to adapt when needed.

Yet, the risks associated with migration to Europe are starkly evident. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) reports that over 2,500 migrants lost their lives or went missing on Mediterranean routes in the first eight months of 2023. Many also face extreme dangers along land routes from sub-Saharan Africa, risking human rights abuses at every turn.

The Challenge of Acceptance

The acceptance rate for asylum seekers varies significantly. Syrians have an over 90% acceptance rate, while only about 60% of Afghan applicants succeed. Afghans continue to leave despite some stabilization, citing personal insecurity and poverty under Taliban rule. Turkish migrants, the third-largest group, see an acceptance rate below 50%, reflecting divergent European policies toward different nations.

This disparity, often described as an “asylum lottery,” highlights the inconsistencies in asylum policies across Europe. Political factors frequently shape these

decisions, with countries applying differing standards influenced by internal pressures like inflation, labor market demands, and social issues.

In an attempt to address these disparities, the EU recently introduced reforms aimed at standardizing asylum protocols across member states. If

approved, these measures could reshape Europe's approach to migration, providing a more consistent framework to meet the challenges posed by a rising tide of asylum seekers.

Hungary Blocks €50bn EU Aid for Ukraine Amid Membership Talks

By Jan Frazier

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has sparked tensions within the European Union by vetoing a proposed €50 billion (\$54 billion) aid package for Ukraine, aimed at supporting the nation's defense and rebuilding efforts against Russia's ongoing invasion. Orban's block came shortly after the EU agreed to initiate membership talks with Kyiv, marking a pivotal moment for Ukraine's potential EU future.



During the summit in Brussels, EU leaders expressed disappointment but decided to revisit the funding issue in the coming months. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte acknowledged Orban's veto, noting,

"We still have time; Ukraine is not out of funds immediately."

He remains hopeful that the EU can secure an agreement by late January. Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo stressed the importance of this support, emphasizing,

"It is essential for Ukraine to have the resources to sustain its defense and rebuild."

"It is essential for Ukraine to have the resources to sustain its defense and rebuild."

Orban's decision has been controversial, as critics accuse him of leveraging the Ukraine aid package to secure billions in EU funds currently withheld due to concerns over Hungary's adherence to the rule of law. In a gesture that some view as a concession, the European Commission recently released €10 billion (\$11 billion) of Hungary's frozen funds, while an additional €21 billion (\$23 billion) remains withheld.

The European Union's support for Ukraine faces mounting challenges. While most EU leaders see Ukraine's

growing scrutiny, with some EU members concerned that waning aid signals diminishing commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty. At NATO headquarters, Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg urged continued support, warning that a Russian victory in Ukraine could threaten broader European security. "Our support is not charity—it's an investment in our security," Stoltenberg said.

Despite the setback, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy remains hopeful that his allies will reinforce their support amid mounting challenges. While most EU leaders see Ukraine's

membership as a key strategic interest, Orban's opposition

underscores the complex dynamics the bloc faces as it

navigates issues of solidarity, law, and funding in support of Ukraine's future.

EU Migration Pact Threatens Asylum Rights, Says Amnesty

By Eric Gahagan



The recent agreement on the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum has sparked criticism from Amnesty International, warning that it could set back asylum rights across Europe. The pact, developed by the European Commission, the Council of the EU, and the European Parliament, introduces stricter regulations that Amnesty argues will lead to increased suffering for people seeking asylum.

Amnesty's European Institutions Office Director, Eve Geddie, expressed concern over the new measures, which she believes will reduce protections for asylum seekers at every stage of their journey. Geddie stated, "This agreement will set back European asylum law for

decades, leading to a rise in human suffering as people face greater obstacles in seeking safety."

The new regulations are expected to channel more people through rapid border asylum processes, often lacking full assessments of their claims. This, Amnesty warns, may result in de facto detention for families and vulnerable individuals, with limited access to fair asylum procedures. The pact also falls short of supporting frontline countries like Italy, Spain, and Greece, allowing other EU nations to bypass solidarity by opting to fund border security rather than participate in relocation efforts.

The pact includes opt-out provisions for countries facing

"increased arrivals" or situations deemed "force majeure." These exceptions, Amnesty cautions, could result in violations of international human rights laws and normalize emergency measures, undermining the right to asylum.

The EU's reliance on non-EU nations to manage migration, building upon partnerships with countries like Libya and Türkiye, further risks displacing Europe's asylum responsibilities. Amnesty has called for renewed EU commitment to human rights and accountability for abuses at borders, arguing that without these, the pact may only exacerbate the challenges facing Europe's asylum system.

Amnesty International continues to urge the EU to prioritize humane and sustainable solutions, advocating for improved reception conditions and safe pathways to asylum that uphold the rights and dignity of those seeking refuge in Europe.

EU Opens Membership Talks with Ukraine and Moldova, Grants Candidate Status to Georgia

By Eric Gahagan

In a groundbreaking decision, European leaders have agreed to open European Union membership talks with Ukraine and Moldova and to grant candidate status to Georgia. Announced at a recent summit in Brussels, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky celebrated the decision as a shared “victory” for Ukraine and Europe. EU Council President Charles Michel confirmed that the decision was unanimous, although Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban briefly stepped out during the vote, later criticizing the decision in a video message.

This move follows Ukraine’s and Moldova’s applications to join the EU after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in early 2022. Moldova’s President Maia Sandu expressed pride in advancing alongside Ukraine, emphasizing the significance of Ukrainian resistance. She called the decision “a new page” for Moldova, adding that Moldovans feel “Europe’s warm embrace.”

While White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan hailed this as a “historic” step for Euro-Atlantic aspirations, EU membership remains a lengthy and challenging process. Candidate nations must pass extensive reforms, addressing justice, corruption, and economic standards. However, the EU’s executive branch has



already noted Ukraine’s progress on critical reforms.

The EU decision is a morale boost for Ukraine, now nearly two years into the war with Russia. Ukrainian and Moldovan leaders view this as validation of their European aspirations. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz also commended the decision, emphasizing that Ukraine and Moldova belong in “the European family.”

While talks on membership could span years, this step signals the EU’s commitment to

supporting Ukraine and Moldova amid ongoing challenges. It comes as both countries face Russian aggression and as Ukraine continues its fight to defend European values.

Elsewhere, the EU aims to begin membership discussions with Bosnia-Herzegovina, once Sarajevo completes required electoral and judicial reforms, adding to a vision of a more integrated and democratic Europe.

Israel's Continued Military Action in Gaza Amid Global Pressure for Ceasefire

BY JAN FRAZIER

Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen has asserted that the country will persist in its military operations in Gaza “with or without international support.” He warned that a ceasefire at this juncture would be “a gift” to Hamas, enabling the group to regain strength and pose further threats to Israeli citizens.

Amid escalating pressure regarding the rising Palestinian civilian toll and the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza, Cohen's comments come as a stark response to a UN General Assembly resolution that overwhelmingly called for an immediate ceasefire. This resolution, supported by 153 member states, also demanded the unconditional release of hostages and unrestricted humanitarian access to the region. Only eight countries, including Israel and the United States, voted against it, while the UK and Germany abstained.

The ongoing conflict, which began following an unprecedented attack by Hamas on southern Israel on October 7, has led to significant casualties. More than 18,600 individuals, predominantly women and children, have been reported killed in Gaza, according to data from the Hamas-run health



ministry.

As intense fighting continues throughout Gaza, the humanitarian situation grows increasingly dire. Heavy rainfall has exacerbated conditions for the hundreds of thousands of displaced individuals living in makeshift shelters. Senior UN officials have warned of a looming public health crisis due to the collapse of the medical system and the rise of infectious diseases in overcrowded conditions.

While the U.S. has generally supported Israel's stance against a pause in military actions, there is a noticeable shift in tone among American officials regarding Israel's conduct in the conflict.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin recently cautioned that Israel risks transforming a “tactical victory into a strategic defeat” without adequate measures to protect civilians.

In the backdrop of these developments, President Biden emphasized that Israel is losing international support due to its “indiscriminate bombing” in Gaza. As diplomatic efforts continue, including upcoming talks between White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the discussions are expected to touch on the future of Gaza and a possible timetable for ending the conflict.

Putin Strengthens Middle East Ties with Visits to UAE and Saudi Arabia

By Eric Gahagan

Russian President Vladimir Putin is set to enhance his influence in the Middle East with visits to the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia on Wednesday. Following these visits, he will host Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in Moscow on Thursday. According to Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, discussions will center on bilateral relations and the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict.

The agenda will also include cooperation on oil markets, with Russia's ties to these countries reinforced through the OPEC+ alliance, which Putin helped establish in 2016. Recent OPEC+ announcements of voluntary supply cuts have drawn skepticism in the oil market, highlighting the complexities of energy diplomacy.



Putin's diplomatic outreach comes as part of a broader strategy to showcase the resilience of Russia amid Western sanctions imposed due to its actions in Ukraine. Notably, the leaders of the UAE and Saudi Arabia are not obligated to arrest Putin under the International Criminal Court's warrant issued in March, allowing him to engage freely.

In response to the Israel-Hamas war, Putin has criticized U.S. diplomatic efforts, framing the conflict as a consequence of Washington's failure to support the establishment of a Palestinian state. He has proposed that Russia could mediate in the conflict, leveraging its relationships with both Israel and the Palestinians, suggesting that Moscow's impartiality positions.

UN Secretary-General Raises Alarm on Gaza Conflict Spillover

By Irene Taschek



Gaza Crisis: UN Warns Half of Population Starving Amid Ongoing Conflict

By Christina Levandowski

A senior UN aid official has issued a stark warning that half of Gaza's population is facing starvation as fighting in the region continues. Carl Skau, the deputy director of the UN World Food Programme (WFP), stated that only a fraction of the necessary supplies has managed to enter the Strip, with nine out of ten residents unable to secure daily meals.

Skau emphasized the dire conditions, noting that aid deliveries have become "almost impossible." In the wake of ongoing airstrikes aimed at Hamas, Israel maintains that these operations are necessary to eliminate the group and recover Israeli hostages. Israel Defense Forces (IDF) spokesman Lt. Col. Richard Hecht acknowledged the civilian toll, expressing regret but stressing the lack of alternatives in their military strategy.

IDF Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi urged soldiers to "press harder" against Hamas, indicating that they are witnessing signs of the group's collapse. Concurrently, the Biden administration has exercised emergency powers to authorize the sale of 14,000 rounds of tank ammunition to Israel, valued at over \$106 million.

Since the escalation began on October 7, following a Hamas



attack that resulted in 1,200 Israeli deaths and 240 hostages taken, movement in and out of Gaza has been heavily restricted. Israel's response included closing its borders and initiating airstrikes, significantly curtailing the flow of aid that many Gazans depend on.

The Hamas-run health ministry claims that over 17,700 people, including more than 7,000 children, have died due to Israel's retaliatory measures. The Rafah crossing with Egypt remains the only entry point for limited aid, although Israel recently agreed to open the Kerem Shalom crossing for inspections before aid is sent to Rafah.

Skau, who visited Gaza this week, described scenes of "fear, chaos, and despair," with desperate crowds at distribution points and empty supermarket shelves. He

highlighted that in some areas, nine out of ten families are spending entire days without food.

In Khan Younis, a city now encircled by Israeli tanks, residents express their desperation. Dr. Ahmed Moghrabi, the head of the plastic surgery unit at Nasser Hospital, shared his anguish over the lack of food and resources, stating, "I feel helpless" as he struggles to provide for his young daughter.

The humanitarian crisis is compounded by intensified airstrikes in Khan Younis, where the hospital director reported losing track of the casualties arriving for treatment. Israel continues its operations, claiming Hamas leaders are hiding in the area and that they are engaging in house-to-house combat.

The humanitarian crisis is compounded by intensified airstrikes in Khan Younis, where the hospital director reported losing track of the casualties arriving for treatment. Israel continues its operations, claiming Hamas leaders are hiding in the area and that they are engaging in house-to-house combat.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has accused

the U.S. of complicity in war crimes, following its veto of a UN Security Council resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. This resolution received overwhelming support from 13 out of 15 Security Council members, with the UK abstaining and the U.S. standing alone in opposition.

The situation remains critical,

with a temporary ceasefire having ended recently. Under this truce, 78 hostages were released by Hamas in exchange for 180 Palestinian prisoners. However, more than 100 hostages still remain in captivity, and recent reports confirmed the death of an Israeli hostage, Sahar Baruch, amidst the ongoing conflict.

Many Killed in Israeli Air Strikes in Jabalia Amid Ongoing Conflict

By Athena Nagel

At least 110 people have been reported killed in Israeli air strikes in Jabalia, northern Gaza, according to the Hamas-run health ministry, amid ongoing conflict across the territory. The air strikes targeted three homes in the Jabalia refugee camp, resulting in the deaths of 50 individuals, with dozens more trapped under rubble.

Videos from local sources displayed the tragic aftermath, including the bodies of young children lined up at a medical facility. The Israeli military stated these operations aimed to dismantle Hamas “terrorist infrastructure” in the area.

The escalation coincides with US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin’s visit to Tel Aviv, where he is expected to discuss strategies to reduce fighting intensity and protect civilians. Meanwhile, the UN Security

Council is preparing to vote on a resolution calling for an urgent and sustainable ceasefire, amidst ongoing negotiations to secure the release of more Israeli hostages held by Hamas.

Gaza has faced immense devastation over the past 10 weeks, following an unprecedented attack by Hamas on southern Israel on October 7, which resulted in over 1,200 casualties, primarily among civilians. The ongoing conflict has claimed more than 19,400 lives in Gaza, with women and children making up approximately 70% of the fatalities.

Reports indicate that the air strikes on Jabalia were particularly devastating, as multiple families were living in the targeted homes. Local journalists noted significant challenges in verifying details due to communication

breakdowns in the region. However, Jabalia has become a focal point for Israeli ground operations, with air strikes intensifying following the recent withdrawal of Israeli tanks from the area.

In another tragic incident, Gaza’s health ministry reported the death of a 13-year-old girl, Dunia Abu Mohsen, due to an Israeli tank shell striking the maternity building of Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis. She had been receiving treatment after previously losing a leg in an earlier attack.

The IDF emphasizes its efforts to avoid civilian casualties, claiming it dedicates significant resources to planning attacks and implementing measures such as advance warnings. However, international pressure is mounting for Israel to scale back its military operations to limit civilian harm. The US and

European leaders have called for a ceasefire, citing the excessive loss of civilian life.

Additionally, Human Rights Watch has accused Israel of using starvation as a method of warfare by blocking essential supplies to Gaza, a claim that Israeli officials have vehemently denied. As the situation continues to unfold, the focus remains on achieving a resolution that addresses both security concerns and humanitarian needs.



Israeli Ground Forces Advance into Southern Gaza Amid Escalating Conflict

By Eric Gahagan

Israeli ground forces have intensified their operations in southern Gaza following three days of relentless bombardment. Initial confirmations from Israeli army radio indicate a full-scale ground assault is underway north of Khan Younis, with verified reports of tanks operating near the city.

Lt. General Herzi Halevi of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) addressed troops, asserting that the military is engaging in “strong and thorough” operations not just in the northern region but now also in the south. An IDF spokesperson later stated that the ground incursion is expanding across Gaza, with troops involved in direct confrontations with Hamas militants.

The resumption of Israel’s extensive bombing campaign comes after a week-long ceasefire, during which Hamas released 110 hostages in exchange for 240 Palestinians. With the ceasefire concluded, residents in Khan Younis have reported what they describe as the most intense wave of attacks so far.

As hostilities escalate, the Israeli army has issued evacuation orders for several districts in Khan Younis, urging residents to flee immediately, citing concerns that Hamas leadership is hiding in the area. Hundreds of thousands who had previously sought shelter from the fighting in northern Gaza are now facing a precarious situation.

A UN official has reported unprecedented panic within Gaza’s hospitals, with UNICEF’s James Elder describing the Nasser Medical Hospital as a “warzone.” He highlighted the arrival of children suffering from severe injuries, underscoring the dire humanitarian crisis unfolding.

The Hamas-run health ministry has reported over 500 fatalities since the bombing resumed, bringing the total death toll in Gaza to more than 15,500 since the conflict reignited.

The ongoing violence has created a catastrophic situation in Gaza, according to local residents. With dwindling resources and constant attacks, the living conditions are rapidly deteriorating. Mohammed

Ghalayini, a British-Palestinian currently in Gaza, described the state of the city as “beyond catastrophic.”

As Israel continues its military operations, the international community watches closely, with calls for restraint and protection of civilians becoming increasingly urgent.





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