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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.

Editorial Team

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Israeli Military Prepares for Prolonged Conflict in Gaza Through 2024

BY ADRIANA MONTES

The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) expect the war in Gaza to continue throughout 2024. In a New Year's message, IDF spokesperson Daniel Hagari announced that troop deployments would be adjusted to prepare for extended fighting. Some reservists will be withdrawn to regroup and re-energize for future operations.

Since October 7, the conflict has escalated, with over 21,978 people killed in Gaza, mostly women and children, and thousands more wounded. Israel's airstrikes have continued, with the IDF targeting Hamas leaders and military sites.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu affirmed that the war is far from over, with significant operations still ahead. Meanwhile, Gaza faces severe humanitarian challenges, with 85% of the population displaced and widespread disease outbreaks reported.



Despite the devastation, Israeli officials remain resolute in their military objectives, stating that the conflict will persist for many months to come.



Israel and Hamas Reach Deal for Increased Humanitarian Aid to Gaza

By Adriana Montes

Israel and Hamas have reached an agreement, brokered by Qatar and France, to facilitate increased humanitarian aid to

Gaza. This arrangement includes the delivery of medicines to hostages held by Hamas, while Israel will allow more basic

supplies into Gaza, where conditions have deteriorated after over three months of bombardment.



The US, through its Middle East envoy, is engaged in ongoing talks aimed at securing the release of more hostages

with discussions described as serious and intensive. More than 132 hostages are still believed to be held in Gaza.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza remains dire, with over 24,000 people killed, most of them women and children, according to Palestinian officials. An estimated 85% of the population has been displaced, and the UN has called the situation “intolerable” due to severe food and medical shortages. The US has urged Israel to increase the flow of essential aid into the territory.

Hamas Acknowledges ‘Faults’ in October 7 Attack, Claims Focus on Israeli Soldiers

By Adriana Montes

Hamas has acknowledged “faults” in the deadly October 7 attack it led on southern Israel, while insisting its fighters targeted Israeli soldiers and people bearing arms. The Palestinian group, which governs Gaza, released a 16-page report titled “Our Narrative” on Sunday, offering its perspective on the assault, which it refers to as Operation Al-Aqsa Flood.

The report asserts that the attack was a “necessary step” to counter Israeli actions against Palestinians and claims the group aimed to target military sites and capture soldiers to leverage their release for Palestinian prisoners held in Israel. According to Hamas, the Qassam Brigades, its armed wing, adheres to a “religious and moral commitment” to avoid

harming civilians, asserting that any civilian deaths were accidental.

Hamas has rejected allegations from Israeli authorities of war crimes, including torture, rape, and mutilation, which Israel claims were committed during the attack. The report also attributed some casualties to the chaos that ensued from the collapse of Israeli security forces and the actions of the Israeli army and police.

In response to the attack, Israel launched a devastating military campaign against Gaza, killing over 25,000 people, mostly women and children, according to Palestinian officials. Both Palestinian authorities and human rights

groups have accused Israel of war crimes during the assault.

Addressing the future of Gaza, the Hamas report emphasized the right of the Palestinian people to decide their fate without external interference, citing the continued Israeli occupation, settlement expansion, and past violence as driving forces behind the conflict.



Palestinian Foreign Ministry Welcomes ICC Investigation Request Amid Gaza Conflict

By Jan Frazier

The Palestinian foreign ministry has welcomed the move by Chile and Mexico to request an investigation by the International Criminal Court (ICC) into alleged crimes against civilians, as Israel's military campaign in Gaza intensifies.

The conflict began on October 7, when Hamas fighters launched a surprise attack inside Israel, resulting in approximately 1,140 civilian deaths, according to Israeli officials. Israel retaliated with a sustained air and ground offensive that, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, has claimed the lives of over 24,600 people, 70 percent of whom were children, women, and the elderly.

Calls for ICC Action

Mexico's foreign ministry issued a statement on Thursday, citing "growing concern over the latest escalation of violence, particularly against civilian targets," and called for the ICC to determine potential criminal responsibility. It referenced numerous United Nations reports detailing incidents that could fall under the court's jurisdiction.

Chile's foreign minister, Alberto van Klaveren, expressed support for the investigation of war crimes, regardless of whether they were committed by Israelis or Palestinians.

Palestinian Response

The Palestinian foreign ministry praised the referral, calling for the ICC to "deter, investigate, and prosecute" the most serious crimes of international concern. It accused Israeli officials of continuing a "genocidal war" undeterred by international scrutiny.

Broader Context of ICC Involvement

In 2021, the ICC opened an investigation into potential war crimes in Palestinian territories, including actions by both Israel and Hamas. ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan stated in November that the investigation now includes the current escalation in violence.

Mexico's request also referenced a separate case brought by South Africa before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza and calling for an emergency suspension of its military campaign. While Israel has rejected the genocide allegations, the pressure for international legal action continues to grow.

Israel's Position

Israel is not a member of the ICC and does not recognize its jurisdiction. Despite this, the calls for accountability from various nations are gaining momentum, adding to the global spotlight on the humanitarian crisis.



Israel Signals Shift in Gaza Campaign, Aims to End Bombardment of Northern Gaza

By Jan Frazier

Israel has indicated it is ready to conclude its bombardment of northern Gaza, claiming it has "dismantled" Hamas in that part of the territory. The military spokesperson announced on Sunday that Israel had nullified the armed group's presence in northern Gaza, extending signs that it plans to transition to a more targeted campaign. This statement coincided with visits by top American and European diplomats, who are increasing international pressure due to the mounting death toll and deepening humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Focus Shifts to Central and Southern Gaza

The military spokesperson asserted that Israeli forces had dismantled Hamas' "military framework" in northern Gaza, having killed approximately 8,000 fighters. While scattered resistance and rocket fire may continue, Hamas no longer operates in an organized manner in the north, according to the spokesperson.

Despite this declaration, the spokesperson did not comment on future troop deployments in northern Gaza, only stating that

the military would "continue to deepen the achievement." Meanwhile, Israel's military focus will shift to dismantling Hamas in the central and southern parts of the enclave. These areas have seen a massive influx of displaced Palestinians, who had fled the north when it was previously designated as a "safe zone" by Israel.

Humanitarian Crisis and Mounting Pressure

Since Hamas' initial attack on October 7, which killed about 1,140 people in Israel and saw 240 captives taken, the Israeli

military's response has caused devastating casualties in Gaza. Recent figures show nearly 23,000 people have been killed, with more than 58,000 wounded. Many remain missing, feared trapped under the rubble of bombed buildings. Over two million people, the majority of Gaza's population, have been displaced and are struggling with severe shortages of food and shelter.

International pressure, particularly from the United States, has mounted on Israel to end the widespread bombardment. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the EU's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, are currently in the region urging Israel to adjust its tactics to reduce civilian casualties and increase the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza. However, Israel has remained firm in its objectives to dismantle Hamas and secure the return of hostages before ending its military operations.



Risk of Regional Spillover

With the conflict showing no signs of abating, the risk of the war expanding beyond Gaza is increasing. Tensions are flaring in the occupied West Bank, along Israel's border with Lebanon, and in Iraq, Syria, and the Red Sea. Jordan's King Abdullah warned U.S. Secretary of State Blinken about the "catastrophic repercussions" of

Israel's continued military actions, signaling growing regional concerns about a wider conflict.

As Israel presses ahead with its campaign, international efforts to de-escalate the conflict and prevent further humanitarian disaster are intensifying, but the path to peace remains uncertain.

100 Days of War on Gaza: Devastation, Humanitarian Crisis, and the Risk of Regional Conflict

By Jan Frazier

As the war on Gaza reaches its 100th day, Israel's relentless bombardment of the besieged territory shows no signs of easing, amidst a growing humanitarian catastrophe and the looming threat of regional escalation.

Since the war began on October 7, following Hamas' assault on southern Israel that killed 1,139 people and saw approximately 240 individuals taken captive, more than 23,968 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, have been killed.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to "continue [the war] until victory," declaring in a televised address on Saturday, "No one will stop us – not The Hague, not the Axis of Evil, and no one else." His comments referred to a case brought by South Africa

to the International Court of Justice, seeking emergency measures to halt Israel's war, as well as to the Iran-aligned "axis of resistance" groups in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.

The Bloodiest Conflict in Decades

This war has been the most destructive in the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Gaza media office recently reported that Israel has dropped over 65,000 tonnes of bombs on the region. Satellite data analyzed by the Associated Press suggests that approximately 33 percent of buildings in Gaza have been destroyed.

According to the United Nations, nearly 85 percent of Gaza's 1.9 million people have been displaced, and over 90 percent of the population faces acute food insecurity. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) warned on Sunday that the "massive destruction, displacement, hunger, and loss" over the past 100 days is "staining our shared humanity."

Calls for Action Amid Humanitarian Collapse

The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has condemned the international community for its failure to implement resolutions that address the Palestinian cause, adding that Israel has turned Gaza into "an



uninhabitable place" within just 100 days.

Israeli Military Objectives and Challenges

Israel's war cabinet has set two main objectives: dismantling Hamas' ability to rule Gaza and securing the release of the remaining captives—136 of whom are still believed to be in Gaza. Last week, the Israeli military announced it had largely dismantled Hamas' northern Gaza "military framework" and indicated a shift to a lower-intensity phase of operations.

However, questions remain about how Israel will manage more focused operations in the southern Gaza Strip, especially after forcing over a million people to evacuate from the

north. Despite earlier truces allowing the release of 105 captives, little progress has been made in recovering the remaining hostages, causing increasing frustration among their families.

Tensions in Israel

In Tel Aviv, tens of thousands of people marked "100 days of hell" at rallies over the weekend, demanding the return of the hostages. The mood at these rallies has shifted from unity to desperation, with protesters adopting the slogan, "Enough is enough."

Risk of Regional Spillover

While the conflict rages in Gaza, tensions are mounting in the wider region. Along Israel's northern border with Lebanon, .

near-daily exchanges of fire between Hezbollah and the Israeli army have raised fears of an expanded conflict. The recent killing of a senior Hamas leader in Beirut by an alleged Israeli strike further increased concerns of a regional spillover.

In Yemen, Houthi rebels have escalated their attacks, targeting ships linked to Israel in the Red Sea—an essential route for global trade.

They have vowed to continue these attacks until the war ends. In response, the United States and the United Kingdom have launched significant strikes on Yemen.

Uncertainty About Gaza's Future

Amidst the chaos, there remains little clarity about what post-war Gaza might look like. The United States has repeatedly suggested that it

wants the Palestinian Authority to govern Gaza once again. However, the Palestinian Authority, which currently controls parts of the occupied West Bank, enjoys limited support among Palestinians.

As the war continues, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza worsens, and the risk of a broader regional conflict looms larger with each passing day.

Global Oil Markets Face Disruption Amid Red Sea Tensions and Rising Demand

BY JAN FRAZIER



The structure of the global benchmark Brent crude futures market and some physical oil markets in Europe and Africa are reflecting a tightening supply. This is partly due to concerns over shipping delays as vessels avoid the Red Sea following missile and drone attacks by Houthi rebels in Yemen. These disruptions, the largest to global trade since the COVID-19 pandemic, have combined with other factors like rising Chinese demand, creating increased competition for crude supplies that don't need to transit the Suez Canal. Analysts have noted that these effects are most apparent in European markets.

In a sign of tighter supply, the Brent crude market structure – which is used to price nearly 80% of the world's traded oil –

hit its most bullish in two months. This occurred as tankers diverted from the Red Sea following recent air strikes by the United States and the United Kingdom on targets in Yemen. Brent's first-month contract premium to the six-month contract rose to \$2.15 a barrel on Friday, the highest since early November. This backwardation structure, where prompt delivery contracts are priced higher than future contracts, indicates a perception of tighter supply for immediate delivery.

Houthi rebels, who control northern Yemen and the country's western coastline, have launched a wave of assaults on ships in the Red Sea in response to Israel's ongoing war in Gaza. Their attacks have

targeted vessels they perceive as linked to Israel, in an attempt to pressure Tel Aviv to halt the war and allow humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. Houthi activity has focused on the Bab al-Mandeb strait, a critical chokepoint that connects the Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea. Around 50 ships pass through the strait daily, bound for or leaving the Suez Canal.

Some of the world's largest shipping companies have suspended transit through the Red Sea, forcing vessels to take the longer route around the Cape of Good Hope in southern Africa. This diversion has driven up freight rates due to the increased costs of fuel, crew, and insurance. According to Viktor Katona, lead crude analyst at Kpler, "Brent is the most impacted futures contract when it comes to Red Sea/Suez Canal disruptions. European refiners are undoubtedly suffering the most on the physical front."

Less Middle Eastern crude is flowing into Europe, with shipments nearly halved from 1.07 million barrels per day (bpd) in October to approximately 570,000 bpd in December, according to Kpler data. Ships traversing the Suez

Canal have taken on greater importance since the war in Ukraine. Sanctions on Russia have forced Europe to rely more heavily on oil from the Middle East, which supplies about one-third of the world's Brent crude. However, the impact of Red Sea shipping disruptions is difficult to isolate, as the crude market remains tight across the board. "It's a strong market everywhere, but people are very nervous," a crude trader told Reuters.

The European crude market has also tightened due to a drop in Libyan oil production following protests, the first disruption in months, and lower exports from Nigeria. Angolan crude, which typically heads to Europe without passing through the Suez

Canal, is now in higher demand from China and India. This shift in demand is due to issues with Iranian and Russian crude, further reducing the availability of oil for European buyers.

China, the world's largest oil importer, is facing challenges with its oil trade with Iran. Tehran has been withholding shipments, demanding higher prices, while India's imports of Russian crude have declined due to currency issues, though India has also pointed to uncompetitive prices. Meanwhile, China has continued to import record amounts of discounted Russian oil despite Western sanctions imposed over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Russian crude shipments to China hit a record

high in 2023, with 107.02 million metric tonnes, equivalent to 2.14 million bpd, surpassing Saudi Arabia to become China's top supplier.

Saudi Arabia, previously China's largest oil supplier, saw its exports to the Asian giant fall by 1.8%, to 85.96 million tonnes. This decrease reflects a loss in market share to cheaper Russian crude. The shifting dynamics in the global oil market underscore the complexity of supply and demand, as geopolitical tensions in the Red Sea, sanctions on Russia, and rising demand from Asia all combine to tighten available crude supplies, particularly for European refiners.

Farmers Across Europe Protest Against Rising Costs and EU Policies

By Jan Frazier

Farmers across Europe have mobilized in large numbers, blocking roads and staging protests to express their frustrations over rising costs and EU regulations. Struggling with the cost of living crisis, they are now also contending with sustainability policies and the effects of the war in Ukraine.

In France, farmers have blocked highways, creating a political crisis for Prime Minister Gabriel Attal, who has introduced measures to ease their concerns. Issues range from national bureaucracy to broader



Germany has seen similar unrest, particularly over the government's plan to phase out tax breaks on agricultural diesel. Farmers argue this could push many into bankruptcy. National strikes have taken place, reflecting the growing anger at EU policies.

The EU's revised Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has also sparked widespread discontent. The CAP's sustainability measures, such as setting aside 4% of arable land for non-productive features and reducing fertilizer use, are seen by many farmers as making Europe less competitive against imports. Inflation has also eroded the value of EU direct payments.

The war in Ukraine has further complicated matters, as the EU lifted restrictions on Ukrainian imports, leading to a flood of cheaper agricultural products into European markets. This has undercut prices in countries like Poland, Romania, and Hungary, where farmers have protested Ukrainian competition. In response, Eastern European nations are calling on the EU to reassess its trade liberalization with Ukraine.

Southern Europe has so far seen fewer protests, but drought and climate change are likely to ignite future unrest in countries like Italy and Spain. Farmers there are already facing water shortages, and regional

With European elections approaching, these protests have caught the attention of Eurosceptic parties. While some fear the protests could empower extremists, experts argue that farmers are more focused on survival than politics.

EU officials, including President Ursula von der Leyen, have acknowledged the growing divide and have initiated talks with agricultural groups. However, for many farmers who feel neglected and unable to support their families, these efforts may not be enough to quell the rising tide of discontent across Europe.

Ukraine Secures Bilateral Military Aid Amid Stalled Western Support

By Mandilee Hecht

As \$137bn in military and financial aid to Ukraine remains stalled in

Washington and Brussels, European allies have stepped in with their own commitments to ensure Ukraine's resistance against Russia continues.

In the past week, Ukrainian forces held a 1,000km line against Russian assaults in an "active defense" strategy. Ukrainian air forces also managed to destroy a rare Russian reconnaissance plane, the Beriev A-50, over the Sea of Azov. Despite this success,



Russia retaliated by launching missile attacks, wounding 17 in Kharkiv.

Russia continues to push for control in eastern Ukraine, while Ukrainian forces focus on holding their positions and

inflicting losses on the enemy. Ukrainian President Zelenskyy emphasized that Russian President Putin will not abandon his goals in Ukraine, calling for continued international support to end the war.

While Western aid packages remain stuck in political deliberations, NATO and the European Commission are stepping up their defense efforts. NATO chief Admiral Rob Bauer called for a

“warfighting transformation” and a focus on military effectiveness, while the EU is planning a \$109bn European Defence Investment Programme to boost defense industries. The EU also aims to produce one million artillery shells annually, fulfilling its earlier commitment to Ukraine.

As Congress debates \$61bn in US aid for 2024, and EU packages totaling \$74bn face

opposition from Hungary, individual European nations are bypassing the gridlock. Estonia has committed \$1.3bn over four years, Latvia has pledged significant military supplies, and the UK signed a \$3.2bn agreement to boost Ukraine’s drone production. France and Germany are also contributing to Ukraine’s defense, with Germany doubling its military aid in 2024.

Farmers Across Europe Protest Against Rising Costs and EU Policies

By Mandilee Hecht

Turkish lawmakers have ratified Sweden’s NATO membership in a long-awaited vote, moving Sweden closer to

joining the alliance after applying in 2022 following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The ratification resolves a significant obstacle, as Turkey had withheld approval, citing Sweden’s alleged support for Kurdish separatists.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is expected to sign the legislation soon, leaving Hungary as the only NATO member yet to ratify Sweden’s accession. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has shown willingness for talks, inviting Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson to Budapest. However, Sweden’s Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom stated there’s no need for negotiation but is open to dialogue.



Turkey initially opposed Sweden’s bid over concerns about Kurdish militant support, specifically regarding the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which Turkey, the EU, and the US classify as a terrorist group. Sweden responded by strengthening anti-terror laws in June.

Finland, Sweden’s neighbor, joined NATO earlier in 2023, doubling NATO’s border with Russia. The approval of Sweden’s membership is now contingent on Hungary’s final decision. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has urged Hungary to complete the ratification process swiftly.

Sweden's Top Defence Officials Warn Citizens to Prepare for War, Stirring Concerns

By Liam Flynn

A warning from two of Sweden's top defence officials urging citizens to mentally prepare for the possibility of war has sparked concerns and accusations of alarmism. Civil Defence Minister Carl-Oskar Bohlin, speaking at a defence conference, stated that "there could be war in Sweden," a sentiment echoed by military Commander-in-Chief Gen Micael Byden. He emphasized that Swedes must prepare on an individual level.



While some have supported the remarks as necessary preparation given the current geopolitical climate, opposition figures, such as ex-Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson, have criticized the tone. Andersson acknowledged the serious security situation but reassured that war was not imminent. Children's rights organization Bris also reported an uptick in worried calls from youngsters following the news, prompting concerns that the message wasn't tailored appropriately for different audiences.

Gen Byden later clarified that his aim was not to cause panic but to encourage people to think about their responsibilities in a potential crisis. The warnings come as Sweden moves closer to joining NATO, pending final approvals from Turkey and Hungary. Sweden has already committed to increasing its defense spending to meet NATO's 2% of GDP target by 2024, doubling its spending since 2020.

Defence experts like Oscar Jonsson see the remarks as a necessary wake-up call to address gaps in Sweden's civil and military preparedness. However, Jonsson also pointed out that the likelihood of war would depend on several factors, including the outcome of the Ukraine conflict, Russia's military rebuilding efforts, and Europe's reliance on US military support.

EU Lawmakers Call for Action Against Hungary's Orban Amid Rule of Law Concerns

By Liam Flynn

Some European Union lawmakers have intensified their calls to sanction Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban by advocating for steps that could strip Hungary of its voting rights within the EU. At least 120 of the European Parliament's 705 members signed a letter addressed to European Parliament President Roberta Metsola, urging more pressure on Budapest.

The lawmakers criticized Hungary's continued disregard for the rule of law and its recent actions, particularly during the December EU Council meeting, where Orban blocked a budget review that included a 50 billion-euro (\$55 billion) financial aid package for Ukraine, covering the years through 2027.

The letter pushed for initiating a process that could result in the suspension of Hungary's voting rights in the EU Council, stating that such a measure is necessary to safeguard the values of the European Union.

Hungary's Rule of Law Disputes with the EU

This latest call for action follows years of tensions between Hungary and the EU, with the bloc raising concerns about the independence of Hungarian courts, corruption, and the protection of minorities and civil liberties. Hungary's actions have sparked repeated accusations of backsliding on EU democratic.

Article 7.2 TEU: A Potential Threat to Hungary's Voting Rights

Finland's MEP Petri Sarvamaa, the author of the letter, emphasized the urgency of addressing Orban's policies. Sarvamaa noted the importance of triggering Article 7.2 of the Treaty on European Union, which could lead to the suspension of Hungary's voting rights if found guilty of violating the EU's core principles.

However, Hungarian MEP Balazs Hidveghi dismissed the letter, calling it yet another "attack" on Hungary by its critics. He referred to ongoing criticism from other EU member states as politically motivated and baseless.

Ongoing EU-Hungary Financial Dispute

The European Parliament plans to adopt a resolution regarding Hungary next week, spurred by dissatisfaction among MEPs with the European Commission's decision in December to unfreeze billions in financial aid to Budapest. These funds had been suspended due to concerns about Hungary's democratic integrity.

Despite the aid unfreezing, Orban continued to block critical EU decisions, including funding for Ukraine. Many MEPs argue that Hungary must address the rule of law concerns before resuming its role in critical EU decisions, particularly regarding Ukraine's aid package.

Poland-Hungary Alliance Makes Sanctions Unlikely

Although suspending Hungary's voting rights remains unlikely due to its close alliance with nationalist governments like Poland, the removal of Hungary's voting rights would simplify the approval process for EU decisions, particularly those involving aid to Ukraine. Poland, a key ally of Hungary, has so far shielded Budapest from facing severe sanctions within the EU.

US Federal Employees Plan ‘Day of Fasting’ in Protest of Biden’s Gaza Policy

BY ERIC GAHAGAN

Broader Pushback on Biden’s Israel Policy

The protest is part of a broader movement of government employees pushing back against US policy in the Middle East. Another group, Staffers for Ceasefire, recently held a vigil for Gaza outside the White House and published a statement condemning a White House morale-boosting event while civilians in Gaza continue to die.

According to Van Jackson, a former Pentagon official under the Obama administration, these protests mark an unprecedented level of dissent among federal employees. He noted that “no presidential administration in the past 40 years has been denounced by its own staff like this.”

Biden Administration’s Response

Despite the protests, it remains unclear whether they are having any impact on the administration’s policies. Insiders suggest that President Biden, the ultimate decision-maker on Israel policy, remains firm in his approach. A Biden official connected to Staffers for Ceasefire indicated that while the administration is aware.

war,” citing UN reports that up to 2 million people in Gaza face food insecurity.

Federal Protests Spark Strong Reactions

Earlier this month, an office walkout staged by the group drew sharp criticism in Washington, with national security officials labeling the protests as acts of insubordination. House Speaker Mike Johnson called for the termination of protesting employees, stating, “They deserve to be fired.”

Despite the backlash, representatives for Feds United for Peace say their goal is to spark conversation within federal offices, where many employees support a ceasefire.

A group of US government employees will participate in a “Day of Fasting for Gaza” this week to protest the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the territory and express frustration with President Joe Biden’s policy toward Israel. The initiative, organized by Feds United for Peace, follows an earlier office walkout and aims to raise awareness of Israel’s blockade and the impact on civilians in Gaza.

On Thursday, participating federal employees from more than two dozen agencies, including the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, and State, are expected to dress in black or wear keffiyeh scarves in solidarity with Palestinians. The group accuses Israel of using “starvation as a weapon of



Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin Takes Responsibility for Delayed Disclosure of Hospitalization

By Eric Gahagan

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin Takes Responsibility for Delayed Disclosure of Hospitalization

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has accepted “full responsibility” for the secrecy surrounding his recent hospitalization for an unspecified medical condition, which began on New Year’s Day.

Austin, 70, was admitted to Walter

Reed National Military Medical Center due to “complications following a recent elective medical procedure.” The Pentagon kept this information under wraps for five days, leading to concerns about transparency within the Biden administration.

In a written statement, Austin acknowledged, “I recognize I could have done a better job ensuring the public was appropriately informed. I commit to doing better.” He emphasized that the matter was his medical procedure, stating, “I take full responsibility for my decisions about disclosure.”

Administration Unaware of Hospitalization

Austin’s statement came as reports surfaced that senior leaders within the Biden



administration, including members of Congress and top Pentagon officials, were unaware of his hospitalization for several days. According to two anonymous administration officials, the White House National Security Council and top adviser Jake Sullivan were not informed until Thursday.

Air Force Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder confirmed that the White House and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were notified of Austin’s condition but did not specify when. Senator Roger Wicker, the top Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, criticized the Pentagon for not immediately informing Congress about the situation, as required by law.

Questions About Command Structure

With Austin unable to fulfill his duties, it remains unclear to what extent his responsibilities were delegated to Deputy Secretary Kathleen Hicks, who was also out of the office at the time. Reports indicate that Hicks did not know of Austin’s hospitalization when she began assuming his duties. However, she was equipped to manage her responsibilities remotely from Puerto Rico.

Concerns were raised about the implications of Austin’s absence, especially during a time when the US faces multiple national security challenges involving allies like Ukraine and Israel. Former Vice President Mike Pence criticized the delayed disclosure, calling it “a dereliction of duty.”

Retired Lt. Gen. Mark Hertling echoed this sentiment, stating, "You always notify your boss if you're hospitalized for something." He added, however, that Austin had trusted deputies to manage the department in his absence.

Fallout from the Incident

The episode has sparked a debate over transparency and communication within the government. Some defense officials suggested that Austin's undisclosed hospitalization could lead to accountability measures, with one unnamed official stating, "Someone's head has to roll."

Military Reporters and Editors (MRE), a non-profit organization for journalists covering the US military, criticized the timing of the announcement, stating that releasing the information on a Friday evening reflects a tradition of "obfuscation and opacity."

Storms and Extreme Weather Hit US: Tornadoes in the Southeast, Snow in the North

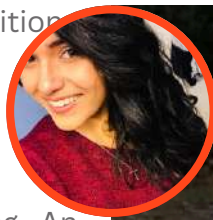
By Christina Levandowski

This week, cold conditions have swept across western parts of the United States, while the eastern regions have been inundated

by tornadoes and flooding. An area of low pressure known as Storm Finn moved northeast from Texas toward the East Coast, resulting in tornadoes that struck several southeastern states, including Florida, where at least 12 tornadoes caused significant damage to homes.

In the northeastern states, flooding left hundreds of thousands without power and led to the cancellation of over 1,000 flights. As the rain moved northward, it transitioned to snow in the mountainous regions, bringing blizzard conditions and strong winds.

Unsettled weather is expected to persist in eastern states, as another area of low pressure over central southern states is forecasted to track in a similar direction, bringing additional rain and snow.



Record-Breaking Temperatures in 2023

On Tuesday, the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service released its annual highlights, revealing that 2023 was the warmest year on record since 1850. The global average temperature reached 14.98°C, surpassing the previous record set in 2016 by 0.17°C and exceeding the 1991-2020 climate average by 0.6°C.

Last year was 1.48°C warmer than the pre-industrial level recorded between 1850 and

1900, with almost half of the year's days showing temperatures at least 1.5°C above that period. For comparison, this occurrence was noted during only 20% of days in 2016.

While last year's warmth was anticipated due to El Niño and ongoing climate change, the extent of the heat was unexpected due to several unforeseen factors. Notably, El Niño typically raises global temperatures during its decline, as seen in 2016. However, last

year's El Niño was still in its buildup phase and was comparatively weaker than during the 2015-16 event. Investigations are ongoing to understand these dynamics further.

Support for Independent Journalism

In September 2023, we launched Guardian Europe, a digital edition of the Guardian aimed at delivering journalism about the world to Europe and European stories to the world. The period since our launch has been dramatic, and with the growing support from readers like you, we have captured

moments of intense political peril and extraordinary people power, along with sporting joy in Paris and beyond.

With an expanded network of correspondents and commentators, Guardian Europe continues to bring renewed focus to new stories across the continent.

Congressional Hearing Addresses Online Child Exploitation: Zuckerberg and Spiegel Apologize to Victims' Families

By Christina Levandowski

have not been able to prevent these tragedies. We work very hard to block all search terms related to drugs on our platform," Spiegel stated.

Zuckerberg and Spiegel were among five tech executives questioned during the hearing titled "Big Tech and the Online Child Sexual Exploitation Crisis." The session aimed to examine the growing issue of online child sexual exploitation, with the participation of CEOs from X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and Discord.

Kristin Bride, holding a photo of her 16-year-old son Carson, attended the hearing, highlighting the personal impact of the issue. However, Zuckerberg's opening remarks seemed to irritate some, as he claimed that existing scientific evidence does not show a causal link between social media use and worsening mental health among young people. Senator Josh Hawley later.



In a poignant moment during a congressional hearing on online harms to children, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg expressed remorse to parents of victims who suffered due to social media exploitation. "I'm sorry for everything you have all been through," he said, as families held up photos of their children who had died as a result of sexual exploitation or harassment online. "No one should go through the things that your families have suffered, and this is why we invest so

much. We are going to continue doing industry-wide efforts to make sure no one has to go through what your families have had to endure."

Similarly, Evan Spiegel, CEO of Snap Inc., offered condolences to parents whose children accessed illegal drugs via Snapchat. In late 2023, over 60 parents filed suit against Snap, claiming the platform facilitated their children's drug acquisitions leading to overdoses. "I'm so sorry that we

The Senate chamber was filled with families and advocates, prompting Senator Lindsey Graham to comment on the large turnout. He accused social media companies of “destroying lives and threatening democracy itself,” declaring, “I know you don’t mean it to be so, but you have blood on your hands.”

Chair of the committee, Dick Durbin, emphasized the urgent need to combat online dangers faced by children, calling child sexual exploitation a crisis in America. He stated that the design choices and profit-driven motives of social media platforms have given predators new tools to exploit children. “Their design choices, their failures to adequately invest in trust and safety.

The executives present reiterated their commitment to managing children’s online experiences and mitigating harm. Zuckerberg mentioned that Meta has introduced over 30 tools aimed at enhancing child safety in the past eight years, investing \$20 billion in safety and security since 2016, and employing around 40,000 individuals for these efforts.

However, a Guardian investigation indicated that Meta has struggled to prevent its platforms from being used for child sex trafficking. In December, New Mexico’s attorney general filed a lawsuit against Meta, alleging that the company enabled adults to groom minors for exploitation.

Internal documents revealed in the lawsuit raise serious concerns.

Members of Congress discussed potential legislative solutions to protect children online, asking executives whether they supported various bills, including the Kids Online Safety Act. Snap Inc. previously endorsed the bill, and X also expressed support during the hearing. However, executives from Meta, Discord, and TikTok declined to back the bills outright, prompting criticism from Senator Graham. “The bottom line is that you aren’t going to support any of this,” he stated. “If you’re waiting on these guys to solve the problem, we’re going to die waiting.”

Growing Dissent Within Biden Administration Over Gaza Policy

By Jan Frazier

Dissent is increasing within the Biden administration regarding its Gaza policy, highlighted by the recent resignation of Tariq Habash, a Department of Education official, and a letter signed by over a dozen campaign staffers calling for a ceasefire and conditional military aid to Israel.

“It’s pretty extraordinary levels of dissent,” stated Josh Paul, a career official in arms sales at the State Department who resigned in protest last month. He noted that many colleagues

are contemplating their own resignations. “I am hearing in recent weeks from people who are thinking more seriously about resigning.”

Habash, the first political appointee from the Biden administration to resign publicly, expressed his concerns in an open letter. “I cannot stay silent as this administration turns a blind eye to the atrocities committed against innocent Palestinian lives,” he wrote, criticizing the administration for not

pressuring Israel to cease its collective punishment tactics in Gaza and for repeating “unverified claims that systemically dehumanize Palestinians.”

In a separate action, 17 current Biden campaign staffers anonymously called for a ceasefire and the conditioning of military aid to Israel. Their letter urged the president to take concrete steps to end the root causes of the conflict, including “apartheid, occupation, and ethnic cleansing.” One organizer

stated, “We know we’re not alone in this, and there is a very big coalition asking for the same thing.”

This dissent is not isolated. In October, a group of administration officials staged a vigil outside the White House in support of a ceasefire, and over 500 alumni of Biden’s presidential campaign signed an open letter advocating for the same. Many current State Department officials, fearful of repercussions, have filed dissent memos to voice their concerns.

Some political appointees and career staffers prefer to remain anonymous while expressing criticism of the administration’s approach, as they try to create change from within. They assert that the president’s Middle East strategy is heavily influenced by the White House, often disregarding expert recommendations.

In response to Habash’s resignation, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre acknowledged the right to voice dissent. She and the State Department deferred inquiries to the Department of Education, whose spokesperson wished Habash well in his future endeavors.

To address internal dissatisfaction, Biden’s advisers have organized listening sessions at the White House and State Department. Emily Horne, a former Biden White House spokesperson, remarked, “It’s a



sign of strength that an administration not only hears but welcomes dissent from within.”

Despite the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, which has claimed over 22,000 Palestinian lives, Biden’s administration has shifted some of its rhetoric to emphasize civilian protection. This week, Secretary of State Antony Blinken is set to travel to the Middle East to reinforce the importance of safeguarding civilian lives in Israel and Gaza.

However, the administration faces criticism from Arab and Muslim Americans in government, who feel their concerns are not being taken seriously. Jasmine El-Gamal, a former Defense Department official, commented on this sentiment.

Paul noted that several government employees are considering resigning over the administration’s handling of Israel. “If there was universal

healthcare, there would be more people willing to resign,” he remarked, highlighting the reliance many have on their jobs for medical benefits.

Habash’s resignation, alongside the campaign staff letter, raises concerns that Biden may be alienating critical segments of his base as the 2024 election approaches. Former Obama officials and political commentators have also become openly critical of Biden’s policies, with campaigners noting a decline in volunteer support and voter confidence among longtime Democratic supporters.

Currently, the dissent does not appear to be influencing Biden’s policies or those of his close advisers. A former official downplayed the significance of these criticisms, stating that they only gain traction when they affect domestic politics or electoral concerns.

Arctic Blast Brings Record Cold, Disrupting Life Across the U.S.

By Jan Frazier

An Arctic air mass continued to sweep across the U.S. on Monday, delivering a bitter cold blast that has set record-low temperatures and disrupted daily life nationwide, including an NFL playoff game and the presidential nominating contest in Iowa.

From Oregon on the West Coast to New York on the East Coast and down to Florida, millions of Americans are facing the impacts of this severe weather system.

Election season kicks off in frigid Iowa

The National Weather Service reported that wind chills are expected to plunge temperatures to as low as -30°F (-34°C) from the northern Rockies to northern Kansas and into Iowa. This extreme cold tested the resilience of caucusgoers who braved the elements on Monday, leading to warnings about frostbite risks for those venturing outside.

Tragically, Arctic storms have resulted in at least four fatalities, knocked out power to tens of thousands in the Northwest, and brought snow to southern regions, while the Northeast faced blizzard



conditions that forced the postponement of the NFL playoff game between the Pittsburgh Steelers and Buffalo Bills in Buffalo, New York.

conditions that forced the postponement of the NFL playoff game between the Pittsburgh Steelers and Buffalo Bills in Buffalo, New York. Sub-zero wind chills will grip much of the country, plummeting to -50°F (-45°C) in Montana and the Dakotas. “It takes a matter of minutes for frostbite to set in,” cautioned the South Dakota Department of Public Safety in a statement urging people to stay indoors. and Buffalo Bills in Buffalo, New York.

Widespread disruptions across the country

Regions from the Rockies to the Ohio Valley could see

temperatures drop 25 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit below normal. In Texas, where temperatures have dropped significantly, the state’s power grid operator urged residents to conserve electricity due to a “record-breaking demand” for energy. Unlike the deadly freeze in 2021, which left millions without power, state officials expressed confidence in the grid’s reliability this time.

The southern plains and southern Appalachians are also expected to experience freezing rain. Even Florida isn’t immune, with forecasts predicting showers and thunderstorms from Monday into Tuesday.

In Oregon, over 120,000 homes and businesses were left without electricity, primarily in the Portland metro area, due to

high winds and a mix of snow and ice that brought down trees and power lines. Tragically, around 100 trees fell over the weekend in a community just south of Portland, resulting in the death of a man when a tree crushed his house. Two other fatalities were linked to suspected hypothermia, and a fourth person died in a fire caused by an open-flame stove after a tree fell on an RV.

Widespread power outages affected tens of thousands across Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. In Nebraska, the Omaha Public Power District also asked customers to conserve electricity to avoid outages.

Air travel severely impacted

Airports across the country were significantly affected by

the weather, with more than half of the flights into and out of Buffalo Niagara International Airport canceled. Scores of flights were also delayed or canceled at airports in Chicago, Denver, and Seattle-Tacoma.

As the frigid weather persists, authorities continue to advise residents to take precautions and stay safe during this unprecedented cold snap.

UK Increases Military Support for Ukraine with New Security Agreement

BY CONOR LA ROUCHE



British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has signed a new security agreement with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during a visit to Kyiv, announcing an increase in military funding for the war-torn nation.

Britain, a key ally of Ukraine amid the ongoing Russian invasion, will boost its support in the next financial year to £2.5 billion (\$3.2 billion), marking a £200 million (\$255 million) increase over the previous two years, Sunak stated on Friday.

The funding will cover essential military supplies, including long-range missiles, air defense systems, artillery ammunition, and maritime security.

"Our opponents around the world believe that we have neither the patience nor

resources for long wars, so waver now, and we embolden not just [Russian President Vladimir] Putin, but his allies in North Korea, Iran, and elsewhere," Sunak warned at a press conference.

An Unprecedented Security Agreement

Zelenskyy described the accord as an "unprecedented security agreement" that will remain effective until Ukraine joins NATO. "This is not simply a declaration; it is a reality that will come to fruition as a result of our cooperation," he said, emphasizing the importance of security commitments from the UK. He added that if such guarantees had been provided after 1991, there would have been no Russian aggression.

Both leaders stressed that ensuring Ukraine's security was critical to preventing future attacks. "If Putin wins in Ukraine, he will not stop there," Sunak warned, urging Western allies to maintain their support.

Britain's Role in Military Aid

As the second-largest donor of military aid to Ukraine after the U.S., Britain has provided a total of £4.6 billion (\$3.3 billion) in 2022 and 2023. Sunak affirmed the UK's commitment, stating, "I am here today with one message: The UK will also not falter. We will stand with Ukraine in their darkest hours and in the better times to come."

Sunak's visit comes as Russia intensifies its efforts to replenish its weapons amid a protracted conflict. Both sides are seeking artillery shells, missiles, and drones, with Kyiv alleging that Moscow is receiving military supplies from North Korea and Iran.

Continued Push for Support

Zelenskyy has been actively rallying support from Western allies, recently visiting the Baltic states to secure additional military pledges. He emphasized the urgent need for air defense

systems to counter recent Russian aerial strikes, which have launched over 500 drones and missiles against Ukraine in a short period.

While the UK's commitment to Ukraine remains strong, support for the war effort is facing challenges elsewhere. A \$60 billion aid package proposed by

U.S. President Joe Biden is currently stalled in Congress, and Europe's goal of delivering 1 million artillery shells by March has fallen short.

European Defense Ministers on High Alert Amid Fears of Trump Presidency and Russian Aggression

By Eric Gahagan

A wave of anxiety has swept through European defense ministers and armed forces, fueled by the prospect of a NATO-skeptic Donald Trump potentially returning to the U.S. presidency. Concerns are mounting that Russia may not be forced out of Ukraine, prompting warnings that Europe could find itself embroiled in a conflict with Russia, even as it remains focused on Ukraine.

Simultaneously, tensions in the Middle East are escalating. Israel's offensive in Gaza continues, hostilities with Iran-aligned Hezbollah in Lebanon are intensifying, and the U.S. and U.K. have launched bombing raids on Houthi-controlled regions in Yemen to protect shipping in the Red Sea.

Voices from the Military

Adm. Rob Bauer, chair of NATO's military committee, emphasized that peace is not guaranteed, stating, "that is why we are preparing for a conflict with Russia and terror groups if it comes to it," ahead of NATO's

largest exercise in decades, which will involve 90,000 troops.

British Defense Secretary Grant Shapps expressed a stark shift in perception, declaring that the post-Cold War peace dividend is over and that the UK and its allies are "moving from a postwar to a prewar world." He urged for rearmament to safeguard Europe from "Putin's fury."

German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius warned that while a Russian attack might not be imminent, experts anticipate a military threat that Europe hasn't faced in 30 years, projecting a five to eight-year timeline for potential aggression.

Is This Scaremongering?

While military planning often includes contingencies for warfare, concerns are heightened by the ongoing war in Ukraine, which has depleted Western stockpiles of munitions.

The looming threat of a \$61 billion military aid package for Ukraine being stalled in the U.S. Congress adds to the uncertainty, as Republicans demand a quid pro quo deal for securing the U.S. southern border.

Despite significant military aid—ranging from German Leopard 2 tanks to U.S. Bradley vehicles—efforts to breach Russian lines have largely failed. Experts caution that without U.S. support, Russia could gradually regain an upper hand in the conflict.

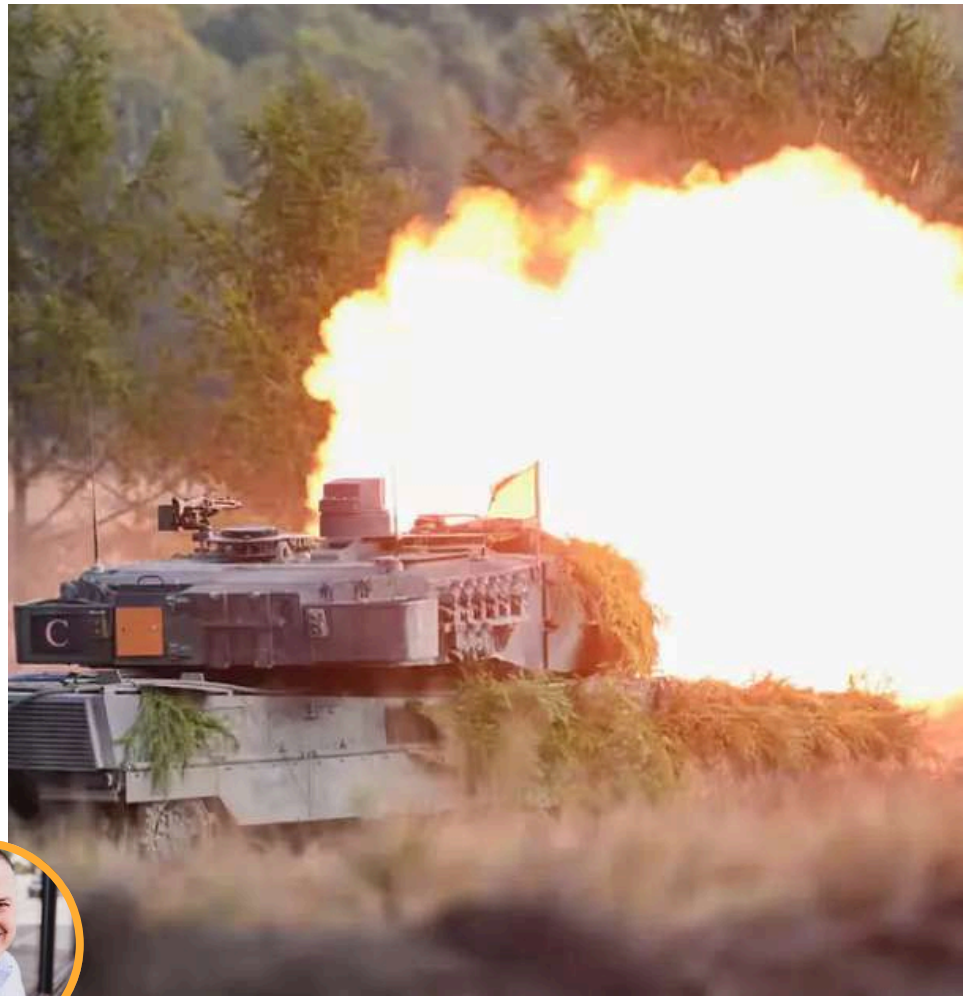
Trump's rising dominance in the Republican primaries, particularly with victories in Iowa and New Hampshire, raises memories of his previous presidency. His past comments on potentially withdrawing U.S. support from NATO, coupled with his close ties to Putin, amplify concerns across Europe.

Future of NATO and European Defense

Manfred Weber, leader of the conservative European People's Party in the European Parliament, has suggested that the EU should assume a greater defensive role, proposing a "European pillar of defense" supported by France's nuclear capabilities. However, discussions about establishing an EU defense commissioner are unlikely to undermine NATO's authority, given the membership of significant military powers like the U.K., Turkey, and the U.S.

Possibility of Wider War

Gen. Sir Patrick Sanders, head of the British Army, hinted that the professional army might not be sufficient for a prolonged conflict with Russia, suggesting a potential return to conscription in an all-out emergency. While such scenarios were deemed "not helpful" by Downing Street, some European nations, including Latvia and Sweden, are reviving forms of military service.



However, despite the aggressive rhetoric, it remains unclear whether Russia, even under Putin's ambitions, possesses the capacity to attack NATO member states. With Western

intelligence estimating 315,000 Russian casualties in Ukraine, the immediate threat to NATO appears less significant than the anxiety surrounding

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin Takes Responsibility for Hospitalization Secrecy

By Eric Gahagan

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has accepted "full responsibility" for the lack of transparency regarding his hospitalization, which began on January 1 at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center due to "complications following

a recent elective medical procedure." This breach of protocol came as a surprise to many top White House officials, including President Joe Biden, who were not informed until several days after his admission

In a statement, Austin acknowledged the oversight, saying, "I recognize I could have done a better job ensuring the public was appropriately informed. I commit to doing better." He emphasized that the decision regarding disclosure

was his to make and assured that he would return to the Pentagon soon.



Reports indicated that National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan was only notified about Austin's hospitalization days later, which was also the case for Congress, who learned of it shortly before the Pentagon made a public announcement. Despite the circumstances, the Defense Department stated that Austin resumed "full duties" from his hospital bed.

The Pentagon Press Association criticized the lack of disclosure, highlighting the importance of informing the public about the health and decision-making capabilities of top defense leaders, especially amid rising tensions in the Middle East and ongoing conflicts in Israel and Ukraine. In contrast, other officials, like Attorney General Merrick Garland, have maintained higher levels of transparency regarding their medical procedures.



Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin Transfers Duties Amid Hospitalization

By John Ruehl

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who was hospitalized on January 1, transferred certain operational responsibilities to Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks on Tuesday, although she was on vacation in Puerto Rico at the time. Hicks was not informed of Austin's

hospitalization until Thursday, three days after his admission, prompting concerns about the Pentagon's communication protocols.

Pentagon Press Secretary Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder clarified that the transfer of responsibilities is not unusual and does not primarily

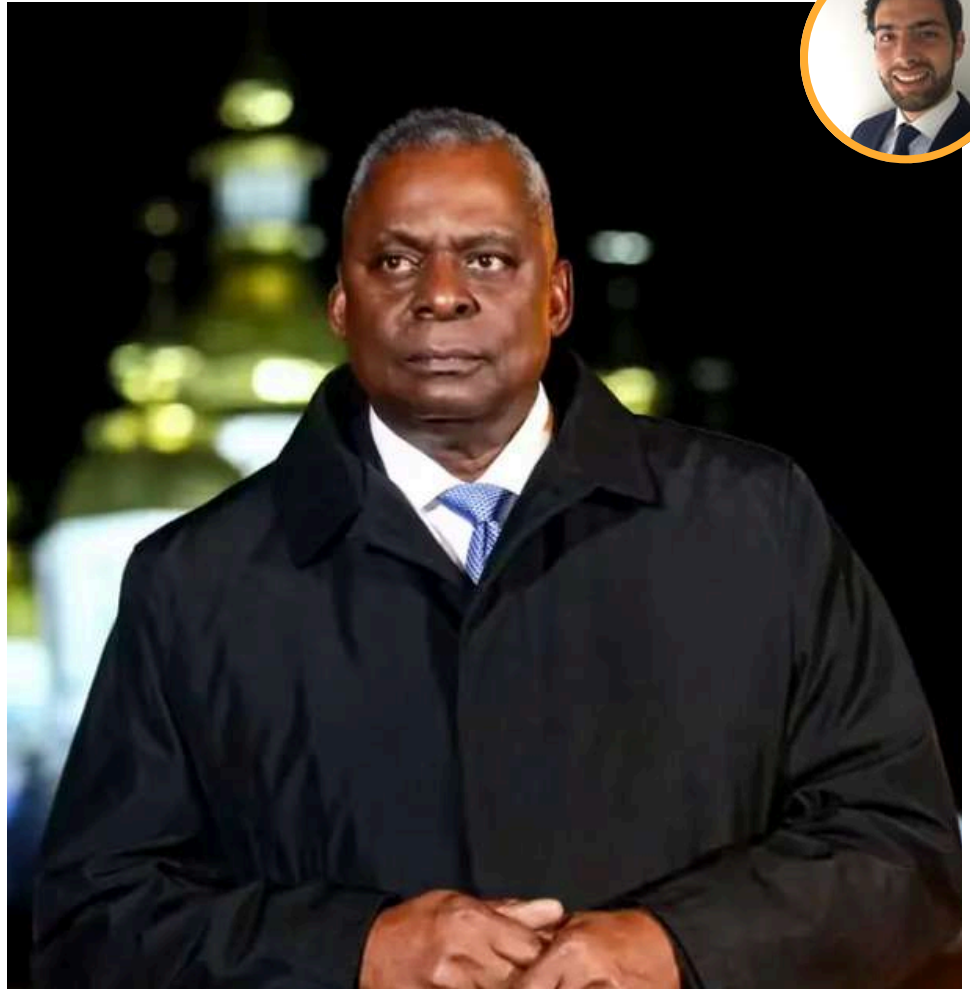
relate to health issues. Despite being on vacation, Hicks prepared to handle Austin's duties, including drafting a public statement and engaging with Congress.

Austin underwent an elective procedure on December 22, returning home the next day, .

but was readmitted due to severe pain and spent four days in the ICU. He has since been reported to be recovering well, although no release date has been provided

The lack of transparency surrounding Austin's condition drew criticism from lawmakers and senior officials, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who was also unaware of the situation. Austin acknowledged the need for better communication and accepted responsibility for the oversight, while Ryder noted that Austin's chief of staff was unable to notify others due to illness.

As Congress prepares to return from recess, lawmakers are expected to raise questions regarding the Defense Department's handling of the situation, with Senators Tom Cotton and Roger Wicker calling for immediate accountability.



The context of Austin's hospitalization includes rising tensions in the Middle East, with the U.S. .

conducting a controversial airstrike during his recovery, and ongoing attacks on American bases in the region

Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin Takes Responsibility for Secrecy Surrounding Hospitalization

By Jan Frazier

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has publicly accepted "full responsibility" for the secrecy surrounding his hospitalization, which began on New Year's Day. He was admitted to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center due to "complications following a recent elective medical procedure." The Pentagon did

not disclose this information for five days, leading to criticism from lawmakers.

Senator Roger Wicker, the top Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, accused the Pentagon of failing to notify Congress in a timely manner, as required by law. It was also revealed that President

Joe Biden was only informed of Austin's situation on Thursday evening, although Biden expressed confidence in Austin and spoke with him on Saturday

Austin's absence raised questions about the delegation of his duties, particularly regarding the extent to which his deputy, Kathleen Hicks,

managed key decisions during his hospitalization. The Pentagon has not provided specific details about Austin's medical condition or when he might be discharged.

In a statement, Austin acknowledged the need for better public communication and emphasized that the situation was his responsibility. He stated, "I recognize I could have done a better job ensuring the public was appropriately informed. I commit to doing better."

Criticism of the Pentagon's handling of the situation has intensified, with the Pentagon Press Association expressing concern over the lack of transparency, especially given current military tensions in the Middle East. They pointed out that even U.S.



presidents typically disclose when they need to delegate duties due to medical issues.

Military Reporters and Editors (MRE) also criticized the timing

of the announcement, suggesting that releasing it on a Friday evening when readership is lower reflects a pattern of "obfuscation and opacity."

U.S. Navy Secretary Calls for UK Military Review Amid Rising Global Threats

By Jan Frazier

During a visit to London, U.S. Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro emphasized the need for the UK to reassess its military size and capabilities in light of ongoing crises in the Middle East and threats from Russia and China. His comments followed a warning from the British Army's chief that current troop levels are insufficient for an all-out conflict without conscription.

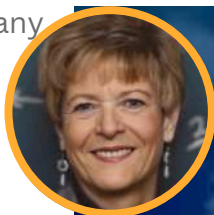
Del Toro suggested that the UK should increase investment in

its navy and strengthen its army, pointing to the ongoing conflicts in the Red Sea as evidence of the need for enhanced military resources. The Royal Navy has recently decommissioned two frigates due to a shortage of sailors, leaving just nine operational vessels. Meanwhile, the British Army's numbers have dropped to 73,520, the lowest since 1714.

While acknowledging the UK's contributions to current military

operations, including the deployment of HMS Diamond in the Red Sea, Del Toro stated that additional funding would ensure the protection of commercial shipping and support U.S. economic interests. He noted that the U.S. continues to make significant investments in national security despite economic challenges, maintaining its position as the world's largest military spender.

Del Toro concluded that any decision regarding increased UK defense spending is ultimately up to the British government, but he underscored the importance of robust military capabilities to address near-term threats.



Analyzing the State of the Republican Party Post-January 6

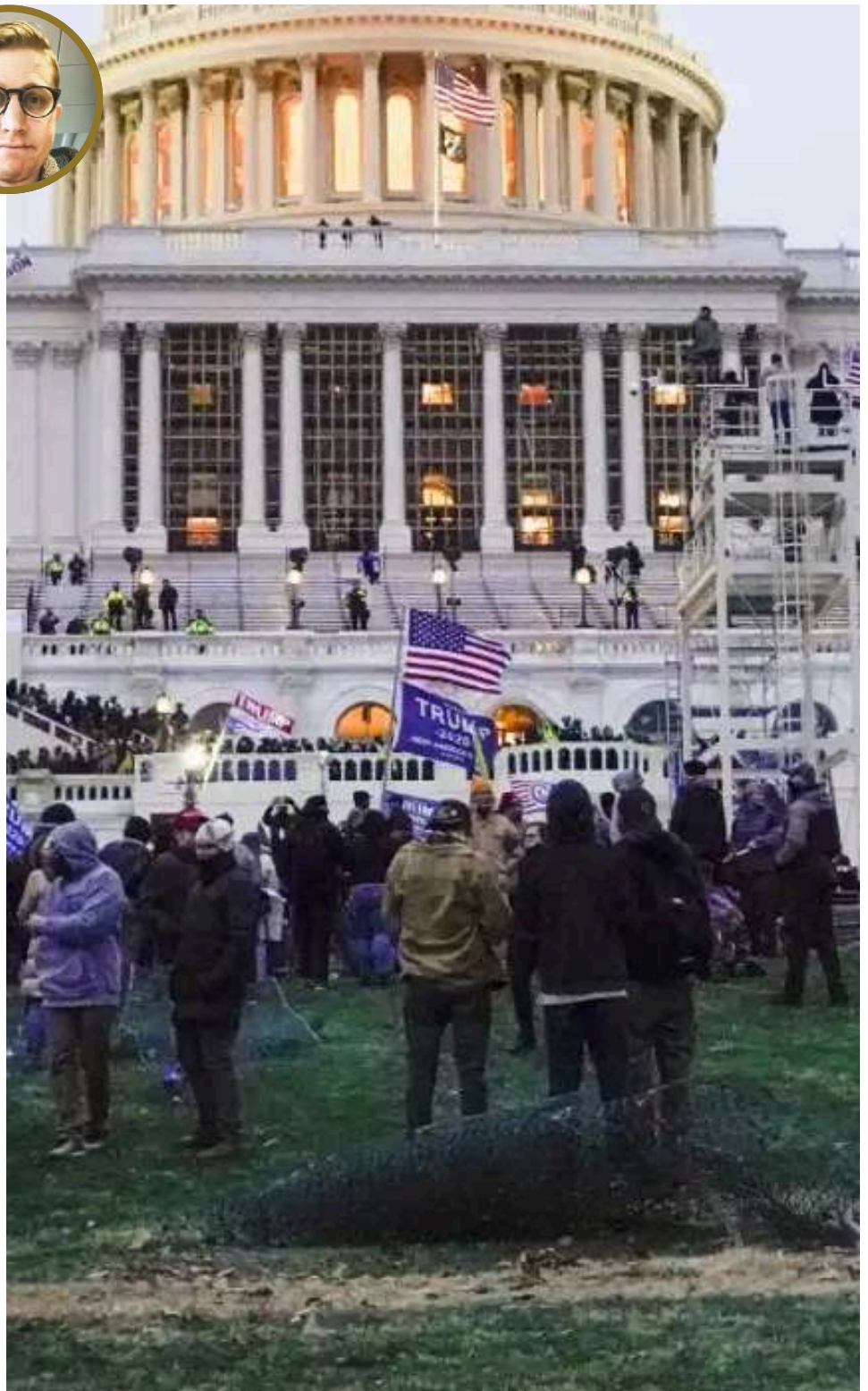
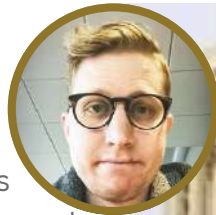
BY HENRY NICHOLAS

In their follow-up to *How Democracies Die*, authors Daniel Ziblatt and Steven Levitsky outline three essential rules

for political parties: accept election results, reject violence for power, and break ties with extremists. They argue that following the 2020 election, only one U.S. political party violated all three rules.

As the third anniversary of the January 6, 2021, Capitol attack approaches, former President Donald Trump remains the leading Republican candidate for 2024, still refusing to concede his loss to President Joe Biden. Instead of denouncing the rioters, Trump has suggested pardoning those convicted of related violent crimes and continues to embrace extremist supporters at his rallies, referring to them as patriots.

Moreover, many Republican leaders who previously condemned Trump's actions now support his candidacy, including those who sought safety during the Capitol riot. This shift reflects a significant alignment of the party's leadership with Trump's controversial stance.



Growing Concerns Over AI-Generated Election Interference

By Randy Whitehead

A fake Joe Biden robocall urging Democrats to skip the New Hampshire primary has heightened concerns on Capitol Hill about the potential threat of artificial intelligence-generated content in elections. Lawmakers express skepticism about passing legislation to regulate deepfakes before the November elections, with some, like Sen. Deb Fischer, questioning Congress's ability to prioritize this issue amid ongoing challenges with appropriations.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren attributed delays to Republican opposition, stating that a

minority can block legislative action. Meanwhile, Sen. Brian Schatz highlighted the alarming nature of deepfakes, emphasizing their potential to mislead voters, even if they only deceive a few. He underscored the importance of public education about deepfake risks, acknowledging that current laws may not deter malicious actors.

bills introduced across the country this year. In response to the fake robocall, which the New

Hampshire GOP attorney general deemed illegal voter suppression, bipartisan efforts have emerged. Notably, Sen. Amy Klobuchar and colleagues introduced legislation banning deceptive AI content in political campaigns, aiming to protect elections from misinformation. Klobuchar emphasized the urgency of addressing this issue as part of broader AI legislation



House Moves Toward Contempt Charges Against Hunter Biden

By Randy Whitehead

On Wednesday, Republicans advanced contempt charges against Hunter Biden for defying a congressional subpoena, moving toward a full House vote. The House Oversight and Judiciary Committees passed the charges with unanimous GOP support, while Democrats opposed the measure. This development comes as part of the GOP's impeachment inquiry into President Joe Biden, although it has yet to provide evidence linking the president to any wrongdoing related to his son's business dealings.

Hunter Biden attended the committee hearing, causing a stir by sitting in the audience with his legal team. Following the session, he stated outside that he was willing to testify publicly but not in a closed-door format, citing concerns about information being selectively leaked. The White House emphasized that Hunter is a private citizen making his own choices.



If the House votes in favor of the contempt charge, the decision to prosecute would fall to the Department of Justice. Hunter Biden is already facing legal challenges related to tax and gun charges, with his attorneys claiming these actions

are influenced by political pressure from Republicans. The contempt resolution criticizes Biden's alleged

failure to comply with congressional authority, stating his behavior has been "contemptuous."

Republicans, while focusing on Hunter's overseas business dealings, assert that their inquiry ultimately targets the president. As the situation unfolds, tensions remain high amid accusations of political motivations behind the investigations.

Short-Term Spending Deal Reached to Avert Government Shutdown

By Kathy Malouf



House and Senate leaders have agreed on a short-term spending deal to prevent a government shutdown, extending funding until March.

This agreement follows last weekend's decision to set the overall fiscal year 2024 spending level at \$1.59 trillion.

The new deadlines for government funding have been moved from January 19 and February 2 to March 1 and March 8. The short-term bill, known as a continuing resolution (CR), must pass both chambers before Friday at 11:59 p.m. to avoid a partial shutdown.

Speaker Mike Johnson is facing pushback from hard-right Republicans who are objecting to the spending deal negotiated with Senate Democrats. However, he stated that the agreement remains in place. In contrast, several moderate Democrats have expressed a willingness to support Johnson's leadership amid threats from some conservatives to remove him.

Increase in Threats Against Congress Members

By Jan Frazier

In 2023, the U.S. Capitol Police investigated 8,008 threats against members of Congress, reflecting an increase from the previous year but lower than the 9,625 cases reported in 2021, the year of the January 6 riot. This figure is significantly higher than the 5,206 cases recorded in 2018.

The threats came through various communication

channels, including phone calls, social media, and emails. With the upcoming election campaign, Capitol Police expect 2024 to be particularly busy for their special agents.

Capitol Police have also initiated efforts to bolster recruitment for agents and investigators to enhance security for lawmakers, responding to a surge in threats. Notable incidents include:

- A Nevada man was arrested for leaving threatening voicemails at the office of Sen. Jacky Rosen.
- Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks reported receiving death threats after voting for House Speaker.
- Democratic Rep. Angie Craig was attacked in a D.C. elevator, leading to a 27-month prison sentence for the assailant.



Grand Jury Subpoena Issued for Democratic Lawmaker

By Jan Frazier

A grand jury subpoena has been issued to the House sergeant at arms concerning a Democratic lawmaker and their use of federal funds for a security vendor. The identity of the lawmaker has not been disclosed.

The announcement was made during the House's session on Monday by House Reading Clerk Susan Cole, who indicated that the subpoena was issued by the U.S. Department of Justice. The sergeant at arms, William McFarland, determined that complying with the subpoena aligns with the rights and privileges of the House.

Details regarding the specific nature of the investigation or the lawmaker involved remain sparse.





Washington Insider

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