53RD ISSUE
DECEMBER 2025

Washington Insider
MAGAZINE

Nicolás Maduro rejects Trump ultimatum and seeks global amnesty

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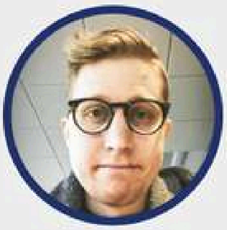

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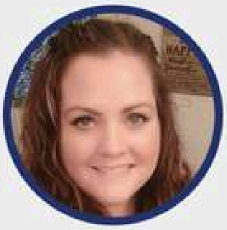

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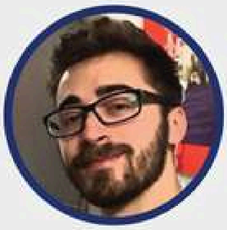

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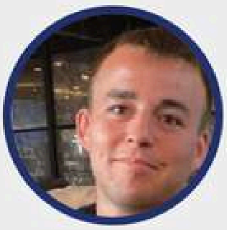

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TRENT R. NELSON

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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 independent 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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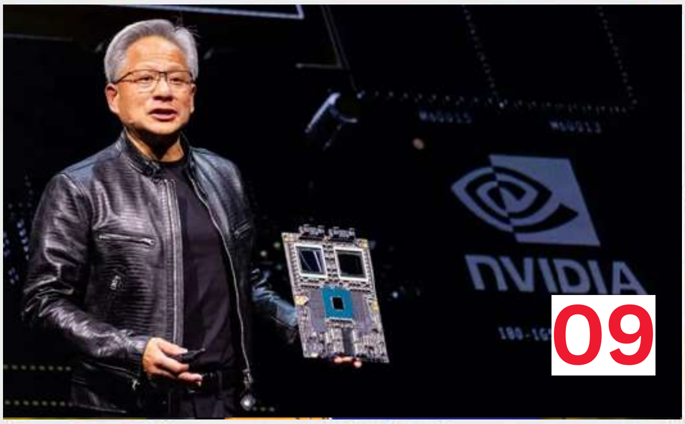

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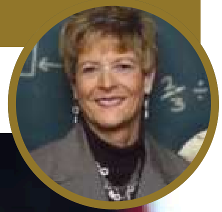


BY JAN FRAZIER

According to Politico, Senate data reveals that Trump has withdrawn 57 nominees, about twice as many as he did during the first year of his first administration.

Republican senators told the publication that in some circumstances, it would seem the White House “isn’t making sure Trump’s nominees can get the votes.”

“It would appear that some nominees haven’t been vetted, and…somebody says, ‘Go with them anyways,’”

Sen. John Kennedy of Louisiana told Politico.

Some of the 57 withdrawals were made "for a variety of reasons," such as

"clerical changes, new positions or adding new responsibilities to

their original role,"

according to a White House official.

However, one such example of “questionable” vetting included the resignation of Paul Ingrassia, the 30-year-old lawyer Trump chose to run the Office of Special Counsel.

Ingrassia’s nomination was withdrawn after a bombshell Politico story that he had purportedly identified himself as having “a Nazi streak” while using racist slurs in a private group conversation.

Some of the nomination screening "has been questionable," a White House insider told the site.

Over 300 nominees to join the government have been confirmed by the Senate since January. A change in the regulations that permits the majority of nominees to be confirmed in groups of infinite size is partially responsible for the pace at which they are being confirmed.

Trump is "nominating the most talented patriots to successfully carry out his America First agenda," according to a statement released by White House spokesman Liz Huston.

“Under President Trump’s leadership, these appointees are delivering on his core campaign promises in record time from securing the border, ending Joe Biden’s inflation crisis, unleashing American energy, and restoring common sense policies,”

Huston added.

How do withdrawn nominations affect Senate confirmation timelines?

Withdrawn nominations generally lead to detainments and dragged Senate evidence timelines because the pullout resets the process, forcing the White House to find, warhorse, and submit new campaigners.

Most recessions do beforehand, before a commission hail or bottom vote, meaning time and coffers spent vetting and recycling the original design are lost and the process restarts. Analysis shows about 69 of withdrawn nominations do previous to commission sounds, 10 after sounds but before Senate administrative timetable placement, and 20 after placement but before full Senate consideration.

Recessions can affect vetting issues, direct Senate opposition, particular reasons, or executive crimes. This pattern frequently leads to vacuities, interim movables , and governance dislocations. Further, dragged evidence detainments aggravated by recessions undermine agency operations and administrative functioning.

Trump renames U.S. Institute of Peace after himself

BY ATHENA NAGEL

This is the most recent development in a seesaw legal dispute over control of the U.S. Institute of Peace, a nonprofit think institution dedicated to peace efforts. This year, the Department of Government Efficiency set it as one of its early goals. In an effort to "reflect the greatest dealmaker in our nation's history,"

the State Department said on Wednesday that it has renamed the agency the Donald J. Trump Institute of Peace. Its building, which is next to the State Department, bore the new name.

Despite being passed over for this year's Nobel Peace Prize, Trump has been publicly advocating for the award for months, claiming he helped resolve a number of international disputes.

However, Trump has also issued orders to target suspected drug-related vessels off the coast of Venezuela and has made repeated threats that assaults on land may occur, which would be an act of war against that nation.

The Peace Institute's takeover was likewise anything from peaceful; before he even put his name on the building, his administration took control of the autonomous organization and removed its board.

Anna Kelly, a White House spokesperson, said:

“The United States Institute of Peace was once a bloated, useless entity that blew $50 million per year while delivering no peace.

Now, the Donald J. Trump Institute of Peace, which is both beautifully and aptly named after a President who ended eight wars in less than a year, will stand as a powerful reminder of what strong leadership can accomplish for global stability.”

She added,

“Congratulations, world!”
The rebranding "adds insult to injury," according to George Foote, a lawyer for the former Institute workers and leadership. “A federal judge has already ruled that the government’s armed takeover was illegal.

That judgment is stayed while the government appeals, which is the only reason the government continues to control the building,”

Foote said.
In legal cases pertaining to the DOGE takeover, the headquarters has changed hands several times since March. The federal appeals court has yet to make a final ruling regarding its fate.

According to USIP, the organization was established independently by Congress and is not subject to the president's executive power. It is an executive branch entity, according to the administration.

The building was given to the General Services Administration after Trump dismissed the institute's board in the spring, along with the employees.

In May, a federal district judge reversed the decision, returning control of the headquarters to USIP leadership. However, a federal appeals court overturned that decision a few weeks later.

President Felix Tshisekedi of the Congo and President Paul Kagame of Rwanda are set to sign a peace deal on Thursday in front of the building. According to Yolande Makolo, a senior adviser to Kagame, high-ranking officials from the African Union, Angola, Burundi, Kenya, Togo, Qatar, Uganda, and the United Arab Emirates are also anticipated to attend the signing.

The headline on the USIP website on Wednesday night read,

“President Donald J. Trump to Sign Historic Peace Agreement at USIP Headquarters.”

This was followed by an article on the agreement between Rwanda and Congo that Trump was supervising at the institute on Thursday.

In the 1980s, Congress established the Institute of Peace. In 1985, the bill was passed into law by President Ronald Reagan. Described as an independent, nonprofit think tank supported by Congress, its goal has been to operate outside of traditional channels, such the State Department, to promote peace and avoid and resolve conflicts. When DOGE closed the mission, it was active in 26 war areas, including Burkina Faso, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Mali.

On the fringes of Friday's World Cup draw in Washington, there is also widespread conjecture that Trump may get a new peace prize from FIFA.

What authority allowed the administration to rename the building?

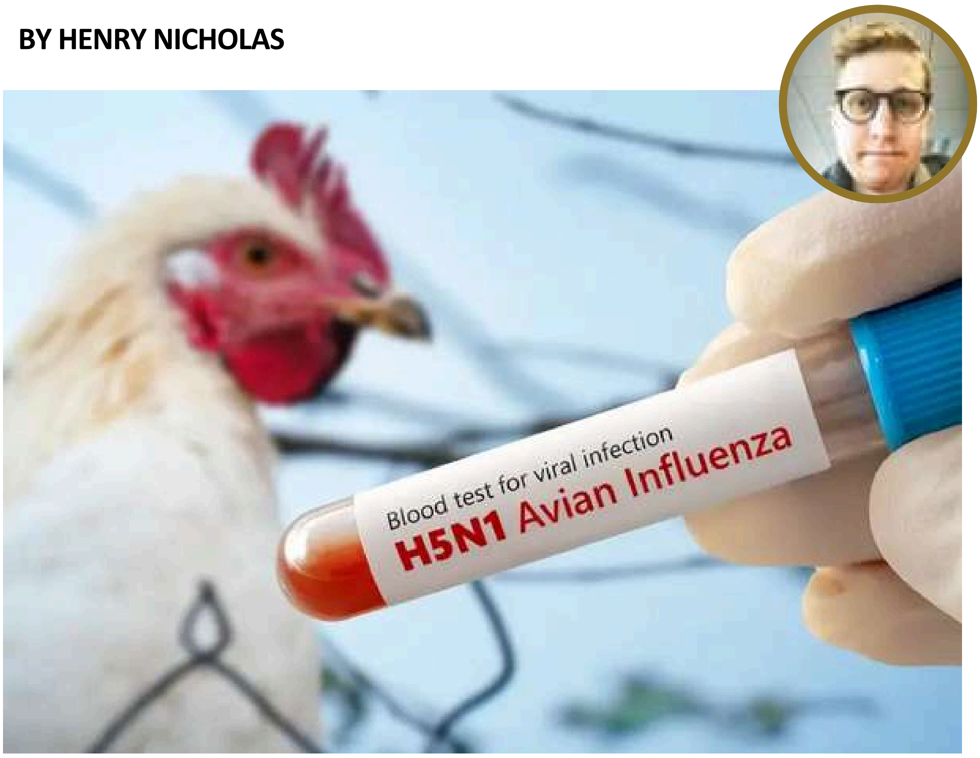
The Trump administration's authority to brand the U.S. Institute of Peace erecting stems from 40 U.S.C.§ 3102, which grants the director of General Services (GSA) broad power to name or brand any structure under GSA guardianship and control, booting previous statutory designations.

The institute's headquarters falls under GSA operation for civil parcels. The GSA director can unilaterally redesignate structures without congressional blessing, as affirmed in amendments removing previous budget oversight conditions. The administration directed GSA to execute the renaming to" Donald J. Trump Institute of Peace," aligning with precedents for presidentially named installations(e.g., Reagan National Airport via analogous authority).

This passed amid DOGE- led efforts to strike the institute, with physical signage installed despite suits from original stakeholders over control/ eviction. No specific enactment governs independent realities like USIP, making GSA's property authority decisive.

Senate leaders press USDA for strong bird flu vaccine plan

BY HENRY NICHOLAS



John Zimmerman, a Minnesota Turkey farmer who chaired the National Turkey Federation in 2024, tells Brownfield that the assiduity has made significant progress in biosecurity and precluding the spread of avian flu.

“But at the end of the day we’re still having very highly bio-secure farms come down with the virus, so we need to look at other options. And that other option for us now is the vaccine.”

In a recent letter to USDA, Senate Ag Committee Ranking Member Amy Klobuchar and over two dozen colleagues requested that the agency move forward with a draft proposal of an HPAI vaccine plan for poultry.

According to Zimmerman, using a vaccination would have an impact on trade.

“So we have to get a strategy in place to work with USDA to make sure that if we do start to selectively vaccinate some of these flocks that have been hit multiple times or certain geographic areas, that it doesn’t interrupt our trade agreements with other foreign countries. So that’s what we’re fighting for now and that’s what we’re asking for help from the Senators.”

Any approved vaccine strategy, according to the letter to USDA, must be based on solid science and consider input from industry experts and animal health stakeholders.

What are the main elements of the USDA vaccine strategy draft?

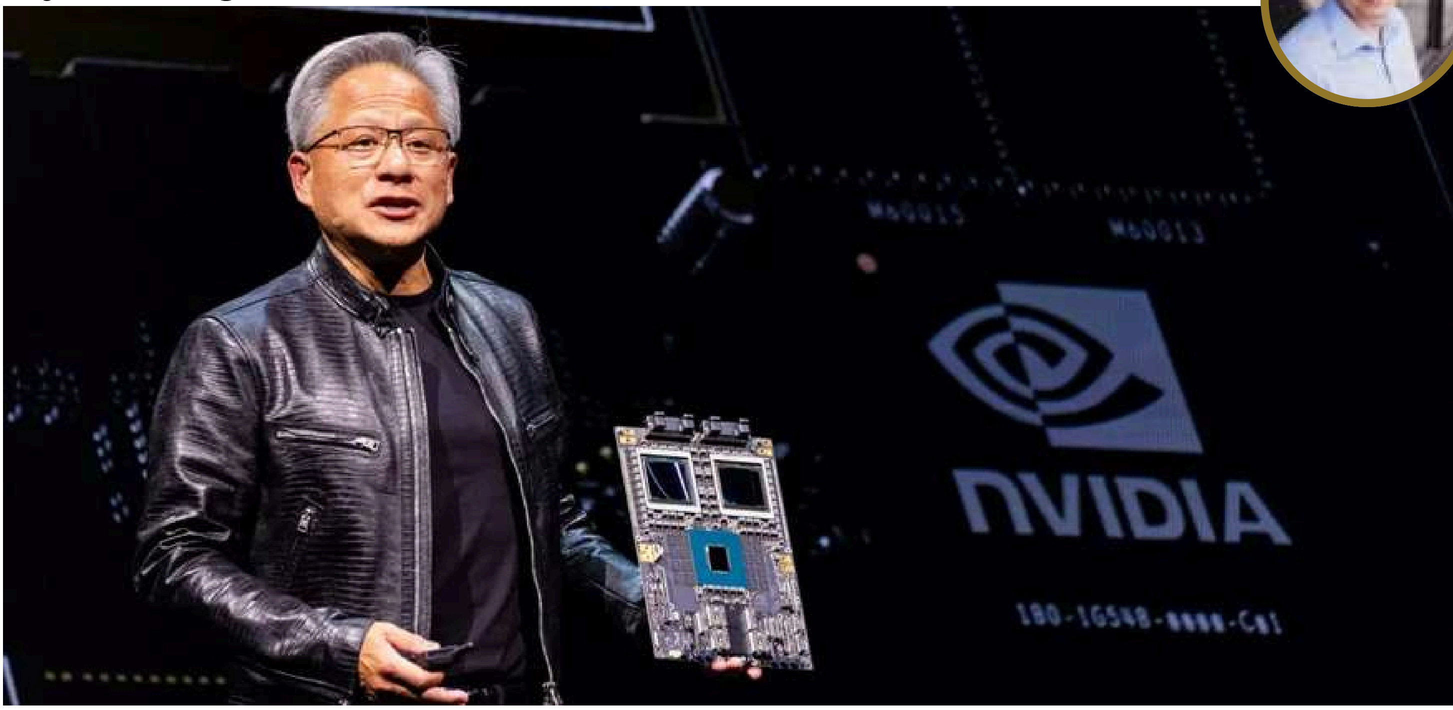
U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee leaders, including Sens. Amy Klobuchar(D-MN) and Mike Rounds(R- SD), transferred a bipartisan letter to USDA Secretary on December 10, 2025, pressing for accelerated development of a largely pathogenic avian influenza(HPAI) vaccine strategy amid rising downtime outbreaks.

Original vaccine cure beforehand in catcalls' lives, followed by boosters, with routine testing to confirm efficiency; vaccinated flocks testing positive would still face handpicking to save import requests. Targets high- threat flocks (e.g., thick marketable layers, clunkers near outbreaks) using profitable impact assessments, with$ 100 million exploration backing for vaccine development.

Requires memoranda of understanding for record-keeping, zone- confined movement, and transnational consultations to alleviate trade walls; rollout plannedpost-stakeholder input, expanding from cookers to dairy cattle.

Senators seek ban on Nvidia AI chip sales to China

By Eric Gahagan



The commerce secretary would be required by the Secure and Feasible Exports Chips Act to refuse advanced chip export licenses to China for a period of thirty months. The measure would prohibit Nvidia from shipping its most cutting-edge chip, Blackwell, and the H200 to China.

It occurs as the White House considers whether to permit Nvidia to ship the H200 to China; some officials are concerned about this potential.

The US is ahead of China in the race for artificial intelligence, according to Pete Ricketts, the Republican chair of the Senate Foreign Relations East Asia subcommittee, who co-sponsored the legislation with Chris Coons, the top Democrat on the panel. This is primarily due to the US's "dominance of global compute power."

“Denying Beijing access to these chips is therefore essential,”

Ricketts said.

“Codifying President Trump’s current AI chip limitations on Communist China as US chip companies continue to rapidly innovate will allow us to widen our compute lead exponentially.”

Coons said:

“The rest of the 21st century will be determined by who wins the AI race, and whether this technology is built on American values of free thought and free markets or the values of the Chinese Communist party.”

The bill is also being sponsored by Democrats Jeanne Shaheen and Andy Kim and Republicans Tom Cotton and Dave McCormick.

The bill comes at a time when Washington's China hawks worry that Donald Trump is neglecting security concerns in order to maintain the economic agreement he made with Chinese President Xi Jinping in October.

The US Treasury had postponed plans to impose sanctions on China's Ministry of State Security spy agency for "Salt Typhoon," a huge cyber penetration of US telecom companies, according to an FT article on Wednesday.

According to US sources, the administration does not currently intend to impose any significant new export restrictions on China.

“Unfettered access to the H200 would allow China to build frontier-scale AI supercomputers to develop the most powerful AI systems,
just at a moderately higher cost relative to cutting-edge Blackwell chips,”

said Khan, a former White House and commerce department official.

“It would also arm Chinese cloud providers to compete globally with US hyperscalers.”

Jensen Huang, the head of Nvidia, met with Trump and Republican senators on the banking committee on Wednesday while in Washington. Prior to the committee meeting, he stated that US companies should be allowed to export their most competitive chips to China and that Beijing would not accept deteriorated chips.

Reporters were informed by John Kennedy, a Republican senator on the committee, that Huang was not a "credible source" regarding US exports to China.

The US shouldn't be sending cutting-edge semiconductors to China, according to Steve Bannon, a former White House adviser in the first Trump administration and a key figure in the Maga movement. This is especially true given that Chinese firms like DeepSeek have made significant advancements in artificial intelligence.

“If this is in fact a ‘Sputnik Moment’ because of DeepSeek then we should ban all chip sales, especially high-end, but also stop all financial support — no access to debt or equity capital markets, no training, no Chinese students — just like in the cold war about nuclear weapons,”

Bannon said.
Additionally, he attacked Huang and David Sacks, the White House AI adviser who supports supplying China high-end chips as part of an AI "action plan" to force nations to rely on the American "technology stack."
“David Sacks has acted as the agent for the Chinese Communist party and Jensen Huang is the arms merchant,” Bannon said.

Nvidia stated that the AI action plan "wisely recognizes non-military businesses everywhere should be able to choose the American technology stack, promoting US jobs and promoting national security" in response to a question regarding the bill.

In response to Bannon’s comment, the company said:

“AI is not an atomic bomb. No one should have an atomic bomb. Everyone should have AI.”

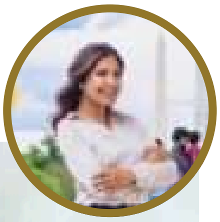
How will a US ban on Nvidia advanced chips affect China's AI industry?

A US ban on Nvidia's advanced AI chips will pose significant challenges to China's AI assiduity but could also accelerate its domestic chip development and invention drive. Chinese AI enterprises lose access to Nvidia's top models(e.g., H100, H200, Blackwell), limiting their capability to make frontier-scale AI supercomputers and emplace advanced AI systems effectively at scale.

Chinese AI providers face backups in conclusion capacity, potentially raising costs and decelerating AI relinquishment across diligence. The trade restrictions incentivize China to expand its domestic AI chip sector with companies like Huawei and Cambricon ramping up investments to fill the void, pursuing" tone-sovereignty" and reducing US dependence.

The ban may boomerang by prodding faster progress in China's semiconductor ecosystem, challenging US AI leadership in the medium- to-long term.

Trump's redistricting battle reaches Indiana Capitol



By Adriana Montes

The long-awaited and contentious issue of whether the state will join the six other states that have approved new congressional election maps ahead of the 2026 midterm elections will be discussed by state legislators on December 11.

A proposed plan that would establish two new, strongly Republican districts will be put to a vote by Indiana Senate members. As both parties share in amulti-state redistricting battle for control of the U.S. House of Representatives during Trump's final two times in office, it would strengthen Republicans' advantages.

The state's largest megacity, Indianapolis, would be divided into four sections under the revised lines, which would change the two Popular- held sections.

It's anticipated that the voting will be tight and may take several hours. Trump's redistricting plan in the Hoosier State could be derailed by more than just Democrats, despite their obvious strong opposition to the new map. The commander-in-chief's public anger has been sparked by the GOP state politicians' inconsistent support for the president on the matter, which has caused turmoil

inside the state party.
The rare mid-decade redistricting is opposed by a number of Republican state senators, including Senate leader Rodric Bray. The president has responded by threatening to stop supporting Bray and encourage primary candidates to succeed him.

"Anybody that votes against Redistricting, and the SUCCESS of the Republican Party in D.C., will be, I am sure, met with a MAGA Primary in the Spring,"

Trump said in a Dec. 10 social media post.

Despite all the encouragement from national leaders, it is still unclear if the plan will pass Indiana's Senate chamber.

For months, the White House has been stepping up its pressure campaign. In an effort to bolster Republican support, the president has twice dispatched Vice President JD Vance to the Indiana

statehouse. According to reports, Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson has called Indiana state senators multiple times in an effort to lobby them.

To persuade politicians to vote yes, friends have established a number of charity organizations and political action committees. Additionally, the organizations have promised to locate primary opponents for politicians who cast a no vote.

Since the legislative session began on November 18, some state lawmakers have also been threatened with violence.

In the summer, Trump sparked the national redistricting controversy by persuading Republicans in Texas that they urgently needed to create a new congressional map, despite the lack of new census data. Voters in California then decisively supported a plan to modify their boundaries, claiming that the addition of five blue-leaning districts would offset Texas' gains. Recent redistricting initiatives have also been started by Republicans and Democrats in other states.

The approval of one of these gerrymandered maps by a statehouse might be crucial to one party's control during Trump's final two years in office, given the present Republican majority in the House.

The geographic pool of voters who can cast ballots for representatives to fill vacancies in the U.S. House has been redrawn in six states thus far. In what the National Conference of State Legislatures refers to as the largest wave of such activity since the 1800s, at least eight more states are thinking about altering their maps.

What legal challenges could block mid decade redistricting in Indiana?

Indiana Egalitarians are preparing legal challenges to blockmid-decade redistricting, arguing it violates the state constitution's inferred formerly-per- decade limit and statutory language tying redraws topost-census sessions.

Opponents cite a 1995 premonitory opinion by former AG Pamela Carter, interpreting Composition 2 as proscribing mid-term redraws, and a 1895 Supreme Court case suggesting charts endure a full decade; these could form the base for injunctions if new charts pass.

Challenges may bring Voting Rights Act protections against discriminative goods, one-person- one- vote difference, or ethnic gerrymandering, though prejudiced claims face wallspost-Rucho v. Common Beget; Indiana Code 3-3-2-1 explicitly links sections to decennial counts, potentially allowing quick legislative overrides but inviting court scrutiny.

Nicolás Maduro rejects Trump ultimatum and seeks global amnesty

By Danielle Campbell

Neither the US nor Venezuelan government have revealed any information of the issues covered during the very unusual discussion, which is understood to have transpired on 21 November.

But sources informed the Miami Herald the US president had issued a "blunt message" to his South American counterpart, who is the target of a four-month pressure campaign in which Trump has ordered a large naval deployment near Venezuela's northern coast.

"You can save yourself and those closest to you, but you must leave the country now,"

Trump reportedly said, offering safe passage for Maduro, his wife and his son "only if he agreed to resign right away".

However, Venezuela's president reportedly refused to stand down immediately and allegedly issued a number of counter-demands, including worldwide immunity from prosecution and being permitted to leave political leadership but preserve control of the armed forces.

The newspaper stated there had been no additional direct contact between Trump and Maduro, although Maduro reportedly requested a second call last weekend after Trump declared Venezuela's

Despite the leaked assertion that Trump had given Maduro an ultimatum, many analysts are doubtful the US president plans to follow such threats up with large-scale military action.

"Maduro and most of his cohorts view the US military threats as a bluff,"

a source with regular contact with top Venezuela officials told the Wall Street Journal last month.

Since his election in 2013, the Venezuelan leader has survived a succession of crises, including Trump's first-term "maximum pressure" campaign, several rounds of mass protests, a historic economic meltdown, a 2018 assassination attempt and apparent defeat in last year's presidential election, which Maduro is widely believed to have lost to the former diplomat Edmundo González.

On Sunday, the Wall Street Journal urged Trump's administration to continue ramping up the pressure on Venezuela and said it believed "deposing Maduro is in the US national interest".

Its editorial board said:
"If Maduro refuses to leave, and Trump shrinks from acting to depose him, Trump and the credibility of the US will be the losers."

In an attempt to find a peaceful solution, Colombia's president, Gustavo Petro, recommended the Colombian city of Cartagena as a probable venue for negotiations between Maduro's dictatorship and Venezuela's opposition.

How have Venezuelan opposition leaders responded to reports of the ultimatum?

Venezuelan opposition leaders have responded with conservative sanguinity but remain skeptical regarding President Donald Trump's reported claim to Nicolás Maduro. crucial opposition numbers, including Nobel Peace Prize laureate María Corina Machado, interpret Trump's pressure especially the demand for Maduro to abdicate incontinently as a possible sign of despair but misdoubt it'll lead to a nippy exit due to Maduro's historically settled control and pious military support.

Opposition leaders emphasize that meaningful transnational pressure and coordinated action are demanded to force Maduro from power, prompting abettors in the U.S. and beyond to escalate sweats beyond rhetoric.

They also remain concerned about Maduro's demands for sweeping global remittances and retention of military command, viewing these as stalling tactics.

US Lawmakers move to roll back sanctions on Syria

By Jan Frazier

SAC is an advocacy group with headquarters in the UnitedStates that focuses on Syrian politics and interaction with Syrian populations.

The Council's Grassroots Advocacy Officer, Alberto Hernandez, told that recent events on Capitol Hill, such as multiple congressional visits to Damascus, have led to favorable evaluations of Syria's new course and created opportunities for collaboration on counterterrorism and counternarcotics.

He cited the flip of House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Brian Mast, who now intends to approve the repeal of the Caesar Act, calling it "the correct step" in bringing US policy into line with local circumstances.

SAC claims that comparable momentum is developing in the Senate, where S.3172 has been submitted by Senators Jeanne Shaheen, Markwayne Mullin, and Joni Ernst, who all visited interim President Ahmad Al-Sharaa this summer. In an attempt to undo the Trump-Biden Caesar sanctions system, the measure aims to abolish sanctions regimes created in 2003 and 2012, including the

Syria Accountability Act and the Syria Human Rights

Accountability Act.
Hernandez stated that Syria's new government is attempting to stabilize the nation and mend ties with regional and international allies.

"These laws were designed to pressure a regime that no longer exists,"

Hernandez said.

He stated that SAC is hopeful that Syria's new administration would achieve and surpass these expectations while maintaining what he called a favorable trajectory, and that the final National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) will contain reporting metrics to measure success.

The group is still committed to dismantling the multi-layered sanctions infrastructure that was built up under four different governments, he continued.

According to the SAC source, the council anticipates the publishing of the NDAA's whole text around the second week of December. As part of the yearly legislative process, the bill must then pass both chambers and be approved by the president by the end of the year.

How will the sanctions rollback affect humanitarian aid access in Syria?

The rollback of crucial US warrants on Syria, via Trump's June 2025 Administrative Order and advancing congressional legislation, will significantly ameliorate philanthropic aid access by easing broad profitable restrictions that preliminarily hindered delivery despite immunity.

Previous warrants caused overcompliance by banks, delaying fund transfers and remittances critical for aid operations; lifting them restores Syria's access to global fiscal systems, speeding exigency responses(e.g.,post-earthquake aid). Trade walls on food, drug, energy, and reconstruction accoutrements (e.g., for hospitals seminaries) lift, addressing dearths and price hikes affecting 16.5 million demanding aid; energy warrants junking ensures electricity/ energy for aid logistics. Enables early recovery/ tone- reliance enterprise(e.g., structure rebuild), reducing reliance on exigency aid amid 90 poverty rates.

China & UAE urged by Wang Yi, Al Nahyan to expand energy ties

By Athena Nagel

UAE (Washington Insider) - Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan in Abu Dhabi, urging expanded cooperation in trade, energy, technology, Belt and Road projects, and multilateral coordination.

As Andolu Ajansi News reported, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has called on the United Arab Emirates to expand cooperation in both traditional and new industries. He made the remarks during a meeting with UAE Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan in Abu Dhabi.

Wang said China is ready to strengthen high-level exchanges and build political trust between the 2 countries. He emphasised raising bilateral relations to a strategic and comprehensive level. Wang also highlighted the Belt and Road Initiative, saying the 2 nations should work together in sectors like energy, infrastructure, and investment.

Wang stressed Beijing's support for the UAE pursuing "a development path suited to its national conditions, safeguarding its national security and development, as well as playing a greater role in international and regional affairs,"

it said.

What are China and the UAE doing to deepen cooperation in trade, technology, and regional partnerships?

Wang also encouraged collaboration in emerging industries such as renewable energy, advanced technology, and innovation-driven sectors.

He said this cooperation would help the UAE diversify its economy beyond oil and gas. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said China is ready to strengthen communication and coordination with the United Arab Emirates on multilateral platforms. He said this cooperation is important to uphold multilateralism and support free trade.

"The UAE is a country in the Middle East with unique importance and influence. China's and the UAE's development strategies are compatible, the governance philosophies are similar, and the economies are highly complementary, making the two countries natural friends and partners,"

Wang said.

Al Nahyan, in turn, said that the UAE

"firmly adheres to the one-China principle, firmly supports China in safeguarding its national sovereignty and territorial integrity and in achieving national reunification, and resolutely opposes external interference in China's internal affairs,"

according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry statement.

Wang noted that the UAE is willing to maintain high-level exchanges with China and expand cooperation in several areas. The 2 sides also discussed the situation in the Middle East and ways to support stability in the region. Officials said China will host the 2nd China-Arab States Summit next year.

The UAE was the first Gulf country to establish a Strategic Partnership Arrangement with the Government of China in 2012, and only through continued growth has that Strategic Partnership Arrangement evolved into a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Arrangement in 2018.

The efforts between Cohen's and the Arab States are supported within the framework of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, which held its 10th Ministerial Meeting in Beijing on May 30, 2024. Furthermore, China's Belt and Road Initiative, which was launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013, has enabled China to connect with the UAE and other Arab countries.

Turkey warns Russia & Ukraine after shooting down Black Sea drone

By Danielle Campbell

Russia (Washington Insider) - Turkey shot down an "out of control" drone from the Black Sea on Monday, Dec 15, 2025, after Ukrainian strikes on Russian tankers; President Erdogan warned both sides to protect security and navigation.

As Alarabiya English News reported, Turkey has called on Russia and Ukraine to act with care in the Black Sea after its air force shot down a drone that entered Turkish airspace. The Defence Ministry said the incident took place on Monday, Dec 15, 2025, when an "out of control" drone approached from the Black Sea. Turkish F-16 fighter jets were sent to the area under standard air defence procedures. The drone was later shot down in a safe location to protect civilians and civil aviation.

"Because of the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia, our counterparts have been warned that both sides need to be more careful regarding incidents that could negatively affect the security of the Black Sea,"

the ministry said.

What is Turkey's response to Russia-Ukraine tensions after Black Sea drone?

Turkish authorities have not revealed the source of the drone that violated the country's airspace. The Defence Ministry said the drone likely shattered into small fragments after it was brought down.

The debris was scattered across a wide area. Officials said search efforts and technical examinations are continuing. Teams are working to recover the remaining pieces and assess the drone's origin and function.

This incident is part of a continuing series of naval drone attacks occurring within the Black Sea region. Ukrainian forces claimed that their naval drones attacked 2 oil tankers on November 28, 2025, and a third oil tanker was hit by Ukrainian naval drones while en route to Sinop in Turkey on December 2, 2025.

As Turkish military officials noted, as military activity increases, there is an increased possibility for accidents and further escalation of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine due to competing interests over key shipping routes and regional stability.

Turkey, a NATO member with territorial interests in the Black Sea, has remained in communication with both Moscow and Kyiv. The Turkish government has called on all parties to the conflict to respect each other's airspace and maritime boundaries and to act in a manner that does not jeopardise either security or maritime trade within the Black Sea.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has denounced the attacks, stating they are detrimental to navigational safety, human lives, and the environment.

As a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, there has been an escalation of tensions between Russia and Ukraine, which has increased military operations, trade, and energy shipments in the Black Sea region.

Due to Turkey's control over access to the Black Sea via the Bosporus and Dardanelles straits, the Turkish government has issued a warning to both sides in the conflict against taking any actions that would lead to a further escalation of the conflict.

US sanctions Iran and Venezuela over drone program

By Kathy Malouf

According to the Treasury Department, the most recent actions are meant to reinforce the UN sanctions that have been reinstated on Iran due to its nuclear program, further pressuring the Islamic Republic. Iran has maintained for a long time that its nuclear program is peaceful.

Three Iranian men involved in attempts to obtain chemicals for ballistic missiles, a group of Iran-based individuals and companies associated with Rayan Fan Group, a holding company previously sanctioned by the United States, and a Venezuelan company and its chairman accused of buying Iranian drones are all included in Tuesday's sanctions.

In an attempt to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, President Donald Trump reinstated a "maximum pressure" campaign against the country in February. Three crucial Iranian enrichment facilities were the target of strikes spearheaded by the United States. “Treasury is holding Iran and Venezuela accountable for their aggressive and reckless proliferation of deadly weapons around the world,”

said Treasury's Undersecretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, John K. Hurley.

“We will continue to take swift action to deprive those who enable Iran’s military-industrial complex access to the U.S. financial system.”

According to Tommy Pigott, a spokesman for the State

Department, Iran is still breaking UN regulations.

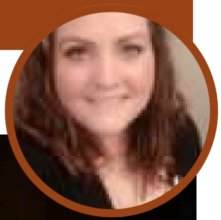
"U.S. interests in our region are threatened by Iran's continuous supply of conventional weapons to Caracas,"
he declared.

How do these sanctions affect Iran Venezuela oil and shipping ties?

U.S. warrants targeting Venezuelan oil painting interposers and shipping enterprises, alongside Iran's networks, oppressively disrupt bilateral oil painting trades by blocking shadow line tankers that shuttle crude between Kharg Island and Venezuelan anchorages, forcing steeper abatements and reduced volumes to black- request buyers like China.

Designated vessels like the Guyana- flagged Skipper preliminarily loading Iranian crude for Venezuela face seizures or elusion costs, shrinking available capacity in the 1,423-tanker shadow line(65 formerly sanctioned), while PDVSA's exports drop amid U.S. non military leaguers. Iran's oil painting minister admits warrants strain logistics, circumscribing diurnal deals at 600,000 barrels for military backing; Venezuela offers $14- 15/ barrel abatements, but tensed enforcement pitfalls halts in collective support, heightening Maduro's reliance on blinked deals despite Chevron sculpt-outs.

UK manufacturing ends 2025 with output 13% & £44bn investment



By Mandilee Hecht

UK (Washington Insider) - Britain's manufacturers ended 2025 cautiously positive, with output +13%, orders +3%, forecast rising; Make UK/BDO survey highlights £44bn investment potential, 0.5% growth, and comments from James Brougham, Richard Austin.

As John Hunter on Machinery Market reported, Britain's manufacturers ended 2025 on a more positive note, with output still growing as strong domestic orders supported activity, according to the latest Make UK/BDO Q4 Manufacturing Outlook survey published today, Dec 15, 2025. They mentioned that the study shows that demand at home helped firms close the year on firmer ground. However, it also points to rising caution across the sector.

Recruitment plans weakened sharply as companies reacted to uncertainty ahead of last month's Budget, with concerns over possible tax increases and higher labour costs. Business confidence fell for the 2nd quarter in a row. Make UK and BDO said the improved end to the year should not be seen as the start of stronger trading conditions. Forecasts remain weak, with manufacturing output expected to grow by only 0.5% in 2025 before falling by 0.5% in 2026.

What is driving UK manufacturing growth and £44bn investment by 2035?

Make UK also released new figures on the UK's long-term investment gap and the potential gains from closing it. The analysis shows that UK investment averaged about 17% of GDP between 2013 and 2024, compared with an

OECD average of around 22% over the same period.

The group said that if the government set a long-term target to match OECD levels by 2035, this could be achieved by increasing investment by 0.5 percentage points each year. Reaching the 22% level would result in around £670 billion in additional public and private investment over the next decade, according to Make UK.

The latest analysis shows that the private sector could provide around 60% of the additional investment if the UK reaches OECD levels by 2035. James Brougham, senior economist at Make UK, said:

"After a difficult 12 months when manufacturers have faced multiple challenges across all fronts, it is a relief to see the year ending on a more positive note. However, the prospects for any form of significant growth remain remote and, with rising employment costs and any help on energy still well over the horizon, companies will have little inclination to fill up the punch bowl to start the party."

Richard Austin, head of manufacturing at BDO, said:

"it is now essential that the Government brings forward the proposed energy support scheme and, at the same time, extends it right across the sector so the broadest possible range of companies are covered. With firms set to take a hit on increased employment costs employers also want to see reassurances from the Government that the upcoming Employment Rights Bill will not add further financial burdens on businesses, otherwise the jobs market will remain weak."

"This year has been a volatile one for UK manufacturers. While the last six months have shown tentative signs of growth in output and orders, the sector is lacking the confidence and assurance they need to put their hands in their pockets and invest.

Last month's Budget gave manufacturers some relief in terms of investment, green transition and some positive skills measures, but it fell short in addressing some of the biggest concerns the sector is facing. Businesses need decisive action if growth is to be realised."

Manufacturers are expected to contribute about 11% of that private share, which would add roughly £44 billion to the manufacturing sector over the period. The Make UK/BDO Q4 Manufacturing Outlook survey also shows that output growth slowed at the end of the year.

The balance on output fell to +13% in the 4th quarter, down from +25% in the previous quarter. Despite this slowdown, manufacturers are more optimistic about the months ahead, with the forward-looking output balance for the next quarter expected to rise to +19%.

There were also similar increases in the number of orders received. The number of orders increased by +3% in Quarter 4 compared to Quarter 3 (+16%). The expectation for the number of orders in Quarter 1 of 2020 is a recovery to +19%. Demand from both UK and overseas export markets is expected to be equal at +20% in Quarter 4 2019. However, this situation will be reversed after Quarter 4 2019, with forecasted Export orders reducing to +3% and UK orders increasing to +27%.

The United States moved down from 2nd to 3rd position on the Future Growth Opportunities list below both Asia and Oceania. The UK manufacturers that previously were among the top three in Quarter 2, after the April Tariff announcements, are looking.

Other regions in the world, like the UK, will be increasingly active in looking for opportunities available outside of that country and the USA. Furthermore, recruitment intent has dropped significantly from +15% down to +3%, while investment intentions have decreased slightly from +25% down to +19%. However, despite these changes, the levels of both remain abovethose of earlier this year remain high.

Head of largest US bank warns of risk of American stock market crash

By Kathy Malouf

Jamie Dimon, CEO of JPMorgan Chase, the largest US bank, issued a stark warning about the risk of a severe stock market crash triggered by vulnerabilities in the US private credit market. He highlighted rising defaults, regulatory concerns, and the opaque nature of private credit as key risks threatening financial stability and investor confidence.

Jamie Dimon's warning on market risks

As reported by Sarah Jenson of Bloomberg, Jamie Dimon delivered a cautionary message, emphasising that while the US equity markets have enjoyed a prolonged rally, underlying risks in the private credit sector could precipitate a sharp correction akin to a crash. Dimon pinpointed worsening credit quality and liquidity strains in this largely unregulated segment as potential triggers for sudden market instability.

Dimon said,
"The rapid growth in private credit over the last decade, without adequate transparency or oversight, has created vulnerabilities that could amplify shocks in financial markets if left unchecked."

His remarks came amid recent collapses of companies like First Brands and Tricolor, whose defaults have illuminated the risks in alternative lending channels heavily reliant on private credit.

Concerns from regulators and market analysts

The International Monetary Fund's Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva joined the chorus of warnings, as reported by Reuters, highlighting that the rapid lending boom in non-bank financial institutions may pose systemic risks internationally. Georgieva urged vigilance and enhanced regulation to mitigate contagion effects that could destabilise global economies.

Emma White of the Financial Times described how the Bank of England is preparing system-wide stress tests focused on private credit risks after notable corporate collapses and reported fraud cases increased anxiety over potential broader spillovers.

Market analysts including Jonas Goltermann of Capital Economics acknowledged the opaque valuation practices and limited public disclosure in private credit markets, which make assessing true risk challenging. Nonetheless, they cautioned that rapid loan growth cannot continue indefinitely without repercussions.

Impact of private credit issues on banking sector

Michael Bryant of Reuters noted that the banking sector has been impacted by private credit risks through exposures on balance sheets and funding markets. Regional banks like Zions Bancorporation recently announced significant losses linked to fraudulent loans, prompting investor concerns about financial health and sector contagion.

Dimon highlighted that "the transmission of risks from private credit defaults could quickly spread through the financial system, impacting traditional banking operations and investor sentiment."

This multi-layered risk landscape clouds the outlook for US markets despite ongoing technology-driven optimism.

Market reaction and broader economic implications

James Porter of CNBC observed that markets reacted nervously but without panic to Dimon's warning, as investors balanced the alarm with confidence in Federal Reserve and regulatory actions. Porter noted,

"Markets may face increased volatility as uncertainties around credit risk persist, but broad equities still show resilience supported by corporate profits and economic data".

Karim El-Sayed of Al Jazeera underscored concerns that a severe equity market downturn could undermine consumer wealth and spending, potentially tipping the US economy into slower growth or recession if private credit troubles deepen.

Regulatory bodies including the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and European Central Bank are intensifying scrutiny on private credit valuations and risk exposures.

Discussions are underway to enhance transparency and stress testing, aiming to curb systemic risks before they escalate.

Dimon advised investors and policymakers to prepare for potential market disruptions while affirming that responsible risk management and regulatory reforms can mitigate severe outcomes:

"We must learn from past crises and act decisively to ensure stability as markets evolve".

This comprehensive report consolidates statements from Jamie Dimon and multiple authoritative financial sources to provide a neutral, thorough journalistic perspective on emerging risks in the US private credit market and their implications for stock market stability.

Stocks close at record highs as investors shake off shutdown concerns

By John Ruehl

Stock markets closed at record highs amid investor optimism, brushing aside concerns over a potential government shutdown. Positive economic data and strong corporate earnings bolstered confidence, leading to broad gains across major indices.

As reported by Lisa Thompson of Reuters, global stock markets closed at new all-time highs on Friday, driven by investor optimism over positive economic indicators and strong quarterly corporate results. Despite ongoing political uncertainties in Washington over a potential government shutdown, markets showed resilience with the S&P 500 and Dow Jones Industrial Average hitting record closing levels.

The economic data released during the week showed robust job growth and consumer spending, which Lisa Thompson noted as major factors reinforcing market confidence. She quoted strategist Mark Anderson saying,

“Investors are focusing more on the fundamentals than the political noise, expecting the economy to maintain its growth trajectory".

Strong corporate earnings support the rally

According to Michael Evans of Bloomberg, strong earnings reports from leading technology and consumer companies contributed to the rally. He highlighted that notable companies, including Apple and Microsoft, exceeded analyst expectations, fueling buying interest across sectors.

Evans quoted analyst Sarah Jenson:

"Corporate results are continuing to impress, offsetting fears about fiscal disruptions. This momentum is likely to carry markets higher in the near term".

Investors bet on economic growth continuity

James Porter of CNBC noted investors' growing confidence in the Federal Reserve's approach to inflation, which is seen as supportive of sustained economic growth without aggressive interest rate hikes. Porter highlighted that bond yields remained stable, reflecting less concern over inflationary risks despite geopolitical tensions globally.

Balanced perspective on risks

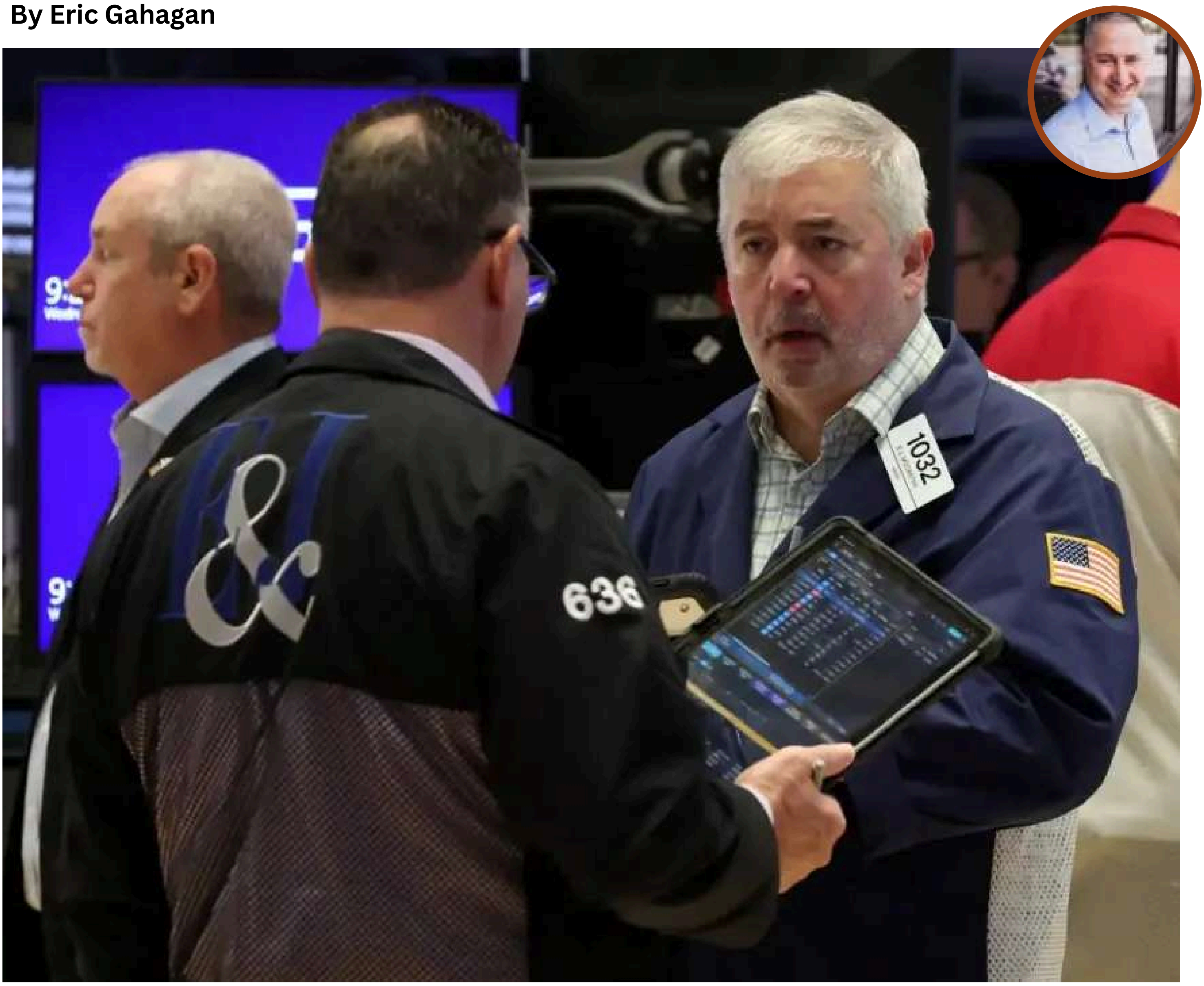
While markets rose, some caution was voiced. Emma White of The Financial Times underlined that the political deadlock over the government funding bill remains unresolved, posing potential risks if a shutdown materialises. However, she pointed out that markets have historically rebounded quickly after such incidents, suggesting the current rally is underpinned by strong fundamentals.

Market summary for the day

- S&P 500 closed at a record 4,720 points, up 0.7%
- Dow Jones reached 38,250 points, a new high, gaining 0.6%
- Nasdaq Composite rose 1.0%, buoyed by tech stock performance
- European markets also mirrored gains, with London's FTSE 100 ending 0.5% higher.

Dow closes down 300 points on trade fears

By Eric Gahagan



The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell by over 300 points amid renewed trade tensions and cautious investor sentiment ahead of upcoming earnings reports. Mixed corporate results and concerns over global trade disruptions weighed on market confidence, leading to a volatile trading session.

As reported by Maria Lopez of CNBC, the Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 309.74 points or 0.65%, marking its largest single-day decline in recent weeks. The move reflected investors' fears surrounding ongoing trade disputes between the US and several key international partners. Lopez noted that trade uncertainty continues to unsettle markets as tariff negotiations remain at an impasse.

The Wall Street Journal's Michael Bryant added, "Trade issues cast a shadow over corporate outlooks, which has led investors to sell off industrial and manufacturing stocks in particular." The decline in these sectors pulled the Dow lower, with notable losses in Boeing and Caterpillar.

Mixed corporate earnings influence sentiment

According to Rachel Kim of Bloomberg, corporate earnings released during the week have been mixed, adding to market caution. While technology companies like Nvidia and Microsoft posted better-than-expected quarterly numbers, other sectors such as retail and energy showed signs of softness. Kim quoted analyst Sarah Jenson who said,

“Earnings season has so far presented a split picture, which is not helping to alleviate concerns about the broader economic impact of trade tensions”.

Nasdaq and S&P 500 show resilience

James Porter of Reuters highlighted that despite the Dow’s fall, the Nasdaq Composite closed slightly higher, buoyed by strong performances in technology and AI-related stocks. The S&P 500, meanwhile, ended the day down marginally by 0.1%, indicating investor caution but not a broad market sell-off. Porter observed that

“markets remain sensitive to geopolitical developments but appear to be digesting the risks pragmatically”.

Market volatility and economic outlook

Emma White of the Financial Times pointed out that volatility indices surged during the trading day, reflecting investor uncertainty. White explained that upcoming economic data releases, including inflation and consumer spending figures, will be closely watched for signs of growth momentum or economic slowdown.

The Federal Reserve’s stance on interest rates continues to be a significant focus. As discussed by James Porter of CNBC, the market is trying to anticipate whether upcoming Fed meetings will signal further tightening or easing policies amidst the complex global trade environment.

Key market movements

- Dow Jones Industrial Average closed down 309.74 points (-0.65%).
- S&P 500 ended down 0.1%, closing near 6,734 points
- Nasdaq Composite finished slightly up by 0.1%
- Major drag from industrials and manufacturing sectors
- Technology stocks helped cushion broader losses

This detailed overview utilises multiple reputable sources to deliver a clear, jargon-free journalistic account of the Dow’s recent decline amidst trade fears and mixed earnings.

The report maintains neutrality and careful attribution while covering economic and market dynamics shaping investor behaviour.

Wall Street edges higher near records on shortened day

BY LIAM FLYNN

At 11:15 a.m. Eastern, the Dow Jones Industrial Average had increased by 0.4%. The Nasdaq Composite dropped 0.1%, while the S&P 500 index increased by less than 0.2%.

Markets are closed on Christmas Eve and will close at 1 p.m. ET. Due to the vacation and the fact that the majority of investors have closed their positions for the year, volumes are anticipated to be low this week even though markets will reopen for a full day of trading on Friday.

Due to investors' support for the Trump administration's deregulatory plans and their optimism about artificial intelligence's potential to increase earnings for both technology businesses and corporate America as a whole, the S&P 500 has increased by almost 15% this year.

Nvidia and Micron Technologies, two businesses that produce chips or other components that drive the expansion of data centers around the nation, are among the top performers this year.

The direction of the US economy and the Federal Reserve's interest rate changes will be major concerns for investors over the coming weeks. When the Fed meets in January, investors are wagering that interest rates will remain unchanged.

Due to consumers continuing to spend despite patient affectation, the U.S. frugality expanded at a suddenly robust 4.3 periodic rate in the third quarter, the fastest rate in two times. Recent reports have also indicated that consumers who are concerned about high prices aren't veritably confident.

Despite some suggestions that the labor request is deteriorating, the number of Americans seeking severance benefits dropped last week and is still at historically high situations.

The Labor Department blamed on Wednesday that operations for severance claims in the United States dropped by 10,000 to 214,000 for the week ending December 20 from 224,000 the week before. That's lower than the 232,000 new operations that judges surveyed by the analytics company FactSet prognosticated.

Following Sanofi's announcement that it would be purchasing the California-based vaccine manufacturer in a $2.2 billion deal, Dynavax Technologies saw a 38% increase. The French pharmaceutical company will expand its product line to include Dynavax's hepatitis B vaccines and an ongoing shingles vaccine.

Following the weight-loss medication company's clearance by US regulators for a tablet form of its popular medication Wegovy, Novo Nordisk's stock increased 2%. However, Novo Nordisk's stock is still down about 40% this year due to the company's increased competition for weight-loss drugs, especially from Eli Lilly. Eli Lilly's stock has increased 40% so far this year.

The European markets were fluctuating between modest gains and losses. Asian markets were likewise calm, with Japan's Nikkei 225 falling 0.1% and Hong Kong rising 0.2%.

Silver prices increased by more than 1%, and both gold and silver futures were higher. The price of US crude oil increased 0.4% to $58.61 per barrel.

How much did trading volume fall during the shortened session?

Wall Street's trading volume on December 24, 2025, during the vacation- docked session fell nearly 50 below the recent diurnal normal, reflecting thin liquidity typical of Christmas Eve trading.

With requests closing beforehand at 1 p.m. ET, consolidated tape recording volume for NYSE and Nasdaq-listed stocks dropped to around 4- 5 billion shares versus 8- 10 billion on normal days, driven by reduced institutional participation and retail vacation absence.

Lower volume amplified intraday swings despite slight earnings, with the S&P 500 near records; judges note similar sessions frequently see heightened volatility from limited liquidity, though no major dislocations passed.

2 U.S. soldiers, 1 interpreter killed in Syria; Hegseth confirms

BY ALICIA POZSONY

Syria (Washington Insider) - On December 13, 2025, 2 U.S. soldiers and a civilian interpreter were killed and 3 wounded in Palmyra, Syria. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth confirmed the ISIS-linked attacker was killed.

As Reuters reported, on Saturday, December 13, 2025, U.S. forces were attacked in Palmyra, central Syria, a region known for conflict and strategic importance. The attack killed 2 U.S. Army soldiers and a civilian interpreter. 3 other American soldiers were injured, Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said.

The team was on a key leader engagement mission with local partner forces. They were working to improve security and fight remaining Islamic State fighters. The attacker, linked to ISIS, was killed by local partner forces. Helicopters evacuated the wounded to U.S. military bases.

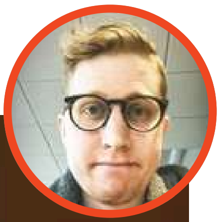
What risks do U.S. forces face from ISIS in Syria after deadly attack?

In 2015, U.S. troops were deployed to Syria to assist in combating ISIS. The deployment of U.S. troops came in response to ISIS's confusing hold on large parts of both Syria and Iraq. In response, the U.S. partnered with local forces to expel ISIS from cities (including Raqqa) via military operations that successfully took control of them by the middle of 2019. However, after being expelled from those cities, some ISIS members fled and continued their operations in secret.Subsequent to ISIS's expulsion, U.S. military personnel remained in eastern and central Syria to support the training and development of local Syrian forces, execute counter-terrorist operations against remnants of ISIS, and protect the detention facilities being operated by the SDF that housed captured ISIS fighters. By the end of 2025, it was estimated that approximately 2,000 U.S.

Military personnel remained in Syria (though many of the bases originally established had been eliminated or significantly reduced and responsibility for operations were transitioned to local partnered forces).

Pentagon probes Pete Hegseth for signal use on Yemen strikes

By Henry Nicholas



The news puts additional pressure on Hegseth, who is already facing criticism over US strikes on suspected drug-trafficking vessels that experts claim equate to extrajudicial murders. Some parliamentarians have called for Hegseth to resign or be dismissed.

"The secretary sent nonpublic DoD information identifying the quantity and strike times of manned US aircraft over hostile territory over an unapproved, unsecure network approximately two to four hours before the execution of those strikes,"

the inspector general's office said in a report, using an abbreviation for the Department of Defense.

"Using a personal cell phone to conduct official business and send nonpublic

DoD information through Signal risks potential compromise of sensitive DoD information,"

it said.

Although Hegseth is an "original classification authority" and has the power to determine when information no longer needs to be protected, the investigation stated that his actions "created a riskto operational security that could have resulted in failed US mission objectives and potential harm to US pilots."

Despite declining to be interviewed for the inspector general's probe, Hegseth called the findings a "total exoneration," writing on X, "Case closed."

The investigation began when the Atlantic magazine revealed in March that its top editor had unintentionally joined a Signal chat where officials, including Hegseth and then-national security advisor Mike Waltz, discussed upcoming strikes on Iran-backed Huthi rebels in Yemen.

The White House argued that no confidential material was disclosed and called editor Jeffrey Goldberg a liar, but the magazine eventually published the contents the officials discussed.

Waltz sent real-time intelligence on the aftermath of the military action, while Hegseth disclosed the timing of strikes hours before they occurred and details on the planes and weapons involved.

"If this information had fallen into the hands of US adversaries, Huthi forces might have been able to counter US forces or reposition personnel and assets to avoid planned US strikes," the watchdog report said.

At the time, Trump rejected calls for Hegseth's dismissal and placed most of the blame on Waltz, whom he eventually replaced as national security advisor by designating him as the US ambassador to the UN.

In April, US media revealed that Hegseth had set up a second Signal chat to discuss the March strikes in Yemen with individuals, including his brother and wife. However, the Pentagon chief also survived that storm and continued to hold his position.

Following the start of the Gaza conflict in 2023, the Huthis started attacking ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden while professing support for Palestinians.

Under the Biden administration, US forces initiated a renewed air campaign against the Huthis and began launching strikes in retaliation.

Trump's attacks on the Huthis continued until early May, when Omani intervention helped negotiate a ceasefire.

A September 2 incident in which US forces executed a follow-up strike on the wreckage of a vessel that had already been hit, allegedly killing two survivors, has also drawn more attention to Hegseth recently.

The Pentagon and the White House have both attempted to disassociate Hegseth from that choice, which some US senators have claimed may constitute a war crime, by placing the blame on the admiral who was in charge of the operation.

What disciplinary steps can be taken against a defense secretary?

Corrections against the U.S. Defense Secretary, similar to Pete Hegseth, are limited compared to ordinary workers due to the political and appointed nature of the position. The Secretary of Defense is a political nominee verified by the Senate and serves at the pleasure of the President; junking generally requires presidential action or abdication.

Formal correctional conduct within the Department of Defense (e.g., rebuke, suspense) don't generally apply to the Secretary, as these apply to mercenary workers and military labor under standard labor force rules. Responsibility mechanisms include congressional oversight, examinations by the Inspector General, and implicit indictment by Congress for misconduct or abuse of power.

The Secretary can be subject to examinations by the Office of Inspector General or other agencies with recommendations that may lead to public rebuke or recommendations to the President.

US defense secretary Pete Hegseth faces scrutiny over 2016 Fox comments

BY LIAM FLYNN

The US executions of suspected drug traffickers in boats off the coast of Venezuela and Columbia have sparked a heated political discussion about whether US soldiers should defy illegal orders.

Hegseth clarified that service members did, in fact, have a duty to disobey any illegal orders in response to Trump's remarks during a debate in March 2016, while Trump was a Republican presidential contender, in a video that CNN was able to uncover.

In an appearance on Fox & Friends, where he would later become a host, Hegseth, a Fox News contributor at the time, stated,

"You're not just gonna follow that order if it's unlawful."

Later that month, he made similar remarks during an interview on Fox Business.

As a candidate in 2016, Trump had promised that if he were elected president, US military forces would carry out instructions that included killing terrorists' families and bringing back prohibited kinds of torture. “The military’s not gonna follow illegal orders,”

Hegseth said of Trump’s claim, which the candidate later walked back.

Due to a second strike on an accused drug boat on September 2 that claimed the lives of two survivors of a strike that had occurred less than an hour earlier, Hegseth is currently involved in a dispute. Over 80 people have reportedly been killed in the administration's 20 strikes in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific, which it claims are drug smugglers without providing any proof.

Critics have characterized the attacks as extrajudicial and illegal killings, pointing out that drug smuggling is not a crime that may result in execution without a trial, even if it is proven. The administration has labeled a number of organizations as "narco-terrorists" in order to defend its attacks.

Hegseth has chastised Democrats in recent weeks for voicing similar worries to his own prior to Trump's election.

Sen. Mark Kelly of Arizona and five other Democrats with military histories released a video last month that warned of internal "threats to our constitution" and urged military troops to defy "illegal orders" from the Trump administration.

Following Trump's objection that Kelly and the other congressmen "should be in jail right now" and that they may have engaged in "seditious behavior, punishable by death," the Pentagon declared it was opening an inquiry into Kelly.

The Democratic politicians, according to Hegseth, are disseminating "despicable, reckless, and false" information. He likened alleged drug smugglers to terrorists affiliated with al-Qaida on Saturday.

“If you’re working for a designated terrorist organization and you bring drugs to this country in a boat, we will find you and we will sink you. Let there be no doubt about it,”

Hegseth said at the Ronald Reagan presidential library in Simi valley, California.

He disregarded worries that the strikes violated international law and added that Trump has the authority to use force "as he sees fit."

“President Trump can and will take decisive military action as he sees fit to defend our nation’s interests. Let no country on Earth doubt that for a moment,”

he said.

However, he contended in 2016 that the military was required to reject orders that were unlawful and that service personnel might be prosecuted for doing so.

“Here’s the problem with Trump,” Hegseth told the Megyn Kelly show on Fox after the debate in which Trump made the comments.

“He says: ‘Go ahead and kill the family. Go ahead and torture. Go ahead and go further than waterboarding.’ What happens when people follow those orders, or don’t follow them? It’s not clear that Donald Trump will have their back.

Donald Trump is oftentimes about Donald Trump,”

he said, adding: “
“If you’re not changing the law, and you’re just saying it, you create even more ambiguity.”

The administration's stance that the Democratic lawmakers who released the video "sowed doubt in a clear chain of command, which is reckless, dangerous, and deeply irresponsible for an elected official" was reiterated by White House spokesperson Anna Kelly in a statement to CNN. She also stated that

"the military already has clear procedures for handling unlawful orders, but seditious Democrats injected ambiguity."

As reported last week, Hegseth made the same claim at a Silicon Valley Liberty Forum event in April 2016, stating that the US military "won't follow unlawful orders from their commander in chief." He went on to say that the military's duty and moral principles included refusing to carry out unlawful orders.

He referred to the Democratic MPs who made that claim as the "Seditious Six" last month.

Pete Hegseth blamed the" Seditious Six" Popular lawgivers Sen. Mark Kelly(D- AZ), Sen. Elissa Slotkin(D- MI), Rep. Jason Crow(D- CO), Rep. Chris Deluzio(D- PA), Rep. Chrissy Houlahan(D- PA), and Sen. Tim Kaine(D- VA) during a December 2, 2025 White House Cabinet meeting.

Hegseth called their conduct" reckless, dangerous, and profoundly reckless," criminating them of undermining the chain of command and creating distrust in the Armed Forces to politically target Trump; Pentagon prophet Kingsley Wilson distinguished Hegseth's once commentary as upholding legal norms, not Popular" politically motivated" rhetoric.

Democrats resurfaced Hegseth's 2016 Fox News remarks praising colors for refusing" unlawful orders from their commander- in-chief," with Kelly asking" What has changed?" and Slotkin/ Crow lacing clips on social media to punctuate inconsistency amid boat strike difficulties.

US Congress moves to curb Pentagon force withdrawals

BY KATHY MALOUF

The 2026 National Defense Authorization Act, which was approved by Senate and House negotiators and made public on Sunday night, maintains both regions' current levels of force participation. It stipulates that the United States must submit an evaluation and attest to Congress that reducing its forces in Europe below 76,000 will not jeopardize the security interests of the United States or NATO. Reductions below 28,500 in South Korea are restricted by the bill. In the event of a drawdown, the Pentagon would have to guarantee Congress that deterrence against North Korea would not be compromised, verify that allies were consulted, and offer an evaluation of the regional impact in addition to a national security rationale. The law also mandates that the United States maintain its top military position in NATO, Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), which has always been filled by an American general.

These restrictions come after it was revealed that the Pentagon had contemplated cutting back on forces in South Korea and Europe, as well as perhaps giving up the SACEUR role. U.S. leaders have recently indicated they are pulling back from such actions even in the absence of congressional limits, regardless of whether those ideas represented actual planning or were meant to put pressure on allies to increase their own defense spending.

In a conference with European leaders last week, U.S. national security officials informed their colleagues that by 2027, Europe must be ready to shoulder the majority of NATO's defense obligations.

According to officials, the U.S. intends to keep the SACEUR job while offering several other key NATO military positions to European countries. Additionally, they pointed out that Washington has no immediate intentions to reduce the number of troops in Europe.

"We've been very clear in the need for Europeans to lead in the conventional defense of Europe.
We are committed to working through NATO coordination mechanisms to strengthen the alliance and ensure its long-term viability as European allies increasing take on responsibility for conventional deterrence and defense in Europe,"

Pentagon press secretary Kingsley Wilson said in response.

The Army withdrew a rotating brigade that was primarily based in Romania earlier this year, raising concerns among European allies about whether this could be the start of more extensive U.S. force reductions on NATO's eastern flank.This week's House vote on the NDAA, the annual must-pass legislation that outlines the Pentagon's spending and policy priorities, is anticipated to proceed quickly. Before Christmas, Congress hopes to have the law on the president's desk.

The bill also includes $400 million for the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative over a two-year period, as well as an amendment that limits the Pentagon's ability to reclaim equipment that has been purchased for Ukraine but has not yet been delivered to situations in which it is critically needed for an ongoing or impending U.S. contingency operation and its non-use could result in fatalities or the failure of a vital mission.

This clause comes after the Pentagon decided earlier this year to stop supplying Ukraine with some U.S.-funded military hardware.

War Secretary Pete Hegseth referred to South Korea and a number of European countries over the weekend as "model allies."

"Model allies that step up, like Israel, South Korea, Poland, increasingly Germany, the Baltics and others, will receive our special favor,"

he said at the Reagan National Defense Forum.

"Allies that still fail to do their part for collective defense will face consequences."

How would the bill affect NATO deterrence plans in Europe?

The 2026 NDAA bill strengthens NATO deterrence plans in Europe by calling congressional instruments for any US troop reductions below 76,000 taking threat assessments, NATO consultations, and SACEUR (Supreme Allied Commander Europe) countersign to ensure cuts don't undermine collaborative defense or eastern hand stability amid Russian pitfalls.

Provisions lock in current US posture(e.g., V Corps forward HQ in Poland, enhanced battlegroups in Baltics/ Romania), precluding unilateral drawdowns that could gesture weakness; codifies confederated consolation via sustained rotational deployments and exercises like Steadfast Defender, bolstering Composition 5 credibility without new backing.

Abettors like Germany/ Poland gain pungency for their 2 spending ramps and host- nation support; bill counters Trump-period reviews (e.g., previous Romania withdrawal), enabling NATO's indigenous plans for multidomain operations, ISR emulsion, and rapid-fire underpinning against cold-blooded aggression.

Zelenskyy warns Russia plans 2026 "Year of War" after Putin pledge

By Eric Gahagan

Russia (Washington Insider) - Ukrainian President Zelenskyy warned that Russia plans a "year of war" in 2026 after Putin vowed to achieve goals, including seizing Ukrainian territories, signalling heightened military threats and regional instability.

As Alarabiya English News reported, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Wednesday, Dec 17, 2025, that Russia is preparing to make 2026 a "year of war" against his country.

His statement followed Russian President Vladimir Putin's claim that Moscow will "certainly" achieve its goals in Ukraine. These goals include taking control of territories that Ukraine and the international community consider part of Ukraine.

What is Zelenskyy warning about Russia's "Year of War" in 2026?

Analysts said Putin's remarks could mean that Russia is planning a more aggressive phase of the conflict next year. Zelenskyy stressed that Ukraine must stay ready and continue defending itself on all fronts.

The warning comes after a year of continuous fighting in Ukraine. Ukrainian forces have faced repeated attacks across many regions. Zelenskyy said Ukraine needs strong international support to strengthen its defence systems.

On February 24, 2022, Russia started invading Ukraine by launching a wide-ranging offensive against it. The conflict has spread to multiple areas in Ukraine, including eastern and southern Ukraine, with enormous casualties and extensive destruction caused by the conflict.

Russia has claimed ownership of some areas of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia; however, Ukrainian forces have counterattacked to reclaim their territory. There were attempts at establishing peace between both parties in 2023 and 2024; however, conflicts continued to arise during those years.

Israel & Germany sign $3.1B Arrow-3 deal to boost missile defense

By Jan Frazier

IIsrael (Washington Insider) - Israel and Germany signed a $3.1 billion Arrow-3 expansion deal, boosting Germany's total to $6.7 billion, strengthening missile defence, NATO capabilities, and Israel-Germany defence cooperation.

As Alarabiya English News reported, Israel and Germany have agreed on a new defence contract worth around $3.1 billion to expand the Arrow-3 missile defence system. The system is produced by Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI). This new deal builds on an earlier agreement signed 2 years ago.

Together, the total value of Germany's investment in Arrow-3 reaches approximately $6.7 billion. The system is part of Israel's layered missile defence network and is designed to intercept long-range missiles outside the Earth's atmosphere.

What will the Israel-Germany $6.7B Arrow-3 deal mean for defense?

According to officials, the Arrow-3 system is capable of destroying ballistic missiles at very high altitudes before they re-enter the atmosphere. It provides a different level of protection than short- and medium-range defence systems.

The expanded contract includes new interceptors, upgrades to existing batteries, and improvedcommand-and-control systems. For Germany, the system adds an important layer to its defence and contributes to NATO's missile defence capabilities.

The Arrow missile project was initiated during the early 1980s as a collaborative effort between the United States and Israel in designing a long-range missile defence system. The most recent iteration of this system, referred to as Arrow-3, became operational in 2017.

Arrow-3 forms part of a layered defence apparatus alongside the already existing Iron Dome and David's Sling systems and provides multiple layers of defensive protection against missile threats. In 2023, Germany entered into an exclusive agreement with Atomica to purchase Arrow-3, which will be the first European nation to acquire the Arrow-3 missile system. The contract between Germany and Atomica is worth approximately $3.6 billion.

Germany pushes back on new U.S. security strategy

By Mandilee Hecht

According to Wadephul, Berlin didn't require outside lectures on democratic society organization or freedom of expression.The "America First" philosophy of US President Donald Trump is described in the US Constitution.It includes harsh criticism of longstanding partners in Europe and marks a move away from Washington's conventional global leadership toward a greater focus on Latin America and migration.

According to the publication, the US would back political parties and players who disagree with EU-led policy stances, including immigration.Speaking in Berlin with Icelandic Foreign Minister Thorgerdur Katrin Gunnarsdottir, Wadephul stated that Germany's constitutional order governs such situations.The United States is and will continue to be

"our most important ally in the [NATO] alliance,"

according to Wadephul. However, the focus of this partnership is on security policy matters.

"We see ourselves as being able to discuss and debate these matters entirely on our own in the future, and do not need outside advice,"

Wadephul said.
According to the minister, the alliance's jurisdiction over Germany did not include matters pertaining to free speech or the establishment of free societies.He did, however, state that he will now "analyze the new US security strategy in detail."Since Trump's return to the White House, tensions between Washington and Europe have increased due to disagreements over free speech and immigration.

A top AfD politician visited the White House in September as part of the US administration's efforts to strengthen connections with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).What specific claims in the US National Security Strategy prompted Foreign Minister Wadephul's strongest rebuttal? Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul's strongest disproof targeted the US National Security Strategy's claims that Europe, including Germany, censors free speech, suppresses political opposition, and undermines popular processes to block peace efforts in Ukraine. The document accuses EU programs of stifling free expression, repressing dissent, and administering migration that risks" civilizational erasure" alongside low birthrates and profitable recession, portraying internal decay as Europe's topmost trouble over Russia or China.

It further alleges European governments ignore public solicitations for Ukraine peace, lessen the republic, and erode sovereignty, calling for US support of" resistance" via nationalistic parties. Wadephul dismissed these as unwarranted" outside advice," defending Germany's indigenous free speech protections and press freedom while rejecting US lectures on internal affairs despite NATO security ties.

MI6 Chief Metreweli warns Russia, pledges UK support for Ukraine

By Kathy Malouf

Russia (Washington Insider) - MI6 Chief Blaise Metreweli, the 1st female head in 116 years, warned that Russia is a global threat, stressed UK support for Ukraine, and called for advanced technology in intelligence operations.

As Zeynab Farajzade on Anewz reported, MI6 Chief Blaise Metreweli has warned that Russia remains a serious threat to global security. Speaking publicly for the first time since taking office in October 2025, she said Moscow is spreading instability around the world on purpose.

Metreweli described chaos as a key part of Russia's foreign policy and said it is used to extend its influence far beyond its borders. She also made clear that President Vladimir Putin should have "no doubt" about Britain's strong support for Ukraine and that London will continue to stand by Kyiv in the face of ongoing Russian attacks.

"(Vladimir) Putin should be in no doubt, our support is enduring. The pressure we apply on Ukraine's behalf will be sustained,"

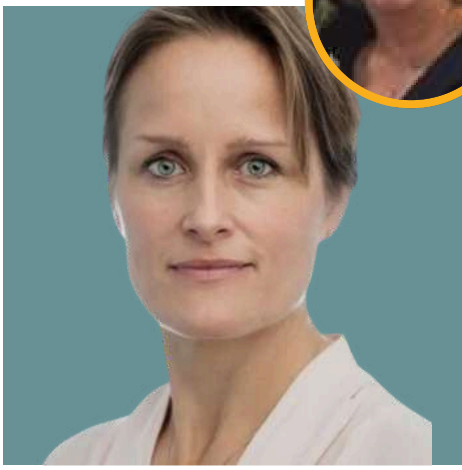
Metreweli will say on Monday.
"The export of chaos is a feature, not a bug in the Russian approach to international engagement, and we should be ready for this to continue until Putin is forced to change his calculus,"
Metreweli said.

What threat does Russia pose as MI6 Chief Metreweli vows UK support for Ukraine?

MI6 Chief Blaise Metreweli will highlight the need to increase the use of technology to protect Britain's security. She will say intelligence officers need to be as skilled in coding and digital work as they are in traditional espionage. Metreweli will call for technology to be applied across all areas of intelligence to address modern threats, including terrorism and information warfare.

"Mastery of technology must infuse everything we do. Not just in our labs, but in the field, in our tradecraft, and even more importantly, in the mindset of every officer. We must be as comfortable with lines of code as we are with human sources, as fluent in Python as we are in multiple languages,"

Metreweli will say.
Officials mentioned that the speech reflects that there is still an ongoing attempt to reach a ceasefire agreement regarding fighting in Ukraine. Over the past week and weekend,



Germany has hosted US and Ukrainian delegations to discuss previously discussed arrangements for the Berlin Summit scheduled for Monday, December 15, 2025, for European leaders to meet with the US President regarding this conflict.

The UK has imposed sanctions against Russia since its military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Sanctioned individuals and businesses include political leaders, major business executives, major companies, imports/exports to/from Russia, Russian ship owners/operators, and the intelligence agency that signed the major sanctions.

Major Richard Knighton (the UK Chief of Staff), who is making a speech at the same time as the Prime Minister's, will call for the UK Government to adopt a "whole of society" approach to providing national defence support.

UK govt launches BBC Charter Review; Tim Davie urges input

By John Ruehl

UK (Washington Insider) - The UK government launched a BBC Charter Review consultation until March 10, 2026. Key themes are licence fee reform, trust, funding, and the BBC's role. Tim Davie urges public input.

As Julian Clover reported on BraosbandTV, the UK government has opened a consultation on the BBC Charter Review. It is considering changes to the licence fee, but not a complete overhaul. A Green Paper published today, Dec 16, 2025, sets out several options for reform.

Currently, the fee applies mainly to households that watch live television. The government is exploring whether other services or activities should also require a licence. Officials said they are "keeping an open mind" about which types of media use could trigger the fee.

What changes is the UK government considering for the BBC Charter and licence fee?

Officials mentioned that the Green Paper also clarifies what is not being considered. The government is not planning to replace the licence fee with general taxation. It is not looking at a new household tax or fees on streaming services like Netflix or Amazon Prime Video. Leaving the licence fee unchanged is also an option. The UK government has started a review of the BBC Charter as the current Charter is set to expire on December 31, 2027. The review will decide the BBC's mission, how it is run, and how it is funded in the future.

A new Charter is expected to begin on January 1, 2028. Ministers said responses to the consultation will help shape a White Paper, due in 2026. After that, a draft Charter will be published and debated in Parliament. The process is meant to give both the public and lawmakers a clear say in the BBC's future direction.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has set out 3 main themes for the review. The first is trust and accountability, focusing on governance and public confidence in the BBC. The second is long-term funding. The third is the BBC's role in supporting the wider economy, including growth and jobs across all nations and regions.

The proposals include changes to the government's role in board appointments, updates to the BBC's Mission and Public Purposes—possibly giving "accuracy" the same importance as impartiality—and new responsibilities on countering misinformation, improving media literacy, and strengthening workplace conduct. A public consultation has been launched to gather views on the Green Paper and future plans for the BBC. It is open until 11:59 pm on March 10, 2026.

BBC Director-General Tim Davie said:

"We welcome the publication of the Government's Green Paper and the start of the public consultation on the future of the BBC. We urge everyone who cares about the success of the UK's world-leading creative industries to have their say.

We want to secure a public service BBC that is independent, sustainably funded for the long term, and meets our audience's needs."

The BBC Charter sets the rules for how the BBC works, including its mission, governance, and funding through the licence fee. The current Charter started on January 1, 2017. The last review in 2015 led to changes such as free licences for over-75s and updates to the board structure. The BBC gets most of its money from the licence fee, which has often been debated.

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