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# Executive Insight Brief

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## Aerospace & Defense

[No Russia-Ukraine peace talks expected this year, U.S. leak shows \(Washington Post\)](#)

The grinding war between Ukraine and Russia is expected to bleed into 2024 with neither side securing victory yet both refusing to negotiate an end to the conflict, according to a

Defense Intelligence Agency assessment that is among the highly sensitive U.S. government materials leaked online and obtained by The Washington Post. The analysis concludes that, even if Ukraine recaptures “significant” amounts of territory and inflicts “unsustainable losses on Russian forces,” an outcome U.S. intelligence finds unlikely, the nation’s gains would not lead to peace talks. “Negotiations to end the conflict are unlikely during 2023 in all considered scenarios,” says the document, which has not been disclosed previously. The assessment, based on close U.S. scrutiny of each side’s troop counts, weaponry and equipment, could galvanize the war’s critics who have called on major powers such as the United States and China to push for Kyiv and Moscow to reach a settlement and end a conflict that has displaced millions and left hundreds of thousands dead or wounded. Asked about the DIA’s assessment, a U.S. official said the decision on when to negotiate is up to President Volodymyr Zelensky and the Ukrainian people, underscoring what has been a hands-off approach to mediation espoused by the administration since Russia’s full-scale invasion began in February 2022. The United States will continue to stand with Kyiv and provide it with the equipment and weapons that will bolster its position at the negotiating table, whenever that day comes, the official said. The document leak, which first came to authorities’ attention last week, has provided extensive insight into U.S. intelligence activities worldwide and exposed the national security establishment’s deep misgivings about the war’s trajectory. Many of the classified assessments that have surfaced thus far date to February and March, first appearing on the Discord messaging platform before spreading elsewhere online. Both the Pentagon, where many of the leaked materials appear to have originated earlier this year, and the Justice Department have said they are investigating the matter. Beyond forecasting a costly open-ended conflict, the newly disclosed document also predicts how Ukrainian and Russian military leaders will respond to battlefield challenges, and it anticipates that the year will end with the two sides achieving only “marginal” territorial gains as a result of “insufficient troops and supplies for effective operations.” Such a stalemate, where neither side achieves a decisive advantage, is described in the document as “the most likely scenario.”

### [Pentagon Leak: The Biggest Takeaways and Questions So Far](#)

#### [Pentagon should expand Defense Innovation Unit’s role, experts say \(Defense News\)](#)

Former defense officials and industry executives are calling on the Pentagon to expand the influence of its commercial innovation hub to make it easier for the military to buy off-the-shelf technology. The recommendation comes from the Atlantic Council’s Commission on Defense Innovation Adoption — a panel of defense experts convened to consider how the U.S. Department of Defense can better integrate new technology into its arsenal. “In our time serving in the Defense Department, we have found that the United States does not have an innovation problem, but rather an innovation adoption problem,” the commission said in an interim report released April 12 by the Washington, D.C.-based think tank. “Our nation leads in many emerging technologies relevant to defense and security — from artificial intelligence and directed energy to quantum information technology and beyond.

But the DoD struggles to identify, adopt, integrate and field these technologies into military applications.” The Defense Innovation Unit, a Silicon Valley-based organization created in 2015 to champion commercial technology integration within the Defense Department, has had success transitioning capabilities from non-traditional defense companies for use by the military services. However, its former leader, Mike Brown, pointed to a lack of support from senior Pentagon leaders. With that in mind, the group called on DoD to increase DIU’s role in shepherding commercial technology into the department by increasing its budget, tightening its relationships with the military offices that buy and develop defense capabilities and positioning it as an innovation and technology adoption leader. “DIU should be resourced and empowered to broaden the defense ecosystem by robustly engaging start-ups, nontraditional vendors and capital market players,” according to the report. To increase the organization’s technology transition rate, the commission — which includes former Defense Secretary Mark Esper, one-time Pentagon acquisition executive Ellen Lorde and Michelle Flourney, a past under secretary of defense for policy — recommends DIU work closely with the military services to make sure they’re taking advantage of commercially available weapons and other enabling technology. The Pentagon is on a path toward growing the agency’s influence. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced April 4 the DIU director will no longer report to the undersecretary of defense for research and engineering but will instead answer directly to him. The report also calls for DIU to partner with Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment Bill LaPlante and other procurement officials to streamline the process for buying commercial capabilities, making it easier for companies to work with the government.

### [Why Is America Still Flying the A-10 Warthog, a Cold War Relic?](#)

#### [US and Philippines launch largest joint military exercise in decades \(Financial Times\)](#)

US defense secretary Lloyd Austin said a deal providing the Pentagon with access to bases in the Philippines would boost interoperability between the militaries, as the two countries kicked off their largest joint military exercise in 31 years. Austin and US secretary of state Antony Blinken met their counterparts from the Philippines in Washington on Tuesday for the first so-called 2+2 meeting between the allies in seven years and the first since Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos Jr took office last year. The meeting came as the US and the Philippines began their joint military exercise, highlighting efforts to revitalize their alliance to deal with an increasingly assertive China. In a joint statement, the ministers expressed “strong objections to the unlawful maritime claims” by Beijing in the South China Sea, including “repeated massing” of Chinese maritime militia vessels in the Philippines’ exclusive economic zone. Austin said it was too early to say what assets and personnel the US would position at the four new sites recently agreed under an “enhanced defense cooperation agreement” but said the move was “essential to strengthen our combined deterrence posture”. Asked by the Financial Times if the Philippines would put restrictions on how the US could use the bases in the event of a war with China over Taiwan, Enrique Manalo, the Philippine foreign secretary, said they would help conduct

training and improve interoperability between the militaries. He added that the two countries were still finalizing details of how the arrangement would work. Although Balikatan, the two militaries' annual flagship drill, had been scheduled for months, its opening on Tuesday — a day after China wrapped up three-day maneuvers around Taiwan — underscored the importance of the Philippines in any regional conflict. About 12,000 US forces, 5,400 Philippine military personnel and more than 100 Australian forces will participate in the Balikatan maneuvers, double the ranks of previous years' exercises, as first reported by the Financial Times. As part of the drills, which are scheduled to run until April 28, US and Philippine forces will sink a ship off the west coast of Luzon in an unprecedented offshore live-fire exercise. The forces will also practice expeditionary advanced base operations — in which small units are injected into territory the enemy can hit with missiles — and coastal defense.

## Budget & Appropriations

### [Key House GOP lawmaker urges debt limit vote this month \(Roll Call\)](#)

Passing a "strong" debt limit bill should be House Republicans' top legislative priority in April, Republican Study Committee Chairman Kevin Hern, R-Okla., wrote to colleagues on Wednesday. Hern sent a letter to the RSC's 176 members arguing "the time for action is now" amid the ongoing stalemate between Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., and President Joe Biden as the Treasury Department approaches a \$31.4 trillion statutory borrowing cap. The debt limit's "x date," when the Treasury can no longer make all required payments on time, is expected as early as June. "We must work night and day to get it passed to show the American people we can be trusted and force the Senate and White House to answer for their dereliction of duty," Hern wrote. The RSC's membership represents nearly 80 percent of the Republican Conference and includes a broad cross-section of ideological factions, committee chairs and members of the party leadership. McCarthy said earlier this month that Republicans are coalescing around a debt limit bill they could bring to the floor if Biden did not agree to negotiate. House Republicans are seeking to pair any debt limit increase with policy concessions from the White House. McCarthy said the bill would reflect the positions he laid out in a March letter to Biden. These positions, which he stressed were not exhaustive, included discretionary spending cuts and caps, rescinding pandemic aid, and other energy policy and border security measures, along with bolstering work requirements for benefit programs. Biden has called on the House to raise the debt ceiling without conditions attached. While he's said he is willing to discuss spending with McCarthy, he has said he will not negotiate on the debt limit. Hern's letter did not specify what the RSC is seeking in the bill, but the group released a "debt limit playbook" in March that identified energy policy changes and cutting discretionary spending as the group's top aims in the debt ceiling negotiations. The House faces a tight two-week window to meet Hern's request after the body returns from its Easter recess on Monday. There are just eight voting days left this month as currently scheduled, though more days could ultimately be added.

## Five scenarios for the FY24 defense budget

### Congress should give Pentagon more flexibility in buying, budgeting, report urges (Breaking Defense)

To fix the Pentagon, start in Congress. That's the central takeaway from an Atlantic Council commission co-chaired by Mark Esper, former Secretary of Defense, and Deborah Lee James, former Secretary of the Air Force. The commission's interim report, released today, argues that before the Defense Department can adopt new technology at the speed and scale required to compete with China, legislators must loosen statutory limits in an array of areas, from reprogramming funds between projects mid-year to contracting with start-up companies. It also calls for Congress to accept less detailed budget data in the Pentagon's annual requests. In return, the Hill would get a new digital "dashboard" that lets staffers directly access the latest program information from the Pentagon's Advana acquisition analytics, without waiting for defense officials to process a formal request for updates. The report also urges internal reforms that DoD can do itself, such as bypassing and streamlining the notoriously bureaucratic JCIDS process, which generates many of the official requirements needed to launch new weapons programs. (James noted today that one of these recommendations, strengthening the Defense Innovation Unit, was already executed by DoD last week). But of the ten broad recommendations made in the report, nine require at least some action on the Hill. That the Pentagon struggles to get key tech out of the prototype or pilot-project stage, across the bureaucratic so-called valley of death, and into large-scale manufacture and deployment is a common diagnosis. But some of the report's prescriptions are far from obvious, including ones that don't directly involve the Defense Department. The bulk of the report's recommendations, however, focus on the ponderous budgeting and programming process, much of which is driven by Congress. In their introduction, Esper and James highlight a proposed pilot project that would give five Program Executive Officers more authority to shift funding among the multiple procurement programs each PEO oversees. That would require congressional approval. The report also asks Congress to okay a major consolidation of smaller projects that today have their own Budget Line Items and Program Elements in the budget — there are currently over 1,700 BLIs and PEs — to, again, allow defense officials more freedom to move funds between them. It also asks the Hill to restore the old rules for reprogramming money from one line item to another, which only required DoD to notify Congress after the fact, with Congress having a 30-day window to move the money back, rather than the current system under which DoD must ask for permission beforehand. Both changes would make it easier and quicker to move money from failing or stalled projects to others with more potential or more urgent needs.

### What's in the defense wish lists? Unraveling FY24 unfunded priorities

### [From Ukraine to debt ceiling, it's a balancing act to pass FY24 budget \(Defense News\)](#)

From a room on Capitol Hill, packed with roughly 100 representatives from companies that help build nuclear-powered aircraft carriers, came the disgruntled murmurs. The group had just received an ominous warning from Sen. Tim Kaine: Congress may not pass a budget for the next fiscal year. Kaine, a Virginia Democrat, told the members of the Aircraft Carrier Industrial Base Coalition that Congress is divided over an intertwined debate about the debt ceiling and spending. He warned the gridlock could mean lawmakers may have to rely on a full-year continuing resolution that would cap defense at this year's levels. "The drama is being pushed from the debt ceiling to" a discussion about the size of the federal budget, Kaine said. "My worry would be that the House will not be able to do an [appropriations] bill that can pass the House with the kinds of cuts that they want." The coalition members had assembled to lobby Congress to approve multi-ship contracts for aircraft carriers, but Kaine suggested they may have to fight simply for Congress to do one of its most basic duties: passing a budget. Today, House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., is deadlocked with the White House over raising the debt ceiling amid Republican demands to curb spending while simultaneously increasing the defense budget. At the same time, he's likely to face another divisive issue within his caucus in the months ahead: additional emergency defense and economic spending for Ukraine. All of that means Congress is poised to rehash a decade-old fight in a divided government, and the Pentagon may no longer be able to rely on the massive defense budget increases it has grown accustomed to in recent years. The new, yet familiar political dynamics on Capitol Hill mean the Defense Department could have to contend with, at best, a flat budget that fails to keep pace with inflation or, at worst, sweeping defense budget cuts if lawmakers inadvertently force themselves into a corner. "Seems like we could be backing ourselves into sequestration," Rep. Mike Waltz, R-Fla., who chairs the House Armed Services Committee's readiness panel, told McCarthy on a conference call in January during his unusually protracted speakership battle, as reported by Politico. As one of the many concessions made to win his speakership race, McCarthy promised the right-most flank of his caucus that he would slash fiscal 2024 spending by at least \$130 billion. Those same members are also pressing him to turn off the spigot of emergency spending for Ukraine after Congress passed \$61 billion in military aid to Kyiv last year. Ukraine funding has allowed the Defense Department to circumvent some budgetary pressures, similar to the way OCO allowed it to evade some of sequestration's impact. For instance, the Army has already received funding totaling one-third of its annual procurement budget from the Ukraine supplementals, allowing it to replace older systems sent to Kyiv with newer weapons. At the other end of the caucus, Republican defense hawks have blasted President Joe Biden's proposed \$886 billion defense budget for FY24 — up 3.3% from last year — as "woefully inadequate." These lawmakers want to grow the top line even as they officially maintain they will cap federal discretionary spending at FY22 levels. McCarthy can only achieve his goals along party lines, and he only has five Republican votes to lose.

## Advanced Technologies

### [Germany pushes Intel to spend more on €17bn chip plant \(Financial Times\)](#)

Germany is pushing Intel to expand its plans for a landmark €17bn chip plant in exchange for higher subsidies, in what is already set to be the country's largest foreign direct investment since the second world war. The US semiconductor group is due to receive €6.8bn in subsidies from Berlin to build its mega fab, or manufacturing plant, in the eastern city of Magdeburg. People close to the company said Intel wanted subsidies to rise to at least €10bn, citing higher energy and construction costs. German officials said they could increase the financial support, but only on condition the group invested more. "It is logical that if the scale of the investment is increased, then the level of subsidy will also rise," said Sven Schulze, economy minister of the eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt, of which Magdeburg is the capital. "We need Intel to meet us halfway," said one German official. However, any requirement for Intel to invest more could add to financial pressure on the company at a critical time. It recently indicated that it would moderate capital spending this year after an unexpected slump in sales forced it to slash its dividend to save cash. The talks between Intel and the German government come at a time when the Biden administration is showering chipmakers with hundreds of billions of dollars in subsidies to increase manufacturing in the US. That has piled pressure on the EU to match such efforts or risk seeing investment drift away to America. German officials say subsidies for Intel's project are being provided under the auspices of the European Chips Act, which aims to mobilize more than €43bn in public and private investments for the bloc's chip industry, but which is still being negotiated. Confirmation will still be needed from Brussels that the financial support on offer complies with EU state aid rules. Intel announced in March last year that it would build its Magdeburg mega fab using the most advanced chip manufacturing technology. It is due to go into operation by 2028. The plant is part of the company's efforts to claw its way back to the forefront of the chip industry after falling badly behind Asian rivals such as Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company. It was designed to be the centerpiece of a decade-long investment plan that could eventually total €80bn, subject to demand and the availability of future subsidies. The venture is pivotal to EU ambitions to double its share of the global semiconductor market from less than 10 per cent today to 20 percent by 2030. It is also central to German chancellor Olaf Scholz's strategy of reducing his country's dependence on Asian suppliers for advanced chips needed in everything from smartphones to electric vehicles.

### [Beijing chooses targets carefully as it goes on offensive in US chip wars](#)

### [Commerce launches \\$1.5B 5G fund to counter China's Huawei, ZTE \(Politico\)](#)

The Biden administration on Wednesday announced it'll soon make available \$140.5 million in grants to foster 5G open radio access network technology, which officials said will help counter the rise of China. This funding notice is the first tranche from a much greater bucket of money — \$1.5 billion in total, which is part of the Commerce Department's Public Wireless Supply Chain Innovation Fund. "We are increasingly dependent on wireless networks," Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo told reporters Wednesday. "We need to

do more to make sure that they're reliable and secure. And the truth of it is it's not just America but our allies — we have to make sure our allies have options for their wireless networks which are secure but frankly also affordable.” The National Telecommunications and Information Administration, the Commerce agency running the fund, will issue multiple rounds of funding awards over the next decade. Funding was slated in last year's CHIPS and Science Act. U.S. efforts to promote 5G open RAN technology are meant to spur the development of more domestic wireless networking suppliers at a time when the country lacks 5G hardware vendors of its own. There are only a handful of global players that supply such critical gear, including China's Huawei and ZTE, and Europe's Ericsson and Nokia. And they use closed, proprietary technology. Open RAN is meant to draw in a greater swath of tech and telecom companies to build these wireless networks, including more Western companies. This year, Biden officials have frankly acknowledged the geopolitical aims and complained of China subsidizing companies like Huawei and ZTE. In coordination with other federal agencies, the Federal Communications Commission has declared these Chinese companies national security threats and sought to block their operations in the U.S. There's an ongoing subsidy program paying rural telecom carriers money to rip out and replace Huawei and ZTE gear from their networks. This inaugural round of Commerce Department grants is meant to support R&D and testing, according to NTIA. It touted the importance of developing the right testing and evaluation protocols for these 5G networks and developing the right testing methodologies for these tasks. The agency said that later funding notices will focus on creating an ecosystem of wireless innovation. NTIA chief Alan Davidson told reporters that the statute gave “a pretty clear steer” in how big to make this first round, and he believes “that's a very prudent approach” given the “key foundational tools” the agency plans to fund in this tranche.

### [House GOP Subpoenas FTC for Twitter Investigation Documents](#)

#### [Amazon Joins Generative AI Race, Targets Cloud Customers \(Bloomberg\)](#)

[Amazon.com](#) Inc. is joining Microsoft Corp. and Google in the generative artificial intelligence race, announcing technology aimed at its cloud customers as well as a marketplace for AI tools from other companies. The e-commerce giant's Amazon Web Services unit on Thursday announced two of its own large-language models, one designed to generate text, and another that could help power web search personalization, among other things. Amazon announced no plans to release a chatbot like the ones Microsoft and Google have debuted to mixed reviews. Amazon's large-language models, called Titan, were trained on vast amounts of text to summarize content, write a draft of a blog post or engage in open-ended question-and-answer sessions. They'll be made available on an AWS service, called Bedrock, where developers can tap into models built by other companies plugging away at generative AI, including AI21 Labs, Anthropic and Stability AI. Generative AI, software that can create text, images, or video based on prompts from a user, has captured the imagination of Silicon Valley, setting off a fierce competition to capitalize on the technology. Proponents of chatbots like ChatGPT and image-generation tools such as Dall-E believe generative AI will revolutionize the kinds of tasks performed by

software. Microsoft, through a partnership with ChatGPT maker OpenAI, has integrated generative AI technology into its Bing internet search service and plans to deploy those tools across the software maker's products. Alphabet Inc.'s Google is racing to make similar moves. Meta Platforms Inc. has released its own large-language model and said similar work will expand across the company. AWS, which sells on-demand computing power and software tools — including a suite of machine-learning applications — had previously partnered with artificial intelligence companies including Hugging Face Inc. and Stability AI, which builds the image generator Stable Diffusion. But the company hadn't previously revealed plans to release a homegrown large-language model. Swami Sivasubramanian, AWS's vice president of databases, machine learning and analytics, said Amazon had long been working on large-language models. They're already used to help shoppers find products on Amazon's retail website and to power elements of the Alexa voice assistant, among other applications.

## **Military Installations & Communities**

### [US National Guard Helicopter Deaths Are Linked to Operator Errors, GAO Finds \(Bloomberg\)](#)

Crashes have killed 28 US National Guard helicopter crew members outside of combat over a decade because of operator errors — from overconfidence to not following standards — according to a review by Congress's oversight agency. The deaths of Army and Air Force guard members from 2012 through 2021 were the most serious toll from 298 helicopter accidents during non combat flight operations in those years, according to the Government Accountability Office. About 15% of the crashes resulted in death, permanent disability, extensive hospitalization, property damages of \$500,000 or more or a destroyed helicopter, the GAO said in the report obtained by Bloomberg News before it was released later Wednesday. The GAO recommended steps including creation of a database to track incidents and full implementation of post-crash recommendations. It said the Army, for example, hasn't established a system "for tracking the status of accident investigation recommendations through implementation." Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said in a statement that "these recommendations will save lives." Schumer requested the study after three Guard members died in an upstate New York training mission in 2021 that investigators attributed to pilot error. "The Army and Air Force must act swiftly to implement the straightforward and achievable safety practices outlined in the GAO report," he said. Problems are exacerbated by shortages of maintenance personnel, Schumer said, "because pilots have less opportunities to fly and train when waiting for helicopters to be repaired." The risks in helicopter training were underscored last month when nine soldiers with the 101st Airborne Division died after two Black Hawk helicopters crashed into each other during a night training mission over Kentucky. The National Guard said in a statement that it "prioritizes the safe operation" of its helicopter fleet "to ensure the safety of our aviators and the public" and welcomed "any study of our aviation processes that results in making them safer and improves our mission capability."

## [Lawmakers demand answers after priests booted from Walter Reed campus](#)

### [GAO reports military needs more oversight of privatized housing \(Federal News Network\)](#)

The Defense Department's struggles to provide suitable, well-maintained housing for its service members remain a problem in both privatized and government-owned housing, according to the Government Accountability Office. Military housing residents still need a formal dispute resolution process, housing inspectors need better training, and the department needs to improve its oversight for privatized housing providers, GAO found in a report this month. Although the report points out legislation enacted since 2019 directs DoD to improve oversight, the department still has work to do. It cited unresolved concerns about assistance available to residents, poor housing conditions, and private company performance. At a recent House Appropriations Committee hearing on military construction, Army Assistant Secretary for Installations, Energy and the Environment Rachel Jacobson offered an update on steps the Army made to remediate some of the problems brought up by the GAO report. "With the help of third-party inspectors, the Army is fulfilling the fiscal 2020 National Defense Authorization Act mandate to conduct comprehensive inspections of 100% of the privatized housing inventory," Jacobson said. GAO noted while the inspections do take place, it wants DoD to improve the process. The report called for uniform inspection standards and more comprehensive training of inspectors. "GAO found that although each of the military departments is conducting these inspections as required, DoD has not developed clear or consistent inspection standards and the military departments have not provided adequate inspector training," said the report. GAO also recommended more support for tenants in resolving disputes. Congress requires DoD to provide tenants access to advocates, but auditors found the roles are ill-defined and tenants don't get enough information about how the dispute process works and how they can get help from advocates. Both the Army and Navy agreed with GAO's 19 recommendations, with the Air Force as the only service noting exceptions. On several of the recommendations for requiring more training, the Air Force only partially agreed to recommendations because they had already implemented necessary training.

## [National Museum of the US Air Force has been showcasing aviation history longer than AF existence](#)

### [Commander of Army Pacific Training Brigade Suspended \(Military.com\)](#)

The commander for one of the Army's premier training elements in the Pacific has been suspended, pending an investigation, [Military.com](#) has learned. Col. Jonathan Chung was removed this week from his position commanding the 5th Security Force Assistance

Brigade after sitting at the helm since July 2021. The circumstances around his suspension are unclear. Chung did not immediately return a request for comment from [Military.com](#). Chung has been assigned to an administrative role at U.S. Army Pacific, an element of the force that oversees operations in the Indo-Pacific, according to a service spokesperson. Col. Tony Braxton will temporarily assume command. Officers in the midst of investigations are commonly suspended from their duties before being formally fired if the investigation validates accusations. Investigations can range from mild policy infractions to poor treatment of subordinates or criminal activity. The Army declined to specify the nature of the investigation into Chung. Service officials typically withhold investigation details until they are complete. Security Force Assistance Brigades, or SFABs, were stood up by the Army in 2017, with 5th SFAB being activated in 2020. The units, with their soldiers sporting brown berets, are designed to fit in loosely between conventional formations and Special Forces. They are tasked with building relationships with partner forces that typically involve training other militaries on U.S. ground combat tactics. The Army is in the midst of reorganizing its forces after decades of focus on the Global War on Terrorism to be prepared for a showdown in the Pacific, with 5th SFAB being one of the key components responsible for preparing any potential ground war. The 5th SVAB, headquartered at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, is regionally partnered with key countries in the Pacific, including Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Japan, Indonesia and Thailand -- all of which are considered to be key allies if a conflict were to ignite with China. Before commanding 5th SFAB, Chung was the commander of the 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division.

## Homeland Security

### [U.S. intel agencies may change how they monitor social media, chat rooms after missing leaked U.S. documents for weeks \(NBC News\)](#)

The Biden administration is looking at expanding how it monitors social media sites and chat rooms after U.S. intelligence agencies failed to spot classified Pentagon documents circulating online for weeks, according to a senior administration official and a congressional official briefed on the matter. The possible change in the intelligence-gathering process is just one potential shift as officials scramble to determine not only how the documents leaked but also how to prevent another damaging incident. President Joe Biden and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin were briefed about the disclosure last week, administration officials say, but the secret documents appeared online in early March on the Discord social media app, according to Bellingcat, the open-source investigative group. Some documents may have appeared as early as January, the group said. The president and other officials were dismayed when they learned the documents had been online for at least a month. The administration is now looking at expanding the universe of online sites that intelligence agencies and law enforcement authorities track, the official said. The secret Pentagon documents appeared in an obscure part of the internet focused on gaming, and some former intelligence officials said it was understandable that U.S. authorities did not spot the disclosure. The U.S. government may not have been looking

there, but cybersecurity experts have long known that Discord has been used by criminals and hackers to spread malware and stealthily transfer stolen information. The intelligence community is now grappling with how it can scrub platforms like Discord in search of relevant material to avoid a similar leak in the future, said the congressional official. The disclosure also has raised fresh questions about how sensitive intelligence information is handled inside the government, and whether the pool of people allowed to access it needs to be scaled back. In the aftermath of the leak, the administration has already tightened access to classified information and is looking at other steps, officials said.

### [U.S. Steps Up Effort to Fight Against Russian Disinformation](#)

#### [Biden says he's expanding some migrants' health care access \(AP News\)](#)

President Joe Biden announced Thursday that hundreds of thousands of immigrants brought to the U.S. illegally as children will be able to apply for Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act's health insurance exchanges. The action will allow participants in the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, to access government-funded health insurance programs. "They're American in every way except for on paper," Biden said in a video released on his Twitter page. "We need to give Dreamers the opportunities and support they deserve." The action is likely to generate significant pushback from conservative leaders of states that have been reluctant to expand Medicaid and critical of the Biden administration's response to migrants who enter the U.S. illegally. While the federal government provides funding and guidelines for Medicaid, the program is administered by the states. Then-President Barack Obama launched the 2012 DACA initiative to shield from deportation immigrants who were brought to the U.S. illegally by their parents as children and to allow them to work legally in the country. However, the immigrants, known as "Dreamers," were still ineligible for government-subsidized health insurance programs because they did not meet the definition for having "lawful presence" in the U.S. Biden's Department of Health and Human Services will aim to change that by the end of the month. The White House action comes as the DACA program is in legal peril and the number of people eligible is shrinking. An estimated 580,000 people were still enrolled in DACA at the end of last year, according to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. That number is down from previous years. Court orders currently prevent the U.S. Department of Homeland Security from processing new applications. The DACA program has been mired in legal challenges for years, while Congress has been unable to reach consensus on broader immigration reforms.

### [Bill targeting the smuggling of girls gets bipartisan support as Congress deadlocks over broader immigration reform](#)

### [Biden administration declares fentanyl laced with xylazine 'an emerging threat' in the US \(CNN\)](#)

The White House has declared that the powerful synthetic opioid fentanyl combined with xylazine – an animal tranquilizer that’s increasingly being used in illicit drugs – is an “emerging threat” facing the United States due to its role in the ongoing opioid crisis. Administration officials call the threat FAAX, for fentanyl-adulterated or -associated xylazine. The move, announced Wednesday, marks the first time in history that any administration has declared a substance to be an emerging threat to the country, said Dr. Rahul Gupta, director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. The SUPPORT Act of 2018 established that the office has authority to declare such “emerging threats,” and no administration has used it until now. Last year, Congress declared methamphetamine an emerging drug threat but none have been declared by an administration previously. Under other agencies or in separate circumstances, concerns such as bioterrorism, infectious diseases or climate change may be identified as “emerging threats.” “This drug, which is an animal sedative, is being mixed with fentanyl and is being found in almost all 50 states now,” Gupta said Tuesday. “It’s become an important part for us to make sure that we’re declaring it an emerging threat.” Now that the administration has declared fentanyl combined with xylazine an emerging threat, it has 90 days to coordinate a national response. “We are working quickly to develop and implement a whole of government nationwide plan, with real deliverable action, that will save lives and will be published within 90 days of this designation,” Gupta said. Xylazine, also known as tranq or tranq dope, has been linked to an increasing number of overdose deaths in the United States due to its rising illicit use. Between 2020 and 2021, overdose deaths involving xylazine increased more than 1,000% in the South, 750% in the West and about 500% in the Midwest, according to an intelligence report released last year by the US Drug Enforcement Administration. And in some cases, people might not even know that xylazine was in the drug they used.

## **Transportation & Infrastructure**

### [Leaked U.S. assessment includes warning about Russian hackers accessing sensitive infrastructure \(NBC News\)](#)

A leaked U.S. intelligence assessment includes a stark reminder of the threat that hackers can pose to critical infrastructure. The assessment, which mostly focuses on Ukraine’s military effort against Russian forces and is believed by a senior U.S. official to be authentic, includes a warning that Russian hacktivists broke into a Canadian gas infrastructure company this year and have received directions from Russian intelligence. That access could provide a way to cause significant damage and possibly an explosion, the assessment notes. Such an attack is considered extremely difficult to pull off but remains among the intelligence community’s worst fears. And though no such major attacks have been found just yet, experts say they are an ever-present threat. “It’s not the first time somebody’s gained access to critical infrastructure,” said John Hultquist, the vice

president for threat intelligence at the cybersecurity company Mandiant, which is owned by Google. “It happens constantly. The Russian intelligence services do it all the time.” The hackers, a Russian-speaking group called Zarya, broke into the computer network of an unnamed Canadian gas distribution facility in February and sent Russia’s FSB intelligence agency screenshots of what it claimed were controls “to increase valve pressure, disable alarms, and initiate an emergency operation [that] would cause an explosion,” the U.S. assessment says. NBC News has not verified that claim, and it is unclear what company was involved. The official also said some of the documents may have been altered before they were posted online, though this part of the assessment shows no obvious signs of changes. “If Zarya succeeded, it would mark the first time the IC has observed a pro-Russia hacking group execute a disruptive attack against Western industrial control systems,” the assessment says, using an abbreviation for the intelligence community. No such disaster appears to have happened. But the assessment illustrates both how the U.S. worries about destructive hacks against Western energy infrastructure and how Russian intelligence can rely on domestic criminal hackers to work for them. The assessment, marked Top Secret, comes from a cache of more than 50 pages of classified documents that surfaced online in recent days after languishing in obscure corners of the internet.

### [Biden infrastructure focus turns to celebrating new bridges](#)

#### [Rocket-Launch Surge Prompts Air-Safety Regulators to Rethink Approvals \(WSJ\)](#)

A surge in rocket launches has spurred U.S. flight-safety officials to rethink how they permit such flights, aiming to better manage airspace near launch sites. The Federal Aviation Administration said Thursday it would consider the number of airline flights affected by a planned launch, among other factors, when determining whether a rocket operator can proceed, or whether an alternative time is required. The FAA licenses commercial space launches and re-entries of space vehicles as part of its work overseeing U.S. aviation. It temporarily closes nearby airspace for such operations, requiring air-traffic controllers, airlines and other planes to adjust. Launch activity has surged in recent years, in large part because of a run-up in flights conducted by Elon Musk’s SpaceX. Most launches originate from Florida, which hosts the Kennedy Space Center and a military space complex next to the Atlantic Ocean on the state’s central coast. The increasing number of launches from Florida has contributed to frustration at airlines trying to navigate the state’s congested airspace and its often volatile weather. About 90 rockets are expected to launch from Florida this year, up from nearly 60 last year, Major Gen. Stephen Purdy, a U.S. Space Force leader who focuses on launch operations, has said. That number could double or triple in the coming years, he said. Other criteria the FAA will now consider include whether a potential rocket launch takes place during holidays, which can exacerbate airspace congestion, and the purpose of a proposed mission. The agency said it generally will give priority to launches tied to national security. “Due to the increasing pace of space activity, the FAA is taking steps to optimize and equitably manage the airspace in the vicinity of launch sites,” the agency said. The number of launches is expected to grow in the years ahead, with satellite operators setting plans to deploy fleets

of internet satellites, and government agencies working on national security, exploration and scientific missions.

### [Brookfield Infrastructure Strikes \\$13.3 Billion Deal for Shipping Container Giant](#)

#### [Airlines, repair shops in North America rely on used, generic parts to keep aircraft flying \(Reuters\)](#)

Airlines and aircraft repair shops in North America are increasingly relying on used and generic parts to keep jets flying, a symptom of the rising costs and supply-chain shortages plaguing the aerospace industry. These alternatives to new parts made by the original manufacturer must be certified and deemed safe. While they account for a fraction of the estimated \$35 billion spent annually on components for repairs, sales are growing, analysts and executives say. Driving demand is the struggle aerospace suppliers face to fill new orders as air traffic soars and the supply chain for aircraft parts recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, when labor shortages and lockdowns slowed production. Higher costs and a shortage of available new parts are also delaying aircraft repairs, which risk pushing up air fares. That has spurred demand from airlines and repair shops for alternatives that cost roughly 20% to 40% less than new parts, analysts and executives said. Some makers of brand-name parts like General Electric Co stand to benefit because they also sell used parts, known as used serviceable material. Some planemakers are also benefiting. Business jet maker Bombardier Inc uses a teardown venture to gain parts for its growing "aftermarket" business that provides maintenance and repairs for planes. The venture has helped the company source parts for older aircraft models that are harder to find in the current market, or are no longer being produced, a spokesman said. American Airlines, meanwhile, says it has helped develop certified parts that were not made by the original manufacturer to mitigate "increased costs and other supply chain constraints." Companies spent \$35 billion in 2019 on materials for aviation repairs and overhauls, including \$5 billion on used parts and \$725 million on generic components, aerospace specialist Naveo Consultancy estimates.

### **Biotechnology & Healthcare**

#### [Sanders, Cassidy postpone drug pricing markup to get expert feedback \(Politico\)](#)

The Senate HELP Committee had hoped to hold a hearing on a bipartisan drug pricing bill shortly after the spring recess, but it appears it's being postponed as the panel gathers intel and hears privately from industry experts. The panel, led by Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), hoped to mark up the yet-to-be-seen legislation focused on pharmaceutical middlemen and generic drug policy on April 19, POLITICO previously reported. But closed-door roundtables with experts and representatives from the pharmacy benefit manager and

generics industries are prolonging the timeline, according to committee documents and a congressional aide familiar with the process. While it's unclear exactly what the legislation will say, policymakers have a number of bipartisan options to pull from as they craft the bill — including some provisions from a 2019 offering introduced by former Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.), who chaired the health panel at the time, and Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.). The committee is hosting a private roundtable with biosimilars experts on Wednesday afternoon and held one to hear from generics industry experts on Monday, according to documents obtained by POLITICO. “We are still waiting on a significant amount of technical assistance, which is not unreasonable with the compressed timeline, but we are still making good progress on a bipartisan basis,” said a Republican HELP Committee staffer granted anonymity to discuss internal process for the markup. Sanders spokesperson Freeland Ellis declined to comment when asked when the committee plans to hold the markup. The effort to craft the bill has already been on a tight timeline. In mid-March, top health staffers for Sanders and Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-La.), the HELP Committee's ranking Republican, reached out to other committee member offices, notifying a planned markup for a bipartisan drug pricing bill focused on generic drugs and PBMs “early in the next work period” — meaning soon after the April break. The legislative push comes amid efforts to increase access to cheaper generic medicines and criticisms about the lack of transparency of the business practices of pharmacy benefit managers, the middlemen that negotiate discounts with pharmaceutical companies and decide which drugs insurance plans will cover.

### [Biden admin to shore up HIPAA to protect abortion seekers and providers](#)

#### [HHS proposes new standards for artificial intelligence in health care \(Politico\)](#)

HHS' Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT will formally propose new rules next week to require makers of artificial intelligence used in health care, as well as health technology developers that incorporate other companies' AI, to open up those algorithms to scrutiny if they want HHS' certification. That health IT certification is voluntary, but is required when the technology is used in many government and private health care settings. The proposed rules, set for publication on April 18, would require health IT developers who want to be certified to disclose what sorts of data inform their algorithms. It also would require the software developers to take up document risk management practices and offer real-world testing plans. Health care providers are using AI to assist with diagnoses and treatment decisions, but AI hasn't yet transformed care amid bureaucratic hurdles and a lack of trust in the technology. The lack of trust is driven in part by known problems with bias, the result of algorithms influenced by historical inequities in care among different racial groups, insufficient testing and flawed design decisions. ONC warns in the proposed rule that bias in models could exacerbate health disparities and that artificial intelligence could be used improperly or inappropriately. ONC said that more transparency would enable users to determine whether a model is appropriate for them. Health tech industry leaders including those from MITRE, Google, Microsoft, and Stanford and John Hopkins universities earlier this month proposed a blueprint to facilitate trust in

AI, with ONC serving as an observer. As it stands, AI is loosely regulated and little is known about how the algorithms work. The FDA has also begun regulating AI, outlining plans to regulate software as a medical device and issuing guidelines for medical device market clearances for AI or machine learning. Last week, it issued draft guidance to ease improvements to algorithms by allowing software developers to win pre-approval for them, rather than requiring an authorization process for each upgrade.

### [Medical-Device Makers Gain Amid Return to Normalcy](#)

#### [Juul to pay \\$462 million to settle youth vaping claims from six states, D.C. \(CNBC\)](#)

Juul will pay \$462 million to settle claims by six states and Washington D.C. that the vaping company marketed its addictive e-cigarettes to underage teens, five Democratic attorneys general announced Wednesday. The agreement is the largest multi-state settlement the company has reached to date, the attorneys general said during a press conference. It means Juul has now settled in suits with 45 states for more than \$1 billion. The deal will impose strict limits on Juul's sales and marketing abilities, and will force Juul to secure its products behind retail store counters and verify the age of purchasers, the officials added. The states that reached the settlement with Juul are New York, California, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Illinois and Colorado. The settlement adds to years of heavy scrutiny on Juul, the one-time Silicon Valley darling among both tobacco giants and investors. A string of payouts to both governments and consumers over allegations that it marketed addictive products to teens has hampered the company and left it seeking options to stay afloat. The settlement brings the company closer to a "total resolution of the company's historical legal challenges and securing certainty for our future," a spokesperson for Juul said. They noted that underage use of Juul products has declined by 95% since the company dropped all U.S. advertising and discontinued most of its flavors in 2019. Juul's priority is to secure Food and Drug Administration authorization of the company's Premarket Tobacco Product Applications, which it needs to legally market its products in the U.S., the spokesperson said. The FDA denied those applications last June, essentially banning Juul from selling its vaping products. But the agency placed a temporary hold on that decision a month later, and it is not in effect now. Under the settlement announced Wednesday, California will receive \$175.8 million, which will be used for e-cigarette research, education and enforcement, the state's Attorney General Rob Bonta said. New York will get \$112.7 million over an eight-year period, which will support underage vaping abatement programs across the state. Massachusetts will receive \$41.7 million, a portion of which will fund vaping addiction services. Colorado will get nearly \$32 million, New Mexico will receive \$17 million and D.C. will get around \$15 million.

### **Climate & Development**

### [US aims to dramatically expand EV fleets with tough new emissions rule \(Financial Times\)](#)

US environmental regulators on Wednesday proposed tough new emissions limits that would force carmakers to make 67 percent of their American models electric by 2032. EPA administrator Michael Regan called it “the most ambitious pollution standards ever for cars and trucks”. It would significantly increase EVs share of the new vehicle market, which stood at about 7 per cent in 2022. The proposed rule would limit tailpipe emissions across all the vehicles in a carmaker’s fleet, forcing companies to make more battery-powered vehicles to meet the new standard. It would affect models built starting in 2027 through to 2032. The proposal would also curb air pollution, boosting the US’s chance of achieving its Paris Agreement pledge to lower emissions by 50-52 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030. The rules would also force carmakers to speed up their timetables for electrification, and in doing so tilt the US car market towards EVs even as they remain more expensive than vehicles with traditional engines. General Motors, Ford and Stellantis have pledged to make between 40-50 percent of their US sales electric by 2030, and they have invested billions of dollars in developing new models and building factories. But there are questions about whether the carmakers can build cheaper electric vehicles, which continue to cost more than gas-powered equivalents. President Joe Biden issued an executive order in August 2021 calling for half of all new US car and truck sales to be electric by the end of the decade. While that order was not legally enforceable, the EPA regulation setting a higher emissions threshold would be. The federal government’s target follows regulation by California eight months earlier to ban sales of petrol-powered vehicles in the state by 2035. The state is a heavyweight in the US vehicle market, with 13 percent of all car and truck sales last year, which has allowed it to influence environmental policy for decades.

### [BP commits to Gulf of Mexico as \\$9bn platform comes online](#)

### [High Energy Costs Threaten Climate Goals, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm Warns \(WSJ\)](#)

High fossil-fuel prices could threaten the green-energy transition, sparking backlash to long-term climate goals, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm warned on Wednesday. Regulators in recent months have begun fleshing out policies intended to transform entire industries by boosting electric vehicles, hydrogen production and more. At the same time, U.S. officials have called on oil-and-gas producers to increase their drilling activity in a bid to slow inflation through lower prices at the pump and smaller utility bills. The balancing act lies near the heart of President Biden’s attempt to reshape the U.S. economy through a climate-and-spending bill that aims to make cleaner energy more abundant for businesses and cheaper for consumers. “It’s really nonbinary,” Ms. Granholm said Wednesday. “You really have to do both to ensure that there’s not a backlash on the clean side.” The dual goals came under pressure last year, after the Kremlin’s invasion of Ukraine whipsawed commodity markets. Western companies and governments’ rapid-fire turn away from Russian oil and gas set off a global scramble for supplies that sent prices skyrocketing and fueled overall inflation. In the face of such costs, gasoline prices became a hot-button

issue in the midterm elections, while some companies in the U.S. and Europe doubled down on dirtier fossil fuels to keep facilities such as power plants and aluminum smelters running. Speaking at Columbia University in New York, Ms. Granholm described such moves as temporary setbacks within an energy transition that the Biden administration hopes to accelerate through a mix of subsidies for green-energy producers and regulations for major polluters. Inflation has cooled in recent months as the Federal Reserve has raised interest rates and a mild winter pushed down demand for natural gas, diesel and other heat-generation fuels. Energy spending by U.S. consumers in March was down 6.4% from a year earlier, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The question now is whether the declines will last. Much of Wall Street forecasts that oil prices will increase throughout the year as the Chinese economy sucks more barrels off the global market and U.S. shale-growth slows. Earlier this month, a Saudi-led group of oil exporters throttled their output in a bid to prop up prices and their ultimate profits. That likely adds up to higher prices at the pump for motorists as summer driving season gets under way in the coming months. Benchmark U.S. crude prices have risen 10% this month, closing Wednesday at \$83.26, the highest level since November.

### [OPEC Sees Oil Demand Climbing, at Odds With Saudi-Led Production Cut](#)

#### [U.S. Banks Set to Miss 2030 Climate Goals, Says Report \(Barron's\)](#)

Many financial institutions have pledged to eliminate carbon emissions by 2050, but a new report finds the biggest U.S. banks will fall short on their interim 2030 targets to reduce oil-and-gas emissions. Sustainability advocacy organization Ceres and the Transition Pathways Initiative (TPI) reviewed the 2030 oil-and-gas targets set by the six largest U.S. banks— Bank of America BAC, Citigroup, Goldman Sachs Group, JPMorgan Chase, Morgan Stanley, and Wells Fargo. Their analysis found “none of the six banks’ oil-and-gas targets align with the cuts in carbon emissions needed” to achieve the goal of the Paris Agreement to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, or 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit, by the middle of the century. Many scientific studies and policy bodies have agreed that to keep global warming to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius, the world needs to cut carbon emissions by half by 2030 and reach net-zero by 2050. To help meet these goals, banks must improve their target-setting practices and accelerate cutting emissions in the real economy, the report said. A Citi spokesperson said the bank has established 2030 emissions-reduction goals for a number of sectors, including an absolute target for the energy sector that is aligned with 1.5 degrees Celsius and benchmarked against the International Energy Agency’s Net Zero Emissions by 2050 scenario. “Citi is committed to supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy,” the bank said. Wells Fargo said it has set a goal of net-zero greenhouse-gas emissions, including client emissions attributable to its financing, by 2050. It said it is committed to reaching its goals and to supporting clients in both renewable and traditional energy to achieve an orderly transition. Bank of America, JPMorgan Chase, and Morgan Stanley declined to comment. Goldman Sachs didn’t respond to a request for comment.

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## Next Week's Hearings

### Armed Service Committees

House:

Tuesday, April 18, 2023, 10:30 AM EDT: [“U.S. military posture and national security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region”](#)

Wednesday, April 19, 2023, 10:00 AM EDT: [“Department of the Army FY24 budget request”](#)

Wednesday, April 19, 2023, 3:00 PM EDT: [“FY24 rotary wing aviation budget request”](#)

Senate:

Tuesday, April 18, 2023, 9:30 AM EDT: [“Open and closed hearings to examine the posture of the Department of the Navy in review of the FY24 defense authorization request and the FYDP”](#)

Tuesday, April 18, 2023, 2:30 PM EDT: [“Hearings to examine Army modernization in review of the FY24 defense authorization request and the FYDP”](#)

Tuesday, April 18, 2023, 4:45 PM EDT: [“Hearings to examine the Department of Energy’s atomic energy defense activities and Department of Defense nuclear weapons programs in review of the FY24 defense authorization request and the FYDP”](#)

### Appropriations Committees

House:

Tuesday, April 18, 2023, 2:00 PM EDT: [“FY24 request for Navy and Marine Corps MILCON and family housing”](#)

Wednesday, April 19, 2023, 10:00 AM EDT: [“FY24 request for the Coast Guard”](#)

Senate:

Tuesday, April 18, 2023, 10:00 AM EDT: [“Hearings to examine proposed FY24 budget estimates for the Air Force and Space Force”](#)

### Homeland Security Committees

House:

Tuesday, April 18, 2023, 10:00 AM EDT: [“The homeland security cost of the Biden administration’s chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan”](#)

Wednesday, April 19, 2023, 10:00 AM EDT: [“A review of the FY24 budget for the Department of Homeland Security”](#)

Senate:

Tuesday, April 18, 2023, 10:00 AM EDT: [“Hearings to examine the president’s proposed FY24 budget request for the Department of Homeland Security”](#)

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