

CLAWS Newsletter



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by Yuvvraj Singh

DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

1. Partial Government Shutdown Ends. [\(ABC News\)](#)

The House of Representatives narrowly approved a government funding package aimed at ending the partial U.S. government shutdown, passing the measure 217–214 and sending it to President Donald Trump to be signed into law. The bill funds most federal departments—including Defense, Education, Treasury, Labor and State—through the end of the fiscal year and includes a short-term, two-week extension of funding for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to allow further negotiations on contentious immigration enforcement reforms. Lawmakers remain deeply divided over conditions tied to DHS funding, and if no agreement is reached by the mid-February deadline, parts of DHS could face another shutdown.

2. Massive Epstein File Release [\(Department of Justice\)](#)

The U.S. Department of Justice has published nearly 3.5 million pages of documents, videos, and images in compliance with the Epstein Files Transparency Act, signed into law in November 2025, as part of its effort to release records related to the investigations and prosecutions of convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein and his associates. The release includes more than 2,000 videos and 180,000 images drawn from multiple federal and state cases, and the DOJ says materials not produced were duplicates, privileged, unrelated, or prohibited from disclosure under the statute, with redactions focused on protecting victim identities. The department contends that notable individuals and politicians were not redacted for reputational reasons, though the volume and timing of the release have drawn scrutiny from lawmakers and advocates questioning whether all responsive material has truly been made public.

3. Trump Doubles Calls to “Nationalize” U.S. Elections [\(New York Times\)](#)

President Donald Trump and his allies are intensifying efforts to reshape U.S. election rules and expand federal influence over voting ahead of the 2026 midterms, a push centered on the GOP-backed Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act, which would require voters to provide documentary proof of U.S. citizenship and strict photo ID to register and vote — measures critics say would disenfranchise many eligible citizens and amount to voter suppression. Trump has also urged Republicans to “nationalize” elections and take greater federal control in some states, repeating unsubstantiated claims of widespread voter fraud, prompting fierce pushback from Democrats and even some Republicans who argue election

administration should remain with the states. The controversy reflects deep partisan divides over election integrity, federal versus state authority, and access to the ballot as elections approach.

4. Trump Administration Plans to Withhold Grants from Some Democratic-Led States [\(CBS News\)](#)

The Trump administration announced a freeze on roughly \$10 billion in federal public assistance funding for social services in five Democratic-led states — California, New York, Minnesota, Illinois and Colorado — citing alleged fraud in programs like the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and the Child Care and Development Fund, though evidence for widespread misuse outside Minnesota has not been presented; the move has faced immediate legal challenges, and a federal judge temporarily blocked the funding freeze while lawsuits proceed, with critics calling the action politically motivated and harmful to low-income families who rely on the support.



1. US announces “Project Vault” [\(The White House\)](#)

The White House unveiled “Project Vault”, a \$12 billion initiative to build a strategic stockpile of critical minerals and rare earths for American businesses, aiming to protect U.S. manufacturers—especially in defense, technology and electric vehicles—from supply chain disruptions and foreign reliance, particularly on China. The plan combines about \$10 billion in financing from the U.S. Export-Import Bank with roughly \$1.6 billion in private investment to procure and store essential minerals across the U.S., strengthening industrial and national security and stabilizing access to vital materials for industry. The step is designed to act as a buffer against shortages and price volatility in critical raw materials that are crucial for high-tech and defense production.

3. India-US sign historic trade deal ([US Embassy in India](#))

The United States and India announced a historic interim trade deal in early February 2026 that sharply reshapes their economic relationship: under the agreement, the U.S. will cut reciprocal tariffs on Indian exports to about 18 % (down from as high as 50 % after prior punitive duties) and eliminate certain tariffs on Indian materials like aircraft parts, while India will reduce or eliminate tariffs on a wide range of American industrial and agricultural goods, including tree nuts, fresh fruit, soybean oil, and wine, as well as address longstanding non-tariff barriers in sectors such as medical devices and technology trade. The pact also lays out cooperation on digital trade rules and supply-chain resilience, and **India has signaled its intent to purchase up to \$500 billion worth of U.S. products over the next five years, spanning energy, technology, coal and aircraft, and has agreed to phase out Russian oil purchases — a key political concession that helped unlock the deal. Both sides describe the framework as a milestone toward a broader future Bilateral Trade Agreement that will further deepen market access and economic ties, though specifics on some provisions and domestic political responses remain evolving

4. Reports surfaced that the White House is in talks with private disaster-response firms to manage a new "logistics and trucking plan" for Gaza ([NDTV](#))

A U.S. disaster-response firm, Gothams LLC, submitted a proposal to the White House in November that would put the company in charge of a new Gaza supply and logistics system under President Donald Trump's "Board of Peace" initiative, charging fees for transport, warehousing and distribution while seeking exclusive control for seven years and guaranteeing at least a 300 % return on investment; although Gothams' partner says no contracts or financial negotiations have yet occurred, the proposal has drawn scrutiny given the massive cost of Gaza's reconstruction and Trump's broader peace plan to rebuild the territory after years of conflict.

5. The U.S. hosted the inaugural Critical Minerals Ministerial in Washington, D.C ([Department of State](#))

On February 4, 2026, the United States hosted the inaugural Critical Minerals Ministerial in Washington, D.C., convening delegations from 54 countries and the European Commission to strengthen international cooperation on securing supply chains for critical minerals and rare earths that are essential to defense, advanced technologies, clean energy and manufacturing, and to reduce global dependence on single suppliers, particularly China. The ministerial, led by Secretary of State Marco Rubio with key remarks from

Vice President J.D. Vance, resulted in the signing of multiple critical minerals cooperation frameworks and memoranda of understanding with partners including Argentina, the Cook Islands, Ecuador, Guinea, Morocco, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, the United Arab Emirates and Uzbekistan, as well as new bilateral plans with the EU, Japan and Mexico, promoting joint investment, streamlined permitting and diversified supply-chain development. The U.S. also proposed a potential plurilateral trade initiative and price-stabilization mechanisms, and highlighted broader efforts such as private and public investment mobilization in mining, processing and recycling projects to build resilient, secure, diversified critical minerals markets globally.

6. The New START Treaty, the final major arms control agreement between the U.S. and Russia, has officially expired ([CNN](#))

The United States and Russia have entered an uncertain new era in nuclear relations after the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) — the last remaining legally binding nuclear arms control pact between the world's two largest nuclear powers — officially expired on February 5, 2026, ending more than 50 years of formal limits on deployed strategic nuclear weapons and verification mechanisms that capped each side at 1,550 warheads and included inspections and transparency provisions. The treaty had been extended once in 2021 but was always due to lapse this year, and while Russia has declared it will continue to observe the treaty's limits as long as the United States also does, and both sides are reportedly in talks to observe its terms or negotiate a successor arrangement, there is no binding framework in place, raising concerns among experts, diplomats and the UN about decreased transparency, a possible new arms race and growing instability in global nuclear dynamics. The expiration comes amid heightened geopolitical tensions, particularly over Russia's war in Ukraine, and represents the first time in more than half a century that there are no binding constraints on U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear arsenals.

7. Iran Nuclear Talks Resume in Geneva ([New York Times](#))

The United States and Iran have resumed a second round of indirect nuclear negotiations in Geneva mediated in part by Oman, even as both capitals engage in military posturing and face domestic pressures; Washington has bolstered its forces in the Middle East, including deploying a second aircraft carrier strike group, while Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has held naval and live-fire drills in the Strait of Hormuz, underscoring regional tensions that shadow the talks. Diplomats led by U.S. envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi are discussing Iran's nuclear program and potential curbs in exchange for sanctions relief, though deep disagreements remain over enrichment limits and broader security issues. The negotiations take place against a backdrop of heightened unrest in Iran and

broader geopolitical instability, with both sides signaling resolve and caution as they seek progress while avoiding escalation.

8. The White House issued an Executive Order establishing an America First Arms Transfer Strategy ([The White House](#))

The White House Fact Sheet outlines the America First Arms Transfer Strategy, a major shift in U.S. defense export policy designed to use foreign military sales and arms transfers as strategic tools to strengthen the U.S. defense industrial base, boost domestic production capacity and resilience, and support national security objectives by prioritizing partners that invest in their own defense and hold strategic importance; the strategy directs federal agencies to streamline and coordinate arms transfer processes, develop a prioritized catalog of U.S. defense systems for export, enhance advocacy for American-made equipment abroad, and improve monitoring and efficiency of the export system, marking a move away from a partner-driven approach toward one that explicitly aligns arms sales with U.S. industrial and geopolitical interests.

9. Iran Rejects "Zero Enrichment": ([Middle East Online](#))

Iran has firmly rejected a key U.S. demand that it eliminate all uranium enrichment ("zero enrichment") ahead of renewed nuclear negotiations, with Iranian officials — including Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi — stressing that ending enrichment would never be acceptable and that Tehran insists on preserving its right to enrich nuclear fuel under international law as part of any deal, even as both sides prepare for further talks in Geneva and Muscat. Iran's stance reflects a broader pattern of refusing to dismantle enrichment capabilities while seeking sanctions relief, and comes alongside ongoing military posturing, regional tensions, and diplomatic efforts by mediators such as Oman amid a deadlock over core issues like enrichment limits and sanctions.

10. Trump-Netanyahu Summit, as Israel joins the Board of Peace ([PBS](#))

President Donald Trump hosted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House for their seventh meeting in 13 months, underscoring the intensity of U.S.–Israel coordination amid ongoing regional tensions. During the summit, Netanyahu reportedly urged Washington to adopt a tougher "Maximum Pressure 2.0" strategy — signaling a push for expanded economic, diplomatic, and possibly military pressure, particularly targeting Iran and its regional proxies. The meeting also marked a symbolic and

strategic development, as Netanyahu formally confirmed that Israel has joined the “Board of Peace” initiative, aligning itself with the Trump administration’s broader diplomatic and security framework aimed at reshaping regional stabilization, reconstruction efforts, and post-conflict governance mechanisms.

11. U.S.-Azerbaijan Sign Strategic Pact, With an Eye on Russia [\(Reuters\)](#)

The United States and Azerbaijan signed a Charter on Strategic Partnership in Baku on February 10, 2026, formalized by U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, marking what leaders called a new phase in bilateral ties combining economic, security, and strategic cooperation as Washington seeks greater influence in the South Caucasus previously dominated by Russia. The agreement — first proposed during talks between Aliyev and President Donald Trump — commits both nations to expand collaboration on defense sales, artificial intelligence and technology, energy security, counterterrorism, trade and investment, and regional connectivity including support for transit infrastructure and the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) corridor; it also affirms mutual support for sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and includes U.S. plans to provide coastal defense vessels to help Azerbaijan secure its Caspian Sea waters. The charter aims to deepen economic and security links, mobilize public and private sector investment, and strengthen Azerbaijan’s role as a key geoeconomic partner between Europe and Asia amid shifting regional dynamics.

12. The Pentagon announced it will deploy 200 additional troops to Nigeria to assist in training local forces against Islamist militants. [\(New York Times\)](#)

The U.S. Pentagon announced plans to deploy approximately 200 additional U.S. troops to Nigeria to assist in training and advising Nigerian military forces as they combat long-standing Islamist militant insurgencies — including Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province — as part of broader U.S. security cooperation in West Africa under what officials describe as the new “Global Security Initiative.” These personnel are expected to focus on training, technical support, intelligence cooperation, and advisory roles rather than direct combat, responding to Nigeria’s request for support amid intensifying violence that has lasted over a decade and destabilized northern regions. The decision follows recent U.S. airstrikes against militant targets and reflects a significant expansion of the American military footprint in the region to help bolster local forces’ capabilities against extremist threats.

13. NATO launched a new "Arctic Security" initiative in response to increasing joint Russian-Chinese maneuvers. [\(NATO\)](#)

In February 2026, NATO launched a new Arctic security initiative — widely referred to as “Arctic Sentry” — to strengthen deterrence and operational coordination in the High North amid growing joint Russian-Chinese military maneuvers and expanding strategic competition in the region. The initiative integrates existing national exercises under a more unified NATO command structure led by Joint Force Command Norfolk, enhances intelligence-sharing, surveillance, maritime domain awareness and cold-weather readiness, and improves interoperability among the Alliance’s seven Arctic member states. While not a permanent troop buildup, it marks a strategic consolidation of allied military planning in response to increased Russian submarine patrols, bomber activity, and Chinese Arctic ambitions tied to shipping routes and resource access as ice melt accelerates. NATO officials describe the move as defensive and stability-focused, aimed at protecting sea lines of communication, safeguarding allied territory, and preventing coercive influence in a region becoming central to global geopolitics.

14. President Trump confirmed the deployment of the second aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald R. Ford, to the Middle East. [\(DW\)](#)

Amid escalating tensions with Iran over its nuclear program and regional behavior, the United States has ordered a second aircraft carrier strike group — centred on the USS Gerald R. Ford, the world’s largest aircraft carrier — to deploy to the Middle East to join the USS Abraham Lincoln already operating in the region, significantly bolstering U.S. naval firepower and deterrence capabilities. The move reflects heightened U.S. pressure on Tehran as indirect nuclear talks have stalled, with President Donald Trump signaling that the increased military presence is meant to “coerce” Iran toward a deal and prepare for potential military action if diplomacy fails; officials say the additional carrier and its accompanying warships will enhance tactical airpower, surveillance and strike capacity, though it will take some weeks for the new strike group to arrive on station. Gulf Arab states have warned that expanded U.S. military buildup could spark a wider conflict, and the deployment comes alongside other U.S. force posture adjustments and preparations for possible sustained operations against Iran.

15. US-Japan hold defence talks, Strengthening Defence Posture in the Indo-Pacific [\(US Congress\)](#)

Senior U.S. and Japanese defense officials held strategic talks in early 2026 reaffirming their long-standing security alliance and agreeing to deepen cooperation to deter growing threats in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly from China and North Korea. Both sides reiterated that the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty remains the “cornerstone” of peace and stability in the region and committed to enhancing joint deterrence

capabilities, including improving coordination against missile threats, bolstering extended deterrence ties, and expanding military interoperability and planning. Discussions emphasized closer integration of military exercises, stronger defense industrial cooperation, improved joint command and control frameworks, and greater readiness to respond to contingencies, reflecting Tokyo and Washington's shared goal of upholding a free and open Indo-Pacific and preparing for evolving security challenges with enhanced U.S. troop posture, Japanese force modernization, and deeper alliance integration.



About the Author

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