



EIB World Trade Headlines

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February 15, 2024 - Volume 19, Issue 4



Alexei Navalny, Russian opposition leader and Putin nemesis, dies in prison, Russian officials say

The 47-year-old anti-corruption crusader, who rose to become the main political opponent to Vladimir Putin, died in the prison colony in the Arctic north, Russia's federal penitentiary service said. Navalny, who survived an assassination attempt with a nerve agent in August 2020, had been imprisoned since returning to Russia in 2021.

2 South Koreans caught for suspected smuggling of U.S. chips to China

10:34 January 25, 2024

SEOUL, Jan. 25 (Yonhap) -- South Korea's customs agency said Thursday it has caught two South Koreans for allegedly smuggling semiconductor chips produced by an American manufacturer to China worth more than 10 billion won (US\$7.49 million).

The two officials of a foreign electronics distributing company, both in their 40s, were accused of exporting 96,000 U.S.-made computer chips worth 13.9 billion won combined to China without a customs declaration, according to the Korea Customs Service.

Of the total, 53,000 units worth 11.8 billion won were designated by the South Korean government as a strategic item subject to state permission for exports, but they failed to go through such due process.

The chips were initially imported by a South Korean telecommunication equipment development firm for domestic use, and they had shipped them to China 144 times via air mail from August 2020 through August 2023 after disguising them as sample products.

The customs agency sent the two to the prosecution for the suspected violation of the Foreign Trade Act, the Customs Act and the Act on Regulation and Punishment of Criminal Proceeds Concealment, the agency said. "The U.S. has tightened its control on semiconductor exports to China and concerns have risen over South Korea being used as an export detour. We will enhance monitoring and sternly deal with such illegal acts," an agency official said.

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**Launch of United States-People’s Republic of China
Counternarcotics Working Group**

02/01/2024 04:53 PM EST

Office of the Spokesperson

On January 30, Deputy Assistant to the President and Deputy Homeland Security Advisor Jen Daskal led a U.S. interagency delegation to Beijing, the People’s Republic of China, to coordinate efforts to counter the global manufacturing and trafficking of illicit synthetic drugs, including fentanyl. The delegation included representatives from the Department of State, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Justice, Department of the Treasury, and White House Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs Todd D. Robinson also met separately with PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director General of the North American and Oceanian Affairs Department Yang Tao and Ministry of Public Security Director General of the International Cooperation Department Hu Binchen. In these meetings, Assistant Secretary Robinson discussed the need for deeper counternarcotics collaboration between the United States and the PRC at all levels, including policymaking, law enforcement coordination, and the sharing of technical information and best practices that can benefit both countries and the world.

The U.S.-PRC Counternarcotics Working Group complements other ongoing efforts by the State Department to counter the scourge of fentanyl, including the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats. It is a mechanism for ongoing bilateral communication and policy and law enforcement coordination to support and implement concrete enforcement actions and exchange information on counternarcotics efforts, which will help to save lives in the United States and around the world.

**Employers added 353,000 jobs in January, starting
the year off surprisingly strong, despite a wave of
recent layoffs**

Even though some high-profile companies laid off workers in technology and media in January, the overall labor market remains healthy, according to the latest data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

**Michael J. Vaccaro
Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Defense
Trade Controls
Bureau of Political-Military Affairs**

January 24, 2024 - Present

Mr. Vaccaro assumed the position of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Defense Trade Controls in January 2024, where he oversees the Directorate of Defense Trade Controls and the International Traffic in Arms Regulations, ensuring that U.S. commercial exports of defense articles and defense services advance U.S. national security and foreign policy objectives.

Mr. Vaccaro has been a member of the Senior Executive Service since 2013. Mr. Vaccaro joined the State Department from the Department of Defense (DoD) where he served as the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Industrial Base Policy (2022-2024) and as the Director for International Armaments Cooperation (2019-2022). In these roles, he led and supported DoD’s efforts to develop and maintain the U.S. defense industrial base to ensure a secure supply of materials critical to national security. He also advised the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment in managing DoD’s cooperative relationships with foreign countries and served as the United States’ Deputy National Armaments Director. Mr. Vaccaro also co-chaired bilateral forums with key European, Indo-Pacific, and Western Hemisphere allies and partners to further armaments cooperation.

Mr. Vaccaro previously served as the Director of the Office of Strategic Industries and Economic Security in the Department of Commerce’s Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) (2013-2019). In this position, Mr. Vaccaro was responsible for implementing BIS’s defense trade, industrial base, and foreign investment programs. Prior to assuming his duties as office director, Mr. Vaccaro served in other senior positions within the Office of Strategic Industries and Economic Security. Before joining Commerce in 2000, Mr. Vaccaro held government affairs and research positions with international trade and consulting organizations in Washington, DC.

Mr. Vaccaro is a recipient of the Office of the Secretary of Defense’s Medal for Exceptional Civilian Service. While at Commerce, he received meritorious service awards for his role in implementing export control reform and supporting emergency preparedness. Mr. Vaccaro holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service and National Security Studies Program. Mr. Vaccaro is also a distinguished graduate of the National Defense University’s Industrial College of the Armed Forces.

**This ancient material is displacing plastics and
creating a billion-dollar industry**

PORTUGAL - CORK

Cork is experiencing a revival as more industries look for sustainable alternatives to plastic and other materials derived from fossil fuels. The bark is now used for flooring and furniture, to make shoes and clothes and as insulation in homes and electric cars.

[Minerals Security Partnership - United States Department of State](#)

Massachusetts Gets 7 FIFA World Cup Matches In 2026

The seven matches hosted at Gillette Stadium will include a round of 32 and a quarterfinal match, and feature up to 14 national teams. Montana Samuels, Patch Staff

Posted Mon, Feb 5, 2024 at 8:45 am ET

Up to 14 national teams will visit the city between June 13 and July 9, 2026. Five of the seven games are matches in the group stage, but Gillette Stadium will also get two knockout round matches, one in the round of 32 and the other a quarterfinal match. (Neal McNamara/Patch)

FOXBOROUGH, MA — FIFA has announced the match schedule for the 2026 World Cup to be played in North America, including seven matches in Massachusetts.

The World Cup games will be played at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, though FIFA and Boston city officials are highlighting Boston as the host location, giving those who travel from across the world to watch their team a unique perspective on the American sprawl.

Up to 14 national teams will visit the city between June 13 and July 9, 2026. Five of the seven games are matches in the group stage, but Gillette Stadium will also get two knockout round matches, one in the round of 32 and the other a quarterfinal match.

Group stage matches are scheduled on June 13, June 16, June 19, June 23 and June 26. The round of 32 match will be played on June 29 and the quarterfinal round on July 9.

Tournament officials are calling this the largest World Cup to date, with 104 matches across three countries featuring 48 teams from around the world.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 9, 2024

www.bis.doc.gov

**BUREAU OF INDUSTRY AND SECURITY
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Readout of Disruptive Technology Strike Force One-Year Summit

PHOENIX, AZ – Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Export Enforcement Matthew S. Axelrod traveled to Phoenix, Arizona from February 7-8 to mark the one-year anniversary since the Disruptive Technology Strike Force was launched.

*(*Continued On The Following Column)*

The Disruptive Technology Strike Force is an interagency law enforcement effort aimed at preventing critical technologies from being acquired by authoritarian regimes and hostile nation-states Assistant Secretary Axelrod co-leads the Strike Force with Assistant Attorney General (AAG) Matthew G. Olsen of the Justice Department’s National Security Division, and they were joined in Phoenix by Gary Restaino, the U.S. Attorney for the District of Arizona. Deputy Attorney General Lisa O. Monaco, who first announced the creation of the Strike Force on February 16, 2023, delivered virtual remarks to commemorate the one-year anniversary.

The two-day event began with a law enforcement-only day focused on case studies, best investigative practices, briefings on cutting-edge technologies, and one-year reports from all fifteen of the local cells throughout the country. On the second day, the Strike Force was joined by representatives from the private sector and academia from across the country for sessions describing the work of the Strike Force across multiple subject areas, corporate compliance, best practices for building trade compliance programs, and law enforcement outreach efforts. Along with U.S. government officials, the summit consisted of presenters from the private sector and academia, including officials from Arizona State University, which hosted the event at its Sandra Day O’Connor School of Law.

Representatives of the Ukrainian government attended the summit as honored guests to present on the use of advanced technology by Russia in support of its unlawful and full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine and on how the work of the Strike Force can assist Ukraine’s war efforts. The Ukrainian delegation consisted of Yuriy Bielousov, the Head of the War Crimes Department in the Office of the Prosecutor General; Dr. Nataliia Nestor, the Deputy Director of the Kyiv Scientific Research Institute of Forensic Expertise in the Ministry of Justice; and Vladyslav Vlasniuk, an advisor on sanctions in the Office of the President of Ukraine. The three were among the Ukrainian officials with whom Assistant Secretary Axelrod and AAG Olsen met during their trip to Kyiv in late 2023. The Strike Force is grateful for its close partnership with the Ukrainian government.

During the event, Assistant Secretary Axelrod and AAG Olsen announced the expansion of the Strike Force to three new metropolitan areas and formally recognized the Defense Department’s Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS) as a partner in the Strike Force. All five agencies that make up the Strike Force—the Department of Justice’s National Security Division, the Commerce Department’s Bureau of Industry and Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Homeland Security’s Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), and DCIS—were represented at the one-year summit.

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Assistant Secretary for Export Enforcement Matt Axelrod of the Commerce Department (right) speaks on panel with Assistant Attorney General Olsen (middle), moderated by U.S. Attorney Gary Restaino for the District of Arizona (left).

In addition to the co-leads of the Strike Force, attendees included Ryan Buchanan, the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia; Jill Steinberg, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Georgia; Markenzy Lapointe, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida; Alamdar Hamdani, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Texas; Ismail Ramsey, the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of California; Joshua Levy, the Acting U.S. Attorney for the District of Massachusetts; Raj Parekh, the First Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia; Grant Fleming, the Deputy Director for Investigative Operations at DCIS; and James Mancuso, the Assistant Director for HSI.

A New Kind Warfare? On a frozen border, Finland puzzles over a ‘Russian game’

By Erika Solomon New York Times, Updated February 10, 2024, 2:12 p.m.

NIJAMAA, Finland — Poking up through the snow drifts on the Finnish-Russian border lies a symbol of Moscow’s biggest provocation yet toward NATO’s newest member: a sprawling heap of broken bicycles.

The battered bikes are sold for hundreds of dollars on the Russian side to asylum-seekers from as far away as Syria and Somalia. They are then encouraged — sometimes forced, according to Finnish guards — to cross the border. Finns say it is a hybrid warfare campaign against their country, using some of the world’s most desperate people, just as it is staking out a new position in a shifting world order.

“Some of the bikes didn’t even have pedals — sometimes they’d link arms, to help each other keep moving,” said Ville Kuusisto, a Finnish sergeant general at the crossing near the Russian town of Vyborg.

As Finns vote Sunday for a new president, who will be responsible for foreign policy and act as commander in chief, Finland has become fixated on its 830-mile border, the longest with Russia of any NATO country. How Finns handle the challenges there is critical not only for them, but also for their new allies on both sides of the Atlantic.

The presidential election, now in its second and final round, is the first since Finland officially joined NATO last year after decades of nonalignment, looking to bolster its own security after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Russia warned Finland of “countermeasures” for its accession, which the Finns suspect they are now seeing in the form of infrastructure sabotage and cyberattacks. But it is the arrival of some 1,300 “human weapons,” as Finnish politicians have described them, in the past few months that has stirred the most public attention and anxiety.

*(*Continued on the Following Column)*

European officials have repeatedly raised alarm over migrants being encouraged to cross into their borders by Russia and its allies, with many concerned that the aim is to destabilize European governments and stoke discord in a bloc sharply divided over how to handle immigration.

In December, Finland closed all of its crossings with Russia. Now, it is preparing a law that Finnish media has said may include provisions to allow Finland to force people back over the border — a practice known as “pushbacks,” which are illegal under European and international law. Finnish officials have so far declined to comment on such measures.

Both presidential candidates headed to the final round Sunday — Pekka Haavisto, of the left-leaning Greens, and centrist conservative Alexander Stubb — have staked out a hard line not only against Moscow, but also the asylum-seekers.

“People see through this Russian game quite clearly,” Haavisto said in an interview. Asked how he felt about the calls for potential pushbacks, he said humanitarian laws banning pushbacks may need to be changed to recognize what he described as a new form of hybrid warfare.

Stubb said force on the border was necessary because “the only thing Putin and Russia understand is power, usually raw power,” referring to President Vladimir Putin of Russia.

Whoever wins Sunday will take the lead in shaping Finland’s new role in NATO. But the migration issue is now likely to absorb much of their attention, something security experts say could be an intended distraction.

“This border problem is not the most urgent issue right now, but it’s now an issue that will consume the bandwidth of the future president and the Finnish government,” said Matti Pesu, a security analyst at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

The crossings into Finland are the latest iteration of the deadly border politics that have played out since 2021, when Belarus, a veritable satrapy of Moscow, offered entry to thousands of migrants, allowing them to cross to Poland. Many ended up trapped between the two countries, beaten by border guards, who forced them back and forth over the border.

This is not the first time an influx has reached the country — there were surges in 2015 and 2016, when over 1 million people made their way to Europe, mostly fleeing war in Syria and ending up in Germany. But since then, the border has gone mostly quiet.

Finnish officials say that, counter to a past understanding between the two countries, Russia is now letting people without Finnish visas through its checkpoints.

Finnish border guards said that when they called their counterparts last year to complain, the Russians insisted they were simply following procedures and could not deny people the right to cross.

Moayed Salami, 36, a Syrian who reached the crossing in November, said his experience showed Russia was clearly using the asylum-seekers as pawns — but willing ones.

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He and seven other applicants interviewed, all of whom arrived before Finland closed its border, described being escorted through three layers of Russian checkpoints, where their passports were taken and their entry visas to Russia were canceled. He and some others said Russian authorities then followed them until the very last stretch before the border.

“What I keep telling the Finnish media, when they say we are being exploited by Russia, is that it does not matter,” Salami said. “How could it? We needed a way out. If we had to flee via Mars, we would do it.”

Maria Zacharova, Russia’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson, has said the accusation that Russia was deliberately facilitating the migrants was not only false, but “another example of the West’s double standards or lack of standards at all.”

Before Sunday’s election, the crossings have forced a debate in Finland about what the risks of these arrivals really are for the NATO member.

Finland’s security and intelligence services have publicly said Russia could try to recruit some migrants as spies, but they have shared no evidence to back this hypothesis.

Others say the risk is of Finland undermining its image of itself as a nation that shares liberal values and acts in accordance with international conventions regarding asylum.

“It’s Russia trying to turn us against our own values,” said Iro Sarkaa, a fellow at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs. “We claim to be a liberal democracy, with a rules-based international order, and then we are not even respecting those treaties ourselves?”

On Wednesday, Finland’s popular departing president, Sauli Niinistö, argued that humanitarian law was being used as a “Trojan horse” for those trying to cross.

Europe’s commissioner on human rights, as well as Finland’s own ombudsman on human rights, have warned that Finland risks violating humanitarian protections if it does not also offer places for people to make asylum claims.

“These players probably look at this issue from the one side,” said Mari Rantanen, the interior minister. “But as a government, we have to see the whole picture. We have to take care of our national security, too, because nobody else will.”

Finland uses drones and plans to build several stretches of 13-foot-high fences along 125 miles of the southern border, with the aim of getting migrants to cross at specific points that can be monitored. With the help of Frontex, the European Union’s border agency, they have bolstered technical surveillance, including heat sensors and cameras.

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For now, Finland’s closures have blocked most new arrivals. But Marko Saareks, the deputy chief of division at the Finnish Border Guard, said that hundreds, if not thousands, of asylum-seekers who are stuck in Russian border towns may still try to trek through the woods, especially come spring.

Already, more than 30 people have made life-threatening winter treks, including Rakan Esmail and Abdullah al-Ali, who are from the Syrian town of Kobani.

Two weeks ago, they said, smugglers drove them deep into the forest in freezing night temperatures, then robbed them at gunpoint of the last \$6,000 they had borrowed for their journey.

“They just shouted at us, ‘Go die!’ and drove off,” Esmail, 20, recalled. They almost did. With only their pajamas beneath their pants and jackets for extra warmth, they trudged through snow banks up to their thighs until they made it to the Finnish side and knocked on the door of a small wooden cabin. Using Google Translate, they said, they begged its lone, aged inhabitant to call them an ambulance and the border patrol.

Their brush with an icy death scared them, but was no deterrent. Told that asylum-seekers like him were being described as human weapons, Esmail was shocked. “We’re not weapons,” he said, shaking his head. “We’re just human.”

This article originally appeared in [The New York Times](#).

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE **Wednesday, February 14, 2024** **Media Contact:**

Office of Public Affairs, publicaffairs@doc.gov

U.S. Department of Commerce Releases 2023 Update to Equity Action Plan, Outlines New Commitments to Advance Equity

Washington, D.C. – Today the U.S. Department of Commerce released the 2023 update to its Equity Action Plan, in coordination with the Biden-Harris Administration’s whole-of-government equity agenda. This Equity Action Plan is part of the Department’s efforts to implement the President’s Executive Order on “[Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through The Federal Government](#),” which reaffirmed the Administration’s commitment to deliver equity and build an America in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.

“Homogeneity is the enemy of innovation. If we are to out-build, out-innovate, and out-compete the rest of the world, we need to ensure we’re harnessing and empowering Americans across the country by utilizing our greatest strength - diversity,” said **Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo**. “That’s why the Biden-Harris Administration’s commitment to equity is so important and why I’m proud to see that reflected in this updated action plan. We fail to meet our full potential as a nation unless we harness the talents and strengths of all parts of the country, including those who have too often been left behind.

House approves bill to block Biden's pause on new gas export projects

by [Rachel Frazin](#) - 02/15/24 2:26 PM ET

The House on Thursday approved a bill that would ax the Biden administration's pause on new natural gas export projects by removing its ability to reject export projects altogether.

The vote was 224-200. Nine Democrats voted with Republicans in favor of the bill. Those Democrats are: Reps. [Yadira Caraveo](#) (Colo.), Jim Costa (Calif.), Henry Cuellar (Texas), Jared Golden (Maine), Vicente Gonzalez (Texas), Rick Larsen (Wash.), Mary Peltola (Alaska), Marie Gluesenkamp Perez (Wash.) and Marc Veasey (Texas).

The legislation would remove the Energy Department's authority to reject projects that would export natural gas, instead giving the power to approve or reject a project solely to the independent Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC).

Currently, projects need approval from both FERC and the Energy Department to begin construction. The legislation would also require FERC, when it makes such decisions, to have the underlying assumption that exporting natural gas is in the public's interest.

While the bill won majority support in the House, it is unlikely to advance through the Democrat-controlled Senate or the White House. The vote comes after the Biden administration paused approvals for some new export projects so that it can decide whether to change its criteria for whether to permit them.

The pause does not impact existing exports or projects that are under construction, but could delay proposed projects that are currently under review.

The delay ignited significant Republican pushback, with the GOP arguing that any moves to halt U.S.-produced gas would allow for more fuel produced by countries such as Russia.

"[President Biden's](#) politically-motivated ban on American LNG exports is a monumental mistake that benefits our adversaries and dirty global polluters like Iran and Russia," GOP Reps. August Pfluger (Texas) and Kevin Hern (Okla.) said in a written statement after the vote.

"Unleashing U.S. LNG exports means more American jobs, a more secure world for America and our allies, and lower emissions," they added, and also called on the Senate to "immediately" take up the bill.

Though the issue has recently come into the spotlight, getting rid of the Energy Department's authority to block projects has been on Republicans' wish list for a while. They included it in their [H.R. 1 energy package](#) that passed the House last year.

The White House, in a [written statement](#), said it "strongly opposes" the bill, but stopped short of an explicit veto threat.

It said that the bill would "undermine the ability of the United States to ensure that export of a critical and strategic resource is consistent with our economic, energy security, foreign policy, and environmental interests."

"Doing so would also strip back important safeguards that prevent price pressure on industrial and residential consumers, as well as vital consumer, domestic manufacturing, and energy security protections," it said.

Updated at 3:11 pm.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

February 13, 2024

(House Rules)

STATEMENT OF ADMINISTRATION POLICY

H.R. 7176 – Unlocking our Domestic LNG Potential Act of 2024 (Rep. Pfluger, R-TX, and 19 cosponsors) The Administration strongly opposes passage of H.R. 7176, legislation to change the procedures for approval of the import and export of natural gas under the Natural Gas Act. H.R. 7176 would eliminate the requirement for Department of Energy (DOE) authorization of export of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to countries with which the United States does not have a free trade agreement (non-FTA countries). This would undermine the ability of the United States to ensure that export of a critical and strategic resource is consistent with our economic, energy security, foreign policy, and environmental interests. Doing so would also strip back important safeguards that prevent price pressure on industrial and residential consumers, as well as vital consumer, domestic manufacturing, and energy security protections. It would also eliminate an important check that export to non-FTA countries will be consistent with U.S. law and policy.

Currently, the Natural Gas Act requires the DOE to determine whether it is in the public interest to allow LNG exports to non-FTA countries. These determinations involve a review of the economic impacts, including potential changes to domestic natural gas and electricity prices on consumers and manufacturers, and environmental impacts of the exports. They also consider potential effects on the security of U.S. natural gas supply. If enacted, H.R. 7176 would eliminate any consideration of these issues and whether particular exports of U.S. natural gas are consistent with the public interest.

The Administration believes that the critical protections current law provides, which this legislation would repeal, should be retained to protect residential and industrial consumers and national and domestic energy security.

MISSION STATEMENT:

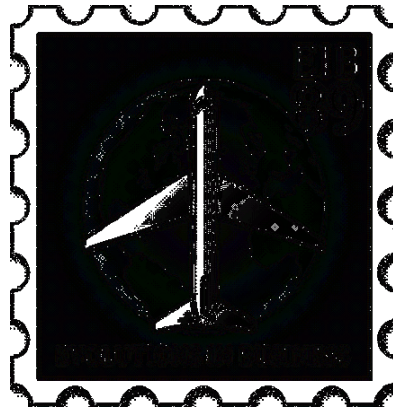
Given the geopolitical state of affairs with China, Russia, and Crimea, the Occupied territories of UKRAINE, Donetsk and Luhansk Oblast, embargoed countries and other specific threatening end users and entities, located in the United States and around the globe;

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