

Headlines:

- **US Passes New Defence Bill**
- **US-Iran Negotiations Continue**
- **Libya's Elections Called Off**

Details:

US Passes New Defence Bill

President Biden signed the massive \$777.7 billion 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) into law. The bill authorizes \$740.3 billion for the Pentagon, \$27.8 billion for the Energy Department's nuclear weapons program, and \$9.9 billion for "Defense-related Activities Outside NDAA Jurisdiction." Many media outlets are reporting the NDAA as a \$768 billion bill, ignoring the additional \$9.9 billion. Biden initially requested \$753 billion for the NDAA, but Congress decided to add another \$25 billion. The push to increase the NDAA was led by hawkish Republicans who argued that more spending was needed to confront China, but the effort ultimately received bipartisan support. With China being the Pentagon's main focus, a good portion of the spending bill will go towards the research, development, testing, and evaluation for new weapons technology, known as RDT&E. The NDAA authorizes over \$117 billion for RDT&E, which will be used to develop hypersonic weapons, artificial intelligence, space and cyber capabilities, and other advanced weaponry.

US-Iran Negotiations Continue

Iran's negotiator struck a positive tone as nuclear deal negotiations resumed in Vienna on Monday for the eighth round of talks after a brief pause. Iranian negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani met with officials representing the EU and the other remaining JCPOA participants: China, Russia, France, the UK, and Germany. After the meeting, Bagheri Kani said the officials agreed "good progress" had been made during the seventh round of talks that concluded 10 days earlier. When the talks first restarted at the end of November, the US wanted Iran to accept a draft agreement reached with the previous Iranian government. But Tehran wanted more sanctions relief and submitted draft proposals. Bagheri Khani said, "The important thing in this Joint Commission meeting was that different sides emphasized on the importance of prioritizing the lifting of sanctions, and also verification and guarantees during the eighth round," leading up to Monday's talks, US officials had negative things to say about the process and warned time was running out. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan visited 'Israel' last week and reportedly reassured 'Israeli' officials that the US was willing to take a harder line if necessary. He warned the deadline for the negotiations would come "within weeks" if an agreement isn't reached.

Libya's Elections Called Off

The Libyan parliamentary committee on Monday refused to fix a new date for the country's first presidential election after it was called off last week amid a multitude of disputes. "After consulting the technical, judicial, and security reports, we inform you of the impossibility of holding the elections on the date of 24 December 2021 provided for by the electoral law," the chairman of the committee wrote last week to the head of parliament. The previously scheduled election was called through an UN-backed roadmap that envisaged simultaneous parliamentary and presidential elections on Libya's independence day - 24 December. The country's High National Electoral Commission (HNEC), which is charged with handling the practicalities of any vote, suggested pushing the election to 24 January. But on Monday, the committee announced that it would be risky to set a new date at this stage, leaving the fate of the elections unknown.