

Headlines:

- **Nord Stream 2: Germany and Russia Decry US Sanctions**
- **Trump Warns About Libya Meddling After Turkey Votes to send Troops**
- **Fears of conflict Spread as Trump Appears to Taunt Iran, Saying it has Never Won a War**

Details:

Nord Stream 2: Germany and Russia Decry US Sanctions

Germany and Russia have reacted angrily to sanctions approved by US President Donald Trump on a gas pipeline between the two countries. The sanctions target firms building Nord Stream 2, an undersea pipeline that will allow Russia to increase gas exports to Germany. The US considers it a security risk. But Germany accused Washington of interfering in its internal affairs, while Russia and EU officials also criticised the sanctions. Congress voted through the measures as part of a defence bill last week and the legislation, which described the pipeline as a "tool of coercion", was signed off by Mr Trump on Friday. The almost \$11bn (£8.4bn) Nord Stream 2 project has infuriated the US, with both Republican and Democratic lawmakers opposing it. The Trump administration fears the pipeline will tighten Russia's grip over Europe's energy supply and reduce its own share of the lucrative European market for American liquefied natural gas. President Trump has said the 1,225km (760-mile) pipeline, owned by Russia's state-owned gas company, Gazprom, could turn Germany into a "hostage of Russia". Speaking on German TV, Finance Minister Olaf Scholz said the sanctions were an infringement of sovereignty. "It is up to the companies involved in the construction of the pipeline to take the next decisions," he said. The US sanctions have also angered Russia and the European Union, which says it should be able to decide its own energy policies. "As a matter of principle, the EU opposes the imposition of sanctions against EU companies conducting legitimate business," a spokesman for the trading bloc told AFP news agency on Saturday. Russia's foreign ministry also strongly opposed the move, with ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova accusing Washington of promoting an "ideology" that hinders global competition. The consortium behind Nord Stream 2 confirmed that it would build the pipeline as soon as possible, despite the sanctions. "Completing the project is essential for European supply security. We, together with the companies supporting the project, will work on finishing the pipeline as soon as possible," it said. However, Allseas, a Swiss-Dutch company involved in the project, said it had suspended its pipe-laying activities in anticipation of the sanctions. Businesses in Germany, meanwhile, have invested heavily in the project. Chancellor Merkel has tried to assure Central and Eastern European states that the pipeline would not make Germany reliant on Russia for energy. [Source: BBC]

There are two reasons why the US opposes the project. First, the US fears the gas pipeline may lead to close relations between Germany and Russia, which challenges US supremacy on the continent. Second, the US has declared global economic war and the latest victim is Nord Stream 2. Under the Trump administration, mercantilism is making a new comeback.

Trump Warns About Libya Meddling After Turkey Votes to send Troops

Donald Trump warned his Turkish counterpart that "foreign interference is complicating the situation in Libya", after Ankara voted to send troops to the oil-rich North African state. Mr Trump spoke to Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish president, on Thursday after Turkey's parliament approved a year-long mandate to dispatch armed forces to prop up the ailing government of Libyan prime minister Fayez al-Sarraj. While Mr Sarraj's government of national accord is recognised by the UN as the legitimate authority in Libya, it has been struggling to fend off an offensive on Tripoli, the Libyan capital, by forces loyal to military strongman Khalifa Haftar. Tripoli

made the request for military support from Turkey to help it counter Gen Haftar's assault last week, making formal for the first time one part of a tangled web of foreign interests. Gen Haftar controls most of Libya and is backed by Turkey's regional rivals Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as Russia. "President Trump pointed out that foreign interference is complicating the situation in Libya," the White House said in a statement following the telephone call on Thursday. Although the US officially supports the UN peace process that underpins Mr Sarraj's government, which Turkish troops are intended to buttress, Mr Trump has previously praised Gen Haftar's efforts to counter terrorism and secure oil resources. The comments have been seen by some as coming close to endorsing Gen Haftar, counter to official US policy. "The United States supports the ongoing efforts of UN special representative Ghassan Salamé and the UN Support Mission in Libya to chart a path that provides security and prosperity for all Libyans," a US state department official said on Thursday, adding that external actors "must stop fuelling the conflict". "All countries must refrain from exacerbating the civil conflict and support a return to the UN-facilitated political process," the official said. Mr Erdogan has previously said that Turkey would do what it could to help the "legitimate government of Libya", which he said was under attack from a "warlord". Turkish officials have not specified exactly what type of military support they will provide to Tripoli. Speaking the day before the vote, Fuat Oktay, Turkey's vice-president, suggested the dispatch of troops may not be necessary if the motion forced Gen Haftar and his supporters to back down. But Mr Oktay also said Turkey would send "the necessary number [of troops] whenever there is a need". [Source: Financial Times]

Turkey has a poor record in Syria and Iraq. Ankara has expedited the control of both countries to foreign powers. The same is likely to happen in Libya. The only solution to the bloodshed in Libya is to bring Libya under the shade of the Khilafah (Caliphate). Indeed, the Ottoman Caliphate provided stability to Libya under the wilayah of Tripolitania and actively prevented western powers from interference.

Fears of Conflict Spread as Trump Appears to Taunt Iran, Saying it has Never Won a War

Iran has vowed to take revenge for a US drone strike that killed its most powerful general, as the US secretary of state attempted to minimise the fallout from the dramatic attack by stating Washington was "committed to de-escalation". The Iranian supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, ordered three days of mourning and declared that the US would face "severe revenge" for the killing of Qassem Suleimani, who ran Tehran's military operations in Iraq and Syria. The 62-year-old general died when his car was targeted by a drone in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, as local allies from the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) were driving him from the airport. The de facto leader of the PMF, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, a close Suleimani associate, was also killed in the attack. "General Suleimani was actively developing plans to attack American diplomats and service members in Iraq and throughout the region," the secretary of state, Mike Pompeo said. "This strike was aimed at deterring future Iranian attack plans." Allegations have been raised, including by a UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial executions, about the legality of the assassination under international law. A total of 10 people died, Iranian state television reported. Speaking to CNN, Pompeo claimed the targeted killing prevented Suleimani from carrying out an "imminent" attack on Americans in the region. He provided no evidence to back up his statement. "I can't talk too much about the nature of the threats. But the American people should know that the president's decision to remove Qassem Suleimani from the battlefield saved American lives," he said. The US Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden said Trump had "tossed a stick of dynamite into a tinderbox". His fellow Democratic hopefuls Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders warned the attack could spark a disastrous new war in the Middle East. [Source: The Guardian]

While the strikes expose America's impunity for the international law, it remains to be seen what response originates from Tehran. Iran and the US have worked closely to safeguard American interests in Iraq and Syria, and it is very unlikely that Iran's response will upend these interests.