

Do Not Send Troops to Kyiv, Russia Warns

Macron's Rhetoric Has NATO Scrambling

By PAUL SONNE
and CONSTANT MÉHEUT

A provocative comment by President Emmanuel Macron of France about the possibility of putting troops from NATO countries in Ukraine has prompted a warning from the Kremlin and hurried efforts by European leaders to distance themselves from the suggestion.

The fractured messaging underscores how Ukraine's allies are struggling to agree on new ways to help Kyiv as resolve weakens in the United States and Russia advances on the battlefield.

The Kremlin warned on Tuesday that a ground intervention by any NATO country would lead to a direct clash between the Western military alliance and Russian forces, fraught with potential dangers, and called the open discussion of such a step as "a very important new element."

"This is of course not in the interest of these countries," Dmitri S. Peskov, the Kremlin spokesman, said in comments to reporters.

The warning came a day after Mr. Macron said "nothing should be ruled out" regarding the possibility of a NATO country sending troops to Ukraine, though he said there was no consensus on the matter.

"Anything is possible if it is useful to reach our goal," Mr. Macron said, speaking after a meeting with European leaders in Paris about future support for Kyiv. Reminding leaders that the West was doing things it did not imagine two years ago, like sending sophisticated missiles and tanks, he said the goal was to ensure "Russia cannot win this war."

Poland, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Italy and the Czech Republic rushed to emphasize they were not considering putting troops on the ground in Ukraine. The NATO chief, Jens Stoltenberg, also told The Associated Press the alliance itself had no such plans.

France clarified that Mr. Macron was trying to emphasize how

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A MATTER OF EGO Hungary's leader had to have the last word in approving Sweden. PAGE A8



President Biden met with congressional leaders at the White House on Tuesday to discuss ways to stave off a partial shutdown.

Oval Office Meeting Falls Short Of Deal to Avoid a Shutdown

By ERICA L. GREEN
and CATIE EDMONDSON

WASHINGTON — Congressional leaders emerged from a meeting with President Biden on Tuesday saying they were optimistic about averting a partial government shutdown at the end of the week, but remained short of a plan to do so before a Friday deadline.

Speaker Mike Johnson, who is facing intense pressure from Mr. Biden, Democrats and Senate Republicans to agree to a spending deal over the fierce objections of right-wing lawmakers in his ranks, suggested he might be ready to do so in the coming days.

"We have been working in good faith around the clock every single day, for months and weeks, and over the last several days, quite literally around the clock, to get that job done," said Mr. Johnson, who met with the president one on

Some Optimism Seen Three Days Before Budget Deadline

one after holding a group session with Mr. Biden and the other three top congressional leaders.

"We're very optimistic," he added, saying that preventing a shutdown was "our first responsibility."

Senator Mitch McConnell, the Kentucky Republican and the minority leader, gave a similarly upbeat assessment to reporters at the Capitol.

"We are making some real headway on the appropriations process," he said.

But it was not clear whether the progress would yield an agreement before midnight on Friday,

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Iran's Proxies Curtailing Attacks On U.S. Bases in Iraq and Syria

This article is by Farnaz Fassihi, Eric Schmitt and Julian E. Barnes.

Iran has made a concerted effort to rein in militias in Iraq and Syria after the United States retaliated with a series of airstrikes for the killing of three U.S. Army reservists this month.

Initially, there were regional concerns that the tit-for-tat violence would lead to an escalation of the Middle East conflict. But since the Feb. 2 U.S. strikes, American officials say, there have been no attacks by Iran-backed militias on American bases in Iraq and only two minor ones in Syria.

Before then, the U.S. military logged at least 170 attacks against American troops in four months, Pentagon officials said.

The relative quiet reflects decisions by both sides and suggests that Iran does have some level of control over the militias.

The Biden administration has

Tehran, Leery of Being Drawn Into War, 'Put the Brakes On'

made clear that Tehran would be held accountable for miscalculations and operations by proxy forces, but it has avoided any direct attack on Iran. The U.S. response "may be having some effect," Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., a retired head of the Pentagon's Central Command, said in an interview.

"The question is are the militias attacking or not," he added, "and at least for now, they are not."

The lull also marks a sharp turnaround by Iran. Tehran had for months directed its regional proxies in Iraq and Syria to attack American bases in the Middle

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FOOD SAFETY GAPS LET CHILDREN EAT TOXIC APPLESAUCE

HIGH LEVELS OF LEAD

Hundreds Poisoned in U.S. as Contaminant Went Undetected

By CHRISTINA JEWETT
and WILL FITZGIBBON

WASHINGTON — Cinnamon-flavored applesauce pouches sold in grocery and dollar stores last year poisoned hundreds of American children with extremely high doses of lead, leaving anxious parents to watch for signs of brain damage, developmental delays and seizures.

The Food and Drug Administration, citing Ecuadorian investigators, said that a spice grinder was likely responsible for the contamination and that the quick recall of three million applesauce pouches protected the food supply.

But hundreds of pages of documents obtained by The New York Times and the nonprofit health newsroom The Examination, along with interviews with government and company officials in multiple countries, show that in the weeks and months before the recall, the tainted applesauce sailed through a series of checkpoints in a food-safety system meant to protect American consumers.

The documents and interviews offer the clearest accounting to date of the most widespread toxic exposure in food marketed to young children in decades. Children in 44 states ate the tainted applesauce, some of which contained lead at extraordinarily high levels.

Time and again, the tainted cinnamon went untested and undiscovered, the result of an overstretched F.D.A. and a food-safety law that gives companies, at home and abroad, wide latitude on what toxic substances to look for and whether to test.

"It's amazing in a bad sense what a catastrophic failure this was," said Neal Fortin, director of the Institute for Food Laws and Regulations at Michigan State University. "Largely, the food supply regulatory system is based on an honor system."

The cinnamon originated in Sri

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New York Democrats Offer Map That Is Tinted Only a Little Blue

By NICHOLAS FANDOS

A day after rejecting a congressional map proposed by a bipartisan redistricting commission, Democrats in New York unveiled new district lines on Tuesday designed to help the party retake the House majority this fall.

Yet their plan exhibits surprising restraint. Although a pair of swing districts would become more Democratic, lawmakers in Albany left the partisan makeup of 24 of the state's 26 districts largely intact.

The middle-ground approach reflected a desire to avoid another protracted court fight like the one in New York that helped swing control of the House to Republicans in 2022, while still better positioning Democrats in key districts.

The most salient changes would affect districts in Central New York and on Long Island. By shifting the districts three and four points leftward, the map would endanger Representative Brandon Williams, a Syracuse Republican, and clear an easy path to reelection for Tom Suozzi, a Democrat, after he flipped a seat in a special election this month.



Lawmakers were expected to vote to finalize the new map.

The Democratic map would also unwind changes proposed by the bipartisan commission that would have made the Hudson Valley district represented by Representative Marc Molinaro, a Republican, more conservative. The new district would look more like his current one, where President Biden won 52 percent of the vote in 2020.

Lawmakers in Albany were expected to vote on the map.

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Facing Aging With Friends, Fancy Footwork and Fireball Whisky

By COLBI EDMONDS

BEAUFORT, N.C. — Martha Barnes's home was buzzing. It was a Saturday in little Beaufort, N.C., time to get ready for the town's Mardi Gras parade, and women were ziggzagging around the house, applying makeup, laughing and calling out repeatedly for the Fireball Cinnamon Whisky sitting on the kitchen counter.

"If you want to say something," one woman hollered above the din, "you better scream it!"

Ms. Barnes's home is not a sorority house — she is 86 years old. But, for the day, it was something of the sort: the meeting spot for the Bodacious Belles — the town's locally famous group of rambunctious retirees — eager to win best in show for the parade, again.

"We're not very contained," said Ms. Barnes, who is the Queen Mother of the group.

The Belles are a chapter of The Sweet Potato Queens — an international network of more than 6,500 women's groups that aim for a similar balance of amusement and mutual support.



The Bodacious Belles of Beaufort, N.C., participating in the town's Fourth of July Parade last year.

Throughout the year, the Belles perform in Beaufort's holiday parades and organize activities among themselves, like going to the movies, playing dominoes and singing karaoke. But they have known one another for years, forming more than meaningful friendships.

For many older people, isolation, declining health or a lack of financial resources make getting older a cascade of challenges without easy solutions.

But in an aging country, where women outlive men by about six years, the Belles are the kind of potent social network that knits older women together, and a window into successful aging.

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Terrorism, hunger and floods have roiled the Horn of Africa country. Now, it faces friction with Ethiopia. PAGE A4

Rebuilding a Wonky U.K. Pub The Crooked House was knocked down after a suspicious fire. The owners have been ordered to reconstruct it. PAGE A9

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A Decisive Michigan Primary

Donald J. Trump easily carried the vote, as did President Biden — but with a substantial number of Democratic ballots cast for "uncommitted." PAGE A18

A New Immigrant Flashpoint

The charging of a Venezuelan migrant in the death of a nursing student has thrust the college town of Athens, Ga., into a national debate. PAGE A13

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A lawsuit argues that a Trump-era rule put in place by the A.T.F. after the Las Vegas massacre overstepped the government's authority. PAGE A17



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A Taste of What's Below

Pete Wells visits Noksu, where dinner is served underneath the street, yards from the subway turnstiles. PAGE D7

Perspectives From the Kitchen Thirty chefs open up about customers, tipping, Gen Z cooks and the challenges of running a restaurant today. PAGE D4

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China Trails U.S. on A.I.

Tech firms were caught off guard by recent breakthroughs, but Beijing's regulations and a sagging economy aren't helping. PAGE B1

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Storming the court has long been an iconic visual for college basketball, but the practice is being questioned after another player was hurt. PAGE B7

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Thomas L. Friedman PAGE A22



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Soaring at the Met

The soprano Lise Davidsen, entering the Italian repertoire at the company, was part of a strong cast in a return of Verdi's "Forza del Destino." PAGE C1

