

MNI POLITICAL RISK ANALYSIS - US Daily Brief 03-02-23

By Adam Burrowes

The White House

08:30 ET 13:30 GMT	President Biden receives his Daily Briefing
-	Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre to gaggle aboard Air Force One
15:15 ET 20:15 GMT	President Biden and Vice President Harris deliver remarks on "the progress the country has made and their work implementing the Biden-Harris economic agenda" in Philadelphia, PA

Elections Countdown:

- ❖ 2024 Presidential Election: 641 days

China

US authorities are monitoring a suspected Chinese spy balloon spotted in high altitude over Montana yesterday. The Pentagon said the balloon posed no military or physical threat and declined to shoot down the balloon due to concerns that falling debris may present a risk to the public.

- Pentagon Press Secretary Brid. Gen. Pat Ryder said the Department of Defense has seen similar spy equipment from China in the past although not over US territory for such a prolonged period and said authorities will continue to monitor the balloon.
- Ryder: "The United States government has detected and is tracking a high-altitude surveillance balloon that is over the continental United States right now. The balloon is currently traveling at an altitude well above commercial air traffic and does not present a military or physical threat to people on the ground."
- Reuters notes that, "Montana is home to a nuclear missile silo field at Malmstrom Air Force Base, but authorities said the balloon is not collecting sensitive information."

Several Republican lawmakers criticised the administration response. Senator Roger Wicker (R-MI), ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said the Pentagon "failed to act with urgency" and the balloon "should be dealt with appropriately."

- Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA): "Biden should shoot down the Chinese spy balloon immediately."
- House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) said on Twitter: "China's brazen disregard for U.S. sovereignty is a destabilizing action that must be addressed, and President Biden

cannot be silent. I am requesting a Gang of Eight briefing." (The eight most senior Congressional leaders on matters of national security).

- Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL), the top Republican on the Senate intelligence committee, said "The level of espionage aimed at our country by Beijing has grown dramatically more intense & brazen over the last 5 years."

The news of the spy balloon comes just days before a highly anticipated meeting between US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his Chinese counterparts in Beijing. According to several news services, Blinken is also slated to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping although the White House and State Department both declined to confirm the reports.

- Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said: "I would like to emphasize that until the facts are clarified, speculation and hype will not be helpful to the proper resolution of the issue... China has no intention of violating the land territory and airspace of any sovereign country."

CIA Director William Burns yesterday warned that China's intention to retake Taiwan by force should not be underestimated and cautioned that competition with China could be more intense than US competition with the Soviet Union.

- Burns: "Our assessment at CIA is that I wouldn't underestimate President Xi's ambitions with regard to Taiwan," saying the US knew "as a matter of intelligence" that Xi had readied his military to retake Taiwan by 2027.
- Burns: "Now, that does not mean that he's decided to conduct an invasion in 2027, or any other year, but it's a reminder of the seriousness of his focus and his ambition."
- Burns continued: "Competition with China is unique in its scale, and that it really, you know, unfolds over just about every domain, not just military, and ideological, but economic, technological, everything from cyberspace, to space itself as well. It's a global competition in ways that could be even more intense than competition with the Soviets was."

Debt Ceiling

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) told reporters yesterday that that he believes the debt ceiling must be lifted, "but you have to cut spending."

- McCarthy: "We will not pass a clean debt ceiling here without some form of spending reform. So, there will never be a clean one."
- McCarthy also revealed that he will hold additional meetings with President Biden saying, "I got to see him at the Prayer Breakfast [yesterday]; he sat next to me ... and said it was a very good meeting."

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) told reporters it "wasn't easy" but Democrats worked with the Trump administration to raise the debt ceiling.

- Schumer: "Playing games with the debt ceiling is dangerous, destabilizing, and would spell disaster for every single American... The last thing we should be doing in Congress is using the debt ceiling as a political bargaining chip."
- Schumer said that any spending considerations should be passed via the budget process and "shouldn't be tied to the debt ceiling."

- Schumer also said he and Biden are on the “same page,” and all Democrats “have the same exact position, which is to pass the debt ceiling clean.”

Congressional Business

The House is out

The Senate is out

Committee Schedule –

Classified Government Documents

Multiple news outlets reported yesterday that the FBI plans to conduct another search of former Vice President Mike Pence’s Indiana home in the coming days.

- Document with classified markings were found in Pence’s home last month following a search conducted by Pence’s team in response to documents found at locations associated with President Biden. Pence said he was “unaware” that any sensitive documents were stored at his residence.

Republican News

Republican leaders in Congress have announced that former Arkansas governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders will deliver the GOP response to President Biden’s State of the Union Address next week.

- Sanders, who also served as former President Donald Trump’s press secretary for two years, said in a statement: “I am grateful for this opportunity to address the nation and contrast the GOP’s optimistic vision for the future against the failures of President Biden and the Democrats.”
- House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) said: “She is a servant-leader of true determination and conviction. I’m thrilled Sarah will share her extraordinary story and bold vision for a better America on Tuesday.”

Speaker McCarthy notched up his first big win as Speaker yesterday when he convinced detractors from his caucus to vote to remove Rep Ilhan Omar (D-MN) from the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

- The holdouts reportedly agree to vote in favour of the motion on the grounds that McCarthy would introduce a rule necessitating bipartisan agreement for future votes, minimising the prospect of tit-for-tat committee assignment votes.
- New York Times: “The 218-to-211 party-line vote, with one member voting “present,” settled a partisan score that has been festering since 2021, when the House, then controlled by Democrats, stripped Representatives Marjorie Taylor Greene [R-GA] and Paul Gosar [R-TX] of their committee assignments for social media posts in which they endorsed violence against Democrats.”

NATO

Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has told Politico that Turkey is an “unfaithful” ally, and the US should withhold the delivery of F-16 fighter planes unless Ankara cooperates with NATO.

- Van Hollen: “I don’t think we should be providing the advanced F-16 to Turkey, when they’re refusing to cooperate with the rest of the NATO alliance. That is my personal view, but I think it reflects overwhelming majority sentiment in the Senate... The bottom line is it’s important for Turkey to be a faithful NATO ally and a faithful partner with the United States.”

Politico: “[Van Hollen] cited a list of transgressions: Turkey’s purchase of Russia’s S-400 missile defense system, attacks on U.S.-backed Kurdish forces in Syria, sidestepping of sanctions on Moscow and, most recently, a near-unilateral block of Sweden and Finland joining the alliance.”

- Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Thom Tillis (R-NC), of the Senate NATO Observer Group, wrote a letter signed by bipartisan group of 29 senators to President Biden urging him delay the sale of F-16s until Turkey approves Sweden and Finland’s NATO accession.
- The letter states that, “Congressional consideration of F-16 fighter jet sales to Türkiye should not begin until the NATO protocols are ratified. The Senators note the importance of welcoming Sweden and Finland into NATO to further strengthen the alliance amid Russia’s brutal invasion of Ukraine and broader attempts to destabilize the global order.”

Republic of Korea

Secretary of State Antony Blinken will meet with his South Korean counterpart Foreign Minister Park Jin at the Department of State today. The pair will hold a joint press conference at 14:45 ET 19:45 GMT.

- The meeting comes as North Korea escalates its nuclear rhetoric in response to joint US-South Korean military manoeuvres conducted over the last month and set to continue with drills using fifth generation fighter planes and strategic bombers in the coming weeks.

North Korean military officials said in a statement that the drill were pushing tensions on the Korean peninsula to “an extreme red line.”

- Statement: “The more dangerous the U.S. threat to the DPRK gets, the stronger backfire the U.S. will face in direct proportion to it.”
- Earlier this week, US Ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield said that China and Russia have consistently blocked the United Nations from taking action against North Korea (DPRK).
- Thomas-Greenfield: “We have pushed hard in the Security Council to produce product condemning the actions of the DPRK but both China and Russia have consistently protected DPRK from the actions of the Security Council. They have the veto power and have used the veto power [to overrule the other 13 members of the Security Council.]”

Poll of the Day

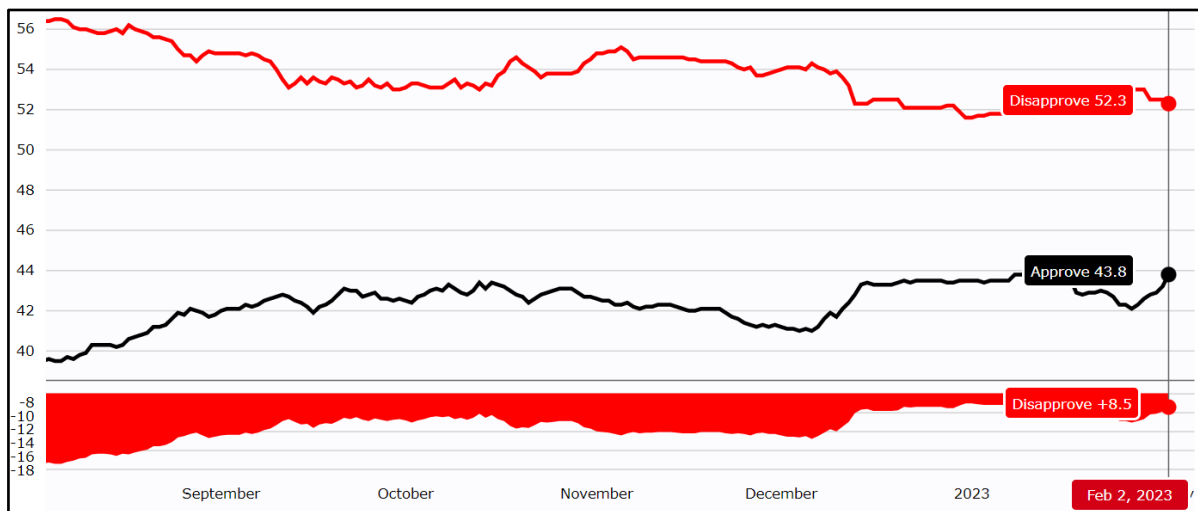
The approval rating of US President Joe Biden has strengthened after suffering a dip following the controversy surrounding Biden's improper storage of classified government documents.

- According to Real Clear Politics, Biden's approval rating currently sits at 43.8%, marginally below the 44.1% recorded on January 12 shortly before the documents story was reflected in polling.
- Biden's approval rating dropped 2% to 42.1% following the documents story, erasing much of the gains Biden made after the strong Democrat performance at the midterm elections in November.

The White House will be watching Biden's approval rating closely as it prepares to announce a bid to run for re-election in 2024.

- Outgoing Biden Chief of Staff Ron Klain gave the firmest indication yet that Biden will run for re-election speaking at a ceremony to welcome new Chief of Staff Jeff Zients on Wednesday: "As I did in 1988, 2008 and 2020, I look forward to being on your side when you run for president in 2024."

Chart 1: President Biden Approval Rating



Source: Real Clear Politics

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