

1/1/22 Saturday

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Base Housing US-Led Coalition Forces in Syria Comes Under Mortar Fire, Investigation Ongoing  
By - Gaby Arancibia

A military base housing US-led coalition forces in northeastern Syria came under mortar fire on Friday, an unidentified spokesperson with the US Central Command has detailed.

A [statement](#) released by the agency indicated that no service members were injured as a result of the incident but that rounds impacted civilian areas near the town of Al-Shaddadi. It was also noted that no coalition area was damaged.

"All coalition personnel have been accounted for, and we continue to maintain all appropriate force protection measures," the statement reads. "[The coalition] maintain the inherent right of self defense and will respond to any attack at a time and place of our choosing."

An investigation is ongoing to determine if the fire prompted civilian fatalities or injuries, as well as whether the incident was "deliberate" and, if so, by whom. The agency further stated it would not release additional information at this time.

The launch was earlier reported by Syrian state television, which indicated that air raids had sounded at the base, and that the alert level was raised in its aftermath.

The Syrian government sees the US presence on its soil as a violation of national sovereignty and an attempt to seize its natural resources.

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'Too Broken': Ghislaine Maxwell Sought to Take Stand in Trial But Legal Team Urged Against Move  
By - Gaby Arancibia

A New York courtroom earlier found British socialite Ghislaine Maxwell guilty on five of six sex-trafficking charges in relation to the late pedophile and high-profile hedge-fund manager Jeffrey Epstein. A sentence ruling in the case is expected sometime in the next several months. Ghislaine Maxwell, a longtime associate of Jeffrey Epstein, reportedly intended to take the stand during her New York trial but ultimately stood down at the behest of her legal defence team, it has been revealed.

Citing sources with knowledge of the move, the Daily Mail [reported](#) on Saturday that Maxwell was effectively "talked out of [taking the stand]" on account of her legal team's concerns regarding her mental stability.

"Ghislaine wanted to take the stand in her own defence. If she was the 'old' Ghislaine, she would have done so," the unidentified individual told the outlet. "She wanted to take the stand, but she is too frail, too broken."

However much Maxwell sought the stand, the source underscored that officials decided after "many spirited discussions" that she was simply "not strong enough to withstand a withering cross-examination."

The report further detailed that Maxwell knew her trial would not end in her favor.

"She never believed she could get a fair trial, which is why she showed so little emotion when the guilty verdicts were read," the individual suggested, adding that Maxwell fears the possibility of the presiding judge tossing her in prison for the rest of her life.

"[Maxwell] believes the judge will throw the book at her and sentence her to the maximum 65 years," the source stressed. "She is expecting a long sentence, a sentence that likely means she will die in jail. She does not believe she will see the outside world again."

While Maxwell, who turned 60 ahead of her recent guilty verdicts in the Empire State, faces up to 70 years in prison, she also has two separate trials on perjury counts to face. She is not expected to attempt any deals with prosecutors in exchange for lighter sentencing.

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**First Day Duties: NYC Mayor Eric Adams Halts Media Engagement to Report Assault  
By - Evan Craighead**

On Saturday, New York City Mayor Eric Adams held his first formal address to the public, vowing to abandon divisive rhetoric and tackle the everyday issues plaguing the five boroughs, such as economic inequality, crime, and underfunded schools. Adams also emphasized that the city will remain "open," despite the current surge in COVID-19 infections.

Adams' New Year's Day commute to City Hall was put on pause Saturday afternoon, after the former New York City police captain observed two men brawling near a train platform.

Social media footage from the scene at Brooklyn's Kosciuszko Street subway station shows the newly-sworn-in NYC mayor surrounded by members of the press as he phones 911 to report "an assault in progress."

Witnesses claim that the altercation between the two men ended prior to the arrival of two police cruisers. While the two men in question were waiting nearby, the officers on the scene only questioned a third man who attempted to intervene.

The NYC mayor told reporters that he would have investigated the report more thoroughly than the responding officers, who did not exit their vehicles.

Adams made an effort to be visible and accessible to the public on his first day, opting to take the subway without a New York City Police Department (NYPD) security detail.

"The city's safe," the NYC mayor said, noting that his security detail will be requested on a case-by-case basis.

"There are days that if intel tells me there is a credible threat, we will make sure we have an appropriate amount," he added.

Adams, a former Brooklyn borough president, held his first cabinet meeting on Saturday morning as the 110th mayor of New York City. NYC's first mayor was appointed in 1665.

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US Military Reportedly Zeroing in on Daesh Cell Linked to Kabul Airport Suicide Bomber  
By - Evan Craighead

Nearly 200 individuals, including 13 US service members, were killed in August 2021 by a suicide bomber near the Kabul airport's southeast gate. Both the Islamic State and the US have identified the bomber as Abdul Rahman Al-Logari, an engineering student-turned-militant who was freed from Parwan prison after Kabul fell to the Taliban\*.

The US and foreign intelligence officials are making headway in efforts to gather intelligence on Daesh-Khorasan\*, the Afghan-based Islamic State branch, as well as an affiliated suicide bomber who killed almost 200 individuals on August 26, [according to a new report in the New York Times](#).

Citing American officials, the outlet detailed that the US and Logari had a previous run-in back in 2017, when the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) tipped off Indian counterparts to warn of a planned suicide bombing by Logari in New Delhi.

Authorities in India ultimately thwarted the student-turned-militant's planned attack and detained the suspect. Soon after, Logari was handed over to the CIA, which assigned him to serve time at the US-made Parwan Detention Facility.

The militant remained at the Bagram Air Base prison until August 15, 2021, when the Taliban swarmed the abandoned air base and freed over 12,000 prisoners—including some 6,000 Taliban fighters.

At the same time, the Taliban also released rival militants from the Pul-e-Charkhi and Parwan prison, including Logari and some 1,800 Daesh-K fighters, according to US officials. The release occurred just 11 days prior to the suicide bombing.

"It's hard to explain what the thinking was in letting out people who were a threat to the Taliban," Edmund Fitton-Brown, a senior UN counterterrorism official, said during a recent security conference in Doha, Qatar.

Daesh-K, which quickly claimed responsibility for the August 26 terror attack, has significantly expanded since Shahab al-Muhajir, a new commander, took hold of the group in June 2020. In October 2021, Colin H. Kahl, a US undersecretary of defense for policy, told members of Congress that the militant group could be preparing to attack the US as soon as 2022.

"We could see ISIS-K generate that capability in somewhere between six and twelve months," Kahl claimed before the Senate Armed Services Committee. "I think the current assessments by the intelligence community is that al Qaeda would take a year or two to reconstitute that capability."

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**Over 200 US Marines Discharged as Service Rejects Thousands of COVID Vaccine Exemption Requests**  
By - Evan Craighead

In August 2021, the Pentagon announced it would immediately require all service members be vaccinated against COVID-19. While the Army and Navy have yet to issue a round of related discharges, thousands of vaccine exemption requests have been denied, and over two dozen airmen and hundreds of Marines have been booted from service.

More than 200 US Marines have been discharged from service due to their refusal to take any COVID-19 vaccine, the US Marine Corps (USMC) confirmed in a Thursday memo.

This week, 37 Marines were discharged over the Pentagon vaccine mandate, bringing the current total up to 206 service members since separations began in mid-December 2021.

Per the fiscal 2022 National Defense Authorization Act, a service member cannot be dishonorably discharged over vaccine refusal alone.

As of Thursday, the USMC reported that it had reviewed and adjudicated 3,080 of 3,192 vaccine exemption requests submitted by Marines. Exemption requests are handled by The Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA) Department, headed by deputy commandant Lt. Gen. David Ottignon.

As for the majority of the USMC, around 95% of all active duty Marines have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, while some 86% of those in the Reserve force have done the same.

The US Air Force and Navy notably shared a November 14 deadline for vaccine compliance, but only the former has moved to discharge troops. At least 27 airmen have been separated from service.

Compliance has also been up for the Air Force and the Navy, as 95% of airmen have been fully vaccinated against the highly-contagious disease, and 99% of all US sailors have received at least their first dose of the vaccine.

Meanwhile, 98% of the Army's active duty force has received at least one jab.

Both the Army and the Navy are projected to announce their first vaccine-related discharges later this month.

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**Kentucky Declares State of Emergency as Severe Weather System Brings Tornadoes, Flooding to US South**  
By - Evan Craighead

Earlier on Saturday, the National Weather Service (NWS) Storm Prediction Center issued an "enhanced risk" (Level 3 out of 5) warning for severe weather—including tornadoes, heavy snow, flash flooding and freezing rain—for the Tennessee Valley and other parts of southeast US.

New Year's day brought damaging winds, flooding, and tornado reports to several parts of eastern and western Kentucky, prompting Governor Andy Beshear to [declare a State of Emergency](#).

"It is devastating that we are once again experiencing severe weather just weeks after the deadly tornadoes hit western Kentucky," Beshear said in a quoted statement, referring to the [recent tornadoes that claimed dozens of lives](#). "Sadly, some counties have been affected by both of these events."

"We will continue to monitor the weather and provide needed updates. Everyone be aware, stay safe and seek shelter when advised," the Kentucky governor added.

The storm system brought heavy rain, thunderstorms, hail and strong, sustained winds to parts of western, eastern and south-central Kentucky, according to the release.

Tornadoes in the state were also reported in Hopkinsville and Taylor County.

Reports of structural damage, downed trees, and broken telephone poles were recorded by the Taylor County sheriff's office. Local reports also detailed that rising floodwaters had prompted several water rescues in central Kentucky's Green County.

Kentucky was not the only state to be impacted by the weather system, as similar thunderstorm warnings [were issued by the NWS](#) for parts of the Ohio and Tennessee Valleys.

A tornado watch has been issued for several areas in north and central Alabama, including the counties of Blount, Cullman, DeKalb, Madison, Franklin, Jackson, and Marion.

Sections of Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee are also under a tornado watch until 3 a.m. ET.

The agency highlighted that flash flooding, frequent lightning, severe thunderstorms, heavy wind gusts and hail may be observed through Sunday morning. The front is expected to slowly move off the east coast of the US by Monday.

Winter storm warnings and winter weather advisories have been issued in a region spanning Colorado and New Mexico to eastern Michigan and Maine. The latter is estimated to get anywhere from two to eight inches of snow by Sunday morning.

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Curiosity Lit the Match: Cats Caused Over 100 House Fires in South Korea, Officials Say  
By - Evan Craighead

Pet-triggered house fires are not exclusive to South Korea, as the American Humane Association estimates that pets in the US are responsible for approximately 1,000 house fires per year. According to the group, a substantial number of blazes have been attributed to a four-legged friend's fascination with stoves.

As if a global pandemic is not enough, cat owners in South Korea are now being warned to keep an eye on their feline friends—particularly around open flame.

A Thursday statement from the Seoul Metropolitan Fire and Disaster Department detailed that domesticated cats have been acting out over the past three years, resulting in at least 107 feline-lit house fires.

"Cat-related fires are continuing to occur recently," Chung Gyo-chul, an official from the department, said in a quoted statement.

Despite dozens of documented blazes, only four instances resulted in injury, as over half of the fires were caused while the cat's owner was out of the house.

"We advise households with pets to pay extra attention as fire could spread widely when no one is at home," Chung added.

The department recommended removing flammable objects from the vicinity of the stove. An electric stove with a lock function was also proposed as a preventative measure.

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'Shedding of the Soul': New Book Reveals Avicii's Journal Entries on Inner Demons, Health Issues

By - Evan Craighead

Avicii, real name Tim Bergling, killed himself in April 2018 at the age of 28. The renowned Swedish disc jockey's death came nearly two years after he announced his retirement from touring, citing stress, poor mental health and chronic health issues, including acute pancreatitis. New excerpts from Måns Mosesson's forthcoming book, "Tim — The Official Biography of Avicii," offers an intimate look into the late DJ's mind via journal entries written amid a series of visits to hospitals and rehabilitation facilities for drug and alcohol abuse.

"I had a hard time accepting never drinking again though strongly suggested from all doctors to wait at least a year before even having a beer," Avicii wrote, according to excerpts obtained by the New York Post.

The Swedish DJ at the time admitted that he had ignored a "majority of the doctors" regarding alcohol, which ultimately led to a declining health cycle complicated by pancreatitis.

"You start right back over again. Those days in [the] hospital were the most anxiety and stress-free days I can remember the past six years, those were my true vacations, as depressing as it might sound," he wrote.

A number of Avicii's entries were written during his 2015 stay at Ibiza Calm, a rehab facility in Spain, following an intervention by family members.

At one point, Avicii began using meditation techniques found in Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's teachings and would meditate for hours at a time, which, according to some, is not recommended.

"It feels like I am in a new default mode of being which is very new and a little bit scary," he wrote. "It felt like the fears the last couple of days caused havoc in me, but I remember the tip to focus on my breathing."

The day before Avicii committed suicide, an acquaintance of the artist contacted his father regarding concerns over his practices, according to a source who spoke with Mosesson. The DJ was reportedly not eating or drinking at the time.

"The shedding of the soul is the last attachment, before it restarts!" read Avicii's final journal entry.

"Tim — The Official Biography of Avicii" is slated to be released January 18.

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Jake Paul Offers to 'Immediately' Retire if UFC President Dana White Meets Three Demands  
By - Nevin Brown

Jake Paul has turned the boxing world upside down. The former YouTuber-turned-boxer has earned millions and become a must-see draw, and now he has the UFC and Dana White in his sights.

Internet figure Jake Paul tweeted on Saturday that he would immediately retire from boxing and fight Jorge Masvidal in the UFC if UFC President Dana White agreed to three forward-thinking demands.

Paul's first demand of White is to increase minimum fighter pay to \$50,000, claiming it currently stands at just \$12,000. His second demand is to guarantee UFC fighters 50% of annual revenue - he noted that the UFC generated an estimated \$1 billion in revenue in 2021.

His third demand is for the UFC to provide fighters with long term health care, citing White's previous comments on brain damage and how former fighters have said they suffer from the effects.

Paul then informed White that he has five days to accept his demands, and until March 5 to implement them. The bargaining chip that Paul offers is his offer to fight Jorge Masvidal. Paul's boxing events have done significant business, particularly as he is an amateur.

[The YouTuber's first fight with Tyron Woodley](#) reportedly sold over 500,000 pay-per-views, and his [fight with Ben Askren snagged an estimated](#) 1.5 million PPV sales. Although Paul's pull could be waning, his rematch with Woodley reportedly only pulled in 65,000 PPV sales, a figure Paul disputes. He previously conceded it was "not my best business night."

Paul's tweet is thought by some to be a ploy to drum up more interest in his next event, whether it's in the UFC against Masvidal or against another opponent. Paul's demands, however, even if they are for his own benefit, have merit, according to many.

[According to the International Business Times](#), UFC fighters can make as little as \$10,000 per fight or as much as \$3 million. The report indicates that there are three tiers of compensation for UFC fighters.

The bottom tier earns between \$10,000 to \$30,000 per fight, the middle tier earns between \$80,000 and \$250,000 per fight, and the highest tier takes home between \$500,000 and \$3 million per fight.

The report found that in 2020, the average UFC fighter took home \$147,965 per bout. However, only 38% of the members made more than six figures.

Paul's request for White to increase the bottom tier's compensation is worthy criticism, according to some, and it plays nicely with his next demand that the UFC split their revenue 50-50 with their primary asset, the performers.

Due to a lawsuit that alleges monopolistic practices by the UFC, there is now more detailed and publicly available salary and revenue data to comb through. Dr. Hal Singer, [through court testimony](#), revealed that fighters have received anywhere between 19% to 20% of UFC revenue since 2011. Singer went as far as to say that UFC held a "long-term 20% of revenue assumption" for their participants.

Paul asking White to split revenue 50-50 with the members would represent a seismic shift in the UFC bottom line. Other prominent MMA leagues, including Strikeforce and Bellator, share their revenue much more evenly with participants, with the former sharing 63.0% over its final years and the latter 44.7%.

The UFC is projected to see steady growth through commercial sponsorships and new licensing deals. Morgan Stanley expects the company to see 8% growth in 2022 and bring in over \$1 billion in revenue.

White has become increasingly agitated by questions of player pay. Many suggest that the CEO of UFC would like to keep the company's share of revenue at its current percentage.

[The UFC president told MMA Junkie in September](#), 2020, in reference to questions about fighter pay, "It's none of your business how much it is. That's it. I mean, that's what people are always asking about. You know, 'What about this? What about that?' Listen, if you don't like how we run our business, go start your own."

When pressed on the subject, White became agitated, adding, "Too f\*\*king bad. Go start another MMA organization and you go f\*\*king figure out how to do it, and you can pay them \$10 million a fight, \$30 million a fight – whatever you want to do. We run a business. We've been very good at it. Not only do we run the business, we continue to grow the sport and take everybody along with us."

White has repeatedly told those that question UFC participant compensation to start their own MMA league. According to observers of the sports entertainment network the ongoing allegations of antitrust amount to a bad faith argument against the UFC.

The final demand of Paul's, to provide UFC fighters past and present with long-term health care, is a topic the US National Football League knows all too well. CTE, chronic traumatic encephalopathy, is a degenerative brain condition associated with repeated blows to the head. Although there is ample anecdotal medical evidence, precise biological links between CTE and MMA have yet to be rigorously studied. Rates of CTE seen in football and boxing, however, indicate that former participants in the network's shows could be at an increased risk of developing serious long-term health complications.

The NFL faced a massive lawsuit from former players who sued the league for hiding the danger of concussion. While it is unknown whether the UFC is hiding health information from its members, without long-term health care many former participants could experience costly major health issues.

Paul's challenge to White and his UFC is, according to some opinions, as opportunistic as it is inspired. The UFC reportedly has financial resources to better support its performers in the present and into the future. It's not clear whether White will address Paul's requests.

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Videos: IDF Launches Multiple Retaliatory Strikes on Gaza After Two Rockets Land Near Tel Aviv

By - Nevin Brown

On Sunday, at approximately 12:10 a.m., local time, the Israel Defense Force (IDF) began airstrikes on targets in Gaza in retaliation over two rockets fired from Gaza early Saturday. After the IDF [confirmed](#) the Sunday rocket launches amid the ongoing operation, a follow-up release by the Israeli military body detailed that its fighter jets had specifically targeted "rocket-making compounds."

"In addition, tanks attacked Hamas military positions on the Gaza Strip border. The scope of the targets and the type of targets were attacked in response to the rocket fire this morning, from the Gaza Strip to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, west of Gush Dan," reads a [translation](#) of the Hebrew statement.

"The terrorist organization Hamas is responsible for what is happening in the Gaza Strip and bears the consequences of terrorist acts from the Gaza Strip."

A few hours after the IDF's statement the agency published video footage that documented its strikes.

Earlier reports indicated that an airstrike was conducted via a helicopter on Hamas' Qaddissiyah site, followed by three missiles strikes from an Israeli Air Force jet.

The Qaddissiyah site in southern Gaza is reportedly a rocket manufacturing facility for Al-Qassam.

At least ten missiles are said to have been launched toward Hamas targets by the IAF.

Following the strikes by the IAF in southern Gaza, reports emerged of strikes in northern Gaza at Hama's Fillistine Camp. Early reports suggested the strikes were from helicopters and tanks, and that the Israeli Navy was shelling parts of the Gaza shoreline.

It has been reported that Hamas launched a number of rockets in the north and toward the sea in response to Israeli actions. On the border, east of Khan Younis, Hamas reportedly launched machine gun fire on IAF jets and onto Israeli civilian communities.

[Sources within the Israeli military](#) earlier vowed retaliation over the firing of two rockets, reportedly by Hamas, that landed off the coast of Tel Aviv. Through unnamed sources, it was learned that Hamas would respond if Israel should launch another strike.

Egyptian mediators unsuccessfully attempted to sway Israel against launching retaliatory strikes.

The Al-Quds Brigades, a Palestinian Islamic Jihad military arm, had [reportedly been evacuating](#) military sites in anticipation of Sunday IDF strikes.

Earlier in the day, a flare, launched from an Israeli helicopter in the northern part of the Gaza strip, was mistaken for a strike. Those initial reports of a retaliatory strike by the IDF were retracted by local media.

Strikes at the Hamas' Qaddissiyah site have been confirmed by the IDF.

The ongoing conflict between Hamas and Israel again escalated dramatically in May 2021, after Hamas fired long-range missiles towards Jerusalem in support of Palestinian protests following killings of Palestinians by Israeli troops. Of the estimated 3,750 missiles fired by Hamas, 90% were intercepted, according to Israel's Health Ministry and 12 people were killed from the missiles.

Tel Aviv responded to the reported attacks by launching an aerial offensive on the highly-populated region of Gaza. A strike toppled a highrise building and an estimated 230 Palestinians were killed according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry in Gaza. On May 20, 2021, the two sides announced a cease-fire.

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50-Person New Year's Eve Orgy Broken Up by Spanish Authorities Over Broken COVID Rules  
By - Nevin Brown

Police in Llica d'Amunt, near Barcelona, Spain, reportedly broke up a 50-person New Year's eve party that was in violation of Spain's 10-person maximum rule for indoor gatherings amid the pandemic.

The party was [described by police as an orgy](#), with guests said to have been having sex in upstairs rooms on the property. The event was reported to have been organized by Americans who are alleged to have hired prostitutes for the New Year celebration.

Police were tipped off to the gathering when two guests mistakenly knocked on a neighbor's door, thinking it was the intended party site.

The total number of guests has yet to be identified but is believed to have been between 50 and 70 people in attendance, all of whom now face fines.

[Catalonia enacted clear restrictions](#) on December 24, due to the surge of the Omicron variant. It is unclear the severity of the fines, but [according to the US Embassy and Consulate in Spain and Andorra](#), fines for breaching Covid protocols range from 60 to 60,000 euro, based upon the relative severity of the violation.