

**11/23/21 Tuesday**

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Syrian Air Defenses Intercept 'Hostile Targets' Over Homs - State TV  
BY - Morgan Artyukhina

Early on Wednesday morning, Syrian state media reported Syrian air defenses engaging aerial targets over the ancient city of Homs in the country's center.

Air defenses in Homs were firing at "hostile targets" attacking the city's center, according to Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), later identifying them as Israeli

Several explosions were heard in the city's Al-Mahatta neighborhood, [according to a reporter](#) with The Arab Source.

Another social media user in nearby northern Lebanon also posted video of what was claimed to be an inbound missile traveling toward Syria from off the coast. The Israeli Air Force commonly uses this method of attack when launching strikes on targets inside Syria.

Numerous IAF airstrikes [have been launched](#) against Syria in recent months, which Jerusalem says are aimed at Iranian forces in the country preparing to stage attacks against Israel. One, launched against targets in [eastern Homs Governorate](#) in October, took place [while civilian aircraft](#) were passing overhead, preventing Syrian air defenses from shooting down the projectiles.

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House Panel on January 6 Riot Subpoenas Leaders of Proud Boys, Oath Keeper Militia  
By - Morgan Artyukhina

The House committee investigating the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol by supporters of then-US President Donald Trump announced five new subpoenas on Tuesday, including the leaders of the right-wing groups the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers, which took part in the riot.

The House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6 Attack on the US Capitol announced five new subpoenas for information on Tuesday, including Henry "Enrique" Tarrío who was chairman of the Proud Boys at the time of the riot, and Elmer Stuart Rhodes, president of the Oath Keepers.

"The Select Committee is seeking information from individuals and organizations reportedly involved with planning the attack, with the violent mob that stormed the Capitol on January 6th, or with efforts to overturn the results of the election," Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-MS), [said in a news release](#) by the committee. "We believe the individuals and organizations we subpoenaed

today have relevant information about how violence erupted at the Capitol and the preparation leading up to this violent attack."

The committee also subpoenaed the groups themselves for records and testimony, as well as a third organization, First Amendment Praetorian, which the release says ran security at several Stop the Steal rallies leading up to January 6, including one the day prior at Freedom Plaza in Washington, DC.

Tarrio was arrested on January 4, 2021, two days before the incidents at the Capitol, in connection with the destruction of a Black Lives Matter banner and other property outside a Black church in Washington, DC, a misdemeanor, the month prior. However, he was then also charged with two felony counts of possession of a high capacity feeding device after two high-capacity firearms magazines were found on him during the arrest. The FBI, for whom Tarrio had served as an informant, [later claimed](#) they had arrested Tarrio in an attempt to prevent the storming of the Capitol.

In August, Tarrio was [sentenced to five months](#) in the DC jail for the three crimes.

The subpoenas come a day after five others [were issued subpoenas](#) by the committee for figures "who organized, planned, paid for, and received funds" for Stop the Steal rallies, including InfoWars owner Alex Jones and former Trump campaign adviser Roger Stone, the latter of whom has often used the Proud Boys as his personal security force.

The committee has issued dozens of subpoenas since forming in July, many of which have been resisted by Trump and his associates. The former president has filed repeated lawsuits attempting to block the National Archives from releasing a dossier of his communications, and several have ignored the subpoenas entirely, including former Trump senior adviser Steve Bannon, who was indicted and booked earlier this month; [Mark Meadows](#), Trump's chief of staff at the time of the riot; and [Jeffrey Clark](#), who was assistant attorney general at the time.

As [Sputnik reported on the day](#) of the insurrection, a number of far-right and neo-Nazi groups were present in force during the storming of the national legislative building, including the Proud Boys, who were spotted fighting with unknown persons and firing a hail of paintball rounds. The US Department of Justice has indicted 34 Proud Boys members in connection with the riot. Eighteen members of the Oath Keeper militia, a group of current and former military and police members who claim to be defending the US Constitution and pledge to only obey constitutional orders, have also been indicted by the DOJ for storming the Capitol. Prosecutors in March claimed that [text messages proved](#) Rhodes had given militia members storming the Capitol direction from outside the building and that the group had planned and prepared for violence during the events of January 6. However, Rhodes himself wasn't charged with a crime.

The storming of the Capitol happened in the wake of a rally outside the White House hosted by Trump in which he called for the repudiation of the November 3, 2020, election results, claiming Democratic rival Joe Biden had won due to fraud. At the time, a joint session of Congress was meeting to certify the results, and the storming of the building temporarily dispersed lawmakers and interrupted the certification process. However, after police cleared the building, they returned and finished the certification.

Five people died in the attack, including a US Capitol Police officer and a woman shot by an officer outside the House chamber while attempting to break through the door. In the aftermath, thousands of US National Guard troops garrisoned the city, although questions about [why they](#)

[weren't present](#) before the attack, despite knowledge of the danger by law enforcement and military officials, have persisted.

Biden was inaugurated as US President on schedule on January 20, 2021, under unprecedented military guard. Trump was impeached on accusations of inciting the insurrection, but acquitted by a minority of senators in a February trial.

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Brian Laundrie Died of Gunshot Wound to the Head, Family Lawyer Reveals  
By - Morgan Artyukhina

Brian Laundrie, who led police on a monthlong nationwide manhunt in connection with the strangulation death of his fiancée, Gabby Petito, died by a gunshot wound to the head consistent with suicide, the family's lawyer said on Tuesday.

Laundrie's [remains were found](#) in the Carlton Reserve wetlands in southern Florida in mid-October, but in the autopsy that followed, "no manner or cause of death was determined," family attorney [Steven Bertolino said](#). The remains were then examined by a forensic anthropologist.

Police had searched the park for weeks, but only found Laundrie's "skeletal" remains once the shallow water they were concealed in had receded.

He initially went missing on September 14, about two weeks after returning home to Florida from a trip to Wyoming's Bridger-Teton National Forest and just three days after Petito was reported missing. Her body was found in the park on September 19 and a coroner ruled her death homicide by "manual strangulation."

Laundrie was never charged with Petito's death, but an arrest warrant was issued for him after he used Petito's debit card without permission. He was regarded as a person of interest in the case.

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California's Newsom Pledges 'No Sympathy' for San Francisco Mass Smash-Grab Perpetrators  
By - Morgan Artyukhina

California Governor Gavin Newsom pledged on Monday to strengthen police presence in shopping districts during the holiday season following a series of smash-and-grab robberies by dozens of people in the San Francisco Bay area over the weekend.

"We want real accountability. We want people prosecuted and we want people to feel safe this holiday season," [Newsom told reporters](#) on Monday. He said there would be increased patrols by California Highway Patrol, the state police force, in highly trafficked areas during the holiday shopping season that begins on Friday.

"I'm not the mayor of California. But I was a mayor. And I know when things like this happen, mayors have to step up," Newsom said, adding that his comment wasn't "an indictment" or "cheap shot" at any of the state's city leaders. He was previously mayor of San Francisco from 2004 until 2011.

"Look, I have no sympathy, no empathy whatsoever, for people smashing and grabbing, stealing people's items, creating havoc and terror on our streets. None. Period. Full Stop," the Golden State's governor said, calling the robberies "crimes of opportunity, but they're very well organized ... we want real accountability. We want people prosecuted. And we want people to feel safe this holiday season."

According to [The Mercury News](#), which cited Bay Area law enforcement officials, a number of pharmacies and high-end shops were stormed by groups of up to 80 people at a time, who quickly carried off large amounts of merchandise. [Targets in San Francisco](#) included Nordstrom, Louis Vuitton, Burberry, Bloomingdale's, JINS, Maxferd Jewelry & Loan, and Yves Saint Laurent. A Lululemon shop on Santana Row in San Jose was also robbed, and in Oakland, a Walgreens and a Wellspring, two pharmacies, were hit, according to [local news](#).

Video posted on social media showed the smashed storefront of the Louis Vuitton store, and the Oakland Wellspring pharmacy also released its security camera footage, showing several dozen people filing through the store and grabbing items.

San Francisco Police Department Chief Bill Scott told [reporters on Saturday](#) that eight had been arrested in connection with some of the robberies. He said police would be limiting car access to certain shopping districts to discourage robberies, which often rely on getaway cars.

'Shoplifting Capital of the USA?'

For months, news outlets have reported on a "shoplifting spree," [portraying the supposed trend](#) as a collapse of law and order that ultimately stems from the nationwide Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020 against police brutality, which called for militarized police forces to be defunded.

"San Francisco, and the larger Bay Area, now could easily claim the title of Shoplifting Capital of the USA," the [New York Post quipped](#) in a Monday story about the weekend crime spree.

"This brazen criminal behavior is endured every single day by San Franciscans and it is the direct result of District Attorney Chesa Boudin and his enablers' criminals-first agenda," Tony Montoya, president of the San Francisco Police Officers Association, [told the New York Post](#) in June, referring to a 2014 referendum that lowered the penalty for stealing goods worth less than \$950 from a felony to a misdemeanor.

"There is no way that any prosecutor in this country can successfully prosecute a case if police don't make an arrest and do a good job investigating it."

However, [according to the Center](#) on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, which cited statistics from the state's justice and finance departments, shoplifting in the Golden Gate City is at its lowest levels since they began collecting data on the practice in 1975.

Adam Johnson, a journalist and co-host of the Citations Needed podcast, wrote in [a July op-ed](#) in the San Francisco Chronicle that while much of the hubbub is coming from police forces feeling insecure in the face of unprecedented calls for police reform, companies like Walgreens are also using the story as cover for bad PR incidents like the November 2020 settlement in a Sacramento court in which the company [agreed to compensate](#) more than 2,500 employees for \$4.5 million in wage theft.

Earlier this month, Ben Dugan, the head of CVS Health's anti-theft division, [told the Senate Judiciary Committee](#) that the company had lost \$200 million a year to shoplifting, claiming the perps then resell the goods online.

"The sale of stolen goods via online marketplaces is increasing rapidly, representing a serious threat to legitimate businesses of all sizes and subjecting our colleagues and in-person and online shoppers to real harm," Dugan told lawmakers. However, the company last year posted a \$7 billion profit, an increase from the year prior, [according to The Appeal](#).

CVS has also given tens of thousands of dollars to lobbyist groups like the California Retail Association and California Chamber of Commerce, both of which have waged a campaign to get Proposition 47 repealed and called for harsher policing of shoplifting, the outlet noted. It is perhaps also worth noting that [a September report](#) by the Bay Area Equity Atlas found that nearly half of Bay Area residents are either low income or very-low income, according to California Department of Housing and Urban Development data. United Ways of California [also noted in July](#) that one-quarter of Bay Area residents aren't making enough money to cover the costs of housing, food, medical care, childcare, or other essentials.

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US State Dept. to Remove Colombia's FARC From List of Terrorist Groups Five Years Since Legalization

By - Morgan Artyukhina

Five years after signing a historic peace agreement with the Colombian government, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) could soon be removed from the US State Department's list of groups deemed terrorist organizations.

US State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters on Tuesday it was beginning consultations with Congress on forthcoming actions regarding the FARC - which sources [familiar with the matter](#) say include removing the group from its list of foreign terrorist organizations. It was added to the list in 1997.

Price added the Biden administration was committed to the "implementation and preservation" of the 2016 peace deal reached between the FARC and the government of then-Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, who won a Nobel Peace Prize for the effort. The talks were hosted in Havana, Cuba, and helped end 53 years of armed conflict that left an estimated 260,000 people dead.

According to [the United Nations](#), 80% of the deaths were at the hands of right-wing militias tied to the drug trade and allied with the Colombian government, while another 12% were at the hands of the government itself.

At its height, the Marxist-Leninist guerrilla group, now a legal political party known simply as The Commons, controlled perhaps one-quarter of the Andean country and counted at least 18,000 fighters, with wide support among the peasantry. However, with the US heavily arming and supporting the Colombian military and the US Drug Enforcement Agency, (DEA), a paramilitary

police force, training the Colombian police, the FARC slowly lost ground and the conflict became increasingly unpopular for both groups.

The first peace agreement, reached in August 2016, saw Bogota agree to support massive investment for rural development and facilitate the FARC's conversion into a legal political party. In turn, the FARC agreed to help eradicate illegal drug crops, most notably coca used to produce cocaine, remove landmines in the areas of conflict, and offer reparations to victims. It also allowed FARC leaders to avoid prosecution by acts of reparation to victims and other community work.

The deal required approval by a majority of Colombian voters in a national referendum. However, a slim majority rejected the agreement, with the "no" campaign being orchestrated by former Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, Santos' predecessor who opposed the peace deal and had waged an all-out war on the FARC.

A second deal, with more than 500 changes proposed by dissenters and requiring parliamentary instead of popular approval, was [agreed to by November](#) of that year. Among the changes was that the peace terms would be enforced by a Special Justice for the Peace who would report to the Constitutional Court, the country's highest legal body, instead of to an international body, and both the legislature and the Special Justice would be able to modify the agreement.

#### Barriers to a Lasting Peace

Last month, the [Washington Post reported](#) on how FARC's continued presence on the US' terrorist list had kept US Treasury sanctions on members of the now-legal party, creating additional barriers to their complete reintegration.

"It's a big contradiction," Pablo Catatumbo, a former senior commander of the FARC, told the Post. "We signed a peace accord that the US government backed. The US gave a great deal of support to the war. They need to support the peace, too."

"The FARC gave up their arms and complied with a justice system and to a peace process and they're still on the list," Santos also told the paper. "This is an outright contradiction."

The United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia [reported in late September](#) that 98% of the FARC's members remain committed to peace, but 46% are still unemployed.

In a [statement accompanying](#) the report, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres urged Colombian President Ivan Duque to "overcome the outstanding challenges" in fully implementing the peace deal, including integrating FARC members but also ending the ongoing killings of former FARC members, noting that 292 have been killed since the agreement was signed.

[According to the report](#), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights recorded the killings of 4 FARC-EP former combatants, 43 human rights defenders and an unstated number of indigenous and Afro-Colombian community leaders this year, for a total of 158 killed. Many of those [died during mass protests](#) in April and May against a proposed tax reform scheme that Duque's government put down with heavy force.

So far, however, Duque has resisted following up on Santos' peace attempts, including abandoning peace talks hosted by Cuba with another Marxist rebel group, the National Liberation Army (ELN), which returned to armed struggle.

"Even before Duque was elected, President Trump met with Uribe and former President [Andrés] Pastrana in Mar-a-Lago in what I believe was probably a strategy session just to foment what is happening in Colombia right now," James Jordan, national coordinator for the

Alliance for Global Justice, [told Sputnik in 2019](#), when part of the FARC was considering [taking up arms](#) due to another wave of killings of former FARC members.

“President Trump has pushed attacks on the agreement that had to do with crop substitution for coca growers and rural development, so they can develop alternative crops and markets. President Trump has led an assault against the accords that had to do with amnesty and reincorporation of guerrillas into civilian life,” Jordan added.

The ELN peace delegation [stayed in Havana](#) after the return to hostilities with Duque’s government in January 2019 because the Cuban government said Bogota wasn’t holding to the terms of the peace talks, which called for security guarantees for the delegates and for a ceasefire until they returned home. Duque replied that it was Santos’ government, not his, that agreed to the terms of the talks, so he wasn’t bound by them. Duque then [demanded the extradition](#) of 10 members of the ELN delegation, which Havana rejected.

Two years later, in January 2021, one of the Trump administration’s final moves was to add Cuba to the US State Department’s [list of state sponsors](#) of terrorism due to the continued presence of the ELN delegation, which remained in Havana because the conditions for their safe return to Colombia had never been reached. The Biden administration has shown little interest in unringing that bell, keeping Cuba on the list in its [annual May reevaluation](#) and slapping a host of new sanctions on the socialist island nation after an [astroturfed anti-government movement](#) fizzled in July.

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Jury Finds 'Unite the Right' Rally Organizers Liable on Four Counts of Violence  
By - Evan Craighead

Nine people filed a lawsuit against Jason Kessler and other organizers of the deadly 'Unite the Right' rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, back in August 2017, arguing that they suffered physical and emotional harm from the demonstration, which resulted in the death of 32-year-old counterprotester and local resident Heather Heyer.

A federal jury in Charlottesville has found defendants in the 'Unite the Right' rally lawsuit liable for four out of the six claims brought against them, including civil conspiracy; racial, religious or ethnic harassment; and infliction of emotional distress.

After violating Virginia state conspiracy laws the individual defendants - including Jason Kessler, Richard Spencer, and Christopher Cantwell - are liable for \$500,000 each, while the five organizations named in the lawsuit are liable for \$1 million each.

Defendants include Jason Kessler, Richard Spencer, Christopher Cantwell, James Alex Fields, Jr., Robert "Azzmador" Ray, Nathan Damigo, Elliott Line, Matthew Heimbach, Matthew Parrott, Michael Hill, Michael Tubbs, Jeff Schoep, the League of the South, Vanguard America, the Nationalist Socialist Movement, Identity Evropa, and the Traditionalist Worker Party.

The civil suit alleged that the defendants conspired to commit violence by organizing their 'Unite the Right' rally in rural central Virginia.

During the trial, attorneys presented several forms of evidence, including dozens of text messages, chat room archives and social media postings authored by some of the defendants. Posts included a variety of racial epithets and plans to attack counter-protesters during the weekend event.

Kessler, Spencer, Kline, Ray and Cantwell are also liable for \$200,000 each in punitive damages related to their violation of Virginia state laws against racial, religious or ethnic harassment or violence.

Additionally, the court awarded \$500,000 to two plaintiffs: Natalie Romero and Devin Willis. James Alex Fields, Jr., the man who drove his car through a group of counter-protesters and ultimately killed Heather Heyer, was found liable for assault and battery against several of the plaintiffs, as well as intentionally inflicting emotional distress against at least six plaintiffs.

The court subsequently issued a cumulative award of \$12 million to the victims.

Fields is presently serving a life sentence after pleading guilty to 29 hate crime charges related to his fatal car attack at Charlottesville's Downtown Mall on August 12, 2017.

While the jury determined that the defendants had violated Virginia state conspiracy laws, it was unable to reach a verdict regarding two additional claims.

One claim pertained to whether the defendants conspired to commit racially-motivated violence and the other related to whether the defendants possessed knowledge of a conspiracy for racially-motivated violence and failed to intervene.

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**Bail for Waukesha Parade Suspect Placed at \$5 million as Death Toll Jumps to Six  
By - Evan Craighead**

Police have recommended that five counts of first-degree intentional homicide be leveled against Darrell Brooks, the 39-year-old Milwaukee resident who drove his SUV through a crowd of people, killing six, including children, during a Christmas parade in Waukesha, Wisconsin, on Sunday evening.

Brooks has been charged with five counts of first-degree intentional homicide, according to a criminal complaint filed on Tuesday by Waukesha County District Attorney Susan Opper.

The complaint, filed in the Waukesha County Circuit Court, detailed that 62 individuals were injured - some remain in critical condition - and another five were immediately killed in the Sunday incident. The death toll has since climbed to six, according to prosecutors.

The sixth individual has been identified as a child, while the others killed were adults, aged between 52 to 81 years old.

Local investigators detailed that one officer discharged three rounds into Brooks' SUV after he broke through a police barricade. The suspect is believed to have been fleeing the scene of an altercation near White Rock School.

"As I continued to watch the SUV, it continued to drive in a zig zag motion. It was like the SUV was trying to avoid vehicles, not people," one witness told a detective, per the complaint. "There was no attempt made by the vehicle to stop, much less slow down."

Another witness recalled the same zig zag driving pattern, telling the detective that he felt it was "a direct intent to hit as many parade participants."

Brooks, a registered sex offender in Nevada, was formally charged for his alleged crimes during his first court appearance on Tuesday.

Bail has been set at \$5 million by the court. Unlike many other jurisdictions that employ a 10% rule for release, bail must be paid in full before an inmate can walk free in Waukesha.

Commenting on the bail amount, Judge Kevin Costello argued that it was warranted due to the nature of the case and the suspect's rap sheet.

"It is extraordinarily high, but it is an extraordinarily big case," he said, noting that Brooks has an extensive history of breaking the law.

If convicted, the suspect faces up to life in prison. Wisconsin is not a US state that upholds the death penalty.

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Biden Admin Asks Federal Court to Lift the Stay on COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate in Workplaces  
By - Evan Craighead

Last week, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) was forced to suspend all activities related to the implementation and enforcement of the Biden administration's COVID-19 vaccine mandate in workplaces, after a Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals panel said it had "grave statutory and constitutional" concerns regarding the order.

The Biden administration has asked a federal court to allow it to proceed with a COVID vaccine mandate for businesses with 100 or more employees, according to a Tuesday filing in the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Lawyers for OSHA and the US Department of Justice argued that the mandate - estimated to impact some 84 million workers in the US - would save the lives of 6,500 workers and prevent over 250,000 hospitalizations within a six-month period.

"OSHA's judgment that these measures are necessary to mitigate Covid-19 transmission in the workplace, and the grievous harms the virus inflicts on workers," the filing reads.

Lawyers also countered the Fifth Circuit's previous argument that COVID-19 is not a workplace hazard.

The Biden administration's team argued that offices and work sites are generally high-traffic areas in which employees come in contact with one another for extended periods, "thus risking workplace transmission of a highly contagious virus."

Per OSHA's [COVID-19 Vaccination and Testing Emergency Temporary Standard \(ETS\)](#), businesses with 100 or more employees would be required to ensure their staffers are fully vaccinated against the highly-contagious disease, or agree to weekly COVID-19 testing.

A three-judge panel in New Orleans' Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals previously issued a stay on the matter, noting in a unanimous decision that the ETS had improperly asserted "virtually unlimited power to control individual conduct under the guise of a workplace regulation." OSHA's ETS was characterized by the panel as a "one-size fits-all sledgehammer that makes hardly any attempt to account for differences in workplaces [and workers] that have more than a little bearing on workers' varying degrees of susceptibility to the supposedly 'grave danger' the Mandate purports to address."

Republican-led states opposed to the federal vaccine mandate have accused the Biden administration and OSHA of federal government overreach.

While the workplace-based COVID vaccine mandate - originally scheduled for January 4 - has been halted amid litigation, no court decision has prompted the suspension of related mandates for healthcare workers and federal government contractors.

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Cell Block Super 8 - Cartoon

Kyle Rittenhouse, the teenager acquitted of wrongdoing in the shooting deaths of two people in Kenosha, Wisconsin, told Fox News' Tucker Carlson that he intends to move on from the highly-politicized moment. He also expressed plans to hold a few people and media entities accountable. "I have really good lawyers," he assured Carlson.

[During a pre-recorded interview](#), Rittenhouse, 18, made it clear that he was not accustomed to living conditions at the Kenosha County Jail, which he likened to a "one-star hotel" like a "Super 8."

Rittenhouse claimed that he went weeks without a shower, as there was no water in the facility between October 31, 2020, and November 20, 2020.

"And when I showered, I showered for like, I took like a three-hour shower," he recounted. "I had like blood. My skin was bleeding because my skin was coming off of my body is just the nastiest thing ever."

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UN Chief: Ex-FARC Rebels Need More Economic Opportunities

By - Evan Craighead

United Nations (UN) Secretary General Antonio Guterres arrived in Bogotá, Colombia, as part of a two-day trip to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Final Peace Agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) rebel group.

While visiting the province of Antioquia with Colombian President Iván Duque Márquez, the UN Secretary-General called for enhanced effort in expanding economic opportunities for former FARC rebels.

"We must redouble efforts to guarantee the sustainability of these projects, with financial and technical support, and land and housing," he said while touring a reintegration camp in the province, as reported by Reuters.

Some 13,000 FARC members were demobilized following the signing of the Final Peace Agreement in 2016.

The agreement also led to the halting of FARC's role in Colombia's long-term internal conflict, which led to the displacement of more than 1 million people and caused some 260,000 deaths. Guterres also spoke out in support of the indigenous communities of Colombia, declaring that the UN stands with them "in the face of the violence that continues to affect their lives, their customs and their ancestral territories."

The secretary-general's remarks come alongside reports that US President Joe Biden's administration intends to remove FARC from its list of terrorist organizations.

US State Department spokesperson Ned Price did not confirm the intent to remove FARC from the list, but did tell reporters on Tuesday that the administration was in talks with Congress regarding forthcoming actions with FARC.

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Australia Designates Entirety of Hezbollah Group as 'Terrorist Organisation'  
By - Gaby Arancibia

The Australian Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Intelligence and Security earlier issued a recommendation to have the entire Hezbollah group designated as a terrorist organisation. A decision on the matter has been kept pending since June.

The Australian government on Wednesday designated the entirety of Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation over growing concerns that the group was providing support to other designated terrorist groups.

Announced by Home Affairs Minister Karen Andrews, the development is set to complicate any aid being dispatched to Lebanon, which has been facing severe political and economic hurdles over the last several months.

Addressing reporters, Andrews justified the government's decision by indicating that the organisation was offering support to at least two other designated terrorist groups - the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas' Iss al-Din al-Qassam Brigades.

Also announced at the news conference was the government's decision to slap The Base, a white supremacist group, with their own terrorist label, especially after reports revealed that the group had been attempting to recruit individuals as young as 17 across the nation.

Andrews described The Base, which formed in 2018 and has since created various cells, as a "violent, racist and neo-Nazi organisation". The Base is already designated 'terrorist' by the UK and Canada.

Touching on Australia's terror threat, Andrews indicated that the level would be kept at "probable", but that the risk would ultimately shift once the nation reopens its borders, which have remained closed as a result of the pandemic.

"That means that we have credible intelligence that there are individuals with the capability and the intent to conduct a terrorist attack here in Australia," Andrews said. "We know that as we open our international borders people will start to gather and gather in greater numbers in crowds and that is the sort of thing terrorists look for."

"Now I am not here to scare people, I actually want people to go about their lives," she added. Andrews' announcement regarding the Hezbollah designation comes weeks after Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison was [urged](#) by Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett to classify the whole of the Hezbollah group as a terrorist organisation.

However, it's worth noting that prior to the designation and Morrison's meeting with the Israeli prime minister, the Australian Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Intelligence and Security had already recommended the designation in June. Until Wednesday, Australia had only classified Hezbollah's External Security Organisation.

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NASA Fires Off First-Ever Planetary Defense Test With Asteroid-Bound DART Spacecraft

NASA's Double Asteroid Redirection Test (DART) mission is meant to determine whether launching an object into an asteroid can successfully change the asteroid's trajectory.

The US space agency's mission will see the DART spacecraft blasted into space atop a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from California's Vandenberg Space Force Base.

DART's target will be the two-asteroid system Didymos, which does not currently pose a threat to Earth. The spacecraft isn't expected to reach the binary system until late September or October in 2022.

If successful, the mission will see the expansion of a NASA planetary defense arsenal.

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Online Hunt: Pfizer Launches Legal Effort to Combat COVID Vaccine Misinformation

By -Nevin Brown

Pfizer is ramping up a program to combat vaccine misinformation. Company CEO Albert Bourla recently described those who spread vaccine misinformation as "criminals," and lawyers for Pfizer are now pursuing defamation charges against at least one website that spread misinformation.

Pfizer's counsel, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP, [filed an Order pursuant to Section 3102\(c\) of the Civil Practice Law and Rules to Compel Pre-Action Disclosure from DreamHost LLC](#) in the state of New York on November 16.

The complaint asks DreamHost LLC, a company registered in Brea, California, that provides web hosting services, to provide Pfizer with the identity of the individual who ran the, as of November 26th, defunct website, the [Conservative Beaver](#), in order to file a defamation case against the individual who ran two articles that contained the vaccine misinformation.

The first article, posted November 5, claimed that Pfizer CEO Bourla had been arrested and charged with multiple counts of fraud stemming from falsifying vaccine data and bribing officials. The post also alleged a media blackout of the event by the mainstream media.

Another article, posted on November 10, alleged that Bourla's wife had been forced by her husband to take the Covid vaccine and had subsequently died. She is not dead and there has been no indication that she was forced to take the vaccine.

The filing could provide Pfizer and other vaccine developers and manufacturers a roadmap to combat vaccine misinformation. Pfizer's legal proceedings are unusual, according to legal observers, as they are asking for documents before formally filing a lawsuit.

If they are successful, it could provide precedent for other companies to combat misinformation. The Pfizer CEO, in an [interview](#) with the Atlantic Council think tank, described those who spread vaccine misinformation as "criminals."

"They're not [just] bad people," he said. "They're criminals because they have literally cost millions of lives."

The task is challenging, however, as Bourla and company lawyers must wade through layers of online identity. Short-lived online media groups that disseminate vaccine misinformation, like the Conservative Beaver, are often run by entities that are extremely difficult to identify.

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Famed Player Lionel Messi 'Impressed' by Rival Cristiano Ronaldo's Return to Manchester United

By - Nevin Brown

In an interview with Marca, famed footballer Lionel Messi opened up about his transition from life at Barcelona to life at Paris Saint-Germain, and his admiration for Portuguese player Cristiano Ronaldo, among other topics.

[In an expansive interview](#), star player Lionel Messi spoke of how impressed he has been by Cristiano Ronaldo's quick re-adaptation to the Premier League and Manchester United.

"Cristiano already knew the club but that was at a different stage and now he has adapted in an impressive manner. From the beginning, he has scored goals as always and had no problems adapting," Messi quipped on his former La Liga rival.

"In the Premier, it is not as good as we all thought, but it is a very difficult and even competition in which things take a lot of turns."

The iconic Argentine-born player chimed in on United's current struggles, saying, "After December it changes a lot and anything can happen." Later in the interview, he spoke about his and Ronaldo's reported rivalry.

"We competed individually and as a team for the same goals," Messi noted, adding that "it was a very beautiful stage for us and also for the people because they enjoyed it very much. It is a beautiful memory that will remain in the history of football."

From 2009 to 2018 the pair were reported to have been at odds in Spain, as Messi headlined Barcelona and Ronaldo led Real Madrid's attack. Messi was far better in La Liga, scoring 329 goals and setting up 131 assists as Barcelona won six La Ligas. Ronaldo, over the same period, scored 311 goals to go along with 85 assists, and won two La Ligas.

In the Champions League, however, Ronaldo had the edge, scoring 105 goals as Real Madrid won four Champions Leagues, including three in a row. Messi, meanwhile, scored 83 goals on his way to two Champions League titles.

Messi's admiration for Ronaldo's quick start to his second life in the Premier League is likely fueled by his own challenges to adjust at PSG. Messi only just registered his first goal in Ligue 1, while Ronaldo has already scored four goals in the Premier League.

The rivalry between Messi and Ronaldo has reportedly raged for over a decade, even as two of the greatest players in the history of the sport are beginning to show their age. Ronaldo's 0.49 goals per 90 minutes is the lowest since he was 20 and Messi's current 0.22 goals per 90 is the lowest in his career.

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**Saudi-Led Coalition Launches Second Round of Military Strikes in Yemen - Report**  
By - Nevin Brown

A Saudi Arabia-led coalition launched a second round of airstrikes early Wednesday on "legitimate" military targets in Yemen's capital of Sanaa.

The strikes are intended to neutralize Houthis targets, as militants have intermittently conducted cross-border attacks on Saudi Arabia since the coalition intervened in Yemen in March 2015.

According to reports, at least four explosions have occurred as jets hovered over Sanaa.

Ahead of the latest round of strikes, the Saudi-led forces dropped leaflets that urged civilians to stay away from Houthi sites.

A coalition release issued shortly after the strikes indicated that forces had targeted secret sites of drone activity.

The early Wednesday operation comes after Saudi-led forces conducted similar strikes on Tuesday against ballistic missile sites in and around the city of Sanaa. Saudi Arabia's Al-Arabiya TV channel released a video clip that showed Houthi militia using Sanaa's airport as a base of operation.

Sanaa, Yemen's capital, is the country's most populous city. It's nearly four million people makeup roughly 10% of Yemen's population. The city was seized by the Houthis, an Iranian-backed group, in September of 2014.

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Winter Covid Surge Could Kill 700,000 Europeans by Next Spring, WHO Warns  
By - Nevin Brown

The World Health Organization's Regional Office for Europe has warned that the region could see up to 700,000 deaths this winter if measures are not quickly taken to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus.

[In a release from WHO/Europe](#), officials noted that Covid deaths have increased to 4,200 a day and that the disease has become the number one cause of death across the 53-country region. The current figure is nearly double the daily death count seen in September.

The region officially topped 1.5 million Covid deaths and WHO/Europe has warned that current trends indicate that the number may balloon to 2.2 million deaths by March 2022, if additional measures are not quickly taken.

Between now and March 2022, WHO/Europe expects that there will be high or extreme stress for hospital beds in 25 countries, and high or extreme stress for intensive care units in 49 out of 53 countries.

"In order to live with this virus and continue our daily lives, we need to take a 'vaccine plus' approach. This means getting the standard doses of vaccine, taking a booster if offered, as well as incorporating preventive measures into our normal routines," Dr. Hans Henri P. Kluge, the WHO regional director for Europe, said.

"Taken together, wearing a mask, washing hands, ventilating indoor spaces, keeping physical distance and sneezing into your elbow are simple, effective ways of gaining control over the virus and keeping societies going."

The release highlighted three factors driving the increase in Covid cases and deaths, with the first factor being the preeminence of the more transmittable Delta variant. Reportedly, no country in the region has more than 1% of any other variant.

The second factor has been the easing of restrictions and the ongoing rhetoric around the danger of the pandemic. The easing of mask-wearing and social distancing, when coupled with people gathering indoors as a result of the colder weather, is a recipe for Covid, according to health agency.

The third factor is the large number of people still unvaccinated and the waning effectiveness of Covid vaccines. The report details that 53.5% of the region has been vaccinated, but cautions the uneven distribution of vaccines. Some countries have over 80% of their population vaccinated, while others are under 10%.

For those that are fully vaccinated, boosters are suggested for the vulnerable and front-line healthcare workers. The report references a recent study pointing out that mask-wearing "reduces COVID-19 incidence by 53%."

The report projects that "if from today universal mask coverage of 95% was achieved, it is estimated that over 160, 000 deaths could be prevented by 1 March 2022."

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#### US Expands Authorization Related to Certain Activities of NGOs in Syria - Treasury

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The United States has expanded the authorization related to certain activities of NGOs in Syria, the Department of Treasury announced on Wednesday.

"The Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) is adopting a final rule amending the Syrian Sanctions Regulations, 31 CFR part 542, to expand an existing authorization related to certain activities of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Syria. This regulatory amendment is currently available for public inspection with the Federal Register and will take effect upon publication in the Federal Register on Friday, November 26, 2021," the statement said.

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#### Biden's Approval Rating at 42%, Lowest in NPR/Marist Polling

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - Joe Biden's approval rating has dropped to 42% as inflation concerns grow, an NPR/Marist poll showed on Wednesday, noting that it is the lowest figure recorded in the survey since the president took office.

"Biden's overall approval rating has slipped to 42%, which matches the approval he receives for his handling of the economy (42%)," a press release explaining the poll said. "Biden's approval rating among all Americans (42%) is the lowest to date in our polling and has dipped down two points from earlier this month (44%)."

The latest survey revealed that 37% strongly disapprove of the job Biden is doing, while only 13% strongly approve of his performance, according to the release.

"As to whether Americans believe Biden is fulfilling his campaign promises after 10 months in office, 43% agree and 51% disagree," the release said. "There is a strong partisan divide (79% of Democrats agree and 83% of Republicans disagree) with independents tipping the balance (43% agree, 52% disagree)."

The release pointed out that the economy continues to drive Americans' perception of Biden's performance in office.

"In the latest NPR/Marist Poll, 39% name inflation as the most important economic concern, far outpacing other worries such as wages (17%), labor shortages (11%), and unemployment (10%)," it added.

Last week, a Quinnipiac University Poll said that a clear majority of Americans disapprove of Biden's performance less than a year into his term of office, with a gap of those who disapprove outnumbering his supporters by 17% – a gap that is continuing to widen. Americans gave Biden

a negative 36 - 53% job approval rating, while 10% did not offer an opinion, according to the Quinnipiac press release.

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**IMF Says Risks to Ukraine's Loan Program High, Urges Implementation of Agreed Reforms**

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) – The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Wednesday that risks to Ukraine's loan program remain high and the implementation of agreed reforms is needed.

"Risks to the program remain high, including global uncertainty and vested interests. The authorities' strong ownership as well as full and timely implementation of agreed reforms is crucial to ensure the success of the program," Deputy Managing Director Antoinette Sayeh said after the IMF Executive Board's discussion on Ukraine.

The statement comes after the Executive Board completed the first review of Ukraine's economic performance under the existing loan agreement and approved the disbursement of \$699 million to the country.

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**US Air Force to Award \$410M in Contracts in 2022 to Prepare Base for B-21 Bomber**

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) – Upgrades at Ellsworth Air Force Base needed to host the future US B-21 bomber, will proceed with the award of contracts worth more than \$400 million during the next 12 months, the Air Force said on Wednesday.

"We are actively working with mission commanders on a wide scope of beddown requirements for the new weapons system, and we anticipate awarding projects worth up to \$410 million at Ellsworth (AFB) in the next year," Air Force Program Manager Naomi Gabriel said in a press release.

Overall, the Air Force is projecting a \$1 billion investment at Ellsworth AFB to meet warfighter demands for B-21 bomber, the release said.

In June, the Air Force chose Ellsworth in the state of South Dakota as the first operating base for the B-21, also known as the Raider.

The initial prototypes of the B-21 are expected to arrive at Ellsworth in the mid-2020s, with the US planning to incrementally replace the B-1 Lancer and B-2 Spirit to perform both conventional and nuclear missions alongside the B-52 Stratofortress, the release said.

The prime contractor, Northrop Grumman, describes the next generation B-21 stealth bomber as a weapon system capable of penetrating enemy air defenses and reaching targets anywhere in the world - something that 90% of the present US bomber fleet is incapable of doing.

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#### Top US General Says Iran 'Very Close' to Being Able to Build Nuclear Weapon

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) – Iran is "very close" to being able to build a nuclear weapon, Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, head of US Central Command, told the Time magazine just days before the Vienna talks on the Iran nuclear deal.

"They're very close this time. I think they like the idea of being able to breakout," he said

The Vienna talks are set to resume on November 29, after a months-long hiatus.

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#### Outgoing UN Envoy Warns Extremist Groups May Step Up Activities in Libya Before Elections

UNITED NATIONS, November 23 (Sputnik) - Outgoing UN Special Envoy for Libya Jan Kubis warned on Wednesday that violent extremist groups could increase their activities in the country to disrupt the stabilization process ahead of the December 24 general election.

"As elections approach, there is a risk that entrenched political and institutional divisions turn into confrontation, fueled by uncompromising attitudes, inflammatory rhetoric and fake news," Kubis said at a UN Security Council meeting. "An increasing likelihood of asymmetric activities perpetrated by violent extremist organizations aiming to disrupt the stabilization process cannot be excluded."

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#### US Blacklists 27 Entities Including 12 in China Over National Security Concerns

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The United States has blacklisted 27 foreign entities, including 12 from China, over national security concerns, the Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) said on Wednesday.

"In this final rule, the BIS amends the Export Administration Regulations (EAR) by adding twenty-seven entities to the Entity List. These twenty-seven entities have been determined by the U.S. Government to be acting contrary to the national security or foreign policy interests of the United States," the BIS said in a rule posted at the Federal Register.

In addition to the 12 Chinese entities, the list contains entities from Japan, Pakistan and Singapore, as well as one entity based in Russia.

The list includes three affiliates of China's Corad Technology Limited, an entity blacklisted in 2019, in China, Singapore and Japan for their role in sales of technology from the United States

and other Western nations to Iran's military and space programs. They also cooperated with North Korean front companies, Chinese government and defense industry subordinate entities, according to the document.

Another eight entities were blacklisted for their participation in the military modernization of the People's Liberation Army, and attempting to acquire US-origin items in support of military applications, the document added.

The rest of the entities were designated for their role in Pakistan's ballistic missile program and "unsafeguarded nuclear program."

"The End-User Review Committee (ERC) determined that the conduct of the above described twenty-seven entities raises sufficient concerns that prior review, via the imposition of a license requirement for exports, reexports, or transfers (in-country) of all items subject to the EAR involving these twenty-seven entities, is appropriate," the rule noted.

The ERC also decided that the possible issuance of license denials or the possible imposition of license conditions on shipments to these entities will protect US national security or foreign policy interests, it added.

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**Biden Nominates Shalanda Young as White House Budget Office Director**

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has nominated Shalanda Young as the director of the White House budget office, the White House announced on Wednesday.

"Today, President Biden announced his intent to nominate Shalanda Young as Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Nani Coloretti as Deputy Director.," the statement said.

If Young and Coloretti are confirmed, the department would be led by two women of color, according to the White House.

"Young, has served as Acting Director since being confirmed as Deputy Director by the Senate in a bipartisan 63-37 vote on March 23, 2021, would be the first Black woman to lead OMB. Coloretti would be one of the highest-ranking Asian American, Native Hawaiians, or Pacific Islanders serving in government," statement added.

OMB is the largest office within the executive branch and its most vital role is to produce the budget of the president.

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**US Q3 GDP Grew by 2.1%, Commerce Dept. Says in Second Reading for Period**

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - US Gross Domestic Product expanded by 2.1% in the third quarter of 2021, the Commerce Department said in its second estimate for the period revised slightly higher than previously.

"Real gross domestic product (GDP) increased at an annual rate of 2.1 percent in the third quarter of 2021," the department said in a release issued Wednesday. It previously reported a 2% growth in its first reading for Q3 GDP.

The US economy shrank 3.5% for all of 2020 from business shutdowns forced by the coronavirus pandemic. Growth this year has been spotty, with an annualized 3.5% expansion in the first quarter and 3.6% in the second.

Third quarter growth slowed on a pullback in consumer spending on goods and services amid continued challenges from the coronavirus pandemic, the Commerce Department said.

Consumers account for 70% of all US economic activity.

"The deceleration in real GDP in the third quarter was led by a slowdown in consumer spending," the department said in its release. "A resurgence of COVID-19 cases resulted in new restrictions and delays in the reopening of establishments in some parts of the country."

It added government assistance payments in the form of forgivable loans to businesses, grants to state and local governments, and social benefits to households also decreased in the third quarter.

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#### White House Sets Up New Energy Division to Coordinate Climate Change Policy – Reports

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration has created a new energy division within the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) to coordinate climate change action, The Washington Post reported on Wednesday, citing sources.

The official announcement is expected later in the day, the report read.

A well-known energy specialist from Stanford University, Sally Benson, will lead the new division as deputy director for energy and chief strategist for the energy transition at OSTP, it added.

The decision to create the new team shows the administration's desire to fulfill President Joe Biden's commitment to combat the climate crisis, the report said.

Speaking of top priorities, Benson highlighted the need to ensure the transition to a clean energy economy, which will work for all Americans. "We have a 120-year-old energy system that was built over a long time period, and we're talking about very quickly changing that to a new system," she told The Washington Post, emphasizing that this move represents a big opportunity for American industry.

Benson also revealed her plans to help support supply chains by creating more electric vehicles, solar panels and other clean energy technologies.

Another leading climate expert, Costa Samaras, has also joined OSTP as a principal director for energy, the report added.

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US Puts Export Restrictions on Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology - Commerce Dept.

MOSCOW, November 23 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed export restrictions on Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, the Commerce Department announced on Wednesday.

"BIS has also added the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology to the MEU List on the basis of its production of military products for a military end-user," it said.

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In addition to the 12 Chinese entities, the list contains entities from Japan, Pakistan and Singapore, as well as one entity based in Russia.

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US Weekly Jobless Claims at Lowest Since 1969 in Continued Rebound From COVID - Labor Dept

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - US jobless claims hit their lowest in five decades last week as employment continued to recover steadily from the nearly two-year long coronavirus pandemic, the Labor Department reported on Wednesday.

"In the week ending November 20, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 199,000, a decrease of 71,000 from the previous week's revised level," the department said in a news release. "This is the lowest level for initial claims since November 15, 1969 when it was 197,000."

Economists polled by US media had expected 260,000 filings for jobless benefits last week.

The Labor Department report could hasten the Federal Reserve's tapering of the stimulus it has been providing the economy since the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020.

"That's a remarkable number and will certainly nudge the Fed towards tapering more quickly," economist Adam Button said in a post on ForexLive.

The Fed has been buying \$120 billion of bonds and other assets each month to support the economy. The central bank has said it will taper \$15 billion of that each month beginning this month.

The four-week moving average for unemployment claims, meanwhile, fell by 21,000 to 252,250. That marked a pandemic-era low as well, registering a bottom since March 14, 2020.

Nearly two years into the COVID-19 crisis, restoring job growth remains one of the main concerns of US policymakers.

The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April 2020, at the height of business lockdowns forced by the coronavirus. At last count, officials said some 5 million of those jobs have not returned.

The American economy itself shrank 3.5% in 2020. Growth this year has been spotty, with an annualized 3.5% expansion in the first quarter, 3.6% in the second and 2.1% in the third.

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DC Jail Abuses Part of Larger Scourge, Activists Fear Political Will Lacking to Halt It

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik), Barrington M. Salmon - The exposure of horrific conditions at prison facilities in the US capital shines a light on a problem that goes well beyond the confines of Washington, DC, but activists are pessimistic these revelations will spark reforms in the face of systemic racism and lack of political courage.

Earlier in November, the US Marshals Service moved 400 detainees from a DC detention facility after a surprise inspection revealed deplorable conditions. The detainees were moved to a federal facility in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania.

The inspection came after a complaint by one of the inmates jailed in connection with the January 6 Capitol riots. Since the attack more than three dozen white defendants have been in jail in Washington awaiting trial alongside more than 1,000 others, the vast majority Black and Latino residents of the District of Columbia.

The problem of prison abuses has been exposed on both local and federal levels nationwide. According to an AP tally earlier this month, more than 100 federal prison workers have been arrested, convicted and/or sentenced for crimes since the start of 2019.

**DC INMATES: 'WE ARE TREATED LIKE ANIMALS, SLAVES'**

In video testimony earlier this month at an oversight hearing of the DC Council's Judiciary and Public Safety Committee, six detainees described abominable conditions they endure in the jail, where one said they have been treated like "slaves" and "animals."

The men described appalling circumstances: feces on beds and daubed on walls, cells infested with mold, rodents and vermin, clogged drains that caused widespread flooding and sewage overflow.

Meanwhile, some detainees were physically abused and denied food and medicine for days, according to the testimonies.

All of the detainees and staff of the DC Public Defender Service (PDS) interviewed said retaliatory tactics by corrections officers prevented many other prisoners from coming forward. With respect to authorities moving prisoners in the wake of the inspection, PDS in a statement and prison reform advocates in their testimonies before the committee expressed outrage the epiphany came only after white people complained of conditions.

The PDS said it is a clear example of "the historic and systemic racism that plagues the carceral system."

Moreover, according to PDS and other advocates, prosecutors in DC Superior Court continue to seek detentions and judges persist in holding clients under conditions that have been deemed too harsh for anyone in federal custody.

#### CHANGE UNLIKELY

Prison abolitionists and reform advocates say elected officials have ignored or overlooked decades of lawsuits, complaints from detainees and their families and are not holding their breath that anything substantially will change.

Social justice advocate, the Rev. Graylan Hagler, senior pastor of Plymouth Congregational Church, slammed city officials - including DC Mayor Muriel Bowser, DC Council Chairman Phil Mendelson, and DC Council member Charles Allen - for allowing the US Marshals Service to ship people to a more racist environ.

"It is a failure on part of DC leadership," Hagler told Sputnik. "They don't even have a plan... this is an issue of humanity."

However, Hagler also called on the citizens of DC to stop thinking this is someone else's problem. With a mayoral race coming up, he noted, it is a good time to apply concerted pressure.

Life After Release Founder Qiana Johnson said public officials "don't have the capacity to reimagine public safety," especially with all the fearmongering within the community.

A big part of the problem is lack of will and a desire to not offend big-money donors, said Johnson, who is also co-conductor with Harriet's Wildest Dreams - a Black female-led prison abolitionist movement.

"I have no confidence in any government or government official and Black elected officials have a desire to adhere to the status quo and appeal to the upper class and people with some money in banks," Johnson said. "Those people are voters. Reimagining justice is not something someone aspiring to public office or getting donations is willing to do."

#### BEYOND DC

The problem of poor conditions in prisons extends well beyond the US capital city, which is why some believe authorities should be inspecting and cracking down on more facilities nationwide. Rhozier "Roach" Brown, who spent about two decades behind bars, said he is very suspicious about why the US Marshals Service chose to inspect the DC Jail when there are 120 federal prisons and detention facilities across the United States with similar and worst conditions than that seen at the Central Detention Facility.

"The marshals should be removing people all over the country after years and decades of complaints," said Brown, Chairman of the Coalition of National Association of Ex-Offenders.

"I've never heard of Marshals inspecting jails. Why is it that they chose to inspect the DC Jail?"

Brown, who said, he was imprisoned in five federal facilities, including the federal prison in Lewisberg, Pennsylvania, said none of the complaints are new. In 1972, he said, he filed a lawsuit seeking to address inhumane and squalid conditions and for 50 years he has worked and advocated for change in the prison system.

"This situation smacks of double jeopardy and blatant racism," said Brown, co-host of Crossroads, a talk show that focuses on issues around and affecting returning citizens. Brown said the detainees will be held at what he called the K Dorm in a prison he described as "one of the death houses in the federal system."

"There's no educational programs, no phone calls, no mental health treatment while you're in transit. No phone calls, no food, no showers," he said. "People are punished and penalized. I wouldn't send a dog to Lewisberg."

Brown, who spent four years at Lewisberg, said it is an experience not for the faint of heart. "The racism and discrimination inflicted on detainees is 'off the chain,'" he said. "At Lewisberg there is a group called The Molly McGuires, the Irish Ku Klux Klan. A lot of the corrections officers were members."

The impact on families, Brown said, is devastating.

"It's four hours away. Kids won't be able to see fathers and mothers and detainees will lose family contacts for political reasons," he said.

However, Brown also said, as bad as conditions are in Lewisburg, it is "a step above" the DC jail.

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#### FBI Agent Developed Havana Syndrome During Stint Near Russia - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - An FBI agent began experiencing symptoms of Havana Syndrome when he was stationed near Russia, NBC News reported on Wednesday, citing internal e-mails.

The now former agent has reportedly complained in a letter to the FBI about possible brain injury symptoms, including dizziness and fatigue, which started about a decade ago during his mission in a country near Russia.

The agency replied that "unfortunately, the FBI is not authorized to give any medical advice and there are not any medical programs in place for current and/or retired employees."

This probably was the first acknowledgment of Havana Syndrome by the FBI.

Reacting to the agent's report, the FBI said that it "does not have the authority to provide direct medical treatment, we now have a process to guide current and former employees to the interagency medical treatment and evaluation options that are available to them."

American diplomats were first diagnosed with Havana Syndrome in Cuba in 2016 and then in China in 2018. The diplomats said they experienced piercing sounds that have caused longer-term health effects. American diplomats in Russia, Tajikistan, Austria and in several African countries have also reported experiencing Havana Syndrome symptoms, including nausea and dizziness.

The US government initially blamed Russia for what it said were "acoustic attacks," but the allegations have been dismissed by Moscow as absurd. In July, CIA Director William Burns said Russia may be responsible for the incidents, but the US government lacks proof to make a final determination.

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US Weekly Jobless Claims Fall to 40-Year Low in Continued Rebound From COVID - Labor Dept

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - US jobless claims hit their lowest since 1969 as employment continued to recover steadily from the nearly two-year long coronavirus pandemic, the Labor Department reported on Wednesday.

"In the week ending November 20, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 199,000, a decrease of 71,000 from the previous week's revised level," the department said in a news release. "This is the lowest level for initial claims since November 15, 1969 when it was 197,000."

Economists polled by US media had expected jobless claims to come in 260,000 for last week.

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RPT: ANALYSIS - 'New Drama in Oil Swings' Seen in OPEC, Consumers Battle

NEW YORK, November 23 (Sputnik) - A new drama in world oil price volatility is expected with producers likely to tighten output further as major consumers release their crude reserves to push the market lower, commentators on energy markets told Sputnik.

On Tuesday, the US Energy Department said that President Joe Biden had authorized the release of 50 million barrels from the country's Strategic Petroleum Reserve. India and Britain followed up with announcements of a 5-million barrel and 1.5-million barrel release from their reserves, respectively.

"We're probably in the phase of a new drama in oil swings," John Kilduff, founder of the Again Capital energy hedge fund and a prominent commentator on oil, said.

The United States' first ever coordinated release of its oil reserves with other consuming countries could be "a momentum killer that could certainly short circuit the rally and push prices lower" for crude, Kilduff said.

Yet, the Saudi Arabia-led OPEC, or Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, and its allies might strike back almost immediately with output reductions that could push the market back up, cautioned Kilduff.

"If the Saudis are upset by this, they could dial back in post-haste. Because essentially, the Saudis would be signaling that they want higher prices than actual barrel count," he said.

Edward Moya, head of US research at brokerage OANDA, concurred with that view.

"The focus is now solely back on OPEC and no one would be surprised if they scaled down their production plans given the short-term uncertainties to the crude demand outlook and some vengeance for the coordinated tapping of oil reserves," Moya told Sputnik.

China, South Korea and Japan are also expected to join the US plan after producers in OPEC+ repeatedly ignored calls by the consuming countries to pump more crude to match soaring demand for energy in economies emerging from the coronavirus pandemic. OPEC+ groups the 13-nation Saudi-led OPEC with 10 other oil producers steered by Russia.

US Energy Department in a news release said today's decision is in response to the highest oil prices experienced in seven years and aims to ensure adequate supply as we exit the pandemic.

Oil prices had risen more than 60% this year due to short supply versus demand, with OPEC+ focused on recovering from a market that crashed the prior year on demand destruction related to the COVID-19 crisis.

The West Texas Intermediate (WTI) benchmark for US crude fell to a historic minus \$40 per barrel in April 2020 at the height of the COVID-triggered oil price crisis. That prompted OPEC+ to launch the steepest ever cuts in world oil production.

Since then, WTI hit seven-year highs above \$85 in October while Brent rose above \$86, responding to the OPEC+ supply squeeze. That has led to soaring inflation in oil consuming countries, particularly the United States, which is grappling now with its worst price pressures in more than 30 years.

Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm earlier said working families and businesses were forced to pay the price because oil supply has not kept up with demand.

Only in recent weeks, had oil prices fallen from their highs.

But they rebounded on Tuesday as traders expected a swift response to the consumers' actions from OPEC+.

"This oil market deficit will not go away anytime soon," said OANDA's Moya. "The US may need to consider another SPR release, but even if they talk about it, energy traders know that OPEC+ controls this market."

Biden in a televised address alluded to Tuesday's release as being inadequate to pull the market lower immediately. While these combined efforts, he said, will not solve the problem of gas prices overnight, it will make a difference. He said it may take time but before long, Americans should see the price of gas drop.

Hours after the consumer countries announced their reserves release, WTI traded at \$78.64 per barrel, up \$1.89, or 2.5%, by 2:25 p.m. ET (19:25 GMT). Global crude benchmark Brent rose \$2.69, or 3.4%, to \$82.39.

OPEC+ is due to hold its monthly meeting on December 2, but the Saudis could announce a pullback in output before that, Kilduff said.

Until Tuesday's SPR release by the Biden administration, OPEC+ had been adding about 400,000 barrels daily to its output from cuts carried out earlier. Energy market experts estimate that some 5 million barrels of regular supply is being withheld by Saudi Arabia and its allies.

"The battle line is drawn here for sure," Kilduff said. "And if WTI gets below \$70, expect an even more bellicose response from the Saudis, where they'd go beyond the 400,000 barrels and into deeper production cuts."

Notwithstanding further OPEC+ cuts, the combined release of more than 55 million barrels announced so far could go some way in meeting peak heating demand for the northern hemisphere winter, said Kilduff.

"We needed about one million barrels a day extra to fill the gap," said Kilduff. "Just on its face, this should be able to get us through early January, and then, depending on what the Asians put on, it could make the difference."

Kilduff also cautioned about another unknown in the oil price drama - the emergence of new COVID-19 breakouts across Europe, which have already sent Austria into a new lockdown and Germany and others into considering the same.

"These new lockdowns are a real problem for energy demand... something not many in the energy markets anticipated," said Kilduff.

More than two million new infections have erupted each week across Europe, the most since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

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RPT - Oil Prices Rise Because Market Expected Higher Release From US Stockpile - Ex-Official

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - Oil prices keep on increasing amid the Biden administration's announcement to release part of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) because demand is still high and the market expected a bigger release from the United States, Branko Terzic, a former commissioner of the US Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, told Sputnik.

"Oil Prices continued to go up because demand for oil is still strong and increasing and the market anticipated a higher release from the US stockpile," Terzic said.

Earlier on Tuesday, President Joe Biden announced the release of 50 million barrels of oil from the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve in concert with other major energy consuming nations, including China, India, Japan, South Korea and the United Kingdom, to stem surging oil prices.

"In the US, where every family has and needs more than one automobile, the politically important price is that of gasoline which on the East Coast is now near \$4 per gallon," Terzic said. "Current prices nationally are 30% above last year. An increase of another 20% would be politically unacceptable to the consumer. The Biden administration and Democratic party congressional leaders will do whatever they can to avoid that gasoline price increase scenario."

The national average gas price dropped slightly on Tuesday from \$3.409 to \$3.403 per gallon, while the total monthly decrease reached almost 40 cents, according to the American Automobile Association. However, prices increased by more than \$1 as compared to 2020.

Pump prices in the United States have increased sharply over the past year under the Biden administration's policy to gradually get away from fossil fuels and seek alternative sources of energy and have hit highs above \$4.70 per gallon in California on Tuesday.

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US, Lithuania Agree to Boost Trade, Defense Ties - White House

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The delegations from the United States and Lithuania met in Washington to discuss efforts to boost trade and defense ties during an Info-Pacific dialogue, the White House said.

"The United States and Lithuania convened high-level bilateral consultations in Washington today to discuss opportunities for enhanced cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, including with like-minded partners," the White House said in a press release on Tuesday. "Both sides committed to pursuing enhanced cooperation, including on trade, investment, and supply chain resiliency; security and defense ties; and addressing challenges associated with emerging and disruptive technologies, as well as cyber and hybrid threats."

Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis and US National Security Council Coordinator for the Indo-Pacific Kurt Campbell and US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink participated in the meeting, the release said. The US delegation reaffirmed strong support for Lithuania as a valued NATO ally and partner in addressing shared global challenges and opportunities, especially those in the Indo-Pacific, the release said.

Over the weekend, the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry said it was disappointed over China's decision to downgrade diplomatic relations to the level of charge d'affaires over the opening of a representative office of Taiwan in Vilnius.

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UPDATE 2 - Wisconsin Parade Attack Suspect Charged With First Degree Intentional Homicide

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - A suspect in the Waukesha Christmas Parade tragedy, Darrel Brooks, has been charged with five counts of first degree intentional homicide, with a sixth to be added, and faces up to life imprisonment for each.

The 39-year old Brooks was brought to court on Tuesday afternoon for a preliminary hearing after he allegedly rammed into a crowd on late Sunday resulting in killing five people and injuring more than 60.

In the opening of the hearing, a State Attorney read Brooks' entire criminal record spanning almost two decades after he was first convicted back in 2000.

The attorney said a sixth count will be added as the prosecution learned another child had died. Later, Judge David Herring accepted the request of Wisconsin state prosecutors to set a \$5 million bail for Brooks. The court agreed to set a tentative date of January 14 for the next preliminary hearing in the case.

The high bail comes after Brooks was released from custody in another case after posting \$1,000 cash bond earlier in November.

Brooks, a Milwaukee resident, was arrested near the scene of the crime Sunday, after which police ruled out terrorism.

Prosecutors during Tuesday's hearing said Brooks has an arrest record from 3 states: Nevada, Georgia, and Wisconsin.

Earlier this month Brooks was charged for bail jumping, endangering safety, domestic violence, and other crimes. In addition to striking the mother of his child, and running her over with his vehicle.

The same maroon Ford Escape Brooks allegedly used in Sunday's crash he drove in the earlier crime.

The prosecution also said Brooks is a non-compliant sex offender in Nevada, where there is a warrant out for his arrest.

According to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Waukesha Police Chief Dan Thompson said the suspect was involved in a "domestic disturbance" before driving to the parade route and may have been armed with a knife.

Meanwhile, a total of 13 children injured in the crash are still being treated at the hospital, six of whom are still in "critical condition," the Journal Sentinel said citing a hospital statement.

The sixth person killed was 8-year-old Jackson Sparks, who died on Tuesday, his parents announced on his GoFundMe page, according to US media. The death comes after Jackson underwent brain surgery on Sunday.

His brother Tucker suffered a fractured skull and will be released from the hospital, the report added.

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US Envoy, Indian Foreign Minister Discuss Re-Launching Bilateral Trade Forum - Statement WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said that she met with Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar to re-launch the trade policy forum between the two countries.

"I had the pleasure to meet Minister S. Jaishankar today to discuss strengthening the US relationship with the Indo-Pacific and the re-launch of the US-India TPF [Trade Policy Forum], specially how we can use it to address labor, environment, and digital trade concerns," Tai said via Twitter on Tuesday.

This is the first trade policy forum to take place between the countries since 2017, but the twelfth overall.

The US Trade Representative's office said in a press release that Tai also Indian Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal to discuss a range of bilateral trade issues and the two agreed to continue to work towards resolving concerns.

The United States and India intend to convene the TPF again at the ministerial level next year, the release added.

The two sides also agreed to work collaboratively in multilateral trade bodies including the World Trade Organization, the G20, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to address bilateral and global trade issues.

Moreover, the release said the two sides also agreed to continue to work to expand bilateral trade in agricultural and food products.

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US-Led Coalition Confirms Rocket Attack on Base in Syria Missed Intended Target- Spokesman

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The US-led Coalition against the Islamic State (banned in Russia) confirmed to Sputnik that an attack took place against a base housing Coalition troops in northeast Syria but missed its intended target.

"There were attacks directed towards a base that has Coalition members on it. The attack did not land anywhere near the base," a US-led Coalition spokesperson said on Tuesday when asked to confirm reports of an attack against a base housing Coalition troops in Syria's Kharab al Jir.

US Defense Department spokesperson Cmdr. Jessica McNulty told Sputnik all personnel are accounted for and there are no impacts to any Coalition installations.

No entity or individual has taken responsibility for the attack.

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Dollar Tree Stores Change Price Point to \$1.25 Due to Inflationary Environment - CEO

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The US chain store Dollar Tree is raising its price point from the namesake \$1 to \$1.25 as a result of the current inflationary economic environment, company President and CEO Michael Witynski said.

"We experienced a strong finish to the quarter, as shoppers are increasingly focused on value in this inflationary environment," Witynski said on Tuesday. "Our Dollar Tree pricing tests have demonstrated broad consumer acceptance of the new price point and excitement about the additional offerings and extreme value we will be able to provide. Accordingly, we have begun rolling out the \$1.25 price point at all Dollar Tree stores nationwide."

The decision to raise the price point is permanent and not a reaction to the inflationary market conditions, but rather, an effort to provide customers with "extreme value" and expand product offerings in the current environment, Witynski said. The move will also allow Dollar Tree to reintroduce products that were previously discontinued due to the constraints of the \$1 price point, he added.

According to surveys cited in the company's press release, 91% of respondents indicated that they would still shop at Dollar Tree with the same or increased frequency despite the price increase and many indicated that they are still being provided products they need at low costs. The announcement comes amid concerns over the decrease in the value of the US dollar that results in higher prices. The Labor Department reported earlier this month that the US Consumer Price Index (CPI), which represents an array of products ranging from gasoline and health care to groceries and rents, rose 6.2% during the year to October. It was the fastest growth of the so-called CPI since November 1990, an acceleration driven mostly by pump prices of fuel running at seven-year highs.

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### Judge Accepts Wisconsin \$5M In Bail Request for Waukesha Christmas Parade Attack Suspect

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - Judge David Herring accepted the request of Wisconsin state prosecutors to set a \$5 million bail for suspected Waukesha Christmas Parade car attacker Darrel Brooks during his first court appearance.

Herring accepted the state's requested bail amount after hearing about Brooks' extensive criminal history in Wisconsin and other US states that include sexual assault, bail jumping, domestic violence and running over someone with a car. The criminal history and repeated violation of court orders was cited by Herring as a reason to accept the bail request.

Brooks is currently charged with five counts of first degree intentional homicide for allegedly running his car into a Christmas Parade on Sunday, killing six and injuring more than 60 people. A sixth count of intentional homicide is expected to be filed soon after it was learned that an additional child had died as a result of the attack, state attorney said.

Herring said that the nature of the case and allegations were shocking and he had never seen a case like it in his long career as a judge. He added that Brooks faces life imprisonment for every count that he is found guilty.

The court agreed to set a tentative date of January 14 for the next preliminary hearing in the case.

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### Wisconsin Parade Attack Suspect Charged With 5 Counts of First Degree Intentional Homicide

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - A suspect in the Waukesha Christmas Parade tragedy, Darrel Brooks, has been charged with five counts of first degree intentional homicide and faces up to a life imprisonment for each.

Brooks was brought to court on Tuesday afternoon for a preliminary hearing after he allegedly rammed into a crowd on late Sunday resulting in killing five people and injuring at least 48, including children.

In the opening of the hearing, a State Attorney read Brooks' entire criminal record spanning almost two decades after he was first convicted back in 2000.

The attorney added that a sixth count will be added as the prosecution learned another child had died.

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### White Nationalists Must Pay \$1.5M In Damages on Charlottesville Conspiracy Charges - Jury

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - Twelve white nationalists engaged in a conspiracy before the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, that led to a fatality must and pay

\$500,000 in damages with another \$1million to be paid by five groups, a jury in the US state of Virginia decided, the Washington Post reported.

White nationalists Richard Spencer, Jason Kessler and Christopher Cantwell were prominent figures in the 2017 conspiracy and rally and they with nine others are liable for conspiracy under Virginia civil law, the jury ruled according to a report on Tuesday.

Counterprotester Heather Heyer was run over by a car at the rally and other counter-protesters there brought the lawsuit against its organizers, the report said.

Spencer led a march that included burning torches through the University of Virginia campus during the rally, the report added.

Spencer claimed to be ashamed of his racist and anti-Semitic comments at the rally while Cantwell tried to defend his own beliefs at the trial, the report said.

Cantwell is currently in prison serving a sentence for extortion and theft, according to the report.

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#### US Energy Stocks Mostly Up on Oil Rally, Despite White House Crude Reserves Release

NEW YORK, November 23 (Sputnik) - US energy stocks ended mostly higher on Tuesday, lifting Wall Street broadly, after the White House's coordinated release of crude reserves with the governments of other consuming countries sent oil prices higher instead of lower as expected. The Dow Jones Industrial Average and S&P 500 indexes, which house most of the US energy stocks, rose as crude oil prices jumped more than 2% despite the Biden administration's announcement that it will release 50 million barrels from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to counter output cuts by producers in the OPEC+ alliance. India and the United Kingdom followed up with announcements of a 5-million barrel and 1.5-million barrel release from their reserves, respectively, and China, South Korea and Japan are also expected to join the US plan.

"The coordinated SPR release was smaller-than-expected," Ed Moya, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said, explaining the rise in the Dow and S&P 500.

Moya also noted that technology stocks on the Nasdaq Composite index fell for a second day in a row on concerns about overvaluation of the Big Tech sector amid soaring US inflation that could force the Federal Reserve into a faster-than-anticipated rate hike.

"The Nasdaq is getting punished as investors scale down their mega-cap tech bets as margin worries grow and Treasury yields continue to rise" on inflation worries, Moya said.

At the close, the Dow was up 195 points, or 0.6%, at 35,814, while the S&P 500 closed up 8 points, or 0.2%, at 4,691.

Stocks of oil majors, particularly rallied, with Exxon up \$1.62, or 2.6%, at \$63.13 and Chevron rising \$2.39, or 2.1%, at \$116.30.

The Nasdaq Composite, which groups Big Tech names such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google, finished down 80 points, or 0.5%, at 15,775.

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#### **White House Says Has Nothing to Preview on Possible Biden-Putin Call**

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has nothing to preview on the content of a possible call between US President Joe Biden and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki told reporters.

"I do not have anything to preview along these lines at this point of time. I will reiterate that we remain in very close contact with our European partners," Psaki said during a press briefing in response to a question about the potential phone call and the Biden administration assessment of the situation in Ukraine.

Psaki pointed out that the United States has enough tools to address Russia's behavior on the issue of Ukraine.

The White House spokesperson said the United States had announced during the recent visit of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Washington that it would provide an additional \$60 million in security assistance.

"We have sent more than \$400 million overall this year to support Ukraine's sovereignty," Psaki added.

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#### **Afghanistan Needs Access to Global Relief to Avoid Humanitarian Disaster - Rights Group**

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The international community must urgently ease financial restrictions on Afghanistan that block the provision of health care, food and other essential services, threatening the lives of tens of millions, Amnesty International said in a press release.

"A combination of a suspension of foreign aid, the freezing of Afghan government assets, and international sanctions on the Taliban, have plunged a country already suffering from high poverty levels into a full-blown economic crisis," the release said on Tuesday.

The release cited United Nations estimates that 22.8 million Afghans, over half the nation's population, now face acute food insecurity and hunger, with at least a million children suffering from malnutrition. The United Nations also estimates that \$200 million in humanitarian aid per month is needed to avert disaster.

With the Taliban remaining on lists of internationally sanctioned groups, Afghanistan's foreign donors have moved to withhold and withdraw funding from the country following the group's capture of Kabul in August.

The Biden administration froze \$9.5 billion assets of the country's central bank. The European Union followed suit by withdrawing \$1.4 billion in aid, resulting in the closure of at least 2,000

health facilities serving 30 million Afghans. In addition, International Monetary Fund has frozen Taliban access to \$450 million, according to the release.

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#### New York Leads 3-States Seeking Tighter Truck Pollution Controls - Attorney General

NEW YORK , November 24 (Sputnik) - A tri-state coalition in the Northeastern United States is urging the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to toughen pollution limits on heavy-duty trucks to relieve the region from smog, New York Attorney Letitia James said.

"In a letter to EPA Administrator Michael Regan and National Climate Adviser Gina McCarthy, the attorneys general urged the EPA to act quickly to propose stronger standards for emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx) from new on-road heavy-duty trucks and engines for model year 2027 and beyond," James said in a press release on Tuesday.

The EPA has long recognized the serious public health and environmental harms caused by NOx emissions. NOx combines in the atmosphere with volatile organic compounds in the presence of heat and sunlight to form smog. As climate change causes warmer temperatures, smog formation will only worsen, the release said

Even though New York, Connecticut and New Jersey have implemented some of the most stringent control programs for NOx in the nation, the impact is limited due to the presence of heavy-duty trucks from other states, the release said.

In New York state alone, nearly 12.5 million residents - about two thirds of the population - breathe air with unhealthy levels of smog, the release added.

The release also cited a recent report by the American Lung Association saying that millions of New Yorkers with lung disease - including 380,000 children and over 1,600,000 adults suffering from asthma - are at special risk to the harmful effects of smog.

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#### US Conveyed to OPEC Members It Wants Increase in Oil Supply - White House

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The United States conveyed to OPEC members during recent communications that it wants to see increase in the oil supply and is ready to use its own tools as needed to reach this goal, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said.

"We've been clear that our preference was producing countries take action, but we were clear we would also use tools, our own tools to take action, meaning we were asking for an increase in supply but also made clear in our conversations, we would use our own tools as needed," Psaki said during a press briefing on Tuesday.

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**White House Says Does Not Rule Out Releasing More Oil From Reserves to Tackle High Prices**

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is not ruling out releasing more oil from the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve in an effort to reduce high gas prices, White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said during a press briefing.

"I'm not going to rule out options from here," Psaki said on Tuesday when asked whether the White House considers releasing more oil from reserves.

Psaki also said that President Joe Biden's top priority in the coming month will remain monitoring gas prices and adequate supply.

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**SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY**

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) -

#### **OIL MARKETS**

\* US President Joe Biden announced on Tuesday the release of 50 million barrels of oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve in concert with other energy consuming nations, including China, India, Japan, South Korea and the United Kingdom.

\* The United States ordered the release from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve in response to the oil prices hitting a seven-year high and to ensure adequate supply, the Energy Department said.

\* The South Korean government decided to sell part of its oil inventories from the country's strategic reserve in order to stabilize prices, as proposed by the United States, the country's foreign ministry said.

\* The United Kingdom will release 1.5 million barrels of oil from its strategic reserves, the Department of Energy said.

#### **US-RUSSIA MILITARY TALKS**

\* Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov spoke by phone with US Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley and the discussion focused on international security issues, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Tuesday.

#### **CONFLICT IN ETHIOPIA**

\* US Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Jeffrey Feltman said on Tuesday he sees "nascent progress" in bringing Ethiopia's warring parties to negotiations amid the ongoing military conflict.

\* The United Nations has decided to temporarily evacuate all eligible dependents from Ethiopia amid the worsening security situation in the country, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

\* Feltman warned that the situation in Ethiopia may escalate further and even cause communications blackouts.

#### NORD STREAM 2 DEVELOPMENTS

- \* The United States will continue to implement sanctions against entities linked to Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.
- \* The United States will continue to implement sanctions against entities linked to Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline, Price said.
- \* The United States has imposed Nord Stream 2-related sanctions on Cypriot entity Transadria Ltd and Russian-flagged Marlin vessel, the Department of Treasury said.

#### UN ENVOY FOR LIBYA RESIGNS

- \* UN Special Envoy for Libya Jan Kubis has resigned due to personal reasons, including health issues, a source at the United Nations told Sputnik on Tuesday.
- \* Kubis, who provided a notice earlier in the day of his resignation, will remain in the post for the time being and will brief the UN Security Council on the situation in the country Wednesday, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.
- \* United Kingdom diplomat Nicholas Kay is a possible candidate to replace Jan Kubis as UN Special Envoy, a source at the UN Security Council told Sputnik.

#### RUSSIA-CHINA MILITARY TALKS

- \* Russia and China are increasing the intensity of joint combat training, the military of the two countries interact on the ground, in the sea and in the air, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said on Tuesday.
- \* Shoigu and his Chinese counterpart Wei Fenghe agreed to step up cooperation between the armed forces of the two countries through strategic military exercises and joint patrols, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
- \* The migration crisis at the Belarusian-Polish border can be viewed as a result of external pressure on Minsk, Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev has said.
- \* Russia is successfully countering US military threats, demonstrating high economic growth, and has achieved success in the fight against coronavirus, Wei Fenghe said during a working meeting with Shoigu.

#### BELARUS-POLAND BORDER CRISIS

- \* The European Union estimates the number of undocumented migrants currently stranded in Belarus at 15,000 in addition to the 2,000 migrants on border with the bloc, European Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas said on Tuesday.
- \* Polish troops used firecrackers and tear gas against refugees on the night of November 22-23, the State Border Committee of Belarus said.
- \* Belarus is alarmed by the increase in the number of military contingent in Lithuania, Latvia and Poland, General Staff of Belarus' Armed Forces said.

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**US Energy Secretary Says Gas to Drop Below \$3 in Early 2022, Steadily Lower Thereafter**

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The price of gasoline in the US will drop below \$3 per gallon in early 2022 and then it will continue to decrease going forward, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said during remarks at the White House on Tuesday.

"As we know, and as the Energy Information Agency has projected, the price of gasoline will come down, what they project, to be below \$3 a gallon in 2022, early 2022, and continue to ratchet down bit by bit," Granholm said.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Biden administration approved the release of gasoline from the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve in an effort to lower gas prices.

The Biden administration wants to see the energy industry increase supply both domestically and abroad in order to meet consumer demand and lower prices, Granholm said during her remarks.

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**US House Panel Subpoenas Leaders of Proud Boys, Oath Keepers in January 6 Probe**

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The US House Select Committee investigating the January 6 Capitol protest said on Tuesday that it has subpoenaed the leaders of right-wing groups Proud Boys, Oath Keepers and the First Amendment Praetorian.

The committee said in a press release that it subpoenaed Proud Boys International LLC, Oath Keepers, and First Amendment Praetorian, including the leaders of the three organizations - Henry Tarrío, Elmer Stewart Rhodes and Robert Patrick Lewis, respectively.

The committee said all requested information related to the investigation must be provided by December 7 and the three individuals are ordered to appear for separate dispositions with the panel the week of December 14.

The organizations and their leaders are accused of being involved in the planning of the riot at the US Capitol and they may have information relevant to the panel's probe, the committee said. On Monday, the committee issued subpoenas to five individuals, including former Donald Trump campaign adviser Roger Stone and InfoWars founder Alex Jones.

Last week, former Trump adviser Steve Bannon pleaded not guilty on the contempt for Congress charge related to his refusal to testify before the committee.

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### State Dept on Russian Concerns of Military Drills Says US Stands for Rules-Based Order

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - US State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said in a press briefing on Tuesday that Washington is doing its utmost to reinforce rules-based system when asked whether Russia should feel intimidated by its military exercises.

"We stand up for the rules-based international order, that to us is what is important," Price said when asked whether Russia has any legitimate grounds to be feeling intimidated by US and NATO military exercises. "It is not that we have our sights on any particular country, it is that we are doing everything we can together with our allies, together with our partners to reinforce the rules based system and international order that has worked to the mutual benefit, mutual prosperity, security of the international community for the past 70 years or so."

Price said US military exercises are "routine and defensive in nature."

Last week, Russian President Vladimir Putin, in a phone conversation with French President Emmanuel Macron, drew attention to the provocative nature of the exercises conducted by the United States and a number of its allies in the Black Sea.

Earlier in November, Putin said that The Russian Defense Ministry suggested that the country should hold a military exercise in the Black Sea in response to the actions of the United States, but he thinks it is unreasonable, and there is no need to accelerate tensions there. Putin added that Russia will not do anything more than "escort [foreign] planes and ships."

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### US Wants to Lower Gas Prices by Increasing Supply at Home, Around World - Energy Secretary

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration wants the global energy industry to increase oil supply both in the United States and around the world in order to lower gas prices, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said on Tuesday.

"We want to encourage [the energy industry] to increase supply. We want supply to be increased both inside the United States and around the world so that we can reduce the pressures at the pump," Granholm said during remarks about the Biden administration's efforts to lower gas prices.

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### US Must Stop Relying on One Energy Source, Especially Volatile Sources - Granholm

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The United States must stop relying on a single source of energy, especially if that source is volatile, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said on Tuesday.

"As we look ahead, the situation shows that we've got to stop relying on one source of energy, especially from volatile sources," Granholm said during a press briefing at the White House. Granholm delivered remarks about the Biden administration's efforts announced earlier on Tuesday to curb rising gas prices, including by releasing gas from the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

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#### Biden Says Americans Will Not Face Empty Stores This Holiday Season

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - US consumers will not face empty shelves in stores during this holiday season, President Joe Biden said on Tuesday.

"Major retailers have confirmed their shelves will be well-stocked in stores this holiday season," Biden said, mentioning his recent meetings with CEOs of several big chains.

Several weeks ago people expressed concerns if stores will have enough food and other goods, Biden noted. He called those fears understandable.

However, US stores will have enough turkey for this Thanksgiving Day and gifts for upcoming Christmas, he promised.

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#### International Airline Trade Group Calls for Simplified COVID-19 Rules to Revive Travel

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The revival of global air travel to pre-pandemic levels requires that governments develop practical and predictable measures to mitigate the threat of COVID-19, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) said on Tuesday.

"Specifically, IATA urged governments to focus on three key areas: 1. Simplified health protocols; 2. Digital solutions to process health credentials [and] 3. COVID-19 measures proportionate to risk levels with a continuous review process," the trade group said in a press release.

The IATA recommendations are outlined in a newly released policy document titled, "From Restart to Recovery: A Blueprint for Simplifying Travel," the release said.

Over 100,000 COVID-19 related measures have been implemented by governments worldwide, with complexity exacerbated by inconsistencies the measures have created among nations, the release added.

Key IATA recommendations include the removal of all travel barriers, including quarantine and testing for fully vaccinated, and quarantine-free travel for non-vaccinated travelers with a negative pre-departure COVID-19 test result.

In addition, IATA urged governments recognize digital health credential such as the European travel certificate that is currently accepted by the EU and 22 non-EU states.

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**Biden Says Gas Price Jump Partially Due to Lack of Oil Producers Readiness to Meet Demand**

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - High gas prices are partially caused by the lack of oil producers' readiness to meet demand, US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday.

"The big part of the reason Americans are facing high gas prices [is] because oil producing countries and large companies have not ramped up to supply oil quickly enough to meet the demand," Biden said at the White House.

Smaller supply means higher prices globally, he added.

To address these issues, Biden said he communicated with leaders of other countries.

"India, Japan, Republic of Korea, the UK have released additional oil from their reserves, and China may do more as well," Biden said. "This coordinated action will help us deal with a lack of supply."

Earlier in the day, President Joe Biden announced the release of 50 million barrels of oil from the SPR in concert with other energy consuming nations, including China, India, Japan, South Korea and the UK.

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**US Special Envoy to Travel to Doha Next Week for Talks With Taliban -State Dept**

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - US special envoy for Afghanistan Thomas West will head to Qatar next week for two weeks of discussions with the Taliban (under UN sanctions over terrorist activities), State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

"I can confirm that next week Special Representative for Afghanistan Tom West will return to Doha for two weeks of meetings with Taliban leaders there," Price said. "They'll discuss, as I said before, our vital national interests when it comes to Afghanistan, that includes counterterrorism, that includes safe passage for US citizens and for Afghans to whom we have a special commitment and that includes humanitarian assistance and the economic situation of the country, that too will be a priority area of conversation with them."

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#### ANALYSIS - 'New Drama in Oil Swings' Seen in OPEC, Consumers Battle

NEW YORK, November 23 (Sputnik) - A new drama in world oil price volatility is expected with producers likely to tighten output further as major consumers release their crude reserves to push the market lower, commentators on energy markets told Sputnik on Tuesday. Earlier on Tuesday, the US Energy Department said that President Joe Biden had authorized the release of 50 million barrels from the country's Strategic Petroleum Reserve. India and Britain followed up with announcements of a 5-million barrel and 1.5-million barrel release from their reserves, respectively.

"We're probably in the phase of a new drama in oil swings," John Kilduff, founder of the Again Capital energy hedge fund and a prominent commentator on oil, said.

The United States' first ever coordinated release of its oil reserves with other consuming countries could be "a momentum killer that could certainly short circuit the rally and push prices lower" for crude, Kilduff said.

Yet, the Saudi Arabia-led OPEC, or Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, and its allies might strike back almost immediately with output reductions that could push the market back up, cautioned Kilduff.

"If the Saudis are upset by this, they could dial back in post-haste. Because essentially, the Saudis would be signaling that they want higher prices than actual barrel count," he said.

Edward Moya, head of US research at brokerage OANDA, concurred with that view.

"The focus is now solely back on OPEC and no one would be surprised if they scaled down their production plans given the short-term uncertainties to the crude demand outlook and some vengeance for the coordinated tapping of oil reserves," Moya told Sputnik.

China, South Korea and Japan are also expected to join the US plan after producers in OPEC+ repeatedly ignored calls by the consuming countries to pump more crude to match soaring demand for energy in economies emerging from the coronavirus pandemic. OPEC+ groups the 13-nation Saudi-led OPEC with 10 other oil producers steered by Russia.

US Energy Department in a news release said today's decision is in response to the highest oil prices experienced in seven years and aims to ensure adequate supply as we exit the pandemic.

Oil prices had risen more than 60% this year due to short supply versus demand, with OPEC+ focused on recovering from a market that crashed the prior year on demand destruction related to the COVID-19 crisis.

The West Texas Intermediate (WTI) benchmark for US crude fell to a historic minus \$40 per barrel in April 2020 at the height of the COVID-triggered oil price crisis. That prompted OPEC+ to launch the steepest ever cuts in world oil production.

Since then, WTI hit seven-year highs above \$85 in October while Brent rose above \$86, responding to the OPEC+ supply squeeze. That has led to soaring inflation in oil consuming countries, particularly the United States, which is grappling now with its worst price pressures in more than 30 years.

Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm earlier said working families and businesses were forced to pay the price because oil supply has not kept up with demand.

Only in recent weeks, had oil prices fallen from their highs.

But they rebounded on Tuesday as traders expected a swift response to the consumers' actions from OPEC+.

"This oil market deficit will not go away anytime soon," said OANDA's Moya. "The US may need to consider another SPR release, but even if they talk about it, energy traders know that OPEC+ controls this market."

Biden in a televised address alluded to Tuesday's release as being inadequate to pull the market lower immediately. While these combined efforts, he said, will not solve the problem of gas prices overnight, it will make a difference. He said it may take time but before long, Americans should see the price of gas drop.

Hours after the consumer countries announced their reserves release, WTI traded at \$78.64 per barrel, up \$1.89, or 2.5%, by 2:25 p.m. ET (19:25 GMT). Global crude benchmark Brent rose \$2.69, or 3.4%, to \$82.39.

OPEC+ is due to hold its monthly meeting on December 2, but the Saudis could announce a pullback in output before that, Kilduff said.

Until Tuesday's SPR release by the Biden administration, OPEC+ had been adding about 400,000 barrels daily to its output from cuts carried out earlier. Energy market experts estimate that some 5 million barrels of regular supply is being withheld by Saudi Arabia and its allies.

"The battle line is drawn here for sure," Kilduff said. "And if WTI gets below \$70, expect an even more bellicose response from the Saudis, where they'd go beyond the 400,000 barrels and into deeper production cuts."

Notwithstanding further OPEC+ cuts, the combined release of more than 55 million barrels announced so far could go some way in meeting peak heating demand for the northern hemisphere winter, said Kilduff.

"We needed about one million barrels a day extra to fill the gap," said Kilduff. "Just on its face, this should be able to get us through early January, and then, depending on what the Asians put on, it could make the difference."

Kilduff also cautioned about another unknown in the oil price drama - the emergence of new COVID-19 breakouts across Europe, which have already sent Austria into a new lockdown and Germany and others into considering the same.

"These new lockdowns are a real problem for energy demand... something not many in the energy markets anticipated," said Kilduff.

More than two million new infections have erupted each week across Europe, the most since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

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**Biden Says High Gas Prices Problem Not Just for Consumers in US But Around World**

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - High gas prices are a problem faced by consumers in the United States as well as by consumers around the world, President Joe Biden said during his remarks on the state of the US economy on Tuesday.

"Today though, I want to address another challenge that families are facing and the one that I think they're most focused on right now: high gas prices. This is a problem, not just here in the United States, but around the world. The price of gasoline has reached record levels recently in Europe and in Asia," Biden said.

Biden cited gas prices in France, Japan and the United States as evidence of the global price increases. However, the US president noted that the United States has been through worse price spikes before, including in 2012 and 2014.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Biden administration announced that it will be releasing 50 million barrels of oil from the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve in concert with other major energy consuming nations, including China, India, Japan, South Korea and the United Kingdom, to stem surging oil prices.

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**US in Regular Talks With Ukraine on Defense Needs, Nothing New to Preview - State Dept.**

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The United States is in regular talks with Ukraine about the country's defense-related needs, but there is nothing to preview at this time about new US security assistance packages, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday. "We are in regular consultation and dialogue with our Ukrainian partners about their defensive needs, we don't have anything to announce or preview at this time," Price said during a press briefing.

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**US to Continue Sanctions Against Entities Involved in Nord Stream 2 Pipeline - State Dept.**

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue to implement sanctions against entities linked to Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"We'll continue to examine entities engaged in potentially sanctionable activity in line with our commitment and it is our commitment to implement PEESA [Protecting Europe's Energy Security Act]," Price said during a press briefing. "Rest assured PEESA is something we are committed to, continuing to demonstrate our opposition to Nord Stream 2 and our commitment to Ukraine's energy security is something we will continue to do."

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US State Dept. Starts Talks With Congress on Actions Against Colombian Rebel Group FARC

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The US State Department started consultations with Congress on forthcoming actions against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"We have started the process of consulting with Congress on actions that we are taking with regard to the FARC but we will have more details on this in the coming days," Price said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Tuesday, US media reported that the Biden administration plans to remove FARC from the government's list of foreign terrorist groups.

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More Rigs, Not Single Release From Oil Reserve to Affect Long-Term Prices - Ex-US Official

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - A one time release from the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) will not have an effect on long-term oil prices, but increasing the number of oil rigs will, Branko Terzic, a former commissioner at the US Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, told Sputnik.

Earlier on Tuesday, President Joe Biden announced the release of 50 million barrels of oil from the SPR in concert with other major energy consuming nations, including China, India, Japan, South Korea and the United Kingdom, to stem surging oil prices.

"A one time release does not affect long-term prices, which are based on balancing long-term supply and long-term demand," Terzic said. "For example, increases in the number of US drilling rigs would factor into long-term price estimates since wells supply oil for years."

Asked how he sees the potential change in oil prices in the upcoming weeks and months, Terzic said the oil price "should increase per design of OPEC plus Russia's future production agreements" if the global economy continues to grow at the current rate.

The national average gas price dropped slightly on Tuesday from \$3.409 to \$3.403 per gallon, while the total monthly decrease reached almost 40 cents, according to the American Automobile Association. However, prices increased by more than \$1 as compared to 2020.

Prices at the pump have increased sharply over the past year under the Biden administration's policy to gradually get away from fossil fuels and seek alternative sources of energy and have hit highs above \$4.70 per gallon in California on Tuesday.

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**US Rights Group Urges Bangladesh to Halt Rohingya Relocations to Flood Prone Island**

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - Bangladesh needs to stop sending Rohingya refugees from crowded camps on the mainland to Bhasan Char island until the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) can protect the migrants and ensure the relocations are voluntary, Human Rights Watch said on Tuesday.

"Donors should insist that Bangladesh fully halt relocations until UNHCR has developed a process for ensuring free and informed consent," Human Rights Watch said in a press release. Refugees and humanitarian workers said the Bangladesh authorities have targeted hundreds of families in mainland camps to move them to the flood-prone island, claiming the move is needed to relieve overcrowding, the release said.

The move, however, would contravene an October 2021 agreement with UNHCR, which established a framework for the UN agency to support and protect refugees on Bhasan Char, the release said.

The Bangladesh authorities have already moved nearly 20,000 Rohingya refugees to the remote island, but many refugees were transferred to the island without full, informed consent and have been prevented from returning to the mainland, the release added.

The UN estimates that about 860,000 Rohingya refugees are housed in camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district, having fled violence and persecution in Myanmar, according to the release.

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**Oil Prices Rise Because Market Expected Higher Release From US Stockpile - Ex-Official**

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - Oil prices keep on increasing amid the Biden administration's announcement to release part of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) because demand is still high and the market expected a bigger release from the United States, Branko Terzic, a former commissioner of the US Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, told Sputnik.

"Oil Prices continued to go up because demand for oil is still strong and increasing and the market anticipated a higher release from the US stockpile," Terzic said.

Earlier on Tuesday, President Joe Biden announced the release of 50 million barrels of oil from the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve in concert with other major energy consuming nations, including China, India, Japan, South Korea and the United Kingdom, to stem surging oil prices.

"In the US, where every family has and needs more than one automobile, the politically important price is that of gasoline which on the East Coast is now near \$4 per gallon," Terzic said. "Current prices nationally are 30% above last year. An increase of another 20% would be politically unacceptable to the consumer. The Biden administration and Democratic party congressional leaders will do whatever they can to avoid that gasoline price increase scenario." The national average gas price dropped slightly on Tuesday from \$3.409 to \$3.403 per gallon, while the total monthly decrease reached almost 40 cents, according to the American Automobile Association. However, prices increased by more than \$1 as compared to 2020. Pump prices in the United States have increased sharply over the past year under the Biden administration's policy to gradually get away from fossil fuels and seek alternative sources of energy and have hit highs above \$4.70 per gallon in California on Tuesday.

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#### Apple Launches Lawsuit Against Israeli NSO Group Over Pegasus Surveillance

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - Apple has filed a lawsuit against Israeli NSO Group holding it accountable for the surveillance and targeting of the company's customers, the high tech giant said in a press release on Tuesday.

"Apple today filed a lawsuit against NSO Group and its parent company to hold it accountable for the surveillance and targeting of Apple users," the release said. "The complaint provides new information on how NSO Group infected victims' devices with its Pegasus spyware."

To prevent further abuse and harm to its users, Apple is also seeking a permanent injunction to ban NSO Group from using any Apple software, services, or devices, according to the release.

"State-sponsored actors like the NSO Group spend millions of dollars on sophisticated surveillance technologies without effective accountability. That needs to change," Apple Senior Vice President of Software Engineering Craig Federighi said in the release.

Earlier this month, the US Department of Commerce included NSO in its list of entities engaging in activities contrary to US national security. The group has been recently embroiled in a massive scandal revealing its Pegasus spyware was used to spy on the phones of about 50,000 targets, including politicians, businessmen, activists, journalists and opposition figures around the world.

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#### US Consumers to See Gas Price Decreases Soon After Oil Reserve Release - Senior Officials

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - Consumers in the United States should see a decrease in the prices of gas soon amid the Biden administration decided to release a portion of

the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR), senior administration officials told reporters on Tuesday.

"In terms of when consumers will see relief, we think that it needs to be soon and should be soon," the officials said. "Importantly, though, we've seen, over recent weeks, fall-especially as reports have come out about the actions that we were considering -falling oil prices, falling prices of unfinished gasoline."

Earlier on Tuesday, President Joe Biden announced the release of 50 million barrels of oil from the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve in concert with other major energy consuming nations, including China, India, Japan, South Korea and the United Kingdom, to stem surging oil prices. The Biden administration officials acknowledged that gas prices at the pump have so far not gone down significantly.

"That's why, you know, we see our actions here is two-pronged: first, making sure that the price of oil is coming down, reflecting the fact that we have to have supply matching demand, but also making sure that those savings are being passed through to consumers, which is why the President directed the Federal Trade Commission to investigate to see if there are anti-consumer practices in the oil and gas industry reflecting consolidation there," they said. However, the officials pointed out that they expect the oil industry to be passing through the savings to consumers as quickly as possible.

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Former US President Obama Nominated for Grammy Award for His Audiobook Memoir

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - Former US President Barack Obama has been nominated for the Grammy award for his audio book "A promised Land in the category Best Spoken Word Album, the Recording Academy said in a statement on Tuesday.

"Best Spoken Word Album Includes Poetry, Audio Books & Storytelling: Aftermath, LeVar Burton, Carry On: Reflections For A New Generation From John Lewis, Don Cheadle, Catching Dreams: Live At Fort Knox Chicago, J. Ivy, 8:46, Dave Chappelle & Amir Sulaiman, A Promised Land, Barack Obama," the statement said.

This is Obama's third attempt to get the award after being previously nominated in the same category in 2006 and 2008.

Published in November 2020, "A Promised Land" is the first of a planned two-volume memoir book that presents the time of Obama in office and describes his early years up through the assassination of Osama Bin Laden in 2011.

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UN General Assembly President to Visit China to Meet With Senior Officials - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, November 23 (Sputnik) - UN General Assembly President Abdulla Shahid will travel to China this week for talks with senior officials on the COVID-19 pandemic recovery, vaccine equity and climate change, his spokesperson Paulina Kubiak said on Tuesday.

"The President of the General Assembly (PGA) Abdulla Shahid is now heading to China. He is visiting for three days at the invitation of the government," Kubiak said during a press briefing.

"This trip is an opportunity to focus on some of the PGA's priorities, including recovery from COVID-19, vaccine equity, environment and climate change and multilateralism."

During his trip, which will take place from Thursday to Saturday, Shahid will meet with Chinese State Council Premier Li Keqiang and State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, she said.

Shahid will also speak with members of the All-China Women's Federation and the United Nations country team, she added.

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US, Malaysia Launch 8-Day Maritime Training Exercise – Navy

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) – The United States and Malaysia resumed an annual maritime exercise that was canceled last year due to the pandemic, with eight days of training divided into at-sea and virtual phases, the navy said on Tuesday.

"The eight-day engagement focuses on the full spectrum of naval capabilities and features cooperative evolutions that highlight the ability of the U.S. and Malaysia to work together toward the common goal of ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific," the US navy said in a press release.

The at-sea phase in the Strait of Malacca will include Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Tulsa, an MH-60S Seahawk helicopter and a P-8A Poseidon aircraft, the release said.

Ships from both nations will practice complex maneuvers, surface warfare, dive and salvage training, replenishment-at-sea, a gunnery exercise, and exchanges between Explosive Ordnance Disposal technicians, the release added.

Virtual events will feature information sharing, force protection, maritime domain awareness, and maritime law and law enforcement, according to the release.

The exercise resumes 27 years of maritime engagements between the US Navy and Royal Malaysian Navy following last year's cancellation due to COVID-19, the release noted.

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#### Kubis to Brief UN Security Council Wednesday, His Resignation Not Immediate - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, November 23 (Sputnik) - UN Special Envoy for Libya Jan Kubis, who provided a notice earlier in the day of his resignation, will remain in the post for the time being and will brief the UN Security Council on the situation in the country Wednesday, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

"We're working quickly as possible to ensure that there's a smooth transition. Mr. Kubis [is] still in his post. He is in his post today and he will be briefing the council tomorrow," Dujarric said during a press briefing on Tuesday.

"Mr. Kubis will not leave the seat and leave the mission [UN Stabilization Mission in Libya] hanging," Dujarric said.

When asked whether Kubis will still be representing the United Nations during the December 24 presidential election in Libya, Dujarric said he could not confirm it.

Dujarric also said Kubis' notice of resignation, which according to diplomatic sources was given due to personal and health reasons, did not come as a complete surprise to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

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#### Meta Declines to Comment on January 1 Deadline to Open Office in Russia

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - Meta, formerly known as Facebook, has declined to comment on its reaction to Russia giving major internet companies until January 1 to open representative offices in the country.

"Thank you for the inquiry; however, we have no comment," the company said in an email to Sputnik.

On Monday, Russian communications watchdog Roskomnadzor published a list of 13 foreign internet companies obligated to open representative offices in the country by January 1. The list includes Google, Apple, Meta Platforms, Twitter, TikTok, Telegram, Zoom, Viber, Spotify, Likee Pte. Ltd. (Likee), Discord, Pinterest and Twitch.

The companies are also obliged to post on their website an electronic feedback form for Russian users, register a personal account on the Roskomnadzor website to interact with authorities, and install a recommended views counter. In addition, foreign entities must restrict access to information that violates Russian law.

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#### UN Evacuates All Eligible Dependents From Ethiopia Amid Worsening Security - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, November 23 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has decided to temporarily evacuate all eligible dependents from Ethiopia amid the worsening security situation in the country, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"Given the security situation in the country and out of an abundance of caution, the United Nations has decided to reduce its footprint in the country by temporarily relocating all eligible dependents," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

Dujarric also said it is important to note that UN staff will remain in Ethiopia to deliver on the world body's mandates that include monitoring the situation as it evolves and continuing operations and support to all people in need of assistance.

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UK Diplomat Nicholas Kay 'Possible Candidate' to Become Next UN Envoy for Libya - Source

UNITED NATIONS, November 23 (Sputnik) - United Kingdom diplomat Nicholas Kay is a possible candidate to replace Jan Kubis as UN Special Envoy, a source at the UN Security Council told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"A possible candidate for the position of UN Special Envoy for Libya is Nicolas Kay," the source said.

Kubis resigned from the post citing personal reasons, including reasons concerning health.

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US Justice Dept. Sues to Halt Sugar Company Merger, Citing Concern Over Market Competition

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department said on Tuesday it is suing in a district court to block the acquisition of Imperial Sugar Company by the rival United States Sugar Corporation.

"The Department of Justice filed a civil antitrust lawsuit today to stop United States Sugar Corporation (U.S. Sugar) from acquiring its rival, Imperial Sugar Company (Imperial Sugar). The complaint, filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Delaware, alleges that the transaction would leave an overwhelming majority of refined sugar sales across the Southeast in the hands of only two producers. As a result, American businesses and consumers would pay more for refined sugar, a significant input for many foods and beverages," the Justice Department said in a press release.

US Attorney General Merrick Garland is quoted as saying in the statement that the Justice Department will not hesitate to "challenge anticompetitive mergers" that harm American consumers and businesses.

The Justice Department's complaint alleges that US Sugar and Imperial Sugar compete head-to-head in the southeastern US market, both having sugar refineries based in the region. That competition has resulted in lower prices, better-quality products and more reliable service for customers in the area, the Justice Department said.

US Sugar sells its product through the United Sugars Corporation – a marketing cooperative owned by US Sugar and three other refined sugar producers. The company currently competes only with Imperial Sugar and American Sugar Refining, better known by its "Domino" brand name, in the region.

The merger would leave only United Sugar and Domino to control the vast majority of refined sugar sales in the southeastern US, the Justice Department said. This would enhance the likelihood that the two companies coordinate with each other and refrain from competing aggressively, the Justice Department added.

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US Oil Reserve Release Important for Gas Prices But Biden Must Boost Home Output-Lawmaker

WASHINGTON, November 23 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration's decision to release part of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) helps tame the raising gas prices, but only increasing oil production at home can resolve the pricing problem inflicted by the administration's policy, US Senator Joe Manchin said on Tuesday.

"Today's release from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve is an important policy Band-Aid for rising gas prices but does not solve for the self-inflicted wound that shortsighted energy policy is having on our nation," Manchin, who chairs the US Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, said.

Earlier on Tuesday, President Joe Biden has announced the release of 50 million barrels of oil from the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve in concert with other major energy consuming nations, including China, India, Japan, South Korea and the United Kingdom, to stem surging oil prices.

"With an energy transition underway across the country, it is critical that Washington does not jeopardize America's energy security in the near term and leave consumers vulnerable to rising prices," Manchin said. "Historic inflation taxes and the lack of a comprehensive all-of-the-above energy policy pose a clear and present threat to American's economic and energy security that can no longer be ignored."

Manchin went on to say that the Biden administration should boost oil production at home.

"I continue to call on President Biden to responsibly increase energy production here at home and to reverse course to allow the Keystone XL pipeline to be built which would have provided our country with up to 900,000 barrels of oil per day from Canada, one of our closest allies," he said. "To be clear, this is about American energy independence and the fact that hard working Americans should not depend on foreign actors, like OPEC+, for our energy security and instead focus on the real challenges facing our country's future."

The national average gas price dropped on Tuesday slightly from \$3.409 to \$3.403 per gallon, while the total monthly decrease reached almost 40 cents, according to American Automobile Association data. However, prices increased by more than \$1 as compared to 2020.

Pump prices in the United States have increased sharply over the past year under the Biden administration's policy to gradually get away from fossil fuels and seek alternative sources of energy and have hit highs above \$4.70 per gallon in California on Tuesday.