

**1/10/22 Monday**

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Robert Durst, Real Estate Tycoon and Convicted Killer, Reportedly Dies At 78  
By - Morgan Artyukhina

Robert Durst was born on April 12, 1943, in New York, the oldest of four children and heir of New York real estate mogul Seymour Durst. He was worth an estimated \$65 million at the time of his death.

A little more than three months after being convicted of murdering his friend, real estate tycoon Robert Durst has reportedly died at the age of 78, his lawyer told the media on Monday. Chip Lewis, Durst's lawyer, told the [New York Times](#) that Durst has suffered cardiac arrest while at the San Joaquin General Hospital for testing, and could not be revived.

Durst was [sentenced to life in prison](#) in October 2021 for the 2000 murder of Susan Berman, who he killed because he feared she was about to reveal to police what she knew about his involvement in the death of his wife, Kathie. He was arrested for the murder based on his admission in a 2015 documentary about his life, during the filming of which he made comments on an open mic that he had "killed them all, of course."

Durst's sentencing took place while he was suffering a [dangerous bout of COVID-19](#), which required him to be hospitalized and placed on a ventilator.

Less than a month after being sentenced, [Durst was indicted](#) on a second-degree murder charge over the 1982 disappearance of Kathie, for whose death he has long been suspected as bearing the blame. He has also been suspected in numerous other deaths spread across several states and decades.

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US Sanctions 116 Ortega Admin Figures for 'Undermining' Nicaragua's Democracy on Inauguration Day  
By - Morgan Artyukhina

The Biden administration announced on Monday it had levied sanctions against scores of Nicaraguan officials, calling it a defense of democracy and human rights in the country. Washington rejected the Central American nation's recent elections because incumbent President Daniel Ortega, a socialist, won.

The sanctions were unveiled as Nicaragua was preparing to inaugurate the victors of the November 7, 2021, election, including Ortega, who will begin a fourth five-year term as president. He has been in office since 2007, winning [reelection four times](#) with comparable margins of support.

"In concert with democracies in the international community, the United States will continue to call out the Ortega-Murillo regime's ongoing abuses and will deploy diplomatic and economic tools to support the restoration of democracy and respect for human rights in Nicaragua," US Secretary of State [Antony Blinken said](#) on Monday.

"To that end, the Department of State is taking steps to impose visa restrictions on 116 individuals complicit in undermining democracy in Nicaragua, including mayors, prosecutors, university administrators, as well as police, prison, and military officials," he said.

The US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control ([OFAC](#)) [designated eight](#) Nicaraguan government officials as sanctions targets, including President Ortega and Vice President Rosario Murillo, Ortega's wife.

It also targets Bayardo De Jesus Pulido Ortiz, head of the personnel and cadre department of the Nicaraguan Army, and Bayardo Ramon Rodriguez Ruiz, chief of the general staff of the Nicaraguan Army, saying they led a violent crackdown on dissent beginning in 2018, when US-backed riots swept the country.

Defense Ministry Rosa Adelina Barahona De Rivas, Nahima Janett Diaz Flores, the director general of the Nicaraguan Institute of Telecommunications and Postal Services (TELCOR), and Celina Delgado Castellon, deputy director general of TELCOR and a member of the board of directors of the National Electric Transmission Company (ENATREL) representing TELCOR, were both sanctioned, as well. The Treasury said they were responsible for running a pro-Ortega troll farm on Facebook that Meta shut down in November, just days before the election.

[However, as Sputnik](#) and [The Grayzone reported](#) at the time, the accounts Meta deleted simply belonged to Nicaraguans who supported Ortega and said so on social media, or to journalists. The US Treasury also sanctioned Ramon Humberto Calderon Vindell, former president of the board of directors of Nicaraguan state-owned oil company Petroleos de Nicaragua, and president of the board of directors of the ENIMINAS. Its reasons for targeting the firm aren't related to any alleged repression, though, and seem to simply be intended to crush an important pillar of the Nicaraguan economy.

"The Government of Nicaragua's 2017 creation of state-owned ENIMINAS increased state involvement in the mining sector, especially gold mining, through joint ventures with private firms. The value of Nicaragua's gold exports has increased dramatically in recent years, driving profits to its allies in the private sector and increasing ENIMINAS revenues, which senior figures in the ruling party manage. Because ENIMINAS is owned or controlled by, or acts for or on behalf of, the Government of Nicaragua, officials of ENIMINAS are, therefore, officials of the Government of Nicaragua," OFAC said.

OFAC added the State Department was sanctioning dozens of mayors, prosecutors, university administrators, and officials in the military and the police and prison systems, calling them "complicit in undermining democracy in Nicaragua."

At the same time, the European Union also [unveiled sanctions](#) on seven individuals and three entities in Nicaragua, including many of the same targets as Washington.

#### 40 Years of US Coup Attempts

It's a playbook the US has used time and again in Latin America, going back to the September 11, 1973, coup in Chile that saw the democratic socialist government of President Salvador Allende overthrown by the murderous military junta headed by Augusto Pinochet. More recently,

the US has used it against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, where President Nicolas Maduro and the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) have been denounced as illegitimate and authoritarian by Washington, which has instituted crushing economic sanctions intended to force the Venezuelan people into revolting against their government.

The US has opposed Ortega and the democratic socialist Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) since they first seized power in 1979 and ousted the US-backed Somoza regime.

Through the 1980s, the US backed right-wing Contra guerrilla fighters who targeted institutions associated with the FSLN's social programs, including rural hospitals and schools. By 1990, Nicaraguan voters removed Ortega from office in a bid to escape crushing US sanctions.

However, by 2006, 15 years of neoliberal reforms to suit the cheap labor demands of US-based corporations had proven deeply unpopular, and voters brought Ortega and the FSLN back.

Ortega quickly grew close to Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, and other Latin American leftist states, earning the lasting enmity of the US, which renewed its attempts to overthrow him. Deadly protests in 2018, which targeted police and FLSN figures, were hailed in Washington as pro-democracy protests, and the arrest of leading figures in the demonstrations last year was denounced by the US as an attack on democracy because many had registered as election candidates.

Just days before the election, the US Congress passed the Reinforcing Nicaragua's Adherence to Conditions for Electoral Reform ([RENACER Act](#)), which created a framework for a new regime of punishing sanctions in case Ortega won the election.

In response to RENACER and other US attacks, [Nicaragua quit](#) the Organization of American States (OAS) after the November election, saying the group "has as its mission to facilitate the hegemony of the United States with its interventionism against the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean."

"We do not view ourselves as a colony of any power, and we claim national dignity and decorum, in legitimate defense of our independence, sovereignty and self-determination, in the face of aggressive actions, violations of the UN Charter and international law by the Organization of American States, the United States of North America and of other colonialist and neocolonialist entities, which at this point in life believe that they have the power to subdue and humiliate our worthy people and government," Nicaraguan Foreign Minister [Denis Moncada](#) [said](#) at the time.

Several Latin American leaders traveled to Managua to attend Ortega's and Murillo's inauguration, including Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel. Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador sent Ramiro Ayala, Mexico's charge d'affaires in Nicaragua, saying that despite qualms about the election results, "we can't set aside our policy of national self-determination and independence."

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North Korea Fires Unidentified Projectile Toward East Sea in Latest Launch - South Korean JCS  
By - Morgan Artyukhina

North Korea has maintained a unilateral moratorium on testing long-range ballistic missiles since April 2018, but tested a variety of other shorter-range weapons it says aren't barred by United Nations resolutions.

Less than a week after what it said was the country's [second hypersonic missile test](#), the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has reportedly fired another projectile into the Sea of Japan, according to South Korean and Japanese defense officials.

The projectile has not yet been identified, but was noted by the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff as a possible ballistic missile launch. A hypersonic glide vehicle like that tested last week also begins its flight atop a rocket booster, but soon detaches to glide unpowered toward its target instead of following a standard ballistic trajectory.

Japanese officials said the projectile landed outside the country's exclusive economic zone. The government reportedly formed a crisis response center in response to the launch.

On Monday, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield criticized the DPRK's recent missile test, saying they "increase the risks of miscalculation and escalation and pose a significant threat to regional stability."

"Our goal remains complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. We are prepared to engage in and support serious and sustained diplomacy to that end. It is the DPRK that now must choose dialogue and peace over its unlawful and threatening weapons program," she added. The UN Security Council met shortly afterward to discuss the launch in a closed-door hearing.

Pentagon press secretary John Kirby also said on Monday that the US was still assessing last week's test, adding that regardless of whether it was a traditional ballistic missile or hypersonic weapon, it "continues to be in violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions and we certainly call on the DPRK to abide by those obligations and those responsibilities and to look for ways to deescalate."

According to the DPRK's Korean Central News Agency, the January 5 test demonstrated the glide vehicle's ability to maneuver as well as its high degree of accuracy in striking the target. It also showed the rocket's fuel ampoule system could operate under harsh wintry conditions. The US has long sought to force the DPRK to give up its ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programs by imposing crushing economic sanctions. Pyongyang says it needs the weapons to guarantee its security in the absence of a permanent peace treaty ending the Korean War, which began in 1950 and only ended with a ceasefire in 1953. It has said it will give up its nuclear weapons if the US removes its sanctions and its 28,500 troops stationed in South Korea, but the Biden administration says it will not begin talks with the DPRK without prior guarantees about North Korean denuclearization.

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China Tests 12.5 Million in Zhengzhou for Covid in Six Hours, Gears Up for Same in Shenzhen, Tianjin

By - Morgan Artyukhina

The global outbreak triggered late last year by the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 has affected China, too, where health officials and public administrators have worked tirelessly to keep the country's vaunted "zero Covid" policy in place and control the outbreak along with still-existing Delta variant cases.

On Friday, Chinese health authorities began testing every single resident of Zhengzhou, the capital of China's central Henan Province, after a handful of COVID-19 cases were detected in the massive city of 12.5 million. Just six hours later, they were finished, achieving a rate of 2.1 million people tested per hour, or 583 residents per second, according to [the Global Times](#). For comparison, that is equal to New York City and Chicago combined. On Sunday, health officials set about trying to do it again with the even [larger city of Tianjin](#), home to 14 million people.

China's National [Health Commission reported](#) a total of 157 new cases in all of mainland China on Sunday, 97 of which were domestically transmitted. Of those 97, 60 were in Henan, including 24 in Zhengzhou, and 21 cases in Tianjin, a port city southeast of Beijing. The city also said over the weekend that it had detected two cases of Omicron.

According to the Global Times, officials in Henan implemented lessons learned from Xi'an, the city of 13 million in Shaanxi that has been [under sustained lockdown](#) for several weeks and where more than 1,700 cases have been detected. In the year 2021, [just two deaths](#) were recorded in China as caused by COVID-19.

By comparison, the US has seen more than 60 million cases of COVID-19 in total, and more than 835,000 deaths. On Sunday, the country's seven-day daily new case average stood at 674,000 cases, [according to data](#) from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Biden administration has explicitly [sworn off another lockdown](#) to stem the spread of Covid cases. The [CDC has forecast](#) nearly 85,000 additional COVID-19 deaths by the end of the month.

Zhang Boli, a Covid-19 specialist and president of the Tianjin University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, told the [South China Morning Post](#) that an asymptomatic "superspreader" had evaded detection for several days thanks to negligence by local authorities, who have since been punished.

China's urgency is in part due to its longstanding [policy of "zero Covid,"](#) which has kept the number of cases in the country to about 120,000 since the start of the SARS-CoV-2 outbreak in Wuhan in December 2019 and deaths to less than 4,700. However, the capital of Beijing is preparing to host the 2022 Winter Olympics in early February, and a major Covid outbreak could ruin the event, as it nearly did the Summer Olympics in Tokyo last year.

Parallel to its Zero Covid policy, China has implemented one of the world's most effective vaccination programs, achieving a vaccination rate of 86% as of Sunday, [according to NHC data](#). That amounts to 1.21 billion people out of China's 1.4 billion population.

"Under the overarching goal of preventing imported infections and domestic flare-ups, this policy means that when a new local outbreak occurs, measures will be taken to promptly stem the spread of the virus and clear new infections," Liang Wannian, head of the National Health Commission's COVID-19 leading task force, [told China Daily](#) on Sunday.

"This approach is the best option and the guiding principle of China's disease control work. We must resolutely adhere to the policy and protect the health and safety of the population as the top priority," he added.

The [SCMP reported on Monday](#) that health officials had also detected a cluster of COVID-19 infections in Shenzhen, a city in Guangdong that is adjacent to Hong Kong Special Autonomous Region. The infections are believed to have arrived in the port city in contaminated goods from overseas. In addition, four locally spread cases of the Delta variant were detected in the city over the weekend.

According to the Hong Kong-based paper, Shenzhen officials started testing all 12.5 million residents of Shenzhen on Saturday, and bus stations and ferry terminals have closed to prevent further spread of the disease. People wishing to leave the city must show a negative COVID-19 test result taken within 48 hours of their departure. Similar tactics have been deployed across China, including along its 23,500 miles of high-speed rail lines connecting all the country's major cities.

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Sen. Sanders: GOP Base Growing as Democratic Party Turns Its Back on the Working Class  
By - Evan Craighead

Between Biden's low approval rating and a gubernatorial loss in the battleground state of Virginia, Democrats have a lot to prove and even more to lose in the upcoming 2022 midterm elections. While Democrats hold the White House and both chambers of Congress, the party has failed to produce the transformational legislation many voters envisioned.

Democrats, although faced with centrist hurdles, must make "a major course correction" and refocus legislative efforts on fighting for the American working class, according to Sen. Bernie Sanders, whose comments were [published exclusively by The Guardian on Monday](#).

Sanders, who serves as chairman of the US Senate Committee on the Budget, told the outlet that the GOP has been able to expand its base due to its appeal to the average employed American.

"It's not because the Republican party has anything to say to them," Sanders observed. "It's because in too many ways the Democratic party has turned its back on the working class." The Vermont senator also noted that lawmakers have fallen victim to capitalism and have ignored the true concerns of the average voter, including low wages, lack of healthcare, debt, and the threat of homelessness.

"It's important that we have the guts to take on the very powerful corporate interests that have an unbelievably powerful hold on the economy of this country," Sanders noted.

While it is hard to approve legislation via the 60-vote threshold in a Senate comprised of 50 Democrats and 50 Republicans, there should be more push—particularly from Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer—to set forth legislation with widespread voter support, such as medicare for all, stricter gun laws, and a wealth tax.

"People can understand that you sometimes don't have the votes," Sanders said. "But they can't understand why we haven't brought up important legislation that 70 or 80% of the American people support."

He also called on Schumer to hold votes on bills to support working families, such as proposals on extending the child tax credit and raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

The US senator from Vermont spoke with the UK-based outlet on January 6, marking the one-year commemoration of a violent and deadly attack by supporters of then-US President Donald Trump against the US Capitol building and its inhabitants.

Sanders also released a statement declaring that American "democracy is under attack from Republicans in Congress" and pointing out that many GOP-controlled state legislatures are working to enact laws that will make it "harder for [people of color and young people to vote.](#)"

The US senator called on Congress to end the disconnect between Americans and politicians, a result of the repetitive cycle of unfulfilled campaign promises.

"Congress must boldly address the long-neglected crises facing the working people of this country," Sanders added, highlighting the strength of the American working-class vote.

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Strong Magnitude 6.5 Earthquake Strikes Cyprus Region - EMSC

By - Evan Craighead

The European-Mediterranean Seismological Center registered a magnitude 6.5 earthquake in the Cyprus region around 3:07 a.m., local time, on Tuesday. The event occurred approximately 55 kilometers from Emba, Cyprus, and is estimated to have a depth of 2 kilometers.

The EMSC's magnitude 6.5 reading is up from the organization's previous 6.3-magnitude estimate.

The earthquake was reportedly felt in regions as far away as Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, Israel and Egypt.

"Wardrobe doors shook and opened," a resident of Pólis, Cyprus, some 40 kilometers from the event's epicenter, said to the EMSC.

Another individual, approximately 53 kilometers from the earthquake's epicenter, said they were woken up by the sound of their home shaking.

The United States Geological Survey [registered the seismic event](#) at magnitude 6.6.

One earthquake witness in Tala, Cyprus, some 55 kilometers from the epicenter, said they woke up amid a "quite violent" shake that lasted "10 seconds."

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GOP Leader Vows to Oust Reps. Schiff, Swalwell & Omar From Panels if Republicans Retake House

By - Evan Craighead

In March, the US House rejected a bid by GOP leader McCarthy to remove Rep. Swalwell from the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence over possible campaign fundraising ties with Christine Fang, a suspected Chinese operative. McCarthy has said that the GOP plans to retaliate for Reps. Greene and Gosar being removed from their respective panels.

Democrats should expect major committee shakeups if the GOP is able to retake the US House of Representatives, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) told Breitbart News in a Monday interview, claiming that the left established a precedent for panel assignments.

"The Democrats have created a new thing where they're picking and choosing who can be on committees," McCarthy said on Monday, referring to the Democrat-majority House's decisions to oust Reps. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) and Paul Gosar (R-AZ) from their respective committees back in 2021.

Gosar was removed from both the House Committee on Natural Resources and House Committee on Oversight and Reform [following a 223-207 vote to censure him](#) for posting an animated video that depicted him using a sword to kill Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY). AOC served alongside Gosar on the Oversight and Reform panel.

Months prior, 11 House Republicans [voted with Democrats to remove Greene from her briefly-held positions](#) on the House Committee on the Budget and the House Committee on Education and Labor. The 230-199 vote came about in relation to incendiary, conspiracy theory-laden remarks uttered by Greene prior to her election to public office.

The GOP leader has maintained that Democrats were carrying out a ["partisan power grab"](#) and established a political precedent with their moves.

McCarthy said that, in the event that Republicans retake the House, the GOP will use this new standard to remove Rep. Eric Swalwell (D-CA) from his committee assignments—particularly his spots on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and the House Committee on Homeland Security.

The GOP leader suggested that if Swalwell, who ran for the Democratic nomination in the 2020 presidential primaries, "cannot get a security clearance in the private sector, there is no reason why he should be given one to be on Intel or Homeland Security."

House Republicans have previously argued that Swalwell should be pulled from committee assignments and even public office over a connection to Fang, a Chinese national accused of targeting local politicians that Beijing allegedly deemed to be up-and-coming and likely to hold higher office.

While federal investigators were involved in the matter, Swalwell was never accused of wrongdoing and reportedly cut ties with the alleged Chinese operative after US authorities made him aware of her activities. The Chinese government denied all associated allegations.

McCarthy also declared that the House Foreign Affairs Committee should no longer include Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-MN), who was at odds with members of her own party and accused by some of antisemitism last year after appearing to liken the US and Israel to Hamas and the Taliban\*.

[Omar later declared](#) that she did not regret her comments on Israel, a country that "hypnotized the world," according to a 2012 tweet posted when she was a private citizen.

"Adam Schiff, he should not be serving on Intel," McCarthy continued, referring to Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA), chairman of the US House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

McCarthy claimed that Schiff "lied to the American public" in supporting an unverified spy dossier authored by former British intelligence officer Christopher Steele.

Rep. Mike Turner (R-OH) was recently appointed as the top GOP member on the US House Intelligence Committee, replacing Rep. Devin Nunes (R-CA), who [resigned from Congress to head former US President Donald Trump's most recent social media venture](#).

Lauren French, a spokesperson for Schiff, [told Axios](#) that while "it is always difficult to take Kevin McCarthy seriously," it would be "catastrophic" if the GOP reclaimed the chamber and the position of House Speaker.

"[H]e will exist solely to do Donald Trump's bidding," French remarked.

Swalwell tweeted that McCarthy's continued pledge to unseat Democrats is an attempt to make up for his inability to quell extremist elements in the Republican party.

"McCarthy is targeting me for 1 reason: I'm effective. He wants to carry water (& sort Starbursts) for Trump's Big Lie & not be called out," [tweeted Swalwell](#), referring to Trump's unsubstantiated claims of widespread voter fraud in the 2020 presidential election.

"He's projecting onto me b/c he's incapable of facing down the Ku Klux Klan elements in his caucus," he added. "If he thinks he's silencing me, he's not."

McCarthy's comments came as part of a long-form video taped in December 2021 at an Eastern Market establishment in Washington DC.

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Trump Lawyers Claim Immunity, Ask Judge to Toss Civil Suits Seeking Damages for Jan. 6 Riot  
By - Evan Craighead

The first civil suit leveled against former US President Donald Trump over the January 6 US Capitol riot was filed in February 2021 by Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-MS) and the NAACP. The suit characterized the deadly storming of the federal building as the result of a "carefully coordinated campaign to interfere" with the US electoral process.

On Monday, lawyers for Trump cited presidential immunity in a request to have a federal judge in Washington, DC, dismiss a slew of suits that accuse the then-US president of conspiring with far-right groups and other entities to block the certification of Electoral College votes.

"There has never been an example of someone successfully being able to sue a president for something that happened during his term of office," claimed Trump lawyer Jesse Binnall to US District Judge Amit Mehta.

The judge, during the five-hour hearing, appeared skeptical of the Trump team's position.

"Is there anything the president could say while president of the United States that could subject him to civil suits?" posed Mehta, who was appointed by then-US President Barack Obama in 2014.

"When that person holds the office, for that term of office, what a president does is constantly part of being the sole person responsible for the executive branch of government," Binnall replied.

In addition to Thompson's civil suit, there was another filed by Rep. Eric Swalwell (D-CA), and a third by US Capitol Police officers James Blassingame and Sidney Hemby, who argue that Trump is liable for the damages associated with the deadly insurrection. Lawmakers have said that Trump violated the Ku Klux Klan Act, an 1871 piece of civil rights legislation geared toward combating the KKK and other white supremacy organizations.

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Hijackers Interrupt Livestreamed Djokovic Court Hearing With Loud Music and Porn  
By - Mary Manley

Pranksters had something else in mind on Monday when they targeted and disrupted a court hearing with loud music and porn. Novak Djokovic, the 20-time Grand Slam tennis champion from Serbia, was in a virtual court on Monday in a hearing related to his visa cancellation when hijackers interrupted the online legal proceedings.

Just before the livestream kicked off, unsuspecting journalists who clicked on an expired Microsoft Teams link supplied by the court were bombarded with porn instead of the anticipated visa-related court hearing.

Australian journalist Sarah Dankert described the livestreamed chaos as, “techno blasting, giggling, shouting and someone is just saying Nole repeatedly in a pained voice.”

Once the tainted link was eventually replaced with a new link, just in time for the 10 a.m. hearing, it was found to lead to a website that had crashed after being overcome with visits. According to [The Times of India](#), the virtual chaos continued when a member of the public gained access to the court proceedings’ livestream, announcing, “We’re in.”

Presiding Judge Anthony Kelly responded: “Can I ask whoever is on screen to mute themselves... the only people who should be online with their microphones are those who are making submissions to the court.”

The court continued to struggle with technical difficulties, with most media outlets gathering their information from a re-broadcast offered by a tennis podcast.

Finally, the court provided a link to their YouTube channel, just in time for those watching to hear the final ruling in Novak Djokovic v Minister for Home Affairs, in which Djokovic won his case. Djokovic recently grabbed mainstream headlines as he tried to enter Australia with a COVID-19 vaccine medical exemption for the Australian Open, one of four major annual grand slams. However, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has argued that the tennis champion didn’t get one to enter the country.

The Serbian player has since been held in immigration detention at the [Park Hotel](#) in Melbourne. The hotel has received criticism by [human rights activists](#) for detaining asylum seekers for undisclosed periods at a time, sometimes years, and serving detainees food which, according to some reports, was either moldy or crawling with maggots.

Ian Rintoul, a spokesperson at Refugee Action Coalition said, “[The maggots] were alive in the plastic dish... People refused to eat it and demanded that it be taken away.”

The [Australian government](#) considered Djokovic to be a health and safety risk, as he isn't vaccinated, and though Djokovic has won his initial court case and has been released from immigration detention, the Australian government has warned him that the immigration minister is still able to cancel his visa. Therefore, although he has been able to leave the Park Hotel, his chance to play in the Australian Open remains undetermined.

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'I Have No Words': Friends, Co-Stars & Fellow Comedians Pay Tribute After Death of Bob Saget

By - Mary Manley

Friends, fellow comedians and co-stars have paid tribute to comedian and America's TV dad Bob Saget, who was found dead in his Ritz Carlton hotel room in Orlando on Sunday. He was 65.

A [Monday statement](#) released by Joshua Stephany, the chief medical examiner of Orange and Osceola Counties, revealed on Monday that initial findings suggest "no evidence of drug use or foul play." However, the cause of death remains unknown. A complete autopsy report is expected to be released in the coming months.

Bob Saget was known famously for his role as Danny Tanner on the 1990s sitcom "Full House," the narrator for "How I Met Your Mother," and host of "America's Funniest Home Videos." The day before he died, Saget had performed a stand-up show at the Ponte Vedra in Florida as part of a tour planned to run until June of 2022.

John Stamos, who co-starred as Uncle Jesse on "Full House," wrote on [Twitter](#): "I am broken. I am gutted. I am in complete and utter shock. I will never ever have another friend like him. I love you so much Bobby."

"I don't know what to say. I have no words. Bob was one of the best human beings I've ever known in my life. I loved him so much," [grieved](#) Candace Cameron Bure, the actress who played the role of D.J. Tanner, Saget's TV daughter.

Those who worked with Saget on "Full House" were particularly heartbroken to hear the news. The show ran for 8 seasons from 1987 to 1995. The show's reboot "Fuller House" began streaming on Netflix in 2016.

Mary Kate and Ashley Olson, who both took turns playing Saget's TV daughter Michelle, took the opportunity to reach out. "Bob was the most loving, compassionate and generous man. We are deeply saddened that he is no longer with us but know that he will continue to be by our side to guide us gracefully as he always has," the two said in a joint statement to American weekly magazine [People](#).

With the influx of shared grief and mourning, tributes on Twitter read more as news of a close friend and TV family member's death than that of a co-worker. Dave Coulier, who co-starred as Uncle Joey on "Full House," [took to Twitter](#) to say, "My heart is broken. I love you, Bob. Your forever brother, Dave."

Henry Winkler [tweeted](#): “BOB...it was great to know you... Oh are you going to make God blush,” referring to Saget’s explicit comedy routines far off from the family-friendly dad most viewer’s grew up knowing.

Comedian Mike Young, who worked and toured with Saget for 10 years, posted a heartfelt caption attached to a photo of the two on [Instagram](#): “I love you Bob. The tears will come and go for a long time. We will watch out for Kelly and check in on the kids, Bob I promise.”

Co-star Josh Radnor, who worked with Saget on “How I Met Your Mother,” [tweeted](#) that “Bob Saget was the older wiser ‘me’ for nine years on How I Met Your Mother. He was the kindest, loveliest, funniest, most supportive man. The easiest person to be around. A mensch among mensches.”

Other celebrities who [tweeted](#) in response to news of Bob Saget’s death include Ben Stiller, Whoopi Goldberg, Judd Apatow, Billy Crystal, Patton Oswalt and Joel McHale.

Pete Davidson, a fellow comedian and cast member of the late-night sketch show “Saturday Night Live,” revealed close, personal ties to Saget in a statement he asked his friend Dave Sirius to share via [Twitter](#), as Davidson does not have his own social media.

“When I was younger and several times throughout our friendship he helped me get through some rough mental stuff,” Davidson recalled. “He stayed on the phone with my mom for hours trying to help in any way he can – connecting us with doctors and new things we can try. He would check in on me and make sure I was okay.”

Saget leaves behind his wife Kelly Rizo, a journalist aged 42, as well as three daughters.

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US Surgeons Transplant Pig Heart Into Human Patient in First-Ever Operation

By - Nevin Brown

Surgeons in Baltimore, Maryland, have successfully performed a first-of-its-kind organ transplant of a genetically-modified pig heart into a human patient. The groundbreaking operation has the medical community excited over the growing potential of xenotransplantation. The eight-hour surgery was performed at the University of Maryland Medical Center on Friday. The 57-year-old recipient of the pig heart was David Bennett Sr, who required the surgery after it had become the only option to save his life as he was deemed too sick to qualify for a human heart.

[According to officials at the University of Maryland Medical Center](#), Bennett said before his surgery, “It was either die or do this transplant.” He added, “I want to live. I know it’s a shot in the dark, but it’s my last choice.”

Dr. Bartley Griffith, who first raised the possibility to Bennett, recounted his conversation with him: “I said, ‘We can’t give you a human heart; you don’t qualify. But maybe we can use one from an animal, a pig. It’s never been done before, but we think we can do it.’”

At first, Griffith was unsure if Bennett fully understood what he was suggesting, but when, “he said, ‘Well, will I oink?’” He knew he was on board.

Before the surgery could be performed, the US Food and Drug Administration had to give the transplant surgeons an emergency authorization.

The surgery has exceeded all previous xenotransplantation surgeries to date. According to doctors, Bennett is doing well, his new heart is doing most of the work, and he could come off the heart-lung bypass machine on Tuesday.

Xenotransplantation surgeries have failed in the past because the human body rejects the foreign organ. However, breakthroughs in gene editing have allowed for the development of pig hearts that the human body is less likely to reject. The heart Bennett received had four pig genes inactivated and six human genes inserted so the human immune system would be less likely to attack it.

If the surgery proves to be successful, it could pave the way for thousands of Americans to extend their lives and improve their quality of life.

[According to the United Network for Organ Sharing](#), 41,354 Americans received a transplanted organ last year but close to half a million Americans are currently on a waiting list for an organ and about 12 people die a day waiting.

Dr. David Klassen, the chief medical officer of the United Network for Organ Sharing, believes that “this is a watershed event.”

“Doors are starting to open that will lead, I believe, to major changes in how we treat organ failure,” Klassen said before cautioning that “events like these can be dramatized in the press, and it’s important to maintain perspective.”

“It takes a long time to mature a therapy like this,” he underscored.

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Power Outage Prompts Connectivity Setbacks at London Metal Exchange

By - Nevin Brown

A power outage at a third-party data center has led to connectivity issues and cut off some traders from the London Metal Exchange (LME). The exchange sets the global standard for commerce in metal commodities.

[According to data from Bloomberg](#), the last trades conducted were before 2:00 a.m. Tuesday, Shanghai time, with the platform usually closing at 3 a.m. Trading, set to resume at 9:00 a.m., Shanghai time, remains unavailable.

A spokesperson for the LME said, “We are looking into this as a matter of urgency, and are keeping market participants updated on progress.”

According to Eric Liu, head of trading at ASK Resources Ltd., in Shanghai, “The LME couldn’t open for trading due to a connectivity issue at a third party data center.” He added, “this will affect arbitrage trades in particular as other exchanges are operating. But we have no options but to wait for that to be solved.”

The location of the third-party data center is currently unknown and no timetable has been issued for its reopening.

The London Metal Exchange is the world's largest metal exchange. The total value of trading at the LME is some \$11.6 trillion annually.

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Miami Dolphins Fire Head Coach Brian Flores After Three Seasons  
By - Nevin Brown

The Miami Dolphins made the shocking decision to fire head coach Brian Flores after three seasons and a 24-25 record. The Dolphins finished the season winning eight of their final nine games, missing the playoffs by one game.

The Miami Dolphins' owner, Stephen Ross, released a statement over the decision to dump Flores.

"After evaluating where we are as an organization and what we need going forward to improve, I determined that the dynamics of our football organization weren't functioning at a level I want it to be and felt that this decision was in the best interest of the Miami Dolphins," said Ross.

According to reports, Flores' relationships with key members of the organization had soured. His relationship with quarterback Tua Tagovailoa and the team's general manager, Chris Grier, had reportedly gotten to the point where ownership felt Flores had to go.

His quick hook for assistant coaches was reported to have rubbed the organization the wrong way. In three seasons, Flores had three different offensive coordinators.

Flores' tenure in Miami has come to a close, but he is expected to be a top candidate for the five other head coach openings, with a possibility of more openings in coming days.

Flores' tenure as head coach had been lauded for turning around the franchise. In his first season, the Dolphins went 5-11, the next season they improved to 10-6, and this most recent season the Dolphins finished the first 17-game season in NFL history 9-8. Prior to Flores, the last time the Dolphins had two consecutive winning seasons was 2002-2003.

Flores' final season with the Dolphins was as up and down as they come. After winning their opening game they lost seven consecutive games. No team in NFL history has ever made the playoffs after starting a season so poorly.

The Dolphins turned their season around by winning seven straight games and, with two games left, controlled their playoff destiny. The Dolphins split their final two games, a loss to the Tennessee Titans and a victory over the New England Patriots. While the Dolphins missed the playoffs in each of Flores' three seasons, the +66 point differential in Flores' second season was their best showing since 2002.

During Flores' tenure in Miami, the quarterback situation was far from ideal. The franchise started with journeyman Ryan Fitzpatrick before drafting Tua Tagovailoa with the fifth overall pick in the 2020 NFL Draft. Tagovailoa had been a highly-rated prospect but suffered a serious hip injury in his final collegiate season. His play in the pros has been inconsistent, leading to rumors that the Dolphins were interested in upgrading their quarterback.

Flores' inability to foster productive relationships with his young quarterback and general manager ultimately doomed him, according to reports. His ability to coach and keep a team

together were on display throughout his tenure. Flores is unlikely to remain out of a job, so long as he wants it, for long.

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#### NATO States With Economic Ties to Russia More Geared to Diplomacy in Ukraine Crisis - Poll

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - Western nations with stronger economic ties to Russia are more likely to seek a diplomatic resolution to the Ukraine crisis, according to a Morning Consult poll out on Tuesday.

"As US and Russian officials meet in Europe this week for high-stakes talks, Morning Consult polling shows adults who reside in countries that would be impacted the most by proposed economic sanctions against Moscow are the most likely to support a diplomatic approach to resolve the Ukraine crisis, and more likely to think negotiations can deter Russia from invading Ukraine," the pollster said.

When asked what stance they would prefer to see the United States take with regard to the Ukraine conflict, 51% of adults in Germany replied that they would like to see "diplomatic negotiations with Russia." Only 11% spoke in favor of "imposing sanctions on Russia" and 15% that the US should offer military support to Ukraine.

Forty-nine percent of the French and 42% of British would similarly prefer to seek diplomatic talks with Moscow.

Tensions between Russia and the West have increased in the past several weeks amid an alleged Russian troop buildup near the Ukrainian border and claims of preparations for an invasion. Russia has repeatedly denied the accusations, saying it reserves the right to relocate troops within its sovereign territory and at its own discretion, while making it clear that NATO's military activity near Russian borders poses a threat to its security.

Against the backdrop of tensions, Russia and the United States held a strategic stability dialogue meeting in Geneva on Monday, which will be followed by a Russia-NATO Council session and OSCE meetings later this week. Russia's proposed security guarantees, which include NATO's non-expansion eastward, are expected to take center stage in the marathon talks.

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#### US Economic Growth Projected at 3.7% in 2022, 2.6 % in 2023 - World Bank

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The US economic forecast for 2022 has been revised downward to 3.7%, while the forecast of 2023 was adjusted slightly upward to 5.6%, the World Bank said in its Global Economic Prospects report on Tuesday.

"Growth is expected to slow to 3.7 percent in 2022 and 2.6 percent in 2023 as excess savings are spent, support from fiscal and monetary policy wanes, and supply bottlenecks gradually dissipate," the World Bank said.

The World Bank also revised downward its projection for US growth in 2021 to 5.6%, compared to an earlier projection of 6.8%.

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Russia's GDP Will Pick Up to 2.4% in 2022, Drop to 1.8% in 2023 - World Bank

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - Russia's GDP growth is expected to flatten at 2.4% in 2022 and drop to 1.8% in 2023, the World Bank's Global Economic Prospects report said on Tuesday.

"Growth in the Russian Federation—the region's largest economy—is projected to moderate to 2.4 percent in 2022, as macroeconomic policy continues to tighten and domestic demand wanes, and to further decelerate to 1.8 percent in 2023, as industrial commodity prices edge down," the report said.

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Economic Growth in Europe and Central Asia to Slow to 3% in 2022, 2.9% in 2023- World Bank

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - Economic growth in Europe and Central Asia will slow to 3% in 2022 and decline further to 2.9% in 2023, the World Bank said in its Global Economic Prospects report on Tuesday.

"Growth in ECA is forecast to slow to 3 percent in 2022 — about half the pace in 2021 — as tighter macroeconomic policy and recurrent COVID-19 outbreaks, including from Omicron, weigh on demand. Regional growth is forecast to continue to ease in 2023, reaching 2.9 percent, as fiscal support continues to be withdrawn," the report said.

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Global GDP Growth to Slow Through 2023 Amid COVID Strains, Inflation – World Bank

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - Global growth is projected to slow through the next two years, decelerating from 5.5% in 2021 to 4.1% in 2022 and 3.2% in 2023 amid the spread of COVID-19 variants, inflation and debt, the World Bank's Global Economic Prospects report said on Tuesday.

"Following a strong rebound in 2021, the global economy is entering a pronounced slowdown amid fresh threats from COVID-19 variants and a rise in inflation, debt, and income inequality that could endanger the recovery in emerging and developing economies ... Global growth is expected to decelerate markedly from 5.5 percent in 2021 to 4.1 percent in 2022 and 3.2 percent in 2023 as pent-up demand dissipates and as fiscal and monetary support is unwound across the world," the World Bank said.

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US Supports ECOWAS Sanctions Against Mali's Military Authorities - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United States supports the Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) sanctions against Mali's military authorities, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a statement.

"We share ECOWAS's deep disappointment with the transition government of Mali's lack of action or progress toward organizing elections, as it committed to do following the August 2020 coup d'état," Price said on Monday. "We support ECOWAS's decision to impose additional economic and financial sanctions to urge the transition government to keep its pledge to the Malian people to return their country to democracy."

On Sunday, Radio France Internationale reported that ECOWAS countries had imposed tough sanctions against the military authorities of Mali. West African states reportedly decided to freeze Mali's assets in the Central Bank of West African States, close borders with Mali and suspend trade transactions with the country, with the exception of medical and essential goods. ECOWAS also decided to withdraw member-states' ambassadors from Mali and to impose sanctions on financial aid.

The Malian authorities called the sanctions illegal and illegitimate. The country's leadership also stressed that they were not based on any guidelines of the community. In response, the Malian military authorities decided to recall ambassadors to the ECOWAS member states and to close land and air borders with the countries of the organization.

In November 2021, Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop announced that presidential and parliamentary elections initially scheduled for early 2022 in Mali would be postponed due to the volatile security situation across the country. ECOWAS, in turn, threatened the Malian military authorities with sanctions.

Price also said the United States supports ECOWAS's concern over the presence of Wagner group forces in Mali, Price said. The defense contractor will divert resources away from the Malian Armed Forces' fight against terrorism, he added.

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Pfizer Wins \$442Mln for 835,000 COVID Treatments - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - Pfizer has won more than \$442 million to produce 835,000 PAXLOVID oral antiviral therapeutic treatments for people suffering from COVID-19, the Defense Department said in a press release.

"Pfizer [of] New York, New York, was awarded a \$442,132,500 modification to contract to produce 835,000 PAXLOVID oral antiviral therapeutic treatments for administration, vendor-managed inventory and distribution activities," the release said on Monday.

Pfizer last week announced that the US government has committed to purchasing an additional 10 million treatment courses of PAXLOVID.

Work on the contract will be performed in New York City over the next year with an estimated completion date of March 31, 2023, the release said.

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#### NASA Names New Chief Scientist and Senior Climate Adviser - Statement

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - NASA has named Katherine Calvin to serve as chief scientist and senior climate adviser, the agency said in a press release.

"NASA Administrator Bill Nelson announced that Dr. Katherine Calvin will serve the agency in dual roles as chief scientist and senior climate adviser effective Monday," the release said on Monday.

Nelson in the same release said Calvin will bring her expertise in integrated human-Earth system modeling to help ensure the Biden Administration has the data to achieve "the critical goal of protecting our planet."

Before her NASA stint, Calvin was an Earth scientist at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory's Joint Global Change Research Institute in College Park, Maryland. Her responsibilities included work on the institute's Global Change Analysis Model which is a system for exploring and analyzing the relationships between human and Earth systems.

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#### Pig Heart Transplant Saves Dying Patient in US - University of Maryland Medical Center

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - US surgeons have successfully transplanted in a pioneering procedure a pig's heart into a patient dying of cardiac disease, the University of Maryland Medical Center (UMMC) announced.

"In a first-of-its-kind surgery, a 57-year-old patient with terminal heart disease received a successful transplant of a genetically-modified pig heart and is still doing well three days later," the UMMC said in a news release on Monday. "It was the only currently available option for the patient."

The historic surgery was conducted by University of Maryland School of Medicine faculty at UMMC, the release said.

"This organ transplant demonstrated for the first time that a genetically-modified animal heart can function like a human heart without immediate rejection by the body. The patient, David Bennett, a Maryland resident, is being carefully monitored over the next days and weeks to determine whether the transplant provides lifesaving benefits," the release added.

Bennett had been deemed ineligible for a conventional heart transplant at UMMC as well as at several other leading transplant centers that reviewed his medical records, according to the release.

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Biden Quietly Authorized \$200M In New Security Aid to Ukraine in Late December - Reports (Updates with details, background in paras 4-8)

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration discreetly approved an additional \$200 million in security assistance to Ukraine in late December, CNN reported. Much of the \$200 million security package included military equipment such as small arms, ammunition, secure radios, and medical equipment, the report added, citing four people familiar with the matter.

Congress was notified about the White House's decision earlier this month, but other US officials found out about the matter through classified channels, the report said.

The new security assistance will take some time to be delivered to Ukraine, the report added.

The report said, citing two congressional aides, that the Biden administration wanted to keep this new security package under wraps ahead of the US-Russia security talks that took place in Geneva earlier on Monday.

Another source told CNN that the additional \$200 million in security aid to Ukraine is not substantial enough to deter any kind of alleged Russian escalation, however, Kiev has made clear it wants more security assistance that is beyond the defensive weaponry the United States is already providing.

Western countries accuse Russia of allegedly deploying thousands of troops near the Ukrainian border in preparation for an aggressive action. Moscow has repeatedly denied the accusations. Following the US-Russia Monday talks, a Russia-NATO Council will meet in Brussels to discuss the issue on Wednesday.

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US Fed Chief Vows to Prevent Higher Inflation From Becoming 'Entrenched'

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The US Federal Reserve will use tools to prevent higher inflation from becoming entrenched while its post-pandemic policy must stay ahead of the changes in the economy, Chairman Jerome Powell said in prepared congressional testimony. Powell's comments come amid expectations that the central bank will raise interest rates for the first time since 2020.

"We will use our tools to support the economy and a strong labor market and to prevent higher inflation from becoming entrenched," Powell said in a speech he will deliver on Tuesday before the Senate committee on banking, housing and urban affairs.

Powell also said the Fed can see the post-pandemic economy is likely to be different in some respects.

"To that end, monetary policy must take a broad and forward-looking view, keeping pace with an ever-evolving economy," Powell said.

The Fed has kept US interest rates at virtually zero since the COVID-19 outbreak which sparked record unemployment in 2020 and the first recession since the 2008/09 financial crisis.

With the economy projected to grow 5.5% last year and 4% this year, the central bank is planning as many as three rate hikes by the end of 2022. What remains uncertain is when those increases will begin.

Minutes of the Fed's December policy meeting released last week showed that its senior officials discussed having rate hikes earlier than previously intended. Since then, several regional heads of the Fed have indicated that the first post-pandemic rate hike could come as early as March.

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Washington, Delhi Agree on New Deal to Export US Pork to India - US Trade Rep.

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has announced the conclusion of an agreement with New Delhi to permit US pork exports to India, the US Trade Representative (USTR) announced in a press release.

"US Trade Representative Katherine Tai and United States Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack today announced that the government of India has agreed to allow imports of US pork and pork products into India, removing a longstanding barrier to US agricultural trade," the release said on Monday.

The agreement followed the successful revitalization of the US-India Trade Policy Forum held in New Delhi in November 2021, during which Tai raised the importance of access for US pork with Indian Minister of Commerce Piyush Goyal, the release said.

"This new opportunity marks the culmination of nearly two decades of work to gain market access for US pork to India - and it signals positive movement in US-India trade relations. We will continue working with the Indian government to ensure that the US pork industry can begin shipping its high-quality products to consumers as soon as possible," Vilsack said.

In 2020, the United States was the world's third-largest pork producer and second-largest exporter, with global sales of pork and pork products valued at \$7.7 billion. In fiscal year 2021, the United States exported more than \$1.6 billion of agricultural products to India, the release said.

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US Officials on Capitol Hill to Talk Biden Opposition to Nord Stream 2 Sanctions Bill

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - Several US State Department officials are meeting with Democratic senators on Capitol Hill on Monday afternoon to discuss the Biden administration's opposition to Republican Senator Ted Cruz's Nord Stream 2 sanctions bill, several reporters said.

Earlier on Monday, US media reported that a group of State Department officials, including Victoria Nuland and Amos Hochstein, are briefing a group of Democratic senators to lobby against support for Cruz's bill.

The US Senate is set to vote on Cruz's bill later this week by January 14.

Last week, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said new sanctions on Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline would undermine US relations with European partners at a critical time when Washington is trying to de-escalate tensions in the region.

US and Russian delegations met in Geneva earlier on Monday to lay the ground work to address bilateral security concerns in Eastern European that include NATO's expansion and Russian military movements near Ukraine's border.

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RPT - Federal Reserve Vice-Chairman Clarida Submits Resignation After Trading Scandal  
(Repeats to improve lede)

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - Federal Reserve Vice-Chairman Richard Clarida said on Monday that he will resign from his post later this week amid a trading scandal that has implicated him and some of the US central bank's most senior policymakers.

"I am writing to inform you that it is my intention to resign from the Board on January 14, 2022," Clarida said in a letter to President Joe Biden on Monday.

The Federal Reserve said Clarida had served as Vice-Chairman and member of the central bank's Executive Board since September 17, 2018.

"Rich's contributions to our monetary policy deliberations, and his leadership of the Fed's first-ever public review of our monetary policy framework, will leave a lasting impact in the field of central banking," Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said in a statement. "I will miss his wise counsel and vital insights."

Clarida's resignation comes after media reported last year that some senior Federal Reserve officials were involved in financial markets' trading that could be influenced at least indirectly by their policy decisions.

A Federal Reserve probe late last year found none of its officials implicated in the scandal violated the central bank's policies on securities trading or US regulations. Clarida has denied any wrongdoing, but public criticism about the apparent conflict of interest among the central bank's top officials has persisted.

US media reported that Clarida's resignation comes two weeks earlier than planned. While the vice-chairman did not give a reason, the reports said he has faced renewed scrutiny about trades he made in 2020 as the Federal Reserve was poised to rescue financial markets.

Last week, US media reported that Clarida had corrected his 2020 financial disclosures in late December. Ethics experts said one of his trades raised questions - he sold a stock fund on February 24 before repurchasing it on February 27, just before Powell announced on February 28 that the Federal Reserve stood ready to help markets and the economy from the emerging coronavirus pandemic.

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US House Lawmakers to Propose Bill to Boost Ukraine Defense Aid, Sanction Russia - Reports WASHINGTON, January 11 (Sputnik) - House Republicans are set to introduce legislation that would boost US defense aid to Ukraine and reimpose sanctions on Russia if passed, Politico reported, citing a draft copy of the bill.

The bill's Senate counterpart of the proposed legislation, entitled the "Guaranteeing Ukrainian Autonomy by Reinforcing its Defense (GUARD) Act," was introduced in mid-December. The move comes amid increased tensions between Russia, the US and its allies over the buildup of Russian forces near the Ukrainian border.

"President Biden is failing to adequately arm Ukraine & deter Russia's military buildup. Today, I joined my House colleagues in reaffirming our commitment to Ukraine. The U.S. can no longer afford to be weak on the international stage," Representative Mike Turner said on Monday in a tweet with a link to the report.

A draft copy of the legislation calls for \$200 million in aid to Ukraine for air-defense capabilities and naval vessels, the reimposition of sanctions related to the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, and the consideration of state sponsor of terrorism designation for Russia.

Russian delegations are meeting with US, NATO and OSCE officials this week to discuss a range of bilateral and European security issues.

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## IMF Says Appoints French Economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas as Head of Research

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund announced that it has appointed the former editor of its economic review, Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas, as Economic Counselor and Head of Research to succeed Gita Gopinath who is moving up as First Deputy Managing Director, the IMF announced on Monday.

"I am very pleased to announce that Pierre-Olivier will join us as the Fund's next Chief Economist," IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said in a statement on Monday. Georgieva said Gourinchas is an outstanding macroeconomic scholar and practitioner with a "finger on the pulse of global economic issues."

Gourinchas was an IMF Visiting Scholar and Editor-in-Chief of the IMF Economic Review between 2009 and 2016. He was also Program Director of International Finance and Macroeconomics at the US National Bureau of Economic Research.

The IMF said Gourinchas will start work as its de facto chief economist on January 24, initially on a part-time basis to conclude some prior commitments, before transitioning to full-time on April 1.

Gopinath will assume her new role as First Deputy Managing Director on January 21.

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## US Insurance Companies to Pay for 8 At-Home COVID Tests Per Person Per Month - White House

\*WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - Americans with private insurance coverage will be able to receive up to eight free at-home coronavirus tests per month beginning on January 15 after the Biden administration mandated insurance companies to increase access to testing, the White House said.

"Beginning January 15, 2022, individuals with private health insurance coverage or covered by a group health plan who purchase an over-the-counter COVID-19 diagnostic test ... will be able to have those test costs covered by their plan or insurance. Insurance companies and health plans are required to cover 8 free over-the-counter at-home tests per covered individual per month," the White House said in a press release on Monday.

The White House explained that there is no limit on the number of any other kinds of tests provided ordered by a health care provider in accordance with a patient's clinical needs.

The new order mandates US insurance companies to reimburse the cost of a test even if it was not bought through a preferred pharmacy, including those cases when an individual purchases tests through an online retailer, the release said.

Shortly before the winter holidays, many outdoor testing stations in the United States have been overwhelmed with long lines by residents who sought a free coronavirus test while pharmacy stores began to experience significant shortage of at-home testing kits.

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UN Chief Calls for Cessation of Hostilities, Airstrikes in Ethiopia's Tigray - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, January 10 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for an immediate stop to hostilities in Ethiopia's Tigray region, including airstrikes, following reports that more than 50 civilians having been killed in an airstrike last week, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a statement.

"The Secretary-General is deeply concerned about the impact the conflict continues to have on civilians in Ethiopia," Dujarric said on Monday. "The Secretary-General reiterates his call for an immediate cessation of hostilities, including airstrikes."

The January 7 airstrike attack reportedly took place in the town of Dedebit, Tigray region, in a site hosting internally displaced people. Earlier last week, another strike hit the Mai Aini refugee camp, killing three Eritrean refugees, including two children.

Dujarric said the United Nations and its partners are engaged with Ethiopia's authorities to urgently mobilize emergency assistance in the area where the latest attack took place.

In the meantime, the UN chief urged all parties to the war in Tigray to adhere to international humanitarian law obligations to protect civilians and sites and facilitate humanitarian access.

Ethiopia has been mired in an internal conflict since November 2020, when the central government accused the Tigray People's Liberation Front of attacking a military base, and launched a counter-operation in the northern Tigray region.

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US Calls Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi's New Sentencing 'Affront to Justice' - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - Former Myanmar State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi's additional four-year sentencing is an affront to justice and Myanmar's military should release her immediately, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

"The Burmese military's unjust arrests, conviction and sentencing of Aung San Suu Kyi is an affront to justice and the rule of law," Price said during a press briefing on Monday. "We call on the regime to immediately release Aung San Suu Kyi and all those unjustly detained including other democratically-elected leaders."

Earlier in the day, US media reported that Suu Kyi was sentenced to another four years in prison. She had already been sentenced to four years in prison in December for inciting public unrest and violating COVID-19 regulations but the sentence was later reduced to two years, which she was allowed to serve under house arrest.

The ex-counselor was found guilty on several charges, including possession of unlicensed walkie-talkies, according to the broadcaster. These are but a few of the charges against the former official, which could see her serving more than 100 years in prison.

Suu Kyi, served as state counselor to Myanmar's civilian government until last February, when the country's military overthrew her government and put her, along with then-President Win Myint, under house arrest. The coup triggered a wave of protests and more than 1,300 people have died since in clashes with law enforcement.

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#### US Officials Respond to Maritime Smuggling Event Involving 176 Migrants - Border Patrol

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) components alongside other law enforcement responded to a maritime migrant smuggling event in southern Florida involving almost 180 individuals and launched an investigation into the matter, CBP Florida said.

"This morning, before 5 a.m., [CBP] components along with our law enforcement partners responded to a maritime smuggling event involving a large group of migrants that made landfall near Ocean Reef Key Largo, FL. The investigation remains ongoing," CBP Florida said via Twitter on Monday.

The post was accompanied by a photo showing a large number of migrants on a boat, mostly men, many of whom are not equipped with lifejackets. Further details about the event and nature of the individuals involved is currently unknown.

"We're still gathering more details, since it was quite a few individuals involved... If I'm not mistaken it was about 176 [individuals]," CBP Public Affairs Specialist Alan Regalado in Miami told Sputnik.

The US Coast Guard in fiscal year 2021 intercepted 838 Cuban migrants, compared with 49 in the prior year. Coast Guard authorities in October apprehended 31 migrants and two smugglers off of the south of Key West, Florida. The Coast Guard said in a related statement they will continue to put a high priority on patrolling offshore to present illegal migration.

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#### US Judge to Decide if Trump as Ex-President May Face Capitol Riot Lawsuits - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - A federal judge in Washington, DC is considering arguments about whether former President Donald Trump may not be protected by executive privilege from being sued over his possible association with the rioters at the US Capitol a year ago on January 6, CNN reported.

During a court hearing, Judge Amit Mehta noted that Trump had asked protesters several times to march to Congress as lawmakers were meeting to ratify the November 2020 presidential election results. Mehta also noted that for two hours Trump did not call on protestors to refrain from violence, the report said.

Mehta said Trump's extended silence on that day plausibly suggested that the then-president agreed with the contact of the protesters entered the Capitol and that at no moment on that day did he call on them to refrain from attacking the parliamentary center of the US democracy. Two other lawsuits are also trying to hold Trump and some other prominent Republican politicians accountable for the violence a year ago. The Justice Department has initiated prosecutions against more than 700 of the protesters who entered the Capitol on January 6, the report added.

The case Mehta is presiding over is the first major test of whether civil litigation is a viable route to holding Trump accountable for the violence at the Capitol on January 6, according to the report.

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Sullivan, Turkish Counterpart Discuss Kazakhstan - US National Security Council

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Turkish president's chief advisor Ibrahim Kalin discussed situation in Kazakhstan and in the Caucasus region, National Security Council spokesperson Emily Horn said.

"They exchanged views on a range of regional issues, including the situation in Kazakhstan," Horn said in a statement on Monday.

The two officials agreed on the importance of engaging in joint efforts toward achieving de-escalation and normalization of the situation in the Caucasus and maintaining stability in and the unity of Bosnia-Herzegovina, she also said.

Sullivan and Kalin also discussed tensions over Ukraine and the necessity to stop the conflict in Ethiopia, Horne added.

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Milley, Ukrainian Armed Forces Chief Discuss Security in Eastern Europe - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley discussed by telephone with Ukraine's top military commander Lt. Gen. Valery Zaluzhny the security situation in Eastern Europe, Joint Chiefs of Staff Staff spokesperson Dave Butler said.

"The military leaders continued to exchange perspectives and assessments of the evolving security environment in Eastern Europe," Butler said in a statement after the conversation on Monday.

Milley underscored the importance of Ukraine as a key NATO partner and added that Kiev plays a critical role in maintaining peace and stability in Europe.

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US, Allies Will Continue to Plan Response in Case Russia Invades Ukraine - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United States and its allies will continue to prepare and plan a coordinated response if Russia moves to invade Ukraine amid its military build-up along the neighboring country's borders, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said.

"If Russia chooses the path of conflict ... we are prepared to impose enormous costs on Russia's economy, reinforce NATO's presence in frontline allied states and increase our defensive assistance to Ukraine," Thomas-Greenfield said on Monday. "We will continue to prepare and plan for responding should they take any actions against Ukraine."

The statement came just a few hours after Russian and US delegations, headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov and Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, concluded talks on security guarantees in Geneva.

Sherman said following the negotiations that Russian officials said Moscow did not intend to invade Ukraine. She also said if Russia launches an invasion in Ukraine, the consequences will include sanctions against key financial institutions and export controls.

Thomas-Greenfield said US diplomats, including those at the mission to the United Nations in New York, have been instructed by President Joe Biden to work intensively and pragmatically to determine whether finding a diplomatic way forward with Russia and avoiding a conflict is still possible.

Asked if she believed her Russian colleagues at the United Nations who state that Moscow has no plans to invade Ukraine, Thomas-Greenfield said she wished that would be the case.

"I wish to believe him [Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia], I wish that it is true that they have no plans, but everything we've seen so far indicates that they are making motions in that direction," she said.

Thomas-Greenfield added that in the days ahead, the United States will continue to make every effort to de-escalate and seek a diplomatic solution to the situation, but it is up to Russia to take steps to lower the existing tensions.

Western countries accuse Russia of allegedly deploying thousands of troops near the Ukrainian border in preparation for an aggressive action. Moscow has repeatedly denied the accusations. Following the US-Russia Monday talks, a Russia-NATO Council will meet in Brussels to discuss the issue on Wednesday.

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US Calls on CSTO Peacekeepers to Depart Kazakhstan When Requested - State Department

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United States calls on the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) peacekeeping forces to depart Kazakhstan when requested, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a press briefing.

"We call on the CSTO... peacekeeping forces and law enforcement to respect human rights and support a peaceful resolution and, importantly, to depart Kazakhstan when the government of Kazakhstan requested," Price said on Monday.

Earlier in the day, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said that the CSTO peacekeepers will remain in Kazakhstan until the situation is fully stable.

Mass protests erupted in Kazakhstan last week over a twofold hike in fuel prices. In view of the rioting and looting that followed, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev declared a nationwide state of emergency, effective until January 19, and invited the Collective Security Treaty Organization peacekeeping forces to help bring the situation under control.

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#### SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) -

#### US-RUSSIA TALKS

\* The United States does not show that it is willing to resolve key issues of the security guarantees in a way that would take into account Russia's interests, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said after the bilateral talks in Geneva on Monday.

\* The United States has taken seriously Russia's proposals on security guarantees, Ryabkov said.

\* Russia will decide what to do next with regards to the work on security guarantees after the negotiations with NATO on January 12 and with the OSCE on January 13, Ryabkov said.

\* The meeting between US and Russian officials in Geneva was a discussion and not a negotiation, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said.

\* The Russian officials informed their US counterparts during the security talks that Russia does not intend to invade Ukraine, Sherman said.

\* The United States is prepared to move swiftly to resolve security issues with Russia but matters related to arms control cannot be negotiated within weeks, Sherman said.

\* The United States and Russia plan to discuss the next way forward in security talks at the end of this week after Washington consults with European allies and partners, Sherman said.

\* The United States expects to have additional multilateral meetings with Russia after it consults with European allies on security concerns in Eastern Europe, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

#### UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

\* Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said in a telephone conversation with the US National Security Adviser Jacob Sullivan that Ankara stands ready to help resolve the Ukrainian crisis, the Turkish broadcaster NTV reported on Monday.

\* The United States will take steps, including export control on key industries and sanctions on financial institutions, if Russia launches an incursion into Ukraine, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said.

\* A Ukraine-NATO meeting is a timely opportunity to express the alliance's support to Kiev ahead of a Russia-NATO Council meeting, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said.

\* US military advisers who recently returned from Ukraine had stayed in the country to consult on its air and missile defense capabilities, Defense Department spokesperson John Kirby said.

#### SITUATION IN KAZAKHSTAN

\* Foreign militants, including those from Afghanistan and the Middle East, have participated in the aggression against Kazakhstan, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said on Monday.

\* The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) peacekeepers will remain in Kazakhstan until the situation is fully stable, Tokayev said.

\* The threat to the statehood, security and sovereignty that Kazakhstan has faced were caused not by protests over a hike in gas prices, but by "destructive forces" that took advantage of the situation, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

#### US SANCTIONS AGAINST NICARAGUA

\* The United States has placed six Nicaraguan nationals on its Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) list, the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced on Monday.

\* The United States is imposing visa restrictions on 116 individuals who are "undermining" Nicaragua's democracy, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

#### CONFLICT IN ETHIOPIA

\* The European Union calls on all parties of the Tigray conflict to respect the international humanitarian law and condemns airstrikes targeting a refugee camp, Janez Lenarcic, the EU commissioner for crisis management, said on Monday.

\* US President Joe Biden discussed the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia and ways to promote peace on a phone call with the nation's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed on Monday, the White House said.

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US Calls on Kazakhstan Government to Rescind 'Shoot Without Warning' Order - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United States is calling on the government of Kazakhstan to rescind its "shoot without warning" order in order to protect the citizens and restore order amid ongoing violent unrest, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in Monday.

During an address to the nation on January 7, Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said that everyone who has weapons in hand and refuses to surrender will be destroyed. Tokayev then ordered law enforcement officers to shoot without warning in cases like this. "We call on the government [of Kazakhstan] to exercise restraint, including, to rescind the so called 'shoot without warning' order to protect the people of Kazakhstan, and to restore order," Price said during a press briefing.

Protests erupted in Kazakhstan last week over a twofold hike in fuel prices that turned into riots. The Kazakh authorities said the protest were hijacked by terrorist elements seeking to topple the government. Tokayev declared a nationwide state of emergency, effective until January 19, and also invited the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) peacekeeping forces to help bring the situation under control.

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Blinken, Brazilian Counterpart Discuss Need for Unity Against Russia - State Dept. Washington January 10 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Brazilian Foreign Minister Carlos Franca during a phone call discussed the need for taking a strong and united stand against Russia, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"Blinken spoke today with Brazilian Foreign Minister Carlos Franca about shared priorities, including a need for a strong, united response against further Russian aggression against Ukraine," Price said in a press release.

Earlier on Monday, Russian officials informed their American counterparts during security talks in Geneva that Moscow does not intend to invade Ukraine, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman told reporters.

Moscow has repeatedly refuted US allegations while making it clear that NATO's military activity near Russian borders poses a threat to its security.

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Americans Will Be Able to Order Free COVID-19 Tests Later in January - White House

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - Americans will be able to order free COVID-19 tests later this month, White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said on Monday.

"We expect to have all contracts awarded within the next two weeks and then Americans will begin being able to order these [COVID-19] tests online later this month," she told journalists. She added that the White House is "working closely" with manufacturers of these tests to understand what they can ship and when.

The United States saw roughly 1 million new coronavirus infections daily at the start of last week.

Health officials have said 95% of the new cases were related to the Omicron coronavirus variant. The Omicron cases, however, are said to be mild.

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US Budget Deficit \$196Bln Lower in First Quarter of 2022 Versus Year Ago - CBO

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The US federal budget deficit is estimated to be \$377 billion in the first quarter of this year, down almost \$200 billion or a third from the record high of \$573 billion seen a year ago during the coronavirus pandemic, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) said on Monday.

"The federal budget deficit was \$377 billion in the first quarter of fiscal year 2022, the Congressional Budget Office estimates - \$196 billion less than the deficit recorded during the same period last year, and slightly larger than the deficit recorded during the same period two years ago, right before the start of the coronavirus pandemic," the CBO said in a statement. The lower deficit for the first quarter of this year is expected to follow with the higher revenues in the final quarter of 2021, estimated at \$248 billion, or 31% higher than the fourth quarter of 2020, the statement said.

Outlays in the final quarter of last year were comparatively \$52 billion, or 4%, higher than the October through December period of 2020, the statement added.

Notwithstanding the reduction estimated for this quarter, the CBO has forecast that US debt itself will reach 195% of gross domestic product by 2050. Previously, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the first quarter of 2020, the debt-to -DP ratio was estimated to be 180%.

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US Real Estate Heir Durst, 78, Dies Serving Life Sentence for Murder - Corrections Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - Multimillionaire real estate heir Robert Durst died of natural causes on Monday morning while serving a life sentence for murder, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation said in a news release.

"Robert Alan Durst, who had been housed at California Health Care Facility (CHCF), died of natural causes at 6:44 a.m. on Monday, Jan. 10, 2022, while being treated at an outside hospital. The coroner in San Joaquin County will determine an exact cause of death," the release said.

The 78-year-old was sentenced to life in prison in October for the 2000 murder of friend Susan Berman. Durst purportedly killed Berman in order to prevent her from incriminating him in a then-reopened investigation into the 1982 disappearance of his wife, Kathie Durst.

Durst was also acquitted in 2001 on murder charges related to the shooting and dismemberment of an elderly neighbor, which he claimed occurred in self-defense. Durst's lawyers had said prior to his death that they planned on appealing his life-sentence decision.

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**US Believes Confidence-Building, Arms Control Measures With Russia Work to Its Benefit**

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United States believes confidence-building and arms control measures with Russia that may work to benefit the two countries are possible, State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Monday.

"Transparency, confidence-building measures, arms control provisions, all of these things have the potential to work to the advantage not only to the security of the transatlantic alliance but also global security," Price said during a press briefing. "These are things that have the potential to be in our interest, these are things that may have the potential to be in the interest of the Russian Federation."

The United States and Russia will work to identify areas where their interests overlap and whether there is room to reach an agreement on reciprocal measures both countries could take, Price said.

Earlier in the day, the two countries held strategic stability talks in Geneva.

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**White House Says US Ready for Russia Spreading Disinformation About Commitments Not Made**

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The US is getting ready for the possibility of Russia spreading disinformation about commitments that have not been made, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki told journalists on Monday.

Earlier on Monday, Russia and the United States concluded talks in Geneva. Among the topics are the security guarantees that were proposed by Moscow and include, in particular, provisions on the mutual non-deployment of intermediate and short-range missiles and limits on military exercises. The meeting was held in a closed format at the US Permanent Mission to the UN Office in Geneva. The Russian delegation was headed by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov and Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin. The US delegation was led by Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman.

"We are preparing ourselves for the possibility and likelihood if Russia spreads disinformation about commitments that have not been made," Psaki said.

The White House has repeatedly stressed it was not planning to discuss all points of Russia's draft proposals, which mostly focused on legally-binding guarantees that NATO will not move

closer to the Russian borders and the alliance will not threaten the country's security. According to Washington, Moscow has no right to dictate who can join the bloc and membership issues cannot be discussed bilaterally.

Additionally, the US has been adamant it will not consider scaling down its military presence in Europe and will demand full reciprocity in any overlapping areas with Russia where progress can be made, including issues of offensive missile systems in Ukraine and scope of military exercises near each other's territories. In general, the White House said it was not optimistic about the talks and had a more realistic approach.

Russia, in turn, has consistently voiced regret over confrontational rhetoric coming from the US ahead of the talks and warned there will be no further dialogue if Washington refuses to acknowledge Moscow's security concerns. Ryabkov said Russia will not make unilateral concessions and will quit the talks if the other side fails to show an understanding of what Moscow needs in regards to firm security guarantees.

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US Expects No Quick Breakthrough From Security Talks With Russia – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) – The United States does not expect any breakthroughs from the NATO-Russia Council and OSCE talks slated for January 12-13, as this is the very beginning of a diplomatic process, State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Monday. "I don't expect any breakthroughs will be reached on Wednesday. I don't expect any breakthroughs on Thursday. This is the beginning of a diplomatic process. We welcome the fact that the Russian Federation is taking part in this dialogue with us, we think it's important," Price told a press briefing.

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US Ready for 'Serious' Diplomacy With North Korea - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United States is prepared to engage in serious diplomacy with North Korea, and Pyongyang must now choose a path to peace, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said in a statement on Monday. Thomas-Greenfield said she stood in unified condemnation of North Korea's latest ballistic missile launch conducted off its east coast on January 5.

"These actions increase the risks of miscalculation and escalation and pose a significant threat to regional stability," Thomas-Greenfield said ahead of the UN Security Council's closed consultations on the missile launch. "Our goal remains complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. We are prepared to engage in and support serious

and sustained diplomacy to that end. It is the DPRK [North Korea] that now must choose dialogue and peace over its unlawful and threatening weapons program."

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**Pentagon Says Committed to Closing Guantanamo Prison, Cannot Confirm Reports of Transfers**

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon remains committed to the Biden administration's plan to close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay but cannot confirm reports of transfer approvals for current detainees, spokesman John Kirby said on Monday. "I can't confirm those reports. I have no transfers out of Guantanamo to speak to today," Kirby said during a press briefing in response to a question about the reported transfer. "We continue to be committed to closing down that facility, and of course that means whittling down the population, which is very small right now. I think just over three dozen detainees remain from the nearly 800 that were there at its peak, so a small number. Not surprisingly, they are the hardest cases to deal with and adjudicate."

The Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) on Monday said in a statement that Guantanamo Bay detainee Gouled Hassan Dourad won approval for transfer out of the facility. The CCR organizes hundreds of attorneys to ensure that any of Guantanamo Bay detainees who want legal representation could have it, according to the statement.

There are 13 detainees at Guantanamo Bay eligible for transfer, 14 are eligible for a review board, 10 have charges pending, and two detainees have been convicted in military commissions, Kirby said.

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**US Expects Multilateral Talks With Russia in Coming Days - State Dept.**

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United States expects to have additional multilateral meetings with Russia after it consults with European allies on security concerns in Eastern Europe, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"Tomorrow the Deputy [Secretary of State Wendy Sherman] will travel to Brussels, she'll meet with our NATO, European allies, they in turn will have multilateral discussions with the Russian Federation," Price said during a press briefing. "We expect there will be additional dialogue with the Russian Federation in the coming days regarding what the next iteration of this discussion will look like."

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US Ready for Talks With Russia on Bilateral Issues as Soon as Practical - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United States is ready to continue talks with Russia as soon as it is practical to address the bilateral issues identified during security consultations in Geneva earlier on Monday, Department of State spokesman Ned Price told a press briefing. "We are ready to continue discussions on the bilateral issues we identified today as soon as it's practical, and we made that clear in the discussions today," Price said.

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Blinken Blasts Chinese Sanctions on US Officials Advocating Religious Freedom

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - China's action in sanctioning four senior US officials in charge of promoting international religious freedom is "yet another" affront to universal human rights, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.

"China's sanctions last month on four US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) commissioners, including Chair Nadine Maenza, Vice Chair Nury Turkel, and Commissioners Anurima Bhargava and James W. Carr, constitute yet another PRC affront against universal rights," Blinken said in a statement.

Beijing has previously sanctioned three other current or former USCIRF commissioners, in addition to dozens of current or former US officials and organizations promoting democracy and respect for human rights around the world, the secretary of state recalled.

"We remain undeterred by these actions, and we stand in solidarity with USCIRF and its staff. The United States is committed to defending human rights around the world and will continue to use all diplomatic and economic tools to promote accountability," he continued.

The United States again calls on China to cease its acts of transnational repression, including coercive practices of imprisoning and denying freedom of movement to family members of Uyghur American activists, including individuals serving the American people, Blinken added.

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Pentagon Says US Advisers Looked at Air Defense Capabilities During Visit to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - US military advisers who recently returned from Ukraine had stayed in the country to consult on its air and missile defense capabilities, Defense Department spokesperson John Kirby said on Monday.

"They [US military advisers] were largely looking at air and missile defenses as I understand and they've been back a while," Kirby said during a press briefing. "I'm not aware of a formal report that was issued, they just took a look and consulted with the Ukrainians about what they believe their air defense needs were."

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US Advises Americans to Avoid Travel to Canada Due to COVID-19 - CDC

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - Americans should avoid traveling to Canada due to high coronavirus risks, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said on Monday. "Avoid travel to Canada," the CDC said on its website, under the section for international travel. "If you must travel to Canada, make sure you are fully vaccinated before travel."

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US Charges New York Resident for Threatening to Kill Trump, 12 Congressmen

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - An elderly resident of New York City has been charged with threatening to kidnap and kill former US President Donald Trump and 12 unnamed members of Congress during multiple calls to Secret Service officers last year, according to a criminal complaint unsealed on Monday.

The defendant, 72-year-old Thomas Welnicki from Rockaway Beach, Queens, made at least four calls to the Secret Service detailing his intentions to kill Trump and 12 lawmakers who supported him in case he lost the 2020 presidential election and refused to step down, the complaint said.

"I don't want to hurt anyone, but I will stand up to fascism," the complaint cited the defendant as telling the US Capitol Police on July 21, 2020. "I really hope that God takes [Trump] out."

In a voicemail message for the Secret Service's Long Island Resident Office, Welnicki claimed he was expecting to get \$350,000 in reward if he kills the former president and the Congress members who assisted him, the complaint said.

On December 2, the defendant called the Secret Service's New York City Duty Desk to seek information on how to schedule a protest at the Trump's residence and added he used to own a .22 caliber firearm, the complaint added.

Welnicki was arrested by federal agents on Monday and is due to appear in a Brooklyn federal court later in the day.

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Pentagon Supports US-Russia Efforts to Discuss Missile Capabilities in Europe - Spokesman

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department supports the Biden administration's efforts to discuss with Russia issues related to the United States' missile capabilities in Europe, spokesperson John Kirby said on Monday.

"We certainly are aware and supportive of the effort to be able to talk about missile capabilities on the European continent as one thing that the administration would be willing to look at," Kirby said during a press briefing.

The Defense Department supports using a diplomatic path to de-escalate bilateral tensions with Russia to achieve a better outcome, Kirby added.

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US State of Virginia Boosts Hospital Capacity After Increase in COVID-19 Cases - Governor

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The US state of Virginia is expanding the number of available hospital beds to be able to cope with the increasing numbers of COVID-19 patients, outgoing Governor Ralph Northam said in an order on Monday.

"Governor Northam today took steps to increase Virginia's hospital capacity and support healthcare workers responding to COVID-19, after a record number of hospitalizations were posted on Friday of last week," the release said. "He issued a limited 30-day order to expand the number of available hospital beds."

Northam also ordered increased staffing capacity at hospitals and nursing homes and permitted public health agencies greater flexibility in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the release said.

"Health care workers and hospitals are exhausted, and they are again facing increasing numbers of patients, affecting their ability to provide care. These steps will help ease the strain, giving medical professionals more flexibility to care for people," the release added.

More than 3,500 patients statewide are currently hospitalized with COVID-19 and intensive care unit hospitalizations have more than doubled since December 1, 2021, according to the release.

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UN Aware of Photos of Kazakh Troops Wearing UN Helmets, Conveyed Its Concern - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United Nations saw the photos of Kazakh troops wearing blue helmets and conveyed its concern over the misuse of UN insignia to the

Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan, which assured the issue has been addressed, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Monday.

On January 8, the Associated Press released photos showing Kazakh national soldiers during mass protests in the country wearing blue helmets with a "UN" sign, a distinctive attribute worn by the organization's peacekeepers.

"We're very much aware. We have checked on the sourcing of the photos that reportedly show members of security forces wearing UN-branded helmets in Kazakhstan in the last few days," Dujarric said.

The spokesman said any troops and police-contributing countries are to use UN insignia only when performing UN peacekeeping tasks in the context of their deployment mandated by the UN Security Council, which was not the case in Kazakhstan.

"We have conveyed our concern to the Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan directly on this issue, and we've received assurances from them that this issue has been addressed," Dujarric said.

Mass protests erupted in Kazakhstan last week over a twofold hike in fuel prices. In view of the rioting and looting that followed, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev declared a nationwide state of emergency, effective until January 19, and invited the Collective Security Treaty Organization peacekeeping forces to help bring the situation under control.

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#### UN Monitors Reports of Nearly 8,000 Detentions in Kazakhstan's Protests - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United Nations closely monitors the reports about almost 8,000 people having been detained in Kazakhstan by police and urges that those arrested are treated with justice, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Monday.

Earlier on Monday, Kazakhstan's Interior Ministry said 7,939 people were detained throughout the country since the mass protests erupted in the early days of 2022.

"We're obviously continuing to follow these developments. It is important that whether there or in any other place, people who are detained be afforded justice, international norms," Dujarric said.

Mass protests erupted in Kazakhstan last week over a twofold hike in fuel prices. In light of the violence that followed, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev declared a nationwide state of emergency, effective until January 19, and invited the Collective Security Treaty Organization peacekeeping forces to help bring the situation under control.

Almost 1,000 people were injured, the United Nations said. According to the country's Interior Ministry, 17 law enforcers were killed.

On Friday, the Kazakh president said that there were still militants who continued resistance and pledged to fight those who did not lay down their arms. At the same time, Tokayev said that the government had reached a compromise with peaceful protesters on urgent social and economic issues.

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**Guantanamo Inmate Approved for Transfer Out of Facility - Constitutional Rights Center**

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - A longtime prisoner identified in military records as Gouled Hassan Dourad (Duran) and held without trial at the Guantanamo Bay detention facility has won approval to be transferred out, the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) said in a statement on Monday.

"Mr. Duran is the first so-called 'high value; detainee previously held in secret CIA detention approved for transfer through the administrative Periodic Review Board process," the statement said.

Duran was approved for transfer by a Periodic Review Board, at Guantanamo Bay, the statement noted.

"Mr. Duran has never posed a threat to the United States or its allies, and he never should have been detained," the statement said. "We look forward to working with the Biden administration to promptly transfer Mr. Duran and reunite him with his family."

The CCR has organized hundreds of attorneys to ensure that anyone held at the Guantanamo Bay detention facility who wanted legal representation could have it and has advocated for detainees in legal proceedings from Guantanamo to the US Supreme Court to the International Criminal Court of Justice, the statement added.

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**Biden Spoke With New York City Mayor After Bronx Fire, Offered Support - White House**

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden spoke with New York City Mayor Eric Adams to express his condolences and offer support following a deadly fire in a Bronx apartment building, the White House said on Monday.

At least 19 people, including nine children, died in a fire sparked Sunday morning by a malfunctioning space heater, New York City authorities said.

"Today, the President spoke with New York City Mayor Eric Adams to express his heartfelt condolences and offer support following yesterday's devastating fire at a Bronx apartment building," the White House said in a statement.

More than 60 people were injured in the fire, including 41 with life-threatening or serious injuries, firefighters said.

The New York City Fire Department said that the fire was one of the worst that the city has experienced in modern times.

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#### UN Chief Expresses Condolences for Deaths in Fire in New York City's Bronx

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on Monday expressed his condolences over the loss of life in the apartment building fire that took place in the New York borough of the Bronx over the weekend.

"I'm deeply saddened by the lives lost in the apartment building fire in the Bronx on Sunday," Buterres said via Twitter. "My thoughts are with everyone who has been affected by this tragedy, and with our host city New York."

At least 19 people, including nine children, died in the fire that erupted on Sunday morning in an apartment building in the Bronx.

The New York Fire Department said more than 60 people were injured in the fire, including 32 who sustained life-threatening injuries and nine who sustained serious injuries.

The fire was one of the worst incidents in New York City in modern times and an investigation is underway as to the causes of the fire, the city's Fire Department said.

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#### Biden, Ethiopian Prime Minister Discuss Conflict, Peace Opportunities – White House

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden discussed the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia and ways to promote peace on a phone call with the nation's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed on Monday, the White House said.

"President Biden commended Prime Minister Abiy on the recent release of several political prisoners, and the two leaders discussed ways to accelerate dialogue toward a negotiated ceasefire, the urgency of improving humanitarian access across Ethiopia, and the need to address the human rights concerns of all affected Ethiopians, including concerns about detentions of Ethiopians under the state of emergency," the statement read.

Biden also expressed concern over the ongoing hostilities, including recent air strikes that have caused civilian casualties. He reaffirmed the US commitment to cooperate with the African Union and regional partners to help Ethiopians peacefully resolve the conflict.

The two leaders also discussed bilateral relations and prospects of strengthening cooperation in a range of areas, the statement added.

Ethiopia has been mired in an internal conflict since November 2020, when the central government accused the Tigray People's Liberation Front of attacking a military base, and launched a counter-operation in the northern Tigray region.

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UN Encouraged by US-Russia Security Talks - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is encouraged by strategic stability consultations that Russia and the United States held in Geneva on Monday, spokesman Stephane Dujarric told a press briefing.

"We just saw the meeting concluded. We're taking a look at what was decided," Dujarric said.

"We're always encouraged by high-level dialogue, especially between two permanent members of the Security Council."

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Russia Addressed US Concerns in Geneva That Led to Demise of INF Treaty - Sherman  
WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - Russia has addressed the United States' concerns during a meeting between top officials in Geneva that led to the demise of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said on Monday.

"The Russians addressed the concerns that we had that led to the ultimate demise of the INF treaty. This was not a negotiation, we were putting ideas on the table today, and we have a long way to go. But of course there are ongoing concerns about intermediate range missiles, that's the whole reason there was an INF treaty in the first place," Sherman said during a press briefing.

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US Ready to Move Swiftly in Security Talks With Russia, No Timetable Yet – Sherman  
(Adds quote in para 4, background in paras 5-6)

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United States is ready to move as expeditiously as possible in security talks with Russia, but no timetable has been set yet, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said on Monday.

"[T]hese kinds of arms control negotiations, as Mr. [Vladimir] Putin said, don't happen in just a day or even a week. They are generally quite complex, very technical, and take some time, but we are certainly ready to move as expeditiously as one possibly can in these circumstances," Sherman told a press briefing after the talks with Russia in Geneva.

The diplomat added she has hope about the security talks with Russia but cares more about results.

"We didn't set out a specific timetable for anything. The Russians had said that they'd like to move swiftly. We accept that to the extent that there are actions we can take. There's work that can be done, we're happy to move as quickly as possible," Sherman added.

Earlier on Monday, Russia and the United States held strategic stability talks in Geneva. Among the topics were the security guarantees that were proposed by Moscow and include, in particular, provisions on the mutual non-deployment of intermediate and short-range missiles and limits on military exercises.

The meeting was held in a closed format at the US Permanent Mission to the UN Office in Geneva. The Russian and American delegations were headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov and Deputy Secretary Sherman, respectively.

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Sherman Says Bilateral Meeting With Russia in Geneva Was Discussion, Not Negotiation

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The meeting between US and Russian officials in Geneva was a discussion and not a negotiation, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said on Monday.

"Today was a discussion - a better understanding of each other and each other's priorities and concerns. It was not what you would call a negotiation. We're not to a point where we're ready to set down text and begin to go back and forth," Sherman said during a press briefing.

Russia will hear a consistent message from United States, its partners and allies, namely, that it is on Moscow to de-escalate tensions so that there can be a real chance at finding diplomatic solutions, Sherman also said.

The United States believes genuine progress is possible with Russia if the situation de-escalates, Sherman added.

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Russia Tells US in Geneva Talks It Has No Plans to Invade Ukraine - Deputy Secretary

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - Russian officials informed their American counterparts during security talks in Geneva on Monday that Russia does not intend to invade Ukraine, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said.

"As regard to the one hundred thousand troops massed on the borders, I don't think you'd be surprised to hear Russia indeed said to us as they said publicly they do not intend to invade, these are just maneuvers and exercises," Sherman said during a conference call.

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#### UN-Led Talks to Resolve Sudan Political Crisis to Start Immediately - Special Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United Nations will immediately launch consultations with Sudan's military to restore the country's democratic transition following the October 25 coup, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sudan Volker Perthes said on Monday.

"I do hope that these consultations can become something like a confidence-building measure and would help to at least reduce the violence or would help military and their opponents to start with some confidence-building," Perthes said at a press conference to announce the launch of the talks. "That's a fact that still people are killed makes it urgent to start as soon as possible with the talks."

Perthes said the consultations are set to start on Monday afternoon and expressed his hope the initial round of talks will eventually lead to negotiations.

"Negotiations - direct or indirect - may come in a second phase... We will see whether indeed through these [consultations] we can reach some consensus and some important points," Perthes added.

Sudan has entered political crisis since Army chief Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan detained Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and other government officials in October. Following the coup, protesters have taken to the streets demanding civilian rule. At least 60 people have since been killed in clashes with the military authorities.

In mid-November, al-Burhan and Hamdok signed a political agreement stipulating the reinstatement of the prime minister in his duties, the release of all political prisoners detained during the coup and transition of power to a civilian rule at an earlier date.

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#### US Says Will Slap Financial Sanctions, Enhance NATO Forces If Russia Advances on Ukraine

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The US will take steps including export control on key industries and sanctions on financial institutions if Russia launches an incursion into Ukraine, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said on Monday.

"What we said is if Russia further invades Ukraine there will be significant costs and consequences well beyond what happened in 2014 ... Those costs will include financial sanctions, and it's been reported that those sanctions will include key financial institutions, export control that targets key industries, enhancement of NATO force posture on allied territory, and increased security assistance to Ukraine," Sherman told a press briefing.

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**Sherman Says US in Intensive Discussions With Allies About Export Controls**

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - Washington is in intensive discussions with allies and partners about export controls, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said on Monday. "We are in intensive discussions with partners and allies about export control and working through the best way to move forward and are finding a lot of understanding, agreement and interest in pursuing them," Sherman said.

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**US Ready to Move Swiftly on Talks With Russia But Not on Arms Control Issues - Sherman**

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United States is prepared to move swiftly to resolve security issues with Russia but matters related to arms control cannot be negotiated within weeks, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said on Monday. "Russian officials have said in public and in private that they want to move swiftly and the United States is ready to do so," Sherman told reporters in a conference call. "At the same time, negotiations on complex topics like arms control cannot be completed in a matter of days or even weeks."

Sherman added that security talks in Geneva did include missile placement.

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**US Thinks No Country Has Veto Over Another About Joining NATO - Sherman**

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United States does not make decisions for other countries and does not think any country in the world has a veto over another state's decision to join NATO, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said on Monday. "We do not make decisions for other countries. We will not agree that any country should have a veto over any other country when it comes to being part of the NATO alliance. NATO has its own processes for that," Sherman said during a press briefing following bilateral talks with Russia in Geneva, Switzerland.

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### US Expects Reciprocity From Russia at Security Talks - Deputy Secretary

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United States is expecting reciprocity from Russia during security talks, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said on Monday.

"Anything we do that we might put on the table as an idea, we would expect reciprocal action from Russia, it may not be the exact same action, it may be another action which creates mutuality and reciprocity and that is very critical," she said following the consultations in Geneva.

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Sherman Says Will Travel to Brussels Tuesday to Meet With NATO Chief, Others About Russia  
WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said on Monday that she will be visit Brussels the following day to meet with European Union officials, including NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, ahead of holding additional talks with Russia.

"Tomorrow morning, very early, I will travel to Brussels to meet with NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg and brief the North Atlantic Council. I will also meet again with EEAS Secretary General Sannino and I will brief the EU's Political and Security Committee. All of these meetings will take place before the NATO-Russia Council on Wednesday where I will lead the delegation," Sherman said.

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### US Ready to Move 'Expediently' in Security Talks With Russia, No Timetable Yet - Sherman

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United States is ready to move as expeditiously as possible in security talks with Russia, but no timetable has been set yet, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said on Monday.

"[T]hese kinds of arms control negotiations, as Mr. [Vladimir] Putin said, don't happen in just a day or even a week. They are generally quite complex, very technical, and take some time, but we are certainly ready to move as expeditiously as one possibly can in these circumstances," Sherman told a press briefing after the talks with Russia in Geneva.

The diplomat added she has hope about the security talks with Russia but cares more about results.

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US, Russia Will Discuss Way Forward in Security Talks at End of This Week - Sherman

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United States and Russia plan to discuss the next way forward in security talks at the end of this week after Washington consults with European allies and partners, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said on Monday.

"We will have discussions with our allies and partners in the days ahead and at the end of this week ... the US and Russian governments will discuss the way forward," Sherman said during a conference call after strategic stability talks in Geneva.

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US Pushed Back Against Certain Russian Proposals on Security During Geneva Talks - Sherman

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United States has pushed back against certain Russian proposals on security in Europe and will never forego its bilateral ties and cooperation with other states willing to work with Washington, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said on Monday.

"We would start, however, in pushing back on security proposals that are simply non-starters for the United States. We will not allow anyone to set slam closed NATO's open-door policy, which has always been central to the NATO alliance. We will not forego bilateral cooperation with sovereign states that wish to work with United States," Sherman said during a press briefing.

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US, Russia Agreed During Security Talks in Geneva Nuclear War Cannot Be Won - Sherman

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United States and Russia have agreed during the bilateral security talks in Geneva that there cannot be a winner in a nuclear war and such a war must not be fought, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said on Monday.

"United States and Russia agree that a nuclear war can never be won and must never be fought," Sherman said during a press briefing after the talks.

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US, Russia Had 'Frank, Forthright' Discussion on Security Proposals in Geneva - Sherman

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman had "frank and forthright" discussion with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov on the security proposals in Europe outlined by Moscow, the US diplomat said on Monday after the bilateral talks concluded in Geneva, Switzerland.

"We had a frank and forthright discussion over the course of nearly eight hours in the US mission in Geneva," Sherman said during a press briefing. "The United States offered to meet again soon to discuss these bilateral issues in more detail."

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US Puts Visa Restrictions on 116 Individuals for 'Undermining' Nicaragua's Democracy  
WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United States is imposing visa restrictions on 116 individuals who are "undermining" Nicaragua's democracy, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.

"In concert with democracies in the international community, the United States will continue to call out the Ortega-Murillo regime's ongoing abuses and will deploy diplomatic and economic tools to support the restoration of democracy and respect for human rights in Nicaragua. To that end, the Department of State is taking steps to impose visa restrictions on 116 individuals complicit in undermining democracy in Nicaragua, including mayors, prosecutors, university administrators, as well as police, prison, and military officials," he said.

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US Sanctions 6 Nicaraguan Officials on Ortega's Inauguration Day  
(Updates headline, lede; changes quote in para 2; adds details in paras 3-5; background in paras 6-7)

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United States has sanctioned another six Nicaraguan officials in connection with fraudulent November elections, the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced on Monday.

"Today, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated six officials of the Government of Nicaragua pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13851. President Daniel Ortega and Vice President Rosario Murillo are scheduled to be inaugurated today following fraudulent national elections orchestrated by their regime in November, further consolidating their control of power to the detriment of the Nicaraguan people.," the Treasury said.

The Monday action, in particular, targeted officials of the Nicaraguan military, the Nicaraguan minister of defense, the Nicaraguan Institute of Telecommunications and Mail (TELCOR), and the state-owned Nicaraguan Mining Company (ENIMINAS).

The move is part of sanctions that target the ongoing abuses of President Daniel Ortega and Vice President Rosario Murillo, the Treasury Department said

"The Ortega-Murillo regime continues its subjugation of democracy through effectuating sham elections, silencing peaceful opposition, and holding hundreds of people as political prisoners. The United States and our partners are sending a clear message to President Ortega, Vice President Murillo, and their inner circle that we continue to stand with the Nicaraguan people in their calls for the immediate release of these political prisoners and a return to democracy," Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian Nelson said.

Nicaragua held its presidential and parliamentary elections on November 7, with Daniel Ortega securing a fourth consecutive five-year term. Since early June, several dozen opposition politicians and activists have been arrested in Nicaragua on various charges, including seven presidential candidates. Critics of Ortega accuse him of having cracked down on opponents ahead of the elections.

In November, President Joe Biden proclaimed nearly all Nicaraguan officials, including Ortega and his spouse, barred from entering the United States in response to alleged "repressive and abusive" acts by the Central American nation's government.

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Greenhouse Emissions in 2021 Move US Further From Paris Accord Targets - Research Group

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The increase in greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) in the United States last year moved the country further away from reaching the Paris Climate Agreement goals to cut the emissions in half below 2005 levels by the end of the decade, the Rhodium Group said in a report on Monday.

"The uptick in GHG emissions in 2021 moves the country even further from meeting its Paris Agreement climate target of reducing emissions 50-52% below 2005 levels by 2030," the report said.

The Rhodium Group noted that the restrictive COVID-19 pandemic measures greatly contributed to reducing greenhouse emissions in the United States to 22.2% below 2005 levels in 2020.

However, greenhouse gas emissions increased to 17.4% below 2005 levels in 2021, the report said.

The Rhodium Group pointed out that its research indicates the increase in coal-fired power generation is responsible for the rise in greenhouse gas emissions last year in addition to the uptick in road - primarily freight - transportation.

The price of coal doubled in 2021 even despite producers decreasing production as the COVID-19 pandemic measures caused oil prices to collapse and triggered a slow growth in demand.

As a consequence, the United States' progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions was slowed in 2021, putting the country in the position of having to work harder to reach its climate targets for 2025 and 2030.

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US-Russia Security Talks in Geneva Conclude After Roughly 7.5 Hours - State Department

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - US-Russia security talks in Geneva concluded after roughly 7.5 hours, the State Department said in a statement circulated in media.

Earlier on Monday, Russia and the United States began talks in Geneva. Among the topics are the security guarantees that were proposed by Moscow and include, in particular, provisions on the mutual non-deployment of intermediate and short-range missiles and limits on military exercises.

The meeting was held in a closed format at the US Permanent Mission to the UN Office in Geneva.

The Russian delegation was headed by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov and Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin. The US delegation is led by Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman.

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Forty Percent of Americans With Credit Card Debt Unaware of Their Interest Rate - Poll

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) – Many Americans choose credit cards based on cash back and other features, but aren't paying attention to interest rates, a new survey conducted by bankrate.com revealed on Monday.

"Among cardholders who carry a balance, cash back was more than twice as popular (30 percent) as a low interest rate (13 percent). In fact, the survey found a large share of card debtors (40 percent) don't even know the interest rate for the primary card on which they owe money," the survey said.

Cash back is the most popular credit card feature, according to 41% of 2,764 American adults. Fourteen percent consider where the card is accepted, while another 6% said that travel rewards are the most important to them. Meanwhile, only 14% said that low interest rates and fees play a significant role when choosing a card.

"But focusing on earning rewards while carrying a balance is a costly mistake. First, the interest you pay on the debt will cancel out your rewards many times over," the survey noted.

Almost half of participants said they had not changed their primary credit card in last five years. That includes 26% of those who never switched. Eleven percent changed cards over a decade ago.

"Older consumers are more likely to keep reaching for the same credit card for years. One in four boomers (25 percent) has always stuck with the same primary credit card, while almost one in three (31 percent) says it has been at least five years since they swapped their top card," the survey added.

However, the younger generation also prefers constancy – 27% of millennials said they have never traded in their primary cards, while another 16% keep them for at least five years, the survey said.

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#### US Does Not Foresees Situation to Walk Away From Talks With Russia - White House

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - US Deputy National Security Adviser Jonathan Finer said on Monday that he does not see a situation in which the United States will walk away from the talks with Russia,

"I do not see a situation in which the US walks away from talks," Finer told CNN when asked if Washington can leave the talks as a response to Russia's position it will not accept a potential Ukraine membership in NATO.

Earlier on Monday, Russia and the United States began talks in Geneva on the security guarantees that were proposed by Moscow, including concluding a legally binding agreement that NATO will not move eastward.

Finer reiterated the often stated US position that Russia has no right to determine relations between Ukraine and NATO.

"That is a sovereign decision for the government of Ukraine and for the alliance itself. It is not up to Russia to close what we call NATO's open door," he said.

Finer also said the United States can impose significant and severe sanctions if Russia invades Ukraine.

Tensions between Russia and Ukraine have increased in the past several weeks amid an alleged Russian troops buildup at the Ukrainian border and claims of preparations for an invasion. Russia has repeatedly denied the accusations, saying it reserves the right to relocate troops within its sovereign territory and at its own discretion, while making it clear that NATO's military activity near Russian borders poses a threat to its security.

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#### Most Americans Back Nuclear Talks With Iran But Doubt Deal Will Stop Bomb - Poll

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - A plurality of US voters favor continued negotiations with Iran to prevent Tehran acquiring nuclear weapons, but even if a deal is reached, most Americans are convinced the Islamic republic will go ahead with developing its own nuclear arsenal, a Morning Consult poll said on Monday.

Some 42% of voters support dropping sanctions on Iran in order to revive the nuclear negotiations compared with 35% who opposed it, according to the poll.

However, 51% of Americans believe that even if the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is revived, Iran will go ahead and develop its own nuclear weapons while only 28% believe Tehran will then suspend its nuclear weapons program, the poll said.

Some 77% of voters are concerned Iran will manufacture nuclear weapons, Morning Consult said. A 56% majority of Americans still supports the JCPOA, with 72% backing from Democrats and just 43% from Republicans, the poll found.

The survey was carried out on December 28-29.

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**US Imposes Sanctions on 6 Nicaraguan Nationals - Treasury Dept.**

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) - The United States has placed six Nicaraguan nationals on its Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) list, the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced on Monday.

"The following individuals have been added to OFAC's SDN List: BARAHONA CASTRO, Rosa Adelina... CALDERON VINDELL, Ramon Humberto,... DELGADO CASTELLON, Celina,... DIAZ FLORES, Nahima Janett... PULIDO ORTIZ, Bayardo de Jesus, RODRIGUEZ RUIZ, Bayardo Ramon," the Treasury Department said.

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**Moderna Expects to Have COVID-19 Booster Targeting Omicron by Fall 2022**

WASHINGTON, January 10 (Sputnik) – Moderna is developing an updated booster vaccine against COVID-19 set to be released in the fall and offer protection against Omicron, CEO Stephane Bancel told CNBC.

"We are discussing with public health leaders around the world to decide what we think is the best strategy for the potential booster for the fall of 2022. We believe it will contain omicron," Bancel said.

The Omicron-specific booster shot will soon enter clinical trials as Moderna prepares to supply as many as 2-3 billion booster doses this year alone, according to the report.

The United Kingdom, South Korea, Switzerland have already placed orders for Moderna boosters worth \$18.5 billion, the report said.

Last week, the US Food and Drug Administration shortened the interval between receiving the initial COVID-19 vaccine doses produced by Moderna and getting a booster shot from six months to five in American adults 18 and older.

Omicron remains the predominant variant of the coronavirus in the United States and accounts for 95.4% of new infections, according to data compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention during the week ending January 1.

