

12/9/22 Friday

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'The Ick Factor': Watch Scientists Illuminate Thousands of Micro-Droplets Spewed by Flushing Toilet

By - Fantine Gardinier

A 2020 study found that more than half of UK residents didn't close the toilet lid before flushing, allowing "toilet plume" to spread potentially infectious pathogens several feet away from the toilet.

Thanks to a group of scientists at the University of Colorado Boulder, we will never see toilets and their contents the same way again.

A summary of their research was [published in Scientific Reports](#) on Thursday, describing how they managed to visualize the typically-invisible droplets of water that splash out of a toilet when it flushes.

"We are using lasers to look at what is ejected out of a commercial toilet when it is flushed," John Crimaldi, lead author on the study and professor of civil, environmental, and architectural engineering, said in [a news release](#). "The laser light is being shown in a thin sheet and it just reflects off the particles and then our eyes or the camera are able to pick them up and visualize them."

"When the toilet is flushed, it emits these very small, aerosolized particles, and they range from as small as tenths of microns up to potentially as large as almost 1 millimeter. The very large particles fall out quickly, the smaller particles remain suspended," he explained.

"There's obviously the 'ick' factor," Crimaldi noted, recalling that prior studies have shown that pathogens can persist in a toilet bowl for several dozens of flushes after being deposited there. "From a public health perspective, it's really important to understand this."

Toilets can harbor any number of bacteria contained in human feces, including e. Coli and m. tuberculosis, as well as viruses passed from the body like influenza, norovirus, and SARS. Some studies [have suggested](#) that "toilet plume" could be a disease vector for norovirus on ships and airliners, and that SARS may have spread this way during the 2002-4 outbreak. However, there is no direct experimental proof of disease transmission via toilet plume. Crimaldi cautioned: "We aren't epidemiologists, we're not in public health, we're engineers and physicists. Our role is to understand the physics of this mechanism and show that that could lead to exposure to pathogens and then to work, ideally, with other people down the road to try to minimize the transmission."

"I think this will change your relationship with toilets," he added.

Past studies have shown that the design of the toilet [greatly influences](#) the size and spread of the toilet plume, and generally increases with water pressure in the toilet. The least-pluminous toilets are modern siphoning toilets and the low-flush gravity-flow toilets commonly found in homes. They also found that closing the toilet lid before flushing could cut the spread of plume by a factor of 12.

One study performed by bathroom cleaner manufacturer Harpic in 2020 also used high-speed cameras to [track the distance](#) toilet plume droplets flew, with some landing up to six feet (1 meter) away. It was released as part of a #CloseTheLid campaign.

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China Reveals Purchase of Over 1 Million Gold Ounces, First Addition to Reserves Since 2019
By - Fantine Gardinier

Nations around the world went on a buying spree for gold earlier this year, which analysts fear may hint at growing economic instability. The precious metal, long used as currency, is prized for its value stability amid the upheavals of capitalist boom and bust. However, it also has important industrial applications.

According to the most recent data published by China's State Administration of Foreign Exchange, the socialist state recently made its first purchase of gold for its reserves in nearly three years.

The data, published at the start of the month, showed that China bought 1.03 million ounces of the precious metal, or the equivalent of 32 tons, worth \$1.8 billion.

The buy increases China's total gold reserves from 62.64 million ounces to 63.67 million ounces, or about \$112 billion. It is the world's sixth-largest stash of gold, after the US, Germany, Italy, France, and Russia.

The purchase came amid a flurry of buys by other countries. According to the World Gold Council, the third quarter of 2022, from July 1 to September 30, witnessed the largest-ever mass of gold purchases for such a time period at 399 tons. The high demand has driven up prices, which are currently around \$1,775 an ounce.

According to reports in Chinese media, Beijing made the big buy was aimed partly at reducing the proportion of US dollar assets it holds. In the year prior to Q3 2022, China dumped \$113.9 billion in US Treasury bills.

The purchase of gold is also seen as reflecting the increasing volatility of global markets, as whispers of a global recession in the coming year grow stronger.

However, China is also the world's largest consumer of gold, using 1,100 metric tons last year. The malleable metal has wide applications in industry, but roughly 80% of gold used in industry goes into electronics, where it's valued for its conductive properties and its resistance to tarnish. China is the world's largest producer of electronic devices, [manufacturing 36% of the annual](#) total.

That central role has also made China the world's largest buyer of semiconductor chips used in electronics - and made those chips an important battlefield in the stiffening competition between Beijing and Washington. US ally South Korea and the government in Taiwan, which enjoys informal US support, make most of the world's computer chips, and China buys a large amount of them. Taiwan's centrality in making high-end chips has also [made American strategists fret](#) about the implications of a potential Chinese takeover of the island, which Beijing sees as a rebellious Chinese province.

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Democratic Party Scion Kyrsten Sinema Says She's Leaving, Registering as Independent
By - Fantine Gardinier

Two US Senators, Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Angus King of Maine, define themselves as Independents, aligned with neither the Democrats nor Republicans. Nonetheless, both lawmakers caucus with the Democrats, giving liberals a slim majority.

Long at odds with party leadership, US Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ) has said she is leaving the Democratic Party and registering as an Independent, making her the third non-aligned lawmaker in the Senate.

The junior senator from Arizona revealed her decision in [a Friday op-ed](#) in the Arizona Republic, casting the decision as motivated by frustration with Democratic “party doctrine.”

Describing Arizonans as people who “make our own decisions, using our own judgment and lived experiences to form our beliefs” and don’t “automatically subscribe to whatever positions the national political parties dictate or view every issue through labels that divide us,” Sinema said her constituents “expect our leaders to follow that example.”

“When politicians are more focused on denying the opposition party a victory than they are on improving Americans’ lives, the people who lose are everyday Americans,” she said. “That’s why I have joined the growing numbers of Arizonans who reject party politics by declaring my independence from the broken partisan system in Washington. I registered as an Arizona independent.”

In a separate [interview](#) that was also published on Friday, Sinema suggested that, unlike Sanders and King, she might not automatically side with the Democrats, although she said she didn’t plan to rock the boat, either.

“When I come to work each day, it’ll be the same,” Sinema said. “I’m going to still come to work and hopefully serve on the same committees I’ve been serving on and continue to work well with my colleagues at both political parties.”

With the victory of US Sen. Raphael Warnock (D-GA) in [a special runoff election](#) earlier this week, the Democrats have 48 seats to the Republicans’ 49 seats, so at least two of the three independents choosing to side with the Democrats have given them a razor-thin majority. In the event of a tie vote, the tie-breaking ballot is cast by the President of the Senate, which is US Vice President Kamala Harris - a Democrat.

Sinema has long frustrated Democratic strategists with her moderate politics, often joining Republicans in [casting aspersions](#) at progressive bills on US President Joe Biden’s agenda and suggestions that the [filibuster rule be suspended](#) to get them past the GOP blockade. The rule allows a senator to refuse to yield the floor if they can talk continuously, enabling a party to block a bill’s progress. A 60-vote supermajority in the 100-person chamber can override a filibuster. Another Democratic Party maverick, US Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia, has long been expected to abandon the party by liberals [frustrated with his tendency](#) to side with Republicans. However, Manchin has announced no such plans. His state governor, Jim Justice, did make

such a move in 2017, switching from the Democrats to the Republicans at a rally attended by then-US President Donald Trump.

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Third 'Twitter Files' Trove Goes Live, Reveals Meetings With FBI & DHS on Trump Suppression
By - Ian DeMartino

A group of journalists were given a trove of data by new Twitter owner, tech-billionaire Elon Musk, now known as "The Twitter Files." A third batch was released on Friday, and two additional releases are expected to come this weekend.

Journalist Matt Taibbi released another batch of "The Twitter Files" on Friday, calling the latest installment "Part One" of "The Removal of Donald Trump." He also promised journalists Michael Shellenberger and Bari Weiss would release parts two and three on Saturday and Sunday, respectively.

The Friday release includes internal Slack communications between high-level Twitter executives, including the former Trust and Safety Head Yoel Roth, former Trust and Policy Chief Vijaya Gadde, Deputy General Counsel and former FBI lawyer Jim Baker, and former Twitter Election & Crisis Response Lead Patrick Conlon, who previously worked in intelligence for the US Department of Defense.

The release shows Twitter executives working closely with the FBI, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI), which oversees all US intelligence departments. The chat shows Twitter executives often made decisions arbitrarily, and that they even planned to retaliate against accounts they couldn't find violations for with stricter enforcement in the future.

Taibbi points to two groups that were in charge of content moderation at Twitter, the Safety Operations team that used a more "rule based" approach to address issues like scams and threats, and a group of policy executives that Taibbi describes as a "high-speed Supreme Court of moderation" that they made content decisions "on the fly, often in minutes and based on guesses, gut calls, even Google searches, even in cases involving the President."

Chat logs show that top policy executives had weekly meetings with the FBI, DHS, and DNI in the weeks before the election, and spoke to them about the suppression of the New York Post's story on Hunter Biden's infamous laptop.

The post also shows the chaos that erupted in the Twitter offices in the face of the Hunter Biden laptop story:

"We blocked the NYP story, then we unblocked it (but said the opposite), then said we unblocked. And now we're in a messy situation where our policy is in shambles, comms is angry, reporters think we're idiots, and we're refactoring an exceedingly complex policy 18 days out from the election, in short, FML."

Roth also talked about having to miss a meeting with the FBI and DHS so he could have a call with Apple to prevent Twitter from being removed from the App Store. The released chat logs

did not provide clarity into what that potential removal was for or how close it came to happening.

Roth also joked about having to hide his meetings with intelligence agencies on his calendar, noting he was running out of generic names for the meetings.

“Very Boring Meeting That is Definitely Not About Trump ;)” he joked, adding another quip a few messages later: “DEFINITELY NOT meeting with the FBI I SWEAR.”

Another message mentions the FBI was reporting tweets from conservatives to Twitter, including one from a former Indiana Councilor and Republican who claimed mail-in ballots were being rejected for errors. Twitter executives ultimately decided that tweet did not violate the rules but it shows the FBI’s involvement in suppressing speech it deemed harmful on Twitter.

The Twitter executives also considered taking action on a joke from former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, who said he was considering sending a mail-in ballot for his deceased grandparents.

Despite every executive knowing the tweet was a joke, they debated removing it before deciding it was an “edge case,” and that the joke didn’t cause any “confusion.”

Taibbi says arbitrary decision-making will be important in later decisions.

The executives also put restrictions on a Trump tweet, making it so it could not be replied to, shared, or liked, even though it did not violate any specific rules. Conservative actor James Wood would then screenshot and share the post, angering Twitter executives.

They could not find a specific rule to apply to Woods, so they instead planned for retaliation later.

“I’d suggest we action him for something worth the fiasco rather than this screenshot, since we don’t have a firm policy basis for action on his account,” a Twitter employee with a redacted name suggests.

Another redacted employee replies: “Yep. Are you fine letting this one lie [redacted] can hit him hard on future [violations] with firmer basis”

Another tweet by Georgia Republican congresswoman Jody Hice was also slammed with a label. The tweet stated “Say NO to Big Tech censorship!” and “Mailed ballots are more prone to fraud than in-person voting. That shouldn’t be controversial. It’s just common sense.”

Though Twitter staff agreed the comment about mail-in ballots was “more of a legitimate statement,” it still got a warning label applied to it. Roth indicated he wanted to go further but worried about a “wah wah censorship” backlash.

Meanwhile, posts by Biden and other Democrats claiming Trump and Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett would try to steal the election were brought up in the Slack channel and routinely approved by Twitter executives.

One message by US Attorney General Eric Holder stated the post office was “deliberately crippled” by the Trump administration and got hit with a generic warning label, but it was quickly removed.

Eventually, Twitter would create a new “deamplification” tool called “L3” that would automatically suppress tweets that had a warning label on them. Twitter executives immediately wanted to use it on Trump but had to wait a day for the system to come online.

Taibbi says chat logs show Twitter was working to suppress Trump long before January 6.

Twitter also used automated processes that it calls “bots” to watch both Trump and conservative news site Breitbart. The bots looked for certain words or phrases coming from certain accounts

or locations and would then proceed to automatically take action. At one unspecified time, Roth looked at the Trump account and found what Taibbi described as “a slew” of duplicate bot applications for Trump’s account.

Taibbi noted that even as late as January 6, Twitter executives were still trying to apply rules when suppressing accounts, albeit with an “ever-expanding, ostensibly rational set of rules to regulate every conceivable speech situation that might arise between humans,” and that they had become “infected with groupthink, coming to believe – sincerely – that it was Twitter’s responsibility to control, as much as possible, what people could talk about, how often and with whom.”

But Taibbi hints that was no longer the case starting on January 7: “By the next day, [Twitter execs] will contemplate a major change in approach. Watch this weekend for the play-by-play of how all that went down. ... By January 8th, which will describe Sunday, Twitter will be receiving plaudits from ‘our partners’ in Washington, and the sitting US president will no longer be heard on the platform.”

Taibbi also noted that while they were told that the Trump administration, and Republicans in general, also made moderation requests to Twitter, he says they have so far been unable to find them, despite looking. He also said they found tidbits on COVID-19 and foreign policy, but those reveals will have to wait while they comb through the “enormous” data sets they were given.

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‘Poll Dancing’ and Infighting - Cartoon
By - Ted Rall

After Democrats performed better than expected in November’s midterm elections, Republicans started sniping at each other, casting blame for their underperformance. Possibly in response to that, President Joe Biden’s approval rating ticked up a couple of points.

Then, Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ) announced that she was leaving the Democratic party and turning into an independent. Democratic lawmakers, including Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), took to Twitter to mock the senator’s decision.

The action was reminiscent of the dunking Republicans did on each other after the midterm elections and brings up the question of whether Democrats are starting their own infighting with a senator they may still need to pass legislation.

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House Committee: Commanders Owner & NFL Obstructed Inquiry, Enabled Toxic Work Environment
By - Ian DeMartino

The Washington Commanders are one of 32 National Football League teams, and has an estimated value of \$5.6 billion. In early November it was reported owner Dan Snyder was looking at options for selling part or all of the team. Snyder has owned the Commanders since 1999, when he purchased the team for \$800 million.

A report from the House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Reform on the Washington Commanders has outlined that team owner Daniel Snyder “permitted and participated” in a toxic work environment, and that he and the NFL worked together to obstruct the 14-month congressional inquiry.

The 79-page report released Thursday says the NFL was complicit with Snyder’s cover-up efforts by helping him bury a 2020-21 internal investigation of the team’s workplace performed by attorney Beth Wilkinson. The results of that investigation have not been made public.

The report [details accusations](#) of witness intimidation and tampering, private investigators following and harassing employees, unauthorized secret nude recordings of cheerleaders, and an alleged sexual assault by Snyder on his private plane in 2009.

The committee also accused Snyder of evasive and “misleading” answers to the committee’s questions and said he attempted to dodge the subpoena issued by the committee.

In a statement released by the team, the commanders said the report is politically driven, and that Snyder and the team fully cooperated with the investigation.

“These Congressional investigators demonstrated, almost immediately, that they were not interested in the truth, and were only interested in chasing headlines by pursuing one side of the story,” the statement said. “Today’s report is the predictable culmination of that one-sided approach. There are no new revelations here.”

Republicans on the committee also released a memo, blasting the investigation.

“The Democrats’ sham investigation into the Washington Commanders has been an egregious waste of taxpayer-funded resources,” the statement read, adding that the committee should be focused on the government.

“No foundation exists for conducting congressional oversight of the Team. Simply put, Congress cannot provide any additional relief or remedies to any of the aggrieved parties. Why, then, has the Committee investigated a professional football team and targeted an individual team owner? Committee Democrats have chosen to weaponize the power of Congress against a single private workplace.”

The memo also echoes Snyder’s comments that the team’s toxic work environment was the result of former team president and general manager Bruce Allen; however, it also notes the environment improved since he left the team. Allen has countered the memo by pointing out that he did not work for the team for many of the years covered by the investigation.

Bruce Allen and the Private Investigators

Allen swore under oath to the committee that investigators were following him, and that they told him they were sent by the Washington Football Team (from 2020 to 2022 the Commanders were known as the Washington Football Team). Allen says the investigator who approached him also gave him a business card indicating he was a former FBI agent and pointed out several other individuals who were watching him.

Allen also says that prior to that incident, Snyder told him he was considering hiring a private investigator to follow NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell. Allen informed the committee he

believed Snyder was joking at the time but after his incident with the private investigators and reading about similar experiences from other employees, he is no longer sure it was a joke. In October, it was reported Snyder bragged to associates about having “dirt” on other team owners and Goodell, which would prevent any attempts by the league to force him to sell the team.

The NFL Helps Snyder

Allen also said he informed NFL Senior Vice President and special counsel in the Wilkinson investigation, Lisa Friel, about his experience with the private investigators. He said Friel gave him the impression she was not surprised, and called it “conduct detrimental” to the league’s integrity.

New York Representative and committee chairwoman Carolyn Maloney, a Democrat, said the conversation showcases the NFL knew what Snyder was doing and enabled it to continue. “They knew,” Maloney said. “They called it detrimental conduct that they then become complicit in by hiding the detrimental conduct. So it could continue, literally could continue. And that was, to me, irresponsible beyond belief.”

The report says Snyder admitted to using private investigators but claimed he could not recall conversations with his legal team about who the investigators approached or targeted. According to Allen, Friel also informed him the Commanders planned to blame the toxic culture on him and heavily implied the Commanders were behind the email leak that revealed sexist and misogynistic comments from former Las Vegas Raiders coach Jon Gruden.

In 2020, Snyder was hit with allegations that he ordered employees to take “the good bits” of outtakes from a swimsuit calendar photoshoot with the team’s cheerleaders and put them on a DVD for him. Snyder denied the allegations at the time but nude photos of the cheerleaders surfaced in the Gruden email leaks. The team would eventually settle out of court with the cheerleaders for an undisclosed sum. One of those cheerleaders is one of the employees that Snyder is accused of paying a private investigator to follow.

Snyder swore under oath that he never saw the “purported videos” but that he could not remember what the team did about them.

Maloney also said the use of private investigators was “extreme” and something she had not seen in her more than 30 years serving on Capitol Hill.

The committee notes the NFL refused to turn over more than 40,000 documents collected by the Wilkinson investigation, including her findings and final report.

It also states that while the NFL and Snyder claim that all former employees of the Commanders have been released from their confidentiality agreements, the committee found “a significant number of potential witnesses” who declined to share their experience either out of fear of retaliation or because the team had not yet released them from their “confidentiality obligations.” “[Snyder] was intimidating the workforce and the executives,” Maloney said. “Anyone who spoke out, he had private investigators go to their home and track them. Going to a cheerleader’s home with their children and try to offer hush money and try to intimidate them not to talk anymore.”

Also detailed in the report is the record-breaking \$10 million fine the NFL imposed on the Commanders after the Wilkinson investigation. That fine was split into two \$5 million parts; one half went to the NFL and the other went to local charities. The committee notes the arrangement

potentially allowed the Commanders to use tax deductions to limit the impact of the fine and may have conferred “a benefit” to the team.

Beyond the Wilkinson report, the committee also notes three other incidents where the NFL and the Commanders refused to release evidence related to the investigation. The committee was unable to obtain the outtakes from the cheerleader calendar shoots, the PowerPoints made by the team to present to the NFL and Wilkinson, and information about a confidential settlement between Snyder and a woman he allegedly sexually assaulted on his plane in 2009.

That assault is now the subject of a second internal investigation by the NFL and is headed up by former Securities and Exchange Commission chairwoman Mary Jo White.

In October, ESPN reported the woman rejected a seven-figure offer from the Commanders’ legal team to not speak about the allegations or the settlement. The Commanders deny any additional money was offered after the initial settlement.

According to the committee, a secret “common-interest agreement” between the NFL and the Commanders further implicates the league. The Committee contends (and ESPN reported in February) that the agreement essentially gave Snyder the power to veto any public releases from the Wilkinson investigation.

What's Next

The NFL is conducting its second investigation into Snyder, this time focusing on the 2009 sexual assault allegations. The Commanders are also dealing with a lawsuit and a criminal investigation by the US attorney office in Eastern District of Virginia dealing with alleged financial improprieties related to season-ticket deposits.

The Committee recommended that Congress should require the NFL and other professional sports leagues to “demonstrate compliance” with employment laws to keep their federal antitrust exemptions and tax-exempt bonds used to finance stadium construction and renovations.

At least two bills have been drafted in Congress in response to the investigation, including a bill titled “No Tax Subsidies for Stadiums Act.” Maloney also introduced a bill banning employers from recording and distributing images of employees without prior notice and consent. The law would also ban the use of nondisclosure agreements being used to prevent employees from speaking out about harassment, discrimination, or retaliation in the workplace.

However, the bills have little hope of passing in the political climate. Republicans are set to take over the House of Representatives in January and Rep. James Comer (R-KY) has already indicated the Committee will not continue its investigation once he becomes its chair.

Meanwhile, Maloney lost her seat to fellow Rep. Jerry Nadler (D-NY) in a primary that took place because of redistricting. She will be out of Congress in January.

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US Considering Federal Funding for Mineral Projects Overseas - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - The White House is considering funding a dozen mineral projects overseas in a push for more resources used in lower-carbon technologies, Axios reported on Monday.

The number of such projects could be "around a dozen," Jose Fernandez, under secretary of state for economic growth, energy, and the environment, told the news outlet.

The federal funding may be distributed through the Mineral Security Partnership, which includes Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, South Korea, the United Kingdom and the European Commission, the report said.

According to Fernandez, such cooperation is meant to address increasing demand for rare earth elements, which affects production of electric vehicles and solar panels.

The move may rekindle criticism of the Biden administration for rejecting mines at home, the report noted.

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Americans' Confidence in US Economy Sees Slight Boost – Poll

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) – Americans' confidence in the US economy has improved over the last month, although it remains low, according to a Gallup poll released Monday.

In the latest survey conducted from November 9 to December 2, Gallup's Economic Confidence Index increased from -45 in October to -39. It had been as low as -58 in June.

Despite the slight uptick, confidence levels remain lower than they were in 2021 and are amongst the worse measured since the record -72 low during the 2008 financial crisis. The index ranges from -100 to +100.

Currently, 15% of respondents said economic conditions were either "excellent" or "good," while 46% rated them as "poor." These ratings are a slight improvement from the 14% and 49%, respectively, reported in October.

In terms of the economy's direction, 24% of respondents said it was improving while 70% said it was getting worse, compared to 20% and 74%, respectively, in October.

Gallup suggested that ongoing high inflation, a weak stock market, high interest rates, and fears of a recession may be curbing economic confidence.

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US Semiconductor Ban on China Will Force Chinese to Grow Own Chip Industry - US Investor

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration's new restrictions to limit China's access to advanced US semiconductor technology will force the Chinese to strengthen their own chip industry that may become a competitor in a few years, US investor Jim Rogers told Sputnik.

In October, the Biden administration expanded controls on the export of US semiconductor technology going to China to restrict Beijing's ability to make certain high-end microchips used in military applications.

"This will cause the Chinese to spend more money developing a semiconductor industry," Rogers said. "It is going to hurt America in the long run because we, the Americans, are forcing the Chinese to develop their own semiconductor industry."

China has a strong enough economy to support efforts to advance its own semiconductor industry, possibly becoming a competitor to the US semiconductor industry in about five to 10 years, Rogers said.

Rogers predicts the United States may eventually regret the long-term consequences of the export controls.

The Biden administration aims to make America less dependent on China for semiconductor fabrication. Earlier this year, US President Joe Biden signed legislation which included \$52 billion in subsidies for domestic semiconductor manufacturers that the White House expects would create at least 40,000 jobs in the United States.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry said the United States abuses export control measures to target Chinese companies, while preserving its own technological hegemony. Beijing also said Washington's policy departs from the principle of fair competition and violates international economic and trade norms.

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US Investor Rogers Expects Recession in Next Year or Two

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - Veteran American investor Jim Rogers told Sputnik that he believes that there will be an economic recession in the next year or two.

"At least in the US, it's the largest economy, it's been 13 years since we've had a recession in the US. That's the longest in American history," Rogers said. "Now maybe it'll go 30 years without a recession but it never has. So, we are going to have a recession again in the next year or two. It's going to be very, very bad."

Rogers recalled that the economic problems in 2008 stemmed from too much debt.

"Well, since 2009, debt everywhere has skyrocketed. So the next time we have a recession, that's going to be very, very bad. Because the debt is so very high all over the world. You should be worried," the investor stated.

Rogers went on to say that as of now inflation has slowed down a little bit but the markets have a reaction, a correction.

"When the economy starts getting bad again, the central banks will print a lot more money. That's all they know to do, it is not right, but that's what they do," he said. "That will lead to more inflation, will help kill the recession for a while, but we're going to have more inflation and more problems in the world because there's so much debt and so much money printing yet to come." Earlier in December, President of the World Bank Malpass said at the Reuters Next Summit that many countries face the risk of recession next year.

Standard and Poor's Global Ratings said last month that the chances the United States will be able to avoid a recession next year are dimming as rising commodity prices and rate hikes are expected to weaken spending in the country.

Although the US economy has been protected by some momentum this year, the biggest concern is what awaits in 2023, such as extremely high prices and aggressive rate hikes, which will weigh down on affordability and aggregate demand, the release said.

Moreover, according to S&P Global Ratings, the conflict in Ukraine, tensions over Taiwan and China's economic slowdown are contributing to the chances that the US economy may tip into a recession.

Rogers, the creator of the Rogers International Commodity Index (RICI), co-founded the world-renowned Quantum Fund and is currently the chairman of Rogers Holdings and Beeland Interests. The Quantum Fund grew by 4,200% from 1970 to 1980.

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Arabs Realigning With China, Russia to Affect US Allies' Energy Markets - Investor Rogers

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - The Middle East nations realigning with China and Russia will have an impact on the energy markets of the US allies, renowned American investor Jim Rogers told Sputnik.

"It'll have some effect, not immediately, not even this year or next year. But you know, you have the Arabs become more friendly with the Chinese or the Russians or somebody else. Obviously, that's going to have a big effect on where their energy goes, and their pricing and their effect on the West," Rogers, the founder of the Rogers International Commodity Index (RICI), said.

America is pretty self-sufficient in energy now, he added, but many US allies will be affected.

"Many of Americas' friends will have to get energy somewhere if the Saudis become enemies of the US. Then obviously America's friends will have to get energy somewhere else," he said.

In October, OPEC+ unanimously agreed to take 2 million barrels of oil per day off the market, starting in November, in response to uncertainty in global energy markets. The decision caused a backlash in the White House, which announced it will revisit the relationship with Saudi Arabia in view of its step to support the OPEC+ decision.

Last week, the OPEC+ alliance decided to maintain the current quotas for oil production after considering a further cut.

"Throughout history, no matter how close some countries have been, those relationships often change," Rogers said. "What I see happening is that - I'm an American, so I don't like it- but it looks to me like some of the Arab countries are starting to say, wait a minute, we should reconsider. And maybe we can have friends with other countries. It would not be unusual or strange in history for days like this to happen."

Western countries have been facing a massive energy crisis, struggling to fill their gas reserves in time for the heating season in the aftermath of sanctions imposed on Russia over its military operation in Ukraine. The conflict resulted in significant disruptions in supply chains and a spike in energy prices worldwide.

The G7 states and some allies last week placed a price cap of \$60 per barrel on Russian crude as part of an effort to limit earnings they said Moscow could use to fund the special military operation in Ukraine. The Kremlin has said the price cap is unacceptable and Russia will not sell oil to any country that tries to implement it.

Rogers co-founded the world-renowned Quantum Fund, and is currently the chairman of Rogers Holdings and Beeland Interests. He is also the author of several books including "Investment Biker," "Adventure Capitalist," and "Street Smarts," and has the Guinness World Record for most countries visited in a continuous journey by car, an adventure he undertook from 1999-2002.

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EU Likely to Get Russian Energy Via Back Door, US Cannot Replace Supply - Investor Rogers

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - While the United States has some extra energy resources to help Europe, it cannot replace Russian supply, which would likely find its way to Europe despite sanctions, possibly via the back door, legendary investor Jim Rogers told Sputnik.

"The US has some excess energy supplies at the moment. Not a whole lot, but it has some. So, the US can help to some extent for Europe, but Europe is gigantic. Europe has more than 900 million people," Rogers said. "So, as much as we'd like to have, we can only do a small amount. The market will take care of it somehow one way or the other. I'm sure Russian energy will get to Europe eventually through the black market or the back door or something else. But the US can help some and will help some, but not enough. Europe is huge."

European Commissioner for Energy Kadri Simson said on Tuesday that it is not possible for Europe to replace the entirety of its Russian gas supply with alternative sources.

The statement came as a coalition of countries led by the United States and Europe seek to diminish Russia's revenue from energy exports, including by imposing a \$60, adjustable price cap on Russian oil.

Europe began moving away from Russia as a supplier of energy following the beginning of its special military operation in Ukraine on February 24.

Projects to connect the continent to new sources of energy include a turn to the United States as a supplier of fuel and plans by Slovenia to build a pipeline to Hungary for Algerian gas.

However, Hungary still receives some 85% of its gas from Russia.

Earlier this month, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban said he would seek an exemption from EU sanctions on Russian gas and atomic energy.

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Top US Investor Rogers Says Russian Oil Price Cap to Have Short-Term Effect, Markets Adapt

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - The restrictions on Russian oil prices imposed by the G7 countries will have only a short-term impact on energy markets because people will find ways around the regime, legendary American investor Jim Rogers told Sputnik.

Western states and their allies last week placed a price cap of \$60 per barrel on Russian crude as part of an effort to limit earnings they said Moscow could use to fund the special military operation in Ukraine.

The founder of the oft-cited Rogers International Commodity Index (RICI) expressed doubts about the effectiveness of the new measures based on his years of experience investing in and studying markets.

"People react and they do what they have to do," Rogers said. "Within a few days people can figure out a way to get around the energy controls or the caps or anything else."

Rogers said the impact of the oil price cap will be short-term because buyers and sellers will take measures such as moving oil through black or parallel markets. Over a longer term - a week, a month or a year - the oil price cap will have "virtually no effect at all," Rogers added.

"It distorts things for some people, but then in the end the market takes care of it," he said.

Rogers said he has always been skeptical of these types of price control efforts.

"I'm certainly skeptical of this one too, because I know how human beings are. It doesn't matter if they're Australians, if they're Germans or Russians or Americans. People figure out ways to get around controls," he said.

The Kremlin has said the price cap is unacceptable and Russia will not sell oil to any country that tries to implement it.

Rogers co-founded the world-renowned Quantum Fund and is currently the chairman of Rogers Holdings and Beeland Interests. He is also the author of several books including "Investment Biker," "Adventure Capitalist," and "Street Smarts," and has the Guinness World Record for most countries visited in a continuous journey by car, an adventure he undertook from 1999-2002.

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Renowned US Financier Rogers Says Now Good Time to Invest in Russia, Ukraine

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - US investment guru Jim Rogers told Sputnik that now is the right time to invest in Russia and Ukraine, for anyone that can, including in the countries' transportation and entertainment industries because history shows a significant amount of money can be made during times of conflict.

"I have learned over my investment career and reading that if you invest in a country when there's war or civil war, especially near the end, you will probably make a lot of money," Rogers, the creator of the Rogers International Commodity Index (RICI), said. "It's impossible for me to invest in Ukraine or Russia right now. But I would certainly like to."

Many Western investors had to leave Russia, he added, but others not restricted, like Brazilians or Indonesians, should consider investing in both countries.

"I'm very much against war, but... I have learned that if you invest in a disaster, you often make money. I am not investing in Russia or Ukraine, I am just saying what history shows," he added. Rogers also advised that the investments should be made in the areas most affected by the conflict, like the transportation and entertainment industries, including hotels.

"If you just look at the Russian economy or the Ukraine economy, you can see what suffered the most and that usually will be the things that will rise again," he explained. "Things that are hurt the most will usually do the best when peace comes."

At some point, the war is going to be over and there will be opportunities, he predicted.

"Someday people are going to fly to Tokyo again. They're not going to take the train to Tokyo. So, people like Aeroflot or airports or somebody will have a revival," he added.

In late September, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Moscow was still open to talks with Kiev and called on Ukraine to stop the hostilities. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, stated however that Kiev was ready for dialogue with Moscow only if another president came to power in Russia, a demand he later dropped.

So far, both sides insist that the right conditions for peace talks have not been established yet. Rogers co-founded the world-renowned Quantum Fund and is currently the chairman of Rogers Holdings and Beeland Interests. He is also the author of several books including "Investment Biker," "Adventure Capitalist," and "Street Smarts."

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Investor Rogers Expects Most Crypto to Vanish, Says Some May Survive as Trading Vehicles

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - US legendary investor Jim Rogers told Sputnik that he believes most cryptocurrency will eventually fall to zero and disappear or survive purely as trading vehicles.

Crypto exchange-operator FTX announced on November 11 that it was filing for bankruptcy protection, sending Bitcoin and other notable digital currencies plunging. US media reported last week that federal investigators are probing the FTX case over concerns of market manipulation.

"I am still skeptical about crypto, and I expect most of them will disappear and go to zero eventually," Rogers, the creator of the Rogers International Commodity Index (RICIS), said.

"The optimists say the crypto will be money... money everywhere is going to be on the computer - but in my view it is going to be government money."

Nearly all governments are developing crypto or computer money now, he added.

"I don't think most governments will say 'okay, this is our money... now on the computer but if you want to use somebody else's money you can.' That's not the way governments think," he added. "They like to control, they like monopoly... I would suspect that that we're going to have more problems and eventually they will disappear."

Rogers went on to say that if cryptos survive, they survive as trading vehicles.

"I don't think many people are threatened by trading vehicles and people want to buy or sell their stuff and have fun. Sure people have lots of games they play, trading games, so they are just trading vehicles," he said.

Rogers does not see any potential threat or future for the instruments.

"If I buy wheat and wheat goes down a lot, at least I have some wheat that I can eat. But if I buy this stuff and it goes down, there's nothing I can do with it," he added. "I'm just sitting here and I look and I got nothing."

FTX was ruined after rival digital currency exchange operator Binance walked away from a proposed acquisition and left it scrambling to raise about \$9.4 billion from investors and rivals, a task it was not up to.

Since FTX's announcement, BlockFi, a lender with exposure to the failed exchange operator, also filed for bankruptcy protection.

Bitcoin hovered at 17,000 on Friday, down 64% on the year. The currency started at \$0 in 2009, broke the one dollar barrier in 2011. About a decade later, Bitcoin would hit an all-time high of \$69,000.

Rogers co-founded the Quantum Fund, which delivered a return of 4,200% between 1970 and 1980 while the S&P 500 gained 47 percent. Rogers has said such returns are still possible if people do their homework.

Currently the chairman of Rogers Holdings and Beeland Interests based in Singapore, Rogers is also the author of several books including "Investment Biker," "Adventure Capitalist," and "Street Smarts."

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US Investor Rogers Warns of 'Worst Economic Problems in Lifetime' in 2-3 Years

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - US investment guru Jim Rogers told Sputnik that the world should brace for serious economic challenges in the next two-three years, which will likely become the "worst in his lifetime."

When asked about his forecast for the year of 2023, Rogers stated, "You should be worried."

"There's going to be a period of good, something will cause optimism to return," Rogers said.

"After the optimism, you should be extremely worried because we're going to have economic problems again sometime in the next two or three years and they will probably be the worst in my lifetime because there's so much debt. So much debt worldwide has built up since 2009. So the next time we have a problem, it's going to be very very bad. So, be worried."

Global growth is forecast to slow from 6% in 2021 to 3.2% in 2022 and 2.7% in 2023, the International Monetary Fund said in an outlook released in October. The IMF said this is the weakest growth profile since 2001 except for the global financial crisis and the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rogers, the creator of the Rogers International Commodity Index (RICI), co-founded the world-renowned Quantum Fund and is currently the chairman of Rogers Holdings and Beeland Interests.

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RPT - Most Germans Not Interested in Coup, Reviving Hitlerism – Russian Metropolitan in Germany

WASHINGTON, December 10 (Sputnik) - Most of the people in Germany are not interested in political coups and in reviving Hitlerism in the country, Russian Church Abroad (ROCOR) Metropolitan Mark (Arndt) of Berlin and Germany told Sputnik.

"We certainly do not agree with any such ideas or attempts to undermine democracy in this country," Metropolitan Mark said.

On Wednesday, the German Prosecutor General's Office said the police arrested 22 members and three supporters of an alleged terrorist organization that was plotting to overthrow the existing German government. Former German lawmaker and member of the AfD Birgit Malsack-Winkemann was among those arrested.

According to reports, she was supposed to become the justice minister following the coup. AfD leaders Alice Wiedel and Tino Chrupalla condemned the coup plans, saying that they "completely trust" the authorities in their investigation.

Metropolitan Mark (secular name Michael Arndt) was born in 1941 in Chemnitz, Germany. He was baptized into Russian Orthodox Christianity in 1964.

He expressed confidence that the coup attempt was prepared by a small group of people who have no support among the country's population.

"It is a marginal group. Usually these things in Germany are blown up by the media because of our past, the time of Hitler. But nobody here is seriously interested in reviving anything similar," Mark said.

On Wednesday, Der Spiegel reported that an extremist organization was planning to take control of the Bundestag and arrest its members. This act was supposed to spark riots all over the country and lead to the creation of a transition military government under Heinrich XIII Prince of Reuss, a 71-year-old German nobleman.

This government would have started negotiations on Germany's place in the world with the victors of the World War II, namely Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom and France. The German police confiscated pistols, swords, helmets and gold from the arrested extremists, according to local media.

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US Navy Orders Almost \$300Mln Amphibious Assault Ship Modernization - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, December 10 (Sputnik) - BAE Systems has won an almost \$300 million US Navy contract to modernize and repair the USS Kearsarge landing helicopter dock or amphibious assault ship, the Defense Department announced.

"BAE Systems - Norfolk Ship Repair [in] Norfolk, Virginia is awarded a \$294,786,804 firm-fixed-price contract action for maintenance, modernization and repair of USS Kearsarge (LHD 3)," the Defense Department said in a press release on Friday.

The contract, which is for Fiscal Year 2023, includes options that could bring its cumulative value to \$340.3 million, the release said.

"Work will be performed in Norfolk, Virginia and is expected to be completed by November 2024," the release added.

US Naval Sea Systems Command in Washington, DC is the contracting activity overseeing the work, according to the release.

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West Can't Blame Russia for Casualties Caused by Ukraine With Western Weapons -Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, December 10 (Sputnik) - The countries of the collective West cannot blame Russia for the casualties caused by Ukraine as a result of Western-supplied weapons, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy said.

"You will not be able to place the blame on Russia," Polanskiy said during a meeting of the UN Security Council on Friday.

Ukraine has been killing people in the Donbas since 2014 by using Western-supplied weapons, he added.

Earlier on Friday, the Donetsk People's Republic's (DPR) mission to the Joint Center for Control and Coordination on the ceasefire regime said that Ukrainian troops have shelled two districts in the city of Donetsk with 155mm artillery shells.

Ukrainian troops also shelled the village of Holmivskiyi in the Donetsk region on Friday night, using three 155mm artillery shells, according to the DPR mission.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that the United States plans to continue "fueling" the conflict in Ukraine at least until the end of 2025, which can be concluded from official documents that Washington is openly releasing.

Since Russia launched its special military operation in Ukraine on February 24, the collective West has been providing Kiev with humanitarian, military and financial aid in the amount of dozens of billions of dollars. Russia has denounced the flow of weapons to Ukraine from the collective West and warned that any cargo containing weapons bound for Ukraine is a legitimate target.

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Ex-Officer Involved in George Floyd Murder Sentenced to 3.5 Years - Lawyer

WASHINGTON, December 10 (Sputnik) - The former Minneapolis police officer who kneeled on George Floyd's back while his colleague kneeled on the Black man's neck was sentenced to 3.5 years in prison, civil rights Attorney Benjamin Crump said in a statement.

"J. Alexander Kueng is sentenced to 3 1/2 years in prison on a state count of aiding and abetting second-degree manslaughter in George Floyd's death," Crump said on Twitter after the sentencing on Friday.

The sentencing of Kueng, he added, for his role in the murder of Floyd delivers yet another piece of justice for the Floyd family.

Kueng pleaded guilty in October as part of a deal that averted what observers say would have been the third long and agonizing trial over Floyd's murder.

He knelt on Floyd's back during the incident in May of 2020 while then-officer Thomas Lane held Floyd's legs and Tou Thao, also an officer at the time, kept bystanders from intervening. All of the officers were fired and faced state and federal charges.

Kueng, who is already serving a federal sentence for violating Floyd's civil rights, appeared at Friday's sentencing hearing via video from a low-security federal prison in Ohio. He declined to address the address the court, CBS reported, The hearing was scheduled to take place Friday morning but was postponed to the afternoon due to technical difficulties.

Floyd's family members opted not to make any victim impact statements.

Kueng's sentencing brings the cases against all of the former officers a step closer to resolution, though the state case against Thao is still pending.

Floyd died on May 25, 2020, after former officer Derek Chauvin kneeled on Floyd's neck for 9.5 minutes as the Black man repeatedly said he could not breathe. The death sparked a wave of protests after the video of the incident went viral.

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Journalist Taibbi Releases New Batch of 'Twitter Files' on Removal of Trump From Platform

WASHINGTON, December 10 (Sputnik) - Journalist Matt Taibbi released a new batch of so-called Twitter Files in coordination with the social media platform's CEO, Elon Musk, on the removal of former US President Donald Trump's account in the wake of the January 6 Capitol riot.

Taibbi has been releasing information based on internal company records in conjunction with Musk and other journalists. The latest installment, released Friday evening, focuses on the buildup to Trump's removal from Twitter.

"We'll show you what hasn't been revealed: the erosion of standards within the company in months before January 6, decisions by high-ranking executives to violate their own policies, and more, against the backdrop of ongoing, documented interaction with federal agencies," Taibbi said via Twitter.

While the bulk of internal debate leading to Trump's ban took place in the wake of the January 6 Capitol riot, the intellectual framework for the move was laid in the preceding months, Taibbi said.

In October 2020, Twitter executives created a communications channel for discussions about election-related removals, particularly those involving "high-profile" accounts, according to internal records shared by Taibbi.

Twitter files released by Taibbi last week provided insight into "extraordinary steps" taken by the company to suppress the Hunter Biden laptop story ahead of the 2020 US Presidential Election.

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US Navy Orders \$350Mln Work on Tactical Intelligence, Analysis Control Networks - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, December 10 (Sputnik) - Science Applications International Corporation has won an almost \$350 million US Navy contract to carry out engineering work on tactical communications and intelligence networks, the US Defense Department said.

"Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) [in] Reston, Virginia, is awarded a \$349,500,982 ...contract for support to execute in-service engineering agent (ISEA) functions for afloat and ashore tactical networks (TACNET)," the Defense Department said in a press release on Friday.

The US Naval Information Warfare Center Pacific requires ISEA support, technical and engineering assistance, design analysis, network information assurance accreditation to install, integrate and support SEA functions for afloat and ashore TACNET systems, the release said. The engineering support will be provided for "command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence systems including the sustainment of fielded systems through end-of-life replacement," the release added.

The contract will also cover system upgrades, follow-on, or interrelated system, distant support, on-site repair, installations and system analysis to ensure networks are performing within designed specifications and peak capabilities, according to the release.

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Large Number of Weapons in Ukraine to Complicate Reconstruction - Chinese Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, December 10 (Sputnik) - The large amount of weapons in Ukraine will worsen the chances for the country's post-conflict reconstruction, Chinese Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Geng Shuang said on Friday.

"From a long term perspective, the largest stockpile of ammunition and explosives in the Ukrainian territory may pose security risks to post-conflict reconstruction," Shuang said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia are among the countries that have had this "painful experience," Shuang added.

On Thursday, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that the United States plans to continue fueling the conflict in Ukraine at least until the end of 2025, which can be concluded from official documents that Washington is openly releasing.

Since Russia launched its special military operation in Ukraine on February 24, the US-led collective West has been providing Kiev with humanitarian, military and financial aid in the amount of dozens of billions of dollars. Russia has denounced the flow of weapons to Ukraine and warned that any cargo containing weapons for Ukraine is a legitimate target.

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US Air Force Offers Giant Contracts to 93 Firms to Boost Multi-Domain Tech - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, December 10 (Sputnik) - Ninety-three companies have been awarded an up-to \$900 million US Air Force contract to develop new multi-domain systems capabilities and new technologies to accelerate prototype developments in tactical interoperability, the US Defense Department said.

"[The companies] have each been awarded an up-to \$900 million ceiling, indefinite-delivery/indefinite-quantity contract for the development of innovative approaches," the Defense Department said in a press release on Friday.

The goal of the new research and development is to create multi-domain systems capabilities and new technologies and systems, the release said.

This is to be achieved through the funding of "studies, recurrent demonstration and rapid development to enable rapid prototyping and test and capability transition," the release added. The location of work performance will be determined at the contract direct order level and is expected to be completed a decade from now in December 2032, according to the release.

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US Becoming Less Cautious About Arms Shipments to Ukraine Escalating Conflict - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 10 (Sputnik) - The United States is becoming less concerned about the risks that its arms shipments to Ukraine may spark a major escalation, the British newspaper The Times reported, citing a US defense official.

The report said on Friday that since October, the Pentagon revised its threat assessment about its arms shipments to Ukraine potentially leading to a military confrontation between Russia and NATO.

The United States is now less concerned that new long-range strikes inside Russia could lead to a major escalation, the report said.

On Monday, Ukraine launched attacks on Russian military airfields in the Saratov and Ryazan regions with what the Russian military said were Soviet-made jet drones. The Russian air defense intercepted the drones, but their fragments killed three and injured four soldiers, according to the Russian Defense Ministry.

The head of the Russian delegation at the military security and arms control talks in Vienna, Konstantin Gavrillov, told Sputnik on Thursday that NATO knew and facts indicate its members had a hand in Kiev's attacks against Russian airfields.

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Biden Will Invite African Union to Join G20 as Permanent Member at Africa Summit - Kirby
(Updates with more details, background in paras 3-5)

WASHINGTON, December 10 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will invite the African Union to join the Group of Twenty (G20) as a permanent member during the upcoming US-Africa Leaders Summit, White House National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said during a press briefing.

"The President intends to announce his support during the US-Africa Leaders Summit for the African Union to join the G20 as a permanent member," Kirby said on Friday.

The summit is scheduled for December 13-15 in Washington, where leaders will focus on bolstering ties between the United States and African nations to advance shared priorities such as public health and energy access. Biden invited 49 African heads of state, as well as African Union leadership, to attend.

US House Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Gregory Meeks commended Biden's support for an African Union seat on the G20 in a statement released Friday.

The United States has taken a significant step in demonstrating its commitment to African representation on the global stage ahead of the "historic" summit, Meeks said. The move promotes African agency, equity and leadership in the international community, he added.

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Corrections Officer Who Bullied, Beat Inmates Constantly Promoted - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 10 (Sputnik) - Corrections officer Thomas Ray Hinkle was constantly promoted despite abusing inmates and attempting to silence a whistleblower as well as impede an investigation by a member of Congress, the Associated Press reported after conducting an investigation into the matter.

The investigation found that the Bureau of Prisons repeatedly promoted Hinkle despite numerous "red flags" and rewarded him repeatedly over a three-decade career while other employees who also assaulted inmates lost their jobs and went to prison, the report said on Friday.

The Bureau of Prisons has defended Hinkle, saying he is a changed man and a model employee who has even promised to work with the Justice Department and Congress to root out "staff misconduct," the report said.

The report also said the Bureau of Prisons - and the Justice Department - knew about allegations against Hinkle in 1996 yet promoted him nine times - a practice that culminated in June with his promotion to the position of acting regional director, the report said. The Bureau of Prisons officials opted not to publicize Hinkle's promotion and refused requests to provide the corporate media news site basic information about him, the report said. While the Bureau of Prisons has vowed to change its toxic culture in the wake of numerous scandals regarding inmate abuse - a promise recently reiterated by the agency's new director, Colette Peters - it has continued to elevate Hinkle despite being involved in one of the darkest, most abusive periods in its history, the report added. Hinkle said that even though he bullied and beat inmates in the 1990s, he regrets his behavior and now only talks about what he did to teach others how to avoid making the same mistakes, according to the report.

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US Tariffs on Aluminum Imperfect, Need More Targeted Method to Address China - Trade Group

WASHINGTON, December 10 (Sputnik) - Trump-era tariffs imposed on aluminum imports are an imperfect tool and a more targeted approach is needed to address China's unfair trade practices, the Aluminum Association Vice President of External Affairs Matt Meenan told Sputnik.

Earlier in the day, the World Trade Organization (WTO), after receiving complaints from China and others, concluded that the United States violated international trade rules by imposing the Trump-era tariffs on steel and aluminum imports.

"The [US-based] Aluminum Association believes that Section 232 tariffs are an imperfect tool to address the continued challenge of heavily state subsidized aluminum, particularly originating in China, impacting the global market," Meenan said. "More broadly, the association supports more targeted efforts to address non-market behavior in China including Section 301 tariffs and antidumping/countervailing duty actions."

Meenan underscored that the Trump-era tariffs are so integrated into the US aluminum industry, any changes to the status quo should be done carefully to avoid unintended consequences in the market.

In 2018, former US President Donald Trump began using Section 232 of the US Trade Expansion Act, authorizing him to impose duties on imports if the Commerce Department determines there is evidence of a national security threat from foreign shipments.

Trump placed tariffs of 25% on steel imports and 10% tariffs on aluminum imports, which applied to European Union countries and Japan as well.

The US Trade Representative's office said the United States strongly rejects the WTO's conclusion and intends to keep the duties in place due to national security concerns.

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Western Claims That Iran Aids Russia's Military Industrial Complex Incorrect - Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, December 10 (Sputnik) - The claims by the collective West that Iran is aiding Russia's military industry are not correct and the latter does not need anyone's assistance, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vasily Nebenzia said.

"I know all those Western countries who speak after me will try to shift blame and will start talking about the military supplies from Iran to Russia, which have already been refuted on many occasions," Nebenzia told the UN Security Council on Friday. "The military industrial complex in Russia works perfectly fine and does not need anyone's assistance."

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Russia Has Information That US Satellite Data Was Used in Attack on Airfields - Nebenzia
WASHINGTON, December 10 (Sputnik) - Russia has information that American satellite data was used for attacks on Russian airfields, Ambassador to United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said during a UN Security Council meeting.

"We have information that the Russian airfields attacked were attacked using American satellite data," Nebenzia said on Friday.

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Preventing Diversion of Arms From Ukraine Essential to Avoid Fueling Conflict - UN

UNITED NATIONS, December 10 (Sputnik) - Preventing supplies of arms into the conflict in Ukraine is necessary to avoid worsening the situation, the UN Under-Secretary-General of Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu told the Security Council.

"I want to reiterate: preventing diversion of supplied weapons and ammunition is essential to avoid fueling... conflict and insecurity in the region and beyond," Nakamitsu said on Friday. Nakamitsu was requested to brief the Security Council on supply of weapons into Ukraine - a meeting, which was requested by Russia earlier this week. Nakamitsu added that this briefing follows a similar discussion which was held in September of this year.

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US Headed for Recession Likely in 3rd Quarter of 2023 - Bank of America

NEW YORK, December 10 (Sputnik) - The United States is likely headed for a recession by the third quarter of next year as demand in the economy gets restrained by a Federal Reserve determined not to stop interest rate hikes until it gets inflation under control, the Bank of America said in a new forecast.

"A recession is very likely in the US," Bank of America said in its Year Ahead 2023 report on Friday.

Economists typically characterize an economy of being in a recession if it experiences two straight quarters of decline in GDP. US GDP fell in the first two quarters of this year, registering negative growths of 1.6% and 0.6%, respectively. However, the third-quarter marked a positive GDP growth of 2.6%, raising questions as to whether soft-landing was possible for the US economy, instead of a continued recession.

The Bank of America outlook suggests that the Fed's interest rate hikes aimed at curbing runaway inflation would likely push the United States toward another recession a year from now. US inflation, as measured by Consumer Price Index, trends near a 40-year high, growing by 7.7% during the year to October, after a 9.1% peak in June. The Fed's target for inflation is 2% per year.

In its bid to control surging prices, the Fed has added 375 basis points to interest rates since March via six rate hikes. Prior to that, interest rates peaked at just 25 basis points, as the central bank slashed them to nearly zero after the global COVID-19 outbreak in 2020.

The Fed, which executed four back-to-back interest rate hikes of 75 basis points from June through November, has said it may be contemplating a more modest 50-basis point increase in December.

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Biden Urges Release of Political Prisoners in Cuba as Part of Human Rights Day - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 10 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden in a statement called on Cuba to release hundreds of political prisoners detained last year in protests as part of the administration's recognition of Human Rights Day.

"As we look forward to honoring Human Rights Day this Saturday, December 10th, I once again call for the release of the hundreds of political prisoners in Cuba who remain in detention following the July 11, 2021 protests," Biden said on Friday.

In July 2021, anti-government demonstrations broke out in Cuba in response to a shortage of food and medicine, as well as the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Cuban authorities arrested hundreds of demonstrators during the protests, prompting US sanctions. The United States will continue to advocate for the release of the prisoners and hold accountable Cuban officials responsible for cracking down on peaceful protests, Biden said.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, December 10 (Sputnik)

WESTERN SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

* The United States is announcing that it is imposing sanctions on three Russia-based entities, including the country's Aerospace Forces, over their acquisition and use of Iranian drones, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Friday.

* The United States imposed sanctions on Russia's Central Election Commission and its 15 members, including chairwoman Ella Pamfilova, the US Treasury Department said.

* Canada is imposing sanctions on the Russian ministries of justice and interior, the Central Election Commission, the Investigative Committee and the Federal Penitentiary Service, Global Affairs Canada said.

* Russia will seek to change the regulations in order to legally consolidate the withdrawal of Russian food and fertilizers from sanctions, Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko said.

GRINER-BOUT PRISONER EXCHANGE

* The Russian Federal Security Service negotiated the exchange of Russian businessman Viktor Bout for US basketball player Brittney Griner and achieved results, contacts on other exchanges are continuing, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Friday.

* The exchange of prisoners between Russia and the United States took place, which means that the parties were able to find common ground, Bout said,

* The exchange of Bout for Griner, as well as the meeting of CIA Director Robert Burns with Russian Foreign Intelligence Service head Sergey Naryshkin, do not signal positive dynamics in Russia's relations with the United States, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said.

* The US Justice Department released President Joe Biden's pardon of Bout that prohibits him from returning to the United States.

URKAINÉ CONFLICT

* The White House agrees with members of Congress on the need for increased oversight of the assistance provided for Ukraine, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Friday.

* The United States has concerns about the use of the cluster munitions, Kirby said when asked about reports that Washington is planning to send cluster bombs to Ukraine.

* The United States will provide another \$275 million military aid package for Ukraine, Kirby announced.

GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS

* Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak welcomed India's decision not to support the price cap for Russian oil, the Russian government said.

- * Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan understand that they require additional volumes of energy resources, prepared to begin work on a "triple gas union," Russian President Vladimir Putin said
- * China will increase oil and gas imports from the countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), Chinese President Xi Jinping said during a meeting with GCC leaders in Riyadh.
- * The introduction of a price cap on Russian oil will reduce investment in the energy industry to zero and lead to a catastrophic surge in prices, Putin said.

EAEU COOPERATION

- * Russian President Vladimir Putin, speaking about the results of the meeting at the EAEU summit, said that they may have been better.
- * The prospects for the development of the EAEU are good, we have agreed to create a mechanism to support cooperation in the industry sphere, Putin said.
- * The EAEU countries are not ready to rush into the formation of a single gas market, the states will solve these issues on a bilateral basis until 2025, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said.

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US Has No Updates on Full Resumption of Visa Services at Embassy in Moscow - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - The United States does not have any updates regarding when the American embassy in Moscow will resume full visa services for Russian citizens, State Department deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said on Friday.

"I don't have any updates or specific new measures to announce as it relates to the Embassy's issuance of visas," Patel said during a press briefing.

Earlier in the day, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said Moscow continues to urge Washington to fully resume visa issuance in Russia.

Russia raises the issue at all levels about the need for the US side to return to normality in consular-visa relations, including the resumption of full-fledged visa services for Russian citizens in our country, which were discontinued under "far-fetched pretexts" in May last year, Ryabkov said.

However, due circumstance revolving around the crisis in Ukraine, the issue is becoming political and is being used by Washington as another pressure point on Moscow, Ryabkov said. The diplomat added that the United States started filling vacancies in the embassy in Moscow with those responsible for issuing visas.

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US Failed to Secure Germany's Release of Krasikov in Exchange for Whelan - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - Russia insisted that alleged former colonel Vadim Krasikov, who is serving a life sentence in Germany for purportedly murdering former Chechen fighter Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, be freed in exchange for US citizen Paul Whelan, but Washington failed to secure Krasikov's release, CNN reported on Friday.

The report said, according to a German government source, that US officials asked their German counterparts if Krasikov could be included in the prisoner exchange between the United States and Russia, but Washington was unable to secure his release.

The United States offered to swap other Russians currently in US custody in exchange for Whelan, such as Russian national Alexander Vinnik and Roman Seleznev, the report said.

Former US Ambassador Bill Richardson, who helped negotiate Griner's release, is hoping to meet with Russian officials soon, his spokesperson told Sputnik earlier this week.

On Thursday, the US and Russia exchanged Griner and Bout in a one-for-one prisoner swap. Bout was serving a 25-year sentence in the US on arms dealing charges. Griner was sentenced earlier this year to nine years in prison in Russia for illegally bringing cannabis oil into the country.

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US Sanctions 3 Russia-Based Entities at Forefront of Acquiring Iranian Drones - Kirby
(Updates with more details in paras 3-6)

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - The United States is announcing that it is imposing sanctions on three Russia-based entities, including the country's Aerospace Forces, over their acquisition and use of Iranian drones, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Friday.

"Today, we are announcing designations against three Russia-based entities that have been at the forefront of the acquisition and use of Iranian drones," Kirby said. "These targets include the Russian Aerospace Forces [VKS], the intended beneficiary of the Russia-Iran agreement on transferring drones and Russia's 924 State Center for unmanned aviation, which sent personnel to Iran, to train on Iranian drones."

Blinken said the United States also designated the Command of the Military Transport Aviation (VTA)

"VKS was the intended beneficiary of the Russia-Iran agreement on transferring UAVs [drones]; the 924th State Center for Unmanned Aviation sent personnel to Iran for training on operating Iranian UAVs; and VTA was involved in the transfer of UAVs from Iran to Russia," he said.

Blinken said Russia's acquisition of Iranian drones has been done in violation of UN Security Council Resolution 2231 and also fuels the conflict in Ukraine.

The United States stands ready to use "every tool" it has to stop such transactions, Blinken added.

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Most Germans Not Interested in Coup, Reviving Hitlerism – Russian Metropolitan in Germany

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - Most of the people in Germany are not interested in political coups and in reviving Hitlerism in the country, Russian Church Abroad (ROCOR) Metropolitan Mark (Arndt) of Berlin and Germany told Sputnik.

"We certainly do not agree with any such ideas or attempts to undermine democracy in this country," Metropolitan Mark said.

On Wednesday, the German Prosecutor General's Office said the police arrested 22 members and three supporters of an alleged terrorist organization that was plotting to overthrow the existing German government. Former German lawmaker and member of the AfD Birgit Malsack-Winkemann was among those arrested.

According to reports, she was supposed to become the justice minister following the coup. AfD leaders Alice Wiedel and Tino Chrupalla condemned the coup plans, saying that they "completely trust" the authorities in their investigation.

Metropolitan Mark (secular name Michael Arndt) was born in 1941 in Chemnitz, Germany. He was baptized into Russian Orthodox Christianity in 1964.

He expressed confidence that the coup attempt was prepared by a small group of people who have no support among the country's population.

"It is a marginal group. Usually these things in Germany are blown up by the media because of our past, the time of Hitler. But nobody here is seriously interested in reviving anything similar," Mark said.

On Wednesday, Der Spiegel reported that an extremist organization was planning to take control of the Bundestag and arrest its members. This act was supposed to spark riots all over the country and lead to the creation of a transition military government under Heinrich XIII Prince of Reuss, a 71-year-old German nobleman.

This government would have started negotiations on Germany's place in the world with the victors of the World War II, namely Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom and France. The German police confiscated pistols, swords, helmets and gold from the arrested extremists, according to local media.

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Celebrity Superstar Elton John Quits Twitter, Says Misinformation Dividing the World

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - British musician Elton John said on Friday that he is leaving Twitter because of concerns that misinformation on the social media platform is allegedly being used to divide the world.

"All my life I've tried to use music to bring people together. Yet it saddens me to see how misinformation is now being used to divide our world," Elton John wrote on Twitter. "I've decided to no longer use Twitter, given their recent change in policy which will allow misinformation to flourish unchecked."

Twitter's new CEO Elon Musk replied to Elton's post, praising his music and expressing hope that he will soon decide to use the platform again. Musk also asked the artist if there was any misinformation in particular that he was concerned about.

In a separate statement, Musk said Twitter has been doing a much better job of combating disinformation since his takeover.

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UN Grain Negotiator to Travel to Ukraine Next Week - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, December 9 (Sputnik) - UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths, who was involved in negotiating the grain deal, will travel to Ukraine from December 12-15, spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Friday.

"At this point, he is just going to Ukraine," Dujarric told a briefing.

Griffiths has recently frequently visited Moscow. This time, he is going only to Ukraine, Dujarric said.

Russia is still having issues with exportation of fertilizers onto the global markets - an issue which the UN is supposed to deal with.

In late November, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, during the visit of the leaders of Hungary, Belgium, Lithuania and Poland to Kiev, officially launched the "Grain From Ukraine" initiative, under which Ukraine should send at least 60 ships with grain to countries threatened by famine and drought, namely Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, Congo, Kenya and Nigeria, by the end of spring of 2023.

On July 22, Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and the United Nations struck a deal to provide a humanitarian maritime corridor for ships with food and fertilizer exports from Ukrainian Black Sea ports. However, Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly said that most of the ships carrying Ukrainian grain did not make it to the world's poorest countries and ended up in Europe. At the same time, Putin has voiced his concerns that Russian products are not entering the global markets as promised by the agreement.

Since then, the grain deal, originally scheduled to expire on November 19, has been extended for another 120 days.

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Russian Envoy to Canada Calls Designation of Russia's Central Election Commission Absurd

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to Canada Oleg Stepanov said in an interview with Sputnik on Friday that including Russia's Central Election Commission (CEC) on the list of sanctioned entities is absurd and promised that Moscow will respond to the new restrictive measures.

"Frankly speaking, we almost stopped paying attention to these stamping of sanctions. If you look at the current targets, especially the inclusion in the sanctions list of the Central Election Commission under the pretext of violating human rights, this is some kind of absurdity," Stepanov said.

The ambassador said the current Cabinet of Ministers of Canada led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau "does not care at all about the future state of bilateral relations" despite the fact that Russia and Canada are neighboring countries.

"Ottawa operates in the mode of today and the establishment is chasing ratings - in this case, the support of the Ukrainian community," he said. "Be that as it may, the response to these sanctions from our side will follow."

After the Trudeau government razes to the ground bilateral relations on principle, what legacy will they leave for the future generations of Canadian politicians who will have to clean up the rubble sooner or later, Stepanov asked.

"We know perfectly well that in the Western system it is very easy to impose sanctions, but it is difficult to lift them," he said. "When sanctions are introduced, they leave a very serious and negative imprint on bilateral relations,"

Stepanov pointed out that Russia considers sanctions in a strategic context and the restrictive measures will not have a direct impact on Russia and its policies.

"But the negative political effect of them will be long-term. It is a pity that the current cabinet does not think about it at all," Stepanov said.

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Sexual Harassment, Retaliation Rife in Police Departments Across US - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - Female police officers have little protection from fellow officers or supervisors who prey on them in a number of major police and sheriff's departments across the United States, an NBC News exclusive report said on Friday.

Harassment is present despite existing policies that are supposed to protect female officers, and police and sheriff's departments in New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Chicago have paid more than \$40 million to settle harassment- and abuse-related lawsuits, the report said.

The #MeToo movement sparked a societal reckoning against sexual misconduct, ushering in reforms designed to reduce workplace harassment and prompting the firing of abusive men in a variety of industries, the report said, but added that many women in law enforcement say the movement has yet to arrive.

A review of more than 60 lawsuits that were settled or won and an analysis of internal police documents show that sexual harassment and gender discrimination remain rife in some of the largest police departments, the report said.

Moreover, many of those accused of harassment do not face significant punishment, the report also said.

Female police officers have pointed out that the harassment and discrimination lawsuits capture only a slice of the problem because many women never pursue legal action and internal abuse complaints are not made public, the report added.

In most if not all of the cases, the settlements have been reached without any admission of liability, according to the report.

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Belarus to Allow Transit of Ukrainian Grain for Exports From Lithuanian Ports - UN UNITED NATIONS, December 9 (Sputnik) - Belarus will allow the transit of Ukrainian grain through its territory for export from Lithuanian ports, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' office said on Friday.

Earlier in the day, Guterres received Deputy Foreign Minister of Belarus Yury Ambrasevich. "The Deputy Foreign Minister informed the Secretary General that Belarus will accept, without preconditions, the transit of Ukrainian grains through its own territory for export from Lithuanian harbours," the statement said.

Ambrasevich also "reiterated the requests from his government to be able [to] export its own fertilizer products, which are currently subject to sanctions," Guterres' office added.

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Canada Launches Critical Mineral Strategy, Commits \$2.8Bln – Natural Resources Ministry

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) – Canada has launched its C\$3.8 billion (\$2.8 billion) Critical Minerals Strategy aiming at ensuring clean and inclusive growth for future generations, the Ministry of Natural resources said on Friday.

"Today, in Vancouver, the Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, Canada's Minister of Natural Resources, released Canada's Critical Minerals Strategy, backed by up to \$3.8 billion in federal funding allocated in Budget 2022," Natural Resources Canada said in a statement.

Various activities will be covered by the funding, including geoscience and exploration, mineral processing, manufacturing, and recycling operations, the statement added.

With the newly unveiled strategy, Canada aims at seizing what it sees as a "generational opportunity" which will allow it to achieve key outcomes. Amongst them are strengthening global security, economic growth, job creation and competitiveness as well as climate action and environment protection.

Other goals are advancing in the reconciliation process with the country's First Nations and having a diverse and inclusive workforce.

The initiative will be paired with the exploration and recycling of Canada's 31 critical minerals, the statement said. Those include but are not limited to lithium, graphite, nickel, uranium and potash.

The announcement comes as Canada continues its efforts towards achieving a net-zero world, notably by responsibly exploiting the country's resources and relying only on renewable energy.

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Canada Authorizes Pfizer Omicron Booster Shot for Children 5-11 years – Health Canada
WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) – The use of Pfizer-BioNTech Omicron BA.4/BA.5 bivalent booster has been authorized in Canada for use on children between 5-11 years of age, the country's health authority said on Friday.

"Today, Health Canada authorized the Pfizer-BioNTech Comirnaty Omicron BA.4/BA.5 bivalent-adapted booster for use in children 5 to 11 years of age. This is the first bivalent COVID-19 booster authorized for use in this age group that targets the original COVID-19 strain and the Omicron BA.4/BA.5 subvariants," Health Canada's statement reads.

The decision to authorize the Pfizer-BioNTech Comirnaty Omicron BA.4/BA.5 bivalent-adapted booster, comes after a "thorough and independent scientific review" of the provided evidence to Health Canada, the statement adds, saying it was found to be safe and effective.

On October 7, Health Canada approved the use of a Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 booster for people 12 and above, which also targets the BA.4/5 Omicron variants.

Although the newly approved bivalent-booster remains the same in content, Health Canada said the dose to be administered to children between 5-11 will be only a third of those given to people 12 years and older.

Health Canada continues to recommend that citizens stay up to date with their vaccines, stressing that it is the most effective protection tool against COVID-19-related illnesses, hospitalization, and consequent death.

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US Announces New \$275Mln Military Aid Package for Ukraine - White House
(Updates with more details in paras 3-6)

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - The United States will provide another \$275 million military aid package for Ukraine, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby announced on Friday.

"Today I'm proud to announce a new security package for Ukraine, valued at \$275 million, will soon be on its way," Kirby said.

The \$275 million authorization of Presidential Drawdown Assistance is the 27th such package since August 2021, the Pentagon said in a statement.

The package includes ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) and 80,000 rounds of 155mm artillery ammunition, the statement said.

The package also includes counter-drone equipment, counter air defense capabilities and approximately 150 generators, the statement added.

The United States has committed \$20 billion in security assistance to Ukraine since the start of the Biden administration and will continue to meet its evolving battlefield requirements, according to the statement.

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UN Deliberating Applying Sanctions Must Be Done 'Very Carefully' - Russian Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, December 9 (Sputnik) - The United Nations should apply sanctions on countries "very carefully" given that such restrictive measures are one of the strongest way of responding to threats to peace, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the world body Anna Evstigneeva said on Friday.

"Security Council sanctions are one of the strongest forms of reacting to threats to peace and they need to be applied very carefully, be impeccably justified and nuanced," Evstigneeva said. Many of the sanctions regimes imposed on countries like Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo are out of sync with the situation on the ground, Evstigneeva added.

Russia has traditionally been skeptical about imposing sanctions and has tried to avoid such measures if at all possible. By contrast, the United States and its allies in the so-called collective West have shown eagerness to apply sanctions, often creating a division in the UN Security Council.

On Friday, the Security Council adopted a resolution carving out an exemption for humanitarian aid from asset freezes imposed on countries. The measure was tabled by the United States and Ireland and was circulated on November 2. China and Russia disagreed with the text of the resolution. However, the states were subsequently able to bridge the differences and reach a consensus.

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White House Says Agrees With Congress on Need for Increased Oversight of Ukraine Aid

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) – The White House agrees with members of Congress on the need for increased oversight of the assistance provided for Ukraine, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Friday.

"We agree with members of Congress about increased oversight. We completely agree with that, and we've already taken steps on our own to do exactly that by enhancing the Defense

Attaché Office over there in Kiev, giving them additional resources and personnel to help them get a better sense of accountability and transparency on the security assistance that goes on over there," Kirby said during a press briefing.

The White House also supports more authorities and resources for inspectors general to strengthen the existing oversight of the assistance for Ukraine.

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US Not Surprised by Putin's Comments on Cutting Oil Production – White House

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) – The United States is not surprised by Russian President Vladimir Putin's comments on cutting oil production in response to the oil price cap, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Friday. "We are not surprised by those comments. It's actually not really new. I mean, the Russians have been squawking about that in the past and I don't want to get into addressing a hypothetical or something that we actually don't know is actually going to happen," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Friday, Putin said that Russia will not sell its oil to unfriendly countries that implement the \$60 price cap and is considering a possible reduction in oil production.

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US Has Concerns About Sending Cluster Munitions to Ukraine - Kirby

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - The United States has concerns about the use of the cluster munitions, US National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Wednesday when asked about reports that Washington is planning to send cluster bombs to Ukraine.

"According to our own policy, we have concerns about the use of those kinds of munitions," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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Russia Providing 'Unprecedented' Military Support to Iran in Exchange for Drones - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - Russia is providing an "unprecedented level" of military support to Iran in exchange for Tehran supplying drones to Moscow for use during the special operation in Ukraine, NBC News reported on Friday.

The support may result in Russia providing Iran with advanced military equipment, including advanced helicopters and air defense systems, the report said.

Last spring, Iranian pilots trained in Russia to fly Sukhoi Su-35 jets, a move that indicates Iran may begin receiving the aircraft within the next year, the report said.

Moscow is looking to collaborate with Iran on weapons development, perhaps including the establishment of a joint production line for drones in Russia, the report added.

Earlier on Friday, the Biden administration designated three Russia-based entities, including the country's Aerospace Forces, that have been involved in the transfer of Iranian drones for use in Ukraine.

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Incoming Strategic Command Chief Says US Nuclear Force Now Faces Two Key Adversaries

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - The United States and its strategic nuclear forces now face two peer adversaries in a global competition to shape the future, incoming Strategic Command (STRATCOM) chief Air Force Gen. Anthony Cotton said on Friday.

"Competition is underway among major powers to try to shape what comes next. What we face today is different from the situation our Cold War heroes faced. In this new phase of competition, we face two peer adversaries, and guess what: Strategic Command must be ready for the global challenges of that strategic environment," Cotton said during a change of command ceremony.

Cotton assumed command of STRATCOM from Navy Adm. Charles Richard during a ceremony presided over by US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin. During remarks at the event, Austin spoke to the responsibility of the US and other nuclear powers to prevent escalation and proliferation of arms.

STRATCOM is responsible for managing the US military's strategic nuclear deterrence and global strike capabilities, as well as engaging in command, control and surveillance.

The Biden administration's new National Defense Strategy, released in October, characterizes China as the US' pacing challenge and Russia as an acute threat. Both countries maintain nuclear weapons capabilities.

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US Sanctions 3 Russia-Based Entities at Forefront of Acquiring Iranian Drones - Kirby

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Biden Will Invite African Union to Join G-20 as Permanent Member at African Summit - Kirby
WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden, at the upcoming US-Africa Summit, will invite the African Union to join the G20 as a permanent member, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Friday.

"The President intends to announce his support during the US-Africa Leaders Summit for the African Union to join the G20 as a permanent member," Kirby said.

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US Announces New \$275Mln Military Aid Package For Ukraine - White House's Kirby

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"Today I'm proud to announce a new security package for Ukraine valued at \$275 million, will soon be its way," Kirby said.

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US Might Unite Group of Like-Minded Nations to Discuss Iran-Russia Military Coop. - Kirby

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - The United States is looking at options to bring together a group of like-minded nations to address the matter of cooperation between Iran and Moscow, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Friday.

"We're looking at options to bring together a group of like minded countries to discuss Iran -Russian military cooperation," Kirby said.

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White House Says Iran Considering Sale of Hundreds of Ballistic Missiles to Russia

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - The United States believes Iran is looking at selling hundreds of ballistic missiles to Russia, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Friday.

"We even believe that Iran is considering the sale of hundreds of ballistic missiles from Iran to Russia," Kirby told a briefing.

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US Expects Iranian Support for Russian Military to Only Grow in Coming Months - Kirby

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - The United States expects Iran to boost support for the Russian military in the coming months, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Friday.

"We expect Iranian support for the Russian military to only grow in coming months," Kirby told a briefing.

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US Clemency Prohibits Bout From Financial Benefit From Any Book, Movie - Document

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden's pardon of Russian businessman Viktor Bout prohibits him from receiving any financial benefit from a book, movie, or other media about this matter, the Justice Department revealed in a document on Friday.

"The said Viktor Bout shall not accept or otherwise receive any financial benefit, directly or indirectly, in any manner or amount, from any book, movie, or other publication or production, in any form or media, about the circumstances surrounding the instant offense or commutation," the document said.

The document shows that Biden signed Bout's clemency document on December 2.

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Biden's Clemency Prohibits Viktor Bout From Returning to US - Document

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department on Friday released President Joe Biden's pardon of Russian businessman Viktor Bout, which also prohibits him from returning to the United States.

"It has been made to appear that it is in the national interest that the term of imprisonment related to the aforesaid conviction not be served in its entirety," the Justice Department said. "Be

it known that I, Joseph R. Biden, Jr., President of the United States of America...do hereby commute the total prison sentence related to the aforesaid conviction of the said Viktor Bout to time served."

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UNSC Adopts Resolution Excepting Humanitarian Aid From Application of Asset Freezes

UNITED NATIONS, December 9 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council (UNSC) on Friday adopted a resolution that allows the provision of humanitarian aid as not being in violation of asset freezes imposed on certain countries by the UNSC or its Sanction Committees.

"The provision, processing or payment of funds, other financial assets, or economic resources, or the provision of goods and services necessary to ensure the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance or to support other activities that support basic human needs ... are permitted and are not a violation of the asset freezes imposed by the Council or its Sanctions Committees," the resolution said.

The resolution also establishes that the UN Security Council has to consider the humanitarian impact on people in determining whether to establish a sanctions regime.

Sources at the United Nations told Sputnik that the negotiations on the resolution were "complicated" given that the UN Security Council members have diverging opinions on the issue of sanctions.

The resolution was tabled by the United States and Ireland and the first draft was circulated on November 2, after which several rounds of talks among the member states were held and China and Russia opposed imposing unilateral sanctions in most cases. Nevertheless, the member states were able to address their differences and ultimately reached a consensus on the final text of the resolution.

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US Rejects WTO Conclusions on US Steel And Aluminum Measures, Won't Remove Duties - USTR

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - The United States strongly rejects the World Trade Organization's conclusions that Trump-era tariffs on steel and aluminum violated international trade rules and will not remove the duties, US Trade Representative spokesperson Adam Hodge said on Friday.

"The United States strongly rejects the flawed interpretation and conclusions in the World Trade Organization (WTO) Panel reports released today regarding challenges to the United States' Section 232 measures on steel and aluminum brought by China and others," Hodge said in a press release. "The Biden Administration is committed to preserving US national security by

ensuring the long-term viability of our steel and aluminum industries, and we do not intend to remove the Section 232 duties as a result of these disputes.”

Moreover, Hodge claimed the WTO has proven ineffective at stopping non-market excess capacity of steel and aluminum from China.

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US Homeland Security Dept. Requests Over \$3Bln to Deal With Migrant Surge - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has requested from the government more than \$3 billion to deal with an expected surge in illegal immigrants crossing the US southern border when the so-called Title 42 immigration rule, which arguably prevents the surge, is lifted later this month, NBC News reported on Friday.

The request to the White House's Office of Management and Budget might not be approved by Republicans in Congress, who have said they want the Biden administration to first secure the US border before it can obtain additional funding.

The Title 42 policy enacted during the Trump administration in 2020 states that the federal authorities can prevent immigrants from illegally entering the United States and seeking asylum if they determine that doing so would prevent the spread of infectious diseases. However, a federal judge has ruled that Title 42 rule must be lifted on December 21.

DHS officials pointed out that the number of attempted illegal border crossings by immigrants is 8,000 per day and they estimate it may increase by as many as 2,500 per day after the Title 42 rule is lifted, the report said.

The additional money DHS seeks is intended to process, transport and shelter the anticipated increase in the number of immigrants, the report added.

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US Treasury Targets Over 40 People, Entities From 9 Countries With Human Rights Sanctions
(Adds details in paras 5-7)

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - The United States is sanctioning over 40 individuals and entities from nine countries, including Russia, Iran and North Korea, for alleged connections to corruption and human rights abuses, the US Treasury Department said on Friday.

"Today the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), in recognition of International Anti-Corruption Day and Human Rights Day, is sanctioning a diverse array of over 40 individuals and entities that are connected to corruption or human rights abuse across nine countries," the Treasury Department said in a statement.

OFAC sanctioned four Russian individuals involved in its special military operation in Ukraine, as well as members of the Russian Central Election Commission for its role in monitoring accession referenda in the four former Ukrainian regions.

OFAC also sanctioned North Korea's border security bureau and individuals connected to a government-run animation studio, as well as Iranian law enforcement officials for alleged human rights abuses.

Moreover, the new sanctions targeted individuals with alleged ties to corruption in El Salvador, Guatemala and Mali.

Individuals in Guinea, China and the Philippines are also the targets of sanctions related to alleged human rights abuses.

The actions are a key component of the Biden administration's efforts to implement its anti-corruption strategy, released in December 2021, the Treasury Department statement said. The US is committed to taking actions consistent with its values and recognizes human rights as critical to global peace and security, the statement also said.

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US Senator Sinema Announces Her Resignation From Democratic Party

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - Arizona Senator Kyrsten Sinema said on Friday that she is leaving the Democratic party and has registered as a political independent.

"I've registered as an Arizona independent. I know some people might be a little bit surprised by this, but actually, I think it makes a lot of sense," Sinema said in a Thursday interview with Tapper in her Senate office.

According to Sinema, she never "fit neatly into any party box."

"Removing myself from the partisan structure – not only is it true to who I am and how I operate, I also think it'll provide a place of belonging for many folks across the state and the country, who also are tired of the partisanship," she said.

Reacting to Sinema's announcement, White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said that the senator's decision will not change control of the Senate by the Democratic majority and expressed hope that successful work with her will continue.

In November's Senate elections, the Democratic Party secured 51 seats, giving the Democratic party control of the upper house of Congress.

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Pentagon Has Concerns About Exchange of Griner for Russian Businessman Bout - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon has some concerns about the Biden administration's decision to exchange Russian businessman Viktor Bout for US basketball player Brittney Griner in a prisoner swap, CNN reported on Friday.

"I think there is a concern that he [Bout] would return to doing the same kind of work that he's done in the past," a senior defense official is quoted as saying in the report.

On Thursday, the United States exchanged Bout for Griner, who was serving a nine-year sentence in Russia for illegally bringing cannabis oil into the country. Bout was serving a 25-year sentence in the US on arms dealing charges.

Bout, alleged to have been involved in arms trafficking during the 1990s and early 2000s, was convicted of conspiring to provide arms to a Colombian rebel group as part of a US sting operation.

The US will work with partners in Africa, where Bout is alleged to have been engaged in the arms trade, to understand the current risk factors of the weapons market and the threats of people and organizations with whom they may be working, the senior defense official also reportedly said.

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New F-35 Cockpit Computer Costs Soar by \$680M In Through Expenses, Delays - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) - Costs of developing a new cockpit computer for the Lockheed Martin F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) originally set at \$712 million four years ago have soared by another \$239 million, generating extra expenses of \$680 million so far, Bloomberg reported on Friday.

In all, the F-35 Joint Program Office has acknowledged that cost overruns on the project now total \$680 million, almost doubling the original cost and also delaying delivery of the first aircraft with the upgraded hardware and software by several months from the planned completion date of July 2023, the report said.

The US government and allied nations that have bought the aircraft will pay the additional costs under the terms of the computer's development contract, the report noted.

The F-35 is the most expensive military system ever recorded and its overall cost rose in 2021 to \$412 billion from \$398 billion, a Department of Defense report said in September 2022.

The F-35's projected total cost was \$233 billion when Lockheed Martin won the contract in 2001 to develop and build the aircraft, the report said.

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State Dept. Confirms US Official Visited Istanbul to Meet With Russian Interlocutors

WASHINGTON, December 9 (Sputnik) – The US State Department on Friday confirmed to Sputnik that a senior Biden administration official visited Istanbul to meet with Russian interlocutors to discuss a range of bilateral issues.

"We can confirm a senior official from the State Department is/was in Istanbul to meet with Russian interlocutors on a narrow set of bilateral issues, but Russia's war in Ukraine was not discussed," the US State Department said in a statement.

