

**12/12/22 Monday**

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US to Announce 'Breakthrough' in Efforts to Generate Clean Energy Through Nuclear Fusion  
By - Fantine Gardinier

Turning fusion power into a viable clean energy alternative is seen as key to maintaining human civilization's present electrical use amid efforts to rapidly end the use of fossil fuels, which emit poisonous chemicals that are driving the climate change crisis.

US Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm has confirmed media rumors, revealing that the department is preparing a big announcement concerning nuclear fusion energy on Tuesday. According to US media reports, the scientists working on the project at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory created a fusion reaction with a net gain for the first time.

Long held as the "holy grail" of abundant, pollution-free energy, nuclear fusion has managed to elude scientists for nearly three quarters of a century since its radioactive cousin, nuclear fission, emerged as a potent source of electricity.

Nuclear fusion is the incredible energy-generating reaction that occurs in the centers of stars, giving them their tremendous glow. It happens when intense pressure forces two atoms to fuse into a single atom, an event that releases huge amounts of energy. When the fusing atoms are hydrogen, they produce the inert gas helium - and, essentially, do not produce any radioactivity. Nuclear fission, the explosive power released when atoms are split, produces great quantities of radioactive materials. The far easier reaction to induce, fission is what drives all present-day nuclear power plants, relying on heavy, radioactive elements like uranium and plutonium, which are primed and ready for just such a reaction.

By contrast, hydrogen is not simply waiting around to fuse into helium - part of what makes creating it artificially so elusive.

Scientists have tried since the 1940s to figure out how to create nuclear fusion, but so far have mostly only been successful in the lab for microseconds at a time, requiring far more energy input than the tiny reaction produces. Their greatest success has been at destruction: the incredible power of a thermonuclear hydrogen bomb is the only place scientists have created nuclear fusion so far - not an ideal candidate for a future power plant.

Other countries have [also funded efforts](#) to uncover the secrets of viable fusion power, including the UK, Russia, South Korea and China, where such a reactor is euphemistically-but not inaccurately - referred to as [an "artificial sun."](#) A South Korean lab [succeeded earlier](#) this year at keeping matter in the ionized, superheated plasma state necessary for fusion for a full 30 seconds.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.** US Judge Dismisses Trump Lawsuit Challenging Mar-a-Lago Documents Search for 'Lack of Jurisdiction'

By - Fantine Gardinier

A US judge has thrown a legal challenge brought by former US President Donald Trump, which challenged the FBI's search of his Mar-a-Lago estate a part of a probe into missing classified documents dating to the time of his administration.

In a [brief ruling](#) on Monday, US District Court Judge Aileen M. Cannon, of the Southern District of Florida, said Trump's case was being dismissed due to "lack of jurisdiction."

The suit was an attempt to block the US Department of Justice's [investigation of documents](#) taken by Trump when he left office in January 2021, including hundreds of classified files. Since the start of the year, thousands of files have been discovered at Mar-a-Lago, Trump's estate and resort in southern Florida, and either voluntarily returned to the US National Archives or forcibly seized by the FBI in an August raid.

The search warrant for that raid was justified in part by concerns about violations of the 1917 Espionage Act, obstruction of justice, and other federal laws against the improper handling of documents. However, no charges have been brought against the former president.

Last week, a federal appeals court [struck down an order](#) by Judge Cannon that created a "special master" for the seized documents, or outside arbiter tasked with ensuring prosecutors don't view overly sensitive files, such as those protected by attorney-client privilege or Executive Privilege. Trump had requested the special master, but the DOJ opposed it, arguing it would frustrate their probe and that no special master was necessary.

Trump has called the raid and investigations a "witch hunt" and said he declassified all the files before removing them. Last month, Trump announced his campaign to return to the presidency in 2024, although he is [no longer the most popular](#) potential GOP contender.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Tokyo Wants to Get Tomahawk Cruise Missiles in First Offensive Weapons Buy Since WWII  
By - Fantine Gardinier

The Japanese government is pushing ahead with a reported plan to buy hundreds of BGM-109 Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles (T-LAM), a long-range strike weapon that constitutionally-neutral Tokyo has eschewed since the end of the Second World War.

According to reports in US media, Japan is seeking to buy as many as 500 Tomahawk cruise missiles as part of a massive military expansion. The buy is reportedly being pushed ahead as a stop-gap measure in the wake of the Taiwan crisis, which entered an acute stage in August after then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi [visited the island](#), as well as an unprecedented [flurry of military activity](#) from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in recent months.

"Japan wanted to limit its defense spending and try not to acquire second-strike capability. But the situation surrounding us does not permit us to do that," Ichiro Fujisaki, former Japanese ambassador to the United States, told [a US newspaper](#). "Many people thought [war] was a 20th-century issue, but we are now seeing that again."

Japan's defeat in 1945 spelled the end of a century of Japanese imperialism, its empire broken up by the surrender to Allied forces as Korea became independent and Taiwan and other Chinese territories were returned to Beijing. Under the aegis of US occupation, Japan was reconstructed as a Constitutional Monarchy, with a constitution that mandated its neutrality. Since then, Japan has maintained a limited self-defense force, although conservative political forces have sought to limit or even undo that principle.

Japan has long used a variety of surface-to-ship missiles fired from trucks, aircraft, or warships, and air defense missiles capable of intercepting aircraft or missiles. However, the Tomahawk's surface-to-surface strike ability, and range of roughly 1,000 miles, represents a turning point for the Japanese military. The weapons will enable Japan to fire deep inside China and the DPRK from the Japanese mainland in a way that was previously not possible. The missile is also nuclear-capable, although as the only country ever bombed by nuclear weapons, Japan is extremely opposed to their existence and use.

A [poll last month](#) found that 60% of Japanese citizens surveyed agreed with the idea of acquiring counter-strike weapons.

Last month, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida took the provocative step of proposing to increase the Japanese defense budget to 2% of Japan's gross domestic product (GDP) by 2027 - a massive increase that would give Tokyo the world's third-largest military budget, after the United States and China. Earlier this year, Kishida appealed to the NATO alliance for a closer partnership. At the summit in Madrid, [NATO's declaration](#) for the first time mentioned China, describing the socialist East Asian state as "systemic competition" to the alliance.

In response to Kishida's budget proposal, the Chinese Foreign Ministry condemned the "[highly dangerous](#)" move, warning it would "put Asian neighbors and the international community on high alert about Japan's commitment to an exclusively defensive policy and to peaceful development."

Japan has a territorial dispute with China over the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea, which are uninhabited but occupy a strategically important position. Tokyo is also an informal but open supporter of the autonomous government on Taiwan, which Beijing says is a Chinese territory governed by rebel forces. Japan has increased its cooperation with regional Western-aligned countries in recent years, including South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand, and joined the anti-China "Quadrilateral Security Dialogue" with Australia, the US, and India. Other recently announced military projects include a hypersonic weapons program and a joint venture with the UK and Italy to develop a sixth-generation fighter jet.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Taiwan Announces Plans for Five 'Carrier-Killer' Corvettes Loaded With Supersonic Anti-Ship Missiles

By - Fantine Gardinier

The Taipei government's military has announced plans to upgrade the last five of the scheduled Tuo Chiang-class corvettes to carry more powerful anti-ship missiles capable of threatening China's prized aircraft carriers.

According to reports in Taiwanese media, the five remaining Tuo Chiang-class corvettes on order, a catamaran-style patrol ship displacing just 685 tons, will be loaded down with eight Hsiung Feng III (Brave Wind) supersonic anti-ship missiles each.

The powerful missile is among the most dangerous in the Taiwanese arsenal, propelling a 500-lb-class warhead at speeds of up to 2.5 times the speed of sound, to strike a surface target at a distance of up to 250 miles. At that speed and distance, the missile will pose an existential threat to warships much larger than it, even the Chinese aircraft carriers that can top out at 85,000 tons each, because of the difficulty for air defenses to engage it.

In addition to the advanced missiles, the forthcoming Tuo Chiangs will get four older Hsiung Feng II anti-ship missiles and 16 Ha-Chien II (Sea Sword) surface-to-air missiles. That's a lot of firepower for a coastal patrol ship. The three Tuo Chiangs already completed have a slightly lighter weapons loadout, but remain potent weapons.

Fitting out nimble craft like corvettes with powerful shoot-and-scoot weapons like missiles is part of the [asymmetric warfare strategy](#) increasingly being pursued by Taipei as its fears of conflict with China grow.

The US has encouraged asymmetric thinking in Taiwan, motivated in part by the conflict in Ukraine, where the US has supplied Kiev with large amounts of standoff and ambush weapons like shoulder-fired anti-tank missiles and HIMARS rocket artillery. The [US has sold Taipei](#) a variety of anti-ship and anti-air weapons in recent years, and pushed Taipei to increase its civil defense corps in case of a Chinese invasion.

Beijing regards Taiwan as a wayward province and sees the Taipei government as the vestigial remnant of the former Republic of China, kept alive by support from foreign powers like the US. The US has made clear it sees supporting Taiwan, a capitalist society with a western-style liberal democratic government, as a key weapon in its "[great power competition](#)" with China. Ironically, however, Washington formally recognizes China's position on Taiwan and agrees with Beijing's One-China Policy.

The news comes amid reports that [Japan is seeking to buy](#) hundreds of Tomahawk cruise missiles from the United States. The long-range missile, which can strike targets 1,000 miles away, is also being sought in response to increased tensions over Taiwan, as well as with North Korea.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

FTX Founder Sam Bankman-Fried Arrested by Bahamian Authorities After US Files Criminal Charges

The founder's arrest marks the very first after the FTX cryptocurrency firm filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy and saw Bankman-Fried step down from the company as its chief executive officer. FTX founder Sam Bankman-Fried (SBF) was arrested in the Bahamas after US authorities filed criminal charges against the former cryptocurrency billionaire, Bahamas Attorney General Ryan Pinder announced late Monday.

A statement released by Pinder's office detailed the arrest was made by the Royal Bahamas Police Force after authorities received a "receipt of formal notification" of criminal charges, and that it was "likely" the US was to request Bankman-Fried's extradition.

"As a result of the notification received and the material provided therewith, it was deemed appropriate for the Attorney General to seek SBF's arrest and hold him in custody pursuant to our nation's Extradition Act," reads the release.

"At such time as a formal request for extradition is made, the Bahamas intends to process it promptly, pursuant to Bahamian law and its treaty obligations with the United States."

Included along with the statement was a quote from Bahamian Prime Minister Philip Davis, who stated that the island nation would be conducting its own "regulatory and criminal investigation into the collapse of FTX."

An indictment in the matter is expected to be unsealed early Tuesday, US Attorney Damian Williams [said](#) Monday in a Twitter post. Details of the possible charges have not been specified; however, an unidentified source told ABC News the FTX founder is facing a "multi-count fraud indictment."

Earlier Monday, FTX attorneys accused the Bahamian government of working with Bankman-Fried to relocate FTX assets into crypto wallets controlled by its government officials. News of the arrest comes as Bankman-Fried was expected to testify before the US House Financial Services Committee on Tuesday.

Founded in 2019, FTX experienced its height in 2021, when it had more than a million users and ranked as the third-largest cryptocurrency exchange by volume.

The company ultimately saw the beginning of its downfall in November 2022, shortly after it was revealed FTX funds were allegedly used to cover financial losses experienced by Alameda Research, a crypto trading firm co-founded by Bankman-Fried in 2017.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Jay Leno Jokes He Has a 'Better' and 'Brand New Face' After Gasoline Fire Accident  
By - Mary Manley

The 72-year-old comedian, known best as the former host of the "Tonight Show," was left with serious burns on the side of his face when a gas leak from a car he was working on burst into flames. Leno, an avid car collector, owns about 180 rare cars and about 160 motorcycles as part of a \$52 million collection.

American comedian and entertainer Jay [Leno](#) has rebounded from a gasoline fire accident that left him with third-degree burns on his face, chest, and hands.

"It was an accident, that's all," Leno told an American news outlet on Sunday. "Anybody who works with their hands on a regular basis is going to have an accident at some point. If you play football, you get a concussion or a broken leg. Anything you do, there's a risk factor."

On November 12, Leno had to be admitted to the Grossman Burn Center after a 1907 White Steam Car he was repairing had a fuel leak which sprayed his face, hands and chest with gas and subsequently ignited, setting him on fire.

"Eight days later, I had a brand new face. And it's better than what was there before," the comedian joked.

According to Peter [Grossman](#), a reconstructive surgeon of the Grossman Burn Center, the former talk show host had to undergo a surgical excision and grafting procedure. He also had to be treated with "very aggressive" hyperbaric oxygen therapy, where oxygen is applied to burn areas in order to speed up the healing process by decreasing swelling and increasing blood flow.

According to Grossman, Leno is expected to make a full recovery.

"You have to joke about it," the host of the web series "Jay Leno's Garage" said. "There's nothing worse than whiny celebrities. If you joke about it, people laugh along with you."

Leno has since returned to work after he had to stay at the burn center for more than a week. His first show in late November was a sold-out appearance at the Comedy Magic Club in California's Hermosa Beach where he [reportedly](#) received a standing ovation.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

'Twitter Files' Part 5 Reveals Trump May Not Have Violated Twitter Rules Despite Ban  
By - Mary Manley

The 'Twitter Files' are a part of a series in which CEO Elon Musk is attempting to deliver on promises of transparency with Twitter users. The first batch of the series came just a month after Musk acquired the social media platform.

Former New York Times columnist Bari Weiss released the fifth installment of the 'Twitter Files' series on Monday, arguing that Twitter employees had felt "pressured" to ban Trump despite refusing to do so for the course of his presidency.

"For years, Twitter had resisted calls both internal and external to ban Trump on the grounds that blocking a world leader from the platform or removing their controversial tweets would hide important information that people should be able to see and debate," Weiss, founder and editor of The Free Press wrote in a Monday thread. "But after January 6, as [@mtaibbi](#) and [@shellenbergermd](#) have documented, pressure grew, both inside and outside of Twitter, to ban Trump."

Weiss went on to claim that there were some Twitter employees who behaved as "dissenters" and preferred not to ban Trump because they believed "censorship can destroy the public conversation."

Weiss goes on to write: "In the early afternoon of January 8, The Washington Post published an open letter signed by over 300 Twitter employees to CEO Jack Dorsey demanding Trump's ban."

Meanwhile Twitter staffers were discussing amongst themselves whether or not Trump had actually violated any Twitter user rules. "It's pretty obvious he's going to try to thread the needle of incitement while not violating the rules," wrote one staffer. Weiss' continued thread, which conservatives are honoring as "bombshell revelations," reveals staffer Anika Navaroli, a Twitter

policy official, was unable to find any violations relating to Trump's tweets during the January 6 insurrection.

"Ultimately, the concerns about Twitter's efforts to censor news about Hunter Biden's laptop, blacklist disfavored views, and ban a president aren't about the past choices of executives in a social media company. They're about the power of a handful of people at a private company to influence the public discourse and democracy," Weiss concluded.

In her conclusion Weiss refers to the first installment of the 'Twitter Files' which began on December 2, with a thread of posts alleging that Twitter had censored news about the Hunter Biden laptop [scandal](#).

While the 'Twitter Files' don't necessarily unveil anything [nefarious](#) about the company's decision-making before Musk became the new CEO, the revelations are giving conservatives across the social media site something to drool over. And that begs the question: What exactly are Musk's politics anyway? While he has called himself a centrist, Charlie [Warzel](#), a writer for The Atlantic, has deemed Musk a "far-right activist" following erratic behavior on the company's platform.

Twitter, meanwhile, continues to lose ad revenue as the company's new head of Trust and Safety Council, Ella [Irwin](#), wrote in a post last week that the company would continue to "aggressively de-amplify hate speech" on their platform.

The Monday release also came as Twitter abruptly dissolved the Trust and Safety Council less than an hour before the body was due to meet with executives to discuss recent company developments. An email signed "Twitter" reads in part: "We are grateful for your engagement, advice and collaboration in recent years and wish you every success in the future."

The latest drop in the 'Twitter Files' series was initially expected to be released on Sunday; it remains unclear why the recent publication was pushed to Monday.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Millions Put Under Severe Weather Alert as US Winter Storm to Bring Heavy Snowfall, Wild Tornadoes

By - Mary Manley

The weekend's storm is continuing to push through North America, and will bring with it heavy snowfall, blizzards, rain, and possible flooding.

Winter [storm](#) conditions brought mayhem to Southern California on Monday following the first phase of the weekend storm, which weather experts predict will dump several inches of snow in some parts of the Golden State.

One to four inches of snow are forecasted to hit the mountain in areas as low as 3,000 feet in elevation, and about four to eight inches of snow in parts sitting above 5,000 feet, according to the National Weather Service bureau in Oxnard.

In Northern California's Sierra Nevada region, five feet of snow fell across the area creating dangerous road conditions. The California Highway Patrol and the California Department of

Transportation released videos of vehicles struggling to make their way along Interstate 80, which experienced whiteout conditions on Sunday.

The whiteout conditions—which include blowing snow, wind drifts, and high winds with limited to no visibility—caused a woman in [Kenai](#), Alaska, to die, after she was hit by a pickup truck on Kalifornsky Beach Road during a storm that began Saturday, and left nearly two feet of snow on Western Kenai by Monday morning.

But the winter storm isn't over just yet. Other parts of the United States will experience some effect of the storm, with dangerous blizzard conditions, strong tornadoes, and flooding expected over the week. More than 10 million Americans have been placed under varying levels of winter weather alerts.

“This winter storm is a true coast-to-coast, top-to-bottom impact that will be felt by every person in the country at some point this week,” [Brandon Miller](#), a CNN meteorologist said.

As the storm travels eastward a foot of snow is expected to hit the Rockies on Monday night while the Upper Midwest and northern and central Plains will experience heavy snowfall from Monday night into Tuesday, with an accumulation of six to 12 inches on the Northern High Plains. Western South Dakota and northwestern Nebraska are expected to receive up to 18 to 24 inches of snow.

During that same time, northern Wisconsin will experience 10 to 15 inches of snow while northeastern Minnesota could experience anywhere from 10 to 20 inches of snow.

The area between eastern Wyoming and Colorado to western South Dakota and Nebraska will also experience wind gusts as high as 60 mph. That strong wind, combined with heavy snowfall, could create whiteout conditions for roadways, which will make travel difficult or nearly impossible.

“All preparations for this storm should be well underway and completed sooner rather than later,” the National Weather Service office in Rapid City said.

Blizzard warnings, which stretch from west of Denver into the Dakotas, could bring about as much as 20 inches of snow, and major winds may knock over tree limbs and cause power outages.

“The cold wind chills, as low as 20 below zero [degrees Fahrenheit], could cause frostbite on exposed skin in as little as 30 minutes,” the weather service office in Cheyenne, Wyoming, warned.

Storms capable of producing tornadoes will form on Tuesday across an area stretching from eastern Texas to Arkansas, Louisiana, and a majority of Mississippi. Severe weather and flash flooding can be expected on Tuesday, as well as damaging winds and hail. The lower Mississippi River Valley will experience a Level 2 of 4 risk of excessive rainfall and pockets of flash flooding.

However, that area has experienced some of the lowest water levels on record this fall, and the rain this week could help the Memphis area get above a low water stage for the first time since mid-August.

A [Nor'easter](#) off the Mid-Atlantic coast may bring snow across interior portions of the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic later in the week as the nor'easter is expected to form on Thursday. But if the storm comes close enough to the coast (which is referred to as a 'coastal hugger') it could create rain rather than snow, which is anticipated for parts of the Northeast through Thursday and Friday.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Consumer Prices See Smallest Growth in Almost a Year, Paving Way for Smaller Rate Hikes

(Adds comment, details and context in paras 5-8)

WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) - US consumer prices rose by 7.1% in the 12 months to November, the Labor Department announced on Tuesday, indicating the smallest inflationary growth in almost a year and marking a victory for the Federal Reserve's plans to slow down rate hikes after aggressively hiking them to curb price pressures.

Economists had expected the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers, known in short as the CPI, to expand by 7.3% in the year to November after a 7.7% annual growth reported by the Labor Department for October.

"This was the smallest 12-month increase since the period ending December 2021," the department said in a statement.

The CPI hit a 40-year high in June when it grew at an annual rate of 9.1%. Since that peak, it has slowed every month, giving back a full 2% over the past five months.

"The previous report surprised to the downside," economist Adam Button said in a post on the ForexLive forum, referring to the 0.5% annual drop for October. "This isn't quite as big of a surprise but it's in the same direction" in prodding the Fed to slow down on its rate hikes, Button added.

The Fed's target for inflation is just 2% per annum. In a bid to control surging prices, the central bank 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 Fed slashed them to nearly zero after the global COVID-19 outbreak in 2020.

The Fed, which executed four back-to-back jumbo rate hikes of 75 basis points from June through November, is now contemplating a 50-basis point increase at its December 14 rate decision.

More important than that is what the next rate hike for February 2023 is looking like. Early indications by money markets on Tuesday suggested a 25-basis point hike. If true, it will match the March increase that began the Fed's series of rate hikes for 2022.

12/13/2022 9:30:59 AM -05:00

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Securities and Exchange Commission Charges FTX Founder With Fraud

WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) - The US Securities and Exchange Commission has charged FTX founder Samuel Bankman-Fried with scheming to defraud equity investors in FTX Trading, it said in a statement on Tuesday.

"The Securities and Exchange Commission today charged Samuel Bankman-Fried with orchestrating a scheme to defraud equity investors in FTX Trading Ltd. (FTX), the crypto trading platform of which he was the CEO and co-founder. Investigations as to other securities law violations and into other entities and persons relating to the alleged misconduct are ongoing," the statement said.

FTX, a cryptocurrency derivatives exchange, tanked in November as the result of a liquidity crisis that prompted multiple federal investigations. It is alleged that the liquidity crisis was mostly due to affiliated trading firm Alameda using client funds to cover loans after the collapse of the Luna crypto network.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Consumer Prices See Smallest Growth in Almost a Year, Paving Way for Smaller Rate Hikes

WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) - US consumer prices rose by 7.1% in the 12 months to November, the Labor Department announced on Tuesday, indicating the smallest inflationary growth in almost a year and marking a victory for the Federal Reserve's plans to slow down rate hikes after aggressively hiking them to curb price pressures.

Economists had expected the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers, known in short as the CPI, to expand by 7.3% in the year to November after a 7.7% annual growth reported by the Labor Department for October.

"This was the smallest 12-month increase since the period ending December 2021," the department said in a statement.

The CPI hit a 40-year high in June when it grew at an annual rate of 9.1%. The Fed's target for inflation is just 2% per annum. In a bid to control surging prices, the central bank 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 jumbo rate hikes of 75 basis points from June through November, is contemplating a more modest 50-basis point increase at its December 14 rate decision.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Americans Name Government as Nation's Top Problem for 7th Year in Past Decade – Poll

WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) – Americans have cited government dissatisfaction as the top problem this year and for the seventh year in the past decade, according to a Gallup poll released Tuesday.

An average of 19% of American adults cited some aspect of government as the top problem, followed by inflation (16%) and the economy (12%). The "government" is a broad category that includes a range of aspects, such as the president, Congress, party politics, or gridlock.

The poll found that Republicans are more likely than Democrats and independents to cite the government as the top problem.

Over the last five years, the government did not rank as the top problem in only one year – 2020 – when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in the US.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Let Chevron Extract Venezuelan Oil to Aid EU Allies Amid Energy Cuts - Investor Rogers

WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) - A decision by the United States to grant Chevron an extraction permit aims to help Washington's European allies amid energy shortages, renowned US investor Jim Rogers told Sputnik.

"The shortages are more serious in Europe and that's why the US is trying to help the European allies. And so they've said to Venezuela, ok, you can sell your oil," Rogers said. "The US wants to help its allies and the more energy that Europe has and other allies, the less problems and the less pressure they will have. So if you ask me, it's because America saw what was happening to its allies, wanted to help them and so removed some of the restrictions."

In November, the Treasury Department issued a general license authorizing Chevron to resume a six-month natural resource extraction operation in Venezuela. However, the US government retains the authority to amend or revoke the authorization at any time should the Venezuelan government fail to negotiate in good faith or follow through on its commitments with the country's opposition.

Sources told Sputnik earlier in the month that Chevron has signed contracts with the Venezuelan government and state oil company PDVSA to resume oil production operations in the country.

The contracts enable the parties to implement the new US government license in accordance with the guidance provided by the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), the sources said.

A Chevron spokesperson told Sputnik the company will conduct its business in Venezuela in compliance with the sanctions framework provided by OFAC.

The sources said the license does not allow for Chevron to expand its operations in Venezuela and Western partners would need to be allowed to invest to increase oil production. An increase will take time given that US sanctions are still in place, they said.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Ex-US Judge in Bout's Trial Says Would Support Swapping Vinnik for Whelan

NEW YORK CITY, December 13 (Sputnik) - Former District Judge Shira A. Scheindlin, who presided over Viktor Bout's trial, told Sputnik she would support a potential exchange of Russian citizen Alexander Vinnik for American Paul Whelan.

"I would but I'm just a private citizen. I have no knowledge of what the national security people would think etc. Vinnik was involved in cyber security issues, cyber currency issues, I think, that kind of thing. So it seems to me we can do without him here, but what do I know? It's not my case," Scheindlin said, when asked if she would support such an exchange.

Vinnik was detained in Greece in 2017 at the request of the US government. However, Vinnik was initially extradited to France, where he was sentenced to five years in prison and fined \$119,433. Vinnik was later returned to Greece before being brought to the US in August of this year.

The Russian citizen is accused of financial crimes by US authorities, including money laundering through his cryptocurrency trading platform BTC-e.

Whelan was sentenced in 2020 to 16 years in Russia for spying. He was left behind in last week's prisoner swap, which saw Russian businessman Viktor Bout and American basketball player Brittney Griner released.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Judge in Bout's Trial Says Glad Griner at Home, But Does Not See Swap as Fair Trade

NEW YORK CITY, December 13 (Sputnik) - Former District Judge Shira A. Scheindlin, who presided over Viktor Bout's trial, told Sputnik she is happy that WNBA player Brittney Griner returned home, but does not believe her swap for the Russian citizen convicted of conspiring to sell weapons to Colombian rebels amounts to a "fair trade."

"We are glad that Brittney Griner was returned, but she committed no crime, in my opinion, at all, not even a violation of law, much less a crime, whereas Mr. Bout was convicted of a very serious crime. And so it was a very harsh bargain on Russia's part, because there was no equivalence between Mr. Bout and Ms. Griner," Scheindlin said.

She noted that the American people had hoped that the United States would "at least get two people back" in return for Bout, and were "disappointed" that Paul Whelan had not been freed in addition to Griner.

"That said, we are happy to have her back, and we are glad that at least there was some resolution to the negotiations, but it did not seem like a fair trade," the retired judge concluded.

Last week, 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 charges of conspiring to sell weapons to Colombian rebels to kill Americans. Griner was sentenced earlier this year to nine years in prison in Russia for illegally bringing cannabis oil into the country.

The swap sparked criticism in connection with the US failure to secure the release of former Marine Paul Whelan, sentenced in 2020 to 16 years in a Russian prison for spying.

The Biden administration has vowed to continue to seek his release, noting that Russia had rejected all the proposals to free Whelan, and they had a choice between bringing Griner home or no one at all.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Investor Jim Rogers Expects Money Printing to Continue Leading to More Inflation

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - Renowned US investor Jim Rogers told Sputnik that he expects that money printing will continue and it will result in more inflation.

"Energy and some prices have come down a bit, but that's the way markets work. When something goes straight up, it always has a reaction of correction going on, and that's what's happening now, for a variety of reasons," Rogers said. "If the war gets worse, the prices will go higher. If money printing continues, prices will go higher. Many banks raised interest rates. That is one of the reasons we had corrections and reactions, but in the end we're going to have more inflation, because money printing always leads to inflation and they will print money again." Rogers went on to say that if there are economic slowdowns next year or the year after, central banks will print more money.

"They always do and that will lead to more inflation. Inflation is not over," the investor stated.

"I'm afraid we're gonna have serious inflation in the next few years because central banks have printed and will print a lot of money in the future. Interest rates are up in the last year or two but nothing compared to what they have been historically. Interest rates must go really, really high to kill inflation and they're not killing inflation yet, except in the short term."

Western countries have increased sanctions pressure on Russia since the start of its special military operation in Ukraine on February 24. Disruptions in supply chains have since led to higher fuel and food prices across the EU and the US, driving inflation to record levels and causing the cost of living to soar. In November, inflation in the US slowed down to 7.8%.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Ex-US Judge Says Bout Was Arrested in Sting Op for Crime He Was Not Looking to Commit

NEW YORK CITY, December 13 (Sputnik) - Former District Judge Shira A. Scheindlin, who presided over Viktor Bout's trial, told Sputnik she still believes the 25-year sentence handed to the Russian businessman was very severe, as he was arrested in a US sting operation for a crime he was not looking to commit.

Judge Scheindlin sentenced Bout to 25 years in a US prison in 2012 on charges of conspiring to supply Colombian rebels with weapons to kill Americans. Later, the retired judge said that Bout "got a hard deal," and 10 years would have been a "fair sentence."

"That is still true. I thought he got a very harsh sentence, because this was a crime that he wasn't looking to commit. He was approached by the undercover agents. He did not approach the Colombian terrorist organization. They did not approach him," Scheindlin said, when asked whether she had changed her mind.

"This was set up by the United States government. He was willing to do it [sell weapons] so it's not entrapment. But he wasn't looking to do it. He wasn't looking to commit this crime. Unlike an active drug dealer, for example. Then there's a sting where an agent buys the drugs, that's different, because he's already selling drugs every day," the retired judge explained.

At that point, Bout was "not in the business of the arms and he was not looking to deal with a terrorist organization," the retired judge added. She noted that given that "unique circumstance," she would have given a shorter sentence if she could have.

At the same, she disagreed that it would make sense to give Bout less than 10 years.

Last week, the United States released Bout in exchange for Brittney Griner, who was sentenced earlier this year to nine years in prison in Russia for illegally bringing cannabis oil into the country.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Blinken Meets With Uzbek Counterpart Ahead of Strategic Partnership Dialogue - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has met with Uzbek Foreign Minister Vladimir Norov ahead of the US-Uzbekistan Strategic Partnership Dialogue in Washington, the State Department said.

Both leaders discussed the enduring US-Uzbekistan bilateral relationship, support for the peoples of Ukraine and Afghanistan, and the United States' partnership with Uzbekistan within the context of Central Asia's shifting geopolitical landscape, the State Department said in a press release on Monday.

Blinken welcomed Uzbekistan's announced reforms and urged the country's government to implement them, including measures to protect human rights, support civil society, ensure freedom of media and combat gender-based violence, the release said.

Blinken noted the importance of full and transparent investigations and fair trials of defendants following the unrest in Karakalpakstan earlier this year and reaffirmed the United States' commitment to being a reliable partner to Uzbekistan, the release added.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Bahamas Police Arrest SBF After Notification US Filing Charges - AGO

WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) - The Bahamas Attorney General's office said police arrested former FTX CEO Sam Bankman-Fried upon notification that the US is filing charges.

"The Office of the Attorney General of the Bahamas is announcing the arrest of... Sam Bankman-Fried, former CEO of FTX," the statement said on Monday. "SBF's arrest followed receipt of formal notification from the United States that it has filed criminal charges against SBF and is likely to request his extradition."

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Ex-Judge Who Sentenced Bout Says Considers Him Businessman, Not Terrorist

NEW YORK CITY, December 13 (Sputnik) - Former District Judge Shira A. Scheindlin, who presided over Viktor Bout's trial, told Sputnik she does not consider him a terrorist, rather a businessman, and doubts he plotted to kill Americans.

When asked if she believes Bout really wanted to kill Americans, Scheindlin replied "No, no, not really."

She said that an undercover US agent told Bout during a sting operation "Do you realize these weapons will be used to kill Americans?" and the Russian businessman reportedly said "Oh yes, I understand that. And I agree, it's my enemy too."

"So he said that on the tapes, he said, 'It's my enemy too.' So he said the right word, but he was not himself a terrorist who, who like Al Qaeda [a terrorist organization, banned in Russia] flies planes into the Trade Center. I would always say he's not an ideological terrorist. He's a businessman," the retired judge said.

Scheindlin expressed doubt that the businessman really thought about how the weapons would be used.

"He's a businessman. So I don't think he cares who got killed by these weapons that he sold. Whoever got killed – got killed. He sold it to two sides of a civil war in Africa. He sold to both sides," Scheindlin said.

Judge Scheindlin sentenced Bout to 25 years in a US prison in 2012 on charges of conspiring to supply Colombian rebels with weapons to kill Americans. The Russian citizen pleaded not guilty. Last week, the United States released Bout in exchange for Brittney Griner, who was sentenced earlier this year to nine years in prison in Russia for illegally bringing cannabis oil into the country.

In his first interview since his release to RT, Bout recalled that the judge admitted during the trial that he was an ordinary businessman and his activity did not differ much from the one of his peers, and that she saw nothing illegal in it.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

FBI Releases Report on Hate Crimes in US During 2021 - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) - The FBI has released the latest report on hate crimes in the United States in 2021 that reveals the third-highest number of such crimes committed in this decade, Voice of America reported.

The FBI revealed there were 7,262 hate crime incidents in the United States in 2021 and 8,263 incidents the year before, the report said on Monday.

However, the FBI pointed out that the two figures should not be compared because they are based on different data sets. The agency said that 65% of the 18,000 police departments in the United States submitted information about hate crimes in 2021 compared to 93% the year before, the report said.

The FBI said the decline was in large part due to its switch to a different reporting system, noting that state, local, state and tribal law enforcement are required to submit data on hate crimes to the US federal government.

Two of the country's largest cities, Los Angeles and New York did not submit data, while the third largest, Chicago, reported no hate crimes, the report said.

Last month, FBI Director Christopher Wray said that some jurisdictions fail to report hate crime statistics, while others claim there are no hate crimes in their community - a fact that would be welcome, if true.

The FBI defines "hate crime" as a criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender's bias against race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender or gender identity.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Biden to Announce Multi-Country Trip to Africa During US-Africa Summit This Week - Reports  
WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is planning to announce a multi-country trip to the African continent during the US-Africa summit this week, Axios reported, citing sources in the know.

The trip will likely take place next year, the report said on Monday. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said earlier that an announcement will soon be made about a "broad-based commitment" by Biden administration officials to travel to Africa in 2023, the report added.

The summit is scheduled for December 13-15 in Washington and will focus on bolstering ties between the United States and African nations to advance shared priorities such as public health and energy access. Nearly 50 African heads of state are expected to participate in the summit, including the leaders of the African Union.

Last week, White House National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said that President Joe Biden plans to invite the African Union to join the Group of Twenty (G20) as a permanent member during the upcoming summit.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

## US, Eastern European Lawmakers Urge Blinken, Borrell to Sanction 7 Russians - Letter

WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) - US Congressmen Steve Cohen and Joe Wilson joined a handful of lawmakers from Poland, Ukraine, Estonia and Lithuania to send a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken and EU High Representative Josep Borrell urging them to sanction several Russian citizens who have allegedly been involved in perpetuating the conflict in Ukraine.

"We urge you to impose sanctions on the following seven individuals who have been involved in perpetuating Russia's genocidal war in Ukraine," the letter, obtained by Sputnik, said on Monday.

The lawmakers suggest sanctions against Russian businessmen and politicians Roman Abramovich, Vladimir Potanin, Magomed Gadzhiev, Ksenia Sobchak, Igor Krutoy, Aleksey Likhachov and Vadym Rabinovych, according to the letter.

The lawmakers also urge the United States and the European Union to continue efforts to sanction individuals in the Russian financial sector, the military and in media who support the Ukraine conflict.

The Group of Seven (G7) member states said they will increase economic pressure on Russia and on countries circumventing the sanctions regime imposed on Moscow, according to a joint statement released on Monday.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

## Suspect in 1988 Plane Bombing Appears in US Court, Faces Life in Prison - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) - A man suspected of involvement in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 made an initial appearance in a US court, facing life in prison if convicted, the Justice Department said in a press release.

"Abu Agila Mohammad Mas'ud Kheir Al-Marimi (Mas'ud), 71, of Tunisia and Libya, made his initial appearance in the US District Court for the District of Columbia on federal charges, unsealed today, stemming from the Dec. 21, 1988, civilian aircraft bombing that killed 270 people," the Justice Department said on Monday.

In December 2020, the Justice Department made public a criminal complaint against Mas'ud, charging him with destruction of aircraft resulting in death, and destruction of a vehicle used in foreign commerce by means of an explosive resulting in death.

The incident, which occurred over Lockerbie, Scotland, killed citizens of the United States, United Kingdom and 19 other countries. The US and Scotland have jointly pursued justice for the victims since the bombing, including in regards to the prosecution of Mas'ud, the Justice Department said.

Mas'ud allegedly worked for the External Security Organization, a Libyan intelligence service engaged in acts of terrorism against other nations, the Justice Department said. Mas'ud and two other men are alleged to have planted a suitcase-bomb that destroyed the aircraft, according to the Justice Department.

Mas'ud faces a maximum penalty of life in prison if convicted, the Justice Department said.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Officials Met Virtually With Paul Whelan's Sister to Discuss 'Next Steps' - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) - Biden administration officials have met virtually with Paul Whelan's sister, Elizabeth Whelan, to discuss the "next steps" of the government's strategy to bring Paul back to the United States, CNN reported.

The meeting took place earlier on Monday with the Whelan family to go through the next steps of the strategy, a US State Department spokesperson was quoted by the report as saying. The official declined to provide further details about the 45-minute-long meeting, the report said. Elizabeth Whelan described the meeting as an opportunity to regroup on her brother's case, the report said.

She explained that it was a working-level meeting with State Department and national Security Council officials that had been arranged at the request of the Biden administration.

Paul Whelan was arrested in Moscow in December 2018 and sentenced to 16 years in prison for espionage. The Biden administration has since tried unsuccessfully to secure his release.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Twitter to Cancel Legacy Blue Checks for Being Given Out in Corrupt, Nonsensical Way -Musk

WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) - Twitter owner Elon Musk said the social-media platform will get rid of the legacy blue checks in a matter of months because they were given out in corrupt and nonsensical ways.

"In a few months, we will remove all legacy blue checks. The way in which they were given out was corrupt and nonsensical," Musk said on Monday.

Since Musk acquired Twitter on October 2 for \$44 billion, the company has undergone numerous significant changes, including laying off more than 3,700 employees and offering users an \$8 monthly blue-check subscription.

On Sunday, Musk went ahead with his November 6 announcement, informing users that they would soon be able to create longer tweets. Twitter will therefore lift the 280 characters message limit, raising it to 4000.

Twitter was founded in 2006 as a company whose main service was to offer a social network for exchanging short messages. The company is headquartered in San Francisco, California.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

## Biden Admin. Taking Steps to Manage End of Title 42 Policy on Southern Border - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration continues ongoing rigorous work to ensure it can handle a potential surge of asylum-seeking migrants on the US southern border once a health policy expires later this month that allowed federal authorities to rapidly expel migrants, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said during a press briefing.

"So the team has been working very hard to ensure that we are taking steps to be able to manage the expiration of Title 42 and to put in place a process that will be orderly and humane and we believe that in doing so, we can protect our national security concerns," Sullivan said on Monday.

The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has requested from the government more than \$3 billion to deal with an expected surge of illegal migrants crossing the US southern border once Title 42 expires, according to media reports.

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, reports said.

The Title 42 policy enacted during the Trump administration in 2020 states that the federal authorities can prevent migrants 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 ruled that Title 42 rule must be lifted on December 21.

Last week, the Biden administration appealed the ruling to suspend Title 42.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

## Schumer Says Anticipates 1-Week Continuing Resolution to Fund US Govt., Avoid Shutdown

WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) - US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said he anticipates Congress will consider a one-week continuing resolution (CR) to avoid a government shutdown and give lawmakers more time to draft a year-long funding bill.

"Both sides also continue negotiating a deal for a year-long omnibus," Schumer said on Monday. "Later this week, members should be prepared to take quick action on a CR, a one-week CR, so we can give appropriators more time to finish a full funding bill before the holidays."

Schumer said he is optimistic Congress would quickly take action on a CR and avoid a government shutdown.

Congress is slated to consider government funding legislation and the National Defense Authorization Act as part of its "lame duck" session that runs through the end of the year.

Republican lawmakers have proposed a CR into the new year and new Congress, during which Republicans will have control of the House of Representatives.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Regrets Erdogan's Rhetoric Toward Greece, Urges Allies to Avoid Threats - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) - The United States regrets the use of escalatory rhetoric toward Greece by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and urges all NATO allies to refrain from threatening one another, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said during a press briefing.

On Sunday, Turkish media reported that Erdogan said a ballistic missile could and would strike Athens unless tensions between the two nations ease.

"We regret this escalation of provocative statements. It is especially regrettable at a time when unity and cooperation are needed most among our own NATO allies. We urge all of our allies to avoid threats and provocative rhetoric," Price said on Monday.

Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias also condemned the rhetoric earlier on Monday, calling it unacceptable for an allied country.

Turkey and Greece have been at odds for decades over competing territorial claims in the eastern Mediterranean.

In October, Turkey tested its short-range Tayfun ballistic missile over the Black Sea, with Erdogan calling the test a signal, though without specifying to whom.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

State Dept. Says Aware of Reports US Citizen Killed in Ukraine, Cannot Confirm Information

WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) - US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said during a press briefing that he is aware of reports that another US citizen was killed fighting in Ukraine but cannot confirm the information.

"I've seen those reports. What I will say is those reports are unconfirmed. Without going into specifics, we have noted before misinformation and disinformation circulating in the context of this conflict," Price said.

Former deputy of the Verkhovna Rada, Valeria Zaruzhko, said that Rebecca Matsirovsky of Knoxville, Tennessee, died in Bakhmut working as a paramedic for the Ukrainian forces. Fighting around Bakhmut has intensified as Russian forces make incremental gains in the area, a senior US military official said earlier on Monday.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

State Dept. Says Sees No Indication of Foul Play in Death of US Sports Reporter Wahl

WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) - The United States has seen no indication that foul play was involved in the death of CBS sports journalist Grant Wahl while covering the World Cup in Qatar, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said.

On Friday, Price confirmed reports of Wahl's death and expressed condolences to his family. Grant Wahl's brother, Eric Wahl, reportedly claimed that the journalist collapsed during a match and later died after being transferred to a hospital. Eric Wahl also expressed skepticism about whether the death was natural.

"When it comes to the tragic death of Grant Wahl, what I can say is that his remains were repatriated today," Price said during a press briefing on Monday. "We have seen no indication of foul play or anything nefarious at this point."

Wahl's remains are now in the possession of the New York City Medical Examiner and will undergo an autopsy in the US, Price said.

Qatar has been cooperative with the US in the wake of Wahl's death, Price added.

Earlier in the World Cup, Wahl was temporarily blocked from entering a stadium for wearing a shirt with a rainbow and soccer ball amid attempts by Qatari authorities to restrict pro-LGBT demonstrations. Wahl, who identifies as gay, claimed his brother received death threats. Last Monday, Wahl wrote that he had been sick for approximately ten days and received antibiotics after getting diagnosed with bronchitis, according to US media reports. Wahl also confirmed he tested negative for COVID-19.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Slovakia to Buy 152 Infantry Fighting Vehicles for \$1.37Bln From Sweden - BAE Systems

WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) - Slovakia has concluded an agreement to buy 152 Infantry Fighting Vehicles (IFVs) from Sweden for \$37 billion, the company explained, BAE Systems announced.

"As part of a government-to-government agreement between Sweden and the Slovak Republic, the Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic has signed a \$1.37 billion (1.3 billion euros) agreement for the delivery of 152 CV9035 Infantry Fighting Vehicles (IFVs) from BAE Systems," BAE Systems said in a press release on Monday.

The CV90s will be produced and delivered in several configurations with the full cooperation of Slovak industry including ZTS - ŠPECIÁL as the main industry partner to BAE Systems, the release said.

"The Slovak Army will receive the newest iteration of the CV9035, known as the CV90MkIV, with the latest advanced capabilities and digital technology. The vehicle combines improved battlefield speeds and handling with an upgraded electronic architecture to support future growth and meet the needs of the evolving battlefield," the release said.

The Slovak CV90s will be equipped with the new state-of-the-art D-series turret with a 35 mm gun. The turret provides CV9035 crews with improved protection and amplified combat

efficiency through the latest generation of sensors, artificial intelligence and augmented reality software, increasing the vehicles' multi-domain capabilities on the battlefield, the release added. The Slovak CV9035 will also be equipped with Elbit Systems' "Iron Fist" active protection system solution and an integrated, Rafael Advanced Defense Systems' SPIKE-LR, an advanced anti-tank guided missile, according to the release.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Will Have High-Level Talks With Russia Later this Week About Paul Whelan - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - The United States will hold high-level talks with Russia later this week about American prisoner Paul Whelan, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Monday.

"With respect to the question of whether we have engagement with the Russian Federation on the Whelan case, we will have an engagement this week," said Sullivan at a press conference.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US State Dept. Says Aware of Reports of Attempt to Exchange Krasikov for Whelan

WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) - US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said he is aware of reports that Washington failed to negotiate the release of US citizen Paul Whelan for former Russian Col. Vadim Krasikov, who was sentenced to life in prison in Germany for murder.

"The only thing I can confirm is what you said, that there was such a report. I'm in no position to speak to the veracity of that specific report," Price said during a press briefing on Monday when asked about the reports.

On Friday, US media reported, citing a German government source, that US officials asked their German counterparts if Krasikov could be included in a prisoner swap between the US and Russia.

Whelan was sentenced to 16 years in Russian prison on espionage charges. Krasikov was given a life sentence in Germany for the murder of former Chechen fighter Zelimkhan Khangoshvili.

On Thursday, the US secured the release of basketball player Brittney Griner, who was sentenced to nine years in prison for bringing cannabis oil in Russia, in exchange for Russian businessman and alleged arms trafficker Viktor Bout.

The prisoner exchange prompted criticism of the Biden administration for failing to secure the release of Whelan, a former US Marine.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.'**

SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY  
WASHINGTON, December 13 (Sputnik) -

#### KOSOVO CRISIS

- \* EU Special Representative for Kosovo Tomas Szunyog will travel to the region in a bid to reduce tensions ahead of the EU Council meeting scheduled for Thursday, the bloc's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Monday.
- \* Russia will help Serbia defend its legitimate national interests in relation to Kosovo based on UN Security Council resolutions, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

#### UKRAINE CONFLICT

- \* US President Joe Biden said on Monday that the United States is only sending material to support Ukraine worth billions of dollars and is not deploying troops to the country.
- \* The United States will continue to review its presence in Ukraine and that of its embassy in the capital Kiev, a senior Defense Department official said on Monday.
- \* Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said on Monday that Kiev wants to get tanks that meet NATO standards, in particular the French Leclerc tanks.
- \* Kiev failed to provide any evidence at a joint expert meeting that Russia was using Iranian drones in Ukraine, Iranian Defense Minister Mohammad-Reza Ashtiani said on Monday.
- \* Kherson regional administration first deputy head Vitaly Bulyuk has been injured in an assassination attempt when his car blew up, killing one civilian, the regional administration office told Sputnik.
- \* The number of Ukrainian refugees in Poland and Germany is growing, so both countries should seek financial support from the European Union, Polish President Andrzej Duda said.

#### US-CHINA RELATIONS

- \* Beijing filed a lawsuit to the World Trade Organization (WTO) over the introduction of US export control measures on chips and other products against China, the Ministry of Commerce said on Monday.

#### GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS

- \* Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced the discovery of a field in southeastern Turkey with net oil reserves of 150 million barrels worth estimated \$12 billion.

#### SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

- \* The G7 members will increase economic pressure on Russia and countries that circumvent restrictive measures imposed against it, according to the G7 leaders' statement
- \* EU foreign ministers at a meeting on Monday did not agree on a new package of sanctions against Russia, work on this package will continue, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said following the meeting of EU Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels.

\* Hungary advocated for the exclusion of several individuals from the ninth EU sanctions package in order to keep official communication channels open, and therefore sanctions are planned to be imposed against 141 people, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto said.

\* Restrictions against the Russian energy sector and nuclear energy are not included in the ninth package of EU sanctions, Szijjarto said.

#### US ECONOMIC SITUATION

\* The US budget deficit almost tripled month-on-month to reach nearly \$250 billion in November, the Treasury Department announced on Monday.

\* Americans expect a lower inflation rate across the board in the United States in 2023 with a headline estimate of a 0.7% decrease from what was previously thought, a survey by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York revealed.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Sullivan Says His White House Team Spoke With Paul Whelan's Sister on Monday Morning  
WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Monday that his team spoke with Paul Whelan's sister Elizabeth, in the morning.

In June 2020, a Moscow court sentenced Paul Whelan for espionage to 16 years in prison and he has since pleaded with the Biden administration to secure his release from Russia.

"So members of my team and the State Department met with Elizabeth Whelan this morning virtually over zoom," Sullivan said during a press briefing. "We are bound and determined to ensure that we work through a successful method of securing Paul Whelan's release at the earliest possible opportunity."

The United States believes that there are opportunities, some that have already been in motion and US officials continue to work on, that could potentially lead to a positive result in Paul Whelan's case.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Finalizes \$2.5Bln Loan to Build Three EV Battery Plants - Energy Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is finalizing a \$2.5 billion loan to a GM joint venture to build three electric vehicle battery manufacturing facilities, the Energy Department said on Monday.

"The US Department of Energy (DOE), through its Loan Programs Office (LPO), today announced the closing of a \$2.5 billion loan to Ultium Cells LLC to help finance the construction of new lithium-ion battery cell manufacturing facilities in Ohio, Tennessee, and Michigan," the release said. "Ultium Cells, a joint venture between General Motors and LG Energy Solution, will

manage battery cell production at the three facilities to address the growing US consumer demand for electric vehicles (EVs)."

The project, the release added, will create more than 11,000 jobs including 700 for United Auto Workers in the newly-organized Warren, Ohio facility.

This is the first loan offered exclusively for a battery cell manufacturing project under the Advanced Technology Vehicles Manufacturing (ATVM) program, according to the release.

The program has attracted over \$104 billion in requested loans and loan guarantees as of the end of October, the release said.

President Joe Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the release added, offers \$7.5 billion for EV charging infrastructure and more than \$7 billion to build out the critical minerals supply chains necessary for batteries, components, materials, and recycling.

Biden's Inflation Reduction Act has been directing critical investments and updates to the ATVM program by appropriating \$3 billion for the costs of direct loans to remain available through September 30, 2028.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US to Commit \$55 Billion to Africa at Upcoming US-Africa Summit - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - The United States at the upcoming US-Africa summit will pledge to provide Africa with \$55 billion over the next three years, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Monday.

"Working closely with Congress, the US will commit \$55 billion to Africa over the course of the next three years across a wide range of sectors to tackle the core challenges of our time," said Sullivan at a press conference.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US, Russia Have Further Work to Remove 'Irritants' Raised in Istanbul Talks - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - The United States and Russia have further work to be done to address bilateral irritants raised during a meeting in Istanbul last week, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"It was a meeting that was narrowly focused on a small set of bilateral issues, bilateral irritants, that tend to, in some cases, get in the way of productive conversations between our two countries," Price said during a press briefing. "I think it is fair to say that we have more to discuss if we are to remove those irritants entirely."

On Friday, the State Department confirmed that a senior Biden administration official visited Istanbul, Turkey, to meet with Russian interlocutors on a range of bilateral issues.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Budget Deficit Almost Triples in November as Year-End Congressional Funding Fight Looms

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - The US budget deficit almost tripled month-on-month to reach nearly \$250 billion in November, the Treasury Department announced on Monday, as a year-end Congressional battle to keep the federal government funded loomed.

The budget deficit stood at a mere \$88 billion in October. The Treasury's monthly statement on "Receipts and Outlays of the United States Government" did not give a breakdown as to what caused the deficit to balloon by another \$160 billion or so for last month.

The US Congress, meanwhile, faces a Friday deadline to fund the federal government, as Democrats and Republicans spar over the details of an expected roughly \$1.5 trillion funding bill in the final weeks that Democrats aligned to President Joe Biden control both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The end-of-year battle over budget priorities has become a legislative ritual. By right, the process should have been resolved by October 1, when Washington's fiscal year started. But November 8 marked the midterm election for Biden, and Republicans were not about to give up their opportunity to have a political wrangling with the Democrats over the budget before the polls, where the president's party narrowly lost the House but kept its control of the Senate. Republican Senator Richard Shelby last week told reporters that negotiators were about \$25 billion apart on the budget in the latest faceoff with Democrats - an amount that makes up less than 2% of last year's spending.

According to media reports, none of the one-dozen appropriations bills have been ratified by the House and Senate, meaning day-to-day operations and public services ranging from air traffic control and the running of national parks to medical research and environmental programs could be strained when existing funds expire at midnight Friday.

Over the weekend though, behind-the-scenes negotiations made progress toward a deal on an "omnibus" spending bill that would bundle the 12 appropriations bills to provide government-wide funding through September 30, 2023.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Welcomes Taliban's Decision to Allow Karzai into UAE - State Dept

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - The United States welcomes the Taliban's decision to allow Hamid Karzai, the former president of Afghanistan, to travel to the United Arab Emirates, State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Monday.

"We welcome the Taliban's decision to allow former President Karzai to travel to the UAE, we saw that as a positive step," Price said at a briefing.

Former president Karzai left Kabul earlier this month for the UAE, nearly 16 months after the Taliban's travel ban following their operations in Afghanistan. The travel ban prevented the travel of several former Afghan officials.

Last week, US Special Representative for Afghanistan Thomas West said while in the UAE he met Karzai along with former Afghan political leaders who fled the country following the 2021 takeover by the Taliban.

West in a tweet said they discussed respecting the rights of women and girls and about initiating a dialogue on the country's future.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Sanctions Zimbabwe President's Son Ahead of Africa Summit

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - The US has slapped sanctions on the son of Zimbabwe's president, Emmerson Mnangagwa, the US Department of Treasury said on Monday.

"Emmerson Mnangagwa, Jr. is President Mnangagwa's son and has been in charge of the president's business interests related to Tagwirei. Mnangagwa, Jr. was designated pursuant to E.O. 13391 for being an immediate family member of the Zimbabwean president and OFAC-blocked Emmerson Mnangagwa," the statement said.

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.

US President Joe Biden invited 49 African heads of state, as well as African Union leadership, to the three-day summit, senior administration officials said.

The summit is rooted in the recognition that Africa is a key geopolitical player that is shaping the present and will shape the future, the officials added.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Russian Munitions Dwindling, Can Keep Rate of Fire Into 2023 - Senior US Military Official

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - Russia could maintain its present rate of rocket and artillery fire on Ukraine into early 2023 despite dwindling ammunition stocks, a senior US military official said on Monday.

"We assess that at the rate of fire that Russia has been using its artillery and rocket ammunition, in terms of what we would call fully serviceable artillery and rocket ammunition, they could probably do that until early 2023. Their stocks of - again, fully serviceable ammunition, this would be new ammunition - is rapidly dwindling," the senior military official said.

Russia is likely being forced to use "degraded" ammunition as stocks of newer equipment are used, the senior military official said.

The United States believes that Russia will struggle to replenish its reserve of artillery and rocket ammunition through foreign suppliers, increased domestic production and refurbishment, the official added.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told US President Joe Biden on Monday that Russia has destroyed approximately half of Ukraine's energy infrastructure in missile strikes.

Russia began a series of strikes on Ukrainian infrastructure starting October 10, two days after an attack on the Crimean Bridge. The strikes have targeted energy infrastructure, the defense industry, military command and communications facilities across Ukraine.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Senior Pentagon Official Says US to Continue Reviewing Its Presence in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue to review its presence in Ukraine and that of its embassy in the capital Kiev, a senior Defense Department official said on Monday.

"We'll continue to review our presence in the country as security conditions evolve, but I don't have any announcements to make or numbers to provide, again for OpSec [operational security] and force protection reasons," the official said during a press conference.

The comment came after media reported that the Biden administration has been considering sending a small military force to assist in weapon-monitoring in Ukraine.

Earlier on Monday, US President Joe Biden said the Defense Department is only sending material to support Ukraine and is not deploying troops to the country.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Biden Says US Only Sending Material to Ukraine Worth Billions of Dollars, Not Troops

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - The United States is only sending material to support Ukraine and is not deploying troops to that country, US President Joe Biden said on Monday.

"Are we sending troops to Ukraine? No. We're sending material like we have, billions of dollars," Biden told reporters.

The statement comes after US media reported that the Biden administration is considering sending a small number of additional US service members to Ukraine to assist in weapons-monitoring efforts.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

## New Los Angeles Mayor Declares State of Emergency Amid Homelessness Crisis

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - New Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass on Monday declared a state of emergency in the city amid an acute crisis of residents who are homeless. "Today, on my first day of office, we hit the ground running with a sea change in how the city tackles homelessness, declaring a state of emergency and activating the Emergency Operations Center," Bass said during a press briefing.

The mayor said that she will not accept the "homelessness crisis" persisting in the city as it currently affects more than 40,000 residents.

Bass explained that Los Angeles is going through a humanitarian crisis that is claiming the lives of at least five homeless residents per day.

The death rate and mass displacement of homeless people in Los Angeles have already exceeded those caused by natural disasters like the Northridge earthquake and hurricane Harvey, Bass said.

Los Angeles will respond to the crisis by building more housing and shelters for those residents who have been forced to live on the streets, Bass also said.

"The executive order that I will sign in the coming days to create the Inside Safe program will create a city-wide approach to tackling encampments and street homelessness to provide people with housing and services, and to restore our public spaces," Bass added.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

## Americans Expect Lower Inflation of 5.2% in 2023 - Federal Reserve Bank of New York

NEW YORK, December 12 (Sputnik) - Americans expect a lower inflation rate across the board in the United States in 2023 with a headline estimate of a 0.7% decrease from what was previously thought, a survey by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York revealed on Monday. "In November, year-ahead expected inflation fell to a record low month over month decline," the Survey of Consumer Expectations said. "Year-ahead inflation in November is expected to be 5.2%, down from 5.9% in October."

The Federal Reserve Bank of New York said its survey showed that consumer expectations for inflation decreased in November for the short-, medium- and long-term.

Three-year inflation, for instance, was expected at 3% in November, down from 3.1% in October, while the forecast for five-year inflation was at 2.3% from a previous 2.4%, the survey found.

The year-ahead increase in gasoline prices was projected at 4.7%, versus 5.3% in October, it added.

Inflation in the United States, as measured by Consumer Price Index, has trended 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 a 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 interest rate hikes of 75 basis points from June through November, has said it is contemplating a more modest 50-basis point increase at its December 14 rate decision.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Canadian Natural Resources Minister Announces Critical Mineral Sustainability Alliance  
TORONTO, December 12 (Sputnik) - Canada and several other nations are launching a new alliance to address sustainable sourcing of critical minerals, Canadian Natural Resources Minister Jonathan Wilkinson said on Monday.

Wilkinson announced the Sustainable Critical Minerals Alliance during an event at the COP15 UN Biodiversity Conference in Montreal. Partner nations include Canada, the United Kingdom, France, the United States, Germany, Australia and Japan, Wilkinson said.

"The goal of this alliance is to commit ourselves, and to drive global alignment, on sustainable and socially responsible mining practices in the critical minerals space," Wilkinson said.

Through the alliance, members commit to encouraging industry practices that prevent biodiversity loss, support nature protection and respect indigenous communities, Wilkinson said.

The founding alliance members call on governments worldwide to join the initiative and welcome commitments from other countries in the coming months, Wilkinson added.

On Friday, Wilkinson released Canada's \$3.8 billion Critical Minerals Strategy that funds a range of industrial and research activities. The strategy aims to support economic growth, promote climate action and enhance global security and partnership with allies, according to Natural Resources Canada.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Successfully Tests Hypersonic Air-to-Ground Missile Prototype - Air Force

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) – The United States has successfully tested a hypersonic air-to-ground missile prototype off the coast in California, reaching speeds of more than five times the speed of sound, the US Air Force said on Monday.

"A B-52H Stratofortress successfully released the first All-Up-Round AGM-183A Air-launched Rapid Response Weapon off the Southern California coast, Dec. 9," the US Air Force said in a press release. "Following the ARRW's separation from the aircraft, it reached hypersonic speeds greater than five times the speed of sound, completed its flight path, and detonated in the terminal area."

While previous tests of the weapon focused on checking the booster performance, the current test was the first launch of a full prototype operational missile, the release explained.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

UNSC Decisions to Scale Down Tribunals Mechanism's Activities 'Not Implemented' - Kuzmin

UNITED NATIONS, December 12 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council decisions on scaling down the activities of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) have not been implemented, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Gennady Kuzmin said on Monday.

"The Security Council decisions, including those pertaining to drawing down the activities of the tribunal [IRMCT], have not been implemented," Kuzmin said during a meeting of the UN Security Council.

The Russian diplomat pointed out that the mechanism has been deliberately dragging out cases, continuing to fulfill functions not within its mandate and seeking to artificially extend its existence.

However, Kuzmin expressed hope that the new IRMCT leadership will change the entity's existing approach.

The IRMCT was established by the UN Security Council in 2015 as an international court aimed at completing the remaining work of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, after those two tribunals finished their respective mandates.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Crews Begin Removing Statue of Confederate General A.P. Hill From Virginia Capital City

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - Crews began removing a statue of Confederate general Ambrose Powell (A.P.) Hill on Monday from its place at an intersection in the city of Richmond, Virginia – current state capital and former capital of the Confederacy.

Workers took down the bronze statue from its pedestal to begin work on removing its base, inside of which Hill's remains were entombed, a live video feed of the effort showed.

The fact that the monument doubled as Hill's grave posed legal challenges to getting the statue removed in a city where more than a dozen Confederate monuments have been removed since 2020.

Last week, a circuit court judge rejected an attempt by four of Hill's indirect descendants to halt the city's removal plans. Hill's remains will be relocated to a burial plot in his hometown of Culpeper, Virginia.

The descendants have agreed to the plan to move the remains to Culpeper, but still contest the plan to give the statue to the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia, instead requesting it be relocated to Cedar Mountain Battlefield.

Efforts to remove Confederate monuments and memorials have been ongoing for decades, with particular attention brought to the issue following racial justice protests linked to the murder of George Floyd in 2020.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Judge Dismisses Trump Lawsuit Challenging Mar-a-Lago Documents Search - Ruling

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - A US judge on Monday ruled to dismiss the lawsuit filed by former President Donald Trump over the seizure of records from his Mar-a-Lago home, marking the end to court fight after the outside review of documents ended last week.

"This case is dismissed for lack of jurisdiction. The Clerk of Court shall close this case," the ruling said.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

US Transportation Chief Buttigieg Took Private Jets 18 Times on Taxpayer Dime - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg chose to fly on a private jet at least 18 times for taxpayer-funded travel despite advocating for reduced carbon emissions, Fox News reported on Monday.

Buttigieg traveled across and out of the country using the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) private jet fleet at least 18 times as a member of the Biden administration, the report said, citing flight tracking data.

The flight records align with Buttigieg's engagement schedule, obtained by government watchdog group Americans for Public Trust (APT), the report said.

Buttigieg avoids flight cancellations and long wait times by taking taxpayer-funded private jets to destinations with readily available commercial airline options, APT executive director Caitlin Sutherland reportedly said.

Sutherland also accused Buttigieg of hypocrisy for taking private jets while also advocating for emission reduction, the report said. Private jets are 10 times more carbon intensive than commercial planes and 50 times more carbon intensive than trains, according to a 2021 Transport and Environment group report.

Former Transportation Secretary under the Trump administration, Elaine Chao, was criticized for using private jets seven times in 2017, costing US taxpayers approximately \$94,000, the report said.

Tom Price, who served as Secretary of Health and Human Services under former US President Donald Trump, resigned after reportedly costing taxpayers roughly \$1.2 million across 26 private jet flights the same year, the report also said.

The cost of Buttigieg's private air travel is unknown at this time, although US media reported in 2017 that the FAA charges approximately \$5,000 per hour to use its jets.

A Transportation Department spokesperson reportedly said that Buttigieg travels mostly by commercial airline and had directed that travel decisions be grounded in efficient and responsible use of taxpayer dollars.

However, there are cases where it is more efficient or less expensive to use an FAA plane instead of a commercial flight, the spokesperson is also quoted as saying in the report.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

Japan, Netherlands to Uphold US Controls on Chip Machinery Exports to China – Reports

WASHINGTON, December 12 (Sputnik) – Japan and the Netherlands have agreed in principle to uphold some US controls on exporting advanced chipmaking machinery to China, Bloomberg reported on Monday, citing sources familiar with the matter.

The two countries are expected to announce in the coming weeks that they will also implement some of the US controls introduced in October on exports of advanced semiconductor manufacturing equipment to China. This includes banning the sale of machinery capable of manufacturing 14-nanometer or more chips to China, the report said.

The controls would greatly restrict China's ability to procure the necessary equipment to make the most advanced chips, as they would bring the two other critical suppliers — Japan's Tokyo Electron Ltd. and Dutch lithography specialist ASML Holding NV — into the US fold.

While the 14-nanometer is not the leading technology on the market, it is the second most advanced technology that China's leading semiconductor manufacturer can make.