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At Least Three Chinese Naval Task Forces Reported Entering Philippine Sea for Drills
By - Fantine Gardinier

A large number of Chinese naval vessels have been spotted entering the Philippine Sea in recent days, including the aircraft carrier Liaoning, leading to what analysts are saying could be the most powerful deployment ever by the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN).

A total of 11 Chinese warships have been spotted in recent days passing by the string of Japanese islands that extend south toward Taiwan, including the aircraft carrier Liaoning and three of the PLAN's mighty Type 055 destroyers.

According to Japanese military officials, the PLAN task force included the Liaoning, the Type 055 guided-missile destroyers Wuxi and Anshan, the Type 054A frigate Zaozhuang, the Type 052D destroyer Chengdu, and the Type 901 comprehensive replenishment ship Hulunhu. On Friday, the flotilla passed through the Miyako Strait, a strategic 135-mile-wide gap in the string of islands stretching from the Japanese home islands to Taiwan.

Separately last week, Japanese military officials reported that a task force led by the Type 055 destroyer Lhasa and including the Type 052D destroyer Kaifeng and Type 903A replenishment ship Taihu had also entered the Philippine Sea from the East China Sea, this time via the Osumi Strait. The narrow waterway, which passes between the Japanese islands of Kyushu and Tanegashima, was made international waters by Japan during the Cold War so that US nuclear weapons-laden warships could transit without violating Tokyo's ban on nuclear weapons in its territory.

In addition, a Dongdiao-class surveillance ship and the Sovremenny-class destroyer Taizhou, one of four built by Russia for China, were also reported passing through the Miyako Strait into the Philippine Sea days earlier. However, it should be noted that there have not been any reports that the three groups of vessels have united for joint drills.

Experts told Chinese media that Chinese aircraft carriers have only ever deployed with one Type 055 at a time, so the inclusion of at least two, and possibly three of the warships in the task force would likely mean new types of drills to better incorporate them. The PLAN [has eight Type 055s](#), which are the second-largest surface combat vessels in service with any nation, eclipsed only by the US Navy's handful of Zumwalt-class destroyers. They carry a bevy of advanced radar and missile systems, including hypersonic weapons.

The Philippine Sea occupies a highly strategic position, being bordered on the east by the US island of Guam, which holds a large naval and air base; US allies Japan in the north and the Philippines in the south; and Taiwan in the west, a Chinese island controlled by rebel forces who enjoy the support of the US and its allies in the region. Several times in the past year, the Philippine Sea has been home to Chinese drills intended to [send a message to Taiwanese separatists](#) and the foreign powers who support them.

During May drills, the diesel-fueled Liaoning pushed the limits of its deployment abilities, staying in the Philippine Sea for several weeks as it conducted continuous aviation operations with its air wing of J-15 "Flying Shark" fighters, part of the Su-27-derived family of fighter aircraft. However, the US and Japan also regularly drill in the Philippine Sea, sending out maritime patrols and conducting their own carrier drills. Until just a few years ago, American domination of the waterway was unquestioned, but the PLAN's construction of three aircraft carriers and a slew of modern warships has enabled it to project power beyond the Miyako and Luzon straits on a regular basis.

The Chinese drills come just days after Japan announced major moves toward remilitarization, decades after being made a neutral state. When Tokyo was defeated at the end of World War II and forced to give up its sprawling colonial empire, its new constitution required it to be neutral and give up offensive military weapons.

However, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida revealed within a couple of days earlier in December the intention to [double the Japanese defense budget](#) over the next five years, [weigh the introduction](#) of offensive cyberwarfare capabilities, a [hypersonic weapons program](#), and a deal to buy [Tomahawk long-range cruise missiles](#) from the United States.

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Pivot to the Third World? China Shouldn't Focus on West Amid Rising Tensions, Beijing Adviser Says

By - Fantine Gardinier

As tensions with the United States continue to rise, China shouldn't make the nuclear superpower its sole focus, Huang Ping, a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), China's top political advisory body, told Chinese media recently. While it is important to carefully manage its relationship with Washington, including cooperating where possible, Beijing should focus on building friendships with "emerging nations," whose economic growth has already surpassed that of the West.

"[This is] no longer a unipolar world, no longer a world in which the West has the final say," he said.

As part of what Washington has called "great power competition," it is seeking to [isolate and strangle countries](#) like China, Russia, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). According to the US, these countries are trying to upend the "rules-based international order" created after the Second World War, in which the US stood dominant over the world and its European allies held vast swaths of the Third World in colonial subjugation.

However, with China 70 years into an upward path from the "Century of Humiliation" when it, too, was dominated by foreign imperial powers, it is inevitable that this vastly larger country will one day eclipse the United States, which has just one-quarter of its population. The US says it welcomes competition, but as it has shown with its rhetoric and its policies, it only wants the kind of competition it can win.

The myth of “debt-trap diplomacy” has grown out of that goal. Even though the Washington, DC-based International Monetary Fund (IMF) forces pro-Western free market policies onto nations who accept loans from it, the Western media has largely painted Chinese loans to those countries as the ones supposedly intent on controlling them through secretive clauses and manipulation. This, despite China regularly [forgiving large debts](#) and offering nations credit on terms more respectful of their sovereignty than the IMF.

Huang’s comments come after Beijing held its first-ever China-Arab summit in Riyadh last week, at which Chinese President Xi Jinping met with 21 Arab League nations, all of whom “agreed to make all-out efforts to build a China-Arab community with a shared future in the new era,” the Chinese Foreign Ministry [said in a readout](#) of the event.

Among the most momentous developments of the summit were the potential creation of a China-Persian Gulf [free trade zone](#), and Xi’s appeal to Arab states to settle oil and gas trades in the Yuan, China’s currency. Such a move [would both undermine](#) the so-called “Petrodollar,” which helps to buttress the US economy, and transfer that stimulus to China as a “Petroyuan.” It was [reported in March](#) that Riyadh was already considering the move.

China has also dramatically expanded its partnerships with Third World nations in other ways, ranging from supplying them with COVID-19 vaccines after Western nations refused to lower their prices, to massive infrastructure investment under the aegis of the Belt and Road Initiative. The BRI has helped developing nations to build ports, highways, power plants, and other critical infrastructure after decades of colonialism and underdevelopment.

China’s long history of friendship with the Third World extends back to the 1950s, when the newly founded socialist state looked to show solidarity with other people struggling to free themselves from colonial rule. Later, China became affiliated with the Non-Aligned Movement, which rejected the US-Soviet Cold War and included many formerly colonized nations in Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

However, Huang noted that China cannot simply turn its back on the US, regardless of its hostile anti-China policies. The adviser stressed that the US-China relationship is the most important bilateral relationship in the world. The two nations have the two largest economies, two of the three largest populations, are two of the world’s nine nuclear weapons states, two of the five permanent members and veto-holders in the United Nations Security Council, and together they straddle the Pacific Ocean.

He noted that important areas of cooperation with the US include on combating climate change, encouraging a peaceful solution to the conflict in Ukraine, and managing the tense situation on the Korean peninsula, where a US-backed state and a China-backed state have yet to reach a permanent peace treaty 69 years after the end of the fighting.

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Fathers and Sons: The Expansive Family of Sukhoi’s Su-27 ‘Flanker’ Fighter Jets
By - Fantine Gardinier

The design bureau founded by Pavel Sukhoi in 1939 has turned out some of the most legendary fighter aircraft of the 20th century, providing the backbone of Soviet air forces through the Cold

War and Russian air forces after. Arguably its most successful design has been the Su-27, intended to be the terror of every NATO pilot.

As with many aircraft of the late 20th century, the story of the Su-27 begins in the skies over Vietnam.

Advanced Frontline Fighter'

During the US invasion of Vietnam from 1965 to 1973, Soviet-built and American-built aircraft faced off in epic battles that revealed the weaknesses and strengths of many of the fast-evolving technologies, including radars, missiles, bomber tactics, Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses (SEAD), and the continued relevance of dogfighting tactics. Out of that conflict, both the Americans and the Soviets drew conclusions about what the next generation of interceptors and bombers should look like - and what their adversaries were capable of producing.

The Americans, whose F-4 and F-105 fighters were heavily outclassed by supposedly "obsolete" Soviet technology, embarked on a highly ambitious project to develop a fast, long-range, dedicated and capable air superiority aircraft, which became the McDonnell Douglas F-15 Eagle. When the Soviet learned of this program and its goals, they set out to develop a competitor aircraft, one capable of meeting the F-15 in skies far from home - and winning.

The order went out in 1969 for an "advanced frontline fighter," but after designers realized the program was too ambitious for just one aircraft, its tasks were split into two jets: the Mikoyan-Guyevich MiG-29 became the shorter-range dogfighter, and Sukhoi built the long-range air superiority fighter that became the Su-27.

Su-27 (NATO Reporting Name 'Flanker')

The first Su-27s entered service with the Soviet Air Force in 1985, two years after the MiG-29 (NATO reporting name 'Fulcrum'), although production issues kept it from being deployed in large numbers before 1990.

The new aircraft was impressive, with a 2,190-mile range, maximum speed of Mach 2.35, and an impressive weapons loadout of up to 12 air-to-air missiles. Its large size, at 71 feet in length and 48-foot wingspan, reflected these capabilities. It would use them to hunt down American B-52 and B-1B bombers at long range, as well as to escort Soviet bombers and engage NATO interceptors.

Even before it was fitted with thrust-vectoring capability in later models, the Su-27 was capable of performing the visually impressive cobra maneuver. A notable design feature on all Su-27 derivatives is the "stinger" between its twin engines: the protrusion houses defenses countermeasures such as chaff and flares, a drag parachute, a fuel jettison outlet, and in some models, a rear-facing radar. It also provides an additional lifting surface.

In the decades since it was introduced, about 680 Su-27s have been built at the Komsomolsk-on-Amur Aircraft Production Association (KnAAPO) and Novosibirsk Aircraft Production Association Plant (NAPO) factories, and the jet has been modified into dozens of different variants, filling a wide variety of roles from surface strike to maritime patrol, foreign export, and technology demonstrator. Some of these have been spun off into completely new aircraft, together comprising the "family" of Su-27s.

Su-30 (NATO Reporting Name 'Flanker C/G/H')

The Su-30 is broadly analogous to the F-15E Strike Eagle, the Su-30 is an Su-27 modified to perform surface strike operations and air defense missions. As a result, the new aircraft has a

greater range than the Su-27's already-impressive combat radius, a second pilot, and a terrain-following radar to help it perform low-altitude strike runs. The first Su-30s were ordered by the Russian Defense Ministry in 1994.

Subsequent modified variants, such as the Su-30MKK, were developed for export to Indonesia, Venezuela, Vietnam, and China, among other buyers. About 630 Su-30s have been built. The Russian Knights aerobatic demonstration team of the Russian Air Force uses the Su-30SM, having originally flown Su-27s.

Su-33 'Flanker-D'

The Su-33 is Russia's carrier-borne fighter aircraft, flying from the aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov.

The Soviet Union made numerous attempts to develop a large carrier capability comparable to the US Navy's, although naval aviation never received the kind of dedicated attention in Moscow that it did in Washington. For years, Soviet "aviation cruisers" combined a limited flight deck for vertical takeoff-capable aircraft with mounts for ship-based missile capabilities, leaving no room for fixed-wing aircraft, save the underpowered Yakovlev Yak-38 and its underwhelming intended replacement, the Yak-141.

The warships today known as the Kuznetsov-class carriers were intended to change that. With its missiles concealed beneath a dedicated flight deck, the Kuznetsov could finally accommodate fixed-wing fighters, and Soviet designers began adapting the Su-27 almost as soon as it entered regular service.

The first Su-27K, as it was known at the time, began tests in 1987, and the first production aircraft rolled out in 1990. However, just 35 have been built - enough to fill the hangar of the Admiral Kuznetsov, which became the Russian Federation's only aircraft carrier. Its sister ship, the Varyag, was bought incomplete from Ukraine by China, which completed it in the Dalian shipyard in 2012 and rechristened it Liaoning.

The Su-33 has struggled to measure up to the other members of the Flanker family, due to the constraints placed upon carrier-borne aircraft. Its massive size was not entirely suitable to the confined environs of a flight deck, and it cannot carry the full weapons loadout of its land-based cousins. The Chinese equivalent, the J-15, has suffered the same constraints. However, the most recent updates to the Su-33 have made it broadly equivalent to the Su-30SM.

Su-34 'Fullback'

The Su-34 grew out of a desire to replace the Su-24 (NATO reporting name "Fencer") naval strike aircraft after Soviet designers realized any replacement would also have to be able to stand up to the F-15 and F-16, another advanced new American interceptor. The Su-27 proved an excellent platform for the new aircraft, which first flew in 1990.

The new jet was likely intended to land on aircraft carriers, but with the cancellation of the supercarrier Ulyanovsk and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, its role evolved. It did not enter full production until 2008. The new aircraft still featured the side-by-side seating of two pilots like the Su-24 had, as well as an armored cockpit and room for crew to stand up, lie down, and move around during very long missions. The Su-27's "stinger" was extended and a rear-facing radar added, to give the Su-34 additional awareness. It is also fitted with an advanced AESA radar with terrain-following capability.

Su-35 'Flanker-E'

The Su-35 has been dubbed “the last Flanker,” despite it being one of the earliest updates to the Su-27. The addition of canards, or small wings ahead of the main wings, was incorporated into many subsequent Su-27 family designs thanks to the increased maneuverability they offer. The Su-35 has a vastly more powerful forward-facing radar than the original Su-27, capable of tracking 15 targets over the horizon and engaging six of them, and was the first to incorporate the rear-facing radar in its “stinger” that was later used in the Su-34.

Still, just over 160 were built, mainly for export, and the platform for years served as a technology demonstrator, although the Russian Air Forces have used several Su-35s up to the present.

Su-37 'Terminator'

Only a single Su-37 was built in 1996 in order to demonstrate advanced new technologies, such as thrust-vectoring, which would be incorporated into new Sukhoi aircraft like the Su-57. The SU-37 crashed during a demonstration in 2002.

Its informal nickname of “Terminator” is believed to have come from Sukhoi designers inspired by its many new electronic features.

Su-47 'Berkut'

Another technology demonstrator, the Su-47 ‘Berkut’ (Golden Eagle) is immediately identifiable for its unorthodox forward-swept wings and black paint job. Like the Su-37, the Su-47 was a technology testbed built in 1997, and although its design was much more radical than the Su-37, its airframe incorporated many parts of the Su-27, such as the forward fuselage, vertical tails, and landing gear, making it a sort of estranged cousin of the Su-27.

For a time, it was speculated that the Su-47 would become Russia’s next-generation fighter - a role it was in fact never considered for, and which has since been filled by the Su-57 fifth-generation aircraft.

Shenyang J-11 'Flanker-B'

In 1992, the People’s Republic of China obtained a license to build Su-27s for the People’s Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF), providing China with a fighter jet light-years ahead of its air fleet at the time. The license-built Su-27 was dubbed the J-11 by Shenyang, but still referred to as “Flanker-B” by NATO observers. China bought 78 Su-27s for this purpose, and had built 440 of them as of 2019, making them the PLAAF’s mainstay air superiority aircraft.

Like in Russia, China then developed the Su-27 into several other platforms to fill other roles, and heavily upgraded the J-11 to keep its technology on the cutting edge. The J-11B “Flaming Dragon” was developed as a way to end its dependency on Russian support by replacing Russian systems with Chinese ones

J-15 'Flying Shark'

Despite its similarity to the J-11, the J-15 comes from a different line of the Su-27 family. Dubbed the “Flying Shark,” the J-15 is China’s only fixed-wing carrier-borne fighter. It was developed from the unfinished Soviet-era test aircraft, the T-10K-3, from which the Su-33 carrier-based fighter was derived for Soviet and later Russian aircraft carriers. Shenyang Aircraft Corporation bought the testbed from Ukraine in 2001, reverse-engineered it, and incorporated indigenous Chinese technologies first developed for the J-11B.

The new aircraft entered service in 2013, but just 50 have been built.

J-16

The J-16 is the newest of the Su-27 family, being introduced to the PLAAF in 2015 as a dedicated strike aircraft based on the J-11BS. The aircraft has a powerful new radar, a reduced radar-cross section thanks to special paint, and is made of lighter composite materials than the J-11. It is specialized for electronic warfare, SEAD, and a bevy of deadly anti-ship missiles. About 245 have been built for the PLAAF.

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Most Compelling UFO Footage Ever Captured Was Just Filmed in Rural Wisconsin
By - Ian DeMartino

Last week, the director of the newly-formed All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office, Sean Kirkpatrick, stated the office had received “several hundreds” of UFO reports from servicemen and women since its formation in July.

Multiple residents in Wisconsin captured what might be the most compelling possible UFO footage ever seen.

Video has surfaced from several residents in rural Wisconsin, showcasing the event from multiple angles and filmed independently, of strange lights dancing across the sky in a way that has thus far defied explanation.

At least two residents filmed the lights at nearly the same time at different locations according to the video’s metadata, while residents in other parts of Wisconsin and Michigan reported and captured similar events.

The videos were first discovered by former FBI agent and host of UFO Witness on Discovery+ Ben Hansen. They were later exclusively obtained and published by DailyMail.com.

The video shows at least five separate globes of light zooming across the Wisconsin sky at incredible speeds, seeming to stay in a formation and making physics-defying maneuvers.

The videos were taken on the night of December 1. A witness identified as Kimberly says she and her husband were driving when they thought they saw a white owl swoop in front of their car. But when the object returned and swooped in front of their car three more times they realized it was not an owl.

“We’ve never seen even two in a row,” Kimberly said. “We looked at each other and went, ‘okay, this is not an owl, what the heck is going on here?’”

Kimberly and her husband then noticed similar lights in the sky and decided to film what they were seeing.

“It kept moving to the east,” she added. “We watched it for several minutes before it even clicked in my head, I have my phone, I could record this. And then we pulled over to do that.”

Other residents reported seeing similar lights in the sky, some turned purple. DailyMail.com published pictures of those events.

There were no significant weather systems active in the area at the time the videos were taken, other than a light covering of clouds. A Milwaukee Federal Aviation Administration controller who has access to radar data told Dailymail.com that no airplanes were in the area at the time.

The lights also do not appear to be the type of spotlights typically used in advertising, which would also be atypical in a rural area.

"The more we're learning about the industry's most advanced searchlights and their limitations, there are several things that just don't add up," Hansen told DailyMail.com. "It's interesting to note that the majority of worldwide UFO sightings are now reported as 'light anomalies' and not traditional shapes such as disks, cylinders, or triangles that normally come to mind."

Hansen added that the "light anomalies" are similar to the "Foo Fighter" lights reported by World War II pilots.

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Next Likely House Speaker McCarthy Vows Subpoena for Clapper & 'Church Committee' Investigation

By - Ian DeMartino

On Monday, independent Journalist Michael Shellenberger revealed the FBI was heavily involved in Twitter's decision to suppress and discredit the Hunter Biden laptop story published by the New York Post.

Current GOP House leader and likely next House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said in [an interview on FOX Business](#) Monday that the FBI needs to be "reformed" to "change the course of the FBI as it exists today." He also promised subpoenas for prominent intelligence officials outside of the FBI, including former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, former CIA Director John Brennan and former NSA and CIA Director Michael Hayden.

McCarthy was responding to a question from Mornings With Maria host Maria Bartiromo about whether he planned to subpoena "bad actors" in the FBI who allegedly censored the New York Post's story about Hunter Biden's laptop in October 2020.

McCarthy responded by saying once he becomes House speaker, he is going to do "more than just subpoena them, we are going to change the course of the FBI as it exists today."

On Monday, independent journalist Michael Shellenberger released the seventh installment of the "Twitter files" that showed the FBI pressured and manipulated Twitter executives into suppressing the story on its platform before the 2020 election.

"Everyday we learn something more ... private companies became a political arm of [the FBI who used them] to go after individuals with no repercussions for individuals that know what is happening. But it raises more questions than just Twitter now that Elon Musk has brought that forward," McCarthy asserted. "What about Facebook? What about Google? What about the 51 intel individuals like Clapper, Brennan and Hayden, former CIA directors, that put their name on a letter saying that Hunter Biden's laptop was false, that it was Russia. Who asked them to sign this letter? Do these people still have clearances? We are going to subpoena them as well."

Last month, McCarthy won a House Republican conference primary to continue as House Republican leader and become the speaker of the House when Republicans officially take control of the lower chamber in January.

Since taking the House in November's midterm elections, House Republicans have promised a series of investigations once they gain power. Specifically, they promised to examine Hunter Biden's dealings with Ukrainian energy company Burisma and potential politically-motivated interference by the FBI and Justice Department in a 2020 investigation focused on those dealings.

McCarthy referenced the 1975 Church Committee investigation of intelligence agencies including the FBI, CIA, IRS, and NSA. That investigation revealed MKULTRA, which involved the drugging and torture of US citizens as part of an experiment on mind control; COINTELPRO a program of surveillance and infiltration of American civil rights organizations; Family Jewels, a covert CIA program to assassinate foreign leaders; and Operation Mockingbird, a propaganda campaign run by the CIA in coordination with domestic and foreign journalists and US Media outlets.

"Why are they able to do this? Working together, using private businesses to go after individuals right before an election, denying the American public the truth. We got to get to the very bottom. I think just subpoenas are [the start,] but you are almost going to have to have a Church style investigation to reform the FBI. ... This is going to be a much bigger situation than people realize."

After the Church Committee, which was performed in the Senate, and the corresponding House investigation called the Pike Committee, President Gerald Ford issued Executive Order 11905. That order prohibited any member of the US government from engaging or conspiring to engage in political assassination. Less than two years later, President Jimmy Carter signed Executive Order 12036 which strengthened the ban on assassination and created new oversight committees and new restrictions for the intelligence community.

Together, they represent the biggest reform to the intelligence community since the National Security Act of 1947.

The speaker of the House decides who the House subpoenas and is also in charge of fills committee seats. McCarthy is presumed to be the next speaker because with Republicans controlling the House, the GOP House leader is expected to take that position. However, at least five House Republicans have indicated they will not vote for McCarthy, with others signaling they are undecided.

McCarthy will need a majority of votes to become speaker. If enough Republicans refuse to support him, House Democrats may be able to nominate a compromise candidate that gets enough votes to snatch the House speaker role from McCarthy.

McCarthy also addressed that upcoming battle, inflation, and the border during the interview.

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Twitter Files 7: FBI Influenced Twitter Executives to Discredit, Suppress Hunter Biden Laptop Story

By - Ian DeMartino

After the New York Post published its story on the Hunter Biden laptop, Twitter moved to limit how it was shared and temporarily banned The Post from its platform. Multiple media outlets, and a letter signed by 51 former intelligence officials, claimed the story was the result of Russian disinformation.

Independent journalist Michael Shellenberger [released part 7](#) of the “Twitter files” on Monday, revealing a close relationship between the FBI and the intentional suppression and discrediting of a story the FBI likely knew was factual.

According to the documents released by Shellenberger, the FBI was in constant communication with Twitter both before and after the New York Post released its story on the Hunter Biden laptop.

Meta* CEO Mark Zuckerberg would also reveal during an interview with podcast host Joe Rogan that the FBI warned him about the Biden laptop story.

Prior to its release, the Post contacted Hunter Biden’s lawyer, asking for comment on the files found on his laptop and informing him the story would be published the next day. Hours later, FBI agent Elvis Chan emailed the then head of security at Twitter, Yoel Roth, and at least one other person that a 10-page document would be sent to them through a special one-way communication channel setup between Twitter and the FBI called “Teleporter.”

A few hours before that email, Biden’s attorney George Mesires called and emailed the Delaware computer repair shop where Biden abandoned his laptop. Since the Post did not tell Mesires where it got the laptop, that further confirmed the veracity of the documents.

Communications released by Shellenberger revealed Chan and the FBI continually prepped Twitter to prepare for a Russian disinformation hack-and-dump campaign. In September 2020, Roth attended an Aspen Institute “tabletop exercise” on a potential “hack-and-dump” operation related to Hunter Biden and his dealings with Ukrainian energy company Burisma.

The exercise was attended by representatives of other social media websites as well as reporters for the New York Times, Washington Post and NBC News, among other outlets. The meeting was held before the story became public - but notably after the computer repair shop owner handed over the laptop to the FBI and after he sent a copy to Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani, who later gave it to the Post.

Roth also testified in December 2020 that the FBI had prepared him to dismiss a potential story involving Biden’s laptop as a Russian “hack-and-dump” disinformation campaign.

However, Chan admitted in a sworn deposition last month, that the FBI’s investigations did not see any evidence of a “hack-and-dump” operation as it did in the Democratic National Committee 2016 email leak. Previous reporting also revealed the FBI had been in possession of the laptop since 2019.

“Through our investigations, we did not see any similar competing intrusions to what had happened in 2016,” Chan said.

Emails between Twitter and the FBI also cast doubt on the oft-repeated assertion that Russian actors were attempting to influence the 2020 election. One email to the FBI notes that the social media site removed 345 accounts suspected to be linked to Russia, but noted that all of them were limited in reach and followers and most of them were inactive at the time.

The FBI continually asked Twitter for evidence of foreign meddling, but Twitter consistently told them they don’t have much information to report. “At this state, my team’s findings have largely been that US-based trolling groups are behind some of the on-platform violative activity and

misleading information we've seen," one email from Roth reads. "We haven't yet identified activity that we'd typically refer to you (or even flag as interesting in the foreign influence context.)"

An internal email also reveals the FBI paid Twitter millions of dollars in restitution for time its employees spent responding to FBI requests. The email between two unnamed Twitter employees was sent in February 2021 and says the FBI paid Twitter \$3,415,323 since October 2019. The email implied the payment was a windfall for Twitter and was titled "Run the business - we made money!"

There were times Twitter pushed back against the FBI. In January 2020, Roth and Twitter executives denied an FBI attempt to have them change their policies to allow a third-party vendor to access their data feed without a warrant.

However, the pressure on social media platforms continues to this day. In August 2022, a meeting was set up between the FBI and Twitter executives so the FBI could persuade them to approve more "emergency disclosure requests," which would allow the FBI to access data on Twitter users without a warrant.

The internal emails show Twitter executives were preparing to challenge the FBI's assertions. White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre declined to comment on the FBI's connection to Twitter on Monday. "Again, I'm just going to refer you to the FBI. I'm not going to comment from here about that," she told White House reporters.

Meanwhile, House Republican leader and likely next Speaker of the House, Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) called it proof private businesses had become "a political arm" of the FBI during an interview on FOX Business. He called for an investigation similar to the Church Committee that investigated intelligence agency abuses in 1975, arguing the issue goes beyond Twitter.

"What about Facebook? What about Google? What about the 51 intel individuals ... that put their name on a letter saying that Hunter Biden's laptop was false, that it was Russia. Who asked them to sign this letter? Do these people still have clearances? We are going to subpoena them as well. Why are they able to do this? Working together, using private businesses to go after individuals right before an election, denying the American public the truth. We've got to get to the very bottom. I think just subpoenas are [the start], but you are almost going to have to have a Church style investigation to reform the FBI. ... this is going to be a much bigger situation than people realize."

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Jan. 6 Panel Unveils Four Criminal Charges Against Donald Trump, Allies Over Capitol Riot
By - Ian DeMartino

The House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6 Attack on the United States Capitol was formed on July 1, 2021 to investigate the role former President Donald Trump and his allies played in the attack. The full report is scheduled to release on December 21.

The January 6 Select Committee met for the last time on Monday and recommended four criminal charges for former President Donald Trump and his allies, chief among them insurrection.

Other charges recommended for the former president and company include obstruction of an official proceeding, conspiracy to defraud the United States government, and making false statements to the United States government.

According to France24 White House correspondent Kethevane Gorjestani, the meeting began with a 10-minute video that summarized what happened on January 6 and what role Trump and his allies played in it.

Each committee member then spoke about an individual element of Trump's role in the riots: Trump knew he lost, pressured state officials, the Department of Justice, and then-Vice President Mike Pence, summoned the mob to the Capitol, and then took 187 minutes to call them off.

The committee approved the report unanimously, including the criminal referrals.

Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-MD) called the insurrection charge "a grave offense." If convicted of the charge, Section 3 of the Fourteenth Amendment would bar Trump from holding public office again, though a two-thirds vote by Congress would allow that restriction to be lifted.

"We understand the gravity of each and every referral we are making today," Raskin concluded during the proceedings. "Just as we understand the magnitude of the crime against democracy that we described in our report."

During his comments on the charges, Raskin explained his rationale in bringing the charges: "Ours is not a system of justice where foot-soldiers go to jail and the masterminds and ringleaders get a free pass."

US prosecutors have convicted a number of individuals with crimes related to the deadly riot, with charges being filed against at least 964 individuals so far.

The House Select Committee does not have the power to bring charges itself but can recommend that the Justice Department bring charges against an individual or entity. To that end, House Chair Bennie Thompson (D-MS) stated: "[The committee has] every confidence that the work of this committee will help provide a roadmap to justice."

The committee has also referred Reps. Kevin McCarthy, Jim Jordan (R-Ca), Scott Perry (R-PA) and Andy Biggs (R-AZ) to be sanctioned by an ethics panel for their failure to comply with issued subpoenas.

Trump [responded](#) to the developments late Friday, calling the charges "fake" and blasting them as yet another attempt to block his White House bid. "The people understand that the Democratic Bureau of Investigation, the DBI, are out to keep me from running for president because they know I'll win and that this whole business of prosecuting me is just like impeachment was — a partisan attempt to sideline me and the Republican Party," he said on his social media platform TruthSocial.

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Canada Sanctions Two Former Haitian Ministers for Alleged Corruption

WASHINGTON, December 20 (Sputnik) - Canada has imposed sanctions on two former Haitian ministers for their alleged involvement in corruption, Global Affairs Canada said on Tuesday. "These sanctions target 2 high-profile elites in Haiti – former ministers Berto Dorcé and Liszt Quitel. The sanctions impose a dealings prohibition on them, effectively freezing any assets they may hold in Canada. These individuals are inadmissible to Canada under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act," Global Affairs Canada said in a news release. According to the release, the Canadian government believes the sanctioned individuals are using their status as high-profile elites in Haiti "to protect and enable the illegal activities of armed criminal gangs, including through money laundering and other acts of corruption." "These gangs and their supporters continue to terrorize vulnerable populations in Haiti with impunity and are precipitating a humanitarian crisis in the country that includes the resurgence of cholera. They are also committing unspeakable violence against affected populations and impeding the delivery of critical services and humanitarian aid," the release stated. Canada has repeatedly imposed sanctions on members of the elite in Haiti in response to their alleged financial and operational support to armed gangs.

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Martyshev's Defense Hopes He Will Be Transferred Home From US Before New Year's Holiday

WASHINGTON, December 20 (Sputnik) – The defense of Russian national Yury Martyshev, who is scheduled to be released from US custody on Tuesday, hopes he will be able to return to Russia before the New Year's holiday, his lawyer Alexey Tarasov told Sputnik. "We are all hopeful that his coming back to Russia will take place prior to the New Year's holiday. We are working on that, I know the Russian embassy is working hard on that. Hopefully, Yury will be able to spend the New Year's holiday with his family," Tarasov said. In April 2019, a US federal court sentenced Martyshev to 78 months in jail on charges of computer hacking. Tarasov said that December 20 is the last day of Martyshev's confinement, but Immigration and Customs Enforcement has 24 hours to pick up an inmate. "Currently Martyshev is still listed on the Bureau of Prisons website as being confined in the Atlanta region. As soon as he is no longer listed on that website, it will be clear that he has been transferred to the Immigration and Customs," Tarasov said. Martyshev wants to return to Russia, the lawyer added.

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Six IS Operatives Detained in US Operation in Eastern Syria – CENTCOM

WASHINGTON, December 20 (Sputnik) – Six operatives of the Islamic State terrorist group (IS, banned in Russia) were detained in a US military operation in eastern Syria, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said on Tuesday.

"Over the past 48 hours, US Central Command forces conducted three helicopter raids in eastern Syria resulting in the detention of six ISIS operatives, including al-Zubaydi, an Islamic State Syria Province Senior Official involved in the planning and facilitation of ISIS attacks in Syria," the press release read.

No civilians were injured or killed during the strikes, according to initial assessments.

The capture of the IS operatives will disrupt the terrorist organization's ability to "further plot and carry out destabilizing attacks," CENTCOM commander Gen. Michael Kurilla was quoted as saying in the release.

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Los Angeles Jury Finds Weinstein Guilty on 3 of 7 Sex Assault Charges - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 20 (Sputnik) - A jury in Los Angeles convicted movie producer Harvey Weinstein on three of seven counts of rape and sexual assault, The New York Times reported.

The charges hinged on the testimony of four women who accused Weinstein of assaulting them between 2004 and 2013, the report said after the verdict on Monday.

The three charges he was convicted on relate to one accuser, referred to as Jane Doe 1, according to the report.

The 70-year-old Weinstein is already serving a 23-year sentence for a sexual assault conviction in New York and had faced up to 60 more years if found guilty on all counts in Los Angeles.

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Actions Against Iran Can Negate Prospects of Reviving Nuclear Deal - Russian Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, December 20 (Sputnik) - Pressure imposed on Iran can halt the revival of the 2015 nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vasily Nebenzia said.

"We see no insurmountable problems preventing restoration of the JCPOA," Nebenzia said during a UN Security Council meeting on Monday. "However, we find ourselves at a critical tenuous juncture- attempts to exert pressure on Iran to unwarrantedly spiraled tensions around JCPOA, concocted attacks with the sole purpose to provoke other participants are liable to completely negate prospects for restoration of the deal."

Should the pressure approach prevail, it would represent a departure from the lofty standards of diplomacy that resulted in the nuclear agreement being reached, Nebenzia added.

The United States, Russia, China, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the European Union signed with Iran the nuclear agreement in 2015. However, the United States unilaterally withdrew from the accord in 2018 and reimposed comprehensive sanctions on Iran. Tehran latter responded by gradually dropping its own obligations under the agreement. The two countries started talks on reviving the JCPOA after Joe Biden assumed office in January 2021.

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Trump Says Charges Against Him by Jan 6 Committee 'Fake', Meant to Prevent Him From Running

WASHINGTON, December 20 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump said that charges by the US House January 6 Panel are 'fake' and aimed to prevent him from running for President. "The people understand that the Democratic Bureau of Investigation, the DBI, are out to keep me from running for president because they know I'll win and that this whole business of prosecuting me is just like impeachment was — a partisan attempt to sideline me and the Republican Party," he said on his social media platform TruthSocial.

On Monday, the US House Committee tasked with investigating the January 6 Capitol riot recommended four criminal charges against former President Donald Trump and other associates.

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Children Firearm Injuries Increased 52% During COVID Pandemic - JAMA Study

Washington, December 20 (Sputnik) - Firearm injuries among children 18 and younger have increased by 52% during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) said in a new study.

"Rates of children with firearm injuries presenting to US children's hospitals significantly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and remained elevated throughout 2021," the study said on Monday. "Firearm injuries are the leading cause of injury-related death for US children, and increased societal violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, including mass shooting events, has sparked renewed public attention toward this public health crisis."

JAMA said some studies early in the pandemic, when lockdowns and other restrictive measures were imposed, indicated a spike in firearm injuries, while others found rates to be unchanged, the study said.

Researchers evaluated contemporary trends in pediatric firearm injuries before and during the pandemic to determine whether socio-demographic risk factors were similar, the study added.

There were 1,815 firearm injuries before the pandemic versus 2,759 during the pandemic - a 52% increase, the study said, adding that 78.5% of the total were boys, according to the study.

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US Intends to Provide \$38Bln More in Aid to Ukraine - Deputy Treasury Secretary

WASHINGTON, December 20 (Sputnik) - US Treasury Deputy Secretary Wally Adeyemo met with Polish Minister of Climate and Environment Anna Moskwa in Brussels and said the United States intends to provide an additional \$38 billion in aid to Ukraine, the Treasury Department said.

"The Deputy Secretary congratulated Minister Moskwa on the EU's agreement to impose further sanctions on Russia and underscored the United States' intent to provide further aid, including the additional \$38 billion in Ukraine assistance that President Biden has requested from Congress," the Treasury Department said in a press release on Monday.

Adeyemo thanked Moskwa for Poland's leadership within NATO and the broader coalition of nations that have imposed sanctions on Russia, the release said.

The two officials also discussed the implementation of a \$60 per barrel price cap on Russian oil, the release added.

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US Supreme Court Temporarily Blocks Biden Admin. From Ending COVID-Era Border Rule - Order

WASHINGTON, December 20 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court issued an order to temporarily block the Biden administration from ending the Title 42 immigration policy that the government used to deter illegal immigrants from entering the United States on the basis of the state of their health.

"It is ordered that the November 15, 2022 order of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia, case No. 1:21-cv-00100, is hereby stayed pending further order of the undersigned or of the Court. It is further ordered that a response to the application be filed on or before Tuesday, December 20, 2022, by 5 p.m. (EST)," the order said on Monday.

Title 42 is scheduled to be suspended on Wednesday while several Republican states and the Justice Department are seeking to postpone the termination date due to concerns the US immigration system will be overwhelmed beyond the strain it is currently facing from significant numbers of immigrants seeking to enter the United States.

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US Air Force Grounds Entire B-2 Nuclear Bomber Fleet Amid Search for Defects - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 20 (Sputnik) - The US Air Force has grounded all 20 B-2 Spirit bombers until further notice amid an ongoing search for potential safety defects following an accident, Air Force Times reported.

The decision to ground the entire fleet of nuclear bombers followed an emergency landing accident of a bomber on December 10 at Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri after an undisclosed in-flight malfunction, the report said on Monday.

The Air Force is currently investigating the accident and the bombers will resume normal operations once the safety inspections are concluded, the report added.

The B-2 Spirit is a multi-role bomber capable of firing both conventional and nuclear munitions. Its stealth characteristics make it difficult to detect with conventional infrared, acoustic, electromagnetic, visual, and radar systems, according to the Air Force. The aircraft can fly approximately 6,000 nautical miles (9,600 kilometers) without refueling.

Earlier in December, Northrop Grumman unveiled the new nuclear-capable B-21 Raider stealth bomber, the world's first sixth-generation aircraft that will soon be delivered to the US Air Force.

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Members of Congress Received More Than 9,000 Threats This Year - US Capitol Police Chief

WASHINGTON, December 20 (Sputnik) - Members of Congress received more than 9,000 threats this year, US Capitol Police (USCP) Chief J. Thomas Manger said during a Senate Rules Committee hearing.

"Among our most significant challenges is the ever-changing threat landscape. The numbers of threats and directions of interests towards Members of Congress have increased approximately 400% in the past 6 years," Manger said on Monday. "This past year the Department saw more than 9,000 threats against Members of Congress."

Mitigating threats requires resources such as additional personnel, security assessments and security enhancements for members of Congress and their families, Manger said.

The attacks on Republican Congressman Lee Zeldin and Paul Pelosi - husband of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi - act as a reminder of the threat environment, Manger said.

In the wake of the January 6 Capitol riot, during which USCP officers clashed with rioters, the department was the focus of several oversight and investigative reviews. USCP has completed 75% of inspector general recommendations, while the department continues to work on the rest, Manger said.

"Having been in this position for more than a year, I know we can now move from fixing the immediate problems identified on January 6 and its aftermath, to better positioning the Department for the future," Manger also said.

USCP is on track to meet its goal of fully reopening the Capitol, with a focus on public-facing entrances around the complex, Manger said.

USCP is also hoping to expand its field office model nationwide after opening offices in San Francisco and Tampa to help prosecute offenses with local attorneys, Manger added.

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Honeywell to Pay \$160Mln to Settle US, Brazil Bribery Charges - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 20 (Sputnik) - A US-based subsidiary of Honeywell International agreed to pay in excess of \$160 million to resolve parallel probes into bribe payments made to a senior official at Brazil's state-owned oil company, the Justice Department said in a press release.

"Honeywell UOP, a US-based subsidiary of Honeywell International Inc., has agreed to pay more than \$160 million to resolve parallel bribery investigations by criminal and civil authorities in the United States and Brazil stemming from bribe payments offered to a high-ranking official at Brazil's state-owned oil company," the department said on Monday.

Between 2010 and 2014, the release added, Honeywell UOP allegedly conspired to offer a \$4 million bribe to the Petrobras executive for a \$425 million oil refinery construction contract. Honeywell UOP entered into a three-year deferred prosecution agreement, the Justice Department said, over charges of conspiracy to violate the anti-bribery provisions of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA).

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, December 20 (Sputnik) -

GAS RPICE CAP

* The Netherlands believes that EU gas price cap potentially cannot guarantee ensuring energy security, Dutch Energy Minister Rob Jetten said on Monday.

* Germany is skeptical about the work of the market correction mechanism through the introduction of gas price cap, German Economy Minister Robert Habeck said.

* The lack of agreement on the price of Russian gas in Europe can hardly speak of a split, it is rather a technical difference of opinion, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

* Peskov said that attempts to set a cap on gas prices were unacceptable, and Moscow would make an appropriate decision, as it was with a decree on oil.

- * EU temporary mechanism to limit excessive gas prices will not apply to over-the-counter trades, as well as day-ahead exchanges and intra-day exchanges, the Council of the EU said,
- * EU energy ministers reached a political agreement on a temporary mechanism to limit excessive gas prices, setting a price cap at 180 euros (\$191) per MWh, the Council of the EU said.

PUTIN-LUKASHENKO TALKS

- * Moscow and Minsk discussed price parameters in the energy sector, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Monday.
- * Putin said that he discussed with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko the issues of economy, but also the military-technical cooperation, and the situation in the world.
- * Putin and Lukashenko confirmed at a meeting in Minsk the course on strengthening the independence of the two countries, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.
- * The trade between Russia and Belarus grew by 10% year-on-year in January-October, this year, most likely, there will be a new record of \$40 billion, Putin said.

RUSSIA RELATIONS WITH THE WEST

- * Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Monday that he maintains contacts with foreign colleagues by phone, including with French President Emmanuel Macron.
- * After the statements of former German Chancellor Angela Merkel about the Minsk agreements, Russia has every reason not to trust the words and signatures of European politicians, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

- * The United States and NATO allies have turned Ukraine into a testing ground for their weapons, with Kiev deliberately shelling a hospital in Donetsk with Swedish howitzers, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Monday.
- * The United Nations is very interested in accelerating prisoner of war exchanges in the Ukraine conflict as Orthodox Christmas approaches, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.
- * Greece's plan to transfer S-300 air defense systems to Ukraine is provocative, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said, adding that all military equipment sent to Kiev will be destroyed by the Russian armed forces.

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US Border Patrol Union Says Morale Low Amid Fears of Migrant Chaos as Title 42 Set to End

WASHINGTON, December 19 (Sputnik) - The morale among US Border Patrol agents is extremely low as they brace for the border crisis to intensify once a Trump-era policy used to deter migrants is lifted, National Border Patrol Council vice president Chris Cabrera told Sputnik. On Wednesday, Title 42 is scheduled to be suspended, however, several Republican states and the Biden administration's Justice Department are seeking to postpone the termination date due

to concerns the US immigration system will be overwhelmed beyond the strain it is currently facing.

"The morale is in the toilet. I've never seen it this bad, and I've seen it pretty bad," Cabrera said. "If you look at our retirement numbers, as soon as people are becoming eligible, they're running for the door. Nobody wants to stick around for this. And it doesn't look like there's any end in sight for us."

According to media reports, the Biden administration expects some 14,000 asylum-seeking migrants to cross the US southern border into the United States if Title 42 is rescinded.

"I think nationwide, we're expecting a lot. I think nationwide everybody is expecting huge numbers. And we won't really know until we see it," Cabrera said.

In October, the US Customs and Border Protection recorded more than 230,000 undocumented migrants arriving at the US southern border.

"If we get any higher, I don't know how we're going to be able to sustain that number," Cabrera said.

The Biden administration claims it has been surging resources to the US southern border to prepare for the lifting of the Title 42 policy. However, Cabrera said there isn't enough manpower to deal with the crisis.

"We've been surging people [Border Patrol agents] all around the country ... we only have a finite amount of resources. We only have a certain amount of agents, and it takes five to six months to get through the academy, not to mention the hiring process. So I don't know what resources they're going to be able to bring that's going to help us," Cabrera said.

The only way to address the crisis on the southern border is through legislative action, but Democrats and Republicans for the most part have failed to make any substantial progress on the issue, Cabrera said.

A Sputnik correspondent reported on Wednesday that for a week, more than a thousand migrants have formed a line each day in Juarez, Mexico, waiting to enter the United States at El Paso, Texas.

Media reported last week that President Joe Biden may consider enforcing a strict asylum process to deter the influx of migrants at the US southern border, but that plan does not appear to be a possibility anytime soon.

"I haven't heard anything about it. I'd be surprised if he did. I mean, I think that's something that's needed. It's been needed since 2013 for somebody to close this loophole that they've [migrants] figured out," Cabrera said.

Cabrera noted that most migrants coming into the United States illegally are being released into the United States after they are apprehended on the US southern border.

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US Treats Putin's Statement About 'Not Absorbing Anyone' as Height of Irony - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 19 (Sputnik) - The United States considers the statement by Russian President Vladimir Putin that Moscow does not want to "absorb" any of its neighbors to

be "the height of irony" in light of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

Earlier in the day, Putin met with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko in Minsk and said during a joint press conference that Russia "has no interest in absorbing anyone."

"I think a statement like that has to be treated as the height of irony coming from a leader who is seeking at the present moment right now to violently absorb his other peaceful next-door neighbor," Price said during a press briefing.

Following the meeting in Minsk, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that Putin and Lukashenko confirmed the path of strengthening the two countries' independence.

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White House Says Has No Comments on FBI-Twitter Ties

WASHINGTON, December 19 (Sputnik) - The White House has no comment on the FBI's ties to Twitter, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday.

"Again, I'm just going to refer you to the FBI. I'm not going to comment from here about that," said Jean-Pierre.

The comment came after Jean-Pierre was asked to comment on the recent documents released on Twitter alleging that the FBI was involved in discrediting the Hunter Biden laptop story.

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US State Dept. Says Ukraine Conflict to Be on Agenda When Blinken Visits China Next Year
WASHINGTON, December 19 (Sputnik) - Russia's special military operation in Ukraine will be on the agenda when US Secretary of State Antony Blinken visits Beijing early next year, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"I am certain that when the Secretary travels to Beijing, which we still expect to happen at some point early next year, that Russia's war against Ukraine will be on the agenda," Price said during a press briefing.

Blinken has said he expects to discuss a wide range of bilateral and global issues with high-ranking Chinese officials during his visit to Beijing next year.

Blinken has also repeatedly stated that the United States is in an intense competition with China but does not want the situation to veer into conflict.

Earlier this month, Assistant US Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink and National Security Council Senior Director for China and Taiwan Laura Rosenberger paid an official visit to China, according to the State Department.

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Blinken, Maltese Foreign Minister Discuss Ukraine, Regional Peace – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 19 (Sputnik) –US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Maltese Foreign Minister Ian Borg met on Monday in Washington, DC to discuss the situation in Ukraine and peace in the Mediterranean region, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said. “Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Borg discussed opportunities to build upon the already strong US-Malta relationship, and they emphasized the importance of maintaining unity in efforts to support Ukraine,” Price said.

The two sides also discussed the bilateral commitment to promoting peace, stability, and prosperity in the Mediterranean region, according to the statement. Blinken promised to work closely with Malta on maintaining global peace and security, Price added.

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US Stocks in Red for 4th Straight Day as Holidays Beckon, Recession Fears Mount

NEW YORK, December 19 (Sputnik) - Wall Street's three major indexes fell for a fourth day in a row as stock markets entered their penultimate week of the year with thin trading volumes amid growing fears of a recession in 2023.

With two hours to Monday's settlement, the Dow Jones Industrial Average, which serves as Wall Street's broadest equities indicator with stocks of 30 large US corporations, was down 267 points, or 0.8%, to trade at 32,653. The Dow fell 0.9% last week and is down 5.4% so far for December. For the year, the broad market index is down about 10%.

The S&P 500 Index, which represents the top 500 US stocks, fell 46 points, or 1.2%, on the day to trade at 3,807. Last week, the S&P fell 2%, extending December's loss to almost 7%. Year-to-date, it is down 20%, falling into bear-market territory.

The Nasdaq Composite Index, which comprises marquee names in technology such as Amazon, Apple, Netflix, Google and others, fell 174 points, or 1.6%, to trade at 10,532. The Nasdaq fell 2.7% last week, extending its drop for the month to 8%. For the year, the Big Tech indicator fell 33% for the deepest bear market experienced by the three indexes.

With just two weeks to the year's close and most market participants having wound down position-taking, Monday's sentiment in stocks wasn't helped by signs that central banks planned to keep rate hikes relatively high in 2023 to beat inflation. In contrast to falling stock prices, US Treasury yields rose — a sign of investors ditching risk for bonds and other safe-haven instruments.

"US stocks were unable to hold onto gains as recession worries run wild and as global bond yields surge higher [on] pushed-back expectations that the Fed will blink once the

unemployment rate starts to climb higher," Ed Moya, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said.

In its bid to control inflation, the Fed has added 425 basis points to interest rates since March via seven hikes. Prior to that, interest rates were at a peak of just 25 basis points as the central bank cut rates to nearly zero after the global outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. Inflation, as measured by the US Consumer Price Index, or CPI, expanded by 7.1% over the 12 months to November, versus a 7.7% in the year to October. Historical data showed it to be the lowest annual reading for inflation since December 2021. Even so, it was still three-and-a-half times higher than the Fed's annual target of just 2% for inflation.

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White House Says Biden Will Sign US Defense Spending Bill This Week

WASHINGTON, December 19 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will sign the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) later this week, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday.

"[Biden] is going to sign that later this week ... I don't have a date for you at this time," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing, when asked when Biden plans to sign the bill. Earlier this month, Congress passed the NDAA, authorizing approximately \$850 billion in defense spending. The legislation also includes measures to raise US military pay, extend a ban on military-to-military cooperation with Russia, restrict significant transactions of gold with Russia and repeal the US military COVID-19 mandate.

Moreover, the legislation provides \$10 billion in security assistance to modernize Taiwan's defense capabilities, as well as \$800 million for the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative. The NDAA also waived key contracting regulations and granted the Pentagon emergency procurement powers to accelerate the provision of munitions to Ukraine, sparking concerns about possible lack of oversight, which is often seen as an impediment to acquisition. Earlier this month, House Democrats blocked a measure by Republican lawmakers to audit the billions of US taxpayer dollars used to fund Ukraine. However, Republicans are due to take control of the House and its Foreign Affairs Committee in the new Congress next year, through which they may be able to pass such legislation.

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US House January 6 Panel Refers 4 Lawmakers to Ethics Committee for Dodging Subpoenas

WASHINGTON, December 19 (Sputnik) - The US House Select Committee investigating the events at the US Capitol on January 6 is referring four members of Congress to be sanctioned

by an ethics panel for their failure to comply with issued subpoenas, Congressman Jamie Raskin said on Monday.

"As part of our investigation, we asked multiple members of Congress to speak with us about issues critical to our understanding of this attack... None agreed to provide that essential information," Raskin said. "As a result, we took the significant step of issuing them subpoenas... None of the subpoenaed members complied, and we are now referring four members of Congress for appropriate sanction by the House Ethics Committee for failure to comply with lawful subpoenas."

The Select Committee is referring Congressmen Kevin McCarthy, Jim Jordan, Scott Perry and Andy Biggs.

The Select Committee referred earlier former US President Donald Trump to the Justice Department for criminal charges.

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US House January 6 Panel Recommends 4 Criminal Charges Against Trump, Others

WASHINGTON, December 19 (Sputnik) - The US House committee tasked with investigating the January 6 Capitol riot recommended four criminal charges against former President Donald Trump and other associates on Monday, including obstruction of an official proceeding and conspiracy to defraud the United States.

"The first criminal statute we invoke for referral is [obstruction of an official proceeding]. We believe that the evidence assembled throughout our hearing warrants a criminal referral of former President Donald J. Trump, John Eastman, and others for violations of this statute," the panel said.

The panel also believes there is sufficient evidence to refer Trump, Eastman and others to the Justice Department for conspiracy to defraud the US, conspiracy to make a false statement and inciting, assisting, aiding or comforting an insurrection.

The committee understands the gravity of each referral, as well as the magnitude of the "crime against democracy," Congressman Jamie Raskin said, noting that facts and the law guided the panel's decision.

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Latest 'Twitter Files' Drop Reveals Extent of FBI Influence Over Social Media Company

WASHINGTON, December 19 (Sputnik) - The FBI engaged with Twitter officials, including former FBI employees, to lay the foundations for the suppression of the Hunter Biden laptop story, author Michael Shellenberger said on Monday as part of the coordinated series of releases.

The seventh release of the so-called Twitter Files, coordinated with new Twitter chief Elon Musk, cites a number of emails between Twitter and the FBI, as well as internal communications.

"In Twitter Files #7, we present evidence pointing to an organized effort by representatives of the intelligence community (IC), aimed at senior executives at news and social media companies, to discredit leaked information about Hunter Biden before and after it was published," Shellenberger said via Twitter.

In December 2019, a Delaware computer store owner gave the FBI a laptop abandoned by Hunter Biden. In October 2020, US media first reported on the laptop, which contained information on foreign business dealings. Social media companies including Twitter subsequently suppressed the story in the weeks before the 2020 presidential election.

Former FBI general counsel Jim Baker, who worked at Twitter at the time, insisted that the Hunter Biden laptop materials were either faked or hacked, Shellenberger said.

However, it is "inconceivable" Baker believed the materials were faked or hacked due to available proof of the laptop's authenticity, Shellenberger said.

Baker was not the only former FBI employee at Twitter, with so many former members of the bureau working at the social media company that they had their own private communications channel, Shellenberger also said.

Moreover, the FBI's influence over Twitter may have been furthered by the fact that it paid the company at least \$3,415,323 for its staff time, Shellenberger said.

Pressure from the FBI on Twitter to accept emergency disclosure requests, a warrantless search, continued through at least August 2022, Shellenberger added.

Previous Twitter Files released by journalist Matt Taibbi revealed "constant and pervasive" contact between Twitter and the FBI, comparing the social media company to a subsidiary of the bureau. The information drops have also detailed Twitter's decision to ban former US President Donald Trump in the wake of the January 6 Capitol riot.

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Honeywell Agrees to Pay Over \$81Mln for 'Bribery Schemes' in Brazil, Algeria - SEC

WASHINGTON, December 19 (Sputnik) - Honeywell International Inc. has agreed to pay more than \$81 million after being charged for engaging in "bribery schemes" in Brazil and Algeria, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) said in a statement on Monday.

"The Securities and Exchange Commission today announced charges against Honeywell International Inc. for violations of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) arising out of bribery schemes that took place in Brazil and Algeria. The company has agreed to pay more than \$81 million to settle the SEC's charges," the statement said.

Honeywell engaged in the bribery schemes via intermediaries and employees to obtain business from the Brazilian state-owned entity Petrobras and offered at least \$4 million to a senior Brazilian official in 2010, the statement said.

In a separate attempt a year later, Honeywell staff and agents in Belgium paid more than \$75,000 in bribes to an Algerian government official to obtain and retain business with the Algerian state-owned entity Sonatrach, the statement said.

The SEC accused Honeywell of neglecting to implement sufficient internal accounting controls to mitigate against known corruption risks in Brazil and Algeria.

"This failure created an environment in which Honeywell employees and agents could and did facilitate bribes," the statement said.

In a parallel case, Honeywell also entered into a deferred prosecution agreement and agreed to pay more than \$78 million to settle criminal charges brought by the US Justice Department of Justice as well as agreed to settle additional charges brought by the Brazilian government, the statement added.

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House Panel Probing January 6 Capitol Riot to Suggest Criminal Charges - Chairman

WASHINGTON, December 19 (Sputnik) - The House January 6 Select Committee probing the Capitol riot will present evidence that may require criminal charges, the panel's chairman Bennie Thompson said on Monday.

"Today, beyond our findings, we will also show that evidence we've gathered points to further action beyond the power of this committee or the Congress to help ensure accountability on the law, accountability that can only be found in the criminal justice system," Thompson said during the committee's final hearing of its findings.

The committee is confident that its findings will provide a roadmap to aid federal agencies and institutions responsible for ensuring justice under US law, Thompson said.

Thompson added that the committee will make a number of non-binding recommendations in its final report of its congressional investigation.

The committee was tasked with investigating the US Capitol riot on January 6, 2021, during which a crowd breached the Capitol Complex and disrupted the certification of election results in favor of Joe Biden.

US prosecutors have convicted a number of individuals with crimes related to the riot, which the committee attempted to tie to Trump over a series of public hearings.

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US Must Do More to Make WTO Relevant to Changing World Economy – Trade Rep.

WASHINGTON, December 19 (Sputnik) – The United States must do more to make the World Trade Organization (WTO) relevant to the changing world economy to be able to address

growing inequality and other pressing issues, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said on Monday.

"But we must do more to make the WTO relevant. The organization must keep pace with the changing world economy, and address widening inequality, workers' rights, the climate crisis, and other fragilities and vulnerabilities," Tai said during a Council on Foreign Relations event. China's Commerce Ministry said Saturday that 32 WTO members filed inquiries with the United States over its discriminatory trade rules.

Canada, Japan, South Korea, and the European Union — some of Washington's closest allies — were among those who filed them. The US is expected to respond in writing to all inquiries. China launched an official trade dispute against the US at the 164-member WTO on Thursday after accusing Washington of undermining global supply chains.

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US Needs New Playbook on China Amid Surge of Low-Priced Imports - Trade Rep.

WASHINGTON, December 19 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration needs a new playbook on China to protect the interests of US businesses and workers amid a surge of low-priced imports from the United States' largest trading partner, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said on Monday.

"We need a new playbook on China that serves our interests, and we will continue to press the PRC [People's Republic of China] on its state-centered and non-market trade practices," Tai said during a Council on Foreign Relations event. "The loss of jobs income and manufacturing capabilities that accompanied a surge in low-priced imports from China has been real and devastating."

Tai also said that China's allegedly unfair trade policies and practices have undercut US prosperity, suppressed labor rights and weakened environmental standards.

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FBI Warns of Increase in 'Sextortion' of Minors, Urges Parents to Address Issue - Alert

WASHINGTON, December 19 (Sputnik) - The FBI, US Homeland Security Investigations and National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) issued a public safety alert on Monday warning of a rapid rise in so-called sextortion cases involving minors, urging parents to address the issue with their children.

"The FBI has seen a horrific increase in reports of financial sextortion schemes targeting minor boys – and the fact is that the many victims who are afraid to come forward are not even included in those numbers," FBI Director Christopher Wray said in a statement. "The FBI is here

for victims, but we also need parents and caregivers to work with us to prevent this crime before it happens and help children come forward if it does.”

Law enforcement has received over 7,000 reports related to online financial sextortion of minors, resulting in at least 3,000 victims and more than a dozen suicides, the FBI alert said.

The schemes, a large percentage of which originate outside the United States, primarily target boys, the alert said.

The alert urged parents and caregivers to engage with their children about the issue of financial sextortion schemes over the holiday season.

The schemes often occur in online environments frequented by minors, including social media and gaming sites, according to the alert. Perpetrators often use fake female accounts to target teen boys, although the FBI had interviewed victims as young as 10-years old, the alert said.

Predators convince minors to produce explicit materials, which they then threaten to make public unless the victim sends payment, the alert said. The shame and fear that victims feel often prevents them from seeking help or reporting the abuse, the alert added.

The NCMEC encourages parents and young people to get help before sending payment, block the predator’s accounts, retain messages that could be useful to law enforcement and contact the FBI.

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UN Chief Says World Lives in Legal Void, Social Media Platforms Can Do 'Whatever They Want'

UNITED NATIONS, December 19 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said on Monday that the world lives in a legal void in which social media platforms can do "whatever they want."

"We live in a kind of a legal void, in which these platforms can do whatever they want, can convey whatever they want and there are no legal consequences," Guterres said during a briefing.

Guterres comment came in response to a question about what it would take to close his Twitter account after the latest accusations that the social media platform denies freedom of speech since billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk acquired the company in October.

The UN chief said he wants to keep active his Twitter account, which has 2 million followers, because it has an important role to play.

The United Nations has recently voiced concerns about the latest Twitter developments and said the world body is "disturbed" about the attempts to suspend accounts of several corporate media journalists who illegally doxxed his location.

In late October, Musk finalized the \$44 billion acquisition of Twitter, a US company founded in 2006 with its headquarters located in San Francisco, California. Musk changed the company's operations, terminated executives who were responsible for the platform's censorship, cybersecurity and privacy, as well as fired about two-thirds of employees. Musk has said one of the primary motivating factors to acquire Twitter was to promote freedom of speech.

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UN Authorizes Russian Fertilizer for Exports After Concluding Inspections - Guterres

UNITED NATIONS, December 19 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres announced on Monday that the United Nations has concluded the inspections of Russian fertilizer in European ports in the Netherlands, Belgium and Estonia, and approved the fertilizer for shipment.

"We have now concluded the inspections concluded in the other quantities that exist in Rotterdam and in Antwerp and in Estonia and the exports were already authorized," Guterres said during a press briefing. "These are non-commercial transactions because these are donations but you, of course, you need to find the ships, you need to find the insurance and you need to find the way to distribute and we have the support of the World Bank for that purpose."

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UN Secretary-General Warns of Risk of Losing JCPOA Deal With Iran

UNITED NATIONS, December 19 (Sputnik) - A return to the terms of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), negotiated to curb Iran's nuclear program, is at risk of failing amid stalled talks, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Monday.

"I have always believed that the JCPOA was a remarkable diplomatic achievement. I was very frustrated when the JCPOA was put into question, and we will do everything we can ... to make sure that the JCPOA is not lost," Guterres said during an end-of-year press conference. "We are, at the present moment, in serious risk of losing the JCPOA."

Losing the JCPOA would be a negative factor for peace and stability in the region, Guterres added.

Iran, Germany and the five permanent UN Security Council members negotiated the JCPOA in 2015. The United States unilaterally withdrew in 2018 under the Trump administration, causing Iran to suspend the deal. The Biden administration has since pursued a return to the deal, although talks have stalled between the parties.

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Guterres Says UN Security Council Reforms, Enlargement Open for Discussion

UNITED NATIONS, December 19 (Sputnik) - UN Security Council reforms and enlargement are both possibilities open to serious consideration by member states, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Monday that

"I think that there is now space for a much more serious discussion in relation to Security Council reform. I think that the possibility of enlarging the Security Council is now seriously on the table. I'm still not optimistic about the right of veto," Guterres said during an end-of-year press conference.

Expanding membership of the UN Security Council, which now includes five permanent and ten non-permanent members, has been discussed by UN members for decades, with no tangible progress achieved.

Members have also recently discussed reforming the veto powers of the permanent UN Security Council members.

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US Aims to Cut Homelessness by 25% by 2025 - White House

WASHINGTON, December 19 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration aims to reduce homelessness by a quarter by 2025, the White House said on Monday.

"Today, the Biden-Harris Administration released All In: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, which sets a bold but achievable goal to reduce homelessness 25 percent by 2025," the White House said in a fact sheet.

The plan is designed to prevent people from becoming homeless, address inequities in local communities, and help cities and states reduce unsheltered homelessness. The administration is also setting up a foundation for new initiatives, including one to reduce unsheltered homelessness.

"My plan offers a roadmap for not only getting people into housing but also ensuring that they have access to the support, services, and income that allow them to thrive," President Joe Biden said. "It is a plan that is grounded in the best evidence and aims to improve equity and strengthen collaboration at all levels."

The White House noted that between 2016 and the beginning of the pandemic, some of the gains previously achieved in the fight against homelessness vanished "due to a lack of focus on evidence-based strategies," and the number of people who have no place to live increased 6%. According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, 582,462 people were experiencing homelessness on a single night in January 2022.

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UN Interested in Accelerating POW Exchange in Ukraine Conflict Before Christmas - Guterres

UNITED NATIONS, December 19 (Sputnik) – The United Nations is very interested in accelerating prisoner of war exchanges in the Ukraine conflict as Orthodox Christmas approaches, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Monday.

"We are very interested in accelerating the exchange of prisoners of war and especially when we are approaching Christmas, and both sides celebrate Christmas in January," Guterres told an end-of-year press conference.

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Guterres 'Not Optimistic' About Possibility of Ukraine Peace Talks in Immediate Future

UNITED NATIONS, December 19 (Sputnik) – UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he is pessimistic about the possibility of serious peace talks on Ukraine any time soon.

"I am not optimistic about the possibility of effective peace talks in the immediate future. I do believe that the military confrontation will go on, and I think we will have still to wait a moment in which serious negotiations for peace will be possible. I don't see them on the immediate horizon," Guterres told an end-of-year press conference.

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Guterres Says He Strongly Hopes for Peace in Ukraine in 2023

UNITED NATIONS, December 19 (Sputnik) – UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Monday he strongly hopes to see peace in Ukraine in 2023.

"I strongly hope that in 2023 we will be able to reach peace in Ukraine," Guterres told an end-of-year press conference.

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Six Dead, 1 Injured in Condominium Shooting in Canada's Ontario - Police

WASHINGTON, December 19 (Sputnik) - Six people are dead, including the suspect, and one individual sustained injuries in a shooting at a condominium building in the Canadian province of Ontario, police said on Monday.

"Five victims are deceased, a sixth victim is in hospital in serious condition and the suspect is deceased following an active shooter incident at a condominium building located at 9235 Jane Street in the City of Vaughan," the police said in a statement.

The shooting took place on Sunday evening. Police were called to the residential building for a report of an active male shooter who had shot several victims.

When police arrived, an interaction occurred between the officers and the male suspect. The latter was shot and pronounced deceased at the scene.

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UN Chief Says 'Determined More Than Ever' for 2023 to Be Year of Peace, Action

UNITED NATIONS, December 19 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed resolve to make 2023 a year of peace and action.

"I am more determined than ever to make 2023 a year for peace, a year for action," Guterres told an end-of-year press conference.

The UN chief added he would work to promote peace, advance sustainable development goals and reform what he said is a morally bankrupt international financial system.

Guterres is serving his second term as secretary-general.

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Canada Starts Seizure of \$26Mln in Assets of Russian Tycoon Abramovich - Global Affairs

WASHINGTON, December 19 (Sputnik) – Canada has commenced the seizure of \$26 million in assets from Granite Capital Holdings Ltd. owned by sanctioned Russian businessman Roman Abramovich, Global Affairs Canada said on Monday.

"The Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs, today announced that Canada will seize and pursue the forfeiture of US \$26 million from Granite Capital Holdings Ltd., a company owned by Roman Abramovich—a Russian oligarch sanctioned under the Special Economic Measures (Russia) Regulations," Global Affairs Canada said in a press release.

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UN Chief Says to Convene 'Climate Ambition Summit' in September 2023

UNITED NATIONS, December 19 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Monday he will host a "Climate Ambition Summit" in September and invites governments and businesses to participate.

"So today I am announcing that I will convene a Climate Ambition Summit in September 2023. I call on every leader to step up – from governments, business, cities and regions, civil society and finance," Guterres told a briefing.

The invitation is open, he added.

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Guterres Says Black Sea Grain Deal 'Making Difference,' Russian Wheat Exports Up 3-Fold

UNITED NATIONS, December 19 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Monday that the Black Sea grain agreement is working, despite challenges, and Russian wheat exports have increased three-fold.

"Despite ongoing challenges, the Black Sea Grain initiative to facilitate exports of food and fertilizers from Ukraine – and a Memorandum of Understanding for unimpeded exports of Russian food and fertilizers to global markets -- are making a difference," Guterres told an end-of-year press conference. "Over 14 million metric tons of grain and other foodstuffs have been shipped from Black Sea ports in Ukraine. Russian wheat exports have multiplied three-fold."