

1/12/23 Thursday

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.

Vice-Minister Xie Feng Seen as 'Pole Position' Candidate for Next Chinese Envoy to Washington
By - Fantine Gardinier

With Beijing's former envoy to Washington, Qin Gang, now heading the entire Chinese Foreign Ministry, experts are speculating about who will be appointed to replace him. Among the many choices, Xie Feng, a veteran diplomat with extensive knowledge of the United States, is seen as the most likely pick.

"During my tenure here, I have been working to implement the common understandings of our two Presidents, serve as a bridge and bond of communication between the two countries, and explore the right way to get along for China and the US in the new era," Qin said in [farewell remarks](#) on January 2.

In [an article published](#) in a US magazine days earlier, Qin urged Americans to "make the right choice" and not follow "the beaten path of the last century," referring to the military, economic, and ideological competition with Beijing and Moscow that Washington has committed itself to in recent years.

Now that Qin has been [promoted to Foreign Minister](#), whoever replaces him in Washington will have big shoes to fill - and have to march to the beat of Qin's drum. However, experts on US-China relations have also noted that an even greater influence will be the tone set by the [November meeting](#) between Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden in Bali. At that meeting, their first face-to-face since Biden became president, the two discussed possible areas of cooperation - areas that did not include their most contentious interactions, such as trade and security. According to experts, that helped alleviate some of the tension built up from the August visit to Taiwan by then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, but left Qin and his successor without much room for creative diplomacy to bring the two superpowers closer. "The process to find his replacement has been going on for a while," said an anonymous knowledgeable source who was quoted in Chinese media. "And Xie is believed to be in pole position."

Another quoted official, from the United States, described Xie as an "adaptive thinker."

Xie is presently the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, specializing in US-China relations. He was previously the ambassador to Indonesia and the foreign ministry commissioner in Hong Kong from 2017 to early 2021, when he was assigned to the US section. From 2008 until 2010, he was the second-highest ranking Chinese embassy official in Washington, and later became head of the department overseeing US affairs. He is a graduate of the China Foreign Affairs University in Beijing.

According to reports, other names under consideration are Ma Zhaoxu, another vice-minister of foreign affairs; Hua Chunying, an assistant minister and ministry spokesperson; Lu Kang, the

ambassador to Indonesia; Zheng Zeguang; the ambassador to the UK; and two other embassy officials in Washington: Xu Xueyuan and Jin Quan.

Beijing is expected to announce its appointment before US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the country's foreign minister, makes an official visit to China in February.

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.

DOJ Names Special Counsel to Probe Biden's 'Mishandling' of Classified Documents

By - Fantine Gardinier

The FBI raided the Mar-a-Lago estate owned by former US President Donald Trump in August on suspicion of potential violations of the Espionage Act and mishandling of documents, finding hundreds of classified files there. Trump has denounced the raid as a "witch hunt," saying the FBI aims to sabotage his 2024 presidential campaign.

After a third batch of unaccounted-for classified documents was found in the possession of US President Joe Biden on Thursday, Attorney General Merrick Garland announced he had appointed a special counsel to handle the investigation.

A special counsel in the US is a lawyer appointed to handle an investigation and any prosecutions that might result from it, if the usual authorities are believed to have a conflict of interest.

Garland told reporters he had appointed Robert Hur, the former US attorney in Maryland, to lead the investigation, taking over for John Lausch, the US attorney from Chicago who Garland had previously assigned to look into the documents.

Hur is also former deputy attorney general and a private practice lawyer [with a history](#) of prosecuting white-collar crime. He was appointed as the US attorney for the district of Maryland in 2017 by Trump, with his term ending in 2021.

Lausch was given the job when just [one batch of 10 documents](#) was publicly known, after US media revealed on Monday they had been found among personal files in Biden's private office he had once used while a professor at the University of Pennsylvania. However, since then two more reports of classified document discoveries have hit the air waves: [one batch in another office](#) of Biden's and another discovery [at the Bidens' home in Delaware](#).

"It's in a locked garage, okay? So it's not like they're sitting out in the street," [Biden told reporters](#) on Thursday about the latest discovery. "Yes, as well as my Corvette," he added, when asked to clarify.

So far, Biden has cooperated with the Department of Justice and the US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), to which presidents are supposed to surrender their files when they leave office. While Biden is the sitting US President, the files date to the time when he was US Vice President, from 2009 until 2017.

"Wow, even *I* handled classified documents more securely. At least I kept them encrypted!" quipped Edward Snowden, the former NSA whistleblower who fled to Russia after revealing a vast domestic spying program called PRISM in 2013.

As the investigation of the potential mishandling of sensitive documents by Biden begins to unfold, his predecessor, Donald Trump, has sounded off.

"Merrick Garland has to immediately end Special Counsel investigation into anything related to me because I did everything right, and appoint a Special Counsel to investigate Joe Biden who hates Biden as much as Jack Smith hates me," Trump said on his Truth Social account on Thursday.

Like Biden, Trump is under investigation for potentially mishandling classified files, but unlike Biden, the FBI raided his Florida home last year and found hundreds of files it had correctly surmised had not been returned to NARA. No charges have been filed against Trump, but he has challenged the DOJ's right to investigate him in the courts.

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 Intelligence Chief Publishes Report Revealing Dramatic Increase in UFO Sightings Since 2020

By - Fantine Gardinier

After decades of accumulating reports and rumors, the Pentagon decided to take reports of unidentified flying objects (UFOs) more seriously, publishing reports on their findings. Congress even held hearings on them last year, playing previously classified footage of unexplained phenomena near US military installations.

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of sightings of UFOs over the past two years, according to [a report published](#) by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) on Thursday.

The report, which was current as of August 2022, revealed that "there have been 247 new reports and another 119" unidentified aerial phenomena (UAPs), as the Pentagon now calls them, that were either since discovered or reported since the ODNI's preliminary assessment on sightings in 2020.

At that time, the office had accumulated just 144 reports in 17 years, but now the total stands at 510, the document states.

The All-Domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO), which was set up by the Department of Defense in July 2022, was assigned to sort through the roughly 366 newly identified reports using a "robust analytic process" to make "initial characterizations" of their nature.

According to the report, the AARO characterized 26 reports as being of Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) or UAS-like entities; 163 were characterized as balloon or balloon-like entities; and six were attributed to clutter.

"Initial characterization does not mean positively resolved or unidentified," the report notes.

"This initial characterization better enables AARO and ODNI to efficiently and effectively leverage resources against the remaining 171 uncharacterized and unattributed UAP reports.

"Some of these uncharacterized UAP appear to have demonstrated unusual flight characteristics or performance capabilities, and require further analysis," the ODNI noted.

“The majority of new UAP reporting originates from US Navy and US Air Force aviators and operators who witnessed UAP during the course of their operational duties and reported the events to the UAPTF [Unidentified Aerial Phenomena Task Force, AARO’s predecessor] or AARO through official channels. Regardless of the collection or reporting method, many reports lack enough detailed data to enable attribution of UAP with high certainty.”

In a [statement on Thursday](#), US Sen. Mark Warner (D-VA), who chairs the Senate Intelligence Committee, hailed the report’s publication, calling it “a step forward in understanding and addressing risks to aviators.”

“Overall, I am encouraged to see an increase in UAP reporting – a sign of decreased stigma among pilots who are aware of the potential threat that UAPs can pose,” he added.

The ODNI’s report is now mandated annually by the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), the massive spending bill that funds the Pentagon every year.

The US military has long taken an interest in UFO sightings, launching several programs to collect reports and study them, beginning with Project Blue Book from 1952 until 1969. That project yielded the conclusion that UFOs were not extraterrestrial craft, but explainable phenomena, including stars, meteors, weather phenomena, and experimental aircraft. Later, the Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program (AATIP) tracked similar reports before being shut down in 2012.

In 2017, the Pentagon confirmed the existence of the UAPTF, despite the public closing of the AATIP years earlier, and after, lawmakers began requesting the [release of footage](#) collected by the program, which also began to be leaked in the press.

In 2021, Congress required the ODNI to begin issuing an annual report on UFO sightings and the potential dangers they might include for US military installations and warships, and in May 2022, the Senate held a hearing on the phenomena.

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.

Latest US Inflation Report Shows Six Straight Months of Slowing, Although Some Prices Still Rising

By - Fantine Gardinier

A December 2022 poll found just 25% of Americans believe the US economy is in a “good” position, and just 43% approved of US President Joe Biden’s performance as the nation’s leader. Still, an anticipated sweeping GOP victory in the November elections, driven by economic discontent, failed to materialize, and the party made only modest gains.

In December 2021, the price for US goods increased by an average of 6.5% over a year prior, according to the latest Consumer Price Index ([CPI](#)) report from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). The news marks six straight months of declining inflation for the US, after the Federal Reserve began increasing interest rates.

The 6.5% increase, while still historically high, was noticeably less than the 7.1% increase seen in December, and the sixth consecutive month of decrease since the high of 9.1% in June of last year.

"Inflation is on its back heels," tweeted Mark Zandi, the chief economist at Moody's Analytics. "Consumer price inflation for December couldn't have been much better."

The Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve, the US' central bank, is set to meet next on January 31, and despite the continuing good news on the inflation front, is likely to continue increasing interest rates to ensure the decline continues. The [Effective Federal Funds Rate](#), which governs how much banks can lend to each other overnight, was increased to 4.33% last month, and the Fed has indicated it expects that number to increase above 5% before letting off the gas pedal. The Fed's target inflation rate is 2.5%.

Speaking of gas, the sharply declining price of gasoline is largely credited with helping slow the increase in commodity prices, as higher gas prices create higher transportation costs. According to the American Automobile Association (AAA), [during the week](#) of January 12, the average price for a gallon of regular unleaded gas in the US was \$3.27, down considerably from the June 2022 peak of \$5.01 per gallon.

Still, the prices of some commodities have persisted in their rise, especially food items such as eggs. Over the last year, the price of eggs has increased by 60%, rising by 11.1% just from November to December 2022, according to the BLS. Breakfast cereal, rice, and bread have also risen by 13-15%. Rent is also 8.3% higher than last year - a devastating metric for working-class Americans, for whom rent is often their single largest expense.

Meanwhile, the price of a used car has continued to drop, as have airfares, although the price of a new car has continued to rise.

However, the Fed's steady rate hikes and the US economy's effective "burnout" over the summer have left many economists and Wall Street investors with dismal expectations for 2023, including anticipating a recession. However, unemployment has remained extremely low - the [BLS' jobs report](#) released last week showed a slight decrease to 3.5% of the workforce - and rising unemployment is often considered a telltale sign of the slide toward recession.

"I'm increasingly confident that inflation will get back to target over the next 18 months with only a couple more Fed rate hikes and no recession," Zandi also said. "The next meaningful drop in inflation will come from falling vehicle prices as supply chains and global vehicle production normalize."

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.

Dolphins Have to 'Shout' Over Industrial Noise, Study Finds
By - Wyatt Reed

Researchers found that despite increasing the volume and duration of their underwater whistles, dolphins' ability to successfully communicate dropped by almost half at the highest audial distraction levels.

Dolphins are forced to "shout" and adopt other strategies to compensate for man-made noise caused by drilling, hipping and military activities, a new study has found.

Dolphins tasked with pressing a button within one second of a partner across a small lagoon "increased the level of their whistles in noise, nearly doubled whistle duration, and oriented

more toward their partner, indicating that both dolphins were actively attempting to compensate for noise to continue communicating with each other,” researchers [reported](#) in a study published in Current Biology on Thursday.

But while the sea mammals have developed multiple methods of dealing with loud environments, they are apparently far from perfect.

“We found that the dolphin [pair’s] success rate in the cooperative task decreased with increasing levels of anthropogenic noise, irrespective of their attempts to compensate by producing louder and longer duration whistles and by changing their physical behavior to allow for better monitoring of their partner,” the researchers wrote.

“Cooperative task success decreased in the presence of noise, dropping from 85% during ambient noise control trials to 62.5% during the highest noise exposure.”

Noise pollution has emerged as a major issue for marine life, especially animals like dolphins that rely on echolocation to locate and track food sources. Scientists have linked the surge in oceanic background noise with an uptick in strandings, changes in behavior, and decompression sickness among cetaceans.

“If groups of animals in the wild are, for example, less efficient at foraging cooperatively, then this will negatively impact individual health, which ultimately impacts population health,” said Stephanie King, one of the study’s co-authors and associate professor at University of Bristol, said.

Their co-author, Pernille Sørensen, reportedly explained that the “same reasons that make sound so advantageous for animals to use also make them susceptible to disturbance from noise in the environment.”

The researchers claim the study is the first to “show how increasing levels of anthropogenic noise negatively impact coordination between conspecifics performing a cooperative task” in any non-human species.

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.

Maduro Blasts ‘Ridiculous’ UK Move to Extend Recognition of Long-Expired 2015 Assembly
By - Wyatt Reed

Venezuela’s leader derided the former legislative body — and the British insistence on continuing to recognize it — as components of a continuing campaign of “political, economic, financial, energy, and diplomatic aggression.”

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro is slamming Whitehall for its “laughable” claim that the National Assembly, which was elected in 2015, is the Caribbean country’s only legitimate institution.

“It is laughable and ridiculous that at this point, they still resort to this farce and falsehood,” Maduro said Thursday in his [annual message](#) to the Venezuelan legislature.

Earlier on Thursday, Britain’s Foreign Office issued a [statement](#) reiterating it continues to “consider the National Assembly elected in 2015 as the last democratically elected National

Assembly in Venezuela” after that group voted to dissolve the supposed ‘interim presidency’ of Venezuelan opposition figure Juan Guaido.

“The UK continues not to accept the legitimacy of the administration put in place by Nicolás Maduro,” it wrote.

Maduro dismissed that 2015 legislature – whose five-year mandate to legislate legally expired in 2020 – as little more than a cat’s paw in a Western-backed plot to “recolonize Venezuela.”

“The only exclusive and determining legislative body is the National Assembly elected by the people in 2020,” Maduro noted.

“Everything else is a farce mounted as part of a political, economic, financial, energy, and diplomatic aggression,” Maduro told lawmakers Thursday.

“We have been able to confront it and in 2023, we will have defeated it.”

London’s refusal to recognize the Venezuelan government could impact the ongoing UK-based court case determining whether the Bank of England will be forced to return over a billion dollars worth of gold to the Caribbean country.

Since 2020, the bank has refused to relinquish 32 tons of Venezuelan gold – valued at roughly \$1.7 billion – to the Maduro administration, citing the British government’s decision to recognize Guaido rather than its elected leader.

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 Aviation Authority Blames Recent Flight Meltdown on ‘Personnel Who Failed to Follow Procedures’

By - Wyatt Reed

Following Wednesday’s flight fiasco, FAA leadership continued their blame game Thursday, blaming subordinates at the agency for a supposed ‘failure to follow procedures.’

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) offered a new scapegoat on Thursday for who was at fault for the advisory system outage that left airports throughout the country in disarray the day prior: their own employees.

The FAA determined that a data file in the country’s Notices to Air Missions (NOTAM) database was “damaged by personnel who failed to follow procedures,” the agency said in a statement issued Thursday evening.

But reports that the FAA has long been employing extremely antiquated software have brought their claim into question.

On Thursday, CNN [reported](#) that “the Federal Aviation Administration software that failed Wednesday causing thousands of flight delays and cancellations is 30 years old and at least six years away from being updated,” citing a “government source familiar with the situation.”

The outage left huge numbers of passengers stranded as scheduling issues cascaded, ultimately leaving 10,945 flights delayed and 1,353 canceled, per flight-tracking website

[FlightAware](#).

Amid the American system's meltdown, Russia – against whom the US has been secretly conducting a “sabotage campaign” [via another NATO member state](#) amid the Western military alliance's ongoing proxy war in Ukraine – was left to pick up the slack.

“Guided by the principles of international mutual assistance, [Russia's Unified Air Traffic Management System]... provided the necessary assistance to the crews of aircraft performing transit flights through the border of the flight information region of these centers with the area control center in Anchorage (Alaska),” Russia's Federal Air Transport Agency wrote Wednesday.

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.

Rep. George Santos Vows to Only Step Down if All 142,000 People Who Voted for Him Say So
By - Mary Manley

The freshman representative from New York has been criticized by fellow Republicans who are calling for him to resign after he admitted to lying about his resume. Santos embellished key details of his life including his education, work experience, and even his religion.

Republican Representative George Santos, 34, has been asked to step down by both Democrats and fellow Republicans after he [admitted](#) to lying on his resume, but despite the backlash, the lawmaker has refused to stand down - at least not until every last of the 142,000 voters that sided with him [change their tune](#) in the next election cycle.

Nearly every Republican leader from NY has asked Santos to step down. But after being sworn in on Saturday, Santos swore his political “commitment” during an interview with Representative Matt Gaetz (R-FL) on Bannon's “War Room” program.

“It's their prerogative,” Santos told Gaetz, referring to colleagues who have asked him to step down. “I came here to serve the people not politicians and party leaders, and I'm going to do just that.”

“I wish well all of their opinions, but I was elected by 142,000 people. Until those same 142,000 people tell me they don't want me - we'll find out in two years,” he added.

Those sentiments were also repeated by the representative on Twitter.

In 2020, Santos managed to dupe the [Nassau County Republican Committee](#) into believing he was an alumnus of Baruch College and had graduated in the top one percent of his class before earning an MBA at New York University. He also lied about working as a project manager at Goldman Sachs and Citigroup. On the campaign trail, he fabricated a story and implied he had Jewish roots. On Wednesday, the committee called Santos a “serial liar” and demanded he resign from Congress.

And when Matt Gaetz (R-FL) asked Santos where the \$700,000 he gave to his campaign originated from, Santos refused to answer.

“He answered the questions — obviously not truthfully — but at that time we trusted him,” Joseph G. Cairo Jr., the committee chairman, told reporters at a news conference, vowing to put in place a more rigorous vetting process. “We were duped here.”

"I don't think there's any way he can possibly perform his duties, and the man's got to be honest with himself and his constituents," Rep. [Marc Molinaro](#) (R-NY) told reporters on Thursday.

"With the extent and severity of the allegations against him, his inability to take full responsibility for his conduct, and the numerous investigations underway, I believe he is unable to fulfill his duties and should resign," Rep. Mike Lawler (R-NY) added.

But House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, who struggled to secure his position until the 15th round of [voting](#), said of Santos when asked if he would take action against him: "Is there a charge against him? You know, in America today, you're innocent until proven guilty."

"Well, what I find is the voters have elected George Santos," McCarthy said. "If there is a concern, it will go through ethics. If there is something that is found, he will be dealt with in that manner, but they have a voice in this process."

According to the [New York Times](#), two Democrats from New York filed an official complaint on Tuesday with the House Committee of Ethics to investigate Santos, and to focus on his financial disclosures which were filed late and without key details.

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.

Singer Lisa Marie Presley, Sole Child of Elvis, Dead at 54 Following Cardiac Arrest
By - Mary Manley

The singer-songwriter's death came just two days after she appeared at the Golden Globes alongside her mother, Priscilla. The 2023 installment of the award ceremony included nominations - and awards - for the Baz Luhrmann-directed film "Elvis."

Lisa Marie Presley has died at the age of 54 after suffering a cardiac arrest on the morning of January 12. She had been placed in an induced coma following the incident.

The death was confirmed by Lisa Marie's mother, Priscilla, in a statement to the People weekly magazine.

"It is with a heavy heart that I must share the devastating news that my beautiful daughter Lisa Marie has left us," the announcement reads. "She was the most passionate, strong and loving woman I have ever known."

"We ask for privacy as we try to deal with this profound loss. Thank you for the love and prayers. At this time there will be no further comment," her mother added in the remarks.

Earlier reports indicated that her housekeeper found her unresponsive in her bedroom at her Calabasas home in California, as her ex-husband Danny Keough, whom she lives with, was arriving home after taking her kids to school.

Keough administered CPR on his ex-wife until the paramedics arrived. Sources close to Presley say she was complaining of intense stomach pains earlier that morning, which increased in intensity. Sources underscored to TMZ that this was not a suicide attempt.

The incident occurred just two days after Presley attended the 2023 Golden Globes with her mother Priscilla Presley and actor Austin Butler, who played her father in the Baz Luhrmann film "Elvis."

Lisa Marie was born in 1968 to parents Elvis and Priscilla Presley. She was born in Memphis, Tennessee, and grew up there until her parents divorced. The soon-to-be American singer-songwriter would later move with her mother to Los Angeles, California, and travel back to Elvis' Graceland estate in Memphis. She was the only child of the famous couple. Lisa Marie followed in her father's footsteps and pursued a music career. In 2003, she released her first album titled "To Whom It May Concern," which reached number five on the Billboard 200 albums chart. She then released her second album in 2005 titled "Now What," which reached number nine on the Billboard 200 albums chart.

While her first two albums followed a popstar sound, her third album "Storm & Grace," which was released in 2012, channeled a more "rootsy and organic" sound than her previous work, according to the artist.

The King's daughter would later go on to oversee [The Elvis Presley Charitable Foundation \(EPCF\)](#), which was created in 1984 in memory of the music legend. The organization also led to the creation of the Elvis Presley Endowed Scholarship Fund at the College of Communication & Fine Arts at the University of Memphis.

[Lisa Marie](#) was only nine years old when her father died. At 25, she inherited the Graceland estate as stipulated under Elvis' will. However, unable to manage the massive estate, she ultimately agreed to sell 85% of it in 2004 in order to resolve its debt, which had amounted to \$25 million. In 2018, it was reported she was still in a debt of about \$16.7 million. A [business manager](#) had reportedly mishandled her finances, allowing her to have unpaid income taxes, a defaulted mortgage, and massive credit bills.

The Memphis-born musician also had a string of difficult relationships. She married musician Danny Keough in 1988 with whom she had two children - her daughter actor and model Riley Keough and [Benjamin Keough](#), who killed himself in Calabasas, California, at the age of 27 in 2020.

Just 20 days after her divorce from Keough in 1994, Lisa Marie married decorated singer Michael Jackson, with the pair eventually filing for divorce two years later. In 2000, she was engaged to musician John Oszajca, who she broke up with after meeting actor Nicolas Cage at a party. Lisa Marie and Cage were married for only four months until he filed for divorce in 2002. In a 2003 interview with Star Tribune she described her relationship with Keough, who was living on her property at the time, as "unconditional" as the two kept a close relationship even after they divorced.

In 2006, she married guitarist and music producer Michael Lockwood, going on to give birth to twin girls Harper Vivienne Ann Lockwood and Finley Aaron Love Lockwood. After 10 years of marriage, Lisa Marie filed for divorce from Lockwood in 2016. Their divorce was finalized in 2021. At the time, the Tennessean accused [Lockwood](#) of possessing child pornography on his computer after he requested child support.

Presley is survived by her three daughters, her mother, and the fathers of her children.

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.

Videos: At Least Six People Dead After Destructive Tornadoes Tear Through US South

By - Mary Manley

The tornado ripped through central Alabama destroying multiple counties in its path as it made its way east into Georgia. Selma Mayor James Perkins declared a local emergency for his city and put an overnight curfew into place to allow first responders to clear routes.

A large [storm](#) system swept through the US South on Thursday, leaving at least six people dead and destroying about 40 to 50 homes in Autauga County, which sits northwest of Montgomery, Alabama, according to the county Emergency Management Agency Director Ernie Baggett.

The official added that at least 12 people had to be taken to hospitals by emergency responders due to severe injuries after the storm struck the communities of Old Kingston and Marbury as it destroyed a path of about 20 miles, reportedly.

The tornado ripped everything in its path and damaged businesses as well homes, as it passed through downtown Selma, Alabama (a city which is rich with the history of the [civil rights movement](#)).

The mayor declared a local emergency for the city and put a curfew in place so first responders could more easily help the injured. According to Perkins, at 6 p.m. local time there was one person believed to be trapped in a building on Broad Street while another remained missing.

“Most city streets are closed due to down power lines and trees. All schools have reported that students are at school and safe. It is not safe at this point to go to the schools or allow the children to leave school,” the city of Selma posted on social media.

“I thought it was all over for me,” said eyewitness [Bobby Green](#), who was in his car when the tornado hit Selma. The debris on his vehicle was so heavy he was forced to escape through his passenger window.

There were a total of 42 reports of tornadoes on Thursday, with a majority of those being in Alabama and some in Georgia and Kentucky, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s [Storm Prediction Center](#). However, authorities will have to survey whether or not those reports were legitimate tornadoes.

[Alabama](#) Governor Kay Ivey and Georgia Governor Brian Kemp both declared a state of emergency for certain counties in their state.

About 4 million people were also placed under tornado watches across the Florida Panhandle and North Carolina. An additional 17 million people in the South were also placed under wind advisories.

At about 10:00 p.m. local time on Thursday, Georgia had 58,646 customers without power and Alabama had 30,664 customers without power, according to [PowerOutage.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.

Trump Organization Fined \$1.6Mln for Tax Fraud – Reports

WASHINGTON, January 13 (Sputnik) – A New York court sentenced the Trump Organization to the maximum possible fine of \$1.6 million on Friday for a long-running tax fraud scheme, NBC reported.

The scheme "awarded high-level executives with lavish perks and compensation while intentionally concealing the benefits from the taxing authorities to avoid paying taxes," Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg said after the verdict, as quoted by NBC. The subsidiaries Trump Corp. and Trump Payroll Corp. were convicted on all charges last month for a tax fraud scheme spanning 15 years. These included 17 counts, including for criminal tax fraud, conspiracy, and falsification of business records. The only person charged was former CEO Allen Weisselberg, who pleaded guilty and became the prosecution's top witness. He was sentenced earlier this week to five months in jail.

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 Mission to UN Says Lack of Trust Biggest Issue Between Russia, West

UNITED NATIONS, January 13 (Sputnik) - The lack of trust is the major hurdle in relationship between Russia and the West, Russian deputy envoy to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy told LBC.

"Relations between Russia and the West are very troubled now, if there are any relations at all. And, of course, there is a big lack of trust, which is the biggest problem," Polyanskiy said in an interview late on Thursday.

The diplomat said he does not understand how Russia can trust the West, particularly in light of recent revelations by former German Chancellor Angela Merkel and former French President Francois Hollande about using the Minsk agreements to buy time to rearm Ukraine.

"This is absolutely breaking any trust. It is very difficult to understand how we can sit and negotiate with this kind of leaders. If you add on top of this, everything that had been said to us about the non-enlargement of NATO in the 90s and later. Of course, all this creates a very big bubble of lies that we face when we negotiate with the West," Polyanskiy said.

According to Polyanskiy, much of the negotiation process between Russia and the West needs to be reworked.

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 Treasury Chief Heads to Africa to Discuss Economy, Food Security

WASHINGTON, January 13 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen will visit Senegal, Zambia, and South Africa from January 17-28 to discuss economy and food security, the Treasury Department said on Friday.

"While in Africa, Secretary Yellen will highlight the Biden-Harris Administration's work to deepen US-Africa economic ties, including by expanding trade and investment flows and promoting sustainable and inclusive economic growth," a statement released by the department said.

The trip follows the US-Africa Leaders Summit held last month in Washington, where President Joe Biden announced over \$15 billion in two-way trade and investment commitments, deals, and partnerships, the department noted.

During her travel, Yellen will raise food security issues and "underscore the spillover effects" of Russia's special military operation, which the United States says "have disproportionately hurt developing countries in Africa and globally."

"The Secretary will note the steps the US has taken to boost food security, including through over \$13.5 billion in assistance, a call for international financial institutions to develop and implement an Action Plan to Address Food Insecurity and new support to the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program," the statement said.

Yellen also plans to discuss the implementation of the US-Africa Strategic Partnership on Food Security launched at the African Leaders Summit, it added.

In each country during the travel Yellen will meet with senior government officials and business leaders.

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.

Seven People Killed in Storms in Alabama, Georgia - Governors

WASHINGTON, January 13 (Sputnik) – Seven people are dead in Alabama and Georgia after severe storms ripped through the US southeast, governors said.

"I am sad to have learned that six Alabamians were lost to the storms that ravaged across our state. My prayers are with their loved ones and communities," Alabama Governor Kay Ivey said in a tweet late on Thursday.

In Georgia, a six-year-old child was killed in a car when a tree fell on it. Her mother was taken to the hospital but has since been released, media reported.

Governor Brian Kemp expressed his condolences over the tragedy.

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.

Delta CEO Says FAA Computer Outage Not Agency's Fault

WASHINGTON, January 13 (Sputnik) – Delta CEO Ed Bastian said Friday that the outage of the Federal Aviation Administration's computer system that led to a temporary suspension of flight departures in the United States earlier this week was not the agency's fault.

"This is not the FAA's fault...I lay this on the fact that we are not giving them the resources, the funding, the staffing, the tools, the technology that they need to modernize the technology system," Bastian told CNBC in an interview. "We need to fortify it, we need to build resiliency, and we need to modernize it for efficiency's sake."

Bastian added that he hoped the incident would be "the call to our political leaders in Washington that we need to do better."

The FAA said on Thursday that the computer outage appeared to have been caused by a data file that was damaged due to a procedural error. More than 11,000 flights were delayed or cancelled on Wednesday as a result of the overnight outage.

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.

RPT - US Committed to Continue Work on Whelan's Release From Russia - Ex-Envoy Richardson

WASHINGTON, January 13 (Sputnik) - The United States is committed to continue to work to negotiate the release of US citizen Paul Whelan from Russia, former US Ambassador Bill Richardson's office told Sputnik.

The office confirmed that Richardson helped negotiate the release of US Navy veteran Taylor Dudley from Russian custody. Dudley was released earlier on Thursday.

"We remain very concerned for Paul Whelan and committed to continue to work on his safe return, as we have been for the last four years, as well as other Americans," Richardson said in a statement his office provided to Sputnik.

The Russian authorities arrested Paul Whelan in December 2018 and a Moscow court sentenced him to 16 years in prison on charges of espionage. Whelan, who is also a citizen of Canada, Ireland and the United Kingdom, has maintained that he is innocent and insisted that he arrived in Russia for a friend's wedding.

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.

RPT - Ex-CIA Officer Questions if Special Counsel Probe of Biden Docs a 'Real Inquiry'

WASHINGTON, January 13 (Sputnik) - The impact of the newly-launched special counsel probe of President Joe Biden's mishandling of classified documents will depend on whether the investigation is a real inquiry or a mechanism for covering up any potential wrongdoing, former CIA officer Phil Giraldi told Sputnik.

Earlier in the day, US Attorney General Merrick Garland named Robert Hur as special counsel to investigate Biden's mishandling of classified government documents. The records, which stem from Biden's tenure as vice president, were found in his private office at a Washington-based think tank and his home in Delaware.

Biden's lawyers earlier this week said they found a set of documents at the Penn Biden Center, which sparked a more exhaustive search. On Thursday, Biden himself confirmed that his lawyers uncovered more classified documents in file cabinets in his personal library.

"[The impact] depends on whether it is a true investigation or just a mechanism for delaying any real inquiry and covering up any possible malfeasance," Giraldi said when asked how the developments might affect Biden politically.

In addition, Giraldi asked how anyone could trust Garland, a Biden appointee who is also in charge of a probe into classified documents uncovered at former President Donald Trump's Florida estate.

Biden, he added, is unlikely to face any serious consequences because the press will eventually ignore the story.

"The mainstream media is already describing the revelation as not comparable to the Trump problem with documents," Giraldi said. "The story itself will soon disappear from sight."

The former US intelligence official also speculated as to why Biden absconded with the highly sensitive files in the first place.

"Presumably Biden was accumulating documents to enable him to write a memoir autobiography of some sort," he added. "Pathetic."

Hur was a top aide to then-deputy attorney general Rod Rosenstein, who oversaw the appointment of special counsel Robert Mueller during the Russia probe. He was appointed by Trump to serve as US Attorney for the District of Maryland from 2018-2021.

Congressman Paul Gosar earlier on Thursday told Sputnik Republican lawmakers will investigate the incidents and blasted Democrats for seeming to "care less" about Biden stealing secret government records. Gosar also said that negligently retaining classified documents is a felony punishable up to 10 years in prison.

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.

RPT - Republicans Will Probe Biden Mishandling of Classified Records, Serious Felony - Lawmaker

WASHINGTON, January 13 (Sputnik) - Republican lawmakers in Congress will investigate President Joe Biden's mishandling of classified government records after serving as vice president considering it is a serious felony, Republican Congressman Paul Gosar told Sputnik. Biden's lawyers found a second batch of classified documents from his vice presidency at a new location, a day after the president said he was "surprised" when briefed about the first set of records discovered in his private office in Washington.

"Joe Biden stole classified documents and secretly hid them in his office while he was Vice President yet suddenly democrats could care less. Negligently retaining classified documents is a felony punishable up to 10 years in prison. Republicans in congress will investigate and see to it that Biden answers for his crimes," Gosar said in a statement.

On Thursday, US Attorney General Merrick Garland named Robert Hur as special counsel to investigate Biden's mishandling of classified government documents.

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.

RPT: ANALYSIS - Radicals' Agenda in New US Congress Unlikely to Survive Establishment 'Collusion'

WASHINGTON, January 13 (Sputnik) - The Wall Street-bought establishment in both parties will likely kill some of the boldest proposals pushed by the Republicans' ultraconservative wing, including antiwar policies left-wing progressives should get behind, political analysts told Sputnik.

The Freedom Caucus, a right-wing faction in the House, might have outsized leverage in the new Congress as the result of a secret pact struck with Speaker Kevin McCarthy that allowed the Republican leader to seize the House gavel after an exhausting four-day inner-party struggle.

The small group's reform ideas include cutting defense spending and reining in the power of government, while making the lower chamber more transparent.

Earlier this week, House Republican leaders named new heads to run the Foreign Affairs, Judiciary and Homeland Security panels, among others. The new chairs are expected to launch probes into Hunter Biden's business dealings and the Democrats' "weaponization" of federal government.

The latter, which was pushed by the Freedom Caucus, will be closely modeled after the 1970s Church Committee which looked into CIA abuses.

ESTABLISHMENT WALL

Independent journalist and political commentator Sam Hussein suggested the new generation of politicians who questioned establishment orthodoxies could start tackling genuine problems. "We could see some ruptures in the traditional Democrat versus Republican narrative: You could see anti-establishment candidates from each party allying against their respective establishments," he said.

Some of the concessions McCarthy caved into were things progressives should get behind including the new Church Committee to investigate government wrongdoing.

However, he cautioned, new Democratic leadership in the House that succeeded Speaker Nancy Pelosi, looked certain to cooperate in all efforts to block reform.

Democratic Party Minority leader Hakeem Jeffries, for example, like many Republican leaders, is also in the pocket of powerful interest groups, Hussein said.

"Such establishment collusion will be facilitated by the ascension of Hakeem Jeffries - a creature of Wall Street and AIPAC [the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee]," Hussein said.

Besides, unlike the Freedom Caucus, the Democratic Party's progressive wing failed to make demands of Pelosi when she was soliciting votes to become Speaker in the last Congress.

"They didn't do that claiming it wouldn't work. Well, it worked fine for the Republicans," he said. Professor Emeritus of Political Science at California State University Beau Grosscup said the Democrats, under the control of "Wall Street" Democratic National Committee loyalists, want the party to remain a "Lincoln-Neo Conservative lite."

In addition, long-standing rivalries between the two parties were likely to contribute to continuing political stalemate, Grosscup advised. Not to mention, rather than cooperate, the Democrats are more likely to exploit divisions within the Republican Party given the latter's slim majority.

"As long as the Democrats stay united... there is a stalemate in the House," Grosscup said.

Meanwhile, some are even skeptical that McCarthy himself will try to enact the details of the deal that won him the speakership.

Political commentator and former Hedge Fund manager Charles Ortel doubts McCarthy will help the radicals given he was not helpful to former President Donald Trump.

"McCarthy is a career politician who, under Speaker Paul Ryan, was not helpful to President Trump during 2017 and 2018, when it seems that RINOS and fellow Swamp Democrats attempted to hobble the Trump Administration many ways, including appointing and funding Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller on specious grounds," Ortel said.

Moreover, the new speaker will have a tough time in championing corruption probes.

"There are unanswered questions concerning the financial position and personal life of Speaker McCarthy which likely will weaken his ability to tackle endemic corruption in Washington, DC," Ortel added.

DEMS' CORE AGENDA UNDER ATTACK

The Republican rebels overall still face an uphill battle given their party's majority in the House is slim while the Senate remains under Democratic control.

However, US constitutional historian and political commentator Dan Lazare still thinks some of the Freedom Caucus' demands will put a ton of pressure on the Democratic Party and the Biden administration's core agenda, including social spending.

"The Freedom Caucus will demand big concessions in return. And when I say 'big,' I mean big as in Social Security or Medicare big," Lazare said. "The ultra-right wants to cut both, and it thinks it may finally have the opportunity."

The right-wing Republican proposals will also make it difficult to lift the ceiling on America's \$31-trillion federal debt, Lazare added.

Such extreme demands from Republicans controlling the House could present a huge dilemma for the president, Lazare predicted.

"It will present the White House with a Hobson's choice: either default on US bonds or default on a social contract going back to FDR and the New Deal," Lazare 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.

RPT: PREVIEW - Japan's Kishida Looks to Invigorate Security Alliance During Meeting With Biden

WASHINGTON, January 13 (Sputnik) - Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will end his week-long Group of Seven (G7) tour in Washington, where he will meet with US President Joe Biden to discuss the further strengthening of the military alliance between the two countries. Kishida, who took office in October, has been on the G7 tour since Monday and has already visited France, Italy, Canada and the United Kingdom in a bid to strengthen relations with the G7 countries.

The Biden-Kishida summit on Friday will be the final one in a series of high-level meetings between top Japanese and US officials this week that focused mainly on security-related issues. During a 2+2 ministerial meeting on Wednesday, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi and Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada met with their US counterparts, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, and agreed that attacks from or within space against either country could lead to the invocation of Article 5 of their bilateral treaty.

The officials also agreed that the United States will optimize its force posture in Japan by stationing more "versatile and resilient capabilities" there, while Washington will closely coordinate with Tokyo for the latter to employ a counter-strike capability and enhance security in the region.

On Thursday, Austin and Hamada signed new arrangements to enhance the opportunities for Japan and the United States to cooperate in the field of advanced technologies.

According to the White House, Kishida will arrive in Washington after consulting closely with the Biden administration and regional partners on the release of Japan's new national security strategy, including a commitment to boosting Tokyo's defense spending on 2% of GDP and to investing more in new defense capabilities.

The United States welcomes Japan's new strategy and its willingness to spend more on defense and security, the White House said.

As part of Japan's new strategy, Tokyo plans to buy hundreds of US-made Tomahawk missiles capable of reaching potential targets in China, several media outlets reported in recent weeks, citing officials in both governments.

Kishida and Biden will likely also discuss the introduction of semiconductor export controls with respect to China after the United States curbed its hi-tech exports to its primary rival in 2022, according to media reports.

Also, NASA Administrator Bill Nelson and Deputy Administrator Pam Melroy will welcome Kishida to the NASA Headquarters in Washington at 4:30 p.m. EST (21:30 GMT) on Friday. In addition, Blinken and Hayashi are expected to sign an agreement that "will build on the nation's commitment to the peaceful, transparent exploration of space," NASA said.

Finally, Kishida and Biden will discuss North Korea's weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs and Russia's ongoing special military operation in Ukraine, according to the White House.

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-CIA Officer Questions if Special Counsel Probe of Biden Docs a 'Real Inquiry'

WASHINGTON, January 13 (Sputnik) - The impact of the newly-launched special counsel probe of President Joe Biden's mishandling of classified documents will depend on whether the investigation is a real inquiry or a mechanism for covering up any potential wrongdoing, former CIA officer Phil Giraldi told Sputnik.

Earlier in the day, US Attorney General Merrick Garland named Robert Hur as special counsel to investigate Biden's mishandling of classified government documents. The records, which stem from Biden's tenure as vice president, were found in his private office at a Washington-based think tank and his home in Delaware.

Biden's lawyers earlier this week said they found a set of documents at the Penn Biden Center, which sparked a more exhaustive search. On Thursday, Biden himself confirmed that his lawyers uncovered more classified documents in file cabinets in his personal library.

"[The impact] depends on whether it is a true investigation or just a mechanism for delaying any real inquiry and covering up any possible malfeasance," Giraldi said when asked how the developments might affect Biden politically.

In addition, Giraldi asked how anyone could trust Garland, a Biden appointee who is also in charge of a probe into classified documents uncovered at former President Donald Trump's Florida estate.

Biden, he added, is unlikely to face any serious consequences because the press will eventually ignore the story.

"The mainstream media is already describing the revelation as not comparable to the Trump problem with documents," Giraldi said. "The story itself will soon disappear from sight."

The former US intelligence official also speculated as to why Biden absconded with the highly sensitive files in the first place.

"Presumably Biden was accumulating documents to enable him to write a memoir autobiography of some sort," he added. "Pathetic."

Hur was a top aide to then-deputy attorney general Rod Rosenstein, who oversaw the appointment of special counsel Robert Mueller during the Russia probe. He was appointed by Trump to serve as US Attorney for the District of Maryland from 2018-2021.

Congressman Paul Gosar earlier on Thursday told Sputnik Republican lawmakers will investigate the incidents and blasted Democrats for seeming to "care less" about Biden stealing secret government records. Gosar also said that negligently retaining classified documents is a felony punishable up to 10 years in prison.

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.

Striking New York Nurses Return to Work After Reaching Tentative Deal - Reports

Washington, January 13 (Sputnik) - The union representing more than 7,000 nurses who work at Montefiore Bronx and Mount Sinai - two of the largest hospitals in New York - reached a tentative agreement to end their three-day strike, ABC News reported.

The New York State Nurses Association union reached tentative deals with the Mount Sinai Health System and Montefiore Health System, which operate the hospitals, the report said on Thursday.

The nurses emphasized that immense staffing shortages have caused widespread burnout, hindering their ability to properly care for their patients, the report said.

The nurses also pointed out that they were dealing with a toxic work environment and burnout and had to do something to alleviate the crushing conditions, the report also said. Union leaders said the deal will provide enforceable "safe staffing ratios" for all inpatient units at Mount Sinai and Montefiore so that there will always be enough nurses at the bedside to provide safe patient care, not just on paper, the report added. Moreover, the Montefiore hospital administrators agreed to settle financial penalties they had not paid for not complying with previously agreed-upon staffing levels in all hospital units, according to 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.

ANALYSIS - Radicals' Agenda in New US Congress Unlikely to Survive Establishment 'Collusion'

WASHINGTON, January 13 (Sputnik) - The Wall Street-bought establishment in both parties will likely kill some of the boldest proposals pushed by the Republicans' ultraconservative wing, including antiwar policies left-wing progressives should get behind, political analysts told Sputnik.

The Freedom Caucus, a right-wing faction in the House, might have outsized leverage in the new Congress as the result of a secret pact struck with Speaker Kevin McCarthy that allowed the Republican leader to seize the House gavel after an exhausting four-day inner-party struggle.

The small group's reform ideas include cutting defense spending and reining in the power of government, while making the lower chamber more transparent.

Earlier this week, House Republican leaders named new heads to run the Foreign Affairs, Judiciary and Homeland Security panels, among others. The new chairs are expected to launch probes into Hunter Biden's business dealings and the Democrats' "weaponization" of federal government.

The latter, which was pushed by the Freedom Caucus, will be closely modeled after the 1970s Church Committee which looked into CIA abuses.

ESTABLISHMENT WALL

Independent journalist and political commentator Sam Hussein suggested the new generation of politicians who questioned establishment orthodoxies could start tackling genuine problems. "We could see some ruptures in the traditional Democrat versus Republican narrative: You could see anti-establishment candidates from each party allying against their respective establishments," he said.

Some of the concessions McCarthy caved into were things progressives should get behind including the new Church Committee to investigate government wrongdoing.

However, he cautioned, new Democratic leadership in the House that succeeded Speaker Nancy Pelosi, looked certain to cooperate in all efforts to block reform.

Democratic Party Minority leader Hakeem Jeffries, for example, like many Republican leaders, is also in the pocket of powerful interest groups, Hussein said.

"Such establishment collusion will be facilitated by the ascension of Hakeem Jeffries - a creature of Wall Street and AIPAC [the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee]," Hussein said.

Besides, unlike the Freedom Caucus, the Democratic Party's progressive wing failed to make demands of Pelosi when she was soliciting votes to become Speaker in the last Congress.

"They didn't do that claiming it wouldn't work. Well, it worked fine for the Republicans," he said. Professor Emeritus of Political Science at California State University Beau Grosscup said the Democrats, under the control of "Wall Street" Democratic National Committee loyalists, want the party to remain a "Lincoln-Neo Conservative lite."

In addition, long-standing rivalries between the two parties were likely to contribute to continuing political stalemate, Grosscup advised. Not to mention, rather than cooperate, the Democrats are more likely to exploit divisions within the Republican Party given the latter's slim majority.

"As long as the Democrats stay united... there is a stalemate in the House," Grosscup said. Meanwhile, some are even skeptical that McCarthy himself will try to enact the details of the deal that won him the speakership.

Political commentator and former Hedge Fund manager Charles Ortel doubts McCarthy will help the radicals given he was not helpful to former President Donald Trump.

"McCarthy is a career politician who, under Speaker Paul Ryan, was not helpful to President Trump during 2017 and 2018, when it seems that RINOS and fellow Swamp Democrats attempted to hobble the Trump Administration many ways, including appointing and funding Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller on specious grounds," Ortel said.

Moreover, the new speaker will have a tough time in championing corruption probes.

"There are unanswered questions concerning the financial position and personal life of Speaker McCarthy which likely will weaken his ability to tackle endemic corruption in Washington, DC," Ortel added.

DEMS' CORE AGENDA UNDER ATTACK

The Republican rebels overall still face an uphill battle given their party's majority in the House is slim while the Senate remains under Democratic control.

However, US constitutional historian and political commentator Dan Lazare still thinks some of the Freedom Caucus' demands will put a ton of pressure on the Democratic Party and the Biden administration's core agenda, including social spending.

"The Freedom Caucus will demand big concessions in return. And when I say 'big,' I mean big as in Social Security or Medicare big," Lazare said. "The ultra-right wants to cut both, and it thinks it may finally have the opportunity."

The right-wing Republican proposals will also make it difficult to lift the ceiling on America's \$31-trillion federal debt, Lazare added.

Such extreme demands from Republicans controlling the House could present a huge dilemma for the president, Lazare predicted.

"It will present the White House with a Hobson's choice: either default on US bonds or default on a social contract going back to FDR and the New Deal," Lazare added. "It ain't gonna be pretty."

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.

PREVIEW - Japan's Kishida Looks to Invigorate Security Alliance During Meeting With Biden

WASHINGTON, January 13 (Sputnik) - Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will end his week-long Group of Seven (G7) tour in Washington, where he will meet with US President Joe Biden to discuss the further strengthening of the military alliance between the two countries. Kishida, who took office in October, has been on the G7 tour since Monday and has already visited France, Italy, Canada and the United Kingdom in a bid to strengthen relations with the G7 countries.

The Biden-Kishida summit on Friday will be the final one in a series of high-level meetings between top Japanese and US officials this week that focused mainly on security-related issues. During a 2+2 ministerial meeting on Wednesday, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi and Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada met with their US counterparts, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, and agreed that attacks from or within space against either country could lead to the invocation of Article 5 of their bilateral treaty.

The officials also agreed that the United States will optimize its force posture in Japan by stationing more "versatile and resilient capabilities" there, while Washington will closely coordinate with Tokyo for the latter to employ a counter-strike capability and enhance security in the region.

On Thursday, Austin and Hamada signed new arrangements to enhance the opportunities for Japan and the United States to cooperate in the field of advanced technologies.

According to the White House, Kishida will arrive in Washington after consulting closely with the Biden administration and regional partners on the release of Japan's new national security strategy, including a commitment to boosting Tokyo's defense spending on 2% of GDP and to investing more in new defense capabilities.

The United States welcomes Japan's new strategy and its willingness to spend more on defense and security, the White House said.

As part of Japan's new strategy, Tokyo plans to buy hundreds of US-made Tomahawk missiles capable of reaching potential targets in China, several media outlets reported in recent weeks, citing officials in both governments.

Kishida and Biden will likely also discuss the introduction of semiconductor export controls with respect to China after the United States curbed its hi-tech exports to its primary rival in 2022, according to media reports.

Also, NASA Administrator Bill Nelson and Deputy Administrator Pam Melroy will welcome Kishida to the NASA Headquarters in Washington at 4:30 p.m. EST (21:30 GMT) on Friday. In addition, Blinken and Hayashi are expected to sign an agreement that "will build on the nation's commitment to the peaceful, transparent exploration of space," NASA said.

Finally, Kishida and Biden will discuss North Korea's weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs and Russia's ongoing special military operation in Ukraine, according to the White House.

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.

Trudeau Says Canada Will Help Probe Findings of Child's Remains Near Former Indian School

WASHINGTON, January 13 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said the federal government will help a Native American tribe investigate the discovery of a child's remains near a former Indian residential school in Saskatchewan.

"I'd like to acknowledge Star Blanket Cree Nation and the difficult news today related to potential unmarked graves near the former Lebret Indian residential school in Saskatchewan," Trudeau said during a press conference on Thursday. "This work is only just beginning. Of course the federal government will be there to support you every step of the way."

Earlier on Thursday, Canadian media reported that a fragment of a child's jaw bone - estimated to be 125-years-old - was found at the site of the former Lebret Indian Industrial School, which opened in 1884 and closed in 1998.

Star Blanket Nation said they ran tests of the grounds at the school that suggested it is possible there may be more unmarked graves on the site.

The tribe used ground penetrating radar to identify possible grave sites, but it has to run tests of any items it finds in the soil before it can conclude that an unmarked grave has been discovered, the report 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.

Japan Undecided on Imposing Price Cap on Russian Petroleum Products - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, January 13 (Sputnik) - Japan has not determined its stance regarding the newly discussed price gap on Russian oil products, the Japanese Foreign Ministry Deputy Press Secretary Okano Yukiko said.

US media reported on Wednesday that the United States and its allies are preparing to impose new sanctions on the Russian oil industry, specifically on petroleum products.

"We have not decided on our position yet, so we cannot comment on that," Yukiko said during a press briefing on Thursday.

Yukiko noted that Japan has so far coordinated its stance with the Group of Seven (G7) advanced industrial countries.

The deputy press secretary pointed out that since Japan is slated to assume the G7 presidency this year, "we will coordinate among ourselves" how to respond to Russia's special military operation in Ukraine.

The countries of the so-called collective West have sought ways to limit Russia's income from oil and gas exports, as well as reduce their dependence on Russian energy products after Moscow launched the special military operation in Ukraine on February 24. The European

Union imposed last month a price cap of \$60 per barrel on Russian crude oil, joined by the G7 countries and Australia.

In late December, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree banning supplies of Russian oil and petroleum products if contracts directly or indirectly provide for a price cap.

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.

Trudeau Says Japanese Delegation Coming to Canada in Spring to Visit Battery, Mining Firms

WASHINGTON, January 13 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said during remarks in Ottawa that a Japanese delegation will visit Canada in the spring to meet with representatives of Canadian battery and mining companies.

"This spring, we're also looking forward to hosting an important business delegation from Japan," Trudeau said on Thursday alongside Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. "They're planning to be meeting with Canadian battery and mining companies and potential partners."

Trudeau emphasized that Canada is a reliable and stable trading partner in these sectors because it has critical and valuable resources, including a skilled and educated workforce.

Kishida said that Japan wants to develop a close relationship with Canada in the field of energy, including securing supplies of liquefied natural gas.

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. Declines Comment on Russia Releasing US Citizen Due to Privacy Considerations

WASHINGTON, January 13 (Sputnik) - The State Department said Thursday it is aware of reports of Russia releasing a US citizen from custody, but declined to comment further due to privacy considerations.

"We are aware of reports that a US citizen was deported after having been in Russian custody. I am not in the position to discuss the particulars of this case due to privacy considerations," spokesperson Ned Price told a briefing.

Earlier in the day, former US Ambassador to the United Nations Bill Richardson's office confirmed to Sputnik that Russia has released US Navy veteran Taylor Dudley from custody. Dudley, 35, was reportedly detained by the Russian border patrol police in April 2022 after crossing from Poland into Kaliningrad, a Russian exclave region bordering Poland and Lithuania. The release took place following months of negotiations facilitated by Richardson.

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, January 13 (Sputnik) -

CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS FOUND AT BIDEN'S HOME

- * US President Joe Biden confirmed on Thursday that his lawyers found a "small number" of classified documents at his home and personal library in Wilmington, Delaware.
- * US President Joe Biden-related think tank in Washington was not authorized to store classified documents pertaining to the period when Biden was vice president of the United States, US Attorney General Merrick Garland said.
- * Republican lawmakers in Congress will investigate Biden's mishandling of classified government records after he served as US vice president, and consider his actions to be a serious felony, Congressman Paul Gosar told Sputnik.
- * Congress should investigate Biden's alleged mishandling of sensitive materials following the discovery of classified documents at two separate locations, US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said.
- * A US President Joe Biden-related think tank in Washington was not authorized to store classified documents pertaining to the period when Biden was vice president of the United States, US Attorney General Merrick Garland said.

US PRISONERS IN RUSSIA

- * The United States is committed to continue to work to negotiate the release of US citizen Paul Whelan from Russia, former US Ambassador Bill Richardson's office told Sputnik on Thursday.
- * Russia released US Navy veteran Taylor Dudley after he spent nearly a year in detention, CNN reported.
- * Richardson confirms that he helped negotiate the release of Dudley from Russian custody, his spokesperson told Sputnik.

TURKEY-SYRIA-RUSSIA TALKS

- * The meeting of Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad is being prepared, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Thursday.
- * The meeting of the foreign ministers of Russia, Turkey and Syria may take place in early February, there is no final date yet, Cavusoglu said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

- * The Russian armed forces have done a great deal of work to take control of Soledar, these are selfless and heroic actions, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Thursday.
- * Moscow does not know the details of the death of a United Kingdom citizen in Soledar nor whether there have been any contacts with London, Peskov said.
- * Russian drones and missiles continue to impact the situation in Ukraine and that is why Washington will continue providing Kiev with additional air defense capabilities, US Defense Department spokesperson Pat Ryder said.
- * The issue of creating a safety zone around the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant is expected to be discussed during the visit of the International Atomic Energy Agency Director General

Rafael Grossi to Ukraine next week, Russian Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov said.

* The International Federation of Journalists called on Ukraine to revise a new law that grants the state-appointed broadcasting authority sweeping controls over all types of national media.

* Kiev has transferred part of its troops to the north of Ukraine, redeploying them at the border with Belarus over fears that Russia would try to attack from that direction, Ukrainian Ambassador to the United Kingdom Vadym Prystaiko said.

* UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has only seen press reports of the Ukraine-proposed peace summit to be held on February 24 at the United Nations, but he stands ready to mediate if all parties make such a request, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

RUSSIAN ECONOMY

* Sales of passenger cars and light commercial vehicles (LCV) in Russia will increase by 12% in 2023 to 770,000 units, the Association of European Businesses (AEB) said on Thursday.

* Sales of new passenger cars and LCV in Russia dropped by 58.8% to 678,000 vehicles in 2022 compared to the year before, the AEB 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 Budget Deficit at \$85Bln in December, Down Two-Thirds From November Levels - Treasury

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The US budget deficit was at \$85 billion in December, almost three times lower than in November, the Treasury Department said on Thursday.

While last month's deficit was \$21.3 billion higher from a year ago, it was about a third of the previous month's tally of \$249 billion, the Treasury said in its monthly statement of income and expenses.

The federal income of \$454.9 billion decreased 6.5% from a year before, while expenditures rose 6.3% year-on-year to \$539.9 billion. Despite that development, the deficit shrunk 66% from the November levels.

The US budget deficit has fallen from a record peak during the coronavirus pandemic after the end of the emergency relief payments, but is still high on an annual basis.

The US national debt exceeds \$31 trillion.

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.

White House Says Russia Takeover of Soledar, Bakhmut Won't Have Strategic Impact

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said that if the cities of Bakhmut and Soledar fall to Russia in the Ukraine crisis, it will not have a strategic impact in the conflict.

"Even if both Bakhmut and Soledar fall to the Russians... it's not going to have a strategic impact on the war itself," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Kirby said the United States has not been able to confirm for itself whether Soledar fell to Russian forces.

On Wednesday, the Russian Defense Ministry said the Russian airborne units had blocked the northern and southern parts of Soledar. Later in the day, the head of the Wagner Group private military company, Yevgeny Prigozhin, said the city had come under the full control of the Russian forces.

The capture of Soledar has opened the way to the bridgehead of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk, which can become a turning point in wresting control over the entire territory of DPR from Ukraine, according to DPR acting head Denis Pushilin.

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.

Pentagon Says Responsive to US Congress' Oversight of Ukraine Aid

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department has been responsive to requests by Congress to conduct oversight of US aid to Ukraine, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"We've been very public in terms of the steps that we've taken, working closely with the State Department and Ukraine, in terms of monitoring the equipment that we've provided to them, as well as being responsive to Congress when it comes to oversight of the capabilities that we've provided," Ryder said during a press briefing.

The Pentagon will continue to work with Congress and looks forward to further bipartisan support for Ukraine, Ryder added.

Republican members of the US House, who won a majority in the chamber following midterm elections, have vowed to audit the billions of dollars in assistance sent to Ukraine.

In December, the State Department Office of Inspector General said that US oversight of military aid to Ukraine is limited by the operational environment, risking fraud and mismanagement of assistance.

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.

Ukraine Deputy Foreign Minister Says Hopes Peace Formula to Be Considered in February

UNITED NATIONS , January 12 (Sputnik) - The discussions of the peace formula on Ukraine are underway and it would be hopefully considered in February, Emine Dzhaparova, Ukrainian First Deputy Foreign Minister, said on Thursday.

The administration of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has been recently finalizing a 10-point "peace formula" initially mentioned at the G20 summit in Bali and will likely present it in late February, reports emerged recently. According to the media, Ukraine is seeking achievements on the battlefield in order to strengthen its bargaining position before talks.

"When it comes to the peace formula, every single country supports the peace formula. I don't see any doubt, any skepticism from the NATO countries... We are discussing the text of the resolution. And we will do so with the group of our partners, we hope to consider it in February. The idea is to enshrine our views in it," she said.

She added that peace formula on Ukraine "is the basis," and vision for Ukraine.

"But it does not mean that we are going to sign this agreement at the cost of our interests. We are open to good offers of negotiations," she said, adding that Turkey is very important in this negotiations.

In December, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said Kiev wants to convene a peace summit in two months with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as mediator. The United Nations had nothing to say regarding the Ukraine-made proposal to convene a peace summit at the UN in New York, according to UN.

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.

Russia May Be Trying to Change Dynamic in Ukraine With New Commander - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Russia may be aiming to change dynamic in Ukraine by reshuffling top military commanders in charge of Russia's special operation in Ukraine, State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters on Thursday.

"Russia May be trying to change [the] dynamic once again with a new commander of Russian forces inside Ukraine but the broader dynamic, the underlying dynamic is not going to change," Price said in a press briefing. "That very dynamic is one in which Ukrainians are fighting for their territory, they are fighting for their country, they are fighting for their democracy, they are fighting for their freedom."

Chief of Russian General Staff Gen. Valery Gerasimov was appointed as the new Commander of the Joint Group of Forces in Ukraine. His predecessor, Gen. Sergei Surovikin, will now serve as Gerasimov's deputy alongside Gen. Oleg Salyukov and Col. Gen. Alexei Kim.

The Russian Defense Ministry attributed the reshuffle to "the expansion in the scale of the tasks to be carried out during the military operation" and the need to enhance coordination between various branches of the Russian armed forces involved in the operation.

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.

Pentagon Says Will Not Drop US Below Defense Readiness Requirements While Arming Ukraine

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The United States will not allow defense stocks to drop below readiness requirements in its effort to supply Ukraine with military equipment, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"We will not go below our readiness requirements as we take into consideration what Ukraine's security assistance needs are," Ryder said during a press briefing.

Monitoring US stockpile levels is difficult amid the billions of dollars in arms being transferred to Ukraine, US Deputy Secretary of Defense for Force Readiness Kimberly Jackson said in December.

Fellow members of the NATO alliance likewise face arms shortages due to their response to the conflict in Ukraine, US NATO Representative Julianne Smith also said last month.

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.

White House on Sending Abram Tanks to Ukraine: Won't Get Ahead of Future Announcements

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has not made any decision yet on whether it will consider sending US Abram tanks to Ukraine to use amid Russia's special military operation, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Thursday.

"I won't get ahead of decisions on security assistance that haven't been made yet," Kirby said during 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.

Vampire System to Become Part of Broader Ukrainian Air-Defense Network - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The so-called Vampire anti-drone system, committed by the United States to Ukraine, will be integrated into the country's broader air-defense network once it is delivered, US Defense Department spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"It [Vampire] is an anti-drone capability, and once provided to Ukraine, that will be integrated into its broader air defense capability, its integrated air defense system, so to speak, as part of that multi-layered defense capability to protect it from aerial attacks to include drones," Ryder said during a press briefing.

The Defense Department promised the delivery of Vampire counter-drone systems to Ukraine in August, but only approved a \$40 million contract for the weapon last month, according to media reports.

Vampire stands for for Vehicle-Agnostic Modular Palletized ISR Rocket Equipment and was designed to target and intercept drones with laser-guided munitions, the report said. The counter-drone system is intended to fit in the back of a standard pickup truck, the report added. The system is meant to address the reported widespread use of drones by Russian forces during the special military operation in Ukraine. Washington and Kiev accuse Moscow of utilizing Iranian Shahed-136 drones in Ukraine. Moscow and Tehran have denied the accusations.

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 Will Have More Details Soon on Cavusoglu's Possible Visit

ASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The State Department will soon have more details on a possible visit by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu to Washington, spokesman Ned Price said on Thursday.

"We will likely have more details on this before too long," Price told a press briefing when asked whether Cavusoglu will visit Washington in the next couple of days. "I would expect they'll [Blinken and Cavusoglu] have an opportunity to see one another before too long in-person." Last week, Cavusoglu said he will visit the United States this month.

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 Welcome Dutch Prime Minister Rutte to White House on January 17 - Kirby

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will host Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte at the White House on January 17 to discuss a range of matters of mutual concern, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Thursday.

"Next week President Biden will welcome Prime Minister Mark Rutte of the Netherlands to the White House on Tuesday the 17th to further deepen the historic ties between our two nations," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Kirby added that the two leaders will discuss shared efforts to strengthen transatlantic security and economic prosperity, support for Ukraine, among other 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.

Blinken, Biden Unaware If State Dept Records Among Classified Docs Found - Spokesman

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Neither Secretary of State Antony Blinken nor President Joe Biden would know whether any State Department records were among the classified documents found at separate locations and pertaining to Biden's vice presidency, State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Thursday.

"Of course, there would not be anything I would know," Price told a press briefing when asked whether any State Department documents could be among the documents recovered. "It is not anything the Secretary would know. As we've heard from the White House it is not something that the President knows."

Price recalled that the matter is being investigated by the Department of Justice.

"Just as the President was, he [Blinken] was surprised to learn that there were any government records taken to that location," Price added.

US Attorney General Merrick Garland said on Thursday that he concluded it is in the public interest to appoint a special counsel to investigate the alleged mishandling of classified government documents from the time Biden was vice president of the United States.

Garland added that the special counsel will look into whether any person or entity violated federal law in connection to Biden's classified documents incident.

It came after classified documents were found at Biden's former private office at the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement think tank. A second batch of classified documents was discovered in the garage of the Biden residence in Wilmington, Delaware, while another one-page document was found in an adjacent room.

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 Missiles, Drones Continue to Have Impact in Ukraine – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) – Russian drones and missiles continue to impact the situation in Ukraine and that is why Washington will continue providing Kiev with additional air defense capabilities, US Department of Defense spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

“Clearly, Russian missiles and drones continue to have an impact. And so we will do our part to continue to support them to provide them with additional air defense capabilities,” Ryder said during a press briefing.

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.

Training of Ukrainians on Bradleys to Begin in Germany Next Week– Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) – The training of Ukrainian military personnel on how to operate Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles will begin next week in Germany and will last rather weeks than months, US Department of Defense spokesperson Pat Ryder said on Thursday.

"So, on the joint maneuver training, combined arms training, Bradleys, it should start next week in Germany," Ryder said during a press briefing. "We anticipate that that training will take weeks, not months, but I'm not going to get into the specific numbers of weeks or months."

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.

Four New York Men Charged With Gun Trafficking Under New Gun Safety Law - DOJ

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) – Four men accused of trafficking guns were charged on Thursday with illegally selling more than 50 firearms in Brooklyn, with this being the first prosecution in New York state under a federal bipartisan gun safety law that went into effect in June 2022, law enforcement officials said on Wednesday.

Along with enhancing background checks for firearms buyers under 21-years old and restricting firearm ownership by convicted domestic abusers, the legislation creates a standalone firearm trafficking conspiracy offense. Such crimes are punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

"As alleged, the defendants are responsible for attempting to flood the streets of Brooklyn with over 50 deadly weapons, including ghost guns, as well as narcotics, feeding the cycles of gun violence and drug abuse," Breon Peace, US Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, was quoted by the Department of Justice as saying.

He stressed that it is "the first prosecution utilizing new federal legislation in New York, and one of the first in the country."

Law enforcement officials returned a seven-count indictment against Raymond Minaya, 26, Calvin Tabron, 25, David Mccann and Tajhai Jones, both 28, with conspiring to illegally traffic more than 50 firearms. Mccann and Minaya are also charged with conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute cocaine base. Mccann faces another charge of conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute fentanyl.

The men face up to 15 years in prison.

Prosecutors say the men made a number of illegal firearm buys between January 2022 and August 2022 from an NYPD undercover cop who the men thought was a drug dealer. The purchases took place during the day from vehicles in and near housing projects in Brooklyn. Two men are said to have gotten the firearms in Virginia and then transported them to New York and sold them in Brooklyn, the Department of Justice said.

Some of the firearms had serial numbers rubbed out and some were made from ghost gun kits.

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.

Snowden Says He Handled Classified Info More Securely Than Biden

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Former NSA contractor Edward Snowden said Thursday he handled classified documents more responsibly than the US president after Joe Biden confirmed a portion of sensitive materials was found at his garage.

"Wow, even I handled classified documents more securely. At least I kept them encrypted," Snowden wrote on Twitter.

On Thursday, US Attorney General Merrick Garland appointed a special counsel to investigate Biden's handling of classified documents pertaining to the period when he was vice president of the United States.

It came after classified documents were found at Biden's former private office at the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement think tank. On Thursday, Richard Sauber, special counsel to the president, said a second batch of classified documents was discovered in the garage of the Biden residence in Wilmington, Delaware, while another one-page document was found in an adjacent room.

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.

White House Says Biden's Classified Docs 'Inadvertently Misplaced,' Review Will Prove It

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The White House is confident the Justice Department's review of President Joe Biden's mishandling of classified government documents from his vice presidency will show that they were inadvertently misplaced, Special Counsel to the President Richard Sauber said on Thursday.

"We are confident that a thorough review will show that these documents were inadvertently misplaced, and the President and his lawyers acted promptly upon discovery of this mistake," Sauber said in a statement.

The White House has cooperated closely with the Justice Department throughout its review, and it will continue that cooperation with the Special Counsel appointed by US Attorney General Merrick Garland to investigate the matter, Sauber 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.

West 'Real Source' of Ukraine Crisis, Its Narrative Against Russia Hypocritical - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, January 12 (Sputnik) - The collective West is the real source behind the crisis in Ukraine and its narrative blaming Russia for creating threats to international peace is hypocritical because it ignores the West's egregious violations of international law, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vasily Nebenzia said on Thursday.

"International law was repeatedly floated and harmed, well before that, and not by Russia. Let us take some of these examples, the real source of the Ukraine crisis, the hypocrisy of the West

and its absolute unwillingness to address the other's interests," Nebenzia said during an UN Security Council open debate on the rule of law.

The collective West has been pushing the narrative that Russia is responsible for threats to international peace and security while ignoring its own egregious violations of international law, Nebenzia said.

The Russian ambassador pointed out that the current crisis goes back to the United States' desire to play the role of a global policeman, which Washington unilaterally took upon itself. Russia believes that international law was dealt a "fatal blow" when European countries trampled on the guarantees made to the democratically-elected Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, who was stripped of his post in violation of the then constitution, he said.

Nebenzia also listed various instances where the collective West failed to uphold international law and was never held accountable for violating the rule of law such as in Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya and Ukraine.

"If Washington or its allies need to invade somewhere or bomb somewhere, It suffices to declare that there are terrorists there," Nebenzia 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.

Global Temperatures in 2022 'Fifth Warmest on Record' Since 1880 - NASA

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Global surface temperatures in 2022 made it the fifth warmest on record, NASA announced in a press conference and an official press release on Thursday.

"Earth's average surface temperature in 2022 tied with 2015 as the fifth warmest on record, according to an analysis by NASA," the release said.

NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said the 2022 data revealed an "alarming" trend that urgently needed to be addressed with more energetic curbing of greenhouse gas emissions around the world.

"This warming trend is alarming. Our warming climate is already making a mark: Forest fires are intensifying; hurricanes are getting stronger; droughts are wreaking havoc and sea levels are rising," Nelson said.

The nine-year period from 2014 through 2022 has been the warmest era since modern climatic figures were first taken in 1880, NASA said. Earth in 2022 was 2 degrees Fahrenheit or 1.11 degrees Celsius warmer than the late 19th century average, NASA 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.

Pentagon Releases Annual UFO Report, Says Cataloged More Than 500 Accounts of Encounters

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US officials tasked with studying unidentified aerial phenomena (UAP, also known as UFO) have cataloged more than 500 instances of UAP encounters, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) said in its annual UAP report on Thursday.

"In addition to the 144 UAP reports covered during the 17 years of UAP reporting included in the ODNI preliminary assessment, there have been 247 new reports and another 119 that were either since discovered or reported after the preliminary assessment's time period. This totals 510 UAP reports as of 30 August 2022," the report said.

The Director of National Intelligence is required by law to provide Congress with an annual UAP report.

UAP reporting is increasing, partially due to a better understanding of the possible threats UAP may represent, ODNI said. UAP events continue to occur in restricted or sensitive airspace, highlighting possible concerns about flight safety or adversary collection activity, ODNI added.

"The safety of our service personnel, our bases and installations, and the protection of US operations security on land, in the skies, seas, and space are paramount. We take reports of incursions into our designated space, land, sea, or airspaces seriously and examine each one," Defense Department Press Secretary Pat Ryder said in a statement on the report.

The Defense Department's UAP efforts are being led by the All-Domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO) in coordination with ODNI and other government agencies. The group is tasked with documenting, analyzing and resolving UAP reports using a rigorous scientific framework and data-driven approach, Ryder said.

AARO's initial analysis of the 366 newly-identified reports judged more than half as exhibiting unremarkable characteristics, including 163 characterized as balloon or balloon-like entities and another 26 as drone-like entities, ODNI said.

The majority of new UAP reporting originates from US Navy and Air Force aviators and operators who witnessed the incidents during the course of their duties, ODNI said. To date, there have been no reported collisions between US aircraft and UAP, although they do pose a collision hazard to air assets, ODNI 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.

Private Office at Penn Biden Center Not Authorized to Store Classified Documents - Garland

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - A US President Joe Biden-related think tank in Washington was not authorized to store classified documents pertaining to the period when Biden was vice president of the United States, US Attorney General Merrick Garland said on Thursday.

"On the evening of November 4, 2022, the National Archives Office of Inspector General, contacted a prosecutor at the Department of Justice. He informed him that the White House had notified the archives that documents bearing classification markings were identified at the office of the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement, located in Washington, DC

That office was not authorized for storage of classified documents," Garland said during 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.

Garland Says Special Counsel Must be Appointed to Probe Biden Mishandling Documents

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US Attorney General Merrick Garland said on Thursday that he concluded it is in the public interest to appoint a special counsel to investigate President Joe Biden's mishandling of classified government documents from the time he was vice president of the United States.

"I concluded that under the Special Counsel regulations, it was in the public interest to appoint a special counsel," Garland said during a press conference.

Garland added that the special counsel will look into whether any person or entity violated federal law in connection to Biden's classified documents incident.

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 Government, Media Peddled Russia Bot Hoax Despite Pushback by Twitter - Twitter Files

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US government officials and media outlets promoted conspiracies about Russian bot activity on Twitter despite pushback and evidence to the contrary from the social media company, reporter Matt Taibbi said on Thursday in the latest release of the so-called Twitter Files.

In January 2018, Twitter users began posting the hashtag "ReleaseTheMemo" in support of the declassification of a memorandum by then-Congressman Devin Nunes, which detailed flaws in the FBI's investigation of alleged collusion between former President Donald Trump and Russia. In response, Democrats denounced the memorandum, claiming it was boosted by Russian "bots" and not an organic social media movement, even after Twitter informed the lawmakers that they found no signs that the movement was affiliated with Russia.

"Twitter warned politicians and media they not only lacked evidence, but had evidence the accounts weren't Russian – and were roundly ignored," Taibbi said. "Execs eventually grew frustrated over what they saw as a circular process – presented with claims of Russian activity, even when denied, led to more claims."

Nevertheless, Twitter went on to follow a pattern of not challenging the claims regarding Russia on the record, Taibbi said. Consequently, a number of US media outlets continued to push the Russian bots narrative despite a lack of evidence, Taibbi added.

The lawmakers contributed to one of the "greatest outbreaks of mass delusion in US history" by spreading the Russian collusion hoax and attempting to discredit Nunes' memorandum, the

congressman said in a statement. The contents of Nunes' memorandum were verified in a December 2019 report by Justice Department Inspector General Michael Horowitz. The Twitter Files are based on internal information and released in coordination with Twitter CEO Elon Musk, who committed to reforming the social media company after acquiring it last year.

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 Home Mortgage Rates Fall Most Since December as Inflation Slows - Freddie Mac Agency

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US home mortgage rates have fallen their most since December amid a continuous tumble in inflation after interest rate hikes imposed by the Federal Reserve, Freddie Mac, the agency overseeing lending for home buyers said on Thursday. The average for a 30-year, fixed loan for a home — the benchmark for mortgages in the United States, had slid to 6.33% from 6.48% a week ago, Freddie Mac said in a statement.

“While mortgage rates have resumed their decline, the market remains hypersensitive to rate movements, with purchase demand experiencing large swings relative to small changes in rates,” Sam Khater, chief economist at Freddie Mac, said in the statement. “Over the last few weeks, latent demand has been on display with buyers jumping in and out of the market as rates move.”

The latest slide in mortgage rates came as the US Consumer Price Index, or CPI, report for December came in at the lows forecast by economists, bolstering expectations that the Federal Reserve will keep to smaller rate hikes this year that would assist home buyers, after last year's aggressive increases that drove many buyers away.

Inflation, as indicated by the CPI, rose by 6.5% in the 12 months to December, the Labor Department said Thursday. It was the slowest annual advance for the CPI since October 2021. The CPI hit a 40-year high in June when it grew at an annual rate of 9.1%, versus the Fed's inflation target of just 2% per annum. In a bid to control surging prices, the central bank added 425 basis points to interest rates since March via seven 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, imposed a more modest 50-basis point increase in December.

New home sales plummeted 11% in September, reversing the large gain in the prior month, as spiraling lending rates choked off prospective buyers.

Until their recent decline, US home prices jumped almost 40% over the past two years. Price hikes and previous rate hikes by the Fed had pushed up the cost of US home ownership to the highest in a generation, putting purchases out of reach for a growing number of prospective buyers, particularly first-timers.

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.

UN Chief Not Invited to Proposed Ukraine Peace Summit But Ready to Mediate if Parties Ask

UNITED NATIONS, January 12 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has only seen press reports of the Ukraine-proposed peace summit to be held on February 24 at the United Nations but he stands ready to mediate if all parties make such a request, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.

"We have just seen these press reports. The Secretary General's position remains unchanged, as in any conflict he is always ready to mediate should the parties involved in the conflict, all the parties involved in the conflict, ask him to do so," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

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.

Several Biden Aides Interviewed By Feds in Classified Records Review - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Several of President Joe Biden's aides from his vice presidency have been interviewed by US federal authorities in connection to the ongoing review of his mishandling of classified government documents, NBC reported on Thursday citing two people familiar with the matter.

The report said those aides who were asked to be interviewed by federal authorities complied immediately.

The report said, according to a source, that the people who boxed up Biden's office at the end of his vice presidency were not aware there was anything in there that should not have left the White House.

One of Biden's former aides who was interviewed by federal authorities is Kathy Chung, who now serves as the deputy director of protocol for US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, the report said.

Earlier on Thursday, US President Joe Biden confirmed that his lawyers found a "small number" of classified documents at his home and personal library in Wilmington, Delaware.

On Monday, US media reported that the President's personal attorneys discovered a first batch of documents, 10 classified documents pertaining to Ukraine, Iran and the United Kingdom at a Biden think-tank office, prompting a federal probe into the matter.

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 Lawmaker Urges Europe to Use Black Sea Resources to Avoid Dependency on Russian Energy

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Europe should decrease its energy dependency on Russia by utilizing and transmitting resources from places like the Black Sea in cooperation with the United States, US Congressman August Pfluger said on Thursday.

"What we really need to be doing is working together, with the United States having the resources and helping supply Western Europe with those resources, with place like the Black Sea, which has a prolific amount of resources that could be piped and transmitted and shipped to Western Europe," Pfluger said during a discussion at the Hudson Institute.

Pfluger noted that Russia is dominating the energy markets in the region and that reality does not help the geopolitical situation.

"What we want to see is the acknowledgment that the dependency that [Russian President Vladimir] Putin created in Western Europe does not help the geopolitical situation," he said.

Pfluger also called on the US government to implement a new energy security strategy.

"I think that is something that the Republican-controlled Congress can, will and should do," he said.

August Pfluger, a Republican, represents Texas' 11th congressional district in the US 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.

Idaho Quadruple Murder Suspect Waives Right to Speedy Hearing, Again Denied Bail - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The suspect charged in connection with the murders of four college students in Moscow, Idaho, waived his right to a speedy preliminary hearing and was again denied bail during a court appearance on Thursday, NewsNation reported.

Bryan Kohberger was charged with four counts of first-degree murder and felony burglary for his alleged role in the stabbing deaths of four University of Idaho students. Authorities arrested Kohberger in Pennsylvania before extraditing him to Idaho.

Kohberger was a criminology graduate student at Washington State University in Pullman, Washington, located just across the border with Idaho.

Kohberger appeared before a Latah County judge and waived his right to a speedy preliminary hearing, which was set for June 26 at 9:00 a.m., the report said. Kohberger made his first court appearance in Idaho earlier this month, during which he was denied bail. The court again declined to set a bail on Thursday, the report added.

Prosecutors charged Kohberger based on DNA evidence recovered from the scene of the crime, as well as digital forensics and a video canvas linking his car and phone to areas near where the murders occurred, a probable cause affidavit unsealed in the case said.

Kohberger is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

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 House Speaker McCarthy Says Had Good Talk With Biden, Wants to Discuss Issues Early

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said on Thursday that he spoke with President Joe Biden over the phone and expressed his desire to work on legislative challenges together early on in the new Congress.

"I had a very good conversation with the president when he called me, and I told him I'd like to sit down with him early and work through these challenges," McCarthy said during a press conference, when asked about government spending and the debt ceiling.

Earlier on Thursday, Biden told reporters that he called to congratulate McCarthy on being elected House speaker. However, Biden added that he is prepared to veto unfavorable legislation passed by House Republicans.

Republicans, led by McCarthy, won a slim majority in the House in the November midterm elections, leading to divided control of the 118th Congress for the second half of Biden's presidential term.

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 Aviation Agency Says All Operations Back to Normal After Suffering Computer Outage

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said on Thursday that all of its operations are back to normal after a computer outage that affected the Notice to Air Missions (NOTAM) occurred this week.

"FAA operations are back to normal, and we are seeing no unusual delays or cancellations this morning," the agency wrote on Twitter.

The grounding of flights across the United States due to a system problem was the result of a damaged database file and there is no evidence of a cyber attack, the FAA said on Wednesday. The FAA said it is working to further pinpoint the cause of the problem and take steps to prevent future disruptions.

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 Congress Should Probe Biden Handling of Sensitive Materials - House Speaker McCarthy

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The US Congress should investigate President Joe Biden's alleged mishandling of sensitive materials following the discovery of classified documents at two separate locations, House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said on Thursday.

"I think Congress has to investigate this," McCarthy said during a press conference. "We don't think there needs to be a special prosecutor, but I think Congress has a role to look."

On Monday, US media reported that the president's personal attorneys discovered 10 classified documents pertaining to Ukraine, Iran and the United Kingdom at a Biden think-tank office, prompting a federal probe into the matter.

Earlier on Thursday, Richard Sauber, special counsel to the President, said that a second trove of classified documents was discovered in storage space in Biden's Wilmington residence garage, while another one-page document was found in an adjacent room.

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries said he believes Biden has handled the situation in a responsible manner.

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 Price Growth Slows to 6.5% in Year to December, Smallest Advance in Over Year

(Updates with more details in paras 6-8)

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US consumer prices rose by 6.5% in the 12 months to December, the Labor Department said on Thursday, announcing the slowest inflationary growth in more than a year and indicating smaller interest rate increases ahead by the Federal Reserve, which hiked rates aggressively last year to curb price pressures.

The Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers, known in short as the CPI, slowed exactly as forecast by economists, after a 7.1% annual growth reported for November.

"This was the smallest 12-month increase since the period ending October 2021," the Labor Department said in a news release.

The CPI hit a 40-year high in June when it grew at an annual rate of 9.1%, versus the Fed's inflation target of just 2% per annum. In a bid to control surging prices, the central bank added 425 basis points to interest rates since March via seven 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, imposed a more modest 50-basis point increase in December.

For its next rate decision on February 1, economists expect the central bank to announce an even smaller hike of 25 basis points.

The Fed funds rate - a tool used to gauge the odds for a certain quantum of rate hike - was at over 80% on Thursday for a 25-basis point rise in February. The dollar, which rises as US interest rates spike and falls as they slow, was at a six-month low versus a basket of six major currencies that included the euro and the yen.

"The Fed funds market is now more confident in 25 bps at 81% for the Feb 1 meeting and the US dollar is now sinking," economist Adam Button said in a post on the ForexLive forum.

The last time the Fed announced a 25 basis-point increase was in March 2022, at the start of its current rate hike cycle.

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-Envoy to Russia Sullivan Recalls Preparing for Toilet Cleaning Amid Fears of Staff Cuts

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - Former US Ambassador to Russia John Sullivan recalled on Thursday that he was preparing himself to clean bathrooms and floors at the United States embassy in Moscow amid fears of staff cuts.

"[W]e weren't sure that we were going to be able to have our locally employed staff come onto the compound. That's when we first started to prepare for what's called all-purpose duty," Sullivan said in an interview with Foreign Policy. "To prepare for that, we all ... were given at least one other responsibility. I thought, as a leader, I ought to pick the crummiest, so I was with a group that was trained to clean the bathrooms and to clean the floors."

Russia and the United States have requested reducing their respective staff at embassies and consulates in a series of tit-for-tat moves that have led to the closure of several missions.

In November, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov told Sputnik that the United States is not taking the steps necessary to improve the work of the embassy in Moscow and the situation in the Russian diplomatic mission in Washington is not getting better.

The US mission in Russia said it no longer offers non-diplomatic visa services due to Moscow's April 23 notification banning the embassy from employing foreign nationals. According to the State Department, Russian nationals may continue applying for non-immigrant visas at any US embassy or consulate where they can obtain an appointment.

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.

Austin Thanked Qatar Defense Minister For US Support, Successful FIFA World Cup - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III in a phone call with Qatar Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defense Affairs Khalid bin Mohammed Al Attiyah, thanked Doha for its support to the United States and for hosting a successful FIFA World Cup, Pentagon Press Secretary Brig Gen Patrick Ryder said in a readout on Thursday.

"Secretary Austin congratulated the State of Qatar for hosting a successful FIFA World Cup and thanked Minister Al Attiyah for Qatar's support to the United States and regional stability and security," Ryder said. "Secretary Austin expressed his appreciation to the Minister for Qatar's continued hosting of U.S. forces at Al Udeid Air Base and reiterated U.S. commitment to the defense partnership."

Qatar was the first country in the Arab world to host the FIFA World Cup, which took place from November 20 to December 18.

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 House Passes Resolution Banning Sales From Strategic Petroleum Reserve to China

(Update: adds details, background in paras 4-7)

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives on Thursday passed a resolution banning the sale of oil from the United States' Strategic Petroleum Reserve to China as the stockpile reaches historic lows.

The House passed the Protecting America's Strategic Petroleum Reserve from China Act along bipartisan lines in a vote of 331-97.

The legislation bans the sale of petroleum products from the reserve to any entity under the ownership, control or influence of the Chinese Communist Party, except on the condition that the products will not be exported to China, according to the bill text.

"Over the past two years, President [Joe] Biden has drained our Strategic Petroleum Reserve to distract from his war on American energy, weakening our economic and national security," House Majority Leader Steve Scalise said in a statement on the bill. "Worse still, the Biden administration sold oil from our strategic reserves to the Chinese Communist Party, which now has the largest government-controlled reserve of oil in the world."

In contrast, the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve is at its lowest level since 1983, Scalise noted. The US cannot allow the Biden administration to bolster China's national security at its own expense, Scalise said.

The US Energy Department has drawn more than 200 million barrels from the strategic reserve since November 2021 by order of Biden in an effort to stabilize energy market supplies and prices.

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 House Passes Resolution Banning Sales From Strategic Petroleum Reserve to China

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives on Thursday passed a resolution banning the sale of oil from the United States' Strategic Petroleum Reserve to China as the stockpile reaches historic lows.

The House passed the Protecting America's Strategic Petroleum Reserve from China Act along bipartisan lines in a vote of 331-97.

The legislation bans the sale of petroleum products from the reserve to any entity under the ownership, control or influence of the Chinese Communist Party, except on the condition that the products will not be exported to China, according to the bill text.

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 Committed to Continue Work on Whelan's Release From Russia - Ex-Envoy Richardson

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - The United States is committed to continue to work to negotiate the release of US citizen Paul Whelan from Russia, former US Ambassador Bill Richardson's office told Sputnik on Thursday.

The office confirmed that Richardson helped negotiate the release of US Navy veteran Taylor Dudley from Russian custody. Dudley was released earlier on Thursday.

"We remain very concerned for Paul Whelan and committed to continue to work on his safe return, as we have been for the last four years, as well as other Americans," Richardson said in a statement his office provided to Sputnik.

The Russian authorities arrested Paul Whelan in December 2018 and a Moscow court sentenced him to 16 years in prison on charges of espionage. Whelan, who is also a citizen of Canada, Ireland and the United Kingdom, has maintained that he is innocent and insisted that he arrived in Russia for a friend's wedding.

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 Confirms Aides Found Classified Documents at His Home, Personal Library

WASHINGTON, January 12 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden confirmed on Thursday that his lawyers found a "small number" of classified documents at his home and personal library in Wilmington, Delaware.

"My lawyers reviewed other places where documents might have been from my time as Vice President were stored and they finished the review last night. They discovered a small number of documents of classified markings in storage areas, in file cabinets in my home, in my personal library," Biden told reporters following his remarks on the state of the US economy. Earlier on Thursday, Richard Sauber, special counsel to Biden, said that the second batch of classified documents was discovered in Biden residence's garage in Wilmington, while another one-page document was found in an adjacent room.