

12/4/23 Monday

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'Hopium and Defense' All Ukraine Has to Sustain Itself as NATO Weapons Dry Up

With its supply of Western weapons dwindling and little sign of change from the NATO powers, Ukraine will be incapable of launching another counteroffensive like last summer, an analyst told Sputnik. However, barring a mutiny or political crisis, a collapse of the Ukrainian war effort isn't necessarily imminent.

White House Office of Management and Budget Director Shalanda Young [told federal lawmakers](#) on Monday that the US was "out of money to support Ukraine in this fight."

"There is no magical pot of funding available to meet this moment. We are out of money - and nearly out of time," [Young wrote](#). "Without congressional action, by the end of the year we will run out of resources to procure more weapons and equipment for Ukraine and to provide equipment from US military stocks."

According to Pentagon statistics, the US has sent Ukraine some \$44 billion in military aid since February 2022, as well as \$76 billion in other types of support, including budget financing and humanitarian aid. US President Joe Biden has asked for billions more to be approved, but the Republican majority in the House, now led by Ukraine skeptic House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA), has remained cool to the idea without improvements in oversight.

The news also comes as the [Pentagon failed its audit](#) for the sixth year in a row.

Moscow-based international relations security analyst Mark Sleboda told [Radio Sputnik's The Final Countdown](#) on Monday that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was correct in a way: Ukraine is indeed entering a new phase of the conflict - a defensive phase, as it waits and hopes that time will bring favorable changes to the situation.

"Just last week, the Pentagon announced that all of the Middle East deployments that the US has made, sending air defense forces and aircraft carrier battle groups around the Middle East to support Israel in its conflict with Palestine, and the Pentagon's like 'actually, we're all out of money, we don't have money to pay for this'. So it's rather interesting times, maybe that \$30 trillion accounting black hole is finally coming back to haunt the Pentagon, although I suspect congressional relief is somewhere around the corner, maybe that will have to wait until after the holidays, though."

"But it is definitely having an effect on the battlefield in Ukraine. There was already a trend because of the US and collectively NATO's inability to ramp up their own industrial production to provide their Kiev Regime proxy with enough of the war basics like artillery shells, air defense missiles, and many other things that it needed. And now, that is coupled with the fact that Kiev is competing with Israel for many of the same things, which have been on the demand list ... for Israel for what it needs for its conflict. And Zelensky is finding himself second-fiddle, vying not only for attention and supplies and funding" from the US and European Union, which he said had hit a "speed bump" in attempting to support both Kiev and Jerusalem at once.

“Kiev Regime forces are experiencing massive shell hunger. I saw a video posted by Ukrainians of a couple of them at a position in East Ukraine, their shell allotment for the day had arrived, it came in a truck: two artillery shells. They collapsed into laughing and very obscene swearing in Russian,” he said.

Over the weekend, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said the alliance “should also be prepared for bad news” from Ukraine, noting that wars “develop in phases” and that the West should continue to support Kiev “in both good and bad times.”

“This is an amazing admission,” Sleboda said of Stoltenberg’s words. “It’s like the Western mainstream media in many ways has turned on a dime. It was just a couple months ago that we were told that Ukraine is still winning and their victory in the great glorious NATO southern counteroffensive is right around the corner and Russian forces are about to break, and I think you could be forgiven for thinking that the consumers of Western mainstream media must have whiplash from how quickly everything has turned. The Economist, the British news weekly, one of the most virulently Russophobic news mags out there, the last cover was ‘Is Putin Winning?’” “For Zelensky, this is really a case of ‘the emperor has no clothes,’” Sleboda said, noting that other figures had turned against him, too, including anti-Russian journalist Simon Shuster, who quoted Ukrainian officials calling Zelensky “delusional” and claiming he won’t hear talk of Ukraine losing the conflict, and Kiev Major Vitaly Klitschko had called Zelensky “authoritarian.” “Evidently, Zelensky and his own top general, [Valery] Zaluzhny, aren’t talking - for months now,” he said. “Zelensky is issuing orders to his own generals beneath Zaluzhny directly, telling them what to do ... and military decisions are being made by a comedian. Not a good idea.”

“I guess the Western propaganda is failing, and when the mainstream media is already out in front of him, even Jens Stoltenberg [has to turn it around and admit](#) certain things, although it must be said that these admissions are not coming in front of the media, they’re coming behind it, he simply no longer has any propaganda spin for maneuver.”

Sleboda said he agreed with Zelensky that Ukraine had entered a new phase of the conflict. “Their offensive days are over, there is no large new offensive package from the West anywhere within sight, there’s not even enough maintenance aid to continue basic supplies of anything at this point. So the next year is solidly about desperate defense, building defensive lines, and a much-talked-about new total mobilization, meaning mass, forced conscription, that could possibly include 17- to 70-year-olds now and possibly women being conscripted for combat roles. And, evidently, it is going to be privatized, the last months of conscription having failed miserably, they are now evidently going to turn to private companies, which literally means Westerners coming in and help press-gang Ukrainians off the streets and putting them in the trenches.”

“The plan is simple: the plan is defense, desperately try to mass conscript more people, and hope that something changes,” Sleboda said. “Hopium and defense.”

However, he cautioned that modern battlefield technology makes defense much less costly than offense, so “it does not necessarily mean a collapse of the Kiev Regime military,” adding that the bigger danger to the government was a mutiny or a political crisis.

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Ex-Pentagon Analyst: Ossified MIC to Prevent US From Ramping Up Counter-Drone System Production

The Pentagon will have trouble getting weapons makers to mass produce counter-drone weapons for quite a while, due to its entrenched and decades-old acquisition system that was dependent on the US being the world's foremost military power, a former Pentagon analyst told Sputnik.

A top Pentagon official said the US needs to dramatically increase its production of counter-drone systems to maximum capacity during the Reagan National Defense Forum in California over the weekend.

"The production for counter-UAS [has] to go through the roof," US Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment Bill LaPlante told forum-goers, comparing the need to that faced a year ago when the US was [rapidly running out of 155-millimeter artillery shells](#) after having sent its entire stockpile to Ukraine.

According to US media reports, LaPlante and other top Pentagon officials have been using a chart of the growth of 155-millimeter artillery shell production capacity over time as part of their efforts to pressure defense contractors into pumping out more anti-drone weapons and loitering munitions, which are also called "kamikaze" or suicide drones.

"The industrial base has to be able to produce these at high numbers," LaPlante said.

Retired US Air Force and former Pentagon analyst Lt. Col. Karen Kwiatkowski told Sputnik that the privately-owned military-industrial firms face a slew of obstacles to ramping up production of brand-new systems like counter-drone weapons, including research and development (R&D), questions of demand for buyers, and stability in Congress for funding such contracts.

"As LaPlante noted, the money being spent thus far by the US on these types of systems is in R&D. Shifting from an incomplete and ongoing research and development mode to a production mode takes time, and also decisions by Congress to fund - and that requires a production proposal and cost estimates - something that the US doesn't have yet," she explained.

"Production costs are reduced at scale, but Mr LaPlante and the Pentagon confuse Congressional demand with 'market' demand. Market demand and market signals are faster and more accurate than the political signals that drive and control the US defense industry. Smaller and more agile international producers may have an advantage over the big five American firms that make counter-drone and loitering technologies and munitions."

However, she said that the "identification of a persistent demand globally" was the first obstacle to ramping up production - something that could be highly dependent on the White House's foreign policy. Demand for anti-drones systems is likely to become less acute if a more isolationist government replaces the present interventionist-minded one.

Another part of the equation is Congress, which must be "convinced to pay for this newer and costly segment of Pentagon spending," Kwiatkowski said.

"Assuming the US continues on a path of global political and military interference, and a 2- or 2-and-a-half-front war aspiration, the Congress may be successfully lobbied and the share of the budget that goes into the Pentagon and the CIA will increase to over a trillion dollars annually," she said. "But given the interest cost and the massive deficits - and the inability of the shrinking US middle class to pay their taxes - this could be problematic even for a pro-war

Congress and administration, without canceling other less-needed capabilities, like the F-35, which would be impossible to do at this point barring national bankruptcy.”

“The third obstacle, of course, is the ramp-up speed of the US manufacturing sector for these technologies. As we have seen with aid to Ukraine, mass munitions and small arms, as well as complex technological consumables, even with tens of billions of dollars made available for pre-existing technologies and existing production lines, it was not enough to make even the slightest difference in the Ukraine war.

“The first money that is spent profits the corporations, their pay and bonuses, and upgrades to infrastructure and manpower (factory upgrades, manpower hires, and other corporate investment). Then you see the output increase, and as many of these wars that are driving the counter-drone (and drone) demand are relatively short-lived, by the time the infrastructure and manpower improvements are in place, the demand is less urgent. The system then lobbies for the longer run, and cost plus contracts for the next time,” she explained.

Kwiatkowski highlighted that for decades, the Pentagon has been able to rely on “endless upgrades” for off-the-shelf equipment, which has streamlined much of its acquisition policies. However, that system was dependent on US global dominance - something that can no longer be taken for granted, making the [recent funding issues created by Congress](#) into a threat for the development of new systems like anti-drone weapons.

“Because of cyclical political and short-term war trends drive the money that funds the Pentagon, it clings to the long-term systems with endless upgrades for the bulk of their profit, along with R&D which is interminable, and often financially rewarding for these companies even when programs end up not working, as we have seen with the long history of Ballistic Missile Defense and also more recent forays into hypersonic missiles,” she said. “So when you follow the money, both in terms of Congressional enthusiasm to fund this or that, and Pentagon/corporate interest in long term growth and steadiness, you can see what falls through the cracks: small munitions in mass numbers and highly experimental technologies that have massive competition in design and production around the world.”

“Just like the US consumes produced end items from the rest of the world, the US defense industry is also dependent on production capabilities from the rest of the world, and has a long acquisition history of buying ‘off the shelf.’ As the world bifurcates into multipolar and shifting alliances, this approach that the US has invested in for decades, can become another weak point. It's not just consistent funding, it's how to actually shift how the Pentagon is invested - and that is like moving a mountain.”

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Hundreds Protest Osprey Flights as US Refuses Japan's Request to Ground Crash-Prone Aircraft

The US has more than 50,000 troops in Japan at nearly two dozen bases, part of a presence maintained since Japan surrendered to the US at the end of World War II. The post-fascist reconstruction as a constitutional monarchy saw the US include a clause mandating neutrality in Japan's constitution.

At least 200 people rallied on Okinawa on Monday to protest against continued flights over Japan by US Air Force V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft after Washington refused a request by Tokyo to ground the aircraft. A day prior, the wreckage from a crashed Osprey and the remains of five crewmembers were discovered in the waters of nearby Kagoshima Prefecture.

The demonstrators gathered in Kadena in front of the headquarters of the Okinawa Defense Bureau, one of the Japanese Defense Ministry's eight regional bureaus. Protesters delivered a letter to bureau officials demanding the Ospreys be blocked from flying until an investigation into the crash last week can be completed, and they chanted slogans against the tilt-rotor aircraft, which is notoriously crash-prone.

"It is so sad that another young American man's life was sacrificed and others are still not found," protest organizer Yuji Fukumoto of the anti-base group All Okinawa shouted into a microphone. "Ospreys are still flying in Okinawa and all over Japan. We must strongly request once again not to fly them over us."

The US has two massive air bases on Okinawa: Marine Corps Air Station Futenma and Kadena Air Force Base, along with a host of other facilities. The problems caused by the US military, which include falling debris, noise, and pollution, have aroused a strong activist movement that has frustrated attempts to expand the Pentagon's presence on the island.

More recently, the possibility of a US war with China or North Korea have provoked protests at US military sites across Japan that are likely to become targets, [preventing the construction](#) of several Aegis Ashore anti-missile bases.

Last Wednesday, a CV-22B Osprey stationed at Yokota Air Force Base near Tokyo [crashed into the waters](#) off the island of Yakushima, to the north of Okinawa.

The body of one person aboard was immediately found by search and rescue operations, but the remains of the other five were only discovered over the weekend, when the wreckage of the crashed aircraft was recovered.

The cause of the accident is not yet known, although one fisherman told Japanese media he saw the aircraft's left engine on fire as it plummeted into the sea. The plane has a unique tilt-rotor system that allows its huge propellers to either spin vertically or horizontally, enabling it to fly either like a helicopter or a fixed-wing aircraft. While theoretically it makes the Osprey a nimble transport and patrol aircraft, in reality the plane has become infamous for its deadly crashes.

After the plane went down on Wednesday, Tokyo grounded all 14 of its Ospreys and [asked Washington to do the same](#) until a probe into the crash could provide answers. The aircraft has been grounded several times in the past, [most recently last year](#), following a series of safety check failures.

Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa told reporters on Friday that Tokyo's request had been denied, with Japanese media reporting that day that Osprey flights from Futnema had been observed.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno, the main spokesperson for Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's government, called Washington's decision "deeply regrettable," saying that "flights are being carried out without sufficient explanation about safety, despite repeated requests from Japan."

"These Ospreys should not have been deployed at all," one Okinawan protester on Monday carrying an anti-Osprey sign told a US military-affiliated media outlet.

"It is so scary; it could have crashed in Kadena," she said. "They must not fly and must be withdrawn."

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Activist Says Gaza May Cost Democrats in November

Joe Biden's support among Arab Americans has plummeted over Gaza. In 2020, 59% of Arab Americans voted for the future President, even higher in swing states like Michigan, but by the end of October, just three weeks after the war began, support for Biden fell to just 17% among Arab Americans nationwide.

US President Joe Biden's unwavering support of Israel may hurt Democrat chances in November, Anthony Rogers Wright, the spokesperson for Movement for Black Lives and the Black Hive told Radio Sputnik's Political Misfits on Monday.

Talking with hosts John Kiriakou and Michelle Witte, Wright argued that the conflict in Gaza is likely to hurt Biden in critical swing states with large Arab populations, in particular Michigan which he says is likely to determine the next President of the United States.

Kiriakou noted that Presidential elections are typically decided on the strength of the economy, but Wright said that foreign policy and the economy are no longer mutually exclusive in the minds of voters.

"I think more and more residents of the United States are becoming very wary of blank checks being sent to Ukraine and now a good amount of money, \$14 billion being proposed to be sent to Israel," Wright explained.

"Then you start looking at your local neighborhood," Wright continued, "you start looking at your local situation, the housing situation in the bay area and Los Angeles, the migrant situation in New York City, and it's like 'wait a second, we are sending all of this money abroad for a conflict we don't necessarily understand and then there are no local investment to take care these local issues that are affecting my everyday life' so I think people are becoming more wary about that."

Wright noted that Michigan in particular has a large Arab population and that Muslim and Arab groups are starting to organize against Biden, pointing to the recently launched [Abandon Biden campaign](#) as evidence.

“You have a population of people who are essentially saying that this issue in Gaza... is enough to get them not to vote for Joe Biden,” noting that unlike previous years there are likely to be more anti-Zionist options on the ballot. He said that the “paternalism” of liberals won’t be enough to get Arab voters to overlook credible accusations of crimes against humanity by Israel.

“Rather than saying ‘oh my goodness, let’s reach out to these people’ they are trying to scare them ‘Fine you can have Trump then’ and that is almost even worse than the situation that is causing them not to vote for Biden in the first place,” Wright explained. “It seems that the attitude of Democrats and their consultants, their multimillion dollar consultants... is that [those voters] will come along because where else are they going to go?”

However, Wright points to alternatives that might be on the ballot in November.

“Now you have third party and anti-war candidates like Brother Cornel West, like Sister Jill Stein, and maybe people will turn that way, because this is a visceral issue,” he said.

Earlier in the interview, Wright discussed a potential second term for Donald Trump, and how worried leftists and marginalized groups should be about his recent comments that Kiriakou described as increasingly “authoritarian.”

“Of course we should be concerned about his rhetoric. It is also a call to action for people to get very locally invested and state-wide invested... It is looking more and more that we are going to have to create local and state force fields to protect ourselves in case there is a massive catastrophe at the federal level,” Wright said, pointing to the Attorney General lawsuit against Trump’s previous Muslim ban and New York’s offer to help out of state women receive contraceptive care in the wake of Roe v Wade being shot down by the Supreme Court.

“It really is about preparation right now,” Wright explained.

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Dozens of Servicemen Suspected of Advocating for the Overthrow of the US Government

Throughout the 60s and 70s, the Pentagon considered left-wing extremist groups as America’s greatest threat. However, after a rise of right-wing violence in the 1990s it began considering right-wing anti-government groups the bigger threat.

According to an annual report released by the Pentagon, 78 servicemen were suspected of advocating for the overthrow of the US government and another 44 were suspected of engaging in or supporting terrorism.

The report, released by the Defense Department inspector general last week, found 183 allegations of extremism across all branches of the military. The majority of them, 130, were found in the Army. The Air Force had 29 and the Marines and Navy had ten each. The Space Force, which was counted separately from the Air Force, had four accusations of extremism. The investigation also found 58 allegations of gang activity across all branches. The report notes that at the time the report was published, 68 cases had been cleared or determined to be unsubstantiated.

In March, the Pentagon called racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism “the most lethal threat” to America in its annual threat assessment.

In February, former National Guardsman Brandon Russell, who founded a neo-Nazi group named Atomwaffen, was arrested for allegedly plotting to blow up the electrical grid in Baltimore after previously serving five years for possessing explosives. His trial is ongoing and he has been classified as a domestic terrorist. He faces decades in prison.

After the January 6, 2021 riots on the Capitol, which included a number of current and former military personnel, US Defense Secretary Austin Lloyd, ordered a “stand-down” extremism training across all branches of the military.

However, US Military media outlets have described the training and other measures as “symbolic” with at least one enlisted officer saying that no one was paying attention during the lecture and that the commander spent time talking about groups he saw as radical like Black Lives Matter.

Law enforcement officials and other experts have found that far-right and white supremacist groups are a bigger threat and attract more members of the military.

There have also been reports that recruiters have been ignoring some screening steps to filter out those with extremist or gang associations.

The report does note that military officials have been taking action. It states that 135 allegations were referred to military or civilian courts and that 109 cases were referred to another Defense Department organization or official.

It also notes that 69 allegations had been substantiated. Most were handled through administrative action, including 19 involuntary discharges and three counseling cases.

Seventeen other cases were handled with nonjudicial punishments and two were court-martialed.

It notes that no substantiated claims of extremism or gang activity were left with no action taken.

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Pentagon Spokesman Kirby Again Declines to Place 'Red Lines' on Israel

Fighting between Hamas and Israel resumed on Friday after a weeks-long truce ended. With Israel bombing both the southern and northern areas of Gaza, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby reiterated on Sunday that the US has not placed any red lines on Israel that would cause the administration to halt military aid being sent to Israel.

While US President Joe Biden has publicly asked Israel to do what it can to avoid civilian casualties, the administration has consistently declined to outline any scenario that would cause the administration to reconsider sending aid to Israel.

During an interview broadcast on American television, Kirby was asked about comments made by Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) that he was concerned that the Biden administration has declined to express red lines to Israel as the civilian death toll in Gaza continues to mount.

“We are having these discussions with our Israeli counterparts every day about being careful, precise and deliberate in their targeting and trying to minimize civilian casualties to the maximum extent possible,” Kirby said while declining to set a red line.

Kirby argued that the challenges Israel faces are unique, accusing Hamas of using Palestinians as human shields. "Hamas deliberately shelters themselves inside residential buildings, hospitals and schools. Basically on purpose, putting civilians in the line of fire and what Israel is trying to do is get them out of the line of fire," Kirby contended.

Kirby also pointed to leaflets that Israel has been dropping on areas as proof that the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) are doing all they can to prevent civilian deaths.

However, the IDF leaflets have been criticized by Gazan residents and outside observers. The papers instruct residents in Gaza to scan QR codes for the most up-to-date information, but despite a partial restoration, the internet remains hard to access in Gaza.

Halima Abdel-Tahman, a Palestinian widow and mother of four who fled her home in Beit Lahia in October to a relative's home outside of Khan Yunis [told reporters](#) that she will not move again. "No, we won't leave. The occupation tells you to go to this area then they bomb it. The reality is that no place is safe in Gaza. They kill people in the north. They kill people in the south," she said.

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Who Might Be Trump's VP Pick?

As former US President Donald Trump's seemingly unstoppable march toward the Republican nomination for President continues, some are starting to wonder who will join him on the ticket in November.

Typically, Vice Presidents are picked for one of two reasons: either as a deal with a primary opponent to entice them to drop out or as a tool to appeal to a base of voters the candidate doesn't appeal to.

It does not appear that the 2024 Republican primary will pose any significant challenge to Trump. Outside of a surprise surge by either Nikki Haley or Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, or a potential prison sentence, Trump looks poised to cruise to the nomination.

That seemingly would leave only the candidate's appeal to voters as the deciding factor for the Trump campaign, but there is an additional factor that is unique to Trump: loyalty.

Trump has consistently described those who have spoken out against him as disloyal, including his former running mate, Mike Pence, who suspended his campaign for President in October. Trump has made clear that if elected again, he won't be appointing the same conventional Republicans he filled his cabinet with in 2016.

With those two qualifications in mind, who are the frontrunners to join Trump at the top of the ballot in November next year?

South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem

Noem is not well known on the national stage, but she ticks the loyalty box on her resume. She endorsed Trump already and has received a nod as a potential candidate by Trump. When asked if he would consider her, Trump told a reporter that he "absolutely" would "in a heartbeat." Politically, they match up on social issues, with Noem enacting strict abortion limits in her state and outlawing transgender women from participating in female sports leagues in state schools.

While, as a Governor, Noem has never voted on Ukraine aid, she has called it “Europe’s fight, not ours.” Trump previously said he would end the war in Ukraine within 24 hours.

Her relative youth and gender could help the Trump ticket appeal to women, though Noem’s relatively small name value and abortion legislation may counteract that.

South Carolina Senator Tim Scott

Scott ticks a lot of the appeal boxes for the Trump campaign. As a Senator in South Carolina, he would theoretically head off any challenge by current US President Joe Biden in the state. While Trump won South Carolina in both 2016 and 2020, Biden performed better there than Hillary Clinton and turned around his 2020 primary campaign in the state.

Trump and Scott also have a history of working together, collaborating on a program to bring opportunity zones to low-income areas.

However, the loyalty test is a mixed bag. Scott, who recently suspended his campaign for President, declined to follow his fellow Republicans’ lead in criticizing Trump during the GOP debates earlier this year, and Trump returned that in kind by not attacking Scott. However, when Scott dropped out in November, he declined to endorse any other candidate and implied that he was not interested in running as Vice President.

There are also questions about his appeal. On the face of it, Scott, an African American, should help Trump increase his small but growing support among black voters. However, in a poll pitting various potential Republican candidates against Biden, Scott performed the worst among black voters.

Arkansas Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders

The former Press Secretary for the Trump administration, Huckabee left the White House on good terms and followed her father, Mike Huckabee, to the Governor’s mansion in Arkansas. Huckabee easily passes the loyalty test, having consistently defended the former president in the press at every opportunity.

The question then becomes her appeal. From a staunchly conservative state that Trump won by more than 27 points in 2020, Huckabee seems to have little to offer the Trump campaign outside of loyalty.

Even within her state, there are signs that Huckabee’s star may be fading, a recent poll put her approval rating at 48%, the lowest for an Arkansas Governor since her father polled 47% in 2003.

Georgia Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene

Another candidate, like Huckabee, whose potential hinges almost entirely on her steadfast loyalty to the former President.

Greene has been a staunch defender of the former president, supporting his assertion that the 2020 Presidential election was stolen and has been an outspoken defender of Trump supporters who were arrested during the January 6, 2021 riots on the Capitol building.

However, she was booted from the powerful House Freedom Caucus for her support of former Speaker Kevin McCarthy. While she avoided Trump’s scorn for her consistent support of and friendship with McCarthy, she did anger some of the Trump wing of the party, including former Trump adviser Steve Bannon, who suggested that someone primary her.

If there is one attribute of Taylor-Greene outside of her loyalty to Trump, it’s her home state. Trump narrowly lost Georgia in 2020.

But a gain there may mean a loss elsewhere. Taylor-Greene is unpopular with the voting population as a whole and in a September poll asking 2020 Trump voters who they'd like to be Trump's VP pick, only 1% selected Taylor-Greene.

Florida Representative Byron Donalds

A rapidly rising star in the Republican party, Donalds first entered the national public consciousness when he was the protest pick for Republicans opposed to McCarthy's speakership election in January. That led to him briefly becoming a serious candidate for the position in October, a position [eventually awarded to Mike Johnson](#) (R-LA).

Donalds' loyalty to Trump is unquestioned. He voted with Trump 100% of the time during the Trump presidency and is part of the House Ethics Committee's investigation into Biden.

Able to speak with a populist voice and present himself as an outsider, Donalds is likely to appeal to both independents and Trump's support base. As an African American, he also stands to help Trump grow his support among Black voters, which is already higher than what is typical for a Republican.

Former US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley

If there is one candidate Trump will pick to avoid a primary challenge, it is Nikki Haley. While DeSantis is running close to Haley for second place, Haley is set up in the primary to be a potentially formidable challenger. As the former governor of South Carolina, she is positioned to perform well in that state.

If she can build momentum in the first two states of Iowa and New Hampshire and carry that into a strong second in South Carolina or win the state outright, Trump may feel pressure to get her out of the race.

Outside of that possibility, there seems little chance Trump will tap Haley as his VP. While the two did work together during his Presidency, Trump appointed her as the US Ambassador to the UN, their relationship has since soured. In September, Trump referred to her as "Birdbrain Nikki Haley" and said that she has "No loyalty." He also seemingly ruled her out as his VP, saying "MAGA, or I, will never go for [Haley]."

The two also have differing views on foreign policy. Haley has been a staunch supporter of sending more military aid to Ukraine, even as an increasing number of Republicans oppose it. Trump promised that he would, if elected, [negotiated peace](#) within "24 hours."

Businessman Vivek Ramaswamy

A political outsider and businessman, Ramaswamy's 2020 campaign shares a lot in common with Trump's 2016 bid. He appeals to libertarians and other swing voters and in the same poll that showed only 1% of 2020 Trump voters wanted Taylor-Greene to be Vice President, Vivek Ramaswamy easily led the field with 30%. "Don't Know" received second place at 17%.

Ramaswamy even has a chance to pull in some antiwar votes for Trump. He has been a consistent critic of the NATO-funded proxy war in Ukraine and was one of the first visible politicians to urge Ukraine to enter the negotiating table and cede some territory to Russia to end the conflict.

While he has been a supporter of Israel, he has not gone as far as other Republican candidates, stressing that he supports the right to free speech for pro-Palestine protesters.

Trump also hinted that he is considering Ramaswamy as his pick, saying that he would be "very good" at the job.

He also passes the loyalty test. He called Donald Trump the “best president of the 21st century” and said he would immediately pardon Trump if he is elected as President.

All that said, his popularity has been waning as of late, with his unfavorability rating dramatically rising over the past few months, surpassing his favorability rating for the first time in September.

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Muslim Groups in Swing States Vow To End Biden’s Reelection Chances

While US President Joe Biden has made public statements regarding protecting civilian lives in Gaza, his administration has repeatedly stressed that there are no “red lines” Israel could cross that would compel them to cease aid to the country.

Muslim American groups in critical swing states gathered in Michigan on Saturday to discuss a campaign dubbed #AbandonBiden, US media reports.

Angry about US President Joe Biden’s policy on Gaza and Israel, Muslim leaders from Michigan, Minnesota, Arizona, Wisconsin, Florida, Georgia, Nevada and Pennsylvania were scheduled to meet in Dearborn, Michigan on Saturday to discuss the plans for the movement. Pro-Palestine protesters and Arab and Muslim groups around the nation have been demanding that Biden call for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and do more to protect innocent Palestinians in Gaza.

Since Israel began its campaign against Gaza, more than 15,000 Palestinians have been killed, including more than 5,000 children. Tens of thousands more have been maimed or suffered debilitating injuries.

The group says that the movement is designed to leverage the power Muslim Americans have through their votes.

“We are not powerless as American Muslims. We are powerful. We don’t only have the money, but we have the actual votes. And we will use that vote to save this nation from itself,” Jaylani Hussein, a member of the coalition and the executive director of CAIR-MINNESOTA said. Hussein stressed that the group does not support former President Donald Trump either, but said they will not support either candidate.

“We’re not supporting Trump,” Hussein said. “We’re not going to make the same mistake of thinking about President Biden the way we thought [about Trump]. We don’t have two options. We have many options, and we’re going to exercise that.”

Multiple candidates have made headlines by running third-party. Two in particular, Cornel West (Independent) and Jill Stein (Green) [have been vocal about](#) calling for a ceasefire and ending what multiple human rights organizations have described as a genocide in Gaza.

In 2020, roughly 59% of Arab Americans supported Biden, but that support has evaporated in the shadow of the war in Gaza. In a poll released on October 31, support for Biden among Arab Americans had dropped to just 17%.

While a relatively small percentage of the population overall, there are significant Arab populations in the swing states including Michigan, Arizona and Georgia where the Arab populations are significantly higher than the margin Biden won those states by in 2020. If a significant number of Arab and Muslim voters sit home, vote for Trump, or support a third party, it could be enough to cause Biden to lose the election.

But it is not just Arab and Muslim voters who are turning against Biden on the Palestine issue. A recent national poll showed that 70% of voters aged 18 to 34 oppose his Palestine stance and only 31% say they approve of his job performance overall.

Hussein admits that the group's plan to abandon Biden may help usher Trump into the White House, but says that it is a sacrifice that Muslim Americans may have to make in order to fight against Israel's actions in Gaza. "Four years under [Trump], how horrible it could be, is never equivalent to one night in Gaza," he said.

Beyond merely promising not to vote for Biden, the groups said they plan to "build a mechanism of coordination between all the swing states... to ensure that Muslim Americans will come out in all of those states and that Mr. Biden will lose each and every one of them," said Hassan Abdel Salam, a member of the #AbandonBiden Coalition and professor of the University of Minnesota said at a press conference on Saturday.

"We are joining the national movement to abandon Biden and we will campaign against you along with our political allies," activist Zade Al Ali said at a November 22 #AbandonBiden press conference in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. "As you have purposefully and duplicity worked to genocide the innocent in Gaza."

The Biden administration has not responded to media requests about the coalition.

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Cheney Warns Trump May Seek to Stay in Power 'Forever' if Reelected

Recent polls show former US President Donald Trump besting his White House successor in five out of six battleground states, making a second Trump presidency a legitimate possibility. Former US Rep. Liz Cheney (R-WY) has claimed that if former US President Donald Trump would attempt to remain in power forever if he is ever granted the opportunity to serve out a second presidential term

Cheney's remarks came on Monday during a promotional interview for her new book, "Oath and Honor: A Memoir and a Warning." Trump presently holds a commanding lead in the primary.

"Absolutely," the daughter of former US Vice President Dick Cheney told US media when asked if she believed Trump would try to permanently extend his stay in the Oval Office.

Referencing Trump's role in the January 6 riot at the US Capitol and his efforts to overturn the election results, Cheney underscored that the former commander-in-chief had "already done it once."

"He is the only president in American history who attempted to overturn an election, who attempted to seize power and to stay in power after he had lost," Cheney said, adding that

Trump's efforts were thwarted by state officials who refused to cave to pressure by Trump. "We won't have that guardrail again."

Cheney had a mostly uneventful time in Congress, voting with the Republican bloc and Trump for the majority of her time in office. However, after January 6, she became the most outspoken critic of Trump in the Republican party. The former lawmaker served as the vice chair of the committee investigating the January 6 events, a position given to her by House Democrats. She was also one of 10 Republicans to vote for Trump's second impeachment.

The political shift turned the party against her, having been stripped of her leadership positions in addition to being voted off the ballot in a primary challenge. Cheney has maintained that she has no regrets about her opposition to Trump:

"I will not sit back and watch in silence while others lead our party down a path that abandons the rule of law and joins the former president's crusade to undermine our democracy," she said on the House floor after being stripped of her leadership positions.

Cheney also called Rep. Mike Johnson's (R-LA) election as House speaker "dangerous for the country," adding while she was in Congress, Johnson was suggesting things that "he knew had no basis in fact, no basis in law, no basis in the constitution," by advocating that House Republicans help Trump overturn the 2020 election results.

Johnson was one of 139 Republicans who voted to sustain one or more objections to the 2020 election results. He also expressed support for a lawsuit by the state of Texas aimed at challenging the 2020 election results in Georgia.

However, Rep. Ken Buck (R-CO) who voted against Reps. Jim Jordan (R-OH) and Steve Scalise (R-LA) because of their electoral denialism said Johnson did not go as far as others.

"What [Johnson] did was he went to the courts. That's what the courts are set up for. And it's absolutely appropriate," Buck said after Johnson's election in October. "It's fundamentally different than somebody who is actively involved in moving the protesters from the Mall up here, actively involved in arguing with the White House counsel's office about how we could decertify the election, two completely different things."

"I think what we have seen is that you cannot count on this group of elected Republicans to uphold their oath to the constitution," Cheney said during the Monday interview while calling on voters across the political spectrum to "stand for the Constitution." Cheney said it would be safer for America if Democrats took control of the House.

Last year, Biden signed into law the [Electoral Count Reform Act](#) as part of a year-end omnibus spending bill, which put in place more guardrails to ensure election integrity, including electors being required to follow their state's public vote count and clarifying that the US vice president's role is primarily ceremonial.

When asked if she planned to vote for Biden in 2024, Cheney did not specifically say she would, only stressing she would do "whatever it takes" to stop Trump. The lawmaker-turned-author also insisted that neither Trump nor Biden has wrapped up their nominations and hoped for options and alternatives that "reflect the important challenges we are facing and reflect leadership to meet those challenges, but that choice can never be Donald Trump ... it may mean the last election you ever get to vote in."

Cheney also did not rule out running on a "unity" ticket with a Democrat, saying she would make that decision over "the next couple months."

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Kissinger & the Americas: How the US Built Order 'on The Ashes of Genocide'

As America's once top diplomat is mourned in the halls of power, new light is being shed on the lasting effects of Henry Kissinger's role in US foreign policy. An Argentine speaks with Sputnik about how her family was affected.

"A huge loss." "A cherished friend and mentor." "His appointment said as much about his greatness as it did America's greatness."

[Tributes](#) are pouring in after the death of Henry Kissinger, America's best known diplomat.

Kissinger [died](#) Wednesday at the age of 100 at his home in Kent, Connecticut. Having served as US Secretary of State for eight years under the presidencies of Gerald Ford and Richard Nixon, Kissinger strove to maintain global US dominance during a time when it was in doubt. His influence molded America's foreign policy for years to come.

But not everyone celebrates the empire built by the highly consequential statesman.

"What it really is, is a kingdom built on the ashes of genocide," said Agustina Montes in an interview with Sputnik.

Montes is an Argentine citizen now living in New Zealand. Inflation neared 150% in her home country last month amidst an [economic crisis](#) that's wreaked havoc on Argentina for half a decade.

Compounding the financial disruption, Montes sees an Argentine society still torn apart by its recent history.

"Genocide denialism is at an all time high," laments the 37-year-old. "With the elections in Argentina, it's more pressing than ever. Politicians make barely veiled threats about military uprising. We know what that can mean."

Argentina's vice president-elect Victoria Villarruel has downplayed the brutality of the South American country's seven-year military dictatorship. Villarruel made headlines last month when she criticized UNESCO's decision to declare Buenos Aires' ESMA Navy school a World Heritage site. Tens of thousands passed through the facility before being tortured or killed. Among them were Montes' uncles, Miguel and Guillermo.

Reorganization

The "National Reorganization Process" was the benign name for the regime that seized power in 1976.

Argentines knew it was a military dictatorship. They'd seen several throughout the 20th century. If the generals sought to "reorganize" Argentine society it was through the barrel of a gun.

Amid the violence, one figure in Washington provided Argentina's new rulers with the legitimacy they craved.

"We have followed events in Argentina closely," [said then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger](#) to the country's new foreign minister Admiral Cesar Augusto Guzzetti. "We wish the new government well. We wish it will succeed. We will do what we can to help it succeed."

"If there are things that have to be done, you should do them quickly."

For the junta, the things that had to be done were kidnapping, torture, and murder. The regime faced pressure from armed resistance groups. Some of them aligned with charismatic former President Juan Perón. Many were socialists. The regime was intent on snuffing them out.

"I have a 'desaparecido' on each side of my family," Montes told Sputnik, using the Spanish term for people who vanished during that period. "My dad's brother Guillermo and my mum's brother Miguel Angel."

"Miguel Angel Fiorito - Milan to his family - was taken on July 12th, 1976, so pretty early in the dictatorship. My uncle was 21 and very idealistic, I've been told he was very funny and warm. He worked in the villas, or slums, and had a very keen sense of social justice."

"Guillermo Montes was my dad's brother. He was a bit older when he was taken, about 27 or 28. He made it to 1977. He was a massive man, called 'the Yeti' by his companions. He went to work one day and never came back."

In the repressive fog of the time, "disappeared" became the euphemism for those who fell prey to the reorganization. The word was terrifying as much because of the uncertainty it implied as anything else. Families rarely received closure. "The army never spoke," says Montes.

Parents throughout the country sought answers. The Madres de Plaza de Mayo was formed when a group of mothers came together in Buenos Aires' central square. The group became known for their unique form of silent protest, wearing white headscarves symbolizing the cloth diapers of their disappeared children.

Montes said her grandmother knew of the Madres, but "she lacked the political beliefs they had. She loved her son but didn't believe that what he had done was right."

Politics provoked sharp divisions in Argentine society in those days.

"My mum's family was pretty pro-dictatorship up until that point [that Miguel was kidnapped]," says Montes, "mostly because they were anti-Perón." Montes explained that Miguel began Argentina's required military service in March of 1976.

"He was also a part of the Montoneros, one of the leftist anti-dictatorship movements. Growing up in the '90s, where the rhetoric was that everyone involved in the guerrilla was a terrorist, I had a deep sense of shame about this. We did not discuss politics in my house."

"My uncles were very present ghosts but we would not talk about them."

The Chilean Method

The divisions within Montes' family mirrored those throughout Latin America. Cuba's revolution sent shockwaves across the region with the reverberations felt at the highest echelons of American power. They only intensified as grassroots movements approached political legitimacy.

Washington's worst fears were realized in 1970, when the socialist Salvador Allende was elected president of Chile.

"I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go communist due to the irresponsibility of its people," [said Kissinger](#) during a closed-door meeting with Nixon. "The issues are much too important for the Chilean voters to be left to decide for themselves."

The CIA immediately went to work destabilizing Allende's democratic government, infiltrating Chile's trade unions, provoking strikes, fomenting opposition within the military. Within three years Allende was overthrown in a military coup backed by Kissinger. The country's new leader General Augusto Pinochet declared war on the left, and Santiago's national soccer stadium was filled with dissidents waiting to be tortured, jailed, and killed.

Nixon's embrace of Pinochet was justified under the Cold War banner of anticommunism. Socialists, democratically-elected as they may be, were also simply bad for business as it turned out. Concerned about their investments in Chile, the US-based International Telephone & Telegraph Corporation [funneled millions of dollars](#) toward forces plotting Allende's downfall. Three years later, Argentina's military government sought a similar approach to repress opposition. "Their theory is that they can use the Chilean method," aide Harry Shlaudeman informed Kissinger in 1976. "That is, to terrorize the opposition – even killing priests and nuns and others."

By then an axis of dictatorship stretched across the Southern Cone, with American-backed juntas in Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, and now Argentina. Under the coordination of the US Central Intelligence Agency the governments coordinated their efforts in a campaign of state terror known as Operation Condor.

"I don't remember the first time I heard or read his name," said Montes of Kissinger. "My family didn't speak about this, and back then this whole period of Argentine history was completely erased from history classes at school."

"I think of his name in proximity to the names of our dictators: Videla, Massera. Kissinger, the CIA, 'Plan Condor.' Like shadowy figures behind it all."

Montes is likewise unsure about what drew her uncles towards issues of social justice.

"They didn't get that from their families," she insisted. "None of my grandparents were particularly socialist, quite the contrary. I believe they saw the disparities, the injustice all around them. But they were both middle class. My mum always says Miguel would give the clothes off his back if it meant helping someone else."

The Latin American left was a diverse array of forces. Some admired the guerrilla tactics of Che Guevara. Others simply advocated for Western European-style labor reforms. Still, others professed Liberation Theology, a strain of Catholicism that stressed concern for the poor. But after Cuba's popular uprising against US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista trended towards socialism, any movement from below could be suppressed in the name of fighting the communist threat.

"Some people still say that my uncles and others like them were terrorists," claims Montes, "that they did all sorts of horrible things, bombed child care centers and schools. Where is the evidence of that?"

"And if they did, why did the military – that was in control of the government, the police and the judicial system – not put them through a trial and in jail? Why did they disappear them and destroy any evidence and witnesses of what they allegedly did?"

Miguel and Guillermo stood firm by their beliefs, even as the military consolidated its rule.

"There is resentment towards them from my parents and grandparents," says Montes. "They both could have escaped Argentina. They chose to stay knowing what could happen to them." Heaven and Earth

Kissinger stayed on as secretary of state through 1977. Then-US President Jimmy Carter continued to support the junta until the following year; when he moved to end arms transfers, Kissinger [registered his opposition](#) by attending the 1978 World Cup in Argentina as the personal guest of dictator Jorge Videla.

US relations with the regime were restored and expanded after the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 as the CIA sought their assistance in training Central American death squads. Lieutenant General Videla's government shaped up to be perhaps the most repressive of all those of the Condor era. Of the 60,000 who were killed across the continent, it's estimated that [around half](#) of them were Argentines.

Montes' grandparents were determined to make sure Miguel and Guillermo weren't among them.

"[Miguel] was taken and my grandma, who was also widowed around that time, started moving 'heaven and earth,' as we say, to find him," she said. "She was threatened by police and even by the church when she went there, they told her she would end up just like him."

"My parents met through their mothers' – my grannies' – fight to find out what happened to their sons. I used to think it was a very romantic story when I was a child. But the reality is that two very broken people met each other because of one of the most horrific things that happened to them."

The final years of the dictatorship saw mounting economic instability. The military attempted to distract from the matter by waging war against the United Kingdom for control of the Falkland Islands. When they failed, the days of the junta were numbered.

Liberal democracy was restored in 1983. Time went by, but Miguel and Guillermo were still gone. President Carlos Menem's pardon of the junta leaders six years later suggested a desire to forget about the nightmare of Argentina's Dirty War.

It was only in 2003, when new investigations were opened, that the relatives of Argentina's desaparecidos finally saw the potential to receive some closure. For Montes' family the process would take over a decade.

"We didn't get to find out what happened to my uncles until very recently, almost 40 years after the fact," says Montes. "The only reason we know what happened is because of witnesses, people that survived, who saw them."

In that moment Miguel and Guillermo reappeared, but only in memory as Montes' family imagined their tragic last days.

"They were both taken to the same concentration camp, the ESMA. Miguel Angel was tortured with electricity until he died. We don't know what happened after, his body was likely burned."

"Guillermo was able to survive the electric torture. He was drugged and put on a plane, and dropped alive in the River Plate."

Very Present Ghosts

Montes recounts the horrible toll of her uncles' kidnappings on her family.

"My mum was around 14 years old when her brother disappeared and her dad died. That family was destroyed... Most of the people this happened to have been destroyed: mentally, physically. My parents have had substance abuse issues, mental health issues."

"A lot of people in my country want us to 'move on' from what happened, to stop talking about it. But how can you do that when the collective trauma still remains?"

Montes now feels much differently about her uncles – especially Miguel, who she's heard many stories about.

"I have since learned a lot about my uncle and believe he was an incredible man. It feels weird to say, when he died at 21. But what made Miguel and Guillermo literally give their lives for what they believed in? I don't know. I wish I got to meet them, to talk to them."

Among the many condolences and the judicious praise of Kissinger as a friend, a pioneer, and even a peacemaker, the eulogy of former US ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk may contain the most truth: “He was deeply skeptical of those who would aim to try to achieve a peaceful world. He was much more focused on establishing order because order was more reliable than peace.”

“I’m not surprised,” responded Montes. “Order for most, freedom for few.”

And what about George Bush’s comment, that Kissinger was a symbol of “America’s greatness?”

“I feel like they are saying the quiet part out loud. He is a symbol of America’s imperialism,” says Montes.

“Living in South America – and I’m sure this is true of many other so-called ‘Third World countries’ – we get sold this glossy idea of the US, you know? The Land of the Free, of Opportunity, of Freedom and Dreams.”

“I used to be enamored with the US! I grew up watching US TV shows and movies. I learned English from watching ‘Friends.’ It’s only when you grow up a bit that you start seeing it for what it is.”

The Palestinian American scholar Edward Said [once remarked](#):

Every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort.

And, sadder still, there always is a chorus of willing intellectuals to say calming words about benign or altruistic empires, as if one shouldn’t trust the evidence of one’s eyes watching the destruction and the misery and death brought by the latest mission civilizatrice.

When asked about the influence of the junta – and that of Kissinger and the United States – Montes is unequivocal.

“Their legacy is seen in the poverty in the villas, in the sunken eyes of hungry kids all over the world, in the missing but remembered, in the children of women who were taken that we are still looking for. It’s still very much there.”

But Montes doesn’t think the final chapter has been written in the story of Latin America. “I wholeheartedly believe in justice.”

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USAID Chief Arrives in Egypt With 36,000 Pounds of Aid for Gaza - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) – USAID Administrator Samantha Power arrived in Egypt on Tuesday with 36,000 pounds of food and medical supplies for Gaza.

“Today, Administrator Samantha Power arrived at the international humanitarian assistance hub in El-Arish, Egypt, to meet with local officials and Egyptian and international humanitarian organizations working to accelerate the pace of vitally needed assistance into Gaza. The Administrator accompanied an aid delivery of 36,000 pounds of food assistance and medical

supplies airlifted, at USAID's request, by the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) from Amman, Jordan to El-Arish," USAID said in a statement.

This assistance includes ready-to-use foods for displaced people and winter clothes, it added. Upon her arrival, Power announced that the US plans to help establish a field hospital in the Gaza Strip for civilians wounded amid the ongoing Israel-Hamas war, CBS News reported. It is unclear when the new hospital will start operating and whether other nations or international organizations are supporting it. However, it would be staffed by personnel from nongovernmental groups partnering with US authorities, the report said.

The measure is part of a new \$21 million aid pledge for Gaza and the West Bank, the report added.

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US Offers Reward of Up To \$7Mln for Information Leading to Arrest of Russia's Artem Uss

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The United States has announced a \$7 million reward for information leading to the arrest of Russian businessman Artem Uss who escaped from house arrest in Italy and fled to his homeland, the State Department said on Tuesday.

"Today, the State Department is announcing a reward offer under the Transnational Organized Crime Rewards Program (TOCRP) of up to \$7 million for Russian national Artem Aleksandrovich Uss, for information leading to his arrest and/or conviction for conspiring to participate in or attempting to participate in transnational organized crime," the release said.

In October 2022, a federal grand jury in the Eastern District of New York announced a 12-count criminal indictment against Uss and six other co-defendants that charged Uss with four counts, including conspiracy to defraud a US department or agency, conspiracy to violate the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), conspiracy to commit bank fraud, and conspiracy to commit money laundering for the oil smuggling and IEEPA scheme.

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Musk Supports Candidacy of MMA Fighter Conor McGregor for Irish President

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - Elon Musk on Tuesday expressed support for MMA fighter Conor McGregor to run for Irish president.

"Well, I hope you are at least nominated. That would shake things up!" Musk posted on X in reply to McGregor.

Musk replied to McGregor's post where he argued for better transparency from the Irish government to the Irish people.

"I'd just be happy with absolute transparency and consultation to the public. Currently there is none. Not an iota. False promises come around the time of election and then it is literally

straight ignorance into the face thereafter. It's disgusting," the professional boxer wrote. McGregor said he is "young, active, passionate, fresh skin in the game." Ireland is set to hold its next presidential election in 2025.

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Fewer Young Americans Plan to Vote in 2024 Presidential Election – Poll

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) – Just under half of 18-29-year-old Americans plan to "definitely vote" in the US presidential election next year, Axios reported, citing a Harvard Kennedy School Institute of Politics poll released Tuesday.

The 49% finding represents an eight-percentage-point drop from the 57% recorded in the fall of 2019 by the institute. Sharp declines were particularly seen among black and Hispanic young Americans, with decreases from 50% to 38% and 56% to 40%, respectively.

The figures dropped just two percentage points to 66% in terms of Democrats, while Republican respondents who definitely plan to vote dropped 10 percentage points to 56%.

With 29% of the hypothetical youth vote, Joe Biden led Donald Trump by four points, while 31% of respondents said they didn't know which candidate they would vote for. Notably, 69% of those who said they would vote for Biden rather than Trump said their choice reflected opposition to Trump rather than support for Biden.

The poll was conducted between October 23 to November 6.

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Biden Administration Plans for Palestinian Authority to Head Post-War Gaza – Reports

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration has been drafting a multi-phase post-war plan for administering the Gaza Strip that culminates in the Palestinian Authority assuming control of the territory, Politico reported, citing two US officials, including one from the State Department.

Led by National Security Council Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa Brett McGurk, White House, State Department and other officials have been developing the plan in position papers and interagency meetings since mid-October, the report said on Monday.

They see the Palestinian Authority as the most viable of only bad options, recognizing that it has "significant legitimacy and capability challenges," the State official said.

They plan for an international force in the immediate aftermath of the war, followed by a "revamped" Palestinian Authority taking over administration of Gaza in the long term.

They also plan to increase security aid from the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs and a larger role for the US security coordinator who

advises Palestinian security forces.

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Amnesty International Says Israel Killed 43 Civilians With US Munitions in 2 Gaza Strikes

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) – The Israeli military used US-made munitions to kill 43 Palestinian civilians in two airstrikes in Gaza in October, Amnesty International said on Tuesday. "US-made Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) were used by the Israeli military in two deadly, unlawful air strikes on homes full of civilians in the occupied Gaza Strip, Amnesty International has found based on a new investigation into those strikes," the release stated.

It added that it had "found distinctive fragments of the munition in the rubble of destroyed homes in central Gaza following two strikes that killed a total of 43 civilians – 19 children, 14 women and 10 men."

The incidents refer to the October 10 strike on the al-Najjar family home that killed 24 people and the October 22 strike on the Abu Mu'eileq family home that killed 19, both in the city of Deir al-Balah. The homes were located within the area where the Israeli military had ordered northern Gazan residents to relocate to, and survivors in both cases told Amnesty that they had received no warning of an imminent strike.

Amnesty called for a war crimes investigation and for the "US and other governments" to "immediately stop transferring arms to Israel that more likely than not will be used to commit or heighten risks of violations of international law."

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US Imposes Visa Ban on Former Deputy Prime Minister of North Macedonia for 'Corruption'

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) – The United States has imposed a visa ban on former Deputy Prime Minister of North Macedonia Kocho Angjushev for alleged corruption, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"The United States is designating Kocho Angjushev, a former Deputy Prime Minister of North Macedonia, as generally ineligible for entry into the United States, due to his involvement in significant corruption," Miller said in a statement.

The US accuses Angjushev of using his official position to benefit his private business interests and undermine people's confidence in government institutions.

The department is also designating Angjushev's wife, Elizabeta, and children, Angel and Ognen, as generally ineligible for entry into the US.

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with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

US Senate to Vote on Supplemental Aid Package for Ukraine, Israel on Wednesday

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer set up a final vote for Wednesday on President Joe Biden's \$106 billion emergency supplemental request to provide additional aid Ukraine, Israel, border security and the Indo-Pacific region.

"A few moments ago, I filed cloture on a motion to proceed on a shell bill for a national security supplemental," Schumer said Monday evening.

Sixty votes will be needed in the Senate to approve the new funding.

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В Белом доме заявили, что не в курсе сообщений о выплатах Байдену компанией сына

МОСКВА, 5 дек – РИА Новости. Пресс-секретарь Белого дома Карин Жан-Пьер заявила, что не в курсе сообщений о том, что президент США Джо Байден получал ежемесячные выплаты от компании его сына Хантера.

На регулярном брифинге для журналистов Жан-Пьер попросили подтвердить информацию, опубликованную надзорным комитетом Палаты представителей, которая включает в том числе банковские выплаты, предоставленные по повестке в рамках ведущегося расследование об участии Байдена-старшего в бизнес-делах своих родственников.

"Я буду с вами честна. Я не видела этих сообщений, поэтому вынуждена направить вас к моим коллегам из офиса адвокатов Белого дома", - сказала Жан-Пьер. На этом она завершила брифинг.

Как говорится в заявлении комитета по надзору и подотчетности Палаты представителей, бизнес-структура Хантера Байдена Owasco PC осуществляла прямые ежемесячные платежи Джо Байдену в 2018 году. Сама же структура, как указывается, получала средства от "компаний, связанных с китайским государством, других иностранных лиц и фирм".

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UPDATE - Police Officers Injured Due to Explosion in Residential Building in Suburbs of Washington

(Adds details in paras 5-6)

MOSCOW/WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - Police officers received minor injuries due to a powerful explosion that occurred on Tuesday in a residential building in Arlington, Virginia

after police tried to enter the building to conduct searches, the Arlington County Police Department said.

"As officers were attempting to execute a search warrant at the residence, the suspect discharged several rounds inside the home. Subsequently, an explosion occurred at the residence," police said, adding that "officers on scene reported minor injuries with no one transported to the hospital."

Police added that the Arlington County Fire Department is attempting to extinguish the fire. Before the incident occurred, the police department said that it was "investigating a suspect who has discharged a flare gun from his residence."

Sputnik correspondent reported later that a large number of police officers are at the scene of the incident, and the roads to the scene are blocked. There is also a strong smell of smoke in the air, the correspondent added.

Officials told reporters that until the fire is extinguished, it is impossible to determine whether anyone died in the incident. They also stated that it is still not clear which part of the building is destroyed, the correspondent said.

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US Senate to Vote on Supplemental Aid Package for Ukraine, Israel on Wednesday

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer set up a final vote for Wednesday on President Joe Biden's \$106 billion emergency supplemental request to provide additional aid Ukraine, Israel, border security and the Indo-Pacific region.

"A few moments ago, I filed cloture on a motion to proceed on a shell bill for a national security supplemental," Schumer said Monday evening.

Sixty votes will be needed in the Senate to approve the new funding.

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Schumer Says Zelenskyy Invited to Address US Senators at Classified Briefing

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration invited Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to address US Senators as part of a classified briefing on the situation in Ukraine, US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said during remarks on the Senate floor.

"Tonight, I'd like to announce that the administration has invited President Zelenskyy to address Senators via secure video as part of our classified briefing tomorrow," Schumer said on Monday.

The briefing comes as lawmakers consider whether to provide billions of dollars more to Ukraine as part of a supplemental funding request from the Biden administration.

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US, Indian Delegations Meet to Review Initiative on Critical Technology - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - A US delegation visited New Delhi to review with its Indian counterparts the US-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET), the White House said in a statement.

"Principal Deputy National Security Advisor Jon Finer led a US delegation to New Delhi on December 4 for an intersessional review of the US-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) with Indian Deputy National Security Advisor Vikram Misri," the statement said on Monday.

The White House described iCET as a significant milestone in the US-India partnership, characterized by growing strategic security and technology cooperation, the statement said.

"In addition, Mr. Finer conducted bilateral and regional consultations with Ambassador Misri, Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra for in-depth discussions aimed at strengthening coordination and policy alignment across the Indo-Pacific, including the wider Indian Ocean region," the statement said.

In addition, the delegations discussed matters concerning the situation in the Middle East and the recent attacks on vessels in the Red Sea, the statement said.

The US delegation emphasized the significance of preserving freedom of commercial navigation and exploring plans for post-conflict development of the Gaza Strip along with a potential pathway to a two-state solution, the statement added.

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DARPA Hires RTX Raytheon to Assess Risk Threats to US Military Supply Chain - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon has signed an \$8 million contract with RTX to have the company's Raytheon technologies unit analyze potential threats from shock events to the US armed forces supply chain, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"RTX will help the Department of Defense address systemic risk in the procurement and delivery of supplies under an \$8 million DARPA [Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency] contract," the release said on Monday. "The work will be performed by the company's Raytheon BBN Technologies unit."

Under the Resilient Supply-and-Demand networks (RSDN) contract, Raytheon BBN will develop a modeling and simulation tool that utilizes historical and behavioral survey data to predict the impact of and develop mitigations for shocks to supply demand networks in the first global supply chain stress test framework created for that purpose, the Defense department explained.

"DARPA has emphasized that supply demand networks are potential sources of strategic surprise for the Defense Department. Vulnerabilities stem from the fact that they are open, complex, evolving systems whose dynamics are at the mercy of both external and internal factors - often driven by locally focused decisions. These decisions often place a priority on cost, timeliness and efficiency with little consideration being made to resiliency." Raytheon BBN principal investigator on the project John Santini said in the release.

Raytheon BBN's simulator will Use data on supplies of pharmaceuticals, military metals and military food to implement simulations in realistic environments, the release said.

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US House Panel Says FBI Interviewed Priest, Choir Director in Targeting of Catholic Church

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The FBI interviewed a Catholic priest and a choir director as part of an effort to target traditional Catholics as potential extremists, the US House Select Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government said in an interim staff report.

Earlier this year, the panel began investigating whistleblower allegations of an FBI memorandum that proposed infiltrating the traditional Catholic community as a form of threat mitigation against potential violent extremism.

"The Committee and Select Subcommittee's oversight shows that the FBI abused its counterterrorism tools to target Catholic Americans as potential domestic terrorists," the panel said on Monday, citing whistleblower disclosures. "Not only did the FBI propose to develop sources, but it already interviewed a priest and choir director affiliated with a Catholic church in Richmond, Virginia for the memorandum."

The panel determined that there were errors at every step of drafting, reviewing, approving and removing the memo, the report said.

The FBI had no legitimate basis to insert federal law enforcement into traditional Catholic communities, the report said. The FBI targeted anti-abortion Catholics and those who believe in biology-based gender distinctions as potential domestic terrorists, the report said.

"Perhaps most concerning is that without the whistleblower, this document would still be actionable in FBI systems, potentially endangering the religious liberties of countless Americans who might be investigated simply for espousing certain sincerely held views," the report said.

The FBI must take decisive action to rebuild public trust, the report said. The panel will continue oversight in an effort to protect religious liberty from government overreach, the report said.

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Yellen to Crusade Against Fentanyl Drug, Boost Bilateral Ties During Mexico Visit

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen will travel to Mexico on a three-day trip beginning Tuesday to strengthen bilateral relations and collaborate against the trafficking of the fentanyl drug, among others, her office announced.

"Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen will travel to Mexico City, Mexico, where she will engage with government and private sector leaders to strengthen US-Mexico collaboration on countering fentanyl and illicit finance, deepening mutually-beneficial economic ties, bolstering supply chain resilience through friend-shoring, and other shared economic priorities," a Treasury statement said Monday.

On the fentanyl front, the Treasury said US officials, working in collaboration with their Mexican government counterparts, imposed just last week sanctions on three Mexican individuals and 13 Mexican entities linked to CJNG, which traffics a large portion of the illicit fentanyl that enters the United States.

"This brings the total number of targets sanctioned by Treasury for involvement in drug trafficking activities to almost 250 in the last two years alone," the statement said, adding that the Treasury particularly played a leading role in this effort, leveraging its expertise in fighting illicit financing and financial crimes to disrupt the flows of money that cartels rely on to traffic fentanyl and other harmful drugs.

Yellen's Mexico visit comes on the heels of the founding on Monday of the Treasury Counter Fentanyl Strike Force, which brings together personnel, expertise, intelligence, and resources across key Treasury offices into a coordinated and streamlined operation to combat the trafficking of illicit fentanyl, the statement said.

The treasury secretary will build on the joint commitment made by the United States and Mexico in October to intensify efforts to combat illicit drug trafficking, particularly of synthetic drugs such as fentanyl, the statement added.

"In her meetings and engagements, Secretary Yellen will also focus on deepening the US-Mexico economic relationship, and advancing collective efforts to create reliable, secure supply chains that span the United States and Mexico," the statement said.

Yellen will also emphasize that US and Mexican economies were intertwined and that continued economic cooperation can create good-paying jobs across North America and increase economic security for both nations.

"Secretary Yellen will discuss the benefits of greater coordination on financial and regulatory policy, as well as efforts to explore improving the connectivity between the US and Mexican payments systems," the statement added.

Bilateral goods and services trade exceeded over \$850 billion in 2022, with Mexico becoming the United States' largest goods trading partner this year. US industries export electrical machinery to plastics to Mexico, benefitting American workers and firms by supporting more than 1 million jobs. The economic and trade collaboration also helps American manufacturers and consumers gain from having resilient North American supply chains that made them more competitive globally, the statement said.

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CENTCOM Says US base Rumalyn Landing Zone in Syria Attacked With Rockets From Iraq

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) – The US Central Command (CENTCOM) said in an X post that the US base Rumalyn Landing Zone in Syria was attacked by 15 rockets from the territory of Iraq resulting in no injuries or damage.

“At approximately 2:15 p.m. on Dec. 3, 15 122mm rockets originating in Iraq were fired at the U.S. base Rumalyn Landing Zone in Syria. There were no injuries to personnel or damage to equipment,” the post said on Monday.

The Combined Joint Task Force located the point of origin which turned out to be a fuel truck modified to launch up to 20 rockets and passed this information to Iraqi Security Forces to investigate the site, the post added.

CENTCOM said earlier on Monday, that US-led Coalition forces have killed five persons who were allegedly preparing to launch an attack drone near Kirkuk, Iraq, over the weekend.

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Continuing Budget Deadlock in Congress 'Bad' for US Navy - Joint Chiefs Vice Chairman

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The US Navy needs to see the current budget deadlock in Congress resolved as quickly as possible in order to get its approved funding flowing again, rather than remaining locked into lower and obsolescent funding levels by continuing resolutions (CRs), Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Christopher Grady said at the Atlantic Council.

"The Continuing Resolution is bad," Grady said on Monday. "That's not where we want to be. We need that stable and predictable funding... As we operate under the CR, our top line is 3% below where it would have been with the president's budget request for Fiscal Year 2024."

The Navy was forced to deal with a lack of resources to buy enough replacement weapons as well as mounting delays in developing urgently needed new systems to meet rapidly evolving threats from peer adversaries, the admiral warned.

"The crisis generated "that uncertainty, those discontinuities, that lack of efficiency that comes from that. All these things make it really challenging," he said.

Because of the funding levels limits imposed by the CR, the Navy could launch no new starts on programs and could not buy more weapons, Grady said.

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CBC/Radio Canada to Cut 600 Jobs, Eliminate 200 Vacancies Amid Budget Pressures

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - CBC/Radio-Canada announced in a statement that it would cut 600 jobs and further eliminate 200 vacant positions amid increased budget pressures

forecast for fiscal year 2024-2025.

"CBC/Radio-Canada today announced it will be implementing program and job cuts over the next year in order to manage approximately \$125 million in budget pressures forecast for the 2024–2025 fiscal year," the statement said on Monday.

The corporation will laying off more than 600 current unionised and non-unionised employees, and will eliminate 200 vacant positions, the statement said.

The English and French language branches will both cut 250 jobs and the remaining hundred will be sourced from the Technology and Infrastructure division, among others, the statement said.

Divisions will begin the reduction in numbers based on business plans and operational requirements and while most will be laid off over a 12-month period, some will be terminated immediately, the statement said.

The corporation will be reducing its English and French programming over the next fiscal year, resulting in a reduction of C\$40 million (US\$29.5 million) in independent production and program acquisitions, the statement also said.

"This will result in reduced renewals and acquisitions, fewer new television series and episodes of existing shows, as well as fewer digital original series," the statement added.

CBC/Radio-Canada said that the job cuts were done in a way that maximizes the corporation's flexibility in the event of observing a change in its financial situation over the coming year, according to the statement.

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Gaza Can Get 'Hellish' With Humanitarian Operations Unable to Respond-UN Official

UNITED NATIONS, December 4 (Sputnik) - Conditions for delivering humanitarian aid in Gaza are very challenging but it can get even worse with humanitarian assistance not being able to respond at all, UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory Lynn Hastings said on Monday.

"The conditions required to deliver aid to the people of Gaza do not exist," the statement of Lynn Hastings said. "If possible, an even more hellish scenario is about to unfold, one in which humanitarian operations may not be able to respond."

The health system is "on its knees," and the people are on the verge of collapse physically and mentally, she added.

On October 7, Hamas launched an attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip. Some 1,200 Israelis were killed in the attack. Israel declared war on Hamas and launched retaliatory strikes as well as imposed a complete blockade of Gaza, cutting off water, food, medicines, electricity and fuel. Israel's indiscriminate bombardment and ground invasion of Gaza have resulted in the killing of more than 17,000 Palestinians and the wounding of more than 36,000 others. Fighting has continued after the temporary humanitarian pause of nearly a week between Hamas and the Israeli government.

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US Navy Can Protect Taiwan, Israel, Handle Ukraine Needs at Same Time - Senior Admiral

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has the resources to handle all of the operational demands that may be put on it to support Taiwan, Israel and Ukraine at the same time, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Christopher Grady said.

"We will continue to do what we need to do to ensure Taiwan can defend itself," Grady said on Monday in remarks at the Atlantic Council. "I am confident we can support Israel and Ukraine at the same time."

Grady said the US Navy was not overstretched and had both the naval capabilities and the command and control organization to handle the three crises simultaneously.

"We have to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. ... We can do all of that," he said.

Grady noted that the Navy was now operating two carrier strike groups in the Eastern Mediterranean - one from the US Central Command (CENTCOM) area and another that was redeployed from the US European Command (EUCOM) region - but said the deployments were not straining or threatening the force's overall capabilities and readiness.

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Beijing Moves in South China Sea Challenge Intl. Rules-Based Order - US Admiral

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The US Navy remains committed to maintaining its active presence in the South China Sea in order to uphold the principle of the international rules-based order as a top priority, Vice Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Christopher Grady said.

"I think it's a test case for the entire rules-based international order right now," Grady told a meeting at the Atlantic Council on Monday. "This is a direct challenge to the international rules-based order."

Grady emphasized that the US Navy was committed to maintaining its forward presence in the South China Sea to demonstrate that it remained an open international waterway and that it would uphold and defend the territorial rights of allies such as Taiwan and the Philippines there.

"It is about not ceding that battlespace in the South China Sea," Grady said.

The admiral explained that Beijing's activity in the Thomas Shoals region is "reflective of China's desire to make the South China Sea its own lake."

This is a case where the "probability of buffoonery" - irresponsible behavior that could rapidly escalate - goes way high, Grady said.

The tempo of Chinese maritime activity including so-called "white" or coast guard vessels had increased a little in recent weeks, Grady added.

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UN Says Using Public, Private Ways to Voice Concerns Over Attacks on Navigation in Red Sea

UNITED NATIONS, December 5 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is utilizing both public and private channels to voice its concern regarding recent Houthi attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea, spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

"We are using whatever ways we have, both public and private, to communicate our extremely-serious concern about these attacks on commercial vessels," Dujarric said during a press briefing on Monday.

The remarks were in response to a reporter's question on if Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg is using his good offices in any way to try and get the Houthis to cool down the tensions.

Dujarric said that the UN believes not only in the fundamental importance of basic freedom of navigation, but also recognizes it as a cornerstone of international commerce and law.

"We're also, as we've said in the past, very worried about the expansion of the conflict, as we see it," Dujarric added.

On Sunday, Yemen's Houthis claimed an attack on what they described as two ships associated with Israel in the Bab al-Mandab Strait in the Red Sea, following the end of a week-long truce in the Gaza Strip.

The United States Central Command (CENTCOM) identified the ships as merchant vessels — the UK-owned and Bahamas-flagged Unity Explorer, and the Number Nine, which is flagged in Panama and owned and operated by the Bermudas and the UK. The two sustained minor damage. According to CENTCOM, the Panama-registered Sophie II commercial ship, was also hit by the Houthis.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) -

UKRAINE CONFLICT

* The Biden administration warned Congress that it would exhaust the funds earmarked for military aid to Ukraine by the end of the year, the White House said on Monday.

* The United States will not be able to provide weapons to Ukraine after it uses all of the funds already allocated by Congress for that country, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Monday.

* The battlefield situation in Ukraine is tough for the Kiev regime's forces due to the entrenchment of the Russian military, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said.

* Kiev has launched the first round of consultations with the European Union on its collective security commitments to Ukraine, the Office of the Ukrainian President said.

* The Russian Presidential Human Rights Council has already collected 8,123 cases of crimes committed by the Kiev regime against civilians, Council Chairperson Valery Fadeev said.

ISRAEL INVASION OF GAZA

* Gaza's Health Ministry spokesman Ashraf Al-Qudra said on Monday that it is necessary to facilitate the safe evacuation of all injured people, numbering in the thousands, from the Gaza Strip.

* The communication and Internet services have been completely shut down in Gaza, Palestinian telecommunications company Paltel said.

* The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs warned that the prevailing conditions in Gaza restrict its ability to meet the residents' needs, leading to a significant pause in aid distribution amid the dire humanitarian situation, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

* At least 60 Palestinian journalists and media workers have been killed in the Gaza Strip since October 7, the International Federation of Journalists said.

* The United States expects Israel's operation in southern Gaza to result in civilian casualties but hopes the number will be fewer than that in the north of the Palestinian enclave, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said.

* The United States is engaged in discussions with partners to find a way forward on hostages held in Gaza, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said.

* The United States is engaged in talks with "other countries" regarding the establishing of a maritime task force in the Red Sea to ensure a safe passage of commercial ships, Sullivan said.

UNITED NATIONS

* The UN General Assembly on Monday adopted a Russian-proposed resolution calling on countries to pledge not to be the first to place weapons in space.

* The UN General Assembly also adopted a resolution introduced by Russia to enhance confidence-building and transparency among nations operating in outer space.

EU-NIGER RELATIONS

* The Nigerien authorities said on Monday they had terminated the agreement with the European Union on the deployment of the civilian EUCAP Sahel Niger mission in the African country.

GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS

* Russia considers expansion of investment cooperation with Kuwait a priority and will continue cooperating with the Arab country considering its membership in OPEC, President Vladimir Putin said on Monday.

FENTANYL CRISIS IN UNITED STATES

* The Biden administration has launched its promised fentanyl Counter Strike Task Force to combat the epidemic of opioid drug abuse that is now taking up to 100,000 American lives per

year, the Treasury Department announced on Monday.

PUTIN ADDRESS AT THE KREMLIN

* Russia, as the future chair of BRICS, intends to promote the organization's role in addressing pressing issues on the global agenda, Russian President Vladimir Putin said at the Kremlin on Monday.

* Russia plans to expand humanitarian and cultural partnership with foreign countries, Putin said.

* Russia will develop integration processes within the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), President Vladimir Putin said.

* Russia's withdrawal from a number of international human rights institutions does not mean that the country is ignoring human rights, on the contrary, Moscow is ready to cooperate to build an equal and fair system that ensures respecting human rights, Putin said.

* The West is demonstrating bias and Russophobia, while the process of degradation of international politics continues, Putin said.

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US State Dept. Approves \$85Mln Sale of AN/TPQ-50 Radars, Equipment to UAE – DSCA

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - The US State Department has approved the sale of up to 18 N/TPQ-50 Radar and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$85 million to the United Arab Emirates, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) announced on Monday.

“The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of the United Arab Emirates of AN/TPQ-50 Radar and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$85 million,” DSCA said in a press release.

The related equipment includes 107mm High Explosive rockets for testing purposes only, Computer Digital Military Laptop Radar Control Display units, 5kW Advanced Medium Mobile Power Source, and communication and navigation equipment, the release said.

The radars will allow the UAE defense forces to recognize incoming threats from hostile nations or agents of adversary nations and in this way support efforts to protect critical infrastructure and high-value civilian assets, according to the release.

The contract will be fulfilled by one principal contractor, SRC Inc, Syracuse from the US state of New York, the release added.

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Israel Notifies WHO to Remove Medical Supplies From Southern Gaza Within 24 Hours - Tedros

UNITED NATIONS, December 4 (Sputnik) - World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on Monday that Israel had given his organization a notice to remove medical supplies from two of its warehouses in southern Gaza within 24 hours.

"Today, @WHO received notification from the Israel Defense Forces that we should remove our supplies from our two medical warehouses in southern Gaza within 24 hours, as ground operations will put them beyond use. We appeal to #Israel to withdraw the order, and take every possible measure to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and humanitarian facilities," Tedros wrote on X.

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US Sanctions 3 Ex-Sudanese Officials for Allegedly Undermining Stability - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - The United States sanctioned three former Sudanese government officials over their alleged role in destabilizing the country, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"The United States is today designating three officials of the former Omar al-Bashir regime: Mohamed Atta Elmoula Abbas, Taha Osman Ahmed al-Hussein, and Salah Abdallah Mohamed Salah, also known as Salah Gosh," Miller said in a statement. "Elmoula and Gosh are former security officials who worked to return former regime elements to power and undermine efforts to establish civilian government, while Taha worked to facilitate the delivery of military and other materiel support from external sources to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)."

The Treasury Department earlier in the day said the measures freeze all property and interests of the three officials. The sanctions also prohibit conducting business with any entities if they are owned 50% or more by those designated.

In April, violent clashes broke out between the Sudanese army and the RSF. The parties to the conflict have since introduced a number of temporary nationwide ceasefires, but none has helped settle the conflict. In late October, the parties resumed negotiations, mediated by Saudi Arabia, but the hostilities in the country continue.

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France Says More Than Humanitarian Pauses Are Needed in Israel-Palestine Conflict-UN Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, December 4 (Sputnik) - France believes that the deteriorating situation in Gaza needs more than humanitarian pauses, the French Envoy to the UN Nicolas de Rivièrè said on Monday.

"The situation in Gaza is deteriorating further..." Riviera told journalists. "We need more than humanitarian pauses. I think we need a truce."

We need a truce heading to a ceasefire, he added.

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Austin, Romanian Prime Minister Discuss Eastern Europe, Black Sea Security - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin hosted Romanian Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu on Monday to discuss security matters in Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region, Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder said.

The Romanian prime minister is currently on a visit to the United States.

"Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III met with Romanian Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu and the Romanian Minister of Defense Angel Tîlvăr at the Pentagon today to discuss a range of bilateral and regional issues," Ryder said in a statement.

During the discussion, the officials reiterated their condemnation of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, reaffirming their support for the Ukrainian people, the statement said.

Austin underscored Bucharest's "strong leadership" in the Black Sea region to curb "Russian aggression."

The secretary also thanked Romania for hosting 3,000 US and NATO troops as part of NATO's efforts to strengthen its Eastern Flank, the statement said.

In addition, Austin lauded Bucharest for committing to spend 2% of its GDP on defense as well as their investments in procuring modern, NATO-interoperable military equipment.

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US State Dept. Approves \$582Mln Sale of Air Surveillance Upgrades to Saudi Arabia - DSCA

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - The US State Department approved a potential \$582 million sale of airborne surveillance system upgrades to Saudi Arabia, the Pentagon's Defense Security Cooperation Agency said on Monday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia of RE-3A Tactical Airborne Surveillance System Aircraft Modernization and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$582 million," DSCA said in a statement.

Saudi Arabia requested aircraft hardware and software modifications and support to modernize its RE-3A spy aircraft, including location and navigation systems, the statement said. The proposed sale would support US foreign policy and national security goals, the statement said.

L3 Technologies in Greenville, Texas would serve as the principal contractor for the sale, the statement said.

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Sullivan Says 'No Comment' on Reports Spanish Officers Leaked Secrets to US

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Monday that he has no comment on reports that several Spanish officers are under investigation for allegedly leaking secret information to the United States.

"No comment," Sullivan said during a press briefing when asked about the matter.

According to Spain's defense chief, a judge in Madrid opened an investigation into allegations several agents with Spain's National Intelligence Center leaked classified information to the United States.

Spain's National Intelligence Center reportedly filed a complaint about the incident to the court. According to media reports, two Spanish agents were arrested in connection to the case.

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US Will Not Be Able to Give Weapons to Ukraine After It Uses Up Allocated Funds - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - The United States will not be able to provide weapons to Ukraine after it uses all of the funds already allocated by Congress for the country, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Monday when asked whether there is a "Plan B" for Ukraine if Congress declines to provide supplemental funding.

"When we run out of money to buy weapons to replace the weapons we are giving ... we are not in the position to supply weapons to Ukraine," Sullivan said in a press briefing. "There is no way around the simple arithmetic that if there is no funding to provide weapons to Ukraine, we are just not in a position to continue to provide weapons to Ukraine."

The White House warned Congress earlier on Monday that it will exhaust the funds Congress earmarked for military aid to Ukraine by the end of the year. The Biden administration has proposed a \$106 billion supplemental funding bill, which includes aid for Ukraine and Israel.

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White House Says Congress Vote Against Supplemental Funding for Ukraine Will Help Russia

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - A vote by the US Congress against supplemental funding for Ukraine will hurt Kiev and help Russia, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Monday.

"A vote against supplemental funding for Ukraine will hurt Ukraine and help Russia," Sullivan said. "I believe that any member of Congress who does not support funding for Ukraine is voting for an outcome that will make it easier for [Russian President Vladimir] Putin to prevail. That is a vote against supporting Ukraine is a vote to improve Putin's strategic position."

Earlier on Monday, the White House sent a letter to lawmakers informing them that the Biden administration is out of money to support Ukraine and urging Congress to approve more aid. The Biden administration has proposed a \$106 billion supplemental funding bill, which includes aid for Ukraine and Israel.

Disagreements on providing aid to Ukraine and securing funds to boost US border security could reportedly delay Senate consideration of the supplemental funding bill until next week.

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US to Take Appropriate Action to Deal With Emerging Houthi Challenge - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - The United States is consulting with allies to take decisive action in response to the escalating threat posed by Iran-backed Houthi militants, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Monday.

"We have made clear that the entire world needs to step up together, not the US alone, but all of us working together to deal with this emerging challenge that the Houthis present, backed by Iran. We're going to take appropriate action, in consultation with others, and we will do so at a time and place of our choosing," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

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About 750 More US Citizens, Legal Permanent Residents Remain in Gaza - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - About 750 US citizens, legal permanent residents and their family members still remain in Gaza, while more than 1000 have already left the embattled enclave, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"There are more than 1000 American citizens, legal permanent residents, and their family members who have departed Gaza. There are around 750 who are left. That includes 220 American citizens, the rest are family members and legal permanent residents," Miller said during a press briefing.

Miller also said that Washington has not yet confirmed media reports that an American woman died in the northern part of Gaza while waiting to leave the Palestinian enclave.

On October 7, Hamas launched an attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip. Some 1,200 Israelis were killed in the attack. Israel declared war on Hamas and launched retaliatory strikes as well as imposed a complete blockade of Gaza, cutting off water, food, medicines, electricity and fuel. Israel's indiscriminate bombardment and ground invasion of Gaza have resulted in the

killing of more than 17,000 Palestinians and the wounding of more than 36,000 others. Fighting has continued after the temporary humanitarian pause of nearly a week between Hamas and the Israeli government.

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Biden Administration Sets Up New Fentanyl Task Force to Fight Opioid Crisis - Treasury

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has launched its promised fentanyl Counter Strike Task Force to combat the epidemic of opioid drug abuse that is now taking up to 100,000 American lives per year, the Department of the Treasury announced in a press release on Monday.

"Today, the US Department of the Treasury announced the launch of a Counter-Fentanyl Strike Force to marshal Treasury's resources and expertise in a coordinated and streamlined operation to combat the trafficking of illicit fentanyl," the release said.

The US will also collaborate with foreign financial intelligence units to identify money laundering networks facilitating the flow of funds supporting the fentanyl trade, according to the release.

Treasury's work, the release added, will advance the deal struck between President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping in November to resume bilateral cooperation on counternarcotics with a focus on reducing the flow of precursor chemicals fueling illicit fentanyl and synthetic drug trafficking.

A UCLA study in September found that the proportion of US overdose deaths involving both fentanyl and stimulants has increased by a factor of 50 since 2010, soaring to over 34,000 deaths in 2021, representing about 32.3% of total overdose deaths.

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US in Talks With 'Other Countries' to Ensure Safe Passage of Ships in Red Sea - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - The United States is engaged in talks with "other countries" regarding the establishing of a maritime task force in the Red Sea to ensure a safe passage of commercial ships, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Monday.

"We are in talks with other countries about maritime task force of sorts, involving the ships from partner nations, alongside the United States in ensuring safe passage of ships in the Red Sea, those talks are ongoing as we speak, I don't have anything formal to announce," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

Sullivan explained the United States will take the time to do appropriate consultations, build a response that involves as much involvement from as many countries as possible, before

providing additional reports to the public.

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UNGA Adopts Russian Resolution on Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space

UNITED NATIONS, December 4 (Sputnik) - The UN General Assembly on Monday adopted a resolution introduced by Russia to enhance confidence-building and transparency among nations operating in outer space.

The resolution "Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space Activities" was submitted on behalf of Belarus, China, Cuba, Equatorial Guinea, Syria and Zimbabwe.

The document emphasizes "the importance of the report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space Activities, considered by the General Assembly on 5 December 2013," and encourages the entire United Nations system and relevant bodies to coordinate and act on the recommendations.

The resolution encourages states to "continue to review and implement, to the greatest extent practicable, the proposed transparency and confidence-building measures contained in the report, through the relevant national mechanisms, on a voluntary basis and in a manner consistent with the national interests of Member States."

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Houthi Attacks Against Commercial Ships in Persian Gulf 'Enabled By Iran' - White House

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - The recent attacks by Houthi rebels in Yemen against commercial vessels transiting the Persian Gulf region have been fully enabled by Iran, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Monday.

"We have every reason to believe that these attacks, while they were launched by the Houthis in Yemen, are fully enabled by Iran," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

The United States is currently engaging in intensive consultations with partners and allies to determine the appropriate next steps in light of the attacks, Sullivan said.

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US in Talks With Partners to Find Way Forward on Hostages Held in Gaza - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - The United States is engaged in discussions with partners to find a way forward on hostages held in Gaza, US National Security Advisor Jake

Sullivan said on Monday.

"We're still talking about trying to find a way forward on hostages. We're talking about sustaining and expanding the humanitarian assistance, making it into Gaza, and we're talking about of course the status of Israel's military operation as it defends itself against a terrorist organization that has declared its intent to repeat the October 7 massacres again," Sullivan said during a press briefing.

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US Senator Questions College Football Playoff Panel Over Florida Team's Exclusion - Letter

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - US Senator Rick Scott on Monday sent a letter to the College Football Playoff (CFP) Selection Committee demanding an explanation for the panel's decision to exclude Florida State University from this year's playoffs despite the team's undefeated record.

"The Committee's decision to drop the 13-0 Florida State University (FSU) Seminoles from its previous 4th-place ranking, and thereby exclude the team from the upcoming playoffs... has rightly raised questions among millions of Americans about the integrity of the process employed by this 13-member body," the letter said.

The panel's decision to exclude FSU from the playoffs marks the first time in history that an undefeated Power 5 conference champion team has been cut from the playoffs. The panel excluded FSU after the team's quarterback, Jordan Travis, suffered a season-ending leg injury. The panel disregarded the known strengths of the undefeated FSU team over the speculated impacts of losing a single player, the letter said.

There are financial implications from the panel's decision, the letter said. FSU and the Atlantic Coast Conference have lost out on \$2 million in revenue distribution due to the decision, which is a fraction of the total potential economic impact, the letter said.

The letter requests that the CFP Selection Committee immediately provide information on its ranking process, communications on its decision and its ethical guidelines.

FSU was treated "very badly" by the panel, former US President Donald Trump also said in a statement via social media platform Truth. Florida Governor and fellow 2024 Republican presidential candidate Ron DeSantis deserves blame for the situation due to poor lobbying efforts, Trump added.

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UNGA Adopts Russian Resolution on Not Being First to Place Weapons in Space

UNITED NATIONS, December 4 (Sputnik) - The UN General Assembly on Monday adopted a Russian-proposed resolution calling on countries to pledge not to be the first to place weapons

in space.

Russia introduced the draft resolution on behalf of a number of countries including Belarus, China, Cuba, North Korea, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Sri Lanka, Syria and Zimbabwe.

The resolution encourages states, "especially spacefaring nations, to consider the possibility of upholding, as appropriate, a political commitment not to be the first to place weapons in outer space."

The UN General Assembly also urges the early start of substantive work on the updated draft treaty to prevent the placement of weapons in outer space, introduced by China and Russia at the Conference on Disarmament in 2008.

Russia and China have repeatedly said that preventing an arms race in space is an urgent task.

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UN, Partners on Ground in Philippines Assessing Earthquake Damage - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, December 4 (Sputnik) - The UN and partners are on the ground in the Philippines evaluating the impact of the recent hurricane, Secretary-General Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

"The government of the Philippines is leading the efforts at both provincial and municipal level. Government agencies and the UN, as well as our partners on the ground, are conducting rapid assessments of impacted areas," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

Furthermore, Dujarric added that, based on government information, over 340,000 individuals have been affected, with initial reports indicating damage to hospitals and roads.

Last week, a 7.4-magnitude earthquake hit off the island of Mindanao, northeast of Hinatuan municipality in Surigao del Sur province. It was reportedly the strongest in the area of Mindanao since 1992.

The Philippines is located in the Pacific Ring of Fire, a region which is particularly prone to tectonic activity and earthquakes. About 90% of the world's approximately 1,500 known volcanoes are located in the Pacific Ring of Fire. About 90% of earthquakes occur in this region.

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US-Led Coalition Kills 5 Persons in Iraq Preparing to Launch Attack Drone - CENTCOM

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - US-led Coalition forces have killed five persons who were allegedly preparing to launch an attack drone near Kirkuk, Iraq, over the weekend, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said on Monday.

"On December 3, near Kirkuk, Iraq, forces assigned to Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) engaged five militants preparing to launch a one-way attack

drone," CENTCOM said in a press release. "CJTF-OIR forces responded in self-defense with an armed US unmanned aerial system, killing all five militants and destroying the drone."

CENTCOM noted that the Iraqi Security Forces were notified of the strike and were able to confirm the deaths of the five individuals and the destruction of the drone, the release added.

On Friday, a US official told Sputnik that the United States assesses that Iran-backed proxy forces are placing pressure on the United States and Israel amid the conflict in the Gaza Strip.

The attacks against US forces in the Middle East stopped for several days after Israel and the Palestinian movement Hamas agreed to a humanitarian pause designed to facilitate the release of hostages in the conflict and delivery of humanitarian aid. However, hostilities have resumed since the end of the humanitarian pause.

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State Dept. Says Aware of Reports About US National Death in Russia, Has No Comments

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) – US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday that Washington is aware of media reports that an American took his life at a center for illegal migrants in Russia's Krasnodar region.

Earlier on Monday, Russian media outlets reported that US citizen Ernest Harry Mitchell, 54, died at a temporary detention center for foreigners in the Gulkevichsky district of the Krasnodar region. Mitchell died on the night of December 4 and allegedly committed suicide.

"We have seen those reports, we haven't confirmed them yet and since we haven't, we don't have any comment," Miller said during a press briefing.

According to media reports, Mitchell was placed in a temporary detention center for illegal migrants due to the lack of a valid medical insurance policy, which is mandatory for foreign citizens traveling to Russia.

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US Should Involve Itself in as Many Countries as Possible to Promote Democracy - Senator

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - The United States ought to involve itself in the affairs of as many foreign countries as possible in order to promote democracy and economic development, US Senator Peter Welch said on Monday.

"Where we hopefully can be involved is as many places as we can where we can effectively help promote democracy and economic improvement," Welch said during an interview with the US Institute of Peace.

However, the United States ought not to be militarily involved everywhere, Welch said.

There is an increasing debate among US lawmakers about whether to continue involving the

United States in the affairs of foreign countries, such as in Ukraine, Welch added.

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Oil Prices Extend Losses After 6 Weeks, Market Unconvinced by OPEC+ Pledges

NEW YORK, December 4 (Sputnik) - The world's largest oil producers aren't able to convince traders in the space that they would stick to their pledges on output cuts for the coming year, pressuring crude prices lower again on Monday after six straight weeks of losses.

With an hour to settlement, New York-traded West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, crude for January delivery was at \$73.23 per barrel, down 84 cents, or 1.1%, on the day. WTI has dropped 16% in value since mid-October, falling first on signs of weak seasonal demand before extending losses on the notion that oil producers in the OPEC+ alliance will not keep to their 2024 cuts.

WTI aside, UK-origin Brent crude's most-active February contract was at \$78.23 per barrel, down 65 cents, or 0.8%, on the day. Like its US counterpart, London-traded Brent has lost about 16% since mid-October.

"The OPEC+ 'deal' last week was unconvincing to say the least," said Craig Erlam, analyst at online trading platform OANDA. "And with markets seemingly anticipating more of an economic slowdown next year, the announcement simply doesn't go far enough."

The 23-nation OPEC+ groups the Saudi Arabia-led 13-member OPEC, or the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, and ten independent oil producers, including Russia. Since last year, the alliance has been keeping between 4.0 and 5.0 million barrels per day from the market.

Crude prices took a further dent on Monday despite Saudi Energy Minister Abdulziz bin Salman reiterating that new output cut pledges of 2.2 million barrels per day by OPEC+ will be delivered.

"I see signs of oil demand improving," Abdulaziz said, adding that the pledged cuts will address [projected] inventory build in 1Q" of 2024 and that OPEC+ can "absolutely" go beyond the quarter.

Analysts said while Abdulaziz's words initially sent crude prices higher on Monday, they quickly fell back on skepticism that OPEC+ will follow through on the pledges.

The OPEC+ pledges were voluntary in nature, raising doubts about whether or not producers would fully execute them. Despite the Saudi assurance on Monday, investors also seemed unsure about how the cuts would be monitored.

"There is a sense in the market lately that OPEC has reached the limits of what it can accomplish and that there's the threat of a war for market share in 2024 if US production continues to grow," analyst Adam Button said on the ForexLive platform.

The disbelief over OPEC+ stems in part from the rising output of oil in the United States in recent months, with the world's single largest crude producer pumping a record of more than 13 million barrels per day.

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UN Agency Warns Gaza Crisis Restricts Them From Addressing Residents' Needs - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, December 4 (Sputnik) - The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) has warned that the prevailing conditions in the Gaza Strip restrict its ability to meet the residents' needs, leading to a significant pause in aid distribution, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

"The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs warned that the current situation does not allow them to address the people's needs in Gaza," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

The spokesperson said that humanitarian aid distribution significantly ceased due to heightened hostilities amid Israel's invasion and continued bombardment of the Palestinian enclave.

"Gaza's middle area was largely disconnected from the south following the Israeli forces preventing movements, including humanitarian supplies," Dujarric added.

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US Urges Venezuela, Guyana to Seek Peaceful Resolution of Dispute - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) – The United States urges Venezuela and Guyana to resolve their territorial dispute via peaceful means, and believes it cannot be settled by a referendum, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

On Sunday, Venezuelans voted in a referendum to claim sovereignty over Esequiba, an oil-rich territory disputed between Venezuela and Guyana. More than half of eligible Venezuelan voters, or 10.55 million people, participated in the referendum, with all five questions on the ballot gaining 95% of public support, the National Electoral Council said.

"We support a peaceful resolution of the border dispute between Venezuela and Guyana. The 1899 Award determined the land boundary between Venezuela and Guyana, it should be respected," Miller said during a press briefing. "We would urge Venezuela and Guyana to continue to seek a peaceful resolution of their dispute. This is not something that will be the settled by referendum."

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US State Department Admits Battlefield Situation in Ukraine 'Tough'

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday that the battlefield situation in Ukraine is difficult for the Kiev regime's forces due to the entrenchment of the Russian military.

"Certainly, with respect to the battlefield, it's a tough situation," Miller said during a press briefing.

The Ukrainian forces are fighting against a "very entrenched" Russian military, but Ukraine continues to make progress in spite of the difficulties, Miller added.

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US State Department Says Hopes to See Prosecution of Violent Israeli Settlers

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - The United States hopes to see Israel prosecute settlers who engaged in violence against Palestinians in the West Bank, US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"We have seen [Israel] take some steps to respond to extremist violence against Palestinians in the West Bank. We don't think those steps have been sufficient. We think they need to prosecute people who engage in violent activities against Palestinians," Miller said during a press briefing.

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Gaza's Karem Shalom Crossing May Reopen to Screen Humanitarian Aid - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - Progress has been made to allow for the reopening of the Karem Shalom crossing into the Gaza Strip to screen humanitarian assistance entering the Palestinian enclave, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"We have been trying very hard to get that aid back up not just to the levels that was that it was at during the pause, which was around 200 trucks a day, but to actually increase it and to change the nature of what's coming in," Miller said during a press briefing. "I think we're making progress on that. We have urged that the Kerem Shalom be reopened not as a crossing, but for screening."

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US State Dept. Says Expects Civilian Casualties in Southern Gaza Operation

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - The United States expects Israel's operation in southern Gaza to result in civilian casualties but hopes that the number will be fewer than in the north, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Monday.

"We do expect to see civilian casualties as a result of this campaign," Miller said during a press briefing.

The US made clear to Israel that it does not want to see the same civilian casualty and displacement levels in southern Gaza as there was in the north, Miller said.

It is no secret that the US believes that too many Palestinians were killed in the opening weeks of the conflict, Miller added.

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Former US Ambassador Charged With Secretly Acting as Agent of Cuba - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) – Former US Ambassador to Bolivia and National Security Council official Victor Manuel Rocha has been charged with covertly acting as an agent of the Cuban government, the Department of Justice (DoJ) said on Monday.

Rocha is set to appear before Chief Magistrate Judge Edwin Torres in Miami at 1:00 p.m. EST (18:00 GMT), a court clerk told Sputnik earlier in the day.

"Federal prosecutors have charged Victor Manuel Rocha, 73, of Miami, Florida, a former U.S. Department of State employee who served on the National Security Council from 1994 to 1995 and ultimately as U.S. Ambassador to Bolivia from 2000 to 2002, with committing multiple federal crimes by secretly acting for decades as an agent of the government of the Republic of Cuba," DoJ said in a statement.

In the complaint filed against him, Rocha is said to have held a series of meetings between 2022-2023 with an undercover FBI agent posing as a covert Cuban General Directorate of Intelligence representative. During those encounters, the former diplomat admitted his "decades" of work for Cuba, spanning "40 years," the statement said.

During the meetings with the FBI agent, Rocha consistently referred to the United States as "the enemy" and spoke of leader of the Cuban Revolution Fidel Castro as the "Comandante."

Rocha has been charged with conspiring to act as an agent of a foreign government without prior notification to the Attorney General; acting as an agent of a foreign government without prior notification to the Attorney General; and with using a passport obtained by false statement, the statement added.

The covert activities of the former ambassador made it one of the longest-lasting infiltrations of the US government by a foreign agent, Attorney General Merrick Garland said as quoted in the statement.

Garland warned that "to betray that trust by falsely pledging loyalty to the United States while serving a foreign power is a crime that will be met with the full force of the Justice Department."

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with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

CORRECTION - UNGA to Consider Russia-Sponsored Resolution on Global Information Security System

(Corrects headline, lede)

UNITED NATIONS, December 4 (Sputnik) - The UN General Assembly will vote on a resolution, introduced by Russia, recommending that countries continue cooperating within the framework of the Working Group to develop a system to ensure international information security.

Russia submitted to the UN General Assembly on behalf of a number of countries - including China, Iran, Syria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, China, Cuba, Nicaragua and Mali - a draft resolution dubbed "Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security."

The resolution notes that a number of states are building military capacity in the areas of information and communication technologies. According to the resolution's sponsors, the use of information and communications technologies in future conflicts between states is becoming more likely.

According to the text of the resolution, the UN General Assembly expresses concern about the possibility of introducing hidden malicious functions in information and communication technologies.

"Expressing concern about the possibility of embedding harmful hidden functions in information and communications technologies that can be used to undermine the secure and reliable use of such technologies and the information and communications technology supply chain for products and services," the resolution says.

The UN General Assembly also recognizes the central role of the Working Group as a mechanism for dialogue under the auspices of the United Nations on security issues using information and communications technologies, the proposed resolution says.

The resolution also calls on states to further engage constructively in the negotiations during formal and intersessional meetings of the open-ended Working Group.

Resolutions of the UN General Assembly, unlike resolutions of the Security Council, are not immediately binding.

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Joe Biden Received Direct Monthly Payments From His Son Hunter's Business Entity - Comer

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden received monthly payments from a business entity linked to his son, Hunter, US House Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer said on Monday.

"Today, the House Oversight Committee is releasing subpoenaed bank records that show Hunter Biden's business entity, Owasco P.C., made direct monthly payments to Joe Biden,"

Comer said in a statement.

Joe Biden has repeatedly denied involvement with his son's foreign business activities. The Owasco P.C. account received payments from China and other "shady corners of the world," Comer said.

The US Justice Department is investigating Hunter Biden for allegedly using the company for tax evasion and other criminal purposes, Comer said.

The payments to Joe Biden are part of a pattern indicating that he benefited from an influence peddling scheme centered around his family, Comer also said.

The House Oversight Committee continues to investigate alleged criminal activity by the Biden family and they must be held accountable for "blatant corruption," Comer added.

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North Dakota Governor Burgum Suspends Presidential Campaign - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum announced on Monday that he was suspending his 2024 presidential campaign, expressing reservations about the Republican National Committee's influence on the primary process.

"We launched our campaign for President on June 7 clear-eyed about our mission: bring a business leader and proven governor's voice to the fight for the best of America. We are a nation built on freedom, liberty and personal responsibility," Burgum said in the announcement to end his bid for the Republican presidential nomination. "We remain committed to improving the lives of every American by moving America 180 degrees in the opposite direction of Joe Biden on three critical issues - the economy, energy and national security."

Burgum noted his concern that the Republican National Committee's clubhouse debate requirements were leading to the nationalization of the primary process and were taking the power of democracy away from Iowa and New Hampshire citizens.

"The RNC's mission is to win elections. It is not their mission to reduce competition and restrict fresh ideas by 'narrowing the field' months before the Iowa caucuses or the first in the nation New Hampshire primary. These arbitrary criteria ensure advantages for candidates from major media markets on the coasts versus America's Heartland. None of their debate criteria relate to the qualifications related to actually doing the job of the president," Burgum said.

Burgum added that he believed the attempt to nationalize the primary system is unhealthy for the future of the party, particularly given its stated commitment to valuing leadership from outside of Washington.

Earlier this year, Burgum announced his entry into the 2024 Republican presidential primary race, emphasizing a focus on the economy, energy and national security, but also citing concerns about Biden-induced inflation and the imperative for US energy independence, while identifying Russia, China, North Korea, Iran and drug cartels as common adversaries.

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Australia Developing 'Secret Cloud Initiative' Interoperable with US,UK—Intelligence Chief

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) – Australia is working to develop a "top secret cloud initiative" that will be "interoperable" with US and UK intelligence agencies, its director-general of national intelligence said Monday.

"In Australia, we are working very hard on a top-secret cloud initiative...what that will do is obviously transform how we do our work as agencies but also it'll open up a shared collaborative space," Andrew Shearer said at a talk hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Shearer added that the initiative would make Australia "interoperable" with the US and UK intelligence communities. He said that the project was being designed with "interoperability with our most important partners right from the start."

Shearer said that post 9/11, Australia's intelligence agencies had been going through a "similar journey" to those of the US to heighten collaboration. He also suggested that collaboration stood to be improved across the Five Eyes international intelligence alliance.

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[EMBARGO] UNGA Recommends Countries Continue Developing Global Information Security System

UNITED NATIONS, December 4 (Sputnik) - The UN General Assembly on Monday adopted a resolution, introduced by Russia, recommending that countries continue cooperating within the framework of the Working Group to develop a system to ensure international information security.

Earlier, Russia submitted to the UN General Assembly on behalf of a number of countries - including China, Iran, Syria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, China, Cuba, Nicaragua and Mali - a draft resolution dubbed "Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security."

The resolution notes that a number of states are building military capacity in the areas of information and communication technologies. According to the resolution's sponsors, the use of information and communications technologies in future conflicts between states is becoming more likely.

According to the text of the resolution, the UN General Assembly expresses concern about the possibility of introducing hidden malicious functions in information and communication technologies.

"Expressing concern about the possibility of embedding harmful hidden functions in information and communications technologies that can be used to undermine the secure and reliable use of such technologies and the information and communications technology supply chain for products and services," the resolution says.

The UN General Assembly also recognizes the central role of the Working Group as a mechanism for dialogue under the auspices of the United Nations on security issues using information and communications technologies, the resolution says.

The resolution also calls on states to further engage constructively in the negotiations during

formal and intersessional meetings of the open-ended Working Group.

Resolutions of the UN General Assembly, unlike resolutions of the Security Council, are not immediately binding.

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Former Officer Derek Chauvin Back to Prison From Hospital After Being Stabbed - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) – Former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin convicted of killing George Floyd in 2020 is not back to his prison cell after spending nearly two weeks in a hospital following a stabbing incident in November, The Star Tribune reported on Monday citing a Chauvin's attorney.

On November 24, Chauvin was seriously injured after another prisoner attacked and stabbed him 22 times.

Chauvin's family members confirmed that his medical condition has improved to the extent that he has been removed from the trauma care facility at the local Tucson hospital and returned to prison custody for his follow-up care, the reported cited attorney Gregory Erickson as saying.

At the same time, Chauvin's family remains very concerned about the facility's capacity to protect him from further harm and remains doubtful the mistakes that made the attack possible have been corrected, Erickson said.

Last week, the attacker was identified as a former Los Angeles street gang member, 52-year-old John Turscak. He was charged with attempted murder, assault with intent to commit murder, assault with a dangerous weapon and assault resulting in serious bodily injury.

Turscak is currently serving his 30-year sentence for committing several crimes while being an undercover informant for the FBI in the Los Angeles area, according to media reports.

Erickson pointed out that the Chauvin family learned personally from Derek that the facts in the charging document were true and he was indeed attacked from behind with an improvised knife, the report said.

It remains unknown how the perpetrator was able to obtain and possess dangerous materials to make the improvised knife as well as how a guard was unable to reach and apprehend the perpetrator until Derek was stabbed 22 times, the report added.

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US Media Organization Time Says Putin, Xi, Barbie in Running for 2023 'Person of the Year'

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - The US media organization Time said on Monday that Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping and pop culture icon Barbie are in the running for the title 2023 person of the year.

Time has awarded annually the title to a "person, group or concept" since 1927, the media

organization said in a report. The 2023 winner will be announced on Wednesday, the report said.

Putin, Xi and Barbie are all contenders for this year's title, the report said.

Musician Taylor Swift, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, UK monarch King Charles III and US Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell are also in contention for the 2023 person of the year title, the report added.

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US Congress Could Reach Deal on Ukraine Aid, Border Through 'Reasonable' Talks - Johnson

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Monday that lawmakers and the White House could come to an agreement on Ukraine aid and border security if Democrats engaged in reasonable negotiations.

"House Republicans have resolved that any national security supplemental package must begin with our own border. We believe both issues can be agreed upon if Senate Democrats and the White House will negotiate reasonably," Johnson said in a statement via the social media platform X.

Earlier on Monday, the White House sent a letter to lawmakers informing them that the Biden administration is out of money to support Ukraine and urging Congress to approve more aid. The Biden administration has proposed a \$106 billion supplemental funding bill, which includes aid for Ukraine and Israel.

Johnson said that the Biden administration has failed to address concerns about a lack of a clear strategy regarding Ukraine and is ignoring the situation on the United States' borders.

Disagreements on providing aid to Ukraine and securing funds to boost US border security could reportedly delay Senate consideration of the supplemental funding bill until next week.

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Former US Ambassador Accused of Acting as Agent for Cuba to Appear in Miami Court - Clerk

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) - A former US ambassador for Bolivia who was reportedly acting as an agent for Cuba will appear in Miami federal court for a hearing on Monday afternoon, a court clerk told Sputnik.

The court appearance for Manuel Rocha, 73, has been scheduled for 1:00 p.m. EST (18:00 GMT) before Chief Magistrate Judge Edwin Torres, the clerk said.

Rocha was arrested in Miami on Friday after a long-running and ongoing federal investigation and stands accused of acting as a foreign agent for Cuba, the Associated Press reported.

Details about the case are expected to be made public after Monday's hearing.

Rocha was appointed as US ambassador to Bolivia in July 2000 after serving as Charge

d'Affaires and Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassy in Buenos Aires, according to a State Department biography.

He also previously held diplomatic posts in the Dominican Republic, Italy and Honduras.

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Qatari Prime Minister Meets With Jewish Businessmen, Jared Kushner in NY – Reports

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) – Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani has attended a meeting of Jewish business leaders organized by former White House aides Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner, Axios reported on Monday.

The meeting took place on Wednesday at a members-only restaurant in the General Motors building in Manhattan, the report said, citing three sources with direct knowledge of the matter.

During the meeting, Al Thani spoke of Doha's efforts to release hostages held by Hamas since its October 7 attack on Israel, the report said. The prime minister also addressed questions about Qatar's ties with Hamas.

The meeting took place amid increasing pressure and scrutiny by members of the US Congress and the Jewish business community regarding Qatar's ties with Hamas, the report said.

During the discussion, Al Thani stressed that Qatar's relationship with Hamas began as early as 2006 under former president George W. Bush, something that was subsequently supported by both Barack Obama and Donald Trump who sought to keep channels open to help address the situation in Gaza.

Although the US and the Jewish state have welcomed Doha's mediation in releasing hostages, they are reportedly set to pressure Qatar on its relationship with Hamas once the war comes to an end, according to the report.