

12/5/23 Tuesday

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Environmentalists: Gaza's Water, Farmland 'Will Be Unusable' if IDF Floods Tunnels With Seawater

Gaza's fragile ecosystem could be permanently damaged by a huge influx of salty seawater like that which Israel is considering pumping into the city, experts said. Some of the deepest tunnels dug by Hamas and other militant groups could be near groundwater depths, souring the area's drinking water.

According to reports in US media on Tuesday, Israel has pushed ahead with plans to flood Gaza City with seawater in an attempt to destroy the [network of tunnels](#) dug beneath the city by Palestinian militant groups.

According to the report, the IDF finished assembling five massive seawater pumps north of the Al-Shati refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip in mid-November. The plan is reportedly to flood the tunnels slowly over several weeks, giving Palestinian fighters and their Israeli captives time to safely evacuate.

The report was unclear about the disposition of the White House toward the plan. The Biden administration has largely supported Israel's actions in Gaza as self-defense against Hamas, but given rhetorical warning against violating Palestinian human rights. The warnings have had little effect, though, as nearly 20,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza by IDF bombing and ground operations since Hamas attacked several Israeli border towns in early October, killing some 1,200 people.

Andrey Frolov, co-chair of Moscow's Environmental Organizations, told Sputnik on Tuesday that an influx of salty seawater could wreck Gaza's fragile ecosystem, making it difficult to sustain life there.

"When water comes in, it all depends of course, depending on the scale of the disaster. That is, what kind of tunnels are they, where are they laid and what is their size. Because the first thing that immediately catches your eye is that if the tunnels are shallow, say, two to three meters deep, then this will simply undermine the foundations of buildings. When moisture enters, the stability of the soil changes, subsidence begins, and accordingly, it will just begin [to collapse]. Israel has already destroyed the entire city, so I think that for them it is not important."

"There is information that these tunnels are hundreds of square kilometers in size and go to a depth of up to 80 meters," he noted, adding that it was probably "a bit of an exaggeration." Frolov noted "it depends on the waters" how the influx of salty seawater would affect the fresh groundwater. Some of the deepest tunnels rumored to have been dug in Gaza could be near the depths of the aquifers.

"Because seawater can get into these aquifers it will make them salty. As a result, those wells that were used in Gaza will simply stop working. The territory was already short on water, Israel supplied water from the Sea of Galilee. If a large amount of sea water is pumped into it, it will simply become unusable."

He noted the salt will also impact agriculture in Gaza, making it “so that any kind of farming or maintaining green spaces will simply be impossible.”

“Our nature lives in biocenosis. That is, it is a complex of living beings that adapt to a certain habitat. If the biocenosis is salted and the living conditions are changed, then some species simply will not be able to live there. And if one, two, three species stop living, then the entire biocenosis crumbles,” he explained.

Sergei Mukhametov, a senior lecturer at oceanology and chair of the geographical faculty at Lomonosov Moscow State University, told Sputnik that the amount of salt from the operation would be a smaller danger to the population than Israel’s bombing campaign.

“I don’t think that anything terrible will happen there. The volumes for the sea and ocean [water] are very small. And sand is not a pollutant in this case,” he said.

“Yes, there will be salinization [of groundwater] if they fill [the tunnels] with seawater, there will be soil salinization,” he said.

“Well, it’s more likely that they suffer there because of these monstrous bombings ... If we compare the consequences [of bombing] and the environmental ones, the direct impacts are monstrous. And ecology comes second or even in third place.”

When it came to the flooding of the tunnels, Mukhametov noted it wasn’t the first time such an operation had been carried out.

“When we took Berlin [in 1945], our troops there also broke through the Berlin metro, and the Germans also flooded it in the hope of stopping us, regardless of the civilians who were also hiding there.”

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GOP Must ‘Paint Picture’ of Biden Family Business Deals to Find Impeachable Offense

While Hunter Biden’s business communique suggests his politician father was highly involved in his affairs, GOP lawmakers will have to be careful in their pursuit of a potential presidential impeachment not to mistake Hunter’s “desire to look relevant” for genuine corruption, an analyst told Sputnik.

Republican majority leaders in the US House of Representatives [said on Monday](#) the lower congressional chamber would likely vote next week on formalizing their impeachment inquiry into US President Joe Biden. The inquiry was [opened in September](#) to probe potential misconduct between the president and his businessman son, Hunter Biden.

“We’ve come to this sort of inflection point because the White House is stonewalling that investigation. They’re refusing to turn over key witnesses to allow them to testify as they’ve been subpoenaed. They’re refusing to turn over thousands of documents from the National Archives,” House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) told reporters.

“The House has no choice: if it’s going to follow his constitutional responsibility to formally adopt an impeachment inquiry on the floor, so when the subpoenas are challenged in court, we are at the apex of our constitutional authority.”

Johnson cautioned that the vote would not be about impeaching Biden, which means to bring formal criminal charges against the president. "This is a vote to continue the inquiry of impeachment, and that's a necessary constitutional step," he said.

Domestic policy expert Armen Kurdian told [Radio Sputnik's Fault Lines](#) on Tuesday that GOP lawmakers were trying to "paint a picture" of a series of business deals, communications, and money wires they said suggested improper behavior while Joe Biden was a US senator and US vice president.

"Do they have enough evidence [to impeach Biden]? At this point, no. Do they have a lot of evidence that shows that Joe Biden hasn't been honest and forthright with the American people? Absolutely. So, this impeachment inquiry, as I understand it, will open up the doors for additional subpoena power, enable them to get some witnesses, I think there are some tax attorneys from the DOJ, they want to get in front [of them] and really understand, [following the money](#), where it came from, where it went, was it deliberately hidden, and understand of course the exact timeline," he said.

"There's a lot of smoke there, and it's smoke of their own doing," he said. "I don't think there was any reason to hide a lot of this stuff because it was going to come out, that he did receive money, that he was aware of his son's business dealings, his son did receive a lot of money. At the very least, it's just more evidence to show that Joe Biden just doesn't know what's happening around him."

Kurdian said since the inquiry was opened in September, the GOP had been "stonewalled" and encountered new evidence leading them to "additional trails they want to go down." However, he cautioned he wasn't sure that any new "bombshell evidence" had been found.

"I mean, there was this thing that you saw about these three payments that were made back in 2018, they may very well have been for Hunter Biden's truck, but the question is: was the truck a legitimate business expense? Did you actually use it? And you're getting money from a Chinese company," he explained, adding it was "something small" unlikely to lead to impeachment.

"There are a lot of paths that they have to go do and we have to understand the tax implications, where the money came from, tracing it from its point of origin to its destination, and if you can do that then you'll be able to paint a picture that'll say either 'nothing bad happened' or 'some things happened here that were not proper, that definitely showed a lot of dishonesty but maybe don't rise to the point of impeachment,'" he said, such as that perhaps Joe Biden wasn't actually sitting next to Hunter during business talks, as Hunter suggested in one message that has attracted considerable attention.

Kurdian speculated that perhaps there was a more mundane explanation for comments like that, and for Hunter Biden's suspicious-seeming behavior in general. "If you look at Hunter's behavior, his issue with drugs, his desire to look relevant, being on the boards and selling his influence, is it beyond the realm of credibility to say that Hunter Biden was trying to make himself look a lot more important than he was, that he was overselling his influence, that he said, 'Yeah, my dad's sitting right next to me,' and maybe his dad had no knowledge of that text being sent. So I think that could be a very reasonable potential outcome of this inquiry."

"But at the same time, Joe, don't say you don't know what's happening, I mean you obviously had some knowledge," Kurdian said.

"I mean, name-dropping can be a very useful tool," he said. "It could've opened doors for him, it could've made him more wealthy, in which case he's putting himself on the line there, he may even be putting his life in danger, considering some of the people that he was dealing with."

"The one place where I'm not convinced it was done just for the purpose of name-dropping was the [firing of the Ukrainian prosecutor](#)," he said of the 2015 termination of Viktor Shokin under duress by then-Vice President Biden.

"That is probably the biggest thing that I see going on against Joe Biden. Remember, Democrats were falling all over themselves to impeach Donald Trump based on half a sentence that was taken out of context, and that was a legitimate discussion that he was having. Utterly baseless. There's a ton more here - and that's not saying much - on Joe Biden than there was on Donald Trump, and Republicans are having a hard time getting to the finish line on it."

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China's Credit Outlook 'Negative' as World's Second-Largest Economy Slows, Moody Says

Credit rating agency Moody's downgraded its outlook for the Chinese government's credit on Tuesday, the first time it was rated as "negative" since 2017.

Moody's said its decision "reflects rising evidence that financial support will be provided by the government and wider public sector to financially stressed regional and local governments and state-owned enterprises."

The agency said this was "posing broad downside risks to China's fiscal, economic and institutional strength" and that its decision "reflects the increased risks related to structurally and persistently lower medium-term economic growth and the ongoing downsizing of the property sector."

The Chinese economy has been steadily slowing since before 2020, when it was subjected to the convulsions of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns just as Chinese regulators cracked down on excessive real estate borrowing in response to a series of large-scale debt defaults by property developers. The US-directed trade war with China, which has targeted broad swaths of its economy including the tech field and exports from Xinjiang, has also left its mark.

The Chinese Ministry of Finance said it was "disappointed" with Moody's decision, noting the country's economy has already recovered from its nadir.

"Since the beginning of this year, in the face of the complex and harsh international situations, and against the background of an unstable global economic recovery and weakening momentum, China's macro economy has continued to recover and has been advancing steadily," the ministry said.

Moody's said it expects China's economy to grow at 4% each in 2024 and 2025, then decline slightly to 3.8% until 2030, when it expects the Chinese economy to slow to 3.5% growth. The agency said "weaker demographics" caused by an aging population will require "substantial and coordinated reforms" to help the country maintain its consumer spending and higher value-added manufacturing.

The agency's numbers are considerably below other estimates for Chinese growth in the coming years. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) [projected last month](#) for China's gross domestic product to grow by 4.7% next year and 4.2% in 2025 "on the back of ongoing stresses in the real estate sector and continued high household saving rates." The International Monetary Fund ([IMF said recently](#)) it expects China's GDP to grow by 4.6% in 2024 and 4.2% in 2025. Goldman Sachs said on Tuesday it expects China's GDP to grow by 5% next year.

Within China, which has a planned socialist economy with a large private capitalist sector, government planners are expecting a target of between 4.5% and 5.5% for 2024, although the final details will be worked out at the Communist Party's annual Central Economic Work Conference later this month.

"We need to adopt expansionary fiscal and monetary policy to stimulate aggregate demand," one Chinese government economist told US media. "Corporate investment demand will not be strong as the confidence of companies has not recovered, so we need to expand infrastructure investment."

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Biden Unsure if He Would be Running if Not for Trump

During the 2020 primary, Biden was often questioned about his age and the then 77-year-old left it an open question if he would seek another term.

Speaking to supporters during a fundraising event on Tuesday, US President Joe Biden told the crowd that he was not sure if he would be running for reelection if former President Donald Trump had decided against running.

Biden and his surrogates have consistently tried to paint Trump as an existential threat to Democracy if he returns to the White House, an accusation reiterated by Biden during the speech. "Trump's not even hiding the ball anymore," Biden warned. "He's telling us what he's going to do. He's making no bones about it."

"If Trump wasn't running, I'm not sure I'd be running. But we cannot let him win for the sake of the country," Biden said at the event, which took place at a private home outside of Boston, Massachusetts.

Biden, 81, announced his reelection campaign in April of this year and the White House has consistently brushed off concerns by voters about whether he has enough mental and physical stamina to run another campaign. Additionally, nearly 80% of Americans said Joe Biden is too old to serve another term as President, including a whopping 69% of Democrats.

A rematch between Trump and Biden is looking more likely every day. Trump holds a commanding lead in the Republican primary and the Democrats have seemingly anointed Biden without a primary, declining to hold debates and canceling the primary in Florida.

Neither candidate is particularly popular with voters outside of their base. According to a poll from August, 75% of Americans do not think Biden should seek reelection and 69% do not think Trump should run again.

But unlike Trump, who has remained popular with his base despite four federal indictments, Biden has seen support from his base falter, particularly in the wake of the Israel-Gaza war. The White House and Biden himself have insisted that Biden gives the Democrats their best chance to beat Trump, though several polls have shown Trump leading nationally and in five out of six swing states Biden won in 2020.

However, when Biden was replaced with a “generic Democrat” in a recent poll, that hypothetical nominee beat Trump nationally.

The fatigue over Trump and Biden has also led to an increase in potentially viable third-party candidates. Independent candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the son of assassinated presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy and the nephew of assassinated President John F. Kennedy, polled 24% with voters in six swing states in a three-way race between himself, Biden and Trump. Kennedy leads both candidates with voters under the age of 45, getting 32% compared to 30% for Biden and 29% for Trump, according to that poll.

Additionally, 63% of US adults said that a third party is needed in American politics.

No third party candidate has received more than 8% of the vote since 1992, when Ross Perot received 18.91% after leading in the polls earlier in the year.

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GoFundSky - Cartoon

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky canceled a planned Zoom call with the US Senate in which he was supposed to explain why the US government should approve another military aid package to his country.

His absence was not explained, with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) only saying that “something came up at the last minute.”

Zelensky has complained consistently about his country’s need for additional funding in order to continue fighting Russia. Although Congress has already sent \$113 billion of taxpayer money to Ukraine, US President Joe Biden has requested an additional \$61 billion as part of a \$111 billion spending package that also includes aid to Israel and increased spending on the US southern border.

Last month, a White House spokesperson warned that US funds for Ukraine had nearly run out and that the country was nearly “out of time.”

But with economic issues at home and a new shiny war to fund in Israel, Republicans have balked at spending more money on what even US officials and commentators are slowly starting to admit is [a lost cause](#).

On Tuesday, Ukrainian media reported that Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Valery Zaluzhny reportedly told US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin that he will need an additional 17 million artillery shells and \$350-400 billion in order to achieve his goals in the war.

According to a Ukrainian official, Austin was surprised by the request “because there are not [that] many shells in the whole world.”

There have been months-long rumors of a growing [rift between Zelensky and Zaluzhny](#). Perhaps, a \$350 billion GoFundMe would solve Zelensky's woes.

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'What Colonialist Powers Do': Israel Eying Mid East 'Hegemony' Post-Gaza Conflict

Speaking to Sputnik's Political Misfits on Tuesday, scientist, author and activist for Palestinian Human Rights, Mazin Qumsiyeh said Israel's actions in Gaza are a genocide that has been ignored by the world, and that Zionists in Israel want to dominate the Middle East and potentially beyond.

Asked what comes next in the conflict, [Qumsiyeh said](#) that soon disease, malnutrition and a lack of water and medicine will lead to a civilian death toll that will "quickly overtake the number of civilians killed by bombings."

He then moved onto discussing what he believes to be Israel's plans after Gaza.

"That is the long-term plan of Israel, a newly dominated Middle East, in which Israel holds hegemony. But I don't think they will stop with the Middle East, they will continue because that is what colonialist powers do," Qumsiyeh warned. "I think China and Russia and other countries need to pay attention very closely to what Israeli plans have been."

Israel started heavily bombing Gaza days after a surprise attack by Hamas on October 7, which killed around 1,200 Israelis according to official numbers. It has since launched a ground campaign in Gaza, promising to eliminate Hamas. More than 16,200 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since October 7, including over 7,000 children.

Multiple human rights organizations have described Israel's actions as genocidal. Israel has targeted UN schools, refugee camps and hospitals, claiming that Hamas militants are hiding in those areas or using them as a base of operation.

"For the life of me, I don't understand why so many countries are silent on this, on an ongoing holocaust, an ongoing genocide," Qumsiyeh said, adding that he believes it is "not [just] a Palestinian problem, it's a global problem."

"The State Department now basically works 95% of its time for Israel," Qumsiyeh said, pointing to a recent resignation by State Department official Josh Paul, who said in media interviews that there "has been no space allowed for debate" on the transfer of arms to Israel.

"... since Washington is a superpower, with the tails of Washington being the UK and many other countries like Canada and Australia follow suit. So we have a major global problem that could lead to world war," Qumsiyeh said. "It also already led to the destruction of international law and order and already the UN has become a totally useless organization."

Political Misfits co-host John Kiriakou asked Qumsiyeh if Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu could lose his position and if it would matter if he did.

"They need to be stopped as a collective, not as Netanyahu, let's not make it personal about Netanyahu," he added.

Israel has maintained that it is doing all that it can to protect civilians in Gaza while attempting to eliminate Hamas. It has repeatedly dismissed claims that has committed war crimes in Gaza.

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US Officials Claim Biden Admin Downplaying Red Sea Attacks to Cool Regional Tensions

Attacks on US forces in the Middle East have been increasing amid the US' unwavering support of Israel, whose conflict in the Gaza Strip has been described as a "genocide" by multiple human rights organizations.

Some US officials reportedly believe the Biden administration may be downplaying the attacks on US shipping vessels in the Red Sea in an attempt to avoid expanding tensions across the Middle East amid the ongoing Palestine-Israel conflict.

According to the Pentagon, the USS Carney scrambled to respond to several US commercial ships' distress signals which had been fired upon by Houthi forces in Yemen. The attack reportedly included three unmanned aerial drones and an unspecified number of missiles. An hours-long firefight ensued, during which the three drones were shot down.

The United States and other Western countries claim Houthi forces in Yemen are funded and controlled by Iran, a claim Iran denies.

Officials, including national security adviser Jake Sullivan, have stated that the US "cannot assess" if the Carney was a target in the attack. Likewise, American officials were similarly non-committal regarding other Houthi attacks on commercial shipping in the area over the past few months.

In addition to commercial shipping vessels, US forces have been attacked in Iraq and Syria several times since October 7.

However, four unnamed officials told US media that they believe US naval forces are under threat in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea. "You'd be hard-pressed to find another time" US forces have been challenged in this way in the region, one official reportedly said.

Another said he agreed with the assessment that it is unknown if the Carney was targeted, but added that the Biden administration is stressing the narrative in order to "avoid unnecessary escalation" in the area. However, it was emphasized that the Biden administration left some wiggle room, allowing officials to update their assessment at a later time.

Admiral Christopher Grady said the attacks already represent an expansion of the conflict. "This is very much an expansion of perhaps the larger conflict between Israel and Hamas," he said, contradicting Pentagon spokespersons who have repeatedly described the Houthi attacks on shipping vessels as "separate and distinct" from the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Officials further indicated a greater response by the US is still possible. "If we make the assessment or feel the need to respond, we will always make that decision at a time or place of our choosing. That is a decision that the [US defense secretary] will also make in conjunction with the president," a Defense Department official told US media.

Responding to claims by the UK government that the Iranian government was behind the Houthi rebel attacks, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani dismissed the claims.

"As we have clearly announced earlier, the resistance factions in the region do not receive orders from the Islamic Republic of Iran to counter and respond to the child-killer Zionist

regime's war crimes and genocide," he said, later adding that the US is "an accomplice to war crimes, massacre and genocide committed by the usurper Zionist regime against Palestinians." Foreign policy experts have repeatedly warned that US support of Israel puts American citizens and US interests at risk. In October, weeks after Hamas' surprise attack, the State Department issued a rare "worldwide caution" alert, warning that American tourists were at greater risk of violence and advised them to be cautious in tourist areas.

The US support of Israel has been affecting US relationships and foreign policy for decades as well. Stephan M. Walt, a professor of international relations at Harvard, [wrote](#) in 2021 that it was time to end the "special relationship" between the US and Israel, noting it was used as justification for the September 11 attacks. He further argued the "benefits" of the US support "are zero, and the costs are high and rising."

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White House Believes Eight American Hostages Remain in Gaza – Kirby

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) – The White House believes eight Americans remain as hostages in Gaza, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said Wednesday.

"We think there's about eight hostages that are Americans. We know of at least one woman in that group," Kirby said in an interview with ABC.

Kirby added that the White House was "doing everything we can" to secure the hostages' release, including negotiating another temporary ceasefire with Hamas to facilitate their safe passage out of Gaza.

He demurred to comment on Israel's ultimate goal in its war against Hamas, while noting that the US wanted to "see Hamas eliminated as a threat to the Israeli people" and this had yet to be achieved.

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Prosecutors List Mike Pence as Witness in Trump's Georgia Election Case – Reports

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) – Fulton County prosecutors have listed former US Vice President Mike Pence as a potential witness in former US President Donald Trump's Georgia 2020 election interference trial, CNN reported on Wednesday, citing multiple unnamed sources.

The sources said that the most recent version of the witness list, which has not been publicized, included more than 150 names, including Pence's.

Last Friday, Trump's lead counsel in the Georgia case, Steve Sadow, also indicated that he believed Pence would be called as a witness. He argued that Trump's federal election interference case in DC mirrored his state case in Georgia and thus, he should have access to evidence held by special counsel Jack Smith, including notes taken by Pence after the 2020

election.

Aside from his election interference cases in Georgia and DC, Trump is facing two other criminal trials – a federal case on retaining and concealing classified documents in Florida and a hush money case in New York.

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Fate of Ukraine Aid in US House Remains Uncertain as Republican Support Dwindles - Source

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) -The prospect of the House of Representatives renewing Ukraine aid remains uncertain as Republican support on the matter dwindles, a congressional source told Sputnik.

Earlier this week, the White House warned Congress that US funding for Ukraine will run out by the end of the year and urged lawmakers to immediately approve new aid.

"Ukraine funding on the House side remains uncertain. Support from the GOP is dwindling," the source said on Tuesday.

The path forward remains unclear, the source added.

The US Senate will vote on a shell bill on Wednesday afternoon to approve President Joe Biden's \$106 billion supplemental package, which includes some \$60 billion for Ukraine. However, the measure is expected to fail with the lack of Republican support.

Republican senators want the legislation to include measures that will more adequately address the crisis on the US southern border.

US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said that he will grant Republicans an opportunity to include an amendment in the supplemental bill on Wednesday that will address their border-related concerns, but it will need 60 votes to be adopted.

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Biden to Participate in G7 Leaders Meeting on Wednesday - White House

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will join a virtual G7 leaders meeting on Wednesday morning, the White House said in its daily guidance.

The virtual closed meeting is scheduled to start at 9:30 a.m. EST (1430 GMT), according to the notice released on Tuesday.

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US Signs Defense Cooperation Agreement With Sweden - State Department

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The United States and Sweden finalized a defense cooperation agreement that will apply before and after Stockholm's NATO accession is complete, the State Department said in a press release.

"On December 5, the United States and Sweden signed a Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA)," the release said on Tuesday. "This agreement will empower our two countries to expand our close security partnership, enhance our cooperation in multilateral security operations, and strengthen transatlantic security together. By design, the DCA will apply seamlessly before and after Sweden's accession to the NATO Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)."

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US Congressman Says Washington Helped Overthrow Ukraine Government in 2014

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - US Republican Congressman Thomas Massie said that the United States helped to overthrow the Ukraine's elected government in 2014 to saber rattle against Russia.

"In 2014, we helped to overthrow their elected government, and we were saber rattling against Russia," Massie told Tucker Carlson on Tuesday. "I said these sanctions and this saber rattling and these resolutions, they are going to have consequences and they had consequences."

But nobody in Washington would admit this looking at their voting record even though they know it, he added.

Massie is one of the few Congressmen who are not only against sending more money to Ukraine but he also opposes funding Israel. Massie believes that the United States should first repair its own infrastructure before sending money elsewhere.

The congressman has also developed a small electronic chip, which he is wearing on his blazer, while it shows on a small display real time data about the US Debt.

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US Laundering Defense Industry Money Through Ukraine, Will Pay to Rebuild Ukraine - Massie

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The United States will be asked to fund the reconstruction of Ukrainian infrastructure after also paying for the arms that helped destroy it, US Congressman Thomas Massie said during an interview with Tucker Carlson.

"We've spent twice as much in Ukraine as we do on all of our roads and bridges federally in the United States," Massie said on Tuesday. "That is money that could have gone to double our infrastructure, yet we're blowing up infrastructure that we're going to end up — I hate this, but — they're going to tell us that we have to rebuild it when this is all over with."

Lawmakers tend to support aid to Ukraine because the spending is "laundered" back to the US military industrial complex, Massie said. In turn, the funds can end up enriching lawmakers who hold stock in defense companies, Massie said.

Lawmakers have to be "economically illiterate and morally deficient" to vote for Ukraine aid, Massie added.

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Pregnant Woman Files Unprecedented Lawsuit Against Texas AG for Abortion Relief - Filing

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - In an unprecedented move 20 weeks pregnant Kate Cox filed a lawsuit against Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, seeking a temporary restraining order allowing a doctor to perform an abortion without the threat of prosecution, the lawsuit filed by Kate Cox said.

"Kate Cox needs an abortion, and she needs it now. Ms. Cox is currently 20 weeks pregnant, and she has been to three different emergency rooms in the last month due to severe cramping and unidentifiable fluid leaks. For weeks, Ms. Cox's physicians have been telling her that early screening and ultrasound tests suggest that her pregnancy is unlikely to end with a healthy

baby," the lawsuit said on Tuesday.

Ms.Cox, who has undergone two previous cesarean surgeries (C-sections), faces elevated risks to her life and future fertility if she continues the pregnancy, including potential complications like uterine rupture and hysterectomy, the lawsuit said.

"Yet because of Texas's abortion bans, Ms. Cox's physicians have informed her that their 'hands are tied' and she will have to wait until her baby dies inside her or carry the pregnancy to term, at which point she will be forced to have a third Csection, only to watch her baby suffer until death," the lawsuit said.

In November, Ms. Cox received amniocentesis results revealing that her third pregnancy has full trisomy 18, indicating an uncertain chance of survival at birth. If the baby does survive, it is likely to be stillborn or live only briefly. Furthermore, these results coincided with the Texas Supreme Court's discussion of a related case, *Zurawski v. State of Texas*, which was filed in March and heard on the same day, the lawsuit said.

"Over the months that *Zurawski* has been pending, the state defendants have refused to provide any clarification of the law or even their own interpretation of its meaning," the lawsuit said.

Moreover, the lawsuit points out a previous acknowledgment by the state defendants regarding the possibility of a physician performing an abortion in cases of fatal fetal diagnosis. However, it underscores the lack of clarity on required evidence or conditions, leaving pregnant women in prolonged suffering, the lawsuit added.

According to reports, abortions are largely illegal, with exceptions for life-threatening situations. This has led women to seek alternatives beyond the state, including travel to other locations or countries, or resorting to at-home abortions.

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Biden Says US Senator Tuberville's Hold on Military Promotions in Congress 'Pointless'

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said that Senator Tommy Tuberville's hold on hundreds of military staff promotions in Congress ultimately was "pointless" after the hold was lifted.

The senator placed holds on hundreds of nominees in protest of the Defense Department's abortion policy, which provides funding for the procedure and claimed that Pentagon officials are "legislating from the Pentagon" instead of through Congress as the US Constitution requires.

"After ten months of undermining military readiness and the morale of our troops, Senator Tuberville of Alabama has finally lifted his politically motivated hold on hundreds of military nominations," Biden said in a press release on Tuesday. "In the end, this was all pointless."

Biden said the senator and the Republicans who stood with him needlessly hurt hundreds of service members and military families and threatened US national security in order to push "a partisan agenda."

"I hope no one forgets what he did," Biden said.

Biden noted that the promotions of 425 military staff have now been confirmed by the Senate

following the lift of Tuberville's hold.

The confirmations were long overdue, Biden added.

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Lockheed Martin Successfully Conducts Test of Air-to-Ground Mid-Range Missile - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - Lockheed Martin has successfully flight tested its Joint Air-to-Ground Missile-Medium Range (JAGM-MR) in California, the company announced in a press release.

"Lockheed Martin successfully conducted a JAGM-MR guided flight test on Dec. 2, 2023, at China Lake Test Range in California," the release said on Tuesday.

The successful flight test demonstrated JAGM-MR's tri-mode seeker and its ability to aid the missile to successfully discriminate between multiple targets, Lockheed Martin said.

"The enhanced tri-mode seeker provides a new level of precision guidance and defense capabilities, allowing JAGM-MR to lock onto the selected target even when there's multiple targets in the field." Lockheed Martin Missiles and Fire Control Air-to-Ground Missile Systems Program Management Director Joey Drake said in the release.

JAGM-MR's tri-mode seeker employs a near-infrared (NIR) sensor, which is a third sensor incorporated into the guidance system compared to JAGM, which utilizes a dual-mode sensor system. The sensor enhances missile performance, allowing for improved target tracking and guidance over a range of conditions and target sets, the company said.

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Thriving Large Banks Keep US Economy Thriving - American Banks' CEOs

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - It is important that the largest US banks thrive if the American economy is to thrive as well, the heads of the country's biggest financial institutions said in testimony released ahead of the Senate's annual review of Wall Street firms.

"We must also acknowledge that in our American financial system – and the world's markets – there are some things that can only be done by large, complex banks - things that are essential to a thriving US economy and American competitiveness," Jamie Dimon, chairman and chief executive of JPMorgan Chase, the No. 1 US banking group, said in his pre-Senate hearing testimony released on Tuesday.

Large US banks serve America's interests overseas and serve America's multinational corporations around the world, Dimon said, adding that they also meet the funding needs of other financial institutions such as mortgage finance companies, insurance companies and community banks.

"Large banks provide critical financing to every sector of the US economy, fueling job creation

and new business development," Dimon said.

Besides these, large banks support the deepest and most liquid capital markets in the world.

"We underwrite initial public offerings, corporate bonds and municipal bonds, which provide federal, state and local governments financing for roads and bridges, schools, libraries and other public works projects," Dimon said. "In good times, large banks help America save, invest and grow. America's large banks underwrite stocks and bonds to create investments for retirees and other savers, and raise money for companies, institutions and governments. We collectively make up a liquid, transparent marketplace where these stocks and bonds trade easily and efficiently."

Dimon noted that JPMorgan Chase extended \$1.7 trillion in credit to consumers and corporations in 2023 alone, moving over \$10 trillion in 120 currencies across 160 countries daily and safeguards more than \$29 trillion in assets.

"In troubled times, large banks support orderly capital markets to protect Americans. As demonstrated recently during the spring 2023 regional bank turmoil – and previously during COVID – large banks stepped in to provide market liquidity and support trading, which protected consumers, retirement savers and employers," Dimon said.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, he said America's large banks provided significant support throughout the cycle of the pandemic, extending tens of billions of dollars of credit and capital to struggling large and small businesses, local governments, universities and hospitals – at a time when they needed it the most.

"Banks waived hundreds of millions in fees and postponed debt repayments for consumers struggling to make ends meet," Dimon added.

Given the strategic dependence of the US economy on its largest banks, it would not be prudent to harm these financial institutions with excessive operating burden, James Gorman, chief executive of Morgan Stanley, said in his pre-Senate testimony.

"Current proposals to put additional capital requirements on the largest US banks – commonly called the Basel III Endgame – need to consider the full impact to the US economy and the US consumer," Gorman said. "Regulations are only effective when they balance both the safety and soundness of the financial system, with the proper functioning of bank financing that spurs our economic growth."

Blanket increases in capital for the large US banks – which already undergo rigorous stress testing each year and are required to maintain additional specific capital buffers – are wholly unnecessary, Gorman said.

"It will make credit more expensive and less accessible to consumers and businesses while harming the competitiveness of the US economy and driving more activity to the less regulated parts of the financial services industry," Gorman said. "As it stands, the proposal would increase the cost of capital and borrowing across the U.S. economy – not just to large corporations and small businesses, but also to pensions, municipalities, and endowments."

He expressed hope that federal agencies will be open to changes and will review the industry's comments thoughtfully.

Citigroup CEO Jane Foster concurred with Dimon and Gorman on the need to safeguard the interests of the largest US banks.

"For American multinationals, global banks such as ours offer the size and scale to compete in a rapidly changing world without having to rely on a mix of foreign banks," Foster said, referring

to Citigroup. "We finance supply chains and partner with America's top companies to bring products and services to American consumers at affordable prices. We also lend our robust balance sheets to fund transformational projects."

Last year alone, Citi worked with state and local governments to raise or refinance nearly \$31 billion in infrastructure investment in the United States, Foster said.

"The strength of our financial system becomes most critical when the outlook for our economy weakens," she said. "Although we don't see a drastic downturn on the horizon, we do expect a recession as the result of a range of macroeconomic factors. This includes persistent inflation in services, rising debt, a slowdown in global growth and two major conflicts in Europe and the Middle East."

The annual review of Wall Street caps a politically contentious 2023 for financial firms in Washington. The regional banking crisis earlier this year sparked heightened scrutiny of banks, and questions about the industry overall.

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US House Republicans Should Condemn Congressman Massie for 'Anti-Semitism' - White House

(Update: adds details in paras 7-9, changes dateline, edits throughout)

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - US House Republican leadership ought to condemn US Congressman Thomas Massie for posting a meme critical of Zionism, White House Deputy Communications Director Herbie Ziskend said.

On Tuesday, Massie posted a meme to social media platform X, which accused the US Congress of rejecting American patriotism in favor of Zionism.

"All Americans — including [House Republican] leadership — should condemn this virulent anti-Semitism from a sitting member of Congress," Ziskend said in response to Massie's post. Zionism refers to a belief in the right of Jewish people to maintain self-determination and statehood in Israel, according to the Anti-Defamation League. Anti-Zionism is not equivalent to anti-Semitism, Massie said in a statement earlier this week.

The House of Representatives passed a resolution on Tuesday condemning a purported rise in anti-Semitism in the United States. Massie, alongside a group of prominent Jewish Democratic lawmakers, declined to support the measure.

Congressmen Dan Goldman, Jerry Nadler and Jamie Raskin urged lawmakers to vote present on the resolution, characterizing it as an "unserious attempt" by House Republicans to weaponize Jewish pain for political points.

Later on Tuesday, US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer called on Massie to take down his post, echoing the White House in characterizing the lawmaker's meme as anti-Semitic.

"If only you cared half as much about our border as you do my tweets," Massie said in response to Schumer.

The US Congress is currently considering a supplemental funding request from the Biden administration for Israel and Ukraine aid. However, Republicans have said that Democrats must

come to an agreement on border security in order to pass the legislation.

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Biden Says Not Sure He'd be Running For President if Trump Wasn't Campaigning- Press Pool

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said he is not sure he would be running in the 2024 presidential elections if former President Trump did not decide to campaign again, the White House Press Pool report cited Biden on Tuesday as saying.

"If Trump wasn't running, I'm not sure I'd be running. But we cannot let him win," the White House press pool report said. Biden spoke at a Boston reception in Massachusetts.

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Biden Says Working to Get Humanitarian Pause in Gaza 'Back on Track' - Pool Report

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said that the humanitarian pause in the Gaza Strip should be brought "back on track" and he is working to determine a course of action after the conflict ends, according to a White House press pool report.

"We have to get it [humanitarian pause in Gaza] back on track," the report said on Tuesday evening. "I've been working with a number of people in and out of government to figure what after Gaza. And I think the only available solution is a two-state solution."

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US Senate Unanimously Confirms Over 400 Military Promotions Lawmaker Blocked for 10 Months

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The US Senate unanimously confirmed more than 400 senior military promotions that were blocked by Senator Tommy Tuberville for more than ten months.

On Tuesday afternoon, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer asked for unanimous consent for senators to confirm hundreds of military promotions only hours after Tuberville lifted his long-standing hold.

Earlier on Tuesday, Tommy Tuberville told reporters in a surprise move that he had decided to lift his 10-month hold on hundreds of military promotions except a short list of four-star generals.

The senator placed holds on hundreds of nominees in protest of the Pentagon's abortion policy, which provides funding for the procedure, and claimed that defense officials are "legislating from

the Pentagon" instead of through Congress as the US Constitution requires.

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US Senate Democrats Release \$111Bln Supplemental Funding Bill With Ukraine, Israel Aid

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - US Senate Democrats released draft legislation that would provide approximately \$111 billion in supplemental funding to aid Israel and Ukraine, as well as to address the fentanyl crisis and border security in the United States.

The legislation, dubbed the National Security and Border Act, provides roughly \$5 billion more in funding than the Biden administration initially requested from Congress.

The legislation, released on Tuesday, is split into the National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, the Border Security and Combatting Fentanyl Supplemental Appropriations Act, the Compact of Free Association Amendments Act, and the Fentanyl Eradication and Narcotics Deterrence (FEND) Off Fentanyl Act.

The proposal comes amid negotiations between Democratic and Republican lawmakers to pass the foreign aid in exchange for domestic border security measures. The Biden administration has warned that the US will soon run out of aid to support Ukraine if Congress does not act.

However, US Senator Mitt Romney said on Tuesday that Republican lawmakers left a classified briefing on the situation in Ukraine after congressional Democrats and the Biden administration showed an unwillingness to negotiate a deal.

US House Speaker Mike Johnson has also said that the Biden administration must provide more details on its Ukraine strategy and address border security concerns before lawmakers can approve further aid.

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US Success In West Africa Depends on Continued Investment - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) – The US has to keep its investment in West Africa to maintain positions in the region, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Celeste Wallander said during a congressional hearing.

"Our success depends on continued investment in West Africa," Wallander told the US House Foreign Affairs Committee on Tuesday.

She stressed the importance of maintaining "some continuity" with the efforts the US made in the past to support its partners in the region. However, she added, Washington has to adjust its approach to reflect changes in the environment, as well as the actions of its African partners, international allies, and strategic competitors.

Wallander also pointed out that the Biden administration is constantly working with regional

partners to keep a balance in providing them the practical assistance they need to face emergent threats. At the same time, the US has to assist them in building strong institutions that will reinforce their physical security and stability, she added.

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Arlington Police Say Suspect Was Inside at Time of Home Explosion, Presumed to Be Deceased

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) – The suspect was inside the house at the time of the explosion of a duplex house in one of the neighborhoods in Arlington County, Virginia, and is presumed to be deceased, Arlington County Police Chief Andy Penn told reporters.

Late Monday evening, a powerful explosion took place in one of the residential areas in Arlington County near Washington D.C. at 844 North Burlington Street. It follows from the video of one of the eyewitnesses that the house got blown up after an armored police vehicle attempted to approach it in an attempt to execute a search warrant several hours before residents called police to report the suspect making about 30 shots from a flare gun.

“Based on the preliminary investigation of this incident, we believe that the resident of the home James Yoo, 56, of Arlington is the involved suspect,” Penn said on Tuesday. “The suspect was inside the residence at the time of the explosion and he is presumed at this point to be deceased.”

Investigators have located human remains at the scene and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner will work to positively identify James Yoo and to determine the cause of his death, Penn said.

Penn noted that all communications with the suspect to bring the situation to a peaceful resolution were unsuccessful.

Police, FBI officials, and local authorities in one voice refuse to make any conclusions yet as to the cause of such a powerful explosion and ask to give them some time to analyze the issue.

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US State Dept. Says Confident Congress Will Provide Requested Funding for Ukraine

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The State Department believes that the proposed Biden administration supplemental budget request for additional funds for Ukraine will pass in Congress, spokesperson Matthew Miller said.

"I don't think there's any question about the executive branch's support for Ukraine. We don't think there is any question about the legislative branch's support for Ukraine. If you put funding for Ukraine in an up or down vote in front of both houses of Congress, it is our belief that it would pass," Miller said during a press briefing on Tuesday.

The United States has about \$4.8 billion left in restored presidential drawdown authority for Ukraine and about \$1.1 billion in existing resources to backfill US stocks, according to the Defense Department.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer announced a likely vote on the Biden administration's supplemental request on Wednesday afternoon.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Charles Brown will join other senior leaders in a closed session with all members of Congress to brief them on the urgent need to pass the supplemental budget request.

Earlier in October, the White House sent to Congress a request for an additional \$106 billion. The supplemental package includes \$61.4 billion for Ukraine, half of which is to provide the Kiev regime with weapons and replenish US military stocks, and \$14.3 billion in aid for Israel.

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Barbados Electoral Roadmap Might Open the Door for US-Venezuela Normalisation – State Dept

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) – The Barbados electoral roadmap agreement between the Venezuelan government and the country's opposition might pave the way for the normalisation of US-Venezuela relations, Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian A. Nichols

“We believe that the Barbados electoral roadmap agreement is a critical step that will allow Venezuelan to choose their own future,” Nichols said at the Atlantic Council. “Ultimately this process opens the door for the potential normalization of our relationship with Venezuela built on trust and mutual respect. If the Maduro [Nicolas] side follows through on its commitments.”

Nichols noted that since the agreements were signed on October 17, positive steps have been observed by the US side, such as the release of political prisoners, and a primary election with a significant turnout.

However, the US official highlighted that even though significant developments have taken place, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his government are still failing to fully meet expectations.

“The United States has made clear our expectations for Nicolas Maduro and his representatives to define a process for the reinstatement of all candidates and begin the release of wrongfully detained us national and Venezuelan political prisoners. Those steps have not taken place,” Nichols said.

The Assistant Secretary further added that alongside international partners, the US will continue its assessment of the measures taken by the Venezuelan authorities and conduct a review of the sanctions policy, noting that unless progress is made, sanctions relief will be halted.

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US Senator Says Republicans Left Ukraine Briefing Over Democrats' Refusal to Negotiate

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - US Sen. Mitt Romney said on Tuesday that Republican lawmakers left a classified briefing on the situation in Ukraine over an unwillingness by congressional Democrats and the Biden administration to negotiate a deal that covers Ukraine aid and US border security.

"Republicans are just walking out of the briefing because the people there are not willing to actually discuss what it takes to get a deal done," Romney said after leaving the meeting.

Democrats must come to an agreement on border security in order to pass aid for Ukraine and Israel, Romney said.

The briefers were providing senators entirely with known information, Romney added.

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PREVIEW - US Holds Defense Industrial Base Conference With Ukrainian Officials

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The United States is hosting a two-day Defense Industrial Base Conference with Ukrainian officials this week to discuss cooperation on weapons production in support of Ukraine.

The conference will take place from December 6-7 and will feature officials from the White House National Security Council (NSC), US Commerce Department, Defense Department and State Department. Ukrainian officials from the Office of the President, Defense Ministry, Strategic Industry Ministry and Foreign Affairs Ministry will also participate.

"The conference is part of the US government's efforts to significantly increase weapons production to support Ukraine's fight for freedom and security," NSC spokesperson Adrienne Watson said in a statement.

Approximately 350 government and industry officials from the United States, Europe and Ukraine are reportedly set to attend conference sessions, Politico reported on Tuesday.

The second day of the conference will focus on networking and cooperation between businesses, the report said, citing an NSC spokesperson.

The conference comes amid efforts within Congress to pass a supplemental aid request from the Biden administration, which includes \$60 billion in aid for Ukraine. However, some Republican lawmakers have expressed concerns about providing additional aid to Ukraine and demanded that US border security measures be attached to any supplemental funding bill.

In contrast, the White House and Senate leadership have urged passage of the request, which also includes billions of dollars in aid for Israel. The Senate is set to begin consideration of the request on Wednesday afternoon.

On Tuesday, House and Senate lawmakers both received briefings on the situation in Ukraine

in an effort by the Biden administration and Ukraine to bolster support for additional aid. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said earlier this week that Ukraine finds itself in a "tough situation" on the battlefield due to the entrenchment of Russian forces.

The Biden administration also warned lawmakers earlier this week that the United States will run out of resources to support Ukraine by the end of the year if Congress does not approve more funding.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) -

NEW US SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

* The United States imposed sanctions on 13 individuals and 20 entities related to Russia and Belarus, the Treasury Department said in a notice on Tuesday.

* Two indictments have been unsealed against a Belgian national for allegedly unlawfully exporting sensitive US technologies to Russia and China, the Treasury Department said.

* The United States will impose export restrictions on 42 entities for allegedly circumventing US export controls on sensitive US military electronics and avionics equipment on behalf of Russia and China, the Commerce Department said.

ISRAEL INVASION OF GAZA

* The death toll from Israel's bombardment of the Gaza Strip has increased to 16,248 since October 7 and another 43,616 people have been injured, the Gaza government's information center said on Tuesday.

* There are no safe zones in the Gaza Strip despite the statements of the United States and Israel to the contrary, Hamas spokesman in Lebanon Osama Hamdan said.

* The United Nations confirms there are no safe zones in Gaza, here including shelters flying the UN flag, spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* The Russian military has repelled four Ukrainian attacks in the Donetsk direction in the past 24 hours, where Kiev lost up to 270 soldiers, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Tuesday.

* President Joe Biden and other senior officials will be "very clear" about the consequences that could result from declining further funding for Ukraine, White House deputy spokesperson Olivia Dalton said.

* Volodymyr Zelenskyy will not be available to provide US senators a briefing on Tuesday afternoon due to a last minute change in his schedule, US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said.

RUSSIA-IRAN TALKS

* Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amirabdollahian discussed prospects for the resumption of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear agreement, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday.

* Russia and Iran said in a joint declaration that a roadmap should be developed to reduce the dependence of international trade on national currencies, which can be used as an instrument of unilateral sanctions.

* Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi will hold talks in the presence of their delegations and continue the meeting in the working lunch format, Kremlin aide Yury Ushakov said.

PUTIN VISITS TO UAE, SAUDI ARABIA

* Russian President Vladimir Putin will discuss the accession of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia and Iran to BRICS with the leaders of these countries, Kremlin aide Yury Ushakov said on Tuesday.

* Putin will discuss the Middle East conflict and regional issues during his trip to the UAE, Ushakov said.

ARTEM USS CASE

* 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 US State Department said on Tuesday.

* The United States has charged Vladimir Jovancic, a national of Bosnia and Herzegovina, for allegedly helping Artem Uss flee Italy to avert a US extradition order, the Justice Department said.

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US Must Lift Unilateral Sanctions, Provide Equal Environment for Chinese Firms - Embassy

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The United States must lift the unilateral sanctions it has imposed on China and provide an equal environment for Chinese companies, Chinese Embassy in Washington spokesperson Liu Pengyu said on Tuesday.

"It is important that the US side take China's concerns seriously, lift unilateral sanctions and provide an equal, fair and non-discriminatory environment for Chinese businesses," Liu said during a press briefing about the meeting between US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping last month.

Liu said Xi emphasized during the meeting that China has legitimate interests that must be safeguarded as well as principles and positions that must be upheld.

In addition, Xi also emphasized that China's red lines that must not be crossed, Liu said.

The Biden administration has imposed restrictions limiting US investment in China and restrictions on the export of US microchip technology to firms with ties to China.

On November 15, Biden and Xi met on the margins of the APEC Summit held in San

Francisco. The two leaders said they discussed a range of bilateral, regional and global issues.

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US Will Continue to Monitor China's Respiratory Illness Surge - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - A State Department spokesperson said on Tuesday that the United States will continue to closely monitor the rise in respiratory illnesses in China and referred reporters to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for any updates.

"We will continue to monitor the situation closely and provide important updates should the situation change. I would say for now, I would refer you to the CDC for any updates on respiratory illnesses in the PRC," Matthew Miller said during a press briefing.

The CDC has said publicly it does not have any evidence that it is a novel pathogen, Miller added.

The Chinese Education Ministry said earlier in the day that it had introduced an epidemiological monitoring system in schools and kindergartens to conduct daily health checks amid a surge in seasonal respiratory illnesses among children.

The move came after China's National Health Commission (NHC) ordered the improvement of medical facilities and increased working hours, if necessary, against the backdrop of rising respiratory illnesses.

Last week, Russian consumer watchdog Rospotrebnadzor said that China had seen an increase in pneumonia cases, especially among children in Beijing and Liaoning province, as well as influenza. The main cause of pneumonia is mycoplasma bacteria, whose incidence is cyclical and peaks every three to seven years, the watchdog said.

World Health Organization spokeswoman Margaret Harris said that outbreaks of Mycoplasma pneumoniae were normal in China during the winter and the illness was not considered to have a pandemic potential at this time.

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Beijing Urges US to Stop Arming Taiwan, Support China's Reunification - Embassy

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - Beijing is calling on the United States to stop sending weapons to Taiwan and support China's peaceful reunification, Chinese Embassy Spokesperson Liu Pengyu told reporters on Tuesday.

"China urges the US to honor the one China principle, oppose Taiwan independence, stop arming Taiwan, stop interfering in China's internal affairs and support China's peaceful reunification," Liu said. "The Taiwan question remains the most important and most sensitive issue in China-US relations."

The spokesperson for Beijing's embassy in Washington also said Chinese President Xi Jinping elaborated on these issues with US counterpart Joe Biden during last month's bilateral talks in San Francisco.

The White House after the talks however said the United States will continue to deliver arms to Taiwan.

In November, Biden and Xi held extensive bilateral talks on the margins of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in San Francisco, during which the leaders agreed to restore bilateral cooperation in an effort to ease rising tensions, including resumption of direct military-to-military contacts.

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US-China Summit in San Francisco Should Be New Starting Point, Not Finish Line - Embassy

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) -The meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and US leader Joe Biden in San Francisco should be a starting point followed by enhancement of the two countries' new vision and consolidation of the foundation of their ties, Spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy in the United States Liu Pengyu told reporters on Tuesday.

"San Francisco should not be a finish line. It should be a new starting point," Liu Pengyu said. "From San Francisco onward, the two sides should foster new vision, further consolidate the foundation of their relations, build pillars for peaceful coexistence and move their relationship in the direction of healthy stable and sustainable development."

In November, Biden and Xi held extensive bilateral talks on the margins of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in San Francisco, during which the leaders agreed to restore bilateral cooperation in an effort to ease rising tensions, including resumption of the direct military-to-military contacts.

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US House Republicans Should Condemn Congressman Massie for 'Anti-Semitism' - White House

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - US House Republican leadership ought to condemn US Congressman Thomas Massie for posting a meme critical of Zionism, White House Deputy Communications Director Herbie Ziskend said on Tuesday.

Earlier on Tuesday, Massie posted a meme to social media platform X, which accused the US Congress of rejecting American patriotism in favor of Zionism.

"All Americans — including [House Republican] leadership — should condemn this virulent anti-Semitism from a sitting member of Congress," Ziskend said in response to Massie's post. Zionism refers to a belief in the right of Jewish people to maintain self-determination and

statehood in Israel, according to the Anti-Defamation League. Anti-Zionism is not equivalent to anti-Semitism, Massie said in a statement earlier this week.

On Tuesday, the House of Representatives passed a resolution condemning a purported rise in anti-Semitism in the United States. Massie, alongside a group of prominent Jewish Democratic lawmakers, declined to support the measure.

Congressmen Dan Goldman, Jerry Nadler and Jamie Raskin urged lawmakers to vote present on the resolution, characterizing it as an “unserious attempt” by House Republicans to weaponize Jewish pain for political points.

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Former DEA Informer Pleads Guilty to Role in Killing Haiti President - Court Record

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - Former US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) informer Joseph Vincent has pleaded guilty in a Florida court to his role in the assassination of Haiti President Jovenel Moise, court documents revealed.

"The defendant agrees to plead guilty to Counts 1, 2 and 3 of the Fourth Superseding Amendment," the plea agreement said on Tuesday.

According to the plea agreement, Vincent was involved with a score of Colombian citizens and several other Haitian-Americans in the conspiracy and is the fourth of 11 defendants in the case to plead guilty.

Vincent may face a life sentence in jail for the crime, the court document noted.

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Pentagon Says About \$4.8Bln Left in PDA Funding for Ukraine

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) – The United States has about \$4.8 billion left in restored presidential drawdown authority (PDA) for Ukraine and about \$1.1 billion in existing resources to backfill US stocks, Pentagon press secretary Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

“Right now, there is roughly \$4.8 billion in restored presidential drawdown authority still available, and there is \$1.1 billion in existing resources available to backfill US stocks,” Ryder said during a press briefing. “Without funding, we will not be able to provide Ukraine with the critical security assistance it needs to protect its cities, its people, its critical infrastructure.”

Later on Tuesday, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Charles Brown will join other senior leaders in a closed session with all members of Congress to brief on the urgent need to pass the Biden administration’s supplemental budget request.

Earlier in October, the White House sent to Congress a request for an additional \$106 billion. The supplemental package includes \$61.4 billion for Ukraine, half of which is to provide Kiev

with weapons and replenish US military stocks. It also seeks \$14.3 billion in assistance for Israel.

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McConnell Urges Republicans to Vote 'No' Wednesday on Biden Supplemental Bill

(Updates with details, background in paras 3-6)

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell on Tuesday urged all Republican senators to vote against legislation on Wednesday to approve President Joe Biden's \$106 billion supplemental request due to partisan disagreements on border policy issues.

"I'm advocating and I hope all of our members vote 'no' on the motion to proceed to the shell [bill]...we insist on meaningful changes to the border," McConnell said during a press conference.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said in a separate press conference that said he is offering Republican senators to draw up and add an amendment to the Biden supplemental bill that will address their border security concerns, but it would need 60 votes to pass.

Schumer said they cannot wait any longer to negotiate on conditions to approve additional aid for Ukraine.

Earlier in the day, Schumer said a vote on Biden's supplemental request will take place on Wednesday afternoon.

The Biden administration supplemental request includes \$106 billion in aid for Israel and Ukraine, as well as funding for US border security. Republicans have been advocating for more meaningful changes in the bill to better address the crisis on the US southern border with Mexico, while some outright oppose any additional aid for Ukraine.

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US Defense Chief Says 'Deeply Saddened' by Loss of 8 Soldiers in Aircraft Crash Near Japan

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Tuesday that he is deeply saddened by the deaths of eight US military service members in an aircraft crash near Japan.

"I am deeply saddened by the loss of eight American troops in a tragic aircraft crash off the coast of Japan," Austin said in a statement.

On November 29, a US Air Force CV-22B Osprey with eight soldiers on board was involved in an aircraft mishap during a training mission off the shore of Japan's Yakushima Island.

The search and rescue effort by the US military has transitioned to a search and recovery effort, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Tuesday. The remains of three soldiers

have been recovered and the remains of three others have been located, Ryder said during a press briefing.

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Unlike Ukraine, Israel Uses Its Funds to Pay for US Weapons, Services - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - In contrast to Ukraine, Israel pays for US military articles and services with its funds, including State Department-provided foreign military financing for certain items, Pentagon press secretary Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

"[The US Department of Defense] has not received appropriated funds or drawdown authority for Israel. Instead, Israel is using its funds to pay for US defense articles and services to include State Department-provided foreign military financing for some items that are sold through foreign military sales, as well as direct commercial sales," Ryder said during a press briefing.

According to Ryder, the funding for Ukraine is budgeted and hence trackable via the Presidential drawdown authority announcements made by the Pentagon.

With the start of the Israeli operation in Gaza following the Hamas attack on October 7, the United States declared its full support for the Netanyahu government, which raised natural fears in Kiev that the generous flow of financial and security aid would be diverted to Israel, one of the United States' closest allies in the world.

At the same time, the Pentagon still refuses to provide data on the amount of support for Israel, while the figures for support for Ukraine are publicly available and are published regularly.

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Pentagon Says Encouraged by US Sen. Tuberville Lifting Holds on Some Military Nominees

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department is encouraged by US Sen. Tommy Tuberville's announcement that he will lift some holds on confirming US military nominees, Pentagon Press Secretary Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

"Well certainly we're encouraged by the news," Ryder said during a press briefing, when asked about Tuberville's announcement.

Earlier on Tuesday, Tuberville reportedly agreed to lift his months-long hold on confirming military nominees, with the exception of four-star generals. Tuberville placed the holds on nominees in protest of the Defense Department's abortion policy, which reimburses service members for costs associated with the procedure.

The Pentagon will remain engaged with Tuberville and other senators to urge that all holds be lifted, Ryder said.

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US Has Not Seen Adequate Israeli Actions to Hold Extremists Accountable - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The United States has not witnessed a satisfactory commitment from the government of Israel in holding extremist settlers accountable for violence, State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"They need to do more, to take action, to stop extremist settler violence and to hold accountable extremist settlers who commit acts of violence... We have not seen actually a sufficient level of actions by the government of Israel that we think hold people properly accountable," Miller said during a press briefing.

Miller said that the government of Israel has taken certain measures, providing assistance to some individuals and placing others in administrative detention.

"We have made clear, we think, that when the facts support it, people should be prosecuted, if they've committed acts of violence. And so we've taken the actions that we, the United States government, can take that does not obviate the need for the government of Israel to take its own actions, and we will continue to be clear with them about it," Miller said.

Furthermore, when asked whether the US would publicly disclose individuals associated with the settlers' movement, Miller said that the US is restricted by law from publicly disclosing the names of those designated for visa restrictions or as a result of the implemented policy.

Today, the US announced the initiation of a new visa restriction policy, targeting individuals implicated in actions undermining peace in the West Bank, including committing violence against Palestinians, with potential impacts extending to their immediate family members.

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McConnell Urges Republicans to Vote 'No' Wednesday on Biden Supplemental Bill

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - US Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell on Tuesday urged all Republican senators to vote against legislation on Wednesday to approve President Joe Biden's \$106 billion supplemental request due to partisan disagreements on border policy issues.

"I'm advocating and I hope all of our members vote 'no' on the motion to proceed to the shell [bill]...we insist on meaningful changes to the border," McConnell said during a press conference.

Earlier in the day, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said a vote on Biden's supplemental request will take place Wednesday afternoon.

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

UNSC to Meet December 11 to Discuss Western Supplies of Weapons to Kiev - Polyanskiy

UNITED NATIONS, December 5 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council will meet at Moscow's request on December 11 to discuss Western weapon supplies to Kiev, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative Dmitry Polyanskiy said on Tuesday.

"On 11 December at 15:00 New York time (23:00 Moscow time) our requested meeting on supplies of Western weapons to Ukraine will be held," Polyanskiy posted on his Telegram profile.

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Zelenskyy Unable to Brief US Senators Tuesday Due to Last Minute Change - Schumer

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - Volodymyr Zelenskyy will not be available to provide US senators a briefing Tuesday afternoon due to a last minute schedule change, US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said during a press conference.

"Zelenskyy by the way could not make it to our, something happened at the last minute, to our briefing at 3 [p.m.]," Schumer said.

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Austin, Swedish Counterpart to Sign First Ever Defense Cooperation Agreement - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin will host Swedish Defense Minister Pal Jonson later in the day for talks and the signing ceremony of the first ever US-Sweden defense cooperation agreement, Pentagon press secretary Pat Ryder said on Tuesday.

"The Secretary [Austin] will host Swedish Minister of Defense Pal Jonson at the Pentagon later today to discuss key defense and security topics. During the meeting, Secretary Austin and Minister Jonson will sign the first ever US-Sweden defense cooperation agreement," Ryder said during a press briefing.

Among other things, the agreement will pave the way to the legal presence of US military personnel in Sweden as well as the US's access to deployment areas and pre-positioning of military materiel, Ryder said.

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

US Made Clear to Israel Level of Aid Getting Into Gaza 'Insufficient' - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The US made clear to Israel that not enough is being done for Palestinians in Gaza and the level of assistance to civilians needs to accelerate, State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"There is not enough being done right now. The level of assistance that's getting in is insufficient. It needs to go up... the level of fuel that is going in is not sufficient. It needs to go up. And we have made that clear to the Government of Israel, and we will continue to engage with them on every level," Miller said during a press briefing.

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State Dept Says Has Made New Proposal to Secure Release of Americans, Russia Rejects

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The United States has made a new proposal to Russia to secure the release of Moscow-based WSJ reporter Evan Gershkovich and former US Marine Paul Whelan, but it has been rejected by Moscow, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"We have made multiple proposals for his [Gershkovich] release as well as for the release of Paul Whealan," Miller said during a press briefing. "In recent weeks, we made a new and significant proposal to secure Paul and Evan's release, that proposal was rejected by Russia

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US Charges Bosnian Man for Allegedly Helping Artem Uss Avert Extradition - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The United States has charged Vladimir Jovancic, a national of Bosnia and Herzegovina, for allegedly helping Artem Uss flee Italy to avert a US extradition order, the Justice Department said on Tuesday.

"A two-count indictment was unsealed yesterday in federal court in Brooklyn, New York, charging Vladimir Jovancic, a Bosnian national, with obstructing justice and assisting escape for his role in helping Artem Uss flee from Italy to Russia following an Italian court ruling that Uss would be extradited to the United States," the Justice Department said in a press release.

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.

The indictment charged Uss with four counts, including engaging in a 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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US Made No Determination About RFE/RL Reporter Detained in Russia - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The United States has made no determination about the case of Alsu Kurmasheva, a correspondent of Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) detained in Russia, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

"We are following the case closely, we remain deeply concerned about the extension of her pre-trial detention" Miller said. "We have not made at this point any further determinations with respect to that case."

Husband of detained American journalist in Russia Alsu Kurmasheva, Pavel Butorin, said in the end of November that he would like the US government to designate her as wrongfully detained, saying that such a move would elevate her case and commit the US to securing her release.

On October 18, Kurmasheva was detained and charged with failure to register as a foreign agent in Russia, which carries a maximum sentence of five years' imprisonment.

However, Kremlin said it is completely unaware of Kurmasheva's case and is not monitoring it.

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US to Designate Additional Individuals for Attacks on Civilians in West Bank - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The United States will designate additional extremists for attacks against civilians in the West Bank under a new visa restriction policy, State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Tuesday.

"Today, we will designate additional individuals pursuant to this policy in the coming days. We unequivocally condemn attacks by violent Israeli extremists against Palestinians and those by violent Palestinian extreme extremists against Israelis," Miller said during a press briefing.

Earlier, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the US is implementing a new visa restriction policy targeting individuals involved in undermining security and stability in the West Bank, including through committing acts of violence or restricting civilians' access to essential services.

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Tuberville Drops Hold on Hundreds of Military Promotions Except 4-Star Generals – Reports

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) – Sen. Tommy Tuberville told reporters on Tuesday in a surprise move that he has decided to lift his 10-month hold on hundreds of military promotions except four-star generals, a National Journal correspondent said in an X post.

"I'm not going to hold the promotions of these people any longer," Tuberville was quoted as saying during a huddle with the press. "We saw some success. We didn't get as much out of it as we wanted."

The senator placed holds on hundreds of nominees in protest of the Pentagon's abortion policy, which provides funding for the procedure, and claimed that defense officials are "legislating from the Pentagon" instead of through Congress as the US Constitution requires.

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FINTRAC Imposes \$5.5 Administrative Penalty on Royal Bank of Canada - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - A C\$7.4 million (US \$5.5 million) penalty has been imposed on the Royal Bank of Canada for its failure to comply with the Proceeds of Crime and Terrorist Financing Act, Canada's financial intelligence agency, better known by the acronym FINTRAC, said in a statement on Tuesday.

"Following a compliance examination in 2022, this bank was imposed an administrative monetary penalty of \$7,475,000 on November 3, 2023, for non-compliance with Part 1 of the Proceeds of Crime (Money Laundering) and Terrorist Financing Act and its associated Regulations," the statement said.

The bank failed to submit suspicious transaction reports where there were reasonable grounds to suspect money laundering offences; failed to provide information in a prescribed form and manner; and failed to keep written policies and procedures up to date, the statement said.

FINTRAC emphasized in the statement that the bank was solely penalized for administrative violations of the act and associated regulations, and not for criminal offences related to money laundering or terrorism financing.

FINTRAC chief Sarah Paquet said they would continue to assist businesses in understanding the obligations under the act but will be firm in ensuring that businesses continue to do their part lest appropriate actions are taken as needed.

The acronym FINTRAC stands for Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Center of Canada.

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Moldovan Parliament Deputy Speaker Says NATO Only Viable Security Guarantee

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - NATO is the only viable guarantee to provide proper security for Moldova in the existing regional environment, but it will take some time to change the public view of the alliance, Deputy-Speaker of the Parliament of Moldova Mihai Popsoi said on Tuesday.

"For a country like Moldova, in the region that Moldova finds itself in, such an alliance as NATO is the only guarantee of proper security but it will take time for us to debate this in the public domain," Popsoi said during a discussion hosted by the US Institute of Peace.

Popsoi added that the Russian long-standing influence inside of Moldova has allegedly made it difficult to argue that neutrality is not the best formula for ensuring security while the new national security concept for the first time outlines alternative avenues of ensuring Moldovan security, including by way of increasing cooperation with NATO.

In October, President of Moldova Maia Sandu unveiled a new national security strategy that labeled Russia as a national security threat for the first time in the country's history since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

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US Announces New Sanctions Related to Russia, Belarus - Treasury

(Adds details in paras 3-7)

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) – The United States has targeted 13 individuals and 20 entities with sanctions related to Russia and Belarus, the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control said on Tuesday.

The sanctions were imposed on persons from Russia, Belarus, Belgium and the Netherlands. The designated entities include businesses in Belarus, Cyprus, Hong Kong, Belgium, and the Netherlands, according to an OFAC notice.

In a separate press release, the Treasury specified that 11 entities and seven individuals were sanctioned pursuant to Executive Order 14038 "Blocking Property of Additional Persons Contributing to the Situation in Belarus" and one individual pursuant to E.O. 14024 "Blocking Property With Respect To Specified Harmful Foreign Activities of the Government of the Russian Federation."

Among those sanctioned is Secretary-General for the Belarus Red Cross Dmitry Shevtsov for his role in transferring children from Donbas to Belarus.

"OFAC [Office of Foreign Assets Control] is designating Shautsou pursuant to E.O. 14024 for having materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, [Russian Children's Rights Commissioner] Maria Lvova-Belova, a person whose property and interests in property are blocked pursuant to E.O. 14024," the statement said.

The restrictions were also imposed on people and companies whom the Treasury labeled as "wallets" of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. The list includes businessmen Aliaksandr Shakutsin, Pavel Topuzidis, and Viktor Petrovich and their companies operating in the construction and tobacco sectors of the Belarusian economy.

The sanctions also target several entities and their executives for operating in the Belarusian defense sector, as well as Open Joint Stock Company Alevkurp, Planar Research and Production Holdings for Precision Engineering, and OJSC Horizont Holding Management Company for allegedly supporting Russia's special military operation in Ukraine.

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US Congressman Patrick McHenry Says Will Not Seek Reelection in 2024

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Patrick McHenry said on Tuesday that he will not seek reelection in 2024, leaving the seat up for grabs with a slim Republican majority in the House of Representatives heading into election season.

"I will be retiring from Congress at the end of my current term," McHenry said in a statement. "There are many smart and capable members who remain, and others are on their way. I'm confident the House is in good hands."

McHenry, who was first elected to the House of Representatives in 2004, currently serves as House Financial Services Committee chair. McHenry also served as House Speaker pro tempore following Congressman Kevin McCarthy's departure from the leadership role.

The House of Representatives is on the verge of "the next great turn," McHenry said. Concerns about the future of the lower chamber of Congress are exaggerated, McHenry added.

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Biden Admin. Fighting to Get Ukraine Aid Greenlighted by Congress Before Winter - Yellen

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The White House is going all out to convince Congress to approve a new multi-billion dollar aid package for Ukraine before the winter, even as Speaker Mike Johnson and a growing number of rival Republicans in the House look unsupportive, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Tuesday.

"They're bracing for a long winter," Yellen said, referring to Ukraine, in an interview with political news site Punchbowl. "And this is support that is critical for them to be able to continue to be engaged in the war effort."

Yellen's push for the aid comes as support for the Ukraine war is waning among Republicans, Punchbowl noted, with the observation that Yellen and Speaker Johnson have not spoken since his election six weeks ago.

Yellen pointed out that the United States was "not doing this alone," referring to a broad international coalition that was sending money to Ukraine as well.

Despite signs that the upcoming supplemental request for Ukraine could be the last Congress approves - if lawmakers can pass it at all - Yellen appeared unfazed, the Punchbowl reported.

"I'm really not going to try to comment on the politics here," Yellen told the site. "But I would say that I do see prominent Republicans like Leader [Mitch] McConnell supporting aid for Ukraine - military and economic - and we have made commitments to our allies. This is something we're doing jointly. I want to make sure they get the aid they need."

She said Ukraine was "currently spending every penny or more" that it takes in revenue for military purposes, to support its war effort. "So we're filling in money that they need for government functions like hospitals, first responders, school teachers."

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UN Spokesperson Says There Are No Safe Places in Gaza, Including Shelters Flying UN Flags

UNITED NATIONS, December 5 (Sputnik) - The United Nations says there are no safe zones in Gaza including shelters flying the UN flag, UN Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"There are no UN designated safe zones in Gaza. I think that all my senior colleagues have been very clear, including the Secretary-General saying there are no safe places in Gaza," Dujarric told a briefing. "There are shelters that fly the UN flag... But we have seen since the beginning of the conflict that those places that fly the UN flag are not safe either."

Dujarric was answering a question regarding the US State Department Spokesperson's Matthew Miller comment during a briefing that people in Gaza should go to UN-designated stores that are listed on Israeli lists as "deconfliction zones that should not be the target of military campaigns."

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US Announces New Visa Policy Covering Violence Against Palestinians in West Bank - Blinken

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The United States is implementing a new US visa restriction policy to holding accountable individuals using violence against Palestinians in the West Bank, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.

"Today, the State Department is implementing a new visa restriction policy targeting individuals believed to have been involved in undermining peace, security or stability in the West Bank, including through committing acts of violence or taking other actions that unduly restrict civilians' access to essential services and basic necessities," Blinken said in a statement.

Blinken added that the immediate family members of the targeted individuals may also be subject to visa restrictions.

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

Schiff Files Paperwork to Run for US Senate Seat Once Held by Feinstein - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Adam Schiff said in a statement to social media platform X that he officially filed paperwork to run for a Senate seat previously held by Dianne Feinstein, who died earlier this year.

"It's official - I just filed my paperwork and will be on the ballot to be California's next United States Senator," Schiff said on Monday.

The primary election for the seat is scheduled for March 5, 2024.

In September, Feinstein died in office, at which time she was the oldest sitting US senator and the longest-serving female senator.

California Governor Gavin Newsom appointed Laphonza Butler to serve out the remainder of Feinstein's senate term. Butler has said that she will not seek election to a full term in 2024.

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UPDATE - Nearly 2000 Canadian Troops Experienced Sexual Misconduct in 2022 - Statistics Canada

(Updates with more details in paras 7-9)

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - Some 1,960 members of the Canadian military reported being sexually assaulted in the workplace or outside of it in 2022, Statistics Canada said in a report on Tuesday.

The report, dubbed "Sexual Misconduct in the Canadian Military," was compiled between October 2022 and January 2023.

"Approximately 1,960 regular force members, or 3.5%, were sexually assaulted in the military workplace or in an incident involving military members in the 12 months preceding the survey. This represented an increase from 2016 (1.7%) and 2018 (1.6%)," the report said.

Fifty-two percent of the regular force members who said they were sexually assaulted identified a peer as the perpetrator in at least one instance, the report said.

Thirty-four percent of women in the regular forces said they experienced some kind of sexualized or discriminatory behavior, twice the number of their male counterparts, the report said. Most cases involved sexual jokes, as well as inappropriate sexual comments and discussion about sex life, the report also said.

However, the number of incidents reported to the competent authorities fell to 21% in 2022, down from 25% in 2018 and 23% in 2016, due to the belief that nothing would change as a result of reporting them, the report added.

The Department of National Defense issued a statement saying that the continued prevalence of sexual misconduct is "incredibly disappointing" given its sustained focus to address the problem.

"We remain resolute in our commitment to eliminating this issue and we believe our current approach ... will lead to enduring change," the statement said.

Although many servicemen have a critical perception of sexual misconduct in the Canadian military, Department of National Defense said the majority agree that improvements have been made - a fact presented in the Statistics Canada report.

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Ukraine Risks Losing Conflict With Russia If US Doesn't Approve New Funding - Official

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - Ukraine risks losing the conflict against Russia if the United States does not approve additional security assistance for the country, head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Andriy Yermak said on Tuesday.

"If the help, which now debating in Congress, will be just postponed...it makes with very high possibility impossible to continue to liberate and give big risk to lose this war," Yermak said during an event hosted by think-tank US Institute of Peace.

On Monday, the White House warned Congress that the United States will run out of funding to assist Ukraine by the end of this year and urged lawmakers to immediately approve new funding to continue helping Kiev into next year.

Yermak said he has many meetings this week with officials from the White House, State Department and lawmakers to discuss the need to renew assistance.

President Joe Biden asked Congress to approve some \$60 billion for Ukraine in the next fiscal year.

US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said a vote is expected on Wednesday to approve a measure to provide additional assistance to Ukraine, including for Israel, US border security, and for US interests in the Indo-Pacific region.

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US Indicts Belgian National for Exporting Sensitive Technology to Russia, China - Treasury

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - Two indictments have been unsealed against a Belgian national for allegedly unlawfully exporting sensitive US technologies to Russia and China, the Treasury Department in a statement said on Tuesday.

"The US Department of Justice unsealed two separate indictments against Hans De Geetere related to his years-long scheme to unlawfully export sensitive, military-grade technology from the United States to end users located in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Russian Federation," the statement said.

Separately, the US Commerce Department of Commerce added De Geetere as well as five related entities to the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) Entity List, the statement said.

The Belgian authorities took action against De Geetere on charges related to his "global illicit"

procurement scheme, the statement added.

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FBI 'Keenly Focused' on Foreign Interference Risk in 2024 Election – Director

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) – FBI Director Christopher Wray said Tuesday that agency was “keenly focused” on the risk of foreign interference in the 2024 presidential election. “We’re keenly focused on the risk that foreign adversaries, whether it’s Russia, whether it’s China, whether it’s Iran, or others, would seek to interfere in our elections,” Wray testified at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing.

He added that since attempted Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, other adversaries had tried to “take a page out of the Russian playbook.”

He cited, as an example, an indictment unsealed last year against agents of China’s Ministry of State Security for harassing a US-based Chinese dissident who was running for Congress in New York.

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US Sanctions 42 Entities Including in Russia, Belarus, China - Commerce Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The United States will impose export restrictions on 42 entities for allegedly circumventing US export controls on sensitive US military electronics and avionics equipment on behalf of Russia and China, the Commerce Department said in a notice in the Federal Register on Tuesday.

"In this rule, the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) amends the Export Administration Regulations (EAR) by adding forty-two entities under forty-four entries to the Entity List. These entities are listed under the destinations of Armenia (3), Belarus (1), Belgium (3), China, People’s Republic of (China) (1), Cyprus (4), Germany (1), Kazakhstan (1), Netherlands (1), Russia (28), and the United Arab Emirates (1)," said the release.

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Hate Crimes Investigations in US Surge by 60% Since October 7 - FBI Director

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - Hate crime investigations conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) have increased by 60% since October 7, FBI Director Christopher Wray said in a congressional testimony on Tuesday.

"Just since October 7, we are opening, I think, 60% more hate crimes investigation post-October 7, then compared to the comparable period pre-October 7," Wray told the US Senate Judiciary Committee.

Wray explained that the predominant number of the investigations pertains to threats directed at the Jewish community, with additional attacks directed at other groups.

The FBI has implemented various measures to address the problem by elevating civil rights, especially hate crimes, to the national threat priority, which brings more investigative resources, Wray said.

"We're trying to do a lot to engage in outreach, both to law enforcement and the communities. Because one thing we know about hate crimes is that they're chronically underreported," Wray added.

On October 7, the Palestinian movement Hamas attacked Israel from the Gaza Strip. Israel declared war on Hamas, imposed a total blockade of Gaza and began indiscriminate bombardments and a ground invasion of the Palestinian enclave. Some 1,200 Israelis and 18,000 Palestinians have been killed and more than 36,000 Palestinians wounded in the fighting.

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US Senate to Vote on Vehicle for Ukraine, Israel Aid on Wednesday Afternoon - Schumer

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The US Senate will hold its first votes on a legislative vehicle for the Biden administration's \$106 billion supplemental aid request on Wednesday afternoon, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Tuesday.

"Last night, I filed cloture on a motion to proceed to a vehicle the Senate can use as a supplemental package. We will have our first vote on this vehicle Wednesday in the afternoon," Schumer said during remarks on the Senate floor.

Without more aid from Congress, Ukraine may fall, Schumer said. Schumer and the Biden administration have backed passing a package that includes aid for both Ukraine and Israel.

However, House Republicans have insisted on including border security measures in any supplemental bill. The House of Representatives also passed a separate aid bill for Israel, which the Senate and White House rejected.

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Ex-Congresswoman Liz Cheney Mulls Over Presidential Run to Counter Trump – Reports

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) – Former congresswoman Liz Cheney is contemplating running for US president in the 2024 election as a third-party candidate to not let Donald Trump return to the White House, The Washington Post reported on Tuesday.

Cheney vows to do “whatever it takes” to prevent Trump from winning the election and is warning that he can transform the US democracy into a dictatorship and try to stay longer than his term, the report said.

“Several years ago, I would not have contemplated a third-party run,” the report cited Cheney as saying in a Monday interview. “I happen to think democracy is at risk at home, obviously, as a result of Donald Trump’s continued grip on the Republican Party, and I think democracy is at risk internationally as well.”

If Cheney does decide to participate in the presidential campaign, it will be far from easy, since to accomplish this, she will need to either run for one of the parties that have ballot access or petition for her place on state ballots, the report said. Moreover, she must have at least 15% support in national polls to participate in the debates next fall.

The former congresswoman believes that Trump “enablers” controlling the House, including Speaker Mike Johnson, pose a serious threat and would likely make an attempt to interfere with the election results in January 2025 in a repeat of the January 6 events, the report added.

Cheney said that is considering voting for Biden or campaigning for him should she become the 2024 Democratic nominee and will make up her mind about the run in the next few months, the report said.

On January 6, 2021, after Trump's election defeat, a mob of his supporters breached the US Capitol in an attempt to halt Congress's Electoral College vote count.

Cheney, the daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney, was one of only 10 House Republicans who voted to impeach Trump after the capitol attack and later went on to become vice chair of the congressional January 6 Committee that investigated the riot.

According to a recent poll by Quinnipiac University, Trump maintains a larger lead in the Republican Party primary race, where he holds 64% support, trailed by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis in second place with 16% support.

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US Announces New Sanctions Related to Russia, Belarus - Treasury Department

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) – The United States imposed sanctions against 13 individuals and 20 entities related to Russia and Belarus, the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control said in a notice on its website on Tuesday.

The sanctions were imposed against persons from Russia, Belarus, Belgium and the Netherlands. The designated entities include businesses in Belarus, Cyprus, Hong Kong, Belgium and the Netherlands, according to the notice.

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White House Says Biden, Senior Officials to Be Very Clear on 'What's at Stake in Ukraine'

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden and other senior officials will be "very clear" about the consequences that could result from declining further funding for Ukraine, White House Principal Deputy Press Secretary Olivia Dalton said on Tuesday.

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 for Ukraine, Israel, border security and the Indo-Pacific region.

"I think that the President has been very, very clear and senior officials will be very clear to every single member of the of the House and Senate today about what the stakes are in Ukraine at this moment," Dalton said during a gaggle.

As time and funding is running out, the United States could be in a difficult position by the end of the year, which could hamper Washington's delivery of military assistance to Ukraine without dipping into the Pentagon's stockpiles and downgrading the country's military readiness, Dalton said.

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Nearly 2000 Canadian Troops Experienced Sexual Misconduct in 2022 - Statistics Canada

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - Some 1,960 members of the Canadian military reported being sexually assaulted in the workplace or outside of it in 2022, Statistics Canada said in a report on Tuesday.

The report, dubbed "Sexual Misconduct in the Canadian Military," was compiled between October 2022 and January 2023.

"Approximately 1,960 regular force members, or 3.5%, were sexually assaulted in the military workplace or in an incident involving military members in the 12 months preceding the survey. This represented an increase from 2016 (1.7%) and 2018 (1.6%)," the report said.

Fifty-two percent of the regular force members who said they were sexually assaulted identified a peer as the perpetrator in at least one instance, the report said.

Thirty-four percent of women in the regular forces said they experienced some kind of sexualized or discriminatory behavior, twice the number of their male counterparts, the report said.

Most cases involved sexual jokes, as well as inappropriate sexual comments and discussion about sex life, the report also said.

However, the incidents reported to the competent authorities fell to 21% in 2022, down from 25% in 2018 and 23% in 2016, due to the belief that nothing would change as a result of reporting, the report added.

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Johnson Says White House Must Give Details on Ukraine Strategy Before Lawmakers Pass Aid

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Tuesday that he told White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan that the administration must provide details on its Ukraine strategy before lawmakers approve further aid to the country.

"I told Mr. Sullivan very directly that there are important questions that must be answered so that we can continue with these negotiations," Johnson said during a press conference. "What is the objective? What is the endgame in Ukraine? How are we going to have proper oversight over the funds?"

Sullivan will provide a briefing on Ukraine to House lawmakers later on Tuesday, Johnson said. The briefing comes as the US Congress considers a \$106 billion supplemental funding request from the Biden administration, which includes billions in aid for Ukraine and Israel.

Any national security passage must begin with US border security, Johnson said. Johnson sent a letter on Tuesday to White House Office of Management and Budget Director Shalanda Young, informing the administration of his positions on Ukraine aid and border security.

"The open US border is an unconscionable and unsustainable catastrophe, and we have a moral responsibility to insist this madness stops immediately," the letter said.

House Republicans stand ready to work with the Biden administration on a robust border security package, the letter said.

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Russia Has Too Many Intel Officers in US, Has Highly Advanced Cyber Programs - FBI Chief

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - Russia has too many intelligence officers in the United States and operates one of the most advanced offensive cyber programs in the world, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation Christopher Wray said on Tuesday

"Russia has one of the most advanced, most widespread offensive cyber programs in the world," Wray said during a Senate hearing. "They have invested in it very heavily and have used it in different ways against us and our allies. They have intelligence officers here in the United States, too many by any measure."

Wray went on to claim that Russia also provides safe haven to cybercriminals.

"They also provide safe haven to cyber criminals, who, whether they're working for the Russian government or not, are conducting cyber attacks against, you know, us and our allies all over the world," Wray said.

Wray's remarks came as part of his testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee on the bureau's responses to the current threats facing the United States.

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US House Panels Say Justice Department Gave Hunter Biden 'Preferential Treatment'

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department gave Hunter Biden preferential treatment during a probe into his alleged criminal misconduct and then attempted to hide evidence of their actions, three US House committees said on Tuesday.

The House Judiciary, Ways and Means, and Oversight Committees released an interim staff report detailing the Justice Department's treatment of Biden, who was under investigation by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and FBI.

"The Committees' investigative work to date has revealed that the Justice Department afforded Hunter Biden — the President's son — preferential treatment throughout its investigation of his numerous alleged crimes, and then sought to cover up its actions after two courageous IRS agents stepped forward to blow the whistle on the Department's deviations from its investigative standards," the report said.

The Justice Department delayed its investigation into Biden, worked to remove Biden's name from search warrants and subpoenas, restricted investigators from asking witnesses about US President Joe Biden during interviews and tipped off defense attorneys about their investigation, the report said.

There is further information that the Justice Department is withholding from the committees, the report said. The Justice Department has not fully complied with requests for relevant documents and impeded the panels' probe, the report said.

The panels will continue to gather evidence to determine whether articles of impeachment against Joe Biden are warranted, the report said.

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White House 'Stonewalling' Biden Impeachment Probe in US House - Johnson

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The White House is impeding the US House of Representatives' impeachment inquiry into President Joe Biden, US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Tuesday

"Right now, the White House is stonewalling that investigation. They're refusing to turn over key witnesses to allow them to testify as they've been subpoenaed. They're refusing to turn over thousands of documents from the National Archives," Johnson said during a press conference, when asked about the House impeachment inquiry.

Earlier this year, several House panels began investigating the Biden family to determine whether articles of impeachment against the president are warranted.

The House of Representatives has a responsibility to formally adopt an impeachment inquiry on the floor, in case their subpoenas are challenged in court, Johnson said. House lawmakers are set to hold a vote next week on officializing the inquiry.

The measure is not an impeachment vote, but rather, to continue the inquiry with maximum

constitutional authority, Johnson noted.

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FBI Says Foreign Terrorism Threats Elevated to 'Whole Other Level' Since October 7

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) – FBI Director Christopher Wray said Tuesday that the threat of attack faced by the United States from foreign terrorist organizations has risen to “a whole other level” since the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel.

“The threat level has gone to a whole other level since October 7,” Wray testified at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing.

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FBI Disrupted 40% More Cyber Operations Last Year Than in 2021 - Director

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) disrupted 40% more cyber operations in 2022 than in 2021, while arresting 60% more cyber criminals, FBI Director Christopher Wray said in a congressional testimony on Tuesday.

"Last year, we disrupted over 40% more cyber operations and arrested over 60% more cyber criminals than the year before," Wray told the US Senate Judiciary Committee.

Wray explained that the FBI has seized over the past two years enough fentanyl to kill 270 million people or 80% of the population of the United States.

Since the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on October 7, the FBI is also working around the clock to identify and disrupt potential attacks by individuals and groups inspired by the Hamas' attacks on Israel.

"In recent years, we've seen an increase in hate crime investigations, including a particular big chunk involving threats to the Jewish community," Wray said.

The trend has worsened after the October 7 attacks and subsequent resumption of hostilities, Wray added.

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US Expected to Impose Travel Ban on Israeli Settlers as Soon as Tuesday - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 5 (Sputnik) - The US State Department is expected to impose a travel ban on Israeli settlers involved in violent attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank as soon as Tuesday, Axios reported.

The ban would prevent the settlers from traveling to the United States, although those with US citizenship would not be affected, the report said, citing two US officials.

The ban would be the first round of sanctions imposed on extremist Israeli settlers since the Clinton administration.

The State Department is also expected to impose a travel ban on Palestinians involved in attacks against Israelis, the report said.

According to the United Nations, 2023 is on track to be the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank, with 248 Palestinians killed by Israeli forces and settlers before October 7.

Since then, the violence has only skyrocketed, with the same number of Palestinians killed.