

**12/28/23 Thursday**

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

California Coast Put on Alert for 'Tremendous' Waves That Could Reach Up to 40 Feet

Waves of up to 40 feet (12 meters) high could hit California's coastline on Thursday. The treacherous surf marks the first swell of winter weather for the Golden State.

The US state of California is preparing for massive waves this week as Pacific storms have been churning up the surf along the coastline from Eureka to Santa Cruz with monstrous waves. Waves ranging in height between 10 and 20 feet—with some as high as 25 feet—are forecasted to hit parts of central and Southern California, with officials warning peak figures for "tremendous wave energy" would likely be documented throughout Thursday.

Significant beach erosion is likely as well as flooding, and some waves could even be strong enough to damage piers. High surf warnings and advisories were put into effect for the state's coastline in preparation for the storm.

Evacuations were ordered across California as the storm began. The Bay Area, Calles Pinos, Pradero, Sierra, Onda Resaca, Ribera, and parts of Calle Del Arroyo, Embarcedero all issued evacuation warnings on Thursday.

"People are advised to stay out of and well away from the water, and keep a close eye on kids and pets," the National Weather Service for the Bay Area wrote on Wednesday. "These are deadly conditions that can easily overpower the strongest swimmers."

"We really want to hammer home that beaches will be very dangerous," added [Nicole Sarment](#), a weather service meteorologist. "People should really not even go."

This is the first time that the Bay Area National Weather Service has issued a high surf warning since January, when a storm destroyed Santa Cruz's scenic West Cliff Drive. This week, multiple storms have whipped up the Pacific Ocean over the course of several days, with a series of hurricane-force winds helping to create the threatening swell.

At least three factors help to create these dramatic wave heights: wind speed, fetch, and time. Fetch being the area over the ocean where winds blow and generate waves, says the weather service. The longer the weather system sits there, the higher the waves will be. These type of weather systems are also more common during the winter months.

"As those (swells) come to the coast and they break, that's when you get those large waves at the coastlines and at the beaches," said [Alexis Clouser](#), a weather service meteorologist.

"These are not the highest wave heights we've seen, but they're certainly on the larger side." Waves as high as 42 feet were seen in the open ocean far offshore on Wednesday, Clouser explained. "They are deadly due to their size and the potential run-up — our biggest concern is people getting too close to the water and potentially getting swept in."

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

## Boeing Calls on Airlines to Reinspect 737 Max Jets After Officials Uncover 'Loose Bolt' Issue

The troubled 737 MAX jets first caught headlines after two major crashes in 2018 and 2019, which resulted in the death of more than 300 people. A worldwide grounding was later announced as a result.

Boeing, the airplane maker, is urging all airlines to inspect their 737 MAX airplanes for a "possible loose bolt" in the rudder control system. The Federal Aviation Administration ([FAA](#)) released a statement on Thursday saying they were "closely monitoring" inspections.

"Under consultation with the FAA, Boeing has issued a Multi-Operator Message (MOM), urging operators of newer single-aisle airplanes to inspect specific tie rods that control rudder movement for possible loose hardware," the FAA said in their statement.

"Boeing recommended the inspections after an international operator discovered a bolt with a missing nut while performing routine maintenance on a mechanism in the rudder-control linkage," the FAA wrote. An airplane's rudder helps control and stabilize an aircraft while it's in flight.

The inspections will take about two hours per plane, said Boeing. At least 1,370 planes that are in service across the world will be inspected for the loose bolt.

"The issue identified on the particular airplane has been remedied," a Boeing spokesperson said in a [statement](#). "Out of an abundance of caution, we are recommending operators inspect their 737 MAX airplanes and inform us of any findings."

"The FAA will consider additional action based on any further discovery of loose or missing hardware," said the FAA.

This is not the first time Boeing has experienced issues with their [737 MAX](#) jets. In October 2018, 189 people were killed when a new Boeing 737 MAX 8 crashed off the coast of Indonesia. Six months later, 157 people died when another 737 MAX 8 crashed just minutes into a flight over Ethiopia.

The 737 MAX line was subsequently grounded for 20 months across the globe, and cost Boeing more than \$20 billion in legal settlements.

Boeing has said that they recommend airlines inspect their MAXs within two weeks. But this issue will not affect the older-model 737 Next Generation planes, they add.

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

The Nikki Stumble - Cartoon

In 2010, when Haley was running for governor, she had said the Civil War was a conflict between two sides fighting between "tradition" and "change".

On [Wednesday](#), Nikki Haley was asked what caused the US Civil War during an event in Berlin, New Hampshire where she was hoping to sway voters ahead of the Republican primary election. In response to the question, she said: "I think the cause of the Civil War was basically how the government was going to run, the freedoms and what people could and couldn't do."

Following heated criticism, [Haley](#) finally admitted on Thursday morning that slavery was the cause of the US Civil War. But she blamed her gaffe on the person who asked her the question, calling them a “Democratic plant”.

“It was definitely a Democrat plant,” said Haley. “That’s why I said, what does it mean to you? And if you notice, he didn’t answer anything. The same reason he didn’t tell the reporters what his name was.”

But the attendee who had asked her the question did so multiple times, surprised that she wouldn’t name slavery as the cause of the war. In response, [Haley](#) said: “What do you want me to say about slavery?” In response, the voter said: “You’ve answered my question. Thank you.”

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

Mammoth Tusk Discovered in North Dakota Mine is One of the State's Most Complete Specimens

The specimen is a well-preserved, seven-foot-long tusk that once belonged to an ancient mammoth, and is a part of one of the largest discoveries of mammoth remains in the state. During Memorial Day weekend in a North Dakota mine, coal miners stumbled upon a significant piece of natural history. A long mammoth tusk that had been buried in the Freedom Mine since the Ice Age was discovered while extracting dirt and rock with a bulldozer, the North Dakota Department of Mineral Resources (DMR) said in a news [release](#).

Prompted by the discovery, state researchers and paleontologists from the North Dakota Geological Survey worked together to turn the mine—near Beulah, North Dakota—into an archeological dig site.

Working close to two weeks to unearth the specimens from the streambed left them with more than 20 additional bones, including: ribs, a shoulder blade, a tooth, and parts of the hips.

“You don’t really expect to see this full curved tusk just laying there in perfect condition after being dumped out of the back of a dump truck,” Clint Boyd, senior paleontologist for the North Dakota Geological Survey, told a Washington, DC news [source](#).

According to the DMR, two species of mammoths roamed North Dakota during the Ice Age: the Woolly Mammoths and the Columbian Mammoths. They walked among saber-tooth tigers and giant sloths, and went extinct in this area about 10,000 years ago.

“Most of the mammoth fossils known from North Dakota are isolated bones and teeth,” said [Boyd](#). “This specimen is one of the most complete mammoth skeletons discovered in North Dakota, making it an exciting and scientifically important discovery.”

The discovery was then transported to the Paleontology Lab at the North Dakota Heritage Center & State Museum in Bismarck, North Dakota, DMR said in their news release. Once at the museum, they will be cleaned and stabilized.

The North Dakota Geological Survey and the Freedom Mine are also working together to develop some form of an educational outreach program, and are thinking of locations where the specimen can be viewed by the public, DMR added. And once the discovery is cleaned and examined, researchers will be able to identify which species of mammoth it is.

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

UN Urges Israel to 'End Unlawful Killings' in West Bank as Conditions 'Rapidly' Deteriorate

Although Israel's military operation in the Gaza Strip has received greater attention, the United Nations also cites numerous abuses in the occupied West Bank territory.

The United Nations released a report Thursday urging Israel to end "unlawful killings" in the West Bank, citing a "rapidly deteriorating human rights situation."

The report from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) cited the use of heavy handed tactics by security officials leading to "arbitrary detention and ill-treatment of Palestinians" as well as "discriminatory movement restrictions."

"The UN Human Rights Office has verified the deaths of 300 Palestinians from 7 October to 27 December 2023 – including 79 children – in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem," read [a news release](#) accompanying the report. Of those deaths, 201 involved no exchange of fire from the victim while 105 were caused by airstrikes and similar use of military force.

"The use of military tactics means and weapons in law enforcement contexts, the use of unnecessary or disproportionate force, and the enforcement of broad, arbitrary and discriminatory movement restrictions that affect Palestinians are extremely troubling," read a statement from UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk.

"The violations documented in this report repeat the pattern and nature of violations reported in the past in the context of the long-standing Israeli occupation of the West Bank. However, the intensity of the violence and repression is something that has not been seen in years," he added.

"I call on Israel to take immediate, clear and effective steps to put an end to settler violence against the Palestinian population, to investigate all incidents of violence by settlers and Israeli Security Forces, to ensure effective protection of Palestinian communities against any form of forcible transfer, and to ensure the ability of herding communities displaced due to repeated attacks by armed settlers to return to their lands."

The report [documented](#) the injury of 3,000 Palestinians by Israeli security forces, including "at least 355 children." Israeli security often prevented the medical treatment of injuries by targeting Palestinian ambulances and paramedics or delaying their response.

Additionally, Israeli military incursions were blamed for "extensive damage to civilian objects and infrastructure" in densely-populated areas, something also observed in Israel's more highly-publicized operation in Gaza where [at least 21,320 people](#) have been killed, according to the latest figures from local officials.

At least 4,700 Palestinians have reportedly been arrested in the West Bank, including some 40 journalists.

The release documents the humiliation and brutal treatment of detainees:

"Some were stripped naked, blindfolded and restrained for long hours with handcuffs and with their legs tied, while Israeli soldiers stepped on their heads and backs, were spat at, slammed against walls, threatened, insulted, humiliated and in some cases subjected to sexual and gender-based violence."

The report refers to the Palestinian territory west of the Jordan River, including East Jerusalem, which has been illegally occupied under international law by the Israeli military since 1967. Türk accused Israel of taking advantage of the situation since October 7 to accelerate the occupation of the West Bank, with both settlers and Israeli security forces engaging in violence against Palestinians.

The rhetoric of Israeli officials has explicitly sanctioned the killing and displacement of Palestinians. "We are now rolling out the Gaza Nakba," [said](#) Israeli security cabinet member Avi Dichter last month, referring to the Arabic word for "catastrophe" used to describe the forced displacement of Palestinians upon Israel's founding in 1948. The Nakba led to the ethnic cleansing of some 500 Palestinian towns and villages and the [killing](#) of thousands.

Israel has acted with apparent disregard for civilian life during its operation in Gaza, where some two-thirds of the dead are [reportedly](#) women and children. "A child is killed every 10 minutes. Pregnant women are undergoing C-sections with no anesthetics," [reported](#) the organization CARE International recently, citing a "collapse of the water, sanitation, hygiene, and health infrastructure as fuel storages run out and major hospitals shut down."

Recently, Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen [announced](#) the country would deny visas to UN staff members to protest the organization's criticism of Israel's conduct.

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

Cause du Jour to Yesterday's News: Western Media's Evolving 2023 Coverage on Ukraine

Media reporting on the conflict in Ukraine is a case study of mainstream journalism's propaganda function on behalf of Western militarism.

Earlier this year, American commentator Bill Kristol observed with distress the growing opposition among Republicans to US funding for Ukraine.

An arch neoconservative, Kristol had been central in rallying support for America's post-9/11 wars. Once democracy had been secured for grateful Iraqis, Kristol hoped to go further, toppling the Islamic Republic in Iran and cementing Western control over a notoriously independent region of the world.

Famously, things didn't work out that way. By 2023, the party of George W. Bush and Dick Cheney had grown increasingly weary of war and skeptical of US military involvement. Not only had Iran's power grown in the Middle East, but now US hegemony over Europe seemed in doubt as well amid Russia's special operation in Ukraine.

Alarmed by the development, Kristol set up a pressure group to ensure the GOP remained committed to funding for Kiev. The organization's first [television ad](#) urged Republicans to keep the money flowing while sounding all the usual jingoistic notes:

When America arms Ukraine we get a lot for a little. Putin is an enemy of America... The more Ukraine weakens Russia, the more it also weakens Russia's closest ally, China. America needs to stand strong against our enemies. That's why Republicans in Congress must continue to support Ukraine.

The advertising blitz signaled the panic felt by much of Washington's pro-war establishment as [almost half of Americans polled](#) now said the country was sending too much money for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's quixotic endeavor.

But how did the United States arrive at this juncture, with a previously hawkish American public now increasingly opposed even to funding a proxy conflict? The answer in part lies in a discredited mainstream media's growing inability to manufacture consent for another "forever war."

Past is Prologue

Anti-Russian sentiment has deep roots in the West. Tensions have grown in the past several years amidst the "Russiagate" narrative, which sought to distract from the declining popularity of America's political establishment and discredit former President Donald Trump with claims Russia interfered in the 2016 US election. The accusation played a useful role in asserting US soft power as part of a broader "pivot to Asia" foreign policy dating back to the Obama administration.

Russiagate itself was built on a decades-long foundation of McCarthyism that came to the fore after the United States and the Soviet Union emerged from World War II as dueling superpowers. Anticommunism was the cornerstone of US foreign policy for four decades, with hostility towards Russia at its core.

Thus, when Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the country's special military operation in Ukraine in early 2022, the notion that Russia was at fault wasn't entirely difficult to sell to Americans. The country's reintegration of Crimea eight years before had already been [portrayed](#) as an act of aggressive conquest, even with ample evidence demonstrating Crimeans wished to rejoin Russia.

If the Soviet Union's entry into Afghanistan decades earlier had been characterized as an attempt to preserve Russian power in the region, the operation in Ukraine was Putin's attempt to rebuild the former "empire." Such was the narrative breathlessly [repeated](#) in corporate media. Key to the Western portrayal of the situation was the idea that Putin's action was entirely "unprovoked." The claim was made emphatically by US President Joe Biden and repeated in editorial pages across the country: Russia's action was an act of unwarranted aggression against a blameless western democracy.

It's practically an element of faith in the United States that any president not willing to countenance military action risks appearing weak.

This view finds ample reinforcement from thought leaders throughout the country: a [study](#) by the Quincy Institute found that of the 15 think tanks mentioned most often in America's major newspapers in relation to coverage of Ukraine, 14 of them receive funding from US military contractors.

Think tanks with defense industry funding were found to be seven times more likely to be cited than those without, according to the study.

When outright military force is not an option, the United States often aims to shape global politics through more subtle means. Government-backed institutions like USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy tilt the playing field in the US' favor by [funneling](#) billions of dollars towards media, activists, and non-governmental organizations around the world. In this way, the US is able to achieve regime change via the astroturfing of protests and opposition movements favorable to the country's interests.

Such background is understood in places like Russia and China, where the media reports on the background of these so-called “color revolutions” but the context is largely unknown by the US public. Thus, the Biden administration was easily able to sell Russia’s special operation in Ukraine as an “unprovoked” attack rather than a response to developments since the 2014 “Euromaidan” coup installed an anti-Russian government in Kiev.

Only several months of adversarial coverage from a few select media personalities amidst heavy political polarization in the United States was able to eventually begin to shift the narrative among the American public.

Cracks Beginning to Show

2023 began with most Americans still supporting the country’s arming of Zelensky’s regime in Ukraine.

Some of the first signs of dissent emerged from the anti-war movement. In March, a [demonstration](#) was held outside the White House that drew thousands of people. Organized by organizations like Code Pink and the ANSWER Coalition that played a major role in opposing the war in Iraq, the protest explicitly identified the violence in Ukraine as a “proxy” conflict intended to defend NATO expansion at the expense of Russian interests.

The media criticism group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) [noted](#) that coverage of the demonstration fell entirely to alternative media as the protest was completely ignored by mainstream US outlets. The Washington Post did not even report on the protest in its local edition despite demonstrators marching to the newspaper’s K Street building carrying several black coffins.

Cracks in Western support for Kiev also began to show internationally. Europe saw a wave of strikes and protests in the beginning of the year over a rising cost of living. Although US-led sanctions on Russian gas played a central role in the crisis, the conflict in Ukraine only [received](#) a single brief mention in an article from Reuters about the unrest.

In Brazil, newly-elected President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva made efforts to reorient his country’s foreign policy in an independent direction when he [noted](#) the role of NATO expansion in Ukraine’s conflict. The [Associated Press](#) and [Reuters](#) ran interference for the US State Department after Lula’s foreign minister met with Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov, soliciting comments from National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby accusing Brazil of “parroting Russian and Chinese propaganda.”

Brazilian media [picked up](#) on the wire services’ stories almost immediately with newspaper O Globo editorializing that “Lula risks taking a fall” by “provoking” the United States – an unmistakable threat of a coup in a country with a long history of US political interference. Mainstream media also continued to dutifully fall in line with US government interests regarding the September 2022 destruction of Russia’s Nord Stream pipeline. When respected independent reporter Seymour Hersh [released](#) a story in February documenting the United States’ responsibility for the bombing, it was overlooked by major outlets like The New York Times.

After the story proved too juicy to ignore, the US “newspaper of record” [responded](#) almost a month to the day later with a competing narrative absolving the United States of any role, instead citing anonymous “new intelligence” blaming a Ukraine-aligned group. FAIR [noted](#) at the time that major US media outlets ignored Hersh’s story and unanimously regarded the New York Times report as more credible, even though both were based on anonymous sources.

In May, researchers at Brown University released a landmark [study](#) estimating that more than 4.5 million people have died as a result of US-led wars in the 21st century.

The research received scant attention in major US media, although it presented an opportunity to reflect on critic Noam Chomsky's conception of "worthy" versus "unworthy" victims. Unlike the victims of America's wars, civilian casualties in Ukraine continued to draw headlines in Western media where the news furthered official narratives of a Russian war of aggression.

As 2023 continued, dissent over US backing of Ukraine increasingly began to emerge from a perhaps unlikely source. Although the Republican Party had spearheaded the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, the Trump-aligned wing of the conservative movement began to question Democratic President Joe Biden's stance in the Ukraine conflict. Whether motivated by mere partisan gamesmanship or by genuine ideological dissent, much of what observers characterize as anti-war sentiment began to emerge from the populist right.

Perhaps most representative of the trend was Fox News host Tucker Carlson, who viewed US support for Ukraine with greater and greater skepticism. Carlson became known as an anti-establishment voice on issues of foreign affairs, even once [explaining](#) the concept of "color revolutions" to his audience.

The host's commentary made him a target of particular ire from mainstream US media: The New York Times [suggested](#) Carlson's nightly program was "the most racist show in the history of cable news," although his foreign policy differences with the consistently pro-US intervention newspaper were impossible to ignore. Carlson took an increasingly anti-Zelensky line throughout the year, even [hosting](#) progressive journalist Aaron Mate on his program to discuss Seymour Hersh's reporting on the Nord Stream pipeline explosion.

Increasingly, a bipartisan consensus against US backing for Ukraine was solidifying among anti-establishment elements of the left and the right. As significant progress in eastern Ukraine eluded Zelensky, his backers were in need of a new strategy to ensure the continued political viability of Western support for the anti-Russia proxy conflict.

#### Propaganda Counteroffensive

Early in 2023 news spread of an upcoming military counteroffensive that Ukraine's supporters promised would reverse the country's fortunes on the battlefield.

More than a year into the conflict Western media noted the significant stakes of the offensive's success or failure, recognizing the declining political support for Ukraine's effort. Still, mainstream outlets uncritically conveyed Ukrainian President Zelensky's optimistic sentiments. "The president... expressed confidence that the Ukrainian military could advance," [read](#) an article from British state-backed outlet BBC.

However, Western efforts to signal faith in Zelensky were damaged in April, when classified foreign intelligence documents were leaked online by Massachusetts Air National Guard member Jack Teixeira. The files [undermined](#) the Biden administration's optimistic characterizations of Ukraine's position, frankly assessing the balance of forces and poor chances for the counteroffensive's success.

Rather than using information from the leak to critically examine US foreign policy, most mainstream media instead openly lobbied for Teixeira's punishment. The Washington Post softened up potential support for the leaker by [revealing](#) unflattering details about his biography while Time magazine [considered](#) the security challenges represented by the unauthorized disclosure.

In effect, major media organizations acted as another branch of the government, prioritizing US security state prerogatives throughout the saga. The debacle recalled the plight of imprisoned WikiLeaks co-founder Julian Assange, who's received little solidarity from mainstream journalists as the United States attempts to extradite him to stand trial for his publishing. Since the revelations from Assange and former NSA contractor Edward Snowden, corporate media has consistently worked hand-in-glove with the US government to help ensure leakers are viewed as criminals rather than folk heroes.

For major Western media outlets all other considerations became secondary to ensuring the success of Ukraine's counteroffensive, even as the Biden administration moved to send internationally-banned cluster munitions to Kiev. The response in major US newspapers ranged from the Washington Post's [characterization](#) of the move as a "tough but correct call" to The New York Times' agonizing over the "vexing" moral dilemma.

Neither outlet was willing to condemn the move. A Washington Post [editorial](#) by Max Boot ridiculed liberals who opposed the policy as "self-appointed humanitarians" and concluded the judgment over whether to use the weapons should remain with Kiev.

Some 20,000 civilians, about half of them children, have been killed in Laos by unexploded cluster bombs since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. Less than 1% of the remaining bomblets have been [cleared](#), meaning the choice to use cluster munitions will likely kill innocent Laotians – and now Russians and Ukrainians – for decades to come.

Notably, when NATO alleged that Russia was using cluster bombs earlier in 2022, media coverage of the incident lacked the same moral hangwringing of a "vexing" dilemma as The New York Times uncritically [carried](#) the accusation.

Throughout it all the pseudo-McCarthyist labeling of anyone who criticized Ukraine support as a "Putin apologist" remained a useful tactic for backers of US foreign policy. The charge has been leveled against everyone from Italian Senator [Matteo Salvini](#) to former French President [Nicolas Sarkozy](#) earlier this year in The New York Times.

Meanwhile, US-based social media companies [featuring](#) veterans of the FBI and CIA in key positions continued to play a role similar to mainstream media in their content moderation decisions.

Twitter explicitly aided the US Department of Defense in spreading anti-Russian sentiment, according to [reporting](#) by investigative journalist Lee Fang. Facebook's\* parent company Meta [announced](#) the neofascist Ukrainian Azov Battalion\*\* would no longer be considered a "dangerous organization" under the site's rules, allowing users to openly support the right-wing group on the platform.

The change reflected Western media's consistent downplaying of the Azov Battalion's fascist roots even as battlefield photos repeatedly emerged of Ukrainian soldiers sporting Nazi tattoos. After social media users continued to draw attention to the phenomenon, The New York Times finally [acknowledged](#) it in a June article – emphasizing the symbols' risk of "fueling Russian propaganda" rather than the ideology they represented.

Cold War propaganda historically [equated](#) the USSR with Nazi Germany; Now, media coverage seems almost to imply Russia is worse than the Third Reich (former Obama administration official Michael McFaul essentially [claimed](#) as much in 2022). But even the most cynical observers of Western media's opportunistic downplaying of the Nazi regime were shocked by what was still to come.

In September, Justin Trudeau's government in Canada suffered a major public relations debacle after the country's parliament offered a standing ovation to Ukrainian military "hero" Yaroslav Hunka, who was revealed to have fought for the Nazis. What followed can only be described as Holocaust revisionism as Western media attempted to defend Hunka and Ukraine nationalists' well-documented association with Hitler's regime.

Out of many disturbing editorials minimizing the crimes of people like Hunka, a Politico [article](#) entitled "Fighting Against the USSR Didn't Necessarily Make You a Nazi" likely represented the bottom of the barrel. Keir Giles' analysis omitted the fact that Hunka's "Galicia Division," which was once visited by Heinrich Himmler, has been found to have committed war crimes by experts in Poland, Germany, and even [Ukraine](#) itself. Members of the group explicitly [swore](#) an oath to "commander in chief of the German Armed Forces Adolf Hitler," eliminating any ambiguity over the ideological affiliations of the Ukrainian collaborators.

Mainstream media had repeatedly attempted to dismiss claims of many Ukrainian fighters' fascist allegiances as the domain of propagandists and online conspiracy theorists, but the event in the Canadian Parliament signaled that the claim had become impossible to ignore. For many, it served as a clarifying moment for the media's propaganda function throughout the conflict, especially in regards to the much-hyped Ukrainian counteroffensive.

Although Western media [uncritically repeated](#) claims of the counteroffensive's imminent success just months before it was forced to [acknowledge](#) it had failed. Zelensky began to be seen as a useful scapegoat with Time magazine [reporting](#) aides' characterization of the Ukrainian president as "delusional," but the West needed a diversion from the catastrophic failure of its central foreign policy effort. In early October, it would receive just that.

#### A New Distraction

In addition to turning Americans' attention toward the familiar [specter](#) of Middle Eastern terrorism, Israel's campaign in Gaza has demonstrated the hypocrisies of Western foreign policy reporting in nearly every way.

Somehow "self-determination" justifies Israel's decades-long expulsion of Palestinians from their land but doesn't legitimize Crimeans voting to join Russia. Ukrainian nationalists, we are told, are right to take up arms against Russia but Palestinian children can be arrested merely for throwing stones.

In the minds of Western commentators no amount of Israeli violence and oppression seems to warrant Palestinian resistance to their occupation. Meanwhile, Ukrainians are lauded as brave and heroic for opposing Russia – even if they are neo-Nazis.

The double standard provides useful confirmation if any were needed that US militarism is beholden to no moral standard, but exists only to serve itself.

Earlier this month, the website for The Washington Post removed a link to coverage of the conflict in Ukraine from the masthead of its homepage, confirming for many that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's war has officially supplanted Zelensky's in the public imagination. But fighting continues in the Donbass even if Americans are less aware of it.

Columnist David Ignatius offered a contrarian [take](#) on the subject recently, arguing the conflict has been a "strategic windfall" for the West. The US had succeeded in antagonizing Russia while NATO had grown larger with the ascension of Sweden and Finland. What's more, sanctions had granted America a large new market for their liquified natural gas in Europe.

In the cold, unfeeling calculus of media propagandists, the annihilation of Russian and Ukrainian life is justified if it serves the right interests. But [support](#) among the US public for arming the conflict is at a low. If Americans are able to effectively organize they may force a peaceful resolution even as military planners devise a "[new strategy](#)" in Ukraine.

\*Meta and its subsidiaries Facebook and Instagram have been banned in Russia for extremist activities.

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

'No Immediate Solution': US' Border Crisis Rooted in Decades of 'Bad Policy'

John Kiriakou and journalist Daniel Lazare discuss the consequences of decades of US policy in Latin America that drives today's drug and migration crises.

The root cause of the crisis unfolding at the US-Mexico border is none other than decades' worth of faulty foreign policy enacted by the American government, investigative journalist Daniel Lazare told Sputnik.

Lazare, who is also the author of "America's Undeclared War," joined [Sputnik's Political Misfits](#) program on Thursday for a broad discussion that touched on US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's recent trip to Mexico and the growing US-Mexico border crisis.

Host John Kiriakou noted that Blinken's meeting with Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador apparently came at the behest of US President Joe Biden, who's searching for a response to a recent surge in migration at America's southern border. The White House [claimed](#) the meeting was "productive," while López Obrador cited agreement on unspecified "important" deals.

Still, Lazare claimed a quick fix for undocumented migration to the US is unlikely, claiming "US policies have been disastrous" for decades.

"First and foremost, that means the war on drugs," said Lazare. "I mean, just imagine Chicago in the 1920s when you had Al Capone and the Saint Valentine's Day massacre and really crime going wild. And multiply it by, say – I don't know, 1,000, 10,000 – and spread it across vast parts of the world... And you have a mega Al Capone explosion."

"Countries like Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and portions of Brazil, for example, are really just riddled with crime on a scale that we can't imagine," the journalist said. Lazare claimed that America's strict drug prohibition combined with heavy-handed enforcement creates an environment for violence to thrive in other countries.

"Whenever you have a black market, you have violence," said Lazare. "So it's really US policies. And then the other statistic, which I think is amazing, is that the United States consumes an estimated 80% of the world's opiate market."

"It's like if you are drinking quart after quart of Jack Daniels and you blame the corner liquor store for your problem. I mean, something's wrong here, right?"

Kiriakou agreed, citing "a hundred years of bad policy leading us to this point," including US-backed coups that destabilized countries in Central America and South America. During the Cold War, the United States backed a broad campaign of violence and state terror known as

[Operation Condor](#) that installed dictatorial governments throughout Latin America. Tens of thousands were killed as the United States looked to stamp out left-wing influence after the Cuban revolution.

The region has returned to liberal democracy in recent decades, but in many countries a legacy of poverty, violence, and guerilla conflict remains. Economic instability prompts migration to the United States or involvement in the lucrative drug trade, which itself fuels violence that often drives migration.

The imposition of neoliberal policy by the United States and US-aligned institutions exacerbates economic inequality in the region, with migration from Mexico rising sharply in the years since the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

“This is not something that can be solved overnight just because Joe Biden realized he has an election coming up and he started to panic in the days before Christmas,” said Kiriakou, who also noted the failure of immigration reform in the US in recent years. Kiriakou recalled a guest worker program negotiated in the early days of the George W. Bush administration that was shelved after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

“Neither Democratic nor Republican White Houses have even considered trying to revive this idea that was so close to passing,” said Kiriakou.

“Clearly, decade after decade of bad policy is finally catching up with the US,” concluded Lazare, “and there is no immediate solution. Things are falling apart in a really dramatic way, and there is just no way out of that that anyone can say.”

“They just can't keep these nonsensical policies in effect year after year. You can't keep kicking the can down the road until at some point something really bad happens,” the journalist underscored.

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

‘Beginning of the End’ of Ukraine Conflict Sees Chance for Diplomacy, Negotiation

Analyst Daniel Lazare sees peace and neutrality in Ukraine’s future if the United States is willing to allow it.

A wind down of fighting in Ukraine could provide the opportunity for compromise, ‘Finlandization’, and maybe even a role for China, according to investigative journalist Daniel Lazare.

Lazare made the claim on the [Sputnik’s Political Misfits](#) Thursday in a wide-ranging [discussion](#) that also touched on US drug and immigration policy.

Host John Kirakou noted that “Republicans have been remarkably unified in their opposition to more military aid to Ukraine, and Democrats have been unsuccessful in tying that aid to aid to Israel.”

“Are we seeing the beginning of the end of this conflict?” asked Kiriakou.

“I think so,” responded Lazare, noting that Russia has a population some three times as large as Ukraine’s and enjoys a significant advantage in access to resources. “They are just grinding the Ukraine down and without massive outside assistance its fate is really fixed.”

But Lazare blamed the United States for the outbreak of the conflict and warned America could still stand in the way of peace.

“The US pushed the Ukraine into an extreme position of [rejecting any kind of compromise whatsoever](#) even though a compromise really made sense. Because it's clear that the population in the eastern Ukraine and the Crimea just have lost faith in the Kiev government, which was taken over by extreme nationalists.”

“This seems to me to be a case of just a completely ill thought out policy that sort of just flowed from years of neocon arrogance,” claimed Lazare.

US President Barack Obama's foreign policy circle was dominated by neoconservatives like Assistant Secretary of State [Victoria Nuland](#) during Ukraine's so-called [Euromaidan coup in 2014](#). Western governments cheered on anti-government protests at that time even though polling showed most Ukrainians disagreed with the demands of protesters at Kiev's Maidan Square.

After neo-Nazi groups forced elected Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich to flee the country, leaked audio emerged of Nuland discussing the United States' attempts to shape the interim government. Nuland boasted of sending \$5 billion to promote so-called “democracy building programs” in Ukraine – code for activity designed to promote US interests in foreign governments. The term “[color revolution](#)” has been coined to describe US regime change efforts spurred by the funding of opposition forces, especially in Russia's sphere of influence.

US interference helped “tear the country in two,” according to Lazare, and made “outright war more or less inevitable.”

“And now the US is facing the consequences. Or rather Zelensky is facing the consequences while the US kind of walks away,” the analyst stressed.

Lazare noted “the US will not find it easy to back off” from [its support for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky](#), but he proposed a future wherein peace could be brought to Ukraine if the country agrees to demilitarize.

“What Russia is looking for is 'Finlandization',” said Lazare, using the term for Finland's foreign policy position throughout the Cold War that saw the country adopt a neutral stance towards the Soviet Union. “'Finlandization' is a dirty word. But bear in mind that [Finland](#), in its entire history, never enjoyed greater peace, prosperity, or democracy than during the period of 'Finlandization'.”

“I actually visited Finland in 1972 during the period of 'Finlandization' and it was a glorious society,” said Lazare. “I mean prosperous, egalitarian, socialistic... That was the [Russian posture](#) for good reason. It could've been worse. I mean, Russia could have demanded the 'Mexicanization' of the Ukraine, which would mean inclined to get into poverty and crime. But Russia didn't do that. And so the deal they offered this border country was really pretty good. It would have been satisfactory [in Ukraine] to a wide range of interests. But the US blocked it.”

Kiriakou asked Lazare if there was potential for China to become involved in negotiations in Ukraine, noting the country's growing influence and recent success in the Middle East bringing together Saudi Arabia and Iran.

“Certainly the Ukraine would be a very interesting area from China's point of view to engage in diplomacy. China wants to break out of this US-imposed embargo,” said the author. “This is an opportunity because the US is failing so badly and leaving the affected countries little choice but to reach out to other parties for assistance.”

“So I think if I was in Beijing, if I was a Chinese diplomat, I'd be saying, 'this is an area we should keep very close tabs on because there may be opportunities for us to exercise influence.’”

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

Eyes to the Sky: US Choppers to Descend on Las Vegas to Monitor Nuclear Threat

A little-known government program observes radiation levels in major American cities to protect against a so-called “dirty bomb.”

Tax dollars will be put to work guarding some of America’s kitschiest landmarks this weekend as the federal government conducts helicopter flights over Las Vegas.

The flights are designed to monitor radiation in the city before upcoming New Year’s Eve festivities. A so-called “dirty bomb” containing nuclear material would result in higher than normal radiation levels. The Nuclear Emergency Support Team’s (NEST) surveillance flights are intended to observe any potential threat and allow for a security response.

The group falls within the operations of the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) overseen by the US Department of Energy.

“The public may see NNSA’s twin-engine Bell 412 helicopter, which is equipped with radiation-sensing technology,” read a [press release](#) on the Department of Energy’s website.

“The helicopter will fly in a grid pattern over the areas at 150 feet (or higher) above the ground at a speed of approximately 80 mph. Flyovers will occur only during daylight hours and are estimated to take approximately two hours to complete per area.”

“These surveys are a normal part of security and emergency preparedness activities. NNSA is making the public aware of the upcoming flights so citizens who see the low-flying aircraft are not alarmed.”

The flights will take place Friday, December 29 in order to detect normal background radiation in the city, and then again on New Year’s Eve to ensure readings are in line with expected levels. The Nuclear Emergency Support Team was [established](#) in 1975 as major US cities faced threats of nuclear terrorism. Most of the threats investigated by the NEST are found to be non-credible, but the federal government was spurred into action by the theft of nuclear material from US labs.

The little-known government program operates in the context of major events in American cities, such as the Super Bowl.

The US federal government instituted a number of educational and awareness programs throughout the Cold War, ostensibly in order to inform the American public. Among the most infamous was the 1952 educational film [Duck and Cover](#), which was shown to schoolchildren in classrooms throughout the country.

The animated video purports to instruct people what to do in order to have a greater chance of surviving a nuclear attack. The film is often considered to actually be a piece of propaganda meant to stoke Cold War paranoia after the Soviet Union developed a nuclear bomb in 1949.

A few years later US Congress would pass the National Defense Education Act after the Soviet Union kicked off the Space Race with the launch of the first manmade satellite, dubbed "Sputnik."

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

2023 was the year that Americans' dissent over the arming of Ukraine went from a minority position to a growing bipartisan consensus.

After the broad failure of Kiev's vaunted counteroffensive, opposition to the continued sending of billions in military aid became impossible to ignore.

Now the conflict in Gaza threatens to sideline discussion of Ukraine entirely as consent is manufactured for another proxy war.

Enjoy this long read illustrating how media reporting on the conflict in Ukraine is a case study of mainstream journalism's propaganda function on behalf of Western militarism.

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

"Some were stripped naked, blindfolded and restrained for long hours with handcuffs and with their legs tied, while Israeli soldiers stepped on their heads and backs, were spat at, slammed against walls, threatened, insulted, humiliated and in some cases subjected to sexual and gender-based violence."

A Thursday report from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights slammed Israel's brutal treatment of detainees in the occupied Palestinian West Bank.

Thousands have been arrested there amidst the documented use of military tactics by Israel that have led to hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries.

Although Israel's conduct in the Gaza Strip - where at least 21,320 people have been killed, has seen greater attention, the UN also stresses "unlawful killings" and a "rapidly deteriorating human rights situation" in the West Bank.

Israel's foreign minister recently announced the country would deny visas to UN staff in retaliation for their criticism.

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

“Decade after decade of bad policy is finally catching up with the US,” said journalist Daniel Lazare in a discussion about immigration and drug policy on Sputnik’s Political Misfits program Thursday.

The conversation comes amidst a surge of migrants at the US’ southern border, with President Joe Biden seeking a solution in time for his expected reelection campaign.

The crisis prompted US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to visit Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico City recently. López Obrador is a harsh critic of US foreign policy and interference in Latin America.

The US backed political subversion, coups, and death squads in the region for decades throughout the Cold War, leading to violence and poverty that’s exacerbated by the West’s imposition of neoliberal economic policy on the region.

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

🗣️ “Some were stripped naked, blindfolded and restrained for long hours with handcuffs and with their legs tied, while Israeli soldiers stepped on their heads and backs, were spat at, slammed against walls, threatened, insulted, humiliated and in some cases subjected to sexual and gender-based violence.”

A Thursday report from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights slammed Israel’s brutal treatment of detainees in the occupied Palestinian West Bank.

Thousands have been arrested there amidst the documented use of military tactics by Israel that have led to hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries.

Although Israel’s conduct in the Gaza Strip - where at least 21,320 people have been killed, has seen greater attention, the UN also stresses “unlawful killings” and a “rapidly deteriorating human rights situation” in the West Bank.

Israel’s foreign minister recently announced the country would deny visas to UN staff in retaliation for their criticism.

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

Cause du Jour to Yesterday’s News: Western Media’s Evolving Coverage of Ukraine

2023 was the year that Americans' dissent over the arming of Ukraine went from a minority position to a growing bipartisan consensus.

After the broad failure of Kiev's vaunted counteroffensive, opposition to the continued sending of billions in military aid became impossible to ignore.

Now the conflict in Gaza threatens to sideline discussion of Ukraine entirely as consent is manufactured for another proxy war.

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

"Decade after decade of bad policy is finally catching up with the US," journalist Daniel Lazare told Sputnik in a discussion about immigration and drug policy.

The conversation comes amidst a surge of migrants at the US' southern border, with President Joe Biden seeking a solution in time for his expected reelection campaign.

The crisis prompted US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to visit Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico City recently. López Obrador is a harsh critic of US foreign policy and interference in Latin America.

The US backed political subversion, coups, and death squads in the region for decades throughout the Cold War, leading to violence and poverty that's exacerbated by the West's imposition of neoliberal economic policy on the region.

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

Analyst Daniel Lazare sees peace and neutrality in Ukraine's future if the United States is willing to allow it.

Lazare discussed the issue on Sputnik's Political Misfits program, claiming Republicans' opposition to further US funding for Ukraine could mark the "beginning of the end" of the conflict in the Donbass.

The investigative journalist blamed the United States for the outbreak of hostilities, saying their push against compromise with the Donbass people tore the country in two and made "outright war more or less inevitable."

“And now the US is facing the consequences. Or rather Zelensky is facing the consequences while the US kind of walks away,” the analyst stressed.

Lazare proposed a “Finlandization” model for Ukraine, referring to Finland’s foreign policy during the Cold War that saw the country adopt a neutral stance towards the Soviet Union.

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

“Some were stripped naked, blindfolded and restrained for long hours with handcuffs and with their legs tied, while Israeli soldiers stepped on their heads and backs, were spat at, slammed against walls, threatened, insulted, humiliated and in some cases subjected to sexual and gender-based violence.”

A Thursday report from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights slammed Israel’s brutal treatment of detainees in the occupied Palestinian West Bank.

Thousands have been arrested there amidst the documented use of military tactics by Israel that have led to hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries.

Although Israel's conduct in the Gaza Strip - where at least 21,320 people have been killed, has seen greater attention, the UN also stresses “unlawful killings” and a “rapidly deteriorating human rights situation” in the West Bank.

Israel’s foreign minister recently announced the country would deny visas to UN staff in retaliation for their criticism.

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

Cause du Jour to Yesterday's News: Western Media’s Evolving Coverage of Ukraine

2023 was the year that Americans’ dissent over the arming of Ukraine went from a minority position to a growing bipartisan consensus.

After the broad failure of Kiev’s vaunted counteroffensive, opposition to the continued sending of billions in military aid became impossible to ignore.

Now the conflict in Gaza threatens to sideline discussion of Ukraine entirely as consent is manufactured for another proxy war.

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

“Decade after decade of bad policy is finally catching up with the US,” journalist Daniel Lazare told Sputnik in a discussion about immigration and drug policy.

The conversation comes amidst a surge of migrants at the US’ southern border, with President Joe Biden seeking a solution in time for his expected reelection campaign.

The crisis prompted US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to visit Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico City recently. López Obrador is a harsh critic of US foreign policy and interference in Latin America.

The US backed political subversion, coups, and death squads in the region for decades throughout the Cold War, leading to violence and poverty that’s exacerbated by the West’s imposition of neoliberal economic policy on the region.

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

● Tax dollars will be put to work guarding some of America’s kitschiest landmarks this weekend as the federal government carries out helicopter flights over Las Vegas.

The flights are conducted by the US Department of Energy’s Nuclear Emergency Support Team and are intended to monitor radiation levels and detect the presence of a nuclear “dirty bomb.”

The program was instituted in 1975 in the midst of terrorist threats and the theft of nuclear materials from US labs. The flights operate in major American cities around large events like the Super Bowl.

People in Las Vegas can expect to see the helicopters on Friday, December 29 and once again during the day on New Year’s Eve.

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

Biden Holds 'Frustrating' Call With Netanyahu Over Palestinian Tax Revenue - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 29 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden has raised concerns with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu about Israel’s withholding of part of the tax revenue

that it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, Axios reported, citing US and Israeli officials.

Biden raised the issue toward the end of a 45-minute phone call on Saturday and proposed that Norway act as an intermediary to safekeep the contested amount of tax revenue that Israel says would reach Hamas in Gaza, the report said on Thursday. These funds would remain with Norway until a suitable arrangement could be found.

A US official described the conversation as one of the most "frustrating" exchanges between the two leaders since the start of Israel's war on Gaza. Netanyahu said he did not trust Norway's proposal, while Israel's financial minister has opposed releasing any funds at all. Biden insisted that Netanyahu accept Norway's proposal, saying it was backed by the US.

The Palestinian Authority has refused to accept a partial transfer thus far. The White House fears this may cause the authority to economically collapse and further escalate the violence in the West Bank if the Palestinian Authority cannot pay the salaries of its security forces. A US official said the Palestinian Authority would accept a partial transfer if the remainder meant for Gaza was kept in Norway, the news outlet reported.

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

EU Deprives Citizens of Alternative Sources of Information - Russian Envoy

VIENNA, December 29 (Sputnik), Lenka White - The European Union deprives its citizens of alternative sources of information, reflecting the bloc's totalitarian tendencies, Russian Ambassador to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov told Sputnik.

"This is a manifestation of totalitarian tendencies in the European Union. In fact, they deprive the population of alternative sources of information," Ulyanov said.

The people living in the European Union are presented only with one-sided news and assessments, especially concerning the situation in Ukraine, Ulyanov said.

"All this, of course, is very worrying. These are anti-democratic trends that persist and can even spread further," Ulyanov said.

Following the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, the EU suspended the broadcasting activities of Sputnik and RT "in the EU, or directed at the EU."

Earlier this month, the EU launched an investigation into the social media platform X under the authority of its new Digital Services Act. EU officials said they will focus on observing if X follows the bloc's rules on countering the dissemination and amplification of disinformation and "illegal content."

The move came after a preliminary information-gathering investigation in October, which also looked at "the dissemination of illegal content in the context of Hamas' terrorist attacks against Israel."

In addition, the bloc has launched preliminary investigations with respect to TikTok, YouTube and other platforms.

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

No Signs EU Could Collapse But Pro-Withdrawal Sentiment Likely to Rise - Ulyanov

VIENNA, December 29 (Sputnik), Lenka White - There are no signs that the European Union could collapse, but pro-withdrawal sentiment will increase unless the current leadership changes its approach, Russian Ambassador to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov told Sputnik.

"As for projections that the European Union will collapse ... I think there are no signs of that at the moment," Ulyanov said.

At the same time, Ulyanov said that the European Union has recently acted "increasingly unprofessionally."

"So, if the EU leadership does not change it, I think anti-EU sentiments, as has happened in the United Kingdom, will rise," Ulyanov said.

Right-wing political forces are becoming more popular in Europe as demonstrated in local and national elections, and the trend is expected to continue, Ulyanov added.

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

CTBT's Monitoring System Effective, Has Detected All DPRK Nuclear Tests - Ulyanov

VIENNA, December 29 (Sputnik), Lenka White - The international monitoring system of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is working effectively and has detected all nuclear tests conducted by North Korea, Russian Ambassador to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov told Sputnik.

"The system is working and, in my opinion, it is working quite effectively. This is evidenced by the fact that, for example, all nuclear tests carried out by North Korea have been recorded by this monitoring system," Ulyanov said.

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

Austria Deviates From 'Vienna Spirit' by Delaying Visas for Russian Diplomats - Ulyanov

VIENNA, December 29 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Austria is not in keeping with the "Vienna spirit" by delaying visas for Russian diplomats, Russian Ambassador to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov told Sputnik.

"I don't observe any mass anti-Russian sentiments. There have been some single episodes, but they are isolated in nature. As for the Austrian authorities, their approach has noticeably

deteriorated. They are trying to create difficulties by delaying entry visas," Ulyanov said.

Ulyanov pointed out that Austria has decided to follow the United States on the issue of delaying visas for Russian officials, which indicates that Vienna has ceased to maintain its reputation known for the spirit of consensus.

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

EU Deprives Citizens of Alternative Sources of Information - Russian Envoy

VIENNA, December 29 (Sputnik), Lenka White - The European Union deprives its citizens of alternative sources of information, reflecting the bloc's totalitarian tendencies, Russian Ambassador to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov told Sputnik.

"This is a manifestation of totalitarian tendencies in the European Union. In fact, they deprive the population of alternative sources of information," Ulyanov said.

The people living in the European Union are presented only with one-sided news and assessments, especially concerning the situation in Ukraine, Ulyanov said.

"All this, of course, is very worrying. These are anti-democratic trends that persist and can even spread further," Ulyanov said.

Following the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, the EU suspended the broadcasting activities of Sputnik and RT "in the EU, or directed at the EU."

Earlier this month, the EU launched an investigation into the social media platform X under the authority of its new Digital Services Act. EU officials said they will focus on observing if X follows the bloc's rules on countering the dissemination and amplification of disinformation and "illegal content."

The move came after a preliminary information-gathering investigation in October, which also looked at "the dissemination of illegal content in the context of Hamas' terrorist attacks against Israel."

In addition, the bloc has launched preliminary investigations with respect to TikTok, YouTube and other platforms.

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

Russia Should Create Own Social Media Platform Similar to X - Envoy

VIENNA, December 29 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Russia should create its own social media platform that would draw both domestic and international audiences, Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov told Sputnik.

"I would prefer that the Russian government take a look at the issue and create a strong platform for both domestic and external audiences," Ulyanov said in an interview at his mission in Vienna. "I think we could gain a lot if we took care of this issue, including in terms of the

image of our country in the West."

Speaking of the social media website X, Ulyanov called it a "very important tool" of multilateral diplomacy that "has helped find solutions to acute issues."

Ulyanov, an active user of X, said however that his attitude toward the platform has been "quite skeptical."

The diplomat said his account was "shadow banned" after the onset of the special military operation. Ulyanov stated he believes there is a cap on the number of his subscribers, which has been maintained at some 33,600. The situation has not changed since Elon Musk took charge of the platform, he added.

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

West's Stance on Iran Deal Flawed, Uncontrollable Escalation Possible - Russian Envoy

VIENNA, December 29 (Sputnik), Lenka White - The position of the collective West regarding the Iran nuclear deal is strategically flawed and risks provoking an uncontrollable escalation, Russian Ambassador to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov told Sputnik.

"The current situation is fraught with the possibility of uncontrollable escalation at any moment, but this is their choice, we cannot force them to return to the negotiating table and no one can. This is a short-sighted and strategically flawed position," Ulyanov said in an interview.

The chances of resuming the agreement at present are "minimal," and the ball is in the West's court, according to the diplomat.

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

'Isolation' of Russia Remains West's Wishful Thinking - Russian Envoy

VIENNA, December 29 (Sputnik), Lenka White - Russia's alleged isolation in the international arena is the wishful thinking of the West, Russian Ambassador to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov told Sputnik.

"I think Western colleagues are engaged in wishful thinking," Ulyanov said.

The diplomat admitted that contacts with the West have been at a low point but "there are plenty more fish in the sea."

"Probably, we are isolated by the West a little bit, but this is a small segment," he stated.

The lack of dialogue with the West is not normal but it will be overcome with time, Ulyanov added.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file**

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

EU Guided by Anglo-Saxon Agenda, Any Shift Unlikely – Russian Envoy

VIENNA, December 29 (Sputnik), Lenka White – The European Union is subordinate to the Anglo-Saxon agenda on key issues, and the situation will not change any time soon, Russia's Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov told Sputnik.

"At many key points, EU policy is determined by the Anglo-Saxon agenda [and] it doesn't look like there will be any changes," Ulyanov said in an interview.

Ulyanov stated that the Europeans follow the lead of the United States, even when it comes to their own security.

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

Trump to Quickly Appeal Maine's Decision to Oust Him From Primary Ballot - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 29 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump's legal team will immediately file an appeal against the decision by the state of Maine to disqualify him from the state's Republican primary ballot, a Trump campaign spokesperson said in a press release.

Maine Secretary of State Sheena Bellows decided to disqualify Trump from the state's Republican primary ballot in March because of his alleged role in the January 6 Capitol riot, but it will not take effect until a Superior Court rules on the Trump defense team's appeal to the decision.

"We will quickly file a legal objection in state court to prevent this atrocious decision in Maine from taking effect, and President Trump will never stop fighting to Make America Great Again," the spokesperson said on Thursday.

Most recently, Colorado reinstated Trump in the state's primary ballot pending a decision from an appeals court while Michigan rejected an effort to oust Trump from the state's ballot.

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

Maine Disqualifies Trump From Republican Primary Ballot Over January 6 Riot - Filing

WASHINGTON, December 29 (Sputnik) - Maine Secretary of State Shenna Bellows disqualified former President Donald Trump from the state's Republican primary ballot because of his role in the January 6 riot at the Capitol in 2021.

"They [challengers] have provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate the falsity of Mr. Trump's declaration that he meets the qualifications of the office of the presidency," Bellows wrote in a document on Thursday. "Therefore, as required by [law], I find that the primary petition of Mr. Trump is invalid."

However, Bellows added that the effect of the decision will be suspended until the Superior Court rules on any forthcoming appeal from the Trump defense team. Maine will hold its vote for the Republican primary in March.

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

No Signs EU Could Collapse But Pro-Withdrawal Sentiment Likely to Rise - Ulyanov

VIENNA, December 29 (Sputnik), Lenka White - There are no signs that the European Union could collapse, but pro-withdrawal sentiment will increase unless the current leadership changes its approach, Russian Ambassador to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov told Sputnik.

"As for projections that the European Union will collapse ... I think there are no signs of that at the moment," Ulyanov said.

At the same time, Ulyanov said that the European Union has recently acted "increasingly unprofessionally."

"So, if the EU leadership does not change it, I think anti-EU sentiments, as has happened in the United Kingdom, will rise," Ulyanov said.

Right-wing political forces are becoming more popular in Europe as demonstrated in local and national elections, and the trend is expected to continue, Ulyanov added.

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

Chinese Balloon Shot Down by US in February Utilized US Internet Service - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 29 (Sputnik) - A Chinese balloon shot down by the United States in February utilized a US internet service provider to share information with China, NBC News reported, citing two current and one former US official with knowledge on the matter.

In February, the US military shot down the balloon, which it accused of conducting surveillance activities, after it flew over the US. The Chinese government said that the balloon was a civilian airship conducting scientific research.

The balloon used a US-based internet service provider to send and receive information from China, the report said on Thursday. A US intelligence assessment reportedly concluded that the balloon used a US internet service provider to communicate navigational data, although the report declined to name the company.

The company denied that the balloon utilized its network, pointing to its own probe and talks with US officials, the report said.

The Biden administration requested permission from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court to gather intelligence on the balloon while it flew across the US, the report said. However, it is unclear how the federal court ultimately ruled.

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

#### Texas Governor Says Biden Hostile to Rule of Law in US Over Policy to Deter Migrants

WASHINGTON, December 29 (Sputnik) - Texas Governor Greg Abbott said in a statement that US President Joe Biden's administration is displaying hostility to the rule of law in the United States after threatening to sue the state over a newly-imposed law designed to address the crisis on the southern border with Mexico.

Earlier on Thursday, media reported that the Justice Department is threatening to sue the state of Texas if it enforces a state law that allows local authorities to arrest illegal immigrants and deport them amid record migration on the southern border that is overwhelming law enforcement and border communities.

"The Biden admin. not only refuses to enforce current US immigration laws, they now want to stop Texas from enforcing laws against illegal immigration," Abbott said on Thursday. "I've never seen such hostility to the rule of law in America."

Abbot also said that Biden is destroying the United States while Texas is trying to save it. The American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit last week aiming to block this state law, known as SB4.

The federal government is usually tasked with the responsibility of deporting illegal migrants. However, migrants potentially subject to deportation are first released into the United States after they are apprehended and processed so they can await an immigration court date, which can take months or years to take place. Some migrants skip out on the immigration proceedings and remain in the United States as illegal migrants.

The US southern border has turned into a crisis that has seen three consecutive record-breaking years of illegal crossings since Biden came into office and relaxed immigration policies, which has summed up to more than 5.4 million to date.

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

#### GM Sues San Francisco for \$107.9Mln in Tax Refund, \$12.9Mln in Interest - Lawsuit

SAN FRANCISCO, December 29 (Sputnik) - General Motors (GM) has filed a lawsuit against the city of San Francisco, seeking a refund of \$107.9 million in taxes and \$12.9 million in interest and penalties for the tax years 2016 through 2022.

"This is an action for refund of Gross Receipts Tax, Homelessness Gross Receipts Tax, and Overpaid Executive Gross Receipts Tax already paid. Specifically, by this Complaint, GM seeks a refund of taxes, interest, and penalties overpaid by GM in the amounts of \$107,981,205.30 in taxes, and \$12,946,387 in interest and penalties, plus interest as provided by law, for the 2016 through 2022 taxable years," the lawsuit said on Thursday.

GM argues that San Francisco violated the fair apportionment requirements of the US and California constitutions, including the Due Process and Commerce Clauses, the lawsuit said. "[F]or tax year 2022, GM included payroll in its payroll factor that should be excluded and GM is therefore due a refund," the lawsuit added.

GM is entitled to a refund as per the amended return submitted on October 24, 2023, which incorporated modifications to gross receipts and the payroll factor, according to the lawsuit.

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

US, Mexican Officials to Continue Talks on Managing Border Crisis in January - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 29 (Sputnik) - The United States and Mexico said in a joint statement on Thursday that officials from both sides will meet again in January to continue discussions on managing the ongoing immigration crisis on their shared border.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken led a delegation in Mexico City this week for talks with Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador about the border crisis and other bilateral issues.

"The two delegations agreed to meet again in Washington in January 2024 to continue to advance our strong partnership on migration management," the statement said.

During Wednesday's meeting, the two countries discussed continuing an "orderly, humane, and regular migration," but also highlighted the need to address the root causes of migration, such as poverty, inequality, democratic decline, and violence, the statement said.

Lopez Obrador, the release said, stressed the need to continue diplomatic and political engagements with all countries in the region, as well as investing in ambitious development programs throughout the entire hemisphere of the Americas, according to the statement.

Both delegations also agreed on the importance of maintaining and facilitating bilateral trade at the US-Mexico border.

Media reports citing CBP sources said that the month of December is on track to set an all-time record for the largest number of crossings in a month on the US southern border. As of Tuesday, there were some 250,000 illegal crossings on the US-Mexico border this month, according to the reports.

The number of illegal immigrant crossings into the United States over the last 11 months outnumbered the population of 15 US states, according to data from US Customs and Border Protection (CBP). The data shows that about 2.7 million immigrants came illegally across the US borders from January to November, most of which occurred via the United States' border with Mexico.

Republicans in Congress are currently negotiating with White House officials on a plan to impose stricter immigration policies that will deter the heavy flow of immigrants arriving on the US southern border.

12/28/2023 4:00:19 PM -05:00

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

WASHINGTON, December 29 (Sputnik) -

#### ISRAEL INVATION OF GAZA

\* The Israel Defense Forces said on Thursday that it had recovered 500,000 various documents and over 65 million files belonging to Palestinian movement Hamas from the October 7 attack.

\* The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has requested an emergency UN Security Council meeting for December 29 in connection with Israeli settler violence and reports of raids in the West Bank, the UAE mission to the United Nations said on Thursday.

#### LAVROV COMMENTS

\* It is questionable that the Israeli leadership knew about Hamas' plans to attack on October 7 but did not take any measures to prevent it, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in an interview with Sputnik and Rossiya 24.

\* Judging by the situation in the Taiwan Strait, the United States is clearly not abandoning forceful methods of solving problems, Lavrov said.

\* Only a serious internal shock can rid the United States of its sense of superiority, Lavrov said.

\* Lavrov said that he does not see any bright future for the European Union.

#### RUSSIA-JAPAN RELATIONS

\* Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko has pointed out during a meeting with Japanese Ambassador to Russia Akira Muto steps taken by Tokyo that aggravate the degradation of relations, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Thursday.

\* Japan's Mitsui, which is involved in the Arctic LNG 2 project as part of Japanese consortium J-Arc, is carefully studying the impact of the US decision to include the project in the sanctions list, a company representative told Sputnik on Thursday.

#### UKRAINE CONFLICT

\* Ukraine has lost up to 230 soldiers both killed and wounded in the Donetsk direction over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Thursday.

\* The peace plan proposed by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is "a figment of a sick imagination," Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

12/28/2023 3:54:51 PM -05:00

UN Chief Says AI Must be Force For Good

UNITED NATIONS, December 28 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that the international community must ensure that Artificial Intelligence is a tool that helps, not harms.

"And we must make sure new technologies such as artificial intelligence are a force for good," Guterres said via video in his end of the year message.

The UN will continue standing up for peace, sustainable development and human rights, he added.

Guterres is serving his second and last term as UN Secretary General. Throughout his tenure, he has focused heavily on climate change and was criticized by Russia for his biased approach on Ukraine. This month, however, Guterres asked the UN Security Council to act swiftly and prevent a disaster in Gaza from happening.

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

US, Allies Call on Iran to Reverse Undoing of Uranium Enrichment Slowdown - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - The United States and its key allies in a joint statement on Thursday called on Iran to reverse its decision to resume its pace of 60% uranium enrichment.

Earlier this week, the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said that Iran has increased its rate of production of uranium enriched up to 60% at the Natanz and Fordow facilities.

"These findings represent a backwards step by Iran and will result in Iran tripling its monthly production rate of uranium enriched up to 60%," the statement said. "We urge Iran to immediately reverse these steps and de-escalate its nuclear program."

The United States, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom pressed Iran to fully cooperate with the IAEA to provide assurances that its nuclear program is exclusively peaceful, and to re-designate the inspectors suspended in September 2023.

The Western nations claim that the production of high-enriched uranium by Iran has "no credible civilian justification" and carries significant proliferation-related risks.

Iran's decisions, the statement said, demonstrate Iran's "lack of good will" toward de-escalation and represent reckless behavior in a tense regional context.

The statement further said that the United States and its allies remain committed to a diplomatic solution and reaffirm their determination that Iran must never develop a nuclear weapon.

According to the Iranian Students' News Agency, Mohammad Eslami, president of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, explained that Iran's uranium enrichment activities remained unchanged and compliant with international regulations. Iran has been enriching uranium to 60% for some time now but has not created new capacity, he added.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file**

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

UN Chief Says 2024 Must Be Year to Restore Trust, Hope

UNITED NATIONS, December 28 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that 2024 should become a year of renewing trust and hope.

"2024 must be a year for rebuilding trust and restoring hope. We must come together across divides for shared solutions," Guterres said in his end of the year video message.

This should be done for climate change action, a fairer global financial system and to stand up against the discrimination and hatred that are "poisoning relations between countries and communities."

He also called 2023 a "year of enormous suffering, violence, and climate chaos."

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

Trump Will Appear on Colorado Primary Ballot Unless Higher Court Acts - Secretary of State

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump will appear on the Republican Party primary election ballot in the state of Colorado unless a higher court takes action otherwise, following an appeal by the state's Republican Party branch, Colorado Secretary of State Jena Griswold's office said on Thursday.

"The Colorado Republican Party has appealed the Colorado Supreme Court's decision in Anderson v. Griswold to the US Supreme Court. With the appeal filed, Donald Trump will be included as a candidate on Colorado's 2024 Presidential Primary Ballot when certification occurs on January 5, 2024, unless the US Supreme Court declines to take the case or otherwise affirms the Colorado Supreme Court ruling," Griswold's office said in a statement.

Griswold has until January 5 to certify names and party affiliations for the 2024 primary ballot, the statement said. The US Supreme Court has a conference day scheduled for January 5 as well, the statement said.

Colorado's presidential primary election is scheduled for March 5, but ballots must be sent to military and overseas voters by January 20, the statement said.

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

Biden Says Will Not Stop Working to Bring Hostages in Gaza Back Home

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden, in response to the tragic death of American Judith Weinstein, reiterated his commitment on Thursday to persist in the mission to bring home all hostages held in Gaza back home.

"I reaffirm the pledge we have made to all the families of those still held hostage: we will not

stop working to bring them home," President Joe Biden said in a statement on Thursday.

Judith Weinstein, 70, an American hostage who was believed to be held by Hamas, was killed during the October 7 attack on Israel. In addition to being a US citizen, Weinstein was reportedly also a citizen of Israel and Canada.

Earlier this month, Biden confirmed that Weinstein's husband, Gad Haggai, was believed to have been killed by the Palestinian movement Hamas during the surprise attack it conducted against Israel on October 7.

In late November, the White House said that approximately nine Americans remain in Hamas captivity following the attack.

On October 7, Hamas launched an attack into Israel from the Gaza Strip. As a result, some 1,200 Israelis - military personnel and civilians - were killed and 240 others abducted. Israel launched massive retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza and launched a ground invasion of the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas and rescuing the hostages.

On November 24, Qatar mediated a deal between Israel and Hamas on a temporary truce and the exchange of some of the prisoners and hostages, as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. The ceasefire was extended several times and expired on December 1.

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

Biden Announces US Extending Tariff Rate Quotas for EU Steel, Aluminum for 2 Years

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Thursday that he is extending tariff quotas on steel and aluminum imports from Europe for another two years or through December 31, 2025.

In March 2018, then-US President Trump imposed tariffs of 25% on certain steel imports and 10% on certain aluminum imports from the European Union for national security reasons. An interim solution was reached in 2021 to remove the tariffs, replacing them with a quota system.

"I have determined that specified volumes of eligible aluminum [and steel] articles imports from the EU will no longer threaten to impair the national security and have decided to exclude such imports from the EU up to a designated quota from the tariff proclaimed in Proclamation 9704 through December 31, 2025," Biden said in a proclamation.

It is important to note that while Biden stated in 2021 that the agreement with the EU removed all tariffs on metal exports from the EU, it is not exactly true since zero tariffs are applied only to certain volumes of steel and aluminum.

European metal exporters will be able to ship duty-free to the United States no more than 3.3 million metric tons of steel, 18,000 metric tons of unwrought aluminum and 366,040 metric tons of semi-finished wrought aluminum, according to the proclamation.

US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said in a statement that the two-year extension will give Brussels and Washington additional time to negotiate a way forward on the issue of the tariffs on steel and aluminum products.

The decision to extend the tariff preferences for the EU follows the European Commission's

announcement earlier in December that the European Union has extended the suspension of re-balancing tariffs on US steel and aluminum products until March 31, 2025, after reaching an agreement with the United States. The European Commission pointed out that EU aluminum and steel exporters will save an estimated 1.5 billion euros (\$1.64 billion) in tariffs annually.

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

US National Weather Service Warns of Dangerous Surf, Rip Currents in California

SAN FRANCISCO, December 28 (Sputnik) - The National Weather Service (NWS) said on Thursday that dangerous surf, rip currents and coastal flooding loom over the beaches of California this week.

"Dangerous surf, life-threatening rip currents, and coastal flooding are expected at the beaches this week. Impacts are expected to become most extreme on Thursday," NWS said in a statement.

Certain areas may experience waves of sufficient size to harm piers, potentially causing coastal flooding and substantial beach erosion, especially along the Northern California coastline with the possibility of breaking wave heights up to 40 feet, according to media reports.

Waves extending from 10 to 20 feet could hit central and Southern California coasts, potentially causing flooding in low-lying areas, such as beach parking lots and roads, the reports added.

Beaches extending from Santa Barbara County to La Jolla and San Diego County face the highest risk, according to the reports.

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

Austin, Gallant Discuss Israel Operation in Gaza, Stabilization Preparations - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - US and Israeli top defense officials discussed by telephone the military operation in the Gaza Strip and preparations for the so-called stabilization efforts, Defense Department spokesperson Pat Ryder said in a readout of the conversation on Thursday.

"Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III called Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant today to discuss Israel's military campaign in Gaza and preparations for the stabilization phase that will follow major combat operations," Ryder said.

Austin reiterated the United States' resolve to ensure the Palestinian movement Hamas can no longer threaten Israel's security and underscored the importance of protecting Gaza's civilians as well as accelerating humanitarian assistance, Ryder said.

Austin and Gallant also discussed threats to regional security, including attacks against US forces in Iraq and Syria, Ryder added.

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

Plurality of US Voters Back House Impeachment Inquiry Into Biden - Poll

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - A plurality of likely voters in the United States support the US House of Representatives' impeachment inquiry into President Joe Biden, a new JL Partners poll undertaken in conjunction with the Daily Mail revealed on Thursday.

Nearly half of likely voters, 47%, strongly or somewhat support the House impeachment probe, the poll report said. Thirty-five percent (35%) of respondents oppose the investigation and 17% lack an opinion on the matter, the poll report said.

A majority of respondents, 58%, believe that Joe Biden was likely inappropriately involved in the business dealings of his son, Hunter Biden, the poll report said. One-third of respondents are not convinced that Biden was likely involved in his son's business affairs, the poll report said.

The poll surveyed 1,000 likely US voters from December 15-20, the poll report said. The poll maintains a margin of error of plus-or-minus 3.1%.

US House lawmakers are investigating Biden and his family for alleged criminal activity, including financial crimes and corruption. The House probe is intended to help determine whether further impeachment proceedings against Biden are warranted, House Speaker Mike Johnson said.

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

US Deploying National Guard Troops to Kosovo for NATO Peacekeeping Mission - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - The United States is deploying a few dozen members of the Iowa National Guard to Kosovo in the coming days to take part in a NATO peacekeeping mission, Iowa National Guard spokesperson Jackie Schmillen told Sputnik on Thursday.

The situation in Kosovo escalated again in late September when a shooting occurred between armed local Serbs and the so-called Kosovo police at a monastery near the village of Banjska, some 30 miles from Pristina, leaving four people dead and several others injured.

"The Iowa National Guard is proud and honored for our Soldiers to deploy and serve in our state partner nation of Kosovo," Schmillen said. "We are excited to be a part of a multi-national NATO mission for providing safety, security, and stability for all citizens throughout Kosovo."

The Iowa National Guard will deploy two groups of troops to Kosovo over the coming days.

On Friday, 33 Iowa National Guard soldiers will leave for Texas to complete their pre-mobilization training before heading to Kosovo, Schmillen said. Once in Kosovo, they will be on a 9-month tour where they will be conducting live aerial medevac operations, refueling and maintenance support to US, Coalition, and Kosovo Security forces, she added.

Another 20 soldiers will deploy to Kosovo on January 7 to provide law enforcement support at a

NATO installation where US troops will be located, according to Schmillen.

In 2008, the Albanians in Serbia's province of Kosovo and Metohija proclaimed independence, with the backing of the United States and several European countries. Serbia has not recognized Kosovo's self-proclaimed independence. A remainder of the large Serb community is still residing in Kosovo's north, often bearing the brunt of diplomatic tensions between Belgrade and Pristina and protesting discriminatory policies by the ruling Albanians.

In late May, clashes erupted after Kosovo forcibly installed new ethnic Albanian mayors in offices in several northern cities following municipal elections in April. The polls were boycotted by the Serb community but declared valid despite a less than 3.5% voter turnout. More than 50 Serbian protesters and at least 30 NATO peacekeeping troops were injured in the clashes.

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

UAE Requests Urgent UNSC Meeting on Escalation in West Bank - Mission

UNITED NATIONS, December 28 (Sputnik) - The United Arab Emirates has requested an emergency UN Security Council meeting for December 29 in connection with settler violence and reports of Israeli raids in the West Bank, the country's mission to the United Nations said on Thursday.

"UAE has called for an urgent UNSC meeting tomorrow, on the rapidly escalating situation in the West Bank & its impact on the viability of the two-state solution," spokesperson Shahad Matar wrote on social media.

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

Boeing Urges Inspections of 737 Max Airplanes for 'Possible Loose Bolt' - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - Boeing is urging airlines to inspect its 737 Max airplanes to look for a "possible loose bolt" that is part of the rudder control system, CNBC reported on Thursday, citing Federal Aviation Administration officials.

Boeing started recommending inspections after the bolt with a missing nut was discovered during a routine maintenance inspection of an aircraft, the report said.

Later, an additional aircraft was found to have a nut that was improperly tightened, the report said.

The issue identified on the particular airplane has been remedied, but out of an abundance of caution, Boeing is recommending operators to inspect their 737 Max airplanes and inform the company of any findings, the report added.

Boeing pointed out that the inspections should take about two hours per airplane and all new 737 Max airplanes will be thoroughly checked before being transferred to customers, according

to the report.

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

**Biden Says "Love Your Enemies" in Response to Trump's 'Rot in Hell' Christmas Message**

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Thursday responded to the Christmas message from former President and 2024 presidential candidate Donald Trump, in which the latter wished certain political opponents to rot in Hell.

On December 25, Trump published a statement on Truth Social, characterizing officials who support policies such as open borders, high taxes and the Russia-Ukraine conflict as "thugs" seeking to destroy the United States. "May they rot in hell," the statement said.

On Thursday, Biden issued a response to Trump's Christmas message, invoking sayings from Jesus Christ's Sermon on the Mount.

"There's an expression they say in church sometimes: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you," Biden said in a statement via social media platform X.

Biden's message references several lines from the Sermon on the Mount, in which Christ outlines core moral principles of Christianity.

Biden is the United States' second Catholic president, following John Kennedy.

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

**Senator Graham Suggests US Should Attack Iran in Response to Recent Houthi Attacks**

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - US Senator Lindsey Graham said in an interview this week that the United States should blow parts of Iran off the map in response to Houthi attacks against commercial vessels.

"Without Iran, there are no Houthis. The Houthis are completely backed by Iran," Graham told Fox News on Wednesday. "I have been saying for six months now...hit Iran. They have oil fields out in the open, they have the Revolutionary Guard headquarters you can see from space. Blow it off the map."

Houthi attacks near the Red Sea have disrupted maritime trade routes for some time now since the Gaza conflict erupted in October. Dozens of commercial vessels have come under attack, leading to the formation of a US-led maritime coalition to provide security for ships navigating through the region.

The Houthi rebels vowed they would continue to prevent the passage in the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea of ships linked to Israeli companies or bound for Israel until the latter's military actions in the Gaza Strip end. The Houthis also vowed to attack any ships that join the US-led maritime coalition.

Moreover, so-called Iranian proxy forces have carried some 100 attacks against US forces in Iraq and Syria. On Monday three US troops were injured, one critically, during an attack on Erbil Air Base.

"If you really want to protect American soldiers, make it real to the ayatollah [that if] you attack a [US] soldier through a proxy, we're coming after you," Graham said.

Graham said President Joe Biden and US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin are failing US troops in the Middle East.

Iran has already rejected accusations from Western countries over Tehran's alleged involvement in the Houthi attacks on merchant ships in the Red Sea. In addition, Iran emphasized that resistance groups in the Middle East, such as the Houthis, do not receive any instructions from Iran.

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

Progress Made in US Government on Wrongful Detention of Americans Abroad - Whelan Family

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - Progress has been made within the US government on dealing with wrongfully detained Americans abroad, but much work remains to be done, the family of convicted spy Paul Whelan, who is serving a 16 year prison sentence in Russia, said on Thursday.

"At a high level, there has been progress within the US government over the last 5 years but it remains insufficient. There does not yet seem to be a deterrent effect against hostage-taking," the Whelans said in a statement.

The US government has not always been interested in bringing Paul Whelan home as in the case of former President Donald Trump, who declined Russia's offer that would have freed him more than three years ago.

The Whelans believe that there is no reason to expect Paul will be released any time soon given that Washington and Moscow are unable to come to terms on a possible swap deal.

Earlier this month, Russian President Vladimir Putin said the Kremlin hopes to reach a mutually acceptable prisoner exchange deal with the United States to return Whelan and Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich.

The Russian authorities arrested Whelan in 2018 and subsequently sentenced him to 16 years in prison on espionage charges. Whelan has denied the charges and maintained he was innocent.

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

US Eyeing Minerals, Oil as It Claims Huge Chunk of Arctic Continental Shelf - Experts

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - The United States' extended continental shelf claims would secure access to vast resources, including critical minerals and oil, former US Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Environmental Security Sherri Goodman told Sputnik.

Last week, the Department of State released a new map showing that the US government is now claiming additional territories spanning approximately one million square kilometers (386,000 square miles), an area more than twice the size of California. The extension is predominantly in the Arctic and Bering Seas.

"The US announcement of its extended continental shelf claims establishes America's strategic and economic interest in the vast resources below the seabed, from the minerals and rare earths needed to power the green economy, to oil and gas," Goodman said.

The territorial extension also establishes the United States' interest in protecting the marine habitats, including fish, crab and corals, that contribute to our environmental security, Goodman added.

According to US Naval War College professor of international maritime law James Kraska, the US continental shelf contains 50 hard minerals and 16 rare earth elements.

The Arctic Circle also has about 90 billion barrels of undiscovered oil and 1,670 trillion cubic feet of gas, along with critical minerals, according to the most recent assessment the US Geological Survey conducted in July 2008.

Retired Colonel Pierre Leblanc, former commander of the Canadian Forces in the Arctic, told Sputnik that oil exploitation and sea-bed mining are very expensive in the Arctic, especially north of Alaska, and more exploration will be required to determine the potential of critical minerals in the region.

"There has not been sufficient exploration and research to support a claim based on the presence of those minerals," Leblanc said.

#### THE UNITED STATES' UNILATERAL CLAIM

Arctic Research Professor Abbie Tingstad of the Center for Arctic Study and Policy at the US Coast Guard Academy wrote in a recent article that the credibility of the United States' self-made claim could run into issues with international law.

"Unfortunately, the significance of this step is muted by the implementation and credibility challenges the United States will face as a consequence of its continuing failure to ratify the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), in which the process for arbitrating ECS claims is laid out, among many other areas of important maritime governance," Tingstad said.

Article 76 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea provides a mechanism for coastal states to claim additional economic rights on resources on or below the seabed beyond the 200 nautical miles of their exclusive economic zone (EEZ) if they can prove through geology and bathymetric mapping that there is a natural extension of their continental shelves.

The State Department claims the United States determined its continental shelf extension limits in accordance with international law, including relevant provisions of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Leblanc said he is hopeful the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf will receive the US claim since international law contains language that may allow any "coastal state" to submit a claim.

"I think that the United States made its claim to secure its interests in the extension," Leblanc said. "If it did not, Russia and Canada could potentially claim parts of that area."

Leblanc predicts the United States and Canada would resolve any possible territorial disputes through a "good neighbor practical approach."

Former EU Ambassador to the Arctic Marie-Anne Coninx told Sputnik that although the United States is not a UNCLOS member, it is applying the convention in practice.

"Critical minerals are a key issue that plays a determining role for the United States, as well as for the European Union and European countries," Coninx said. "Territorial claims are limited by international law, including UNCLOS. No exceptions are admitted because of national security reasons."

The UNCLOS has been ratified by 168 states and the European Union, but the United States has not joined because of a decades-long stalemate in the US Senate on this matter.

The US claim comes as Washington has been attempting to secure supply chains of key green metals, including by investing nearly \$3 billion to boost production of materials required to meet the growing demand for electric vehicles and energy storage. The United States relies on China, which controls nearly two-thirds of the world's critical mineral supply, to meet most of its demand for key minerals.

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

#### US Senator Sanders Says Tested Positive for Covid

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - US Senator Bernie Sanders shared on Thursday that he has tested positive for Covid.

"I have tested positive for Covid," Sanders said in a statement on X. "My symptoms are minimal and I will continue to work from home in Vermont while isolating in accordance with CDC guidance. I am glad to be fully up to date with the vaccine."

Last week, the World Health Organization (WHO) said that the number of COVID-19 cases across the world has increased by 52% in 28 days compared to the previous 28 days, adding that 850,000 cases of the disease had been reported.

More than 3,000 people have died from the disease during the period, with the number being 8% lower than during the previous 28-day period, the organization added. As of December 17, over 772 million confirmed COVID-19 cases and more than 7 million deaths have been reported to the WHO globally.

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

#### Trump Says Current Crisis on US Border With Mexico Worst in History

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - Former President Donald Trump claimed on Thursday that the state of the US-Mexico border crisis is unprecedentedly "out of control."

"Our border is out of control like no border in history, from [sic] any country, has ever been,"

Trump said via the social media platform Truth Social.

Trump said that the United States was "being extorted by Mexico and other countries, when it should be the other way around."

Trump also said that the US border was the "strongest and safest" in history three years ago during his presidency.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said that US officials had a "very productive meeting" regarding migration issues on Tuesday with their Mexican counterparts, without providing specific details.

US border officials apprehended some 6,000 migrants at the border with Mexico on Tuesday, media reported, marking a drop from the daily average of 9,600 encounters earlier this month.

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

US Sanctions 1 Person, 3 Entities for Helping to Flow Iranian Aid to Houthis - Treasury

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - The United States is sanctioning one person and three entities for helping to flow Iranian aid to Houthi forces in Yemen, the US Treasury Department said on Thursday.

"Today, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated one individual and three entities responsible for facilitating the flow of Iranian financial assistance to Houthi forces and their destabilizing activities," the Treasury Department said in a statement.

The US is sanctioning Nabil Ali Ahmed Al-Hadha, the president of the Currency Exchangers Association in the Houthi-controlled area of Sanaa, for serving as a financial intermediary between the Houthis and the Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF), the statement said.

The sanctions also target three exchange houses in Turkey and Yemen, including Rawda Exchange and Money Transfers Company, Nabco Money Exchange and Remittance Company and Al Aman Kargo Ithalat Ihracat Ve Nakliyat Limited Sirketi, the statement said.

"Today's action underscores our resolve to restrict the illicit flow of funds to the Houthis, who continue to conduct dangerous attacks on international shipping and risk further destabilizing the region," US Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian Nelson said in the statement.

The sanctions come amid attacks by Houthi forces on vessels in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, which the group has said are in response to support for Israel in its conflict against Hamas. The Houthi attacks are a clear violation of international law and curtail the free flow of commerce through the region, the statement said.

Iran denies providing weapons to Houthis to attack Israeli-linked commercial ships, saying that the group is acting on its own.

**This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file**

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

UN Peacekeeper Injured After Attack on Patrol in Lebanon - UNIFIL

UNITED NATIONS, December 28 (Sputnik) - A United Nations peacekeeper has been injured in Lebanon after his patrol was attacked by a group of young men, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) said on Thursday.

"Last night, a peacekeeper was hurt after a patrol was attacked by a group of young men in Taybeh, south Lebanon. A vehicle was also damaged," UNIFIL said via the social media platform X.

The United Nations condemns attacks against people who stand for peace and are also in violation of international law, the statement said.

UNIFIL was established by the UN Security Council in 1978 to observe Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon and help the Lebanese government enforce its authority.

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

US Hostage Judith Weinstein Killed in October 7 Attack on Israel - New York Governor

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - Judith Weinstein, 70, an American hostage who was believed to be held by Hamas, was killed during the October 7 attack on Israel, New York Governor Kathy Hochul said on Thursday.

"Heartbroken to learn that Judith Weinstein was killed during the October 7 attack. My heart is with her family abroad and those still here in New York," Hochul said via the social media platform X.

In addition to being a US citizen, Weinstein was reportedly also a citizen of Israel and Canada.

Earlier in December, President Joe Biden confirmed that Weinstein's husband, Gad Haggai, was believed to have been killed by the Palestinian movement Hamas during the surprise attack it conducted against Israel on October 7.

In late November, the White House said that approximately nine Americans remain in Hamas captivity following the attack.

On October 7, Hamas launched an attack into Israel from the Gaza Strip. As a result, some 1,200 Israelis - military personnel and civilians - were killed and 240 others abducted. Israel launched massive retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza and launched a ground invasion of the Palestinian enclave with the declared goal of eliminating Hamas and rescuing the hostages. More than 21,000 Palestinians have been killed so far in Gaza and some have been 56,000 wounded, according to the local authorities.

On November 24, Qatar mediated a deal between Israel and Hamas on a temporary truce and the exchange of some of the prisoners and hostages, as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. The ceasefire was extended several times and expired on December 1.

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

University of Idaho Begins Demolishing House Linked to 2022 Quadruple Murder - Footage

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - The University of Idaho on Thursday began demolishing a house where four students were murdered in November 2022, according to footage of the demolition shared via social media.

Earlier this month, the University of Idaho said in a statement that demolition of the off-campus house would begin on December 28. The demolition could take several days to complete, the statement said.

In November 2022, four University of Idaho students were murdered in the house, located in the city of Moscow, Idaho. Prosecutors allege that Bryan Kohberger, who was a graduate student at the nearby Washington State University, committed the quadruple murder.

Prosecutors and Kohberger's defense team were given access to the house earlier in December as part of trial preparations, the statement said. The court has yet to set a date for the trial, the statement added.

"While we appreciate the emotional connection some family members of the victims may have to this house, it is time for its removal and to allow the collective healing of our community to continue," University of Idaho President Scott Green said in the statement.

The university has intended on demolishing the house since it was gifted to the institution in early 2023, the statement said.

However, the family of two of the victims — Kaylee Goncalves and Xana Kernodle — sent a statement on Wednesday, urging the university and prosecutors to keep the house standing for evidentiary purposes. The families also urged the court to schedule a trial date for Kohberger.

"All of this affects us, the victims' families, and we can not understand the constant delays," the statement said. "This case has to move forward!"

The home should not be demolished until after Kohberger's trial, the statement added.

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

US Congresswoman Says Biden Press Secretary's Annual Salary Should Be Reduced to \$1

WASHINGTON, December 27 (Sputnik) - US Congresswoman Claudia Tenney said on Thursday that the salary of President Joe Biden's Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre should be reduced to \$1 per year for allegedly dodging reporters' questions, lying and violating the Hatch Act.

"Karine Jean-Pierre has spent the entire year dodging fair questions from reporters, lying to the American people and violating the Hatch Act. That's why I'm advocating for her salary to be lowered to \$1 a year," Tenney said via the social media platform X.

The end of December marks the end of Jean-Pierre's first year as White House press secretary but during her time she has come under constant criticism for not answering reporters' questions and getting into tussles with them during press conferences such as with Today News Africa reporter Simon Ateba. Often, the altercations have resulted in Jean-Pierre abruptly ending press briefings.

In November, Tenney introduced an amendment in the US House of Representatives seeking to reduce Jean-Pierre's annual salary to \$1. However, the lower chamber of Congress rejected the amendment in a vote of 257-165.

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

Gypsy Blanchard Walks Free After 8Yrs in Prison for Killing Her Abusive Mother – Reports

WASHINGTON, December 28 (Sputnik) - Gypsy Rose Blanchard, who plotted the murder of her allegedly abusive mother, has been released after eight years behind bars, 6 ABC reported on Thursday.

In June 2015, Claudine "Dee Dee" Blanchard was found dead in a pool of blood from multiple stab wounds in her Missouri home. Subsequently, police arrested Gypsy and her boyfriend, Nicholas Godejohn, on suspicion of murder.

Gypsy Blanchard pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced to 10 years while Godejohn was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison.

At trial, Godejohn said that he tried to save his beloved girlfriend, who had fallen victim to her abusive mother. Her mother was convincing her daughter and everyone else that Gypsy was extremely sick, including with leukemia, asthma, muscular dystrophy, and even brain damage resulting from premature birth, the report said.

Moreover, "Dee Dee" Blanchard subjected her daughter to many unnecessary surgeries and medications, according to media reports.

Gypsy said that "Dee Dee" Blanchard grew increasingly controlling as she got older and became jealous when she began her online dating with Godejohn, the report added.

"She physically chained me to the bed and put bells on the doors and told ... anybody that I probably would've trusted that I was going through a phase and to tell her if I was doing anything behind her back," the report quoted Gypsy as saying in a 2017 interview.

The plot of the case received several film and TV adaptations, including HBO's 2017 film *Mommy Dead and Dearest* and Hulu's 2019 series *The Act*.