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12/1/23 Friday

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Second Place: South Korea Puts First Spy Satellite in Orbit Following North's Launch

The South Korean Defense Ministry is preparing to place its first reconnaissance satellite in Earth's orbit, an official told reporters on Friday. The launch comes just days after the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), their rivals to the north, launched their own spy satellite.

The satellite, domestically built, was launched on Friday aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Vandenberg Space Force Base in California.

The device is set to orbit between 400 kilometers and 600 kilometers up, and is capable of detecting an object as small as 30 centimeters, according to South Korean media. Seoul plans to launch four more devices by the end of 2025.

"Until now, South Korea has relied heavily on US-run spy satellites" when it comes to monitoring the DPRK, Choi Gi-il, professor of military studies at Sangji University in Wonju, told French media.

While the South has "succeeded in the launch of a military communications satellite, it has taken much longer for a reconnaissance satellite due to higher technological hurdles," he said.

Choi added that after the North launched its own satellite last month, "the South Korean government needs to demonstrate it can also pull this off."

However, a key difference is that while South Korea has had to use an American rocket to launch its satellite, due to limitations on its ballistic missile program put in place by Washington, the DPRK used its own rocket.

Moscow-based military expert Alexey Leonkov told Sputnik earlier this week that this had made the DPRK "a member of the club of space powers," an elite group of spacefaring nations to which South Korea could only "conditionally" be included.

"South Korea most likely belongs to the states that do not have their own spaceports and use the services of spaceports of other states. And after the launch of such a satellite, North Korea entered not just the club of space powers, but the club of those powers that have military reconnaissance satellites," he said.

Called Malligyong-1, the satellite was launched on November 21 on a Chollima-1 carrier rocket from the Sohae Satellite Space Launching Station on the country's western coast. According to observers, the rocket bore a resemblance to the Soviet Union's Zenit rocket. However, the United States accused Pyongyang of using the launch as an excuse to advance its ballistic missile program, which the United Nations has sanctioned, claiming they violate the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Pyongyang withdrew from the treaty in 2003.

To test out the new satellite, the DPRK photographed key military and command sites in the US and its allies, including the White House and bases in Virginia, Japan, and elsewhere.

Kim Yo Jong, vice department director of the Central Committee of the DPRK's ruling Workers' Party of Korea and a key spokesperson for the North Korean government, blasted American

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hypocrisy in its response to the launch, noting the US has threatened the DPRK with attack since the 1953 ceasefire.

"The whole course of the open meeting of the UNSC over the DPRK's reconnaissance satellite launch, convened at the gangster-like demand of the US and its followers, clearly proves how weak, false and absurd are the unreasonable arguments of some UN member states denying the DPRK's sovereign rights," Kim said on Wednesday.

The 1950-53 war, which caused widespread devastation across both North and South Korea, only ended in a ceasefire, not a permanent peace treaty, allowing 28,000 US troops to remain in South Korea and for American commanders to retain control over South Korean forces in wartime. Pyongyang has said it needs nuclear weapons and advanced missiles as a deterrent against attack in the absence of peace.

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Scott Ritter: US Pushing Nuclear Arms Race 'Can Only Have Tragic Ending'

The US has steadily fallen behind Russia and China in terms of strategic competition, while still insisting on pursuing conflict with both nations in an attempt to reassert its claimed superiority. That situation is ripe for producing a disastrous outcome, an analyst told Sputnik.

In early November, a scheduled test of an unarmed Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) by the United States ended in failure as the Air Force was forced to prematurely self-destruct the missile in mid-flight. The Pentagon said it was "due to an anomaly" during the test.

The nuclear-tipped missile has been in service since 1970, having its service life extended several times after the end of the Cold War in 1990, which caused the US to de-emphasize strategic missile production. A new system, the Sentinel ICBM, is currently being developed to replace the Minuteman III, but isn't scheduled to fully replace the older missile for another decade.

However, when the Sentinel and other nuclear-capable weapons, such as the B-21 Raider bomber, finally enter service, they'll already be outclassed by Russian and Chinese counterparts, since those nations have already achieved nuclear superiority over the US, Scott Ritter, a former UN weapons inspector in Iraq, told Radio Sputnik's The Critical Hour on Thursday. Ritter recently authored an article on Consortium News titled: "The End of US Nuclear Superiority."

"The United States has a nuclear deterrence model called the Triad. There's three legs to the triad: there's the manned aerial bomber leg that consists of B-52H bombers and B-2 bombers; there is a sea leg, submarine launched ballistic missiles, the Trident IIs carried on board the old Ohio-class submarines; and then there's the ground leg, which consists of 400 Minuteman III missiles that are loaded into silos across the Midwest of the United States," Ritter explained.

"The Minuteman III is a very old missile. It's been refurbished. It's had its fuel scraped out, new fuel put in. But the bottom line is, it's reached the end of its usefulness in this test. You know, it's a test that the Air Force carries out periodically that's designed to show the reliability of the

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Minuteman III system. Well, it failed. And so what we have here is a Cold War relic that is on life support and it may not be able to do the job that it's supposed to do.

“Then you compare and contrast this with the Russian missiles that are being fielded now, two in particular: the Sarmat missile, which is a heavy intercontinental ballistic missile carrying multiple warheads, including the Avangard hypersonic maneuverable warhead. It also can be fired, because of its range, over the South Pole, which means it comes into the United States from a direction that our early-warning radars aren’t situated - all our radars are oriented toward the North Pole, the traditional entry route of Russian missiles if there was to be a war. There's the Yars missile, which is not only road-mobile, but also could be fired from a silo. And the Yars missile can carry the Avangard hypersonic maneuverable warhead.”

“The Avangard is a warhead that's designed to defeat any missile defense system in the world. It was developed by the Russians in response to the decision by President George W. Bush, back in 2002, to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and therefore begin deploying ballistic missile defense systems that the Russians deemed to threaten the notion of strategic parity, meaning that the United States fielded a missile defense system capable of shooting down Russian warheads and fielded systems that could allow for a preemptive first-strike. The United States may believe they can nullify Russia's strategic nuclear deterrent and therefore push Russia around any way they want. That's unacceptable to the Russians.”

“So they built these new missiles, the Yars, the Sarmat, the Avangard, and others, including a nuclear-powered cruise missile, which they just successfully flight tested last month. All these weapons were put out by the Russians, they're better than anything we have, there's nothing we have that comes close to these weapons, which means now that we have to move forward to modernize our own way.”

“And we're doing that: we're spending hundreds of billions of dollars to build a new ground-based missile, I think it's called the Sentinel. It's supposed to be ready sometime in the 2030s, but it never will be. It doesn't work that way in America. The systems always overrun on time, on costs, etc.. We have a new bomber, the B-21, that's been flight-tested, but is it going to be filled in sufficient numbers? We don't know. Has it been accepted for operational service? No. Are there problems that can come up? Probably. And then we have a new class of ballistic-missile submarines that are being built. But everything is on the drawing board. And what we're finding out now is that we don't have any money. I mean, we spend almost $900 billion a year on defense and we don't have any money.”

“The military that has failed six consecutive audits, $3.3 trillion in assets, 65% of these assets can't be accounted for, and yet we're going to spend hundreds of billions of dollars to try and modernize a Nuclear Triad that, when it's deployed, will already be inferior to that which the Russians have. And here comes the dangerous part: there will be no arms control treaties in place. The only arms control treaty that exists today is the New START Treaty, negotiated in bad faith by the United States in 2010. The Russians say, ‘the hell with you, We're done with you. We're finished. We're tired of your lies, your deceit. We now have achieved nuclear superiority and we're not going to let you go to the negotiating table and take that back at a time when you continue,’ you being the United States, ‘to articulate a policy that says our goal and objective is the strategic defeat of Russia,’” Ritter said.

“We have to get our act together and if we don't, we're in danger of heading down the path of a nuclear arms race that can only have a tragic ending.”

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Ritter said that the West had underestimated Russia for decades, pointing to Russia's performance in the special operation in Ukraine as an example of the tragic consequences of that false sense of superiority.

"Look at The Economist, the hard Russophobic magazine. The cover[says]: 'Is Russia winning the War?' Oh, yeah. 'Did we get it wrong?' You're damn right you did. Everybody got it wrong. The Russian defense industry right now is orders of magnitude advanced over ours. They are producing new systems, modern systems, systems that are derived from experiences of less than a year. Like I told you, the B-21 is a 10-to-15 year old design. The Russians are putting out new things. Look what we did with China: we're trying to strangle their chips, saying they will never be able to develop a certain size chip. And so we cut them off from the lithographic machines from the Netherlands and from this supply and that supply, and in less than a year, the Chinese are not only producing that chip, but better chips, because they were compelled to do it themselves. And they are so far ahead of us in terms of other technologies." he said.

"You know, we just fool ourselves, this is the problem. All of these policies are put out by a Congress that lives off of the ignorance of the American people and the fear that's generated by that ignorance. So all of these policies are not designed to actually address the problem, because they're not. The proof is in the pudding: we didn't stop Russia, we failed, Russia is succeeding on all fronts. The same thing with China. We haven't dented them at all, they're moving ahead full steam. So none of our policies have worked except to do one thing: play off the ignorance of the American people to put fear into them and then to do these policies of these politicians look strong, because the last thing the politicians want to do is be explaining to the American people why the Chinese and the Russians are better than we are."

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US Navy Drops Underwater Footage of Crashed Poseidon Aircraft Near Hawaii

The US Navy has published footage of its underwater salvage efforts off the coast of Hawaii, where a P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft recently skidded off the runway during landing. Amid adverse weather conditions, the airliner-sized jet overshot the runway at Marine Corps Air Station, Kaneohe Bay in Hawaii and landed in shallow water atop a coral reef. Nine crew members were aboard, all of whom escaped the plane as it partially filled with water.

In the footage, shot by a diver, the plane's undercarriage can be seen wedged into coral and a slew of cables tangled around its wheels to stabilize the 130,000-pound plane and prevent it from moving further. Its massive turbofan engines sit suspended just inches from the coral reef. However, the aircraft is not totally submerged: Navy photos taken after the crash show most of the aircraft above the wing roots to be above water, although the aircraft's aft end is more submerged than the nose.

At a news conference earlier this week, Navy officials said a protective floating barrier had been erected around the aircraft within 30 minutes of the crash, and that it had already been drained of fuel in a special operation, removing 2,000 gallons of fuel in an operation never performed underwater before on this aircraft.

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"Since the incident and through the weekend, this team has been singularly focused on developing a salvage plan for this aircraft that prioritizes the safety of personnel and the environment," Rear Adm. Kevin P. Lenox told reporters, adding that the bay has significance "not just as a strategic location for the military, but as a critical ecosystem and a cherished part of the local community."

He added that the Navy was working with the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources to assess the impact on the reef caused by the crash.

Lenox said the Navy was exploring two options: either using a crane to drag the aircraft out of the water or to use inflatable cylindrical floating bags to lift the plane up to the point that it could then be rolled onto land. He said the decision would be made on Friday afternoon.

Derived from a Boeing 737 airliner, the P-8A Poseidon has become the US Navy's workhorse maritime patrol aircraft. With a combat range of 1,383 miles, the massive aircraft can loiter for hours as it hunts submarines or surface warships with sonar buoys, naval mines, or a variety of anti-ship missiles and torpedoes. Several US allies have also purchased the Poseidon, including Australia, Norway, and India.

In the South China Sea, Poseidons on patrol regularly come into conflict with Chinese military authorities as the aircraft fly near islands claimed by Beijing, and have been known to alter their international identifier codes to appear as civilian aircraft when flying close to the Chinese border.

In 2020, as the patrols were being dramatically expanded, a Poseidon was forced to make an emergency landing at a US base in Okinawa, Japan, after suffering engine trouble, possibly from overuse on such patrols.

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'Genocide Becomes Functional' When Israel, US Deny Palestinian Existence - Academic

Israel has long tried to write the Palestinians out of history by claiming the land settled by millions of Jews since the late 19th century was "empty," which has made it easier for them to justify terrible actions from the 1948 war to the present assault on Gaza, a Palestinian academic told Sputnik.

The ceasefire between the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and Palestinian militant groups in the Gaza Strip that began last Saturday was canceled by the IDF, which claimed Hamas had broken the truce by firing on Israeli troops. The ceasefire had been called after more than six weeks of intense IDF attack on Gaza and what Israel described as a "complete siege" of the small territory, leading to acute shortages of food, water, medicine, fuel, and other basic necessities.

Several dozen prisoners were released by both sides during the "humanitarian pause," which also saw much-needed aid begin to enter the densely-populated enclave that is home to more than 2.2 million people, more than half of whom have been forced from their homes by the IDF assault.

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Dr. Ramzy Baroud, an author, editor of the Palestine Chronicle, and senior research fellow at the Center for Islam and Global Affairs, told Radio Sputnik's The Backstory on Thursday that Israeli policy has always been based on negating Palestine and Palestinians as a concept, allowing the justification of any and every action against the Palestinian people.

Baroud said that Israel's assault on Gaza was totally unprecedented, even in terms of its past brutalities, including the 1948 "Nakba" or "catastrophe," when 700,000 Palestinians were forced out of the land that became Israel and 15,000 were killed.

"Nothing, nothing like this has ever been experienced. I lived in a Gaza refugee camp until I was in my early 20s, and we have experienced the First Intifada, the first uprising, we have experienced death, war, bombardments - we have experienced it all," he said.

"But even for that generation, this is completely unprecedented. I don't think we've ever seen anything like this, even during the Nakba, the Palestinian catastrophe of 1947-48. Yes, we have seen massacres, but we haven't seen a situation in which you have 2.3 million people placed within a confined area, surrounded by the navy, by a military, by tanks, by drones, by all the best American air defense is able to offer. And they are being targeted randomly, with no warnings, including schools, hospitals, homes - anything that you can possibly imagine. There is no safe zone. And then with time, a process of starvation began occurring."

"Israel is trying to communicate the message to the Palestinians that 'I'm still in charge'. They are trying to create this illusion that what happened on October 7 did not happen and that Israel remains the invincible army that has always been. So to communicate this message - which by the way, though we are terribly failing at communicating - they had to kill all these people," he said.

"Fifteen thousand people are dead so far, 7,000+ are wounded. If you are missing under the rubble, most likely dead. If you combine these two numbers by themselves - forget about the wounded and forget about everybody else - that's about 1% of the entire population of Gaza that's been killed. One percent. More bodies are being recovered, nearly 40,000 people wounded, the World Food Program is saying that 2.2 million of Gaza's population are in urgent need for food. They have no food. Gaza's entire population is anywhere between 2.2 to 2.3 million. It means that pretty much everybody in Gaza has no food and no clean water," Baroud explained.

"So this is completely unprecedented. And yet American politicians, officials are lining up with the same chorus every day: 'Israel has the right to defend itself'. This is terrifying in the sense that Palestinians have shown clearly that they have no breaking and that they are willing to go to the very end to fight for their rights. But it doesn't seem like there is a moral breaking point for the Americans. I mean, this is the truth of it. If Israel has done all of this and destroyed 60% of all homes in Gaza, and the Americans haven't yet woken up to the idea that this is really bad and this needs to stop, it means that the Americans have no moral threshold that can't be crossed. And that is what's truly terrifying about all of this."

"And it's not like any of this is new to the US," Baroud said. "I mean, books, volumes written about it not only by Palestinian historians like myself, but also by Israeli historians, the likes of Ilan Pappe, for example. This process of dehumanization - recently, I wrote an article about the history of genocidal language in Israel. This has been going on for 75 years. When you fight an enemy and dehumanize that enemy at the same time, you create that mindset that when you are ready to completely get rid of that enemy, it doesn't register as an immoral act. This is why

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the Israelis, from the very, very beginning, for example, before Israel itself was established on the ruins of Palestine in 1948, for decades, they have created this narrative that Palestine is an empty land, it's a land of no people, that should be available for a people who have no land. So the entire infrastructure of Israel, moral infrastructure, was based on the assumption that the Palestinians do not exist."

"And that version of events has been repeated so many times. For example, Golda Meir, the Israeli prime minister in the '60s, made that comment herself in an interview with The Sunday Times in 1969, when she said 'not that there were a group of people living here calling themselves Palestinians, and we came and we kicked them out. They never existed'. Now, only a few months ago, [Bezalel] Smotritch, the far-right Israeli minister of finance, was in Paris, of all places, giving a talk in which he said the Palestinians are 'an invented people'. So 75 years and there's still that genocidal language, complete erasure of the Palestinians."

"Now, why this is functional, and that's what I argued in the article, is because when the war started and the Israelis started trying to convince Egypt and Jordan, through American mediation, to accept millions of Palestinians who were going to be kicked out of Gaza and the West Bank, they immediately resorted to this idea that the only solution is to betray the Palestinians. That's where genocide becomes functional. Because it wasn't entirely surprising to anybody, because that's what they have been saying."

"In Israel they have a different term for it: they don't call it ethnic cleansing, they call it population transfer. It's a polite way of saying 'kick all the Palestinians out of their own historic homeland in which they have been living for thousands of years'. And the Americans, not only were they not neutral about it and they did not say 'no, back off, what is this nonsense, we are living in the 21st century, we can't be allowing this'. No, [US Secretary of State] Antony Blinken actually goes to Egypt and he offers Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the Egyptian president, he offers him money in order for him to temporarily accept 1 million or 1.5 million Palestinian from Gaza."

"And we know, I'm a Palestinian refugee myself, we know that the moment you cross the border out of Palestine, you are never allowed to go back. So basically, they wanted to create another Nakba, another population transfer, if you will, and Palestinians are not going to come back. So they're going to irritate the supposed peaceful existence of the state of Israel."

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Onwards and Upwards - Cartoon

Rep. George Santos (R-NY) was expelled from Congress on Friday, ending his short-lived and tumultuous time in Congress after his 2022 election. His expulsion makes him the third congressman kicked out of the lower chamber since the Civil War and the first since that time who had not been convicted of a felony.

Santos has been indicted and was the subject of a House Ethics investigation that concluded he sought to "fraudulently exploit" his office for personal financial profit. After that report, Santos announced that he would not seek reelection but refused to resign.

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Expulsion requires a two-thirds majority vote in the House. It passed with a 311 to 114 vote, with 105 Republicans joining all but two Democrats who voted for his expulsion (three Democrats and five Republicans did not vote, two additional Democrats voted "present.")
Santos was accused by the House Ethics Committee investigation of spending thousands of dollars of campaign funds for personal expenses, including Botox, OnlyFans subscriptions, a trip to Atlantic City, New Jersey and paying down his credit cards.
He is also facing Federal charges for allegedly stealing the identities of donors and using their credit cards to rack up thousands in charges. Santos has denied any wrongdoing.
As he has since media outlets first reported on falsehoods included in Santos' resume during his 2022 campaign, Santos remained defiant after being expelled.
"Why would I want to stay here?" Santos asked reporters. "To hell with this place."
Perhaps, he will consider continuing his political career in the upper chamber.

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Report: US Told Israel It Will Issue Visa Ban For West Bank Settler Violence

From October 7 to November 24, Israeli forces killed 211 Palestinians in the territory, including 54 children. Meanwhile, Israeli settlers killed an additional eight Palestinians, including one child during that time period.
The Biden administration is planning to issue visa bans on an undisclosed number of Israeli settlers committing violence in the West Bank, US Media reports.
US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and members of his war cabinet that the United States would take action against the settlers on its own, according to the report.
Israeli settler behaviour in the West Bank more than doubled after the October 7 Hamas attacks, but 2023 was already on track for a record number of violence.
Settlements are Israeli properties built on occupied Palestinian lands, primarily based in the West Bank or East Jerusalem. The vast majority of settlements are built on land either wholly or partially privately owned by Palestinians and are illegal under international law and under the Oslo Accords signed by the Israeli government.
Still, in 2017, the Israeli government announced that it formally started authorizing new settlements. Since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, the settlement population in the West Bank and East Jerusalem has increased from a quarter million to nearly 700,000 by September of this year.
From the start of this year to October 1, at least 750 Palestinian buildings, homes and businesses, had been demolished to make room for more Israeli settlements and outposts.
Outposts are settlements not officially sanctioned by the Israeli government, though many have been retroactively authorized.
Multiple incidents, including in February and June, resulted in dozens of Palestinian homes and cars being set on fire by Israeli settlers in the West Bank city of Nablus and the town of Turmus.

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The result is a patchwork of Israeli settlements within the West Bank, one of the areas that are seeking Palestinian statehood, a situation that experts have said makes it more difficult to implement a two-state solution peace plan, a policy officially supported by the US government.
In an op-ed credited to US President Joe Biden published by US media last month, Biden threatened to take action against Israeli settlers in the West Bank.
“I have been emphatic with Israel’s leaders that extremist violence against Palestinians in the West Bank must stop and that those committing the violence must be held accountable. The United States is prepared to take our own steps, including issuing visa bans against extremists attacking civilians in the West Bank,” Biden wrote.
A State Department official told US media under the condition of anonymity that Washington requested that Israel prosecute the perpetrators but has yet to see movement towards that. The official said the bans could come in the next few weeks.
White House spokesperson John Kirby told reporters that he could not confirm the reports, but said it was under consideration.
“I am not able to confirm that reporting - I'd refer you to the State Department,” Kirby said during a press briefing. “The only thing I would add... it's something that we are looking at.”

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Philippines Opens New 'Monitoring' Base in South China Sea Amid Rising Tensions

The South China Sea has been disputed for decades, with China, Brunei, Philippines, Vietnam and Taiwan (Republic of China) all making conflicting claims to parts of the region.
The Philippines opened a new Coast Guard monitoring base on Friday in a disputed area of the South China Sea, which comes after the announcement of increased cooperation and joint military patrols of the area with the country and the US and Australia.
Officials in the Philippines said that the base and expanded patrols were in response to what it perceived as “pure bullying” by China in the area. China has accused the US and other foreign interests of stirring up trouble in the contested region.
Face-offs between Filipino and Chinese ships have intensified over the past year. In October, Filipino and Chinese vessels collided while Chinese ships were trying to block construction materials being sent to a warship that has been marooned near the disputed reef Ren’ai Jiao (aka Second Thomas Shoal) since 1999.
China says the Philippines has failed to fulfill its decades-old promise to remove the ship while the Philippines contends that the ship and submerged reef fall under its territory.
Amid the growing tensions, the US has stressed that it must defend the Philippines in the event of a conflict. The Philippines is the United States’ longest-running treaty ally in Asia.
The new Coast Guard monitoring station sits on a small island named Thitu and includes a two-story building with radar, ship-tracking and other equipment. Philippine National Security Adviser Eduardo Ano and other officials flew for the opening to Thitu, which is home to about 250 inhabitants and is one of nine islands, islets and atolls in disputed territory that have been occupied by Philippine forces since the 1970s.

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Ano hinted that patrols could expand to include Japan. “We’re open to like-minded countries to join as observers or participants,” he told reporters.
In addition to the Philippines, Thitu is claimed by China and Vietnam.
China has repeatedly said that the patrols increase tensions in the area and accused the Philippines of enlisting foreign "forces” to stir up tensions in the region.
“[The Philippines] enlisted forces out of the region to patrol… stirred up [trouble] and engaged in hype, undermining the regional peace and stability,” a Chinese military spokesman said last week.
On Thursday, Chinese Senior Colonel Wu Qian reiterated that China believes the US is behind the growing tensions. “The US instigated and emboldened the Philippine side to infringe upon China's sovereignty, which escalated maritime tensions. The Chinese side firmly opposes that,” Wu, spokesperson for China's Ministry of National Defense, said at a news conference.
The Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro, fresh off his meeting with his US counterpart Austin Lloyd, responded by saying it was China who was “stirring up trouble.”
Earlier this year, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., whose administration has been moving closer to the US, said that his country would not yield to China. “The Philippines will not give a single square inch of our territory to any foreign power,” Marcos warned after meeting with US officials in Hawaii.

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Report: Israel Obtained Hamas' Battle Plan Over a Year Before October Attack

The failure by the Israeli government to stop the October 7 attack by Hamas has shaken the populace's faith in the Netanyahu government. A poll taken at the end of October showed that only 20% of Israelis expressed faith in the government, the lowest level in at least two decades.
Israeli military and intelligence officials had access to Hamas’ battle plan for the October 7 attack, or something very close to it, more than a year before the attack, an investigation by US media has revealed.
According to the report, Israeli officials were in possession of a 40-page attack plan code-named “Jericho Wall” which detailed a hypothetical Hamas attack along Gaza’s southern border with Israel.
It has not been detailed how Israel obtained the document, but the report indicates Israel obtained it sometime last year.
While it did not set a date for the attack, it described in detail the tactics Hamas would employ, including the use of rockets to distract Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers and send them into bunkers. It described following that stage with drone attacks to take out security cameras and remotely-controlled machine guns along the border. The next step included gunmen flooding over the border on foot, using motorcycles and flying over with paragliders.
All of those tactics were seen being used by Hamas and other groups who participated in the October 7 attack.

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It also described breaking through the Israeli border at 60 different points and listed the Re'im military base as a critical target. During the attack, Hamas rampaged through the base, which is home to the Gaza division of the IDF, overrunning it for a time.

While the document was widely circulated among military officials and the intelligence communities, it is unknown if Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu or other high-ranking political figures saw the document.

It was more than six hours after the attack began that the IDF announced it was sending troops to southern Israel to retake towns occupied by Hamas. An eyewitness account by an Israeli who escaped Hamas during the attack said that even the militant group was surprised by the military's slow response.

Among the military, the attack plan was dismissed as aspirational, described as a "compass" of where Hamas wanted to go but not where it currently was.

At least one Israeli intelligence analyst warned that she believed the attack plan was more than hypothetical in the mind of Hamas leadership. According to US media, she informed superiors through encrypted email that Hamas was conducting a training exercise that mimicked the attack described in the document.

The analyst's superior, a colonel in the Gaza division, ultimately brushed off the concerns and called the attack plan "totally imaginative" and not indicative of Hamas' actual capabilities. While he praised the analysis, he told her: "in short, let's wait patiently."

During the email exchange, she reportedly stressed her disagreement with the colonel's assessment. "I utterly refute that the scenario is imaginary," she wrote. "It is a plan designed to start a war. It's not just a raid on a village."

Over the past year and a half, Hamas has been posting videos of it and other groups in Gaza training for an attack on Israel, including with mock buildings, attacking mock Israeli tanks and taking hostages. Some of the training exercises took place within a mile of the Israeli border, adding more questions on how Israel was caught so off-guard.

The intelligence analyst did not say an attack was imminent. However, according to the report, Israeli officials have said privately that the Hamas attack could have been thwarted if it took warnings seriously and redeployed forces to counter the coming attack.

The "Jericho Wall" document was not the first battle plan obtained by Israel. Several documents have been obtained over the years, including one in 2016 that said Hamas planned to move the conflict into Israeli territory, take hostages and occupy land outside of Gaza.

Howver, the "Jericho Wall" document also contained sensitive information about the IDF, including troop locations and numbers which has since opened the possibility that there could be a leak within the IDF.

The battle plan, along with other documents obtained by the IDF, began with a quote from the Quran: "Surprise them through the gate. If you do, you will certainly prevail."

In response to the Hamas attack on October 7, Israel launched a massive bombing campaign and land invasion of the Gaza Strip, killing at least 15,000 Palestinians. According to the UN, more than two-thirds of those killed are women and children.

A weeklong ceasefire was reached following a hostage exchange, but Israel resumed its bombing campaign early Friday following its expiration. The Palestinian Ministry of Health says dozens were killed in the initial strikes.

The official Israeli death toll of the October 7 attack sits at 1,200.

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US Praises Angola for Signing Artemis Accords on Space Exploration – State Department

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) – The United States praised Angola on Monday for signing the US-led Artemis Accords to regulate the peaceful use of outer space, according to a Department of State release.

"The United States looks forward to building on Angola's Artemis Accords commitment and engaging on bilateral space cooperation, including working together to mitigate the effects of climate change and boosting food and water security," the release stated.

Angola signed the accords on November 30, making it the 33rd country to participate.

Led by the Department of State and NASA, the Artemis Accords were established with eight countries in 2020.

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US Loans $568Mln to Multilateral Clean Technology Fund – Treasury

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) – The US Treasury has agreed to loan $568 million to the Clean Technology Fund to support the deployment of clean energy in developing countries, according to a statement released by the department on Monday.

"The loan will enable the Clean Technology Fund to drive progress in key areas, from clean energy deployment to supply chains to green industry. US support to the Climate Investment Funds is a key part of our work to strengthen the climate finance architecture and to evolve the multilateral development banks to better respond to global challenges like climate change," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in the statement.

Funded through resources appropriated by Congress, the $568 million loan will finance projects developed and implemented by multilateral development banks, including the African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Inter-American Development Bank Group, and World Bank Group.

Since 2022, the US has contributed over $1.5 billion in concessional loans to the Clean Technology Fund.

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Hong Kong Police Condemn Opposition Activist for Breaking Bail, Self-Exile in Canada

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WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) – The Hong Kong Police Force condemned opposition activist Agnes Chow on Monday following her announcement that she did not plan to return to the city from Canada this month as required per her bail conditions and that she would likely never return at all, according to a release.

"The National Security Department (NSD) of the Hong Kong Police Force said today (December 4) that Police have noted someone's recent claim of jumping Police bail in social media and strongly condemn the irresponsible action which is against and challenging the rule of law," the release stated.

Without directly naming Chow, it urged "the woman to immediately turn back before it is too late and not to choose a path of no return. Otherwise, she will bear the stigma of 'fugitive' for the rest of her life."

On her 27th birthday on Sunday, Chow had revealed on social media that she had been living in Toronto and studying for a master's degree for the past three months and did not plan to return to Hong Kong to report to the police by the end of the month as required.

"After careful consideration, including the situation in Hong Kong, my personal safety, physical and mental health, I have decided not to go back," Chow wrote, adding that "I probably will never return."

Chow, a co-founder of the now-defunct Demosisto pro-democracy party, revealed that she had been able to retrieve her passport from the police after agreeing in August to take a trip accompanied by five officers to Shenzhen, where she visited an exhibition and the headquarters of tech giant Tencent, and penned a letter of gratitude to the police for enabling her to "understand the great development of the motherland."

Chow was previously jailed for 10 months on unauthorized assembly charges related to a protest outside police headquarters during the 2019-2020 anti-government protests. She had kept a low profile since her release on bail in June 2021. She is under a national security investigation for allegedly colluding with foreign forces and is required to regularly check in with police.

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White House Says 'Out of Money' Unless Congress Passes Ukraine Aid by Year End

WASHINGTON, December 4 (Sputnik) – The White House warned Congress on Monday that it will run out of money to provide military aid to Ukraine by the end of the year unless Congress passes its supplemental funding request.

"I want to be clear: without congressional action, by the end of the year we will run out of resources to procure more weapons and equipment for Ukraine and to provide equipment from US military stocks. There is no magical pot of funding available to meet this moment. We are out of money—and nearly out of time," Office of Management and Budget Director Shalanda Young wrote in a letter to Speaker Mike Johnson and other congressional leaders.

Young argued that despite aid from allies, US support "cannot be replicated by others" and withdrawing it would make a Russian victory increasingly likely. She also said that it concurrently

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helped boost domestic defense industrial base and US military readiness.
Congress has passed $111 billion in supplemental funding for Ukrainian military, economic and other critical needs thus far. Young said that as of mid-November, the Pentagon had used 97% of the $62.3 billion it had received and the Department of State had used all of the $4.7 billion in military aid it had received. State and USAID had also used all of the $27.2 billion allocated for economic and civilian security assistance.

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US Will Not Let Hamas, Russia Win, Remains Focused on Ukraine - Austin

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - The United States will not let Hamas or Russia win and will remain focused on Ukraine, while at the same time surging support for Israel, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Saturday.
"We will not let Hamas or Putin win. And we will not let our enemies divide or weaken us. So even as we surge support into Israel, we remain focused on Ukraine," Austin said in his remarks at the Ronald Reagan National Defense Forum in California.
The Pentagon chief believes that the outcome of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine will define global security for decades to come and the United States has no option of "sitting it out."
With the start of the Israeli operation in Gaza following the Hamas attack on October 7, the United States declared its full support for the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, which raised natural fears in Kiev that the generous flow of financial and security aid would be diverted to Israel, one of the United States' closest allies in the world. However, the Biden administration, including himself, has repeatedly stated that it will be able to support Ukraine and Israel equally.
At the same time, the Pentagon still refuses to provide data on the amount of support for Israel, while the figures for support for Ukraine are publicly available and are published regularly.

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Without Two-State Solution Israel-Palestine Conflict to Be Engine of Instability - Austin

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - The two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains the only option to prevent it from becoming an engine of instability, insecurity and human suffering, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Saturday.
"[The] two-state solution remains the only viable way out of this tragic conflict that has ever been proposed. And without a horizon of hope, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will remain an engine of instability, insecurity, and human suffering," Austin said in his remarks at the Ronald Reagan National Defense Forum in California.
Austin reiterated that the United States will remain Israel's closest friend in the world, adding

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that Washington's support for Israel's security is not negotiable.

The Biden administration continues to state it supports the creation of an independent Palestinian state, including the territories of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and opposes reducing the size of Gaza and any form of forced removal of Palestinians from the enclave.

On October 7, the Palestinian movement Hamas launched a surprise large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip and breached the border, killing and abducting people. Israel launched retaliatory strikes and ordered a complete blockade of Gaza, cutting off supplies of water, food, and fuel. On October 27, Israel launched a large-scale ground incursion into the Gaza Strip.

Last week, 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 truce was extended several times, but on Friday, December 1, the Israeli military resumed fighting against Hamas in the Gaza Strip, saying the group had violated the humanitarian pause by opening fire on Israeli territory.

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US Spends 50% More Funds on Munitions Due to Ukraine's High Artillery Burn Rate - Austin

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Saturday that the United States now has to spend 50% more money on munitions compared to five years ago because of Ukraine's high burn rate of artillery shells amid its conflict with Russia.

"Ukraine's high burn rate for artillery has hammered home the need to invest even more in munitions. So compared to the defense budget from just five years ago, we're putting nearly 50 percent more money into munitions," Austin said in his remarks at the Ronald Reagan National Defense Forum in California.

He also pointed out that during the Biden administration's tenure, the production of artillery shells in the US will quadruple.

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Trump Says Electric Cars Are ‘Ridiculous’: Stands Against Electric Tanks Too

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said on Saturday in Iowa that electric cars are ‘ridiculous’, highlighting that the new idea of making electric tanks is bad too.

"They [electric cars] don't go far. They cost a fortune. So unless you want to go to the local store or something you're not going to buy it … The whole thing is ridiculous," Trump said at Iowa's gathering prior to the primary elections. "Now they want to make tanks all electric, can you believe it?… they have the same problem, they don't go far."

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So imagine you are in the middle of a desert with a tank and then you are asking for an electric charger, he added, pointing out the absurdity of the whole concept.

"So you'd have to have the lumberjack pulling a battery probably in the truck behind it [the tank] pulling a battery - that wouldn't look too cool," he continued.

Trump spoke at a Trump rally in Ankeny, Iowa, because Iowa has one of the earliest primary elections - starting on January 15. Iowa is now also the focus of other Republican candidates for the 2024 US President - such as Vivek Ganapathy Ramaswamy. Primary elections will serve for choosing the Republican and Democratic candidates to compete in the 2024 US presidential election.

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US Osprey Not Flying After Crash Off Japan to Process Loss of Teammates - Air Force

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - US Osprey aircraft in Japan are not flying right now so crew members can process losing teammates in an accident earlier this week, an Air Force spokesperson told Sputnik.

"They have not been grounded in Japan. The unit is not flying now because they are processing the loss of their teammates," the spokesperson said on Friday.

On November 29, the US Air Force said a CV-22B Osprey from Yokota Air Base, Japan was involved in an aircraft mishap while performing a routine training mission off the shore of Yakushima Island, Japan with eight airmen on board.

On Friday, the Air Force said seven airmen are still missing and one set of remains has been recovered.

Media reported earlier that the US had "grounded" Osprey aircraft in the wake of the incident.

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AUKUS Allies to Hold Series of Military Drills Beginning Next Year - Pentagon Chief

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - The US, UK, and Australia under AUKUS pillars have endorsed holding military drills beginning in 2024, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said after talks with his British and Australian counterparts in California.

"Today, we endorsed several new efforts under pillar two of AUKUS. Let me highlight two of these efforts. The first is a maritime autonomous experimentation and exercise. Beginning next year, our three countries will conduct a series of integrated trilateral experiments and exercises. They will enhance capability development, improve our interoperability," Austin said. on Friday.

According to a joint statement, Austin, Australian Defense Minister Richard Marles and UK defense chief Grant Shapps discussed the AUKUS enhanced defense and security partnership.

The group reviewed progress made since the March 2023 announcement of the Optimal

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Pathway for Australia to acquire conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines, the release added.

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US to Work With Egypt, Qatar to Reimplement Truce in Gaza Conflict - Austin

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - The United States will work with Egypt and Qatar to reimplement the truce between Israel and Hamas, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a press conference.

"We're going to continue to work with Israel and Egypt and Qatar on efforts to reimplement the pause," Austin said on Friday.

Israel and Hamas agreed to extend the humanitarian truce between both parties this week.

According to a senior US administration official, a further displacement of Gaza residents in the south would be beyond disruptive and beyond the capacity of any humanitarian network to support.

On Monday, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said Israel Defense Forces (IDF) operation in the Gaza Strip will be more intense after the end of the ceasefire with Hamas and will take place throughout the Palestinian enclave.

The minister added that Hamas will use the ceasefire to regroup and rest its forces, so the IDF will initially use air forces and artillery before resuming ground operations.

The conflict has so far resulted in the deaths of an estimated 1,300 people in Israel and over 16,000 in the Gaza Strip.

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UAE Resolution on Gaza Not Yet Circulated to UNSC Members in Final Form - Source

UNITED NATIONS, December 2 (Sputnik) - The UN Mission of the United Arab Emirates has prepared a new draft resolution on Gaza but the document has not been yet circulated in final form and the Council has not held consultations on it, a UN source told Sputnik.

"The UAE has not yet circulated its resolution in final form and has not held consultations on it. Let's see," the UN source said on Friday.

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Judge Denies Trump Bid to Dismiss Capitol Riot Charges Based on Immunity - Filing

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WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - US District Judge Tanya Chutkan dismissed former President Donald Trump's bid to dismiss charges against him in the federal election meddling case based on presidential immunity.

"The court will DENY Defendant's Motion to Dismiss Indictment Based on Presidential Immunity," Chutkan said in a document filed on Friday.

Trump was charged with four counts including conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding. The indictment is related to Trump's comments in the run up to January 6, 2021, when his supporters stormed the Capitol to prevent Congress from certifying Joe Biden's election victory.

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US Approves $2Bln Sale of Training, Equipment to Australia Under AUKUS Deal - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - The United States approved a $2 billion sale to provide Australia training and related- equipment under the AUKUS security pact, the Pentagon said in a press release.

" The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Australia of AUKUS-related Training and Training Devices and related equipment for an estimated cost of up to $2.0 billion," the release said on Friday.

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Disagreement on Ukraine Aid, Border Policy Could Delay Funding Bill in US Senate - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - Disagreements between US lawmakers on issues of Ukraine aid and border security could delay consideration of a multi-billion dollar supplemental funding request by the Biden administration, Bloomberg reported, citing several members of Congress.

Senators met throughout the week to negotiate a version of US President Joe Biden's $106 billion aid request that both Democratic and Republican lawmakers could support, the report said on Friday. Democrats are seeking to pass the aid request in its entirety, while Republicans are seeking to insert border security measures into the legislation.

The US House of Representatives also passed a standalone Israel aid bill, which the Senate rejected.

Lawmakers left Washington for the weekend without striking a deal on the aid or immigration, the report said. Republicans rejected concessions offered by Democrats, Senators Chris Coons and Chris Murphy reportedly said.

Democrats must accept that they will have to make significant border policy changes in order to secure Ukraine aid, Senator Tom Cotton also reportedly said.

The lack of progress in negotiations could push back consideration of the legislation in the US

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Senate until the week of December 11, the report said. US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer initially said that he planned to bring the bill up for consideration by the week of December 4.

The Biden administration will hold a briefing for members of Congress on December 5 to discuss the consequences of failing to support Ukraine, the report said. Lawmakers are increasingly considering attaching Ukraine aid to government funding measures, which must be passed by January 20 in order to avoid a government shutdown, the report said.

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Ex-Minneapolis Police Officer Stabbed 22 Times in Federal Prison - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - Former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin was stabbed 22 times during an attack in a federal prison last week in Arizona, CBS News reported.

The report said on Friday that the inmate who stabbed Chauvin told corrections officers he would kill the former police officer had they not stopped him immediately.

According to the report, the inmate stabbed Chauvin with an improvised knife.

Chauvin was hospitalized after the attack, but is in stable condition, the report.

The alleged attacker has been identified as 52-year-old John Turscak, who now faces charges of attempted murder, assault with intent to commit murder, assault with a dangerous weapon, and assault resulting in serious bodily injury.

Chauvin was convicted in connection to the death of George Floyd which sparked mass protests across the United States.

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Los Angeles Police Say Seeking Public's Help to Find Suspected Killer of Homeless People

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - Los Angeles Police Department Chief Michel Moore said during a press conference that investigators are seeking the public's assistance to find a suspect believed to have murdered three homeless people.

"We're here today to ask for the public's assistance in identifying an individual that we believe is responsible for a series of three homicides involving three individuals who were experiencing homelessness," Moore said on Friday.

Police believe that a single person shot and killed the three victims while they slept, Moore said. The murders occurred between November 26 and November 29, Moore said.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass said that the suspected killer is preying on the city's homeless population. Bass warned homeless people to avoid sleeping alone.

Investigators have gathered physical and video evidence, identifying the suspect as a possible male, Moore said. Police released images of the suspected killer and their vehicle.

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Police established a task force that will be working around the clock to solve the murders, Moore said.

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Blinken Calls For Iraq To Protect US Installations, Pursue Attackers on US Personnel

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shiaa al-Sudani, urging the Iraqi government to fulfill commitments in safeguarding US installations on Iraqi soil and to pursue those responsible for attacks on US personnel, Spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shiaa al-Sudani. The Secretary called on the Iraqi government to fulfill its commitments to protect all installations hosting US personnel at its invitation and to pursue those responsible for attacks on US personnel in Iraq," the statement said on Friday.

Furthermore, Blinken and the Prime Minister engaged in discussions concerning the Israel-Hamas conflict, emphasizing the need to prevent its escalation, the statement said.

"The Secretary discussed the humanitarian situation in Gaza and our work with Iraq and other partners in the region to identify the steps that we can take now to lay the foundation for a just and lasting peace," the statement added.

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Social Media Company X Says Pursuing Smaller Advertisers Amid Musk Controversies

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - Social media company X said in a statement that it is pursuing relationships with small and medium-sized advertisers, following backlash to controversial remarks by billionaire owner Elon Musk.

“Small and medium businesses are a very significant engine that we have definitely underplayed for a long time,” the statement said, as quoted by the Financial Times. “It [was] always part of the plan — now we will go even further with it.”

The statement comes after Musk told advertisers seeking to blackmail him with ad revenue to “go f*ck” themselves. Some advertisers suspended their activities on X after Musk was accused of promoting anti-Semitism on the platform.

X has already begun working with marketing company JumpCrew, which will focus on selling ad space to smaller businesses, the statement said.

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Falcon 9 Launches New South Korean Spy Satellite Into Orbit - SpaceX

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - A Falcon 9 booster successfully launched a spy satellite into earth orbit for South Korea from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, SpaceX announced in a live video podcast.

The Falcon 9 booster blasted off at 1:19 p.m. EST, SpaceX said on Friday.

The launch went smoothly and the second stage separated on schedule, SpaceX said.

This was the first launch of the $52 million Korea 425 mission that carried five top secret reconnaissance satellites for the South Korean Defense Acquisition Program Administration, with one satellite featuring an electro-optical infrared telescope, according to reports.

The other four synthetic aperture radar satellites are to be launched at a later date, the reports added.

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FBI Confirms Self-Immolation Incident at Israeli Consulate in Atlanta - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) confirmed its collaboration with the Atlanta Police in investigating a self-immolation incident outside the Israeli consulate in Atlanta, FBI Spokesperson told Sputnik.

"We can confirm this statement," FBI Spokesperson said on Friday.

According to reports, a protester carrying a Palestinian flag used gasoline in an act of self-immolation outside the Israeli consulate in Atlanta on Friday, resulting in injuries to both the protester and a security guard who attempted to intervene.

Furthermore, the protester, whose identity remains undisclosed, is in critical condition. The security guard suffered burns on his wrist and leg, the report said.

Authorities said that the incident is not an act of terrorism but rather an extreme political protest, the report added.

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Student Shot in US State of Vermont Says No Palestinian Should Prove Humanity to World

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - Tahseen Ali Ahmad, one of the three Palestinian students shot earlier in the US state of Vermont, said on Friday that no Palestinian should have to prove their humanity to the world, but should live enjoying full rights and dignity.

"My friends and I were shot while visiting family in Vermont for no other reason than the fact that we are Palestinian. The attacker who targeted us didn't see us as human beings. All he saw was our kuffiyehs and violently attacked us without a word," Ahmad said in a statement. "No Palestinian should have to prove their humanity to the world - we are human beings who

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deserve to live with our full rights and dignity."

On Saturday, Ahmad and two other students - Hisham Awartani and Kinnan Abdalhamid - were shot in the city of Burlington near the University of Vermont campus. The three were in Burlington to visit one of the students' relatives for the Thanksgiving holiday.

While all three students sustained wounds in the attack, one has reportedly been seriously wounded.

Police arrested on Sunday the suspected shooter, Jason Eaton, and the following day Eaton pleaded not guilty in court to three counts of attempted murder.

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Four Major US Navy Drydocks at Catastrophic Risk From Floods, Rising Seas - Report

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) - Four major US naval shipyards and drydock centers are at risk from flooding due to climate change and rising global sea levels, an official Department of Defense audit warned on Friday.

"The audit highlighted potential vulnerabilities in the master planning for environmental threats to dry docks and focused on actions to address changing sea levels and flooding at four naval shipyards located in Norfolk, Virginia; Pearl Harbor, Hawaii; Portsmouth, New Hampshire; and Puget Sound, Washington," the Defense Department said in a press release.

Inspector General Robert Storch announced earlier in the day that the Department of Defense Office of Inspector General released the "Audit of Environmental Threats to Naval Dry Docks."

"All four shipyards complied with Federal and [Defense Department] guidance regarding weather response plans and considerations for sea level change and flooding impacts. However, we found that three of the four installations lacked updated master plans to incorporate an installation resiliency component, a requirement introduced in 2020," the release said.

"The audit revealed that the naval shipyards were at increased risk of sustaining catastrophic damage from environmental threats due to lack of current, comprehensive master plans that include installation resilience components," Storch said.

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Venezuela Rejects ICJ Ruling on Guyana, Does Not Recognize Jurisdiction - Maduro

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said on Friday that Caracas took note of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on Guyana's appeal but that it does not recognize its jurisdiction on the matter.

In September, the Venezuelan parliament announced that it would hold a referendum on December 3 on the future of Guyana Esequiba - an oil- and minerals-rich disputed region

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controlled by Guyana and claimed by Caracas.

Guyana appealed to the ICJ to halt the referendum and demanded the United Nation's and CARICOM's assistance for what it considers to be an "existential threat."

Earlier on Friday, the ICJ ordered Venezuela to refrain from taking any action that could modify the existing situation in the long-standing territorial dispute with Guyana.

"The Venezuelan truth has prevailed, leaving behind the pretentions of the Guyanese government seeking to meddle in our fatherland's sovereign and constitutional act. We ratify our historical position of not recognizing the International Court of Justice as a mechanism to resolve the controversy of our Esequibo," Maduro said via X (formerly Twitter). "They will not be able to bend the right of the Venezuelan people of expressing themselves through a vote."

The Venezuelan government issued a statement saying there is no precedent in international law to allow the ICJ to meddle in Venezuela's internal affairs nor to prohibit or modify the conduct of the referendum.

Venezuela will go forward with the preparations for the consultative referendum and nobody would impede Venezuelans from expressing their opinion on such an important matter as territorial integrity, the statement said.

"Venezuela reiterates that it firmly maintains its unshakable defense of international law and the Geneva Agreements as sole legal instrument allowing reaching a practical and satisfactory solution for both parties, trough friendly, political, and pacific negotiations," the statement added.

In 1845, the Spanish Crown recognized the independence of Venezuela, which included the territory of Esequiba, following Venezuela's years-long struggle for freedom from Spain's colonial rule.

However, this situation changed in 1899 when the Paris Arbitration gave the territory to the United Kingdom - a claim Guyana inherited following its independence.

In 1966, Venezuela and British Guiana signed the Geneva Agreement to resolve the border conflict, but Guyana filed a lawsuit with the ICJ asking the court to recognize the 1899 Arbitral Award, which gave the country absolute control over the territory.

However, Venezuela has not ratified any of the interim protocols to the 1966 Geneva Agreement. Since 1983, Venezuela has offered Guyana direct talks on the issue, while the latter has insisted on resolving the dispute at the UN General Assembly, the UN Security Council or the International Court of Justice.

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UNSC Members Unanimously Lifted Arms Embargo on Somalia

UNITED NATIONS, December 2 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Security Council has voted in favor of lifting an arms embargo on Somalia on Friday afternoon.

The draft resolution has received 15 votes in favor.

The resolution states that the Security Council is: "highlighting its decision in this resolution to fully lift the arms embargo on the Federal Republic of Somalia …"

The document further notes to better clarify that "for the avoidance of doubt, that there is no

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arms embargo on the Government of the Federal Republic of Somalia."

The Russian Deputy Permanent Representative Anna Evstigneeva welcomed the decision of the Council and said that: "Russia has consistently spoken in favor of review of temporary sanctions regimes in the states of Africa as they impede the development of international law enforcement and security agencies."

Al-Shabaab is a Somalia-based jihadist militant group linked to al-Qaeda terrorist group (banned in Russia). It wages armed resistance against the Somali government and obstructs UN humanitarian missions in the country.

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UNSC Adopts Resolution to End UN Political Mission in Sudan - UN Council Meeting

UNITED NATIONS, December 1 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council on Friday adopted a resolution to end the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS).

The resolution, stipulates that the UNITAMS mission must end its activities and operations on December 4.

Fourteen of the UN Security Council's 15 members adopted the resolution, while Russia abstained.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) -

ISRAEL INVASION OF GAZA

* The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said on Friday that it struck Hamas targets throughout the Gaza Strip, including in Khan Yunis and Rafah.
* The death toll from Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip on Friday has exceeded 109, the Palestinian enclave's Health Ministry said.
* Israel assesses that its operation against Hamas will last one year or longer, Financial Times reported, citing sources familiar with the operation preparation plan.
* Hamas' military wing Al Qassam Brigades said that it has launched missiles at Tel Aviv in response to Israel killing more than 100 civilians in Gaza.
* Israeli fighter jets and artillery struck Hezbollah infrastructure in Lebanon, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

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* Ukraine has lost up to 300 soldiers - killed and injured - in the Donetsk direction over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Friday.
* Russia sees no reason to reconsider the set objectives of its special operation in Ukraine, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.
* Russia still sees no signals from Ukraine and its Western supporters on their readiness for political dialogue, Lavrov said.
* Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy continues to ask for more weapons and the Biden administration is willing to provide them, but Congress has not been supportive on this issue, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said.

GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS
* The average price of Russia's Urals oil amounted to $72.84 per barrel in November, while the Brent benchmark was trading at $83.12 per barrel, bringing the Russian oil's discount to $10.28 per barrel, the Russian Finance Ministry said on Friday.
* OPEC+ creates the conditions for maintaining balanced global oil prices and Russia will continue to work within this format, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.
* The Biden administration seeks to buy up to 3 million barrels of crude for the US oil reserve, for delivery in February, the US Energy Department said.

OSCE MEETING
* The early departure of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell from Macedonia, where the OSCE ministerial meeting was being held, shows their fear of dialogue, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Friday.
* The chances of preserving the OSCE have diminished as the West continues its failed policy of destroying the organization, Lavrov said.
* The OSCE chairman-in-office must ensure the participation of all delegations of member states rather than consider it a "privilege," Lavrov said.
* The general consensus principle at the OSCE will not work without consent of all member states, including Russia, OSCE Chairman-in-Office and Macedonian Foreign Minister Bujar Osmani said.

NEW SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA
* The United States imposed new Russia-related sanctions targeting three entities and three oil tankers, the US Treasury Department said on Friday.
* The sanctions implemented on Russia will last for many years and the United States will continue to put pressure on the country and on the entire system of international trade and economic relations, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

CHANGES IN RUSSIAN MILITARY
* Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a decree on the maximum number of people employed in the country's armed forces, setting the number at 2,209,130, the Kremlin said on Friday.
* The size of the Russian armed forces has been increased by 170,000 and reached 1,320,000, the Defense Ministry said.

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* More than 450,000 Russians have joined the armed forces since the beginning of 2023, Security Council Deputy Chairman Dmitry Medvedev said.

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UNSC President Says December 7 Debates Will Build on Legacy of Latin American Presidencies

UNITED NATIONS, December 1 (Sputnik) - UN Security Council President Jose de la Gasca, an ambassador from Ecuador, said open debates on December 7 will build on the legacy of previous Latin American and Caribbean presidencies and will focus on international security and transnational crime.

"We will have a signature debate on threats to international peace and security, transnational organized crime, [and] growing challenges and new threats," De La Gasca said on Friday.

The two open debates on December 7, he added, will build on the legacy of various Latin American and Caribbean countries that have taken the presidency before.

Ecuadoran Foreign Affairs Minister Gustavo Manrique Miranda will be joining the December 7 debates in New York to represent Ecuador, he said.

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Pentagon Watchdog Says Conducted 60 Audits, Provided 298 Recommendations Since April

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The US Defense Department Office of Inspector General (OIG) released a report on Friday, providing details to lawmakers on the watchdog's activities from April to September 2023.

"Overall, our oversight of the DoD during the reporting period resulted in a total of 60 audit and evaluation reports and management advisories that made 298 recommendations to the DoD for improvements in a broad range of programs and operations," the OIG said in a semi-annual report to the US Congress.

The OIG's Audit and Evaluations Components issued 13 reports and advisories related to the United States' support for Ukraine. The OIG identified concerns about unanticipated maintenance and repair of equipment provided to Ukraine potentially leading to future delays for their armed forces, the report said.

The OIG also found that there were not enough trained personnel engaging in end-use monitoring or equipment sent to Ukraine, the report said.

The OIG also conducted two senior official investigations and oversaw 177 senior official misconduct, whistleblower reprisal and servicemember restriction probes, in addition to the audit work, the report said.

The OIG encountered difficulties with timely responses from the Defense Department,

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specifically as it relates to the provision of information and security reviews, the report added.

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US Approves Potential $271Mln Sale of F-35 Munitions to South Korea - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) – The State Department has approved a potential $271 million sale of F-35 munitions and related equipment to South Korea, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Friday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Republic of Korea of F-35 Munitions and related equipment for an estimated cost of $271 million. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency delivered the required certification notifying Congress of this possible sale today," the DSCA said in a statement.

The Korean government has requested to buy a large amount of munitions and equipment, including 39 AIM-120C-8 Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AMRAAM), 2 AIM-120C-8 AMRAAM Guidance Sections, 88 KMU-556 Tail Kits for the GBU-31v1 Joint Direct-Attack Munition (JDAM), 86 Mk-84 General Purpose (GP) 2000-lb bombs for the GBU-31v1 JDAM, 70 KMU-557 Tail Kits for the GBU- 31v3 JDAM, 70 BLU-109C/B 2000-lb bombs for the GBU-31v3 JDAM, according to the statement.

The DSCA said that the proposed sale will support US foreign policy and national security goals and improve the security of its major ally in the Indo-Pacific region.

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US Shipped 100 BLU-109 Bunker Buster Bombs to Help Israel Fight Hamas - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The United States has delivered 100 units of 2,000-pound BLU-109 bunker buster bombs among thousands of other ammunition and weapons systems to Israel in the war against the Palestinian movement Hamas in the Gaza Strip, the Wall Street Journal reported on Friday.

Among the nearly 15,000 bombs and 57,000 artillery shells delivered to the Israeli military following Hamas' attack on Israel on October 7, the United States has also transferred 100 BLU-109 bunker buster bombs, the report said, citing US officials.

The BLU-109 bomb, created to cause maximum damage, carries a 2,000-pound warhead capable of penetrating concrete shelters, the report said.

Israel could use such bunker buster bombs to penetrate Hamas' vast network of underground tunnels and installations.

However, several security analysts have pointed out that the delivery of such bombs to Israel is inconsistent with the calls made by senior US officials, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken, to protect civilians and minimize human loss of life, the report said.

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Although there might be legitimate grounds to use the bunker buster bombs, there is a significant threat to civilians in and near major refugee camps inhabited by thousands of displaced Palestinians above the tunnels, the report said.

Proceeding to use such bombs would require factoring in the potential harm to civilians, the report added.

Earlier on Friday, Israel resumed military operations against Hamas in Gaza after nearly a week of a humanitarian pause in hostilities during which time the sides released Israeli and other hostages and Palestinians held in Israeli prisons.

More than 16,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's invasion and indiscriminate bombardment of Gaza and more than 36,000 others have been wounded since Hamas attacked Israel on October 7. Some 1,200 Israelis were killed in Hamas' attack.

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US Prepared to Take Action Soon to Pause Certain Sanctions Relief for Venezuela – Kirby

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) – The United States stands prepared to take action soon to pause certain sanctions relief for Venezuela if it does not see progress on the release of wrongfully detained US citizens and Venezuelan political prisoners, US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said on Friday.

"We are, however, deeply concerned about the lack of progress on the release of wrongfully detained US citizens and Venezuelan political prisoners. So, we're going to continue to be actively engaged here in diplomatic efforts and on those particular issues, and we are prepared to take action in the coming days to pause certain sanctions relief unless further progress is made," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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US Adds to Oil Reserve Refill As Falling Crude Prices Encourage Buying

(Changes headline; adds details, context and comment in paragraphs 3-11)

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration seeks to buy up 3 million barrels of crude for the US oil reserve, for delivery in February, the Energy Department (DEO) announced on Friday as falling crude prices seemed to encourage the government to refill the heavily-drawn reserve.

The DoE "has a requirement to conduct a purchase of up to three (3) million barrels of United States produced sour crude oil for February 2024 delivery," a statement released on Friday said.

US oil companies will also return 4 million barrels to the so-called Strategic Petroleum Reserve, or SPR, by February under a use-and-return program. The return of the 4 million barrels has been expedited from an original timing scheduled in the summer, the DoE said.

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The Biden administration has announced various installments of crude purchases in recent months, aimed at refilling the SPR, which saw outflows totaling more than 200 million barrels over the past two years.

Crude prices have fallen without stop over the past six weeks amid weak seasonal demand and an apparent lack of will among several countries in the OPEC+ oil producing alliance to add to production cuts that would bolster the market. As of Friday, Brent, the global benchmark for crude prices, fell to below $79 a barrel from a mid-October peak of $93.79, losing almost 15% over the past five weeks.

OPEC+ producers, led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, agreed Thursday to remove around 2.2 million barrels per day from the global market in the first quarter of next year, with the amount including a rollover of existing Saudi and Russian monthly cuts of 1.3 million barrels per. The market, however, viewed the announcement with skepticism, said OANDA analyst Craig Erlam.

"[It] seems traders either aren't buying [the OPEC+ pledge] that members will be compliant or don't view it as being sufficient," Erlam said.

The Biden administration leaned heavily on the SPR between late 2021 and early this year to offset tight crude supplies that had raised fuel costs for Americans. As of last month, the SPR's crude balance was at its lowest since November 1983 after the release of about 200 million barrels or more over the past 18 months.

The administration's use of the SPR has, however, been a highly-charged matter for oil bulls and Biden's political opponents. Both sides accuse him of indiscriminately releasing hundreds of millions of barrels from the stockpile to subdue crude prices and shore up his political standing with American voters - when the reserve is meant for emergency use, in times of critically short oil supply.

Biden and the Democrats are up for reelection in November 2024.

Biden, in his defense, had said he was only acting to reduce record high pump prices of fuel, which stood at above $5 per gallon last June and fallen since to around $3.50. The administration had also blamed last year's high crude oil prices for US inflation getting to four-decade highs of above 9% in June 2020.

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Israel to Allow Humanitarian Trucks Into Gaza at US Request – Kirby

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - Israel is going to allow trucks with humanitarian aid to cross into Gaza again at the request of the United States, but their number will be significantly reduced, US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Friday.

"It looks like a spokesman for the Israelis has now said that the trucks were going to be allowed into Gaza at our request and certainly with the approval of their government, and they stressed that all the trucks going in, of course, had to be done with this inspection regime in Israel before entering Gaza," Kirby said during a press briefing. "Looks like we are gonna be able to resume it probably in terms of dozens of trucks versus hundreds of trucks [per day]."

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US Does Not Support Reduction in Geographical Limits of Gaza - White House

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The United States does not support Israel's proposed buffer zone on the Palestinian side of the Gaza border, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Friday.

Media reported earlier in the day that Israel informed several Arab states it wants to carve out a buffer zone on the Palestinian side of the Gaza border after the war ends.

"We don't support a reduction in the geographical limits of Gaza," Kirby said during a press briefing when asked about the report.

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White House Says Can't Confirm Reports US Imposing Visa Bans on Extremist Israeli Settlers

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The White House cannot confirm reports that Washington is set to impose sanctions against extremist Israeli settlers although the Biden administration is looking at taking such steps, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Friday

"I am not able to confirm that reporting - I'd refer you to the State Department," Kirby said during a press briefing. "The only thing I would add... it's something that we are looking at."

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Ukraine Wants More Weapons, US Wants to Provide Them But Congress Not Helpful - Kirby

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy continues to ask for more weapons and the Biden administration is willing to provide them, but Congress has not been supportive on this issue, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Friday.

"We all understand President Zelenskyy's desire for more weapons … of course, he wants more," Kirby said during a press briefing.

The Biden administration wants to provide more weapons, but needs support to make that happen and if it does not get support from Congress, it may not be able to move forward, Kirby added.

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US Seeks to Buy Up To 3Mln Barrels for Oil Reserve for February Delivery - Energy Dept

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration seeks to buy up to 3 million barrels of crude for the US oil reserve, for delivery in February, the Energy Department announced on Friday as falling crude prices seemed to encourage the government to refill the heavily-drawn reserve.

The Energy Department "has a requirement to conduct a purchase of up to three (3) million barrels of United States produced sour crude oil for February 2024 delivery," a statement released by the department said.

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US Working With Israel, Egypt, Qatar to Restore Humanitarian Pause in Gaza – Kirby

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) – The United States is working with Israel, Egypt, and Qatar to restore the humanitarian pause in Gaza and considers Hamas to blame for the pause ending, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Friday.

"We continue to work with Israel, Egypt, and Qatar on efforts to restore the humanitarian pause in Gaza, but let's be clear about this, it's because of Hamas that this pause ended that they were just simply unable, failed to produce a list of hostages that could enable that pause to be extended," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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UN Urges Israel, Hamas Not to Renew Fighting in Gaza - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, December 1 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is calling on Israel and Hamas not to resume military operations in the Gaza Strip as such actions will worsen the already dire humanitarian situation, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Friday.

"We appeal to the parties not to resort to further military action that can only make the already catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza worse and to spare civilians from more suffering," Dujarric said during a press briefing.

Earlier on Friday, Israel resumed military operations against Hamas in Gaza after nearly a week of a humanitarian pause in hostilities during which time the sides released Israeli and other hostages and Palestinians held in Israeli prisons.

Dujarric said UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has expressed frustration over the

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resumption of hostilities in Gaza and urged the parties to swiftly find a way to resume the humanitarian pause while reaffirming his call for a ceasefire.

Israel has placed Gaza under a full blockade, cutting off supplies food, water, medicines, electricity and fuel, while undertaking a ground invasion in the Palestinian enclave.

More than 16,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's invasion and indiscriminate bombardment of Gaza and more than 36,000 others wounded since Hamas attacked Israel on October 7. Some 1,200 Israelis were killed in Hamas' attack.

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UN Informed About Israel's Denial to Extend Visa of UN Special Coordinator

UNITED NATIONS, December 1 (Sputnik) -The United Nations was informed about the decision of the Israeli government to not to renew visa of Lynn Hastings who is the Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, UN Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Friday.

"Yes, we've been informed by the Israeli authorities that they would not renew the visa of Ms Hastings past this due date at some point later this month," Dujarric told a briefing.

As a matter of policy, UN people don't overstay their visas anywhere around the world, he added.

On October 7, Hamas launched a large-scale rocket attack against Israel from the Gaza Strip and breached the border, killing around 1,200 people and abducting some 240 others. Israel launched retaliatory strikes, ordered a complete blockade of Gaza and launched a large-scale ground incursion into the Palestinian enclave with the declared aim of defeating Hamas and freeing the hostages. The conflict has so far resulted in the deaths of over 16,000 people in the Gaza Strip.

Last week, 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 has been extended several times since then and expired this Friday morning. According to Israeli authorities, Hamas has released 110 hostages so far and still holds at least 137 others.

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Seymour Hersh Says Peace Talks Underway Between Russian, Ukrainian Military Commanders

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) – Renowned US journalist Seymour Hersh wrote in a new article that peace negotiations between the top Russian and Ukrainian generals Valery Gerasimov and Valerii Zaluzhnyi have been underway, and could potentially secure Crimea and another four former regions of Ukraine as part of Russia.

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The potential peace deal would also entail Moscow agreeing to Ukraine's accession to NATO provided that alliance troops are not based on its territory and only defensive weapons systems are placed there, according to Hersh.

The understanding on both sides is that the continuation of the conflict does not make sense and that Russian President Vladimir Putin would not be against an agreement that fixes borders according to where the troops are in place when the peace talks finish, according to Hersh and his sources.

"This was not a spur-of-the-moment event," Hersh quoted a US official involved in the general-to-general talks as saying. "This was carefully orchestrated by Zaluzhny. The message was the war is over and we want out. To continue it would destroy the next generation of the citizens of Ukraine."

The Biden administration, however, strongly opposes the peace deal, which is currently on Volodymyr Zelenskyy's table, who remains as the "wild card" in the situation, but who also has been allegedly told that "this is a military-to-military problem to solve and the talks will go on with or without you," the US official said.

"The White House is totally against the proposed agreement," the official said. "But it will happen. Putin has not disagreed."

Zelenskyy has repeatedly refused to negotiate with Russia on any peace agreements. Putin has said on many occasions that Moscow has never given up on peace talks with Ukraine.

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US Judge Says Montana TikTok Ban Likely Violates Rights, Halts Enforcement of Law

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - A law in the US state of Montana slated to block access to social media platform TikTok likely infringes on constitutional rights, a federal judge said in a court order halting enforcement of the restrictions.

The order, signed Thursday by US District Judge Donald Molloy, granted a motion to temporarily block enforcement of the state law.

Earlier this year, Montana Governor Greg Gianforte signed a law imposing penalties on application stores that offered access to TikTok, which was set to start on January 1, 2024. However, TikTok challenged the state law in court.

"Despite the State's attempt to defend [the legislation] as a consumer protection bill, the current record leaves little doubt that Montana's legislature and Attorney General were more interested in targeting China's ostensible role in TikTok than with protecting Montana consumers," the court order said.

Montana has not demonstrated how the law would protect consumers in the state, the order said. The law oversteps state power and infringes on the constitutional rights of users and businesses, the order said.

The law limits speech with protections under the First Amendment of the US Constitution, the order said. The law must at least pass intermediate scrutiny review, although the plaintiffs have demonstrated that it is unlikely able to do so, the order said.

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The order enjoins the enforcement of the law until a final decision is made in the case.

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Iran Proxies Putting Pressure on US, Israel Amid Mideast Unrest - Official

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The United States assesses that Iran-backed proxy forces are placing pressure on the United States and Israel amid unrest in the Middle East, a US official told Sputnik on Friday.

Attacks against US forces in Syria and Iraq spiked after Israel launched a military operation against Hamas in Gaza in mid-October.

"It is true, Iran continues to put pressure on Israel and the United States through its proxy forces," the official said.

Since October, "Iranian-backed" militias have used drones and rockets to conduct multiple attacks against US forces at al-Asad Air Base in Iraq, al-Harir Air Base in Iraqi Kurdistan, al-Tanf garrison in Syria and the US base at the Conoco natural gas field in Syria.

The attacks against US forces in the Mideast slowed after Israel and Hamas agreed to a humanitarian truce designed to facilitate the release of hostages in the conflict.

Israel intends to resume military operations in southern Gaza soon, but the United States has emphasized that Israel cannot replicate the level of displacement that took place in northern Gaza.

According to a senior US administration official, a further displacement of Gaza residents in the south would be beyond disruptive and beyond the capacity of any humanitarian network to support.

On Monday, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said Israel Defense Forces (IDF) operation in the Gaza Strip will be more intense after the end of the ceasefire with Hamas and will take place throughout the Palestinian enclave.

The minister added that Hamas will use the ceasefire to regroup and rest its forces, so the IDF will initially use air forces and artillery before resuming ground operations.

The conflict has so far resulted in the deaths of an estimated 1,300 people in Israel and over 16,000 in the Gaza Strip.

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UPDATE - US Appeals Court Says Trump Can't Claim Presidential Immunity Over January 6 Riot - Order

(Modifies lede, adds new quote in para 3, adds details in paras 3-6)

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump cannot claim presidential immunity and can be sued for his alleged role in the January 6 Capitol riot, the

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United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit ruled on Friday.

In its ruling, the court rejected Trump's attempt to dismiss civil lawsuits against him on the basis of presidential immunity, saying he was not acting in his official capacity as president, but rather as a presidential candidate when he delivered his January 6 speech to his supporters. Several lawsuits have alleged that his speech incited the ensuing riot.

"When he [The President] acts in an unofficial, private capacity, he is subject to civil suits like any private citizen," the court said in its ruling.

The court said that the plaintiffs, who include Capitol Police officers and members of Congress present at the Capitol on that day, can seek civil damages for alleged harms arising from the riot.

“The plaintiffs contend that, during President Trump’s final months in office, he conspired with political allies and supporters to obtain a second term despite his defeat in the 2020 election. He allegedly advanced that cause before January 6 by repeatedly making false claims that the election might be (and then had been) stolen, filing meritless lawsuits challenging the election results, and pressuring state and local officials to reverse the election outcomes in their jurisdictions," the ruling stated.

The ruling was focused on determining whether Trump had successfully substantiated his claim to immunity, and left the door open for him to try to prove in district court that he was acting in his capacity as president, rather than his unofficial capacity as an office-seeker.

"The sole issue before us is whether President Trump has demonstrated an entitlement to official-act immunity for his actions leading up to and on January 6 as alleged in the complaints," the court said in its ruling. "We answer no, at least at this stage of the proceedings. When a first-term President opts to seek a second term, his campaign to win re-election is not an official presidential act."

On January 6, 2021, after Trump's election defeat, a mob of his supporters breached the US Capitol in an attempt to halt Congress's Electoral College vote count. Since the riot, charges have been filed against over 1,200 individuals for crimes related to the breach of the Capitol.

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Fed Will Raise Rates Again If Needed, Premature To Say Tightening Over - Powell

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve will continue raising interest rates if needed as its 11 rate hikes over the past two years haven’t returned inflation to desired levels, making it premature to say monetary tightening by the central bank is over, Chairman Jerome Powell said Friday.

“Over the six months ending in October, core inflation ran at an annual rate of 2.5 percent, and while the lower inflation readings of the past few months are welcome, that progress must continue if we are to reach our 2 percent objective,” Powell said in a live-streamed speech on monetary policy. “It would be premature to conclude with confidence that we have achieved a sufficiently restrictive stance, or to speculate on when policy might ease. We are prepared to tighten policy further if it becomes appropriate to do so.”

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An inflation indicator closely followed by the Federal Reserve grew at an annual rate of 3% for October, nearing the central bank's 2% target as it slowed from September's 3.4% expansion, data showed Thursday.

The so-called Personal Consumption Expenditures, or PCE, Index was also flat on the month at 0.0%, down from an uptick of 0.4% in the prior month. Economists expected readings of 3.0% year-on-year and 0.1% month-on-month for the two measures.

The inflation data could help determine how Fed officials will calibrate interest rates in an upcoming policy decision on December 20, as well as in coming months.

The central bank's policy-making Federal Open Market Committee, or FOMC, is widely tipped to leave rates at a range of 5.25% to 5.50% at next month's decision, although some policymakers say a hike might be needed to bring the Fed closer to its inflation target. Others, meanwhile, are clamoring for a rate cut.

"The data will tell the Fed if it has done enough or needs to do more," Powell said. "Inflation still well above target but moving in the right direction. The Fed does not need to be in a rush now; we are getting what we wanted to get."

The possibility of the US economy averting a recession has been one of the most keenly debated issues over the past two years as the Fed carried out some of the most aggressive interest rate hikes in its history to tame runaway inflation in the aftermath of the 2020 coronavirus outbreak.

Since March 2022, the Fed has boosted rates 11 times, increasing its benchmark rate from a mere 0.25% to 5.5% per annum — the highest level in 22 years.

"The strong actions we have taken have moved our policy rate well into restrictive territory, meaning that tight monetary policy is putting downward pressure on economic activity and inflation," Powell said in Friday's speech. "Monetary policy is thought to affect economic conditions with a lag, and the full effects of our tightening have likely not yet been felt."

But Powell also said the FOMC had to exercise caution in ensuring that policy did not get too tight to extent that a hard-landing for the economy became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

"Having come so far so quickly, the FOMC is moving forward carefully, as the risks of under- and over-tightening are becoming more balanced," Powell said, referring to the narrowing of inflation from a 40-year high of more than 9% in June 2022 to current levels of around 3%.

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Unraveling Kissinger's Work Led to Lack of Trust Among US and Russia - Ex-Official

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - Neoconservatives from recent US administrations unraveled important diplomatic work done by the late Henry Kissinger and his colleagues, resulting in the lack of trust that currently exists between Russia and the United States, former US Assistant Treasury Secretary Paul Craig Roberts told Sputnik.

Kissinger, known for his contributions to contemporary political discourse and the field of international relations, died on Wednesday at his home in the US state of Connecticut at the age of 100.

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"The consequence of unraveling the work of [Richard] Nixon, Kissinger, and [Ronald] Reagan is the total lack of trust today between the US and Russia," Roberts, who served as a senior Treasury official during the Reagan administration, said.

According to Roberts, Kissinger left the world temporarily altered for the better after seeing neoconservatives in the Clinton, George W. Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations "wipe out" his accomplishments.

The former Treasury official pointed out that the Clinton administration violated the pledge made by President George H.W. Bush's administration that in exchange for the Soviet Union permitting the reunification of Germany, the United States would not move NATO one inch toward the East.

Nixon and Kissinger's work to defuse the Cold War were unrivaled until President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev ended the Cold war, Roberts said.

"All subsequent US regimes exited from all of the arms agreements that had reduced tensions and created a bond of trust between the nuclear superpowers," Roberts said. "This bond is especially important, because of the numerous false warnings from warning systems."

Roberts mentioned that conservative presidents such as presidents Nixon and Reagan faced challenges in easing tensions with Russia from their conservative base, who viewed those efforts with suspicion.

"I well remember that Reagan's efforts at detente with the Soviet Union were suspected by Reagan's conservative base," Roberts said. "Conservatives worried that a former movie star was not a match for cunning communists, and that America would come out the loser."

However, Roberts underscored that Reagan's goal was to end the Cold War, not win it.

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RPT - Five Senators Ask Biden to Restrict Travel Between US, China Due to Respiratory Illness

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - A group of five US senators on Friday sent a letter to President Joe Biden asking him to immediately restrict travel between the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) in response to the spread of an unknown respiratory illness in the latter.

"At this moment, the world faces another unknown pathogen emanating from the PRC that could spread to other countries, including the United States," the letter said. "In light of an unknown respiratory illness spreading throughout the…PRC, we call on you to immediately restrict travel between the United States and the PRC."

US senators Marco Rubio, J.D. Vance, Rick Scott, Tommy Tuberville and Mike Braun signed the letter.

Earlier this week, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said that it is safe to travel to China and conduct business in the country despite media reports of a spike in respiratory infections.

In mid-October, China's National Health Commission reported a spike in respiratory illnesses in the country. Last week, media reported undiagnosed pneumonia among children in northern

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China.

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White House Violated US Hatch Act by Referencing 'MAGA' Republicans - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The White House has violated a US federal law - known as the Hatch Act - that restricts public officials from participating in political campaign activities by making reference to so-called "MAGA" Republicans, NBC News reported on Friday.

MAGA stands for "make America great again" and was a slogan popularized by former President Donald Trump.

White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre and deputy spokesperson Andrew Bates violated the Hatch Act by using the MAGA label linked to Trump, the report said, citing an Office of Special Counsel (OSC) letter.

Earlier this year, OSC advised federal employees against using the campaign slogan but the White House continued to use the term after OSC issued the guidance, the report said.

Jean-Pierre and Bates both issued memorandums featuring the term MAGA in the days following the release of the OSC guidance, the report said.

The two White House officials acted contrary to the guidance, but OSC chose not to pursue disciplinary actions, the report added.

OSC said it has not seen the term being used officially since the memorandums were issued in June, but it continues to monitor the situation for any violations, according to the report.

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Fiver Senators Ask Biden to Restrict Travel Between US, China Due to Respiratory Illness

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New US Sanctions on Russia Target 3 Entities, 3 Oil Tankers – Treasury

(Updates with paras 2, 4-7)
WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) – The United States imposed new Russia-related sanctions on Friday targeting three entities and three oil tankers, the US Department of the Treasury said.
"Today, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) is imposing sanctions on three entities and identifying as blocked property three vessels that used Price Cap Coalition services while carrying Russian crude oil above the Coalition-agreed price cap," the statement said.
The sanctions were imposed on Liberia-based HS Atlantica Limited, UAE-based Sterling Shipping Incorporated, and UAE-based Streymoy Shipping Limited. The sanctioned tankers are HS ATLANTICA (5LIP5), NS CHAMPION (A8FD9), and VIKTOR BAKAEV (D5BN6).
"By targeting these companies and their ships, we are upholding the dual goals of the price cap by restricting Russia's profits from oil while promoting stable global energy markets," Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Wally Adeyemo said.
In a separate statement, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said the US and partners are committed to restricting oil revenues that Russia can use, and to maintaining supplies to the global energy market.
In December 2022, the Group of Seven (G7) countries, Australia and the European Union imposed a price cap of $60 per barrel on Russian crude oil transported by sea. Russia responded by prohibiting selling its oil to countries supporting the price cap.
In September, US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen said that the cap was not working as well as expected. Yellen attributed the failure to Russia allegedly expanding its "shadow fleet" to ensure oil exports.

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ICJ Orders Venezuela to Refrain From Any Action to Modify Situation in Dispute With Guyana

(Adds background in paras 2, 4-7)
WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) – The International Court of Justice (ICJ) on Friday ordered that Venezuela refrain from taking any action that could modify the existing situation in the long-standing territorial dispute with Guyana.
In September, the Venezuelan parliament announced it would hold a referendum on December

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3 on the future of Guyana Esequiba, an oil- and minerals-rich disputed region controlled by Guyana and claimed by Caracas. In response, the Guyanese government appealed to the ICJ to halt the referendum and demanded the UN's and CARICOM's assistance for what it considers to be an "existential threat" to the country.

"The Bolivarian republic of Venezuela shall refrain from taking any action, which would modify the situation that currently prevails in the territory in dispute, whereby the cooperative Republic of Guyana administers and exercises control over that area," the ICJ order said.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said earlier on Friday no one would be allowed to steal what belongs to Venezuela, stressing that Esequiba would be defended.

In 1845, the Spanish Crown recognized the independence of Venezuela, which included the territory of Esequiba, following Venezuela's years-long struggle for freedom from Spain's colonial rule. This changed in 1899 when the Paris Arbitration gave the territory to the United Kingdom, a claim Guyana inherited following its independence.

In 1966, Venezuela and British Guiana signed the Geneva Agreement to resolve the conflict over the border, but Guyana filed a lawsuit with the ICJ asking the court to recognize the 1899 Arbitral Award, which gave the country absolute control over the territory.

However, Caracas has not ratified any of the interim protocols to the 1966 Geneva Agreement. Since 1983, Venezuela has been offering Guyana to engage in direct talks on the issue, while the latter insists on resolving the dispute at the UN General Assembly, the UN Security Council, or the International Court of Justice.

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US House of Representatives Expels Congressman Santos Following Ethics Panel Probe

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives on Friday passed a resolution to expel Congressman George Santos from the lower chamber of Congress, after a House Ethics Committee probe determined that there was substantial evidence of the lawmaker breaking federal law.

House lawmakers passed a resolution to expel Santos in a vote of 311-114. More than 100 Republicans voted alongside most Democrats to expel Santos. Two Democrats voted present and two others voted against expelling Santos.

Last month, the House Ethics Committee concluded a probe into allegations of criminal misconduct by Santos, which found substantial evidence of wrongdoing. The panel determined that Santos' conduct discredited the House of Representatives and warrants public condemnation.

Santos also faces criminal charges related to his alleged misconduct. Some House Republicans expressed concerns that expelling Santos could set a poor precedent, since members are not typically expelled until after conviction in court.

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

Rapprochement With China Kissinger's Most Lasting Achievement - Former Virginia Senator

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The United States' rapprochement with China is the most lasting achievement of the late Henry Kissinger - former US secretary of state - as it helped enrich the entire world, former Virginia State Senator Richard Black told Sputnik.

"The most lasting achievement of [former US President Richard] Nixon and Kissinger was rapprochement with China," Black said. "By 1972, the United States had successfully isolated the People's Republic of China from the world for 22 years. In a bold stroke of genius, Nixon and Kissinger broke the isolation, freeing all nations to recognize and trade with China."

Black said the politically courageous action eventually "helped enrich the entire world while enabling hundreds of millions of Chinese to lift themselves from lives of grinding poverty."

Kissinger died on Wednesday at his home in the US state of Connecticut at the age of 100.

Black pointed out that Kissinger made his mark as national security advisor for President Nixon and his career benefited greatly from Nixon's seldom-acknowledged brilliance in foreign affairs.

"President Nixon was comfortable putting Kissinger out front, and they made a powerful team together. In the end, their greatest foes were not the communists abroad, but the leftists at home in the increasingly radical Democratic Party of the late 60s," he said.

Black also said that Nixon and Kissinger struggled to extricate the United States from Vietnam without damaging US prestige or harming its allies, the South Vietnamese.

"Only after the Democrat-dominated media exaggerated a petty break-in in what became the 'Watergate scandal,' were his opponents able to block Nixon from achieving an acceptable peace deal with North Vietnam," Black said. "For as soon Nixon was deposed, Democrats slashed all funding for the increasingly confident and successful South Vietnamese Army. Completely deprived of supplies and ammunition, the situation for South Vietnam became hopeless. The South soon fell to the North."

Black said it is ironic that two Democrat presidents - John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson - launched and expanded the major war in Vietnam.

"But when Nixon, who was elected to end the war, had almost succeeded in doing so, it was the resurgent Democrats who deliberately collapsed the entire war effort to ensure that Republicans were denied credit for ending the long, bloody, and ill-conceived war that the Democrats themselves had foolishly initiated," Black added.

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US Appeals Court Says Trump Can't Claim Presidential Immunity Over January 6 Riot - Order

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - The United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit ruled on Friday that former President Donald Trump cannot claim presidential immunity in connection with the January 6 Capitol riot.

"These causes came on to be heard on the record on appeal from the United States District

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Court for the District of Columbia and were argued by counsel. On consideration thereof, it is ORDERED and ADJUDGED that the District Court's denial of Appellant's [Trump] motion to dismiss the claims against him on the grounds of presidential immunity be affirmed, in accordance with the opinion of the court filed herein this date," the order said.

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Retired US Supreme Court Associate Justice Sandra Day O'Connor Dies at 93 - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman to serve as justice on the US Supreme Court, died at the age of 93 from complications of advanced dementia and respiratory illness, the Supreme Court said in a statement on Friday.
"Retired Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States Sandra Day O'Connor died this morning in Phoenix, Arizona, of complications related to advanced dementia, probably Alzheimer's, and a respiratory illness. She was 93 years old," the statement said.
O'Connor became a justice at the Supreme Court in September 1981 after being nominated by then-President Ronald Reagan.
O'Connor retired in January 2006 having served more than 24 years on the bench, the statement added.

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New US Sanctions on Russia Target 3 Entities, 3 Oil Tankers - Treasury

WASHINGTON, December 2 (Sputnik) – The United States imposed new Russia-related sanctions on Friday targeting three entities and three oil tankers, the US Department of the Treasury said.
The sanctions were imposed on Liberia-based HS Atlantica Limited, UAE-based Sterling Shipping Incorporated, and UAE-based Streymoy Shipping Limited. The sanctioned tankers are HS ATLANTICA (5LIP5), NS CHAMPION (A8FD9), and VIKTOR BAKAEV (D5BN6).

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US Proposes Rules to Rein in Chinese Influence on Electric Vehicle Supply Chain – Treasury

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) – The United States proposed rules on Friday to promote the domestic electric vehicle supply chain and rein in the influence of China and other non-allied countries in the burgeoning industry, according to a Treasury release.

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"Today's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NRPM) provides clarity and certainty around the IRA's foreign entity of concern (FEOC) requirements. To strengthen the security of America's supply chains, beginning in 2024, an eligible clean vehicle may not contain any battery components that are manufactured or assembled by a FEOC, and, beginning in 2025, an eligible clean vehicle may not contain any critical minerals that were extracted, processed, or recycled by a FEOC," the release stated.

According to a federal registry notice, the "covered nations" under the FEOC include China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran.

Eligibility refers to the full manufacturing subsidies that were passed by Congress last year in the Inflation Reduction Act. The proposed rules would also require manufacturers to conduct extensive due diligence to ensure compliance.

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Accepting Gaza Children's Sacrifice Tantamount to Humanity Giving Up - UNICEF

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) - Any acceptance of the Gaza children's sacrifice would be tantamount to humanity giving up, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) spokesperson James Elder said on Friday after Israel resumed military operations in the Gaza Strip.

"It is reckless to think more attacks on the people of Gaza will lead to anything other than carnage. And yet, there were three or four large blasts nearby while I was there," Elder said. "To accept the sacrifice of the children in Gaza is humanity giving up. This is our last chance, before we delve into seeking to explain yet another utterly avoidable tragedy."

Earlier on Friday, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said they resumed military operations in Gaza, claiming that the Palestinian movement Hamas violated the humanitarian pause by opening fire on Israeli territory. The IDF said it struck more than 200 targets throughout Gaza, including in Khan Yunis and Rafah.

Elder said the humanitarian situation in Gaza is so perilous that anything other than sustained peace and at scale emergency aid will mean catastrophe for the children there.

Elder characterized the situation regarding health, nutrition, water and sanitation as being "dire" and emphasized that it threatens "a disaster of unparalleled magnitude for the children of Gaza."

In fact, the health, nutrition and sanitation situation has been deteriorating daily despite the humanitarian efforts over the past week, Elder said.

"Surely, any conversation around Gaza has to begin with empathy. It's deeply unsettling to hear how some have been able to overlook the tragic deaths of these children and now, today, are seemingly comfortable with the horrors - the attacks - starting again," Elder added.

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Over Quarter of Canadians Aged 15 and Older Have Disabilities - StatCan

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) – Twenty-seven percent of Canadians aged 15 and older are affected by one or several disabilities hampering their daily activities, Statistics Canada said on Friday.

The survey considered several types of disabilities. Among several afflictions are those related to pain and mental health, learning, mobility, and flexibility.

"New findings from the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) showed that 27% of Canadians aged 15 years and older, or 8.0 million people, had one or more disabilities that limited them in their daily activities," StatCan said. "The rate of disability in Canada has increased by 5 percentage points since 2017, when 22% of Canadians, or 6.2 million people, had one or more disabilities."

The statistics agency partially attributed the 5% increase to the aging population as well as to a significant surge in mental health-related disabilities among the country's youth and working age adults.

The disability rates among youth, working age adults, and seniors are 20%, 24% and 40%, respectively.

Among Canadians with disabilities, 29% have one disability type, 37% had two or three, and 34% had four or more, according to StatCan.

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ICJ Orders Venezuela to Refrain From Any Action to Modify Situation in Dispute With Guyana

WASHINGTON, December 1 (Sputnik) – The International Court of Justice (ICJ) on Friday ordered Venezuela to refrain from taking any action that could modify the existing situation in the long-standing territorial dispute with Guyana.

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