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‘Trump Alternative Debate’ Full of Candidates Better at Taking on Biden Than GOP Frontrunner

The GOP primary race has failed to produce a candidate to rival former US President Donald Trump, although some of them seem to shine better when taking on the policies of US President Joe Biden, as Florida Governor Ron DeSantis did at a separate debate last week, a journalist told Sputnik.

The third debate in the Republican US presidential primary race is scheduled for Wednesday night. As with previous debates, Trump, the front-runner in the primaries, is not participating, leaving the debate stage for a coterie of low-polling rivals to fight it out on.

Amy DeLaura, a video journalist at the Washington Examiner, told Radio Sputnik’s Fault Lines on Wednesday that the event was “the Trump Alternative debate,” which ultimately had no hope of producing a viable rival to Trump on its own.

The interview can be viewed in full here, starting at 1:21:00.

“I think people are looking for one person to stand out and if everyone can gather behind this one person, maybe they would have a chance against Donald Trump. Now if that’s a pipe dream, I don’t know,” she said.

“I would say that [for former UN ambassador Nikki] Haley, these debates have been very good for her. She does have a lot of stand-out moments. [Entrepreneur] Vivek Ramaswamy, while he will have viral moments, he seems to attack everyone except for his primary candidate, which some people love and say ‘he is what the party needs to change the direction that it’s going.’ It seems to be 50:50, other people just find him annoying. [Florida Governor Ron] DeSantis just has completely bombed, he had higher polling numbers at up to 30%, and Trump at 40%, before he even announced he was going to run. Since he announced he was going to run in May, he has just fallen. Now, with Haley, completely coming up as a competitor again, in some state polls she’s actually above him [DeSantis].”

“Chris Christie, I don’t know what he’s still doing here to be perfectly honest with you. He did have some viral moments in the first two [debates], I can’t even remember him in the third. I mean, Donald Duck was going around forever after the second debate, he seems to still be holding onto his chance as well.”

DeSantis Warmup With Newsom

DeLaura said that opinions about the winner of the debate last week between DeSantis and California Governor Gavin Newsom, a Democrat who is not running for president, “seemed to go along party lines.”

“Except if you’re Donald Trump. Apparently, last night in his town hall, he was saying he thought Newsom did better overall,” she noted.

“I would say, I think DeSantis did better in that debate than he did in any of his actual GOP primary debates. He does better against Biden policies and that’s what Newsom was supposed to be, though he denies his shadow campaign and says he’s supposed to be fighting for the

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Biden administration. I would say Newsom, there was a lot of fact-checking going on, and when DeSantis pulled out the book that had inappropriate images on it that he had the cover of himself, when he was talking about the mass exodus from California to Florida, and he mentioned Newsom's in-laws moving to Florida, and then when he was also talking about the economy very specifically; and Newsom's only rebuttal was 'well, the way you treat women in your state.'"

"DeSantis does well against bad Biden policies, but he doesn't seem to be doing well against other GOP rivals. So that was a chance to show his strong suit in that debate," she said.

"The economy is something that is very difficult for Democrats and Biden is foregoing his 'Bidenomics,' he hasn't said it in a speech since early November, the White House press secretary used to say it four times a day during White House press briefings, she's not mentioning it anymore. Democrats in Congress don't want to have anything to do with it while they're running for election in 2024."

When it came to DeSantis' collapse from a potential rival to Trump in late 2022 to distantly trailing him in the polls just a few months later, even before he formally announced his campaign, DeLaura said that the Florida governor had focused so much on the "culture war" as opposed to bread-and-butter issues that he probably crossed a line with many conservative voters.

"At the same time [as the polls], he started this battle with Disney, which some Republicans - you know, the old-school Republican is all about protecting big business - I think some people think he went too far … using his political power to punish a company, which is exactly what Republicans fighting the 'cancel culture' and fighting 'the woke agenda' have been fighting against, and they feel 'oh well when we do the same thing, they're no better.' I think that left a sour taste in a lot of people's mouths," she said.

"He focuses more on the 'culture war' than on necessarily Republican core principles, and I think he's finding that coming into a debate he's either alienating certain voters or he's not able to win necessarily when it comes to foreign policy," she observed. "He just doesn't seem to have necessarily these stand-out moments where as a voter, you [think] 'that's going to help me' that's going to help Americans in everyday life. And the economy is the number one thing voters are looking at right now. The culture wars, everything like that, has kind of gone to the wayside with the massive inflation we're facing right now."

'He Doesn't See This as Competition'

She said there were of course things the candidates at the debate could do to have a stand-out moment or go viral or improve their positioning by a few percentage points, "but I mean, right now, looking at Real Clear Politics polling, Trump is 48 percentage points above all of them. Even if every single one of them were to drop out except for one and all of those percentage points all went to one candidate, no one would even come close to Trump. He's riding at 61% right now, this is the first time he's not doing counter-programming. Before, he had done [former Fox News host] Tucker [Carlson] at the same time, he had done his own campaign rally literally down the street ... it's not even worth it for him to do counter-programming. He did do [Fox host Sean] Hannity last night, but it's just not the level of doing it at the same time and I think he's just looking forward to Iowa, looking forward to New Hampshire and he just doesn't even see this as competition anymore."

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She also noted the importance of ultra-loyal "forever-Trumpers," who she characterized as "a whole different breed" who would instantly turn on DeSantis once Trump began launching attacks against him. "You can't [get elected] by p*ssing off the person who seems to be the face of the party right now."

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Analyst: US Claims to Desire Peace With China 'Nullified' by 'Extraordinarily Belligerent' Behavior

The US is pushing the Philippines into adopting a belligerent stance in a small territorial dispute with China as part of longstanding plans to weaken Beijing by starting a war in the South China Sea, an essential sea lane to the Chinese economy, a regional expert told Sputnik.

The monthslong standoff over Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea has continued to simmer as China and the Philippines challenge the other's claim of sovereignty over the submerged coral reef and the United States inserts itself into the dispute.

On Monday, Beijing said that the American littoral combat ship USS Gabrielle Giffords "illegally intruded" in the waters near the shoal, which the US Navy claimed was "conducting routine operations in international waters ... consistent with international law."

Such maneuvers are called "Freedom of Navigation Operations" (FONOPS) and are designed to show US contempt for what it considers the "excessive" maritime claims of other nations according to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), a treaty the US has never ratified.

"The US deliberately disrupted the situation in the South China Sea, seriously violated China's sovereignty and security, seriously undermined regional peace and stability, and seriously violated international law and basic norms governing international relations, fully demonstrating that the US is the biggest threat to peace and stability in the South China Sea," the southern command of the People's Liberation Army said in a statement on the episode.

KJ Noh, a scholar, educator and journalist focusing on the Asia-Pacific, and a member of Veterans for Peace, told Sputnik on Tuesday that the US had thrown its weight behind Manila in the dispute in the hopes of turning what should be a small, peacefully-resolved territorial dispute into a casus belli with Beijing, allowing it to deal a mortal blow to the Chinese economy.

Noh referred to a recently published article in a Hong Kong-based newspaper highlighting how the US is violating international law in its purported push to "stop China from violating international law."

"So what Alex Lo in the South China Morning Post is pointing out is that the US always talks the talk that, you know, that it is following the 'rules-based international order' - which is essentially US hegemony, it has nothing to do with international law. And at the same time, it is always criticizing and decrying China's violations of the UNCLOS, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. And what Alex Lo is pointing out is that as the US encircles China with myriad bases and weaponizes them in order to create this massive threat projection platform, it is breaking the law, left, right and center."

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“And so, for example, he points out that in the Cocos Islands, which are possessed by Australia, the understanding is that the caucus islands are not supposed to be militarized. But even as we speak, the Australians are turning it into a platform to launch both submarines and planes. And so this is in direct violation of the understanding that Australia has with the United Nations.”
“And then the other very, very egregious violation is the Chagos Archipelago. Now, once again, you know, the Chagos Islands, the UK forced the Chagos Islanders off - essentially did an ethnic cleansing threatening them with genocide - and then force them off the islands and turned it into a base which it turned over to the United States. And this land, the Chagos Islands, should be given back to the Chagos Islanders. This was the ruling of the legitimate international courts, and the US and the UK have refused to do that.”
“And so all of this goes to show that the United States claims that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea applies to China, but in fact all the rulings and all the agreements that are part of international law the US routinely violates in order to escalate to war against China. So this is just a very, very good example of pointing out the extraordinary hypocrisy of the United States as it prepares for war.”
“The US actions are continually ratcheting up, continual escalation, continually accelerating the material conditions for war. All of this is direct preparation for war. And so whatever the US says in public or in diplomatic venues means nothing. It's completely nullified by these extraordinarily belligerent - and as Alex Lo points out illegal - actions that the US is currently engaging in.”
“As the US escalates to war with China, the South China Sea, along with Taiwan Island in the East China Sea, and then the Korean Peninsula, will be the three main battlegrounds. The US is preparing these for kinetic war and in order to prepare this for kinetic war, the idea is to choke off the South China Sea. And once they're shooting war starts in the South China Sea, it doesn't matter if the US wins it or not, just the disruption to trade and traffic will be enough to bring China down. China's economy will shrink by 25 to 35% because $5.3 trillion worth of goods and most of China's oil travels through the South China Sea. So this is the game plan.”
“And what they are doing is they're weaponizing the Philippines as its key provocateur against China. And so inside that larger context, what the Philippines has done is they've run aground a rusting ship, the Sierra Madre, on the Second Thomas Shoal, which China claims - and that entire area that China claims, it's actually contested between four countries, and these contestations would have been resolved peacefully, except for that the United States got involved on the part of the Philippines and then created this fraudulent tribunal by which it now claims that it has legitimate rights.”
“So since the Philippines has run aground a rusting ship on the Second Thomas Shoal in order to squat it, essentially they're claiming squatter's rights and they leave a bunch of sailors in there for months at a time. These sailors cannot get off the ship, you know, the reef is not self-sustaining, it's mostly submerged. And the Chinese want them to leave and they want them to get that junked ship off the Thomas Shoal. It's like if you were to leave your junked car on my lawn in order to claim it as yours. I mean I think you might be a little bit upset there.”
“So this is the essential contestation that's happening. The Chinese assert that the Sierra Madre should be removed and the Philippines should not squat in that area, and the US is threatening to use this as a kind of casus belli that, you know, if China does anything against the Philippines, then the US will use the mutual defense treaty to get involved. So it's a very delicate situation and essentially the US is trying to provoke war in the South China Sea.”

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“We have to understand geostrategic and global war in terms of choke points: who controls the choke points determines who has strategic advantage. And in this case, the US is trying to gain or leverage strategic advantage by initiating a shooting war in the South China Sea. The US doesn't have to win it, all you need is the congestion, that congestion will damage China. That's the game plan that's mapped out by Rand in their 2015 war document.”

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Photos: World’s Biggest Plane Successfully Lifts Hypersonic Vehicle in First Captive-Carry Test

In another milestone test, the world’s largest airplane conducted its first “captive carry” test with a hypersonic vehicle in tow, which the company is calling a “significant” step toward the Mach 5-capable vehicle’s first solo flight.

Seattle-based aerospace company Stratolaunch announced on Sundaythat its Roc carrier plane had successfully flown with a fully-fueled-up Talon-A hypersonic vehicle slung under its massive central fuselage for the first time.

“Talon-A’s propulsion system supports a liquid-propellant rocket engine that provides the thrust needed for Talon-A to reach hypersonic speeds. While we have conducted several successful ground tests fueling and igniting the system, we needed to evaluate how the system performs in the flight environment prior to release,” Stratolaunch CEO Zachary Krevor said in a news release.

“Initial results from today’s flight show that the system has performed as predicted, and we will determine our next steps pending the full data review of the test.”

The flight lasted three hours and 22 minutes, during which the Talon-A’s rocket engine "performed as predicted" although still attached to the Roc mothership. It was Stratolaunch’s 12th test of the two aircraft, with its most recent being a drop test in May.

The Roc is the world’s largest still-flying manned aircraft and one of the largest of any type of flying machine ever constructed by humans, sporting a colossal 385-foot wingspan. It has the largest wingspan of any aircraft in history, which is 20 feet longer than a Saturn V rocket was tall, but it is still only about half the length of the massive lighter-than-air dirigibles used for transportation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, such as the Hindenburg.

The design of the mothership and test vehicle somewhat resemble VirginGalactic’s White Knight Two motherships and the SpaceShipTwo suborbital spaceplane that it hoists for high-altitude launches.

The company said it must first review the data from Saturday’s flight before deciding what the next step would be, but said that a full-powered test flight of the Talon-A was expected “in the year term.” The aircraft is reportedly capable of reaching Mach 6, roughly three times the speed of modern-day fighter aircraft.

However, such a test would not be the first-ever manned hypersonic vehicle flight: the North American X-15 rocket plane reached Mach 6.7 during a 1967 test flight, which launched from a B-52 Stratofortress carrier plane. In addition, the NASA Space Shuttles regularly reached Mach 25 during atmospheric reentry before the last spaceplane was retired in 2011.

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Stratolaunch said it is also pushing ahead on construction of the Talon-2 and Talon-3 vehicles, and that it had signed flight contracts with the US Air Force Research Laboratory and the US Navy's Multiservice Advanced Capability Test Bed (MACH-TB) program as a subcontractor for Leidos and Dynetics.

The Pentagon has struggled to develop a viable hypersonic weapon or vehicle, having fallen years behind rivals like China and Russia, both of which have multiple Mach 5-plus weapons in service. Because of their speed and maneuverability, hypersonic weapons are nearly impossible to intercept or track using present methods.

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Report: US Officials Believe Israeli Ground Ops May End in January

Biden administration officials are sending mixed messages about Israel's willingness to moderate their tactics amidst heavy civilian casualties in Gaza.

Washington reportedly continues to urge Israel to transition towards more surgical military action in the Gaza Strip, with the Biden administration hoping their Middle Eastern ally will adopt a change in tactics in January.

That's according to reports emerging in US media this week citing a White House official.

The anonymous official claimed Washington is concerned over the potential for Israel's tactics in southern Gaza to mirror their campaign in the north. Israel has been heavily criticized for the high civilian death toll that resulted from the country's heavy bombardment of Gaza City and other areas in the northern portion of the besieged enclave.

The Biden official claimed the administration has engaged in "hard" and "direct" conversations warning Israel against replicating those tactics.

Instead, the United States has reportedly advised Israel to transition towards a lower-intensity campaign similar to US efforts to target militant leaders in Iraq and Afghanistan. One official claimed Israel plans to follow that guidance.

"We believe that the approach that we're taking thus far has produced effective results," said National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby when asked by reporters last week about Israel's cooperation with US requests.

However, another senior Biden official told US media "they did not feel comfortable using the word 'receptive' to capture Israel's response so far to the administration's military advice."

The conflicting reports reflect ongoing tensions between Israel and the Biden White House, which is feeling the string of intense opposition to Israel's tactics from sectors of the Democratic Party's coalition including young people and Arab Americans.

Biden has historically been a strong supporter of Israel, once claiming from the floor of the Senate that "if there were not an Israel, we'd have to invent one" to protect America's "interests" in the Middle East. But polling shows that younger Americans increasingly oppose Israel and back a long-term ceasefire in hostilities in Gaza.

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The Biden administration so far has not articulated how it may compel Israel to moderate its strategy or what consequences the country may face if it doesn't. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin reiterated over the weekend that US backing of Israel is "not negotiable."
Israel's hypothetical shift towards a "counterinsurgency" style campaign in Gaza may suggest the country could have difficulty achieving ultimate control over the territory. The United States occupied Afghanistan for some 20 years before withdrawing in 2021 amidst widespread opposition from the country's civilian population towards the US presence.
Defense Secretary Austin has warned Israel of a potential "strategic defeat" as Israel's tactics in Gaza provoke similar opposition.
Meanwhile, US support for Israel has weakened the country's standing around the world, particularly in Muslim and Arab nations. Some 16,000 people have been killed in Gaza since Israel began operations in the territory shortly after Hamas' October 7 attack. That number reportedlyincludes 7,112 children and 4,885 women.

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Is Ukraine Aid 'Dead'? Analyst Notes Growing Political Opposition to US Support

Journalist Christopher Helali says US aid flowing into the country, long ranked among the most corrupt in Europe, evokes memories of "money being carted around in Iraq on palettes."
Investigative journalist Christopher Helali joined Sputnik's Political Misfits program Wednesday to discuss the growing opposition within the United States towards continued funding for Ukraine's proxy conflict against Russia.
The reported size of the latest proposed foreign aid package – some $110.5 billion – provoked incredulity from host John Kiriakou.
"What has the United States not given Ukraine that would have such an enormous price tag?" asked Kirkiakou.
Helali said that the "aid package is not only military assistance but also funding for rebuilding, for infrastructure… it's funding for Ukraine, it's funding for Israel, it's also… a very small amount for the Palestinians."
However Helali clarified that "Ukraine is at the forefront," noting that the lion's share of funding in the bill was earmarked for the Kiev regime.
"This is funding for rearmament, for new weapons systems, and things like that," the analyst stressed.
Rampant corruption in Ukraine has repeatedly stymied aspirations to join the European Union and other international bodies. Some Western politicians also point out the very high level of corruption in Ukraine.
The business dealings of Hunter Biden in Ukraine, the son of US President Joe Biden, have also come under harsh criticism. President Biden has claimed he had no involvement in his son's business ventures.
"But of course there's no real oversight," added Helali, "there's been a lot of reporting – I'm sure you've all been seeing it – about the rampant corruption, some officials have been buying yachts

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and houses and all sorts of fine luxury items. I think it's going to be held up because there's a lot of questions around this amount of money."

Helali noted the large amounts of money that have gone unaccounted for in previous US-backed military operations, saying, "We remember the old quotes about the money being carted around in Iraq on palettes and not even weighed or metered… I think that that's what's happening again in Ukraine."

Funding for Ukraine did in fact fail in the US Senate on Wednesday when the legislative body refused to advance a supplemental foreign aid bill. Republican legislators, led by Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Speaker Mike Johnson, have used the opportunity to call for increased funding for US border security to secure GOP support.

Helali said that increased border funding is a nonstarter for segments of the Democratic Party base, claiming they see US border policy as an ""instrument of oppression" and a "remnant of colonialism and US empire."

The journalist nevertheless believes the Biden administration will be forced to compromise on the issue, claiming, "I think eventually Democrats will have to cave because they need this funding."

Later, the conversation shifted towards the announcement of Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Kiriakou said the visit is a significant development because "Putin doesn't travel a great deal."

Helali agreed, adding "These two Gulf states, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have not followed along in terms of sanctioning the Russian Federation as the West has advocated for."

Recently Saudi Arabia and the UAE joined Russia in the BRICS bloc, raising prospects for even more cooperation among the oil producing countries.

"It shows that they are taking a more independent path, they're taking a more diplomatic approach," said Helali. "And they want to maintain good relations."

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House Republicans Threaten Contempt of Congress Proceedings Against Hunter Biden

GOP legislators have warned of consequences if the president's son doesn't agree to appear at a closed-door deposition. Hunter Biden's lawyer claims the request is a political stunt.

Two Republican members of the House of Representatives have threatened to pursue contempt of Congress charges against Hunter Biden if the president's son refuses to offer a deposition in a closed-door event next week.

House Oversight Chair James Comer (R-KY) and House Judiciary Chair Jim Jordan (R-OH) made the threat Wednesday in a letter addressed to Hunter Biden's lawyer Abbe Lowell.

"If Mr. Biden does not appear for his deposition on December 13, 2023, the Committees will initiate contempt of Congress proceedings," read the letter.

"Contrary to the assertions in your letter, there is no 'choice' for Mr. Biden to make; the subpoenas compel him to appear for a deposition on December 1."

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The letter referred to another letter from Lowell last week stating Hunter Biden's preference to testify publicly in front of the House Oversight Committee.
"He [Hunter Biden] is making this choice because the Committee has demonstrated time and again it uses closed-door sessions to manipulate, even distort, the facts and misinform the American public," read the letter in part.
"A [public] hearing would ensure transparency and truth in these proceedings."
Republicans are seeking testimony from Hunter Biden in relation to their impeachment inquiry into his father, US President Joe Biden. The party alleges the president's involvement in Hunter Biden's business dealings in Ukraine and elsewhere, which have drawn scrutiny.
Republicans have not found conclusive evidence of any wrongdoing by President Biden.

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Fourth GOP Debate Marked By Spirited Attacks But Still No Trump

The contentious discussion saw shouting, interruptions, and one conspicuous moment of drama provoked by Vivek Ramaswamy.
Candidates for the Republican Party's 2024 presidential nomination aggressively sparred on issues ranging from inflation to foreign policy Wednesday evening at the fourth debate of the primary season.
The selection of candidates narrowed to four after Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC) announced his withdrawal from the race last month.
Donald Trump was conspicuously absent from the debate stage after once again declining to appear, but the controversial former US president was the subject of much discussion over the course of the evening.
Appearing before the audience in the Deep South city of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, were Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, tech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley, and former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie.
Bathroom Bills
Transgender rights, a frequent preoccupation of the Republican Party's socially conservative base, emerged as a point of contention early in the evening when Gov. DeSantis attacked former Ambassador Haley on the issue.
DeSantis and Haley, who polls show are competing for second place with former President Trump, attempted to differentiate themselves from one another throughout the debate, with DeSantis alleging Haley's indifference to procedures he equated with "child abuse" and "mutilation."
Haley rejected the accusation and claimed legislation relating to transgender people represents "the women's issue of our time."
Ramaswamy offered perhaps the most incendiary statement on the issue, declaring "transgenderism is a mental health disorder."
Chris Christie, often considered the most politically moderate Republican candidate in the race, was the lone voice of disagreement on the highly controversial culture war issue. "Republicans

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believe in less government, not more" said Christie, casting the debate as an issue of "parental rights." The stance was met with a lukewarm response from the conservative audience, with Ramaswamy claiming Christie's position on the issue is "disqualifying."

Shortly after, Ramaswamy generated perhaps the most memorable moment of the evening, attacking Haley's alleged inconsistency on various issues and accusing her of utilizing "identity politics." Ramaswamy held up a notepad with "Nikki=Corrupt" written in large letters, a gambit which mostly generated boos from the audience.

When asked for a response, Haley said "it's not worth my time" to answer to the low polling candidate's attack.

Foreign Policy

As in the previous GOP debate held just weeks after Hamas' surprise attack, Israel dominated much of the foreign policy discussion.

DeSantis again broached the subject early in the evening by casting opposition to Israel as inherently antisemitic, a claim which has sparked intense political debate within the United States.

"They would wipe every single Jew off the map," said DeSantis of Hamas, repeating the claim that October 7 represented the greatest violence against Jewish people since the Holocaust (Hamas' most recent charter, in fact, accepts the Israeli state and proposes a Palestinian state within borders internationally agreed upon in 1967).

DeSantis quickly tied the issue to Iran, which has long been a major concern of foreign policy hawks within the Republican Party. "Biden is doing nothing to bring Iran to account," said DeSantis, saying the country foments "jihad throughout the Middle East."

Haley meanwhile brought Russia into the discussion, painting the country as part of an axis with China and Iran that "wants to destroy the West." She also evoked the Ku Klux Klan, a racist terror group in the United States which she compared to pro-Palestine activists on college campuses.

"We've got to get foreign money out of our universities," Haley declared, arguing that funding from China and other countries influences politics on US campuses. The neoconservative candidate also claimed viewing videos on TikTok makes people more antisemitic, insisting "we really do need to ban TikTok once and for all."

Ramaswamy distinguished himself by claiming he was the first among the candidates to advocate a peace deal amidst the growing unpopularity of US military support for Ukraine in their proxy conflict against Russia. Ramaswamy called his opponents "toxic neocons" and alleged Haley couldn't "even state… three provinces in Eastern Ukraine."

A fierce debate erupted between Ramaswamy and Christie, with Christie labeling the tech entrepreneur and political newcomer "the most obnoxious blowhard in America."

Border Politics

Immigration emerged as another significant issue, with Republican Party politicians often alleging a "crisis" at the US' southern border.

Gov. DeSantis claimed he would finish the border wall long promised by former President Donald Trump, saying he would institute fees on remittance payments from outside the country to fund the construction. "There's going to be a new sheriff in town," proclaimed the Florida governor, a line he repeated once more later on in the debate.

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Nikki Haley rejected former President Trump's proposed "Muslim ban," claiming she would not bar people from entering the United States on the basis of their Islamic faith. She said she would instead zero in on countries that are the most politically opposed to the US before insisting "the biggest threat we have right now is Communist China."
Gov. DeSantis echoed the rhetoric of many anti-immigrant politicians throughout Europe, claiming Germany "imported mass numbers of people who reject their culture."
"We're not taking anyone from Gaza because of the antisemitism and because of their rejection of American culture," the candidate promised.
Still No Trump
Amidst an unorthodox campaign season, former President Trump's absence from the stage once again created a novel dynamic.
Chris Christie continued to represent the primary opposition towards the former president within the GOP primary, calling Trump "an angry bitter man."
"He [Trump] wants to exact retribution on anyone who has disagreed with him," Christie warned. "He doesn't care for the American people – it's Donald Trump first."
DeSantis continued to suggest the former president may be too old to hold office again, a line of attack the governor's campaign has previewed on social media in recent weeks. "Father Time is undefeated," said the governor, claiming "I think we need somebody younger."

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Trump Says He'd Act as 'Dictator' on First Day of His Second Term if Reelected in 2024

The former US president continues to address his 91 charges across four criminal cases as a "made up" political attack, rather than a legitimate legal process against him.
Former US President Donald Trump set off a media frenzy late Tuesday after he remarked during an interview that he would not be a dictator upon his return to the Oval Office if he manages to be reelected in 2024 - "except for day one."
The comments came during the former commander-in-chief's participation in a town hall event with Fox News' Sean Hannity that touched on a variety of topics, including the Iowa caucus in January, the cognitive state of US President Joe Biden and US foreign policy.
"You are promising America tonight you would never abuse power as retribution against anybody?" Hannity asked during the taped town hall, to which Trump responded by saying: "Except for day one."
Momentarily stunned, Hannity pressed Trump before the one-time president noted he sought to "close the border" and "drill, drill, drill," presumably referring to the US-Mexico border and his plans to expand oil drilling.
The town hall also saw Hannity ask Trump whether he would abuse his powers once returning to office to "go after people," a question the former president failed to deny.
"You mean like they're using right now?" Trump asked rhetorically, likely in reference to the various legal cases that he's since shot down as being part of a politically-motivated effort to block his reelection effort in the upcoming election.

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Trump has made claims in the past that if he were to be elected he would “appoint a real special prosecutor to go after the most corrupt president in the history of the United States of America, Joe Biden, and the entire Biden crime family.”

The former president further described the dozens of criminal charges filed against him since his departure from the White House as “nonsense” and “made up,” proceeding to compare his charges to the American gangster Al Capone, who he said was indicted once whereas he was indicted four times.

Trump is being prosecuted in two federal cases by special counsel Jack Smith, both of which stem from the improper retention and storage of classified government documents at the Mar-a-Lago estate and efforts to overturn the 2020 election results.

An additional two state-level cases accuse Trump of attempting to reverse election results in Georgia, as well as a case in New York related to hush money payments and the falsification of business records.

Following Trump’s interview with Hannity, the Biden campaign jumped on the former president’s “dictator” comment and weaponized his public affairs nightmare against him - posting his comments to a campaign email, as well as a clip to X.

"Donald Trump has been telling us exactly what he will do if he's reelected and tonight he said he will be a dictator on day one. Americans should believe him," Biden campaign manager Julie Chavez Rodriguez said.

During the interview, Trump told a 25-year-old anecdote about former US Senator Ted Kennedy calling Biden the “dumbest” person in the Senate. Trump also claimed that Biden "doesn't know he is alive" in reference to the Republican talking point that Biden is too old for the presidency, and that his cognitive health is declining.

Trump’s interview in Iowa takes place just 40 days before the first Republican primary contest of the season. Trump still leads largely in the polls with 61% of Republican primary voters choosing him as their frontrunner. The former president also continues to skip out on debating his fellow GOP candidates, including Wednesday’s fourth debate in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

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Boris Johnson Claims He Wasn’t Properly Warned About COVID During Inquiry Grilling

With the UK having one of the highest COVID-19 death tolls in Europe, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, the UK government has, as a result, created a “UK Covid-19 Inquiry” intended to offer “lessons for the future.”

Former UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson recently insisted during a COVID inquiry in London that he was not properly warned about the potential seriousness of novel coronavirus pandemic in early 2020.

“When you read that an Asiatic pandemic is about to sweep the world, you think you’ve heard it before, and that was the problem,” the former prime minister told the inquiry, referring to earlier viruses such as Sars.

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"I was not being informed that this was something that would require urgent and immediate action."

At the beginning of the inquiry, Johnson said he was "deeply sorry" for the "pain and the loss and the suffering of the [COVID] victims and their families." But despite apologizing, Johnson did not admit to any avoidable mistakes that occurred during the pandemic while under his leadership.

"There were clearly things we could and should have done if we had known and understood how fast it was spreading. But we didn't," Johnson said, when asked if he had disregarded the attention that the pandemic needed during a time when he was spending most of his half-term holiday at a country retreat in February 2020.

"I think it would certainly be fair to say of me, the entire Whitehall establishment, scientific community included, our advisers included, that we underestimated the scale and the pace of the challenge," the 59-year-old former prime minister said during the inquiry.

The former prime minister stuck with his argument that his government was simply unaware of the seriousness of the issue, despite evidence of a WhatsApp message from Dominic Cummings, the former prime minister's top aide, saying the virus was "probably out of control now and will sweep the world." In a separate message Cummings had complained that Johnson viewed COVID as being comparable to the H1N1 flu.

During the inquiry, it was revealed that about 5,000 WhatsApp messages from Johnson's phone—which he used for his time in office—were not going to be recovered. Those messages were from the period of January to June of 2020. Johnson denied making a "factory reset" when asked about the missing messages, saying he didn't remember "any such thing."

"I haven't removed any WhatsApp from my phone and I've given you everything that I think you need," Johnson said during the inquiry.

The former prime minister also apologized for meetings on COVID which he admitted were "too male dominated" as well as to former senior civil servant Helen MacNamara for Cumming's disparaging remarks that were made about her. Cummings had referred to MacNamara in a WhatsApp message to Johnson and Lee Cain in August of 2020 as a "c***".

The UK has had over 300 COVID deaths for every 100,000 citizens, which is one of the highest death rates in Western Europe.

Johnson was prime minister from 2019 until 2022, when he resigned due to a series of political scandals that revealed he and other government officials did not go into lockdown, but instead attended party-like gatherings in Downing Street during 2020 and 2021. His testimony is expected to go for two days.

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‘The Empire is in Decline’: OECD Reveals Staggering Test Results - Analysis

The OECD released a study of the academic performance of teenagers from over 80 countries. Their study found that performances in reading and math have dropped dramatically with scores down 10 points in reading and nearly 15 points in math compared to scores from 2018.

Speaking to Sputnik’s Political Misfits on Wednesday, Dr. Wilmer Leon—host of Sputnik’s Critical Hour, a political scientist, and a former lecturer at Howard University in Washington, DC—said he is concerned that the US is trending in the “wrong direction” regarding the country’s test scores.

“What concerns me is the fact that the United States is trending in the wrong direction, and has been trending in the wrong direction for a very long time,” said Dr. Leon.

“When we look at or we listen to the rhetoric from our politicians, when we listen to the president, when we listen to those who we consider to be in charge, and we measure their rhetoric versus our reality, the two don’t match.”

“The Empire is in decline,” the father and educator continued. “And I believe one of the key factors that indicates the future trend is: where are your kids?”

In explaining that the US is headed in the "wrong direction", Dr. Leon referenced a study from September of 2020 in which the Pentagon found that almost 80% of young Americans could not qualify for military service without a waiver due to drug abuse, mental health issues, physical health issues, or issues with being overweight.

“If we’re supposed to be as [Biden and Antony Blinken say] the dominant force in the world—you can’t be the dominant force in the world when your children are stupid,” said Dr. Leon. “I know not all our kids are stupid, but I want to be sure people get the point.”

Dr. Leon went on to explain how, exactly, the US has fallen so far behind China.

According to the lecturer, China's blue collar workforce is now transitioning to a white collar workforce, as retiring migrant workers are replaced by their college-educated children. China, he adds, also expects its college workforce to increase to 70% by 2050, adding that nearly half of the country's graduates are STEM majors.

“I think the biggest problem in this country is a systemic problem, and it starts with federalism—the division of policy between the federal government and the state government,” Dr. Leon explained. “In most other industrial countries—I believe—they have national education standards. We do not. We leave education policy and practice up to the states.”

Dr. Leon then explained that the education standards for Americans vary widely across the country, and when compared to China---despite the country's massive size---the Chinese government is able to ensure a national education standard.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) found that nearly 700,000 15-year-olds who were tested in math, reading, and science---as part of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022---showed an “unprecedented drop” in their test scores due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The OECD found that average scores were down 10 points in reading, and nearly 15 points in math compared to 2018 while science scores did not change significantly.

The sharp decline in math scores was also found to be “three times larger” than any previous change and was most significant in Germany, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Poland.

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US students scored close to the OECD average in math, and higher than average in reading and science.

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Yellen Says Ukraine's Defeat Would Be Fault of the US - Reports

US lawmakers are debating a $111 billion supplemental spending package, of which $61 billion would be included for Ukraine. The spending package would also include funding for Israel, Taiwan, and US border security.

During a trip to Mexico City on Tuesday, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the US would be responsible for Ukraine's defeat should Congress fail to approve US President Joe Biden's latest supplemental spending package, according to media reports.

"I've talked to members of Congress, my colleagues have. I think they understand this, that this is a dire situation and we can hold ourselves responsible for Ukraine's defeat if we don't manage to get this funding to Ukraine that's needed, and I'm including direct budget support here because that's utterly essential," Yellen told the media.

At the US Institute of Peace this week, Andrey Yermak, President Vladimir Zelensky's chief of staff, said not receiving this most recent spending package from the US exposes Ukraine to a "big risk" in losing its war.

The package would include $61 billion to Ukraine, which is nearly as much as the US has already spent on helping to weaponize the country. The US government has spent more than $75 billion on Ukraine thus far, a figure that does not include all war-related spending which is estimated to be about $113 billion.

"Ukraine is just running out of money," Yellen said.

"They're spending more than every penny they're taking in, in tax revenue, on military salaries and defense, and they wouldn't have any schools or hospital or first responders if not for the money we're sending to them to support them," added the US Treasury Secretary.

On Monday, US Management and Budget Director Shalanda Young told US lawmakers that as of mid-November the Pentagon had already spent 97% of the $62.3 billion it had received on Ukraine. She warned leaders that resources allocated for Ukraine are running out.

US House Speaker Mike Johnson said Republican support for the Biden Administration latest supplemental spending package will have to include permanent changes to the US border policy. Before any further spending, wrote Johnson, funding is first dependent upon "enactment of transformative change to our nation's border security laws".

"Second," Johnson wrote in a letter to Young, "Congress and the American people must be provided with answers to our repeated questions concerning: the Administration's strategy to prevail in Ukraine; clearly defined and obtainable objectives; transparency and accountability for U.S. taxpayer dollars invested there; and what specific resources are required to achieve victory and a sustainable peace."

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On Tuesday, Zelensky was scheduled to appeal to the Senator was well as White House officials to discuss aid. The meeting, however, was called off by his team just minutes before it began. According to RT, the following briefing grew heated with some Republicans leaving early. "The point is there's no answer to any questions down there," said Senator Deb Fischer (R-NE). "We've had it."

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US Tells Israel to Leave Houthi Response to US Military – Reports

WASHINGTON, December 7 (Sputnik) – The United States has told Israel to let it handle the military response to attacks by Yemen's Houthis, The Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday, citing US and other government officials.

The officials said the US reasoned that this approach would avoid the risk of a backlash to an Israel response that could expand the conflict.

Since Israel's war on Gaza began two months ago, the Houthis have destabilized global shipping routes by launching a series of attacks on US or Israel-linked ships in the Red Sea, as well as drones and missiles on Israel.

On Sunday, the Houthis' maritime attacks escalated to an hours-long assault with ballistic missiles on three commercial ships in the Red Sea. The ships sustained minor damage, while the USS Carney Navy destroyer intervened to shoot down incoming drones.

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Trump, Biden Are Not Real Enemies for US But Deep State Is - Ramaswamy

WASHINGTON, December 7 (Sputnik) - The real enemy for the United States is not former President Donald Trump or current President Joe Biden, but the deep state, US 2024 presidential candidate and enterpreneur Vivek Ramaswamy said Wednesday.

"I think the real enemy is not Donald Trump. It's not even Joe Biden. It is the deep state that at least Donald Trump attempted to take on," Ramaswamy said at the last Republican presidential debate.

"Why am I the only person on the stage at least who can say that January 6 now does look like it was an inside job?" he said.

Ramaswamy was in a combative mood and often sharply commented on his opponent - Ambassador Nikki Haley.

Ramaswamy and Haley were joined on stage by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie in what some expect to be the final debate of the 2024 primary.

Haley maintains 9% support in the Republican Party primary, trailing former US President

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Donald Trump's 64% support and DeSantis' 16% support, according to a Quinnipiac University Poll released in November.

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DeSantis Says Europe 'Committing Suicide' With Mass Migration

WASHINGTON, December 7 (Sputnik) - European countries are committing metaphorical suicide by importing mass numbers of migrants that do not accept Western culture, Florida Governor and 2024 US presidential candidate Ron DeSantis said during a Republican Party primary debate.

"Look at what's happened in Europe. You have more anti-Semitism in Germany than at any time since Adolf Hitler. Why? Because they imported mass numbers of people who reject their culture. Europe is committing suicide with the mass migration," DeSantis said on Wednesday.

The migration takes place in both legal and illegal forms, DeSantis said.

There need to be limits on immigration, including restrictions on importing people from "hostile" cultures, DeSantis said.

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Ramaswamy in Republican Presidential Debate Says Ukraine Conflict 'Pointless'

WASHINGTON, December 7 (Sputnik) - US entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy during the fourth Republican primary presidential debate said the Ukraine conflict is pointless and slammed former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley for not backing efforts to reach a peace deal.

"I was the first person to say we need a reasonable peace deal in Ukraine. Now a lot of the neocons are quietly coming along to that position, with the exceptions of Nikki Haley and [President] Joe Biden, who still support what I believe is a pointless war in Ukraine," Ramaswamy said on Tuesday during the debate in Alabama.

Ramaswamy and Haley were joined on stage by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie in what some expect to be the final debate of the 2024 primary.

Haley maintains 9% support in the Republican Party primary, trailing former US President Donald Trump's 64% support and DeSantis' 16% support, according to a Quinnipiac University poll released in November.

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US State of Nevada Indicts 6 for Posing as Fake Presidential Electors in 2020 - AG

WASHINGTON, December 7 (Sputnik) - Nevada has indicted six US citizens for falsely presenting themselves as appointed electors in the process of ratifying the results of the 2020 presidential election, the state's Attorney General's office announced in a press release.

"Today, Nevada Attorney General Aaron Ford announced that six Nevadans have been indicted due to their actions in the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election," the release said on Wednesday. "The six defendants, who were indicted by a grand jury in the Eighth Judicial District Court, falsely portrayed themselves as Nevada's presidential electors in the aftermath of the 2020 election."

Nevada Republican chairman Michael McDonald was among the six charged along with Clark County GOP Chair Jesse Law in addition to other clerks and officials.

President Joe Biden won Nevada in 2020 by securing 50.1% of the vote to President Donald Trump's 47.67%.

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White House Aide in Ramallah Visit Stresses US Support for Palestinian State - White House

WASHINGTON, December 7 (Sputnik) - National Security Advisor to the US Vice President, Phil Gordon, during a visit to Ramallah this week stressed the Biden administration's support for a Palestinian state, the White House said in a press release.

"Throughout his meetings in Ramallah, Dr. Gordon emphasized the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to support the Palestinian people and their right to security, dignity, and self-determination," the readout said on Wednesday. "He underscored our commitment to the future establishment of a Palestinian state and made clear that the Palestinian people must have a hopeful political horizon."

On Tuesday, Gordon met with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in addition to Secretary General of the Executive Committee of the PLO Hussein AlSheikh, Head of Palestinian General Intelligence Services Majid Faraj, and Palestinian business leaders, the release added.

Gordon also underscored the imperative of increased efforts to deliver humanitarian assistance to those in need and to protect civilians, the White House said.

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Sullivan Urges US Congress Not to Allow Minority to Hold Ukraine Funds 'Hostage'

WASHINGTON, December 7 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan after the Senate failed to pass a supplemental funding package called on Congress not to let a

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minority group of lawmakers derail the flow of defense funding to Ukraine.

Earlier in the day, the US Senate failed to advance a supplemental funding bill valued at more than $100 billion, as congressional Republicans continue to insist on the inclusion of border security measures in the legislation. The bill included funding for Israel as well as Ukraine.

"The president's supplemental request is critical to advancing our national security interests - from delivering aid to Israel and Ukraine, to providing humanitarian assistance to innocent civilians across the globe, to strengthening border security and fighting the flow of fentanyl into the United States," the statement said on Wednesday. "The stakes are too high and the consequences too grave to allow a minority in Congress to hold Ukraine funding hostage over any unrelated issue."

Sullivan said there is "a broad, bipartisan majority" in Congress that supports Ukraine funding.

In a presser earlier President Joe Biden called on Congress to pass supplemental funding for Ukraine before the holiday recess.

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US, Ukraine Sign Statement on Intent for Military Co-Production, Tech Exchange - WH

WASHINGTON, December 7 (Sputnik) - The United States and Ukraine signed a statement on intent for military co-production and technical data exchange, the White House said in a press release.

Earlier in the day, the United States hosted the first day of the US-Ukraine Defense Industrial Base Conference in Washington.

"The Department of Defense, Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, and Ministry for Strategic Industries of Ukraine signed a Statement of Intent on Co-production and Technical Data Exchange, which will work to address the urgent operational needs of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, including in the areas of air defense systems, repair and sustainment, and production of critical munitions," the release said on Wednesday.

The Pentagon has provided Ukraine with data to start local production of projects that seek to boost air defense systems, the release added.

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US Sending Advisor to Accelerate Ukraine Transition to Interoperable Military - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 7 (Sputnik) - The United States is sending an advisor to Ukraine to accelerate the Eastern European country's transition into an interoperable military force with allies, the White House said in a press release.

Earlier in the day, the United States hosted the first day of the US-Ukraine Defense Industrial Base Conference in Washington.

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"Working with Congress, the Department of State plans to send an advisor to the Ministry of Strategic Industries of Ukraine to support and accelerate Ukraine's transition to an interoperable military force, combat corruption, and attract foreign investment in critical industries," the release said on Wednesday.

The United States also established an interagency team, consisting of representatives from the Departments of State, Defense, and Commerce, that will support the defense industry, Ukrainian, and other partners who seek guidance on potential deals, and export requirements for Ukraine's defense industry, the release added.

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US Navy Grounds All Osprey Aircraft Amid Probe of Deadly Crash Off Japan Coast - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 7 (Sputnik) - The US Navy grounded all Osprey aircraft in light of a probe into a recent Osprey crash that killed eight US service members off the coast of Japan, the US Navy said in a press release.

"Out of an abundance of caution, following the AFSOC operational stand down, NAVAIR is instituting a grounding bulletin for all V-22 Osprey variants Dec. 6. This decision comes after the V-22 Osprey mishap on Nov. 29, off the shore of Yakushima, Japan," the release said on Wednesday.

Preliminary investigation information indicates a potential material failure caused the mishap, but the underlying cause of the failure is unknown at this time, the release added.

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California Governor Newsom Shifts Christmas Tree Lighting to Virtual Event - Reports

SAN FRANCISCO, December 7 (Sputnik) - California Governor Gavin Newsom has decided to cancel the traditional public, in-person Christmas tree lighting ceremony, choosing instead a prerecorded virtual event, The Sacramento Bee reported.

Newsom's decision to shift to a virtual format for the Christmas tree lighting ceremony is the desire to avoid a planned protest advocating for an end to Israel's conflict with Hamas, which has resulted in significant casualties among Palestinian civilians, the report said on Wednesday.

Furthermore, the Sacramento Regional Coalition for Palestinian Rights expressed disapproval, highlighting Governor Newsom's decision to cancel the tree lighting ceremony, seen by some as an avoidance tactic to sidestep public discontent regarding his perceived silence on the Gaza conflict, the report added.

On October 7, the Palestinian Hamas movement 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

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water, food and fuel. On October 27, Israel launched a large-scale ground incursion into the Gaza Strip.

On November 24, Qatar mediated a deal between Israel and Hamas on a temporary truce and the exchange of some of the prisoners and hostages, as well as the delivery of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. The truce was extended several times and expired this past Friday, when the Israeli military resumed fighting against Hamas in the Gaza Strip, saying the group had violated the humanitarian pause.

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Las Vegas Police Dept. Says 3 People Killed in University Shooting, Suspect Also Dead

WASHINGTON, December 7 (Sputnik) - Three people are dead after a gunman opened fire at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department said in a statement.

"According to our investigators at the scene, we have three deceased victims and one additional victim in critical condition at a local hospital," the police said on Wednesday.

The gunman in the shooting is also dead, police added.

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US Energy Secretary to Lead Delegation at Inauguration of Argentina's President-Elect

WASHINGTON, December 7 (Sputnik) - Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm will lead the US delegation that will attend the inauguration of Argentina's president-elect Javier Milei on December 10, the White House said in a press release.

"President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. today announced the designation of a Presidential Delegation to attend the Inauguration of His Excellency Javier Milei on December 10, 2023, in Buenos Aires, Argentina," the release said on Wednesday. "The Honorable Jennifer M. Granholm, Secretary of the United States Department of Energy, will lead the delegation."

The US delegation will include US Ambassador to Argentina Marc Stanley, US Transportation Department Undersecretary for Policy Carlos Monje, US Assistant Secretary of Energy for International Affairs Andrew Light and US Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for the Western Hemisphere Juan Sebastian Gonzalez, according to the release.

Milei traveled to the United States last month for a short visit where he met with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan.

On November 19, far-right libertarian Milei won the runoff presidential election in Argentina. He will officially take office on December 10. During the presidential campaign, Milei spoke against joining BRICS and cooperating with China, Brazil and Russia, and advocated a foreign policy

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oriented toward Israel and the United States.

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US House Passes Bill to Restrict Ability of Adversaries to Influence Higher Education

WASHINGTON, December 7 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives passed legislation to restrict the ability of adversaries to influence institutions of higher education in the United States by bolstering transparency and oversight.

House lawmakers passed the bill, dubbed the Defending Education Transparency and Ending Rogue Regimes Engaging in Nefarious Transactions (DETERRENT) Act, on Wednesday in a vote of 246-170.

The bill enacts stricter reporting standards for gifts, donations and investments by foreign adversaries, including China, Russia, Iran and North Korea. The bill also lays out punishments for institutions that fail to comply with the standards.

“As these dangerous adversaries attempt to infiltrate and influence American higher education, we must demand American education institutions stop hiding their dealings with foreign regimes to allow for transparency and oversight,” House Majority Leader Steve Scalise said in a statement on the bill.

Many contributions to US institutions of higher education have been traced to adversaries like the Chinese Communist Party, which seek to undermine US interests, infect its political discourse and shape young minds to their design, the statement said.

Approximately 70% of institutions fail to comply with foreign reporting requirements, the statement added, citing a 2019 US Senate report.

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G7 Leaders in Virtual Meeting Discuss Support for Ukraine, Mideast Unrest - White House

WASHINGTON, December 7 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and his G7 counterparts during a virtual meeting discussed global issues pertaining to support for Ukraine and the unrest in the Middle East, the White House said in a press release.

"Today, President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. met virtually with G7 Leaders to discuss the G7’s unwavering support for Ukraine and ongoing efforts to respond to the situation in the Middle East," the release said on Wednesday.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy joined the beginning of the meeting and briefed the G7 Leaders , who outlined additional steps that they are taking collectively to support Ukraine, the release said.

G7 leaders then discussed the unrest in the Middle East, particularly in Gaza, the release said, adding that talks included the hostage situation and Israel's resumption of its military ground

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operation.
Moreover, the release said the Leaders also discussed recent Houthi attacks against commercial vessels in the Red Sea. They underscored that they have reason to believe Iran enabled these attacks, the release added.
In addition, the G7 leaders also discussed other matters including climate change and artificial intelligence.

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US Senate Fails to Advance Supplemental Funding Request With Ukraine, Israel Aid

WASHINGTON, December 7 (Sputnik) - The US Senate failed to advance a supplemental funding bill valued at more than $100 billion, as congressional Republicans continue to insist on the inclusion of border security measures in the legislation.
Senators rejected a measure on Wednesday evening to begin debate on the bill, which required 60 votes to pass.
The legislation is backed by Senate Majority Chuck Schumer and the White House, who have urged Republican lawmakers to hastily pass aid for Ukraine before funding runs out.
However, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Speaker Mike Johnson have called on Democrats to include border security measures in the bill in order to receive Republican support.

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UPDATE: Police Report Suspect in Shooting at University of Nevada Campus Dead

(Updates with additional details in paras 6-7)
WASHINGTON, December 7 (Sputnik) - The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department said that the suspect in the shooting on the campus of the University of Nevada is dead.
"The suspect has been located and is deceased," police said in a statement on Wednesday.
It is unclear if the suspect was killed by police or from a self-inflicted wound.
Earlier in the day, police said there were reports of multiple victims in the shooting.
The University of Nevada at Las Vegas in earlier alerts said there were reports of gunshots at two different locations on campus.
Later in the day, Sheriff of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Kevin McMahill said that several shooting victims had been transported to area hospitals but didn't clarify the severity of injuries and whether there were any persons killed.
McMahill also noted that while the motive of the shooter remains unknown, there is no threat to the campus community.

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US Utility Company Disconnects Chinese-Made Batteries From Marine Corps Base - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 7 (Sputnik) - US utility company Duke Energy disconnected Chinese-made energy storage batteries from Marine Corps base Camp Lejeune in the state of North Carolina, the company said in a statement obtained by Sputnik.

Last week, Republican senators sent a letter to US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin about concerns Duke Energy used batteries manufactured in China by Contemporary Amperex Technology Co. Ltd. (CATL) for installation on Camp Lejeune. The senators demanded the US Department of Defense immediately reverse the decision to install the CATL batteries at the base.

"Some concerns about this project have been raised, and, as a result, Duke Energy disconnected these batteries as we work to address these questions," the company said on Wednesday.

However, the company pointed out that the batteries Duke Energy used were not connected "in any way" to Camp Lejeune's network or other systems.

The CATL lithium ion phosphate batteries serve solely as an energy storage device and were connected to Duke Energy's system, which has a robust network security and safeguards fully in place, according to the company.

The US utility company emphasized it supports more domestic manufacturing of energy resources in the United States given a rapidly increasing demand for electricity.

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IDF Says 138 Israelis Held Hostage Still Missing in Gaza, Their Location Unclear

UNITED NATIONS, December 6 (Sputnik) - There are still 138 Israelis held hostage in the Gaza Strip and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) do not know exactly where they are, an IDF official said.

"Hundred-thirty-eight are still held hostage. It's still an ongoing process, we don't know exactly where everyone is," the IDF official told journalists on Wednesday.

On October 7, Hamas attacked Israel from the Gaza Strip. Israel declared war on Hamas and implemented a complete blockade of Gaza, cutting off supplies of water, food, medicines, electricity and fuel. Israel also started an indiscriminate bombing campaign and a ground invasion of Gaza.

Some 1,200 Israelis were killed in the Hamas attack and some 18,000 Palestinians in the

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Israeli military operations since then, with more than 38,000 Palestinians wounded.

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White House Says Tracking 'Horrific' String of Shootings That Took Place in Texas

WASHINGTON, December 7 (Sputnik) - The White House is closely monitoring the tragic series of shootings in Texas, expressing condolences for the six lives lost, including two police officers, Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said during a White House briefing.

"We are tracking the horrific string of shootings that took place in Texas yesterday, and our thoughts are with the six victims who lost their lives as well as several others who were injured, including two police officers," Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Wednesday.

Jean-Pierre said that there is extensive support from multiple federal agencies for local authorities, who are spearheading the response and investigation.

"We are deeply, deeply grateful for the courageous efforts in apprehending the suspect, who is now in custody," Jean-Pierre added.

According to reports yesterday, authorities in Texas identified 34-year-old Shane James as the alleged perpetrator of a shooting spree in Austin and a double murder in San Antonio, resulting in at least six fatalities and three injuries, including two police officers.

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US Congresswoman Greene Says NDAA Panel Cut Deal to Fund Ukraine Conflict

WASHINGTON, December 7 (Sputnik) - US congressional leadership struck a closed-door deal on a reconciled version of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) with funding for Ukraine and other defense policy changes, US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said.

US House Speaker Mike Johnson cut a deal with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer to remove Pentagon restrictions on abortion and transgender surgeries, renew surveillance authorities without reforms and provide funding for the conflict in Ukraine, Greene said on Wednesday in a statement via social media platform X.

“Is the GOP really going to fund abortion vacations and trans surgeries, fund the Ukraine war, all with a clean FISA [Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act] extension under Speaker Johnson? This was a total sell-out of conservative principles and a huge win for Democrats” the statement said.

Congressional leaders are asking members to sign a more than 3,000-page conference report without time to read it, the statement said. Greene said that she will oppose the proposed measures.

Negotiations were conducted behind closed doors without influence from NDAA conference members, the statement said.

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Last month, Greene said that the NDAA reconciliation panel is controlled by congressional leaders who seek to put Ukraine first.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, December 7 (Sputnik) –
WAR IN GAZA
* The United States believes there should be no reduction in the size of Gaza and any post-war buffer zone within the region would violate this principle, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Wednesday.
* Israeli forces are surrounding the house of Yahya Sinwar, the Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, and his capture is only a matter of time, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.
* The high death toll among journalists in the area of the Israel-Palestine conflict has shown that media rights protection mechanisms are dysfunctional, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.
G7 ONLINE SUMMIT
*The G7 countries will ban the import of diamonds mined, processed or produced in Russia by January 1, according to a joint statement published on Wednesday.
* The G7 countries will tighten the compliance with the price cap policy on Russian oil, including by introducing sanctions, according to a joint statement
* The G7 leaders call for a continued implementation of operational, and financial reforms of the World Bank, according to a joint statement.
* The leaders of the G7 countries supported the decision of the leadership of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to increase the quotas for the organization's participants, according to a joint statement.
* The G7 countries said in a joint statement on Wednesday that they will seek to limit the export of all goods of key importance to the Russian military-industrial complex, and are calling on other countries to do the same.
CONFLICT IN UKRAINE
* The G7 countries will look for ways to help Ukraine receive compensation from Russia, and the group instructed ministers to work on this issue by the next meeting, according to a joint statement published on Wednesday.
* The G7 states are determined to continue supporting Ukraine and further develop Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's "peace formula," according to a joint statement.
* The United States is announcing a new $175 million military aid package for Ukraine that will be one of the last ones unless Congress approves President Joe Biden's supplemental request, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.
* US President Joe Biden said that he is not ready to walk away from Ukraine and he believes that the American people are not ready either while the available funding to continue supporting Kiev is coming to an end.

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* Biden urged Congress to approve his supplemental funding request for Ukraine before the upcoming holiday recess.
* The US Justice Department has filed criminal charges against four members of the Russian military for alleged crimes committed against a US citizen in Ukraine, CNN reported, citing documents unsealed in a federal court in Virginia.
* A decrease in Western aid to Ukraine does not affect Kiev's willingness to negotiation, as Ukraine still refuses dialogue, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

RUSSIA – SAUDI ARABIA TALKS

* Russia and Saudi Arabia have good relations in all sectors of cooperation, including economy, and it is important to exchange views on the regional situation, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday.
* The political cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Russia will have a positive impact on the situation in the Middle East, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud said on Wednesday.
* Saudi Crown Prince said that he is ready to pay a visit to Russia.

DEATH OF FORMER UKRAINIAN LAWMAKER IN RUSSIA

* Ukraine's Main Directorate of Intelligence has assumed responsibility for the death of former lawmaker Illia Kyva, Ukraine's defense intelligence spokesman Andriy Yusov said on Wednesday.
* A criminal case was opened into the murder of Kyva in the Moscow region, the main investigative department of the Russian Investigative Committee in the Moscow Region told Sputnik.

UK SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

* The United Kingdom on Wednesday announced 46 new sanctions against individuals and entities engaged in funding and supplying Russian military.
* The United Kingdom has imposed sanctions against Russia's JSC SOYUZ company that is engaged in developing aircraft engines, and members of its board of directors, the Foreign Office said.

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Police Report Suspect in Shooting at University of Nevada Campus Dead

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department said on Wednesday that the suspect in the shooting on the campus of the University of Nevada is dead.
"The suspect has been located and is deceased," police said in a statement.
It is unclear if the suspect was killed by police or from a self-inflicted wound.
Earlier in the day, police said there were reports of multiple victims in the shooting.
The University of Nevada at Las Vegas in earlier alerts said there were reports of gunshots at two different locations on campus.

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White House Monitoring Shooting at University of Nevada's Las Vegas Campus - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The White House is monitoring the unfolding shooting situation at the University of Nevada, Spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Wednesday.

The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department said on Wednesday it is responding to an active shooting on the campus of the University of Nevada and reports there are multiple victims.

"I just was told about the shooting. Obviously we are going to continue to monitor," Jean-Pierre said in a press briefing.

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Police Report Active Shooting at University of Nevada Campus, Multiple Victims

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department said on Wednesday it is responding to an active shooting on the campus of the University of Nevada and reports there are multiple victims.

"We are responding to preliminary reports of an #ActiveShooter on the campus of UNLV near BEAM Hall," police said in a statement. "There appears to be multiple victims at this time. Please avoid the area and we will have more information soon."

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Oil Dives On Oversupply Worry, US Crude at 6-Month Low Beneath $70 Per Barrel

NEW YORK, December 6 (Sputnik) - The selloff in oil showed no signs of slowing Wednesday, with US crude hitting a six-month low below $70 per barrel, as traders anticipated higher supplies after producer alliance OPEC+ failed to convince the trade that it could meaningfully add to output cuts.

New York-traded West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, crude for January delivery settled at $69.38 per barrel, down $2.94, or 4.1%, on the day. WTI earlier hit a six-month low of $69.12.

Since mid-October, the US crude benchmark lost almost 22% of its value, falling first on signs of weak seasonal demand before extending losses on the notion that oil producers in the OPEC+ will not honor their pledged cuts for 2024.

UK-origin Brent crude's most-active February contract settled at $74.30 per barrel, down $2.90, or 3.8%, on the day, after a six-month low at $74.13. London-traded Brent has lost almost 20%

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since mid-October.

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

OPEC+ was supposed to unanimously agree to a new round of deep production cuts this week. What emerged, however, was a deal where producers seemed to agree on new, non-binding, cuts of 2.2 million barrels per day.

"It also doesn't help when you hear headlines like Saudi Arabia are lowering their prices for crude destined for the Asian market," said Fawad Razaqzada, analyst at London's City Index. "The fact that [the] US is exporting nearly 6 million barrels of the black stuff per day also makes the job of oil producers in the OPEC+ group difficult, as they have to give up more market share as part of their agreement to withhold supplies. Some can't afford to lose market share to the US, so they are not comfortable to cut further."

Razaqzada said the global economy was also at a standstill due to high interest rates and the impact of an inflation spike that was continuing to hurt consumers and businesses alike.

"The disinflationary process has been so slow," he added. "Oil prices are demand-inelastic anyway, which means the supply-side of the equation has a much larger impact."

Unless a rebound sets in by Friday, WTI and Brent are poised to end down for a seventh week in a row.

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Biden Says Approving Nearly $5Bln in Student Debt Relief for More Than 80,000 Borrowers

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Wednesday that he approved nearly $5 billion in student debt cancellation for more than 80,000 borrowers, bringing the total student relief under the Biden administration to $132 billion.

"Today my Administration is approving another $4.8 billion in student debt cancellation for 80,300 people. This relief is thanks to my Administration's efforts to fix Public Service Loan Forgiveness, so teachers, members of the military, nurses, and other public service workers get the relief they have earned," Biden said in a statement.

The action brings the total student debt cancellation under the Biden administration to $132 billion, covering 3.6 million people in the United States, the statement said.

The Biden administration will use every tool at its disposal to advance student debt relief, the statement said. The Biden administration is pursuing an alternative student debt relief plan in the wake of a US Supreme Court decision blocking its initial proposal, the statement said.

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US State Dept. Says Reviewing Amnesty Int'l Report About Israel Killing 43 Civilians

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The US State Department is aware of an Amnesty International report about Israeli military forces killing Palestinian civilians with US-made munitions and is currently reviewing it, principal spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Wednesday.

"We are reviewing that report," Miller said when asked to comment on the report.

On Tuesday, Amnesty International said the Israeli military used US-made munitions to kill 43 Palestinian civilians in two airstrikes in Gaza in October. The release said that US-made Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) were used by the Israeli military in two deadly, unlawful air strikes on homes full of civilians in the occupied Gaza Strip.

The incidents refer to the October 10 strike on the al-Najjar family home that killed 24 people and the October 22 strike on the Abu Mu'eileq family home that killed 19, both in the city of Deir al-Balah.

The homes were located within the area where the Israeli military had ordered northern Gazan residents to relocate to, and survivors in both cases told Amnesty that they had received no warning of an imminent strike.

Miller refused to say whether the United States will be conducting its investigation into whether Israel disproportionately used US-supplied munitions.

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US Private Payrolls Up 103,000 in November, Wages Grow Almost 6% - ADP

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The US private sector added 103,000 jobs in November, some 30% less than expected, while wage growth thinned as well, payrolls processor ADP said on Wednesday.

Salaries expanded by an annualized rate of 5.6% last month, the slowest pace of gains since September 2021, ADP said.

"Job-changers, too, saw slowing pay growth, posting pay gains of 8.3%, the smallest year over-year increase since June 2021,"ADP said. "The premium for switching jobs is at its smallest in three years of data."

In October, payrolls grew by 113,000 while for last month, Wall Street economists polled by US media had forecast a growth as high as 130,000.

The Labor Department will release on Friday the non-farm payrolls report for November, with jobs growth still tipped to be relatively high at 187,000 versus October's official tally of 150,000.

ADP chief economist Nela Richardson said jobs growth, while still resilient, was steadily consolidating.

"Restaurants and hotels were the biggest job creators during the post-pandemic recovery," Richardson added. "But that boost is behind us, and the return to trend in leisure and hospitality suggests the economy as a whole will see more moderate hiring and wage growth in 2024."

For economists, that suggested a further potential cooling in inflation toward the Federal

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Reserve's long-term target of 2% per year from October's annualized reading of 3.2%, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI). That could prompt the Fed to hold off on a rate hike for a third time in a row when the central bank sits on December 13 for its next decision on rates.

"This is a great 'soft landing' report with job growth continuing but not contracting and wage numbers cooling," economist Adam Button wrote on the ForexLive platform.

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

The central bank's policy-making Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) is widely tipped to leave rates at a range of 5.25% to 5.5% at next month's meeting although some policymakers say a rate hike might be needed to bring the Fed closer to its 2% inflation target.

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Russia, UAE Ask for UN Security Council Meeting on Gaza for December 8 - UN Source

UNITED NATIONS, December 6 (Sputnik) - The Russian and United Arab Emirates (UAE) mission to the United Nations have asked for a meeting at the UN Security Council on the situation in the Gaza Strip for December 8, a United Nations source told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"Russia, UAE have asked for a UN Security Council meeting on the situation in Gaza for December 8. China has later supported the idea, too," the United Nations source said.

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UN Chief Supports Peaceful Means to Settle Dispute Between Venezuela, Guyana - Spokesperon

UNITED NATIONS, December 6 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres supports peaceful interactions to settle international quarries including the one between Venezuela and Guyana, Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday.

Earlier this week, Venezuelans voted in a referendum to claim sovereignty over Esequiba, an oil-rich territory also claimed by Guyana. The vote came just days after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered Venezuela to refrain from taking any action that would modify the current situation.

"The Secretary-General strongly supports the use of solely peaceful means to settle international disputes. He further recalls that, pursuant to the Charter and to the Statute of the International Court of Justice, decisions of the Court are binding and he trusts that both States will duly comply with the Order from the Court," Dujarric said in a statement.

Earlier today, the Venezuelan Foreign Minister Yvan Gil and his Guyanese counterpart, Hugh Todd, discussed the Essequibo territorial dispute and the recent referendum in Venezuela, with

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Caracas emphasizing the need to stop aggravating the situation and both parties agreeing to keep communication channels open.

Venezuela gained independence from Spain in 1845, with Essequibo recognized as part of its sovereign territory. In 1899, however, the United Kingdom filed and won an arbitration claim to recognize Essequibo as part of its then-Caribbean colony of British Guiana. Independent Gayana cited this 1899 Arbitral Award in its 2018 International Court of Justice suit against Venezuela, claiming sovereignty over the disputed territory.

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US Warship Shoots Down Houthi Drone in Red Sea, No Damage to Forces - Defense Official

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - A US Navy destroyer shot down a Houthi drone in the Red Sea that was launched from Yemen, a US defense official told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"We can confirm the USS Mason shot down an uncrewed aerial vehicle originating from Houthi controlled areas of Yemen at 10:20 a.m (Yemen time) Dec. 6 in the southern Red Sea," the official said.

There was no damage or injury to US equipment or personnel, the official added.

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Post-War Buffer Zone Would Violate Principle of Non-Reduction in Size of Gaza - State Dept

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The United States believes there should be no reduction in the size of Gaza and any post-war buffer zone within the region would violate this principle, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Wednesday.

"There must be no reduction in the size of Gaza, and that remains our position, and it will remain our position. So, if any proposed buffer zone was inside Gaza, that would be a violation of that principle, and it's something that we oppose," Miller said during a press briefing.

Last week, media reported that Israel had informed several Arab states it wants to carve out a post-war buffer zone in Gaza.

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Blinken Says He Determined Sudan Military, Rapid Support Forces Both Committed War Crimes

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday that he has determined that members of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and

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the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) committed war crimes in the conflict between them.

"Based on the State Department's careful analysis of the law and available facts, I have determined that members of the SAF and the RSF have committed war crimes in Sudan," Blinken said in a press release.

In addition, Blinken said in the release that he has determined that members of the RSF and its allied militias have committed crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.

In April, clashes broke out between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary RSF. The parties to the conflict have since introduced a number of temporary nationwide ceasefires but none have helped settle the conflict.

The parties resumed negotiations in late October, mediated by Saudi Arabia, but the hostilities have continued. Fighting has recently intensified in the Darfur region despite the talks and additional announcements by the parties that they are ready to negotiate.

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Guterres Invokes Article 99 For First Time to Raise Situation in Gaza to UNSC - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, December 6 (Sputnik) – UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres invoked Article 99 of the United Nations Charter, sending a letter to the President of the Security Council over the situation in the Gaza Strip, for the first time since he took his position in 2017, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday.

"This is the first time that Antonio Guterres has done [this] since he became Secretary-General in 2017," Dujarric told reports.

Guterres made this decision because of the scale of the loss of human life in Gaza and Israel in such a short amount of time, he added.

Dujarric explained that Article 99 gives the UN chief the right to bring to the attention of the Security Council any issues that, in his opinion, may threaten international peace and security.

Dujarric said he is not aware of the response from the Security Council.

"The letter was received and distributed," he added.

On October 7, Hamas attacked Israel from the Gaza Strip. Israel declared war on Hamas and implemented a complete blockade of Gaza, cutting off supplies of water, food, medicines, electricity, and fuel. Israel also started an indiscriminate bombing campaign and a ground invasion of Gaza. Some 1,200 Israelis were killed in the Hamas attack and some 18,000 Palestinians in the Israeli military operations since then, with more than 38,000 Palestinians wounded.

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Biden Says He Will Defeat Trump in 2024 Presidential Elections - White House

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WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden on Wednesday said that he will defeat former President Donald Trump in the 2024 elections.

"I am not the only one... But I will defeat him [Trump]," Biden said at a press conference on Wednesday.

The remarks were in response to a reporter's question about whether any Democrat, aside from Biden, could potentially defeat Donald Trump.

On Tuesday, Biden said that he is not sure he would be running in the 2024 presidential elections if Trump did not decide to campaign again.

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Biden Says Claims He Interacted With Hunter Biden's Business Associates 'Bunch of Lies'

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden on Wednesday rejected claims alleging he interacted with his son and brother's former business associates.

"I did not, it's just a bunch of lies," Biden said during a press conference.

The Judiciary Committee and other House panels are investigating the Biden family for alleged criminal activity, including foreign bribery and influence peddling.

An attorney representing Hunter Biden notified the House Oversight Committee that Biden would be willing to participate in a public hearing on December 13. Biden insists on a public hearing in order to prevent selective leaks or other one-sided coverage, the attorney said.

According to a poll by the Associated Press, almost 70% of Americans, including 40% of Democrats, believe that Biden acted either illegally or unethically in regards to his family's business dealings.

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Blinken Unveils $175Mln in Ukraine Military Aid, Warns It May Be Last Unless Congress Acts

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The United States is announcing a new $175 million military aid package for Ukraine that will be one of the last ones unless Congress approves President Joe Biden's supplemental request, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday.

"This package, which uses the limited resources that remain available to help Ukraine, provides up to $175 million of arms and equipment under previously directed drawdowns," Blinken said. "Capabilities provided in today's package include air defense munitions, additional ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rockets Systems, artillery ammunition, High-speed Anti-Radiation Missiles, anti-armor missiles, small arms ammunition, demolitions munitions for obstacle clearing, equipment to protect critical national infrastructure, and spare parts, ancillary equipment, services, training, and transportation."

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Blinken warned that "this will be one of the last security assistance packages we can provide to Ukraine" unless Congress acts to pass the president's national security supplemental funding request.

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US House Panel Advances 3-Year FISA Extension With New Warrant Requirement

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The US House Judiciary Committee on Wednesday advanced legislation that would extend Section 702 authorities under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), as well as create new warrant requirements for searches on people in the United States.

The panel advanced the bill, dubbed the Protect Liberty and End Warrantless Surveillance Act, in a vote of 35-2.

"This bill ensures that the government must have a good reason if it wants to target Americans' data," Congressman Andy Biggs said during a markup of the legislation.

FISA Section 702 permits the US government to conduct targeted surveillance of foreign persons located outside the US. However, lawmakers have been pursuing reforms to the authority, which expires at the end of the year, after an investigation revealed that the US government abused the authority hundreds of thousands of times.

Last month, the House Intelligence Committee released a report urging reforms to FISA authorities and the FISA court before reauthorizing the surveillance power.

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Biden Says Chance Exists American Troops Will Be Fighting Russians If NATO Ally Attacked

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden said on Wednesday that if Russia "keeps going" and attacks a NATO ally, there is a chance American troops will be fighting Russian troops.

"If Putin attacks a NATO ally, if he keeps going, and then he attacks a NATO ally when we have committed as a NATO member to defend every inch of NATO territory, then we will have something that we don't seek and that we don't have today - American troops fighting Russian troops," Biden said in his remarks urging US lawmakers to pass his urgent national security supplemental request, which includes $61.4 billion for Ukraine.

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Biden Vows to Make Significant Compromises on Border to Get Supplemental Bill Through

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Wednesday that he is willing to make significant compromises on border security if it means getting Republicans to support his supplemental bill that includes more aid for Ukraine.

"I am willing to make significant compromises on the border... thus far I've gotten no response," Biden said during a press conference.

The US Senate will vote on advancing Biden's $106 billion supplemental bill later on Wednesday, but Republicans are expected to block it because it does not include "credible" measures to address the crisis on the southern border.

US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said he would let Republicans include an amendment that will address their border security concerns, but it will need 60 votes to be adopted into the legislation.

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Biden Says US Not Prepared to 'Walk Away' From Ukraine,

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Wednesday that he is not ready to walk away from Ukraine and he believes that the American people are not ready either while the available funding to continue supporting Kiev is coming to an end.

"We are prepared to stay with Ukraine, our European friends are as well. Who in the United States is prepared to walk away from that? I tell you, I'm not prepared to walk away and I don't think the American people are either," Biden said in his remarks urging US lawmakers to pass his urgent national security supplemental package.

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US House Panels Will Launch Contempt Proceedings if Hunter Biden Fails to Testify - Letter

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The US House Oversight and Judiciary Committees will launch contempt of Congress proceedings against Hunter Biden if he fails to appear for a deposition later this month, panel chairs James Comer and Jim Jordan said on Wednesday.

"Contrary to the assertions in your letter, there is no ‘choice’ for Mr. Biden to make; the subpoenas compel him to appear for a deposition on December 13. If Mr. Biden does not appear for his deposition on December 13, 2023, the Committees will initiate contempt of Congress proceedings," the chairs said in a letter to Biden’s attorney.

The House panels are investigating Biden for alleged criminal activity, including foreign bribery and influence peddling. Last month, the Oversight Committee subpoenaed Biden to appear for a deposition.

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Biden's attorney said that Biden would be willing to participate in a public hearing on December 13. Biden insists on a public hearing in order to prevent one-sided coverage or selective leaks, the attorney said.

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US Senator Claims Foreign Governments Force Apple, Google to Provide Notification Data

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - US Senator Ron Wyden on Wednesday sent a letter to the Department of Justice saying that he knows of instances when foreign governments have forced Apple and Google to share private user notification data and asked the department to allow the tech giants to be transparent about sharing user data.

"In the spring of 2022, my office received a tip that government agencies in foreign countries were demanding smartphone 'push' notification records from Google and Apple," the letter said. "I write to urge the Department of Justice (DOJ) to permit Apple and Google to inform their customers and the general public about demands for smartphone app notification records."

Wyden said he believes there is a risk that Apple and Google can be compelled by governments to provide user data containing metadata, detailing which application received a notification and when, as well as the phone and associated Apple or Google account to which that notification was intended to be delivered, the letter said.

"Apple and Google should be permitted to be transparent about the legal demands they receive, particularly from foreign governments, just as the companies regularly notify users about other types of government demands for data," the letter added.

Wyden also is asking the Justice Department to repeal or modify any policies that impede this transparency concerning such legal demands, according to the letter.

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Biden Says Congress Must Pass Ukraine Supplemental Funding Before Recess - White House

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Wednesday urged Congress to approve his supplemental funding request for Ukraine before the upcoming holiday recess.

"Congress needs to pass supplemental funding for Ukraine, before they break for the holiday recess, simple as that," Biden said during remarks on his National Security Supplemental Request.

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UN Chief Urges UNSC to Avert Catastrophe in Gaza - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, December 6 (Sputnik) - The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in a letter urges the Security Council under Article 99 of the UN Charter to avert catastrophe in Gaza, the UN Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Wednesday.

"I am writing under Article 99 of the United Nations Charter to bring to the attention of the Security Council a matter which, in my opinion, may aggravate existing threats to the maintenance of international peace and security," the statement said.

The letter describes the brutality of the situation in Gaza, with its civilians facing 'grave danger'. It also describes how the health system in Gaza is collapsing and it is unable to serve the needs of its people.

This is the first time that Guterres' has revoked this Article 99 of the UN Charter, asking for Security Council's action.

On October 7, Hamas attacked Israel from the Gaza Strip. Israel declared war on Hamas and implemented a complete blockade of Gaza, cutting off supplies of water, food, medicines, electricity and and fuel. Israel also started an indiscriminate bombing campaign and a ground invasion of Gaza. Some 1,200 Israelis were killed in the Hamas attack and some 18,000 Palestinians in the Israeli military operations since then, with more than 38,000 Palestinians wounded.

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US Sanctions Mexico Beltran Leyva Drug Cartel Leaders, 2 Associated Companies - Treasury

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has imposed sanctions on 15 prominent figures in the Mexico-based Beltran Leyva drug cartel and two associated companies, the Treasury said on Wednesday.

"Today, Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen announced during her travel to Mexico that the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has sanctioned 15 Mexican individuals - several of whom are US fugitives - and two Mexico-based companies linked, directly or indirectly, to the Beltrán Leyva Organization (BLO)," the release said.

The BLO is one of the most powerful drug trafficking organizations in the world and is heavily involved in the transportation and distribution of deadly drugs, including fentanyl, to the United States, the Treasury Department said.

The BLO has also been one of the largest suppliers of cocaine to the US market for over two decades, the release added.

The BLO's split with the Sinaloa Cartel in 2008 ignited years of bloodshed in Mexico and in later years, the Beltran Leyva brothers were either captured or killed. However, now a new generation of violent drug traffickers has gained power and assumed control of the cartel, the

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Treasury said.

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Canada Reports $2.2Bln Merchandise Trade Surplus in October - Statistics Agency

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The Canadian economy has achieved C$3 billion (US$2.2 billion) worth of merchandise trade surplus for the month of October after imports fell 2.8%, Statistics Canada said on Wednesday.

"In October, Canada's merchandise imports fell 2.8%, while exports edged up 0.1%. As a result, Canada's merchandise trade surplus with the world widened from $1.1 billion in September to $3 billion in October," Statistics Canada said in a report.

The report noted a 14.7% reduction in imports of metal and non-metallic mineral products in October, led by reduced purchases of unwrought gold, silver and platinum group metals.

Imports of motor vehicle parts also marked a 5.8% decline, the first monthly reduction in seven months, the report said.

The 5.2% decrease in purchases of passenger cars and light trucks led the downward trend in the sector, the report said.

"In the context of unstable supply due to strikes by US auto workers in October, a large share of the monthly decline was attributable to lower imports from the United States," the report added.

Canada also slightly increased its exports by 0.1%, reaching C$66 billion (US48.6 billion), marking the fourth consecutive monthly growth, mainly due to an increase in the sales of transportation equipment to Saudi Arabia, according to the report.

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US Trade Deficit Up 5% in October, Reaching $64.3Bln - Commerce Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The US trade deficit widened by a significant 5% in October as exports declined, the Commerce Department reported Wednesday, potentially making trade one of the things that could slow the economy in the final quarter of the year.

The trade deficit stood at $64.3 billion at the end of October, versus a revised $61.2 billion in September, data from the Commerce Department's Census Bureau showed.

Economists polled by US media had expected a deficit of $64.2 billion in October.

Data showed that exports of goods and services in October fell by 1% to $258.8 billion.

Imports of goods rose by 0.2% to $323 billion.

The difference between exports and imports led to the rounded up trade deficit of $64.3 billion.

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Adversaries May Use AI to Influence Voters, Next Canadian Elections - Cybersecurity Agency

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - Foreign adversaries could use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to influence public opinion in Canada and the way people vote in the next elections, the Communications Security Establishment (CSE) said in a statement on Wednesday.

Earlier in the day, the CSE's Canadian Center for Cyber Security released its Cyber Threats to Canada's Democratic Process: 2023 Update. The document is an assessment that addresses global cyber-threats activity targeting elections and its implications for Canadian electoral processes.

"Cyber threat actors are increasingly using generative artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance online disinformation. It's very likely that foreign adversaries or hacktivists will use generative AI to influence voters ahead of Canada's next federal election," the statement said.

Among the document's key findings is that actors involved in cyber-threats are improving their ability to hide their operations, while most of the related activity targeting elections remains unattributed, the statement said.

As cyber-threats aimed at elections have been observed as a rising trend around the globe - a quarter of elections being affected in 2022 - such events are more likely to happen in Canada during the next federal elections, the statement said.

Russia and China remain the main actors allegedly involved in such activities, the statement added.

The next Canadian federal elections are scheduled to take place on or before October 20, 2025.

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White House Says Supports US Senate Passage of $110Bln Supplemental Funding Bill

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) said on Wednesday that it supports passage of a $110 billion supplemental funding bill by the US Senate, which will vote to advance the legislation later in the day.

"The Administration strongly supports Senate passage of the substitute amendment to HR 815, the National Security and Border Act, 2024. HR 815 provides over $110 billion in funding for critical bipartisan national security priorities," OMB said in a statement of administration policy.

The legislation provides critical funding for Ukraine, Israel and global humanitarian efforts, the statement said. The bill also ensures US military readiness and invests in the United States' defense industrial base, the statement said.

The bill builds on an earlier supplemental funding request from the Biden administration.

However, Republican lawmakers have said that Democrats must include border security measures in the legislation. The bill should not be "held hostage" by unrelated policy demands, the OMB statement said.

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The Biden administration urges both chambers of the US Congress to hastily pass the legislation, the statement said.

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Kirby Says Putin's Trip to UAE Will Not Be Major Topic of Discussion at Pentagon

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) – Russian President Vladimir Putin's trip to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) will not become a major topic of discussion at the Pentagon later in the day where Ukrainian and US officials will meet to discuss the production of military articles in Ukraine, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Wednesday.

"I don't expect Putin's trip to UAE going to be a major topic of discussion over at the Pentagon today," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Earlier in the day, Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in the UAE capital city of Abu Dhabi and started talks with the country's president, Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. From the UAE, Putin will head to Saudi Arabia.

Later on Wednesday, a two-day Ukraine Defense Industrial Base Conference will kick off at the Pentagon. Ukrainian and US officials will convene to explore opportunities for co-production and other industrial cooperation in Ukraine as Part of Washington's efforts to support Kiev in its conflict with Russia.

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Biden to Speak on Ukraine Supplemental Funding Request Wednesday at Noon - White House

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden will deliver remarks on Wednesday at noon to urge Congress to pass his national security supplemental funding request, which includes aid to Ukraine, the White House said.

"The President will deliver remarks urging Congress to pass his national security supplemental request, including funding to support Ukraine," the White House said in a statement.

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US Probes Hamas Killing 30 Americans During October 7 Attack in Israel - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The United States is investigating the October 7 terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel in which more than 30 US citizens were killed and others

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were kidnapped, US Attorney General Merrick Garland said on Wednesday.

"So, Hamas murdered more than 30 Americans and kidnapped more during their terrorist attack on October 7. We are investigating those heinous crimes and we will hold those people accountable," Garland said during a press briefing.

The remarks were in response to a reporter's question regarding the Justice Department's stance on war crimes related to Hamas, following the filing of criminal charges against four members of the Russian military for alleged crimes against a US citizen in Ukraine.

On October 7, Hamas attacked Israel from the Gaza Strip. Israel declared war on Hamas and implemented a complete blockade of Gaza, cutting off supplies of water, food, medicines, electricity and and fuel. Israel also started an indiscriminate bombing campaign and a ground invasion of Gaza. Some 1,200 Israelis were killed in the Hamas attack and some 18,000 Palestinians in the Israeli military operations since then, with more than 38,000 Palestinians wounded.

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Former US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy Says Leaving Congress at End of Year

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - Former US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said on Wednesday that he intends to leave his seat in the US Congress at the end of the year but will continue to support the Republican Party's electoral efforts.

"I helped lead Republicans to a House majority — twice… I remained cheerfully persistent when elected speaker because I knew what we could accomplish," McCarthy said in an op-ed for the Wall Street Journal. "It is in this spirit that I have decided to depart the House at the end of this year to serve America in new ways. I know my work is only getting started."

Earlier this year, the US House of Representatives ousted McCarthy as speaker, after the congressman negotiated a temporary government funding deal with Democrats.

McCarthy said that he will continue to recruit Republican candidates around the United States and lend his experience to the next generation of leaders.

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IMF Focuses on Keeping Ukraine's Economy In As Good Shape As Possible – IMF

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) – The International Monetary Fund (IMF) focuses its attention on maintaining the Ukraine economy in as good conditions as possible, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Wednesday.

"Our concentration now is on keeping the Ukrainian economy in as good shape as possible despite the war," Georgieva said at the Council on Foreign Relations.

She praised the Ukrainians for maintaining the nation's economy in relatively good conditions,

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including controlling inflation, paying pensions, and fulfilling commitments under the IMF program.

"We just completed our Second review of the Ukrainian program. They have met all their commitments under the review," she added.

When asked about the possibility of using frozen Russian assets for Ukraine, Georgieva pointed out that the IMF has to be a neutral organization and can not address such questions. "What we can say is, if they would be used, it has to be based on an international foundation, and we have to be very mindful of what the risks and implications for monetary policy and for financial stability could be," she said.

In November, the IMF and Ukraine reached a staff-level agreement on the second review of the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) arrangement, which paved the way for some $900 million disbursement.

After the start of Russia's military operation in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Western countries imposed comprehensive sanctions against Moscow, including freezing Russian assets worth approximately 300 billion euros. The EU has been discussing a legal framework that would allow for the confiscation of assets of Russian citizens and entities accused of violating EU sanctions. Russia argues that any attempt by the EU to confiscate frozen assets would violate international law. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Sputnik that Russia would do everything necessary to reclaim its assets.

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Conservatives to Introduce '1000s' of Amendments to Force Trudeau's Hand on Carbon Tax

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) – Conservatives will introduce "thousands" of amendments at Committee and in the House of Commons to force Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's to remove the carbon tax on farmers, families, and First Nations ahead of holidays, faction leader Pierre Poilievre said on Wednesday.

"You've [Trudeau] ruined Christmas for Canadians. Common Sense Conservatives are going to ruin your vacation as well," Poilievre said at his party's caucus. "We are going to put in 1000s of amendments at Committee and in the House of Commons forcing all night, round the clock voting to block your C$20 billion of inflationary spending and the rest of your economically destructive plans until you agree to our demand to take the tax off farmers, First Nations, and families. You will have no rest until the tax is gone."

Poilievre's condemned Trudeau for "manipulating and intimidating" Liberal senators on Tuesday, to vote against a Conservative Bill that would have removed the carbon tax from farmers ahead of the coming holiday season.

"Just in time for Christmas. Justin Trudeau has ensured that your turkey dinner will have a big, fat growing Carbon Tax caked on top of it," Poilievre said, further warning the Prime Minister that a so-called carbon tax election would eventually take place and be won by Conservatives.

In 2019, Trudeau's government introduced a carbon tax. Based on two components, it firstly aims to charge fossil fuel distributors for fuel consumed across Canada, and secondly, to tax

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large industrial companies as major carbon emitters.
However, the tax also affects ordinary Canadians who see gas prices at the pump increase, something they can also observe in their households depending on the fuel used to power home-heating. Both fuel distributors and industrial emitters currently pay C$65 ($47) per tonne of carbon, a price that is set to increase by C$15 every year to ultimately reach C$170 by 2030.

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Texas Sues Federal Government, Blinken for Plot to Censor Media - State Attorney-General

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The Texas attorney-general has joined with two media companies to sue the Department of State and Secretary of State Antony Blinken for allegedly trying to censor and delegitimize American media companies that took editorial positions they disapproved of, the Office of the Texas Attorney-General said in a news release on Wednesday.
"The State of Texas and media companies The Daily Wire and The Federalist have sued the US Department of State, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and other government officials for engaging in a conspiracy to censor, deplatform, and demonetize American media outlets disfavored by the federal government," the release said.
The State Department utilized its Global Engagement Center to actively intervene in the news-media market to limit the reach and business viability of domestic news organizations by funding censorship technology and private censorship enterprises, the release said said.
"Congress authorized creation of the Global Engagement Center expressly to counter foreign propaganda and misinformation. Instead, the agency weaponized this authority to violate the First Amendment and suppress Americans' constitutionally-protected speech," the release added.
The complaint describes the State Department's project as "one of the most egregious government operations to censor the American press in the history of the nation," according to the release.

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US Charges 4 Russian Soldiers Over Alleged Crimes Against American in Ukraine - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department has filed criminal charges against four members of the Russian military for alleged crimes committed against a US citizen in Ukraine, CNN reported on Wednesday, citing documents unsealed in a federal court in Virginia.
The four soldiers are accused of detaining, interrogating and torturing the US citizen, who was married to a Ukrainian citizen and lived in Kherson in eastern Ukraine, the report said.

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Schumer Says Vote to Advance Ukraine Aid Supplemental Essential to Future of Western World

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The US Senate's vote on Wednesday to advance a supplemental funding bill with aid for Ukraine and Israel will be critical to the future of Western and democratic countries, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Wednesday.

"The question before the Senate today is simple yet momentous: will Senators agree to begin debate, just a debate, on legislation to defend America's national security on an issue so important it goes to the actual preservation of Western and democratic values in the world," Schumer said during remarks on the Senate floor.

The vote has implications for the United States' national security, the safety of democracy and the future of Ukraine, Schumer said.

However, US national security begins with border security, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said during a floor speech on Wednesday.

Schumer urged Senate Republicans to join Democrats in advancing the legislation and offered a chance to attach border policy changes through an amendment to the bill.

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Bank of Canada Maintains Policy Rate at 5% But Says May Raise Rates if Needed - Statement

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) - The Bank of Canada on Wednesday issued a statement saying that it would maintain the policy rate at 5%, but stands ready to increase it if such action is required.

"The Bank of Canada today held its target for the overnight rate at 5%, with the Bank Rate at 5.25% and the deposit rate at 5%. The bank is continuing its policy of quantitative tightening," the statement said.

The bank's Governing Council chose to hold the policy rate after it observed more signs that its monetary policy was moderating spending, relieving price pressures and helping in the normalization of its balance sheet, the statement said.

However, the Governing Council remains worries over the risks posed by inflation and is prepared to further raise the policy rate if deemed necessary, the statement said.

The Bank of Canada seeks to see more and sustained easing in Canada's core inflation, the statement added.

The next scheduled announcement for the bank's overnight rate target will take place in January 24.

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Kirby Warns of 'Disastrous' Effect on Allies if US Stops Ukraine Aid

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) – US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby warned on Wednesday that if Congress did not back the White House's supplementary funding request for Ukraine, the effect on the ability of US allies to back Ukraine could be "disastrous."
"We're the biggest contributor of any country to Ukraine's security and other economic needs. And if we just pull the plug, the effect that that might have on other countries and their ability to support Ukraine could be well nigh disastrous, and it's a gift to Vladimir Putin," Kirby said at a press briefing.

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US National Security Interests Cannot Afford Losing in Ukraine – Kirby

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) – The United States' national security interests cannot afford losing the conflict in Ukraine, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on Wednesday amid the lack of agreement from Congress to provide additional tens of billions of dollars to Kiev.
"President [Volodymyr] Zelenskyy's top adviser said that without US support, there's a great risk that Ukraine could lose this war. The Ukrainian people certainly can't afford it, Europe can't afford that, and our own national security interests can't afford it," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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Biden to Emphasize US Commitment to Ukraine at G7 Meeting – Kirby

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden will emphasize America's commitment to supporting Ukraine at his virtual meeting with G7 leaders on Wednesday, according to National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby.
"President Biden will be meeting virtually today with other leaders of the G7 where I can assure you he will stress our commitment to providing support to Ukraine, especially as they enter into these dangerous winter months," Kirby said at a press briefing.

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Austin Says Much of Ukraine Aid Request to Come Back to US Industry Via Investments

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin on Wednesday reiterated his call on Congress to pass the Biden administration's national security supplemental request and said that much of the funds will come back to the US industry in the form of investments.

"I hope that Congress will soon pass the President's urgent national-security supplemental request, which would include another $50 billion to flow through the U.S. industrial base. Much of the money in the supplemental will come right back to us through investments in American jobs," Austin said in remarks prepared for delivery at the US-Ukraine Defense Industrial Base Conference.

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US Working to Make Advanced Manufacturing Capabilities for Ukraine More Available – Austin

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) – The United States is working to make technical data packages and advanced manufacturing capabilities "more readily available" for Ukraine, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said on Wednesday.

"We must expand Ukraine's capacity to sustain the many different systems and platforms being provided by allies and partners around the world. We're working to make technical data packages and advanced manufacturing capabilities more readily available," Austin said in remarks prepared for delivery at the US-Ukraine Defense Industrial Base Conference.

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US Treasury Will Crack Down on Russia's 'Shadow Fleet' to Bolster Oil Price Cap - Reports

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) – The US Treasury has called for better enforcement of the cap on Russian oil prices in order to combat Moscow's enhanced ability to evade it through a "shadow fleet" of ships, Axios reported on Wednesday, citing an internal memo.

"Russia invested in new shipping capacity that operates without Coalition services, creating more capacity for oil exports priced above the cap… We must adjust our approach to account for the new dynamic," Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo wrote in a memo to G7 countries and Australia, as quoted by Axios.

Adeyomo recommended two ways of reducing Moscow's oil profits: strengthening enforcement of the cap when it came to Russia's remaining oil trade with Coalition services and increasing the costs of Russia's efforts to evade the cap.

While a $60 cap per barrel was set last year, Russian crude oil prices on global markets increased to around $80 barrel in recent months.

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US Imports From Russia Rose to $274Mln in October - Census Bureau

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) – The United States imported $274.4 million worth of goods from Russia in October, up from $252.3 million in September, according to data published by the US Census Bureau on Wednesday.

US exports of goods to Russia decreased to $34.8 million in October from $38.4 million in September.

In total, the US imported over $3.9 billion worth of goods from Russia in the first 10 months of the year. Exports of goods to Russia over the same period amounted to almost $470 million.

The US trade deficit with Russia for 2023 has exceeded $3.4 billion.

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Canadians Think Gov't Should Invest More in Health, Housing, Tackling Inflation – Poll

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) – The majority of Canadians want to see the federal government allocate more funds for health care, the housing strategy and initiatives to address inflation and cost of living issues, a Leger poll revealed on Wednesday.

Seventy-one percent of Canadians prefer the federal government invest more in healthcare and health transfers to provinces. Sixty-six percent favor more money to address the housing strategy, with the same proportion wanting to see more funds directed at reducing inflation and cost of living issues.

More than 80% believe that government spending should be capped so that it does not

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contribute to growing inflation, and 79% would like to see the government reduce its spending to balance the national budget in the coming years.

When it comes to funds toward National Defense, services to Indigenous communities, employment benefits, international assistance and cultural initiatives, Canadians believe the government should maintain or reduce the level of spending.

Only a third of those polled said more resources should be directed toward defense, 29% toward Indigenous services, and 28% toward benefits provided through the Department of Employment and Social Development Canada. Just 12% support more spending on international aid in conflict zones or developing countries, with the same share favoring more funds for cultural and heritage initiatives.

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US, Japan to Cooperate on Countering 'Foreign Information Manipulation' – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, December 6 (Sputnik) – The United S tatesand Japan signed a memorandum of cooperation on Wednesday to counter foreign information manipulation, according to a Department of State release.

"The Memorandum of Cooperation is the result of growing cooperation between the US and Japanese governments to identify and counter foreign information manipulation and sets the direction for future collaboration. Under the Memorandum, the two countries will work together to improve capacities to counter disinformation," the release stated.

The signing ceremony occurred during US Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Liz Allen's visit to Tokyo.

It came on the heels of the US signing a separate bilateral Memorandum of Understanding with South Korea on countering foreign information manipulation last week.

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