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Zelenskyy says transatlantic unity fundamental to halt Putin's aggression



Office of the President of Ukraine

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (left) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization chief Mark Rutte meet in Brussels on December 18.

RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said that only transatlantic unity could eventually stop the war in Ukraine and lead to peace amid a change of administrations in the United States.

Mr. Zelenskyy was meeting with European Union leaders in Brussels on December 19 to seek fresh support amid concerns that President-elect Donald

Trump could pull U.S. support for Kyiv after he returns to the White House next month.

"I think only together the United States and Europe can really stop [Russian President Vladimir] Putin and save Ukraine," Mr. Zelenskyy said as he arrived at the summit.

"We need this unity to achieve peace. For us, it's very important, especially from the

(Continued on page 15)

From Bethlehem to the trenches: Plast scouts spread Peace Light throughout Ukraine and beyond

by Roman Tymotsko

LVIV – Amid the dangers of war, a small yet powerful symbol of hope and unity shines across Ukraine. On December 15, members of Plast Ukrainian Scouting Organization brought the Peace Light of Bethlehem from Vienna to Kyiv, passing along a flame of solidarity that will be spread across the country by Ukraine's defenders, volunteers and scouts.

The international scouting tradition, now in its 33rd year in Ukraine, holds special meaning as the country continues to face unprecedented challenges and what many believe will be a difficult, dark and cold winter as Russia continues to batter and bomb Ukraine's power infrastructure.

For many Ukrainians, a lit candle offers more than a symbol of hope and peace. It also provides light and heat needed to survive the coming months.

On December 14, an international scouting ceremony was held in Vienna to pass

along the Bethlehem Peace Light. A delegation from Plast lit a candle that made its way to Ukraine. It was transported overnight by car to Lviv and then sent by train to Kyiv. On December 15, the Bethlehem Peace Light was presented in Kyiv during a ceremony in the capital's central railway station.

The flame was passed to soldiers, volunteers, organizational partners and all interested residents of the capital who wanted to take part in the tradition of spreading the Bethlehem Peace Light across the globe.

Plast members lit 23 additional candles that were placed on night trains and distributed by Ukrzaliznytsia, the country's rail operator, to most regions throughout the war-ravaged.

For four years now, Ukrzaliznytsia has been helping spread the Peace Light by delivering lamps to different destinations. Plast scouts then spread the lit flame as

(Continued on page 14)

Putin, in annual televised show of control, says Russia nearing 'primary goal' in Ukraine war

RFE/RL's Russian Service

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Moscow is nearing its primary goal in the war against Ukraine and challenged the United States to a missile "duel" involving Russia's new Oreshnik hypersonic ballistic missile.

Speaking at an annual news conference used in large part to show his control over almost every aspect of Russia's political and economic spheres, Putin boasted about the country's economy, glossing over the impact of severe sanctions imposed by the West for the Kremlin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The tightly controlled question-and-answer session on December 19, which is broadcast live by state television stations across the country, has focused in recent years on domestic issues, though the war in Ukraine came up almost immediately.

Putin, in power for almost a quarter of a century, said Russian forces were advancing along the front line of Ukraine and were moving toward achieving their primary goals.

He didn't specify what he meant, but previously he has said peace will be possible after the "denazification, demilitarization and a neutral status" of Ukraine.

Russia has falsely claimed that Ukraine is run by "radical nationalist" and neo-Nazi groups.

Later in the broadcast, Putin said he was ready for "negotiations and compromises" in possible peace talks with U.S. President-elect Donald Trump and that he had no conditions for starting such talks.

Putin has previously ruled out making any major territorial concessions to end the war, while it has also insisted that Kyiv abandon its ambitions to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military alliance.

"Soon, those Ukrainians who want to fight will run out, in my opinion. Soon there will be no one left who wants to fight," he said.

"We are ready, but the other side needs to be ready for both negotiations and com-

(Continued on page 8)

Freeland leaves Trudeau Cabinet as Canadian deputy prime minister

by Christopher Guly

OTTAWA – She was the first Ukrainian Canadian to hold the most senior position in the Canadian government as deputy prime minister. But Chrystia Freeland will now sit as a backbencher in the governing Liberals' House of Commons caucus following her stunning resignation from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Cabinet.

On the morning of December 16 – just hours before she was to present to Parliament, as finance minister, the Canadian government's fall economic statement – Ms. Freeland announced that, in light of the prime minister's request three days before that she leave the finance portfolio "for another position in the Cabinet," she would exit it entirely, according to a letter Ms. Freeland released on social media, written in Canada's two official languages of English and French.

First elected to the House of Commons as a Liberal Member of Parliament (MP) for a downtown Toronto riding in 2013, the 56-year-old, Alberta-born Ms. Freeland said that Mr. Trudeau had "made clear" that he had lost "confidence" in her through his intention to switch her Cabinet responsibilities, which media reports suggested would have had her assume a ministerial position



Office of the President of Ukraine
Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy shakes hands with then-Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland, who rose to be the first Ukrainian Canadian to hold the most senior position in the Canadian government as deputy prime minister. Ms. Freeland announced on December 16 that she was resigning from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Cabinet.

responsible for Canada-U.S. relations, but without a department within government.

Just last month, the prime minister announced the reestablishment of a special

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NEWS ANALYSIS

Keeping Ukraine out of NATO will not advance peace with Russia

by **Vladimir Socor**
Eurasia Daily Monitor

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) "open door" policy toward membership-seeking countries was never intended as an across-the-board policy. It has been implemented on a case-by-case basis, sometimes contingent on opportunities. The acceptance of new member countries has not necessarily been merit-based by NATO's declared criteria, and undeclared conditions played their role. The alliance's open-door policy was not fully insulated from Russia's non-statutory blocking power, and NATO-aspirant countries' path toward membership was not always irreversible. It has been closed when Russia stood forcefully across that path, as in Georgia's case after 2008 and Ukraine's after 2014.

Considering the multi-dimensional addition of power the West could have gained from Ukraine in the post-Soviet era, Ukraine is clearly the most convincing aspirant for NATO membership in terms of its added value. Foreclosing that possibility is what motivated, in part, Russia's attack on Ukraine in 2014 and the ensuing low-intensity warfare against it. The Biden administration officially withdrew U.S. political support for Ukraine's NATO membership in 2021, joining European naysayers. At NATO's 2023 Vilnius and 2024 Washington summits, the Biden administration led the way in delaying Ukraine's membership prospects even further until "conditions are met" – unspecified and without a time-frame – and replacing the unrequited "open door" with a "bridge" metaphor (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, July 17, 18, September 23, 25).

Contrary to Moscow's propaganda, already by 2021 Ukraine found itself further removed from NATO membership than ever before. That and other concessions emboldened Russia to begin its full-scale invasion and set maximalist political objectives for its war, including further annexations of Ukrainian territories. Precluding whatever remains of Ukraine from joining NATO is a central war aim for Russia and the core of Russian political settlement proposals (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, June 20).

(Continued on page 9)

What a Ukraine peace plan could look like

by **Mike Eckel**
RFE/RL

Behind closed doors in Moscow, Kyiv, Brussels, Washington and other capitals, diplomats, elected leaders and military officers are gearing up for what will likely be a full-court press to find a resolution to Europe's largest land war since World War II.

On the battlefield, momentum has shifted decisively toward Russia, its forces grinding down Ukrainian troops across the 684-mile front line. It's pummeling Ukraine's energy infrastructure, trying to black out and freeze an exhausted population.

In Western negotiating rooms, sentiment has shifted decisively toward a push to resolve a war that has killed or wounded more than 1 million people on both sides over 34 months and counting.

Nowhere else is the shift more apparent than in the election of Donald Trump who, even before his inauguration in January as the next U.S. president, has insisted that he

will find a way to end the fighting "within 24 hours."

"There's a lot of talk, a lot of noise that some peace talks are imminent," Rosa Balfour, director of Carnegie Europe, a Brussels-based think tank, said on December 12. "We don't really have a plan. Nobody seems to have a plan yet. And, of course, the situation on the ground is not in favor of Ukraine at the moment, so it's a very difficult moment."

Here's what we know about the ideas under discussion, for a cease-fire or otherwise.

Blood and treasure

European and U.S. officials recently took up active discussion about whether Western troops could be sent to Ukraine as peacekeepers, once the shooting stops and a cease-fire or armistice is in place.

French President Emmanuel Macron

(Continued on page 13)

NEWSBRIEFS

Zelenskyy huddles with European leaders

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met in Brussels on December 18 with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) chief Mark Rutte and several European leaders to discuss war strategy amid concerns that U.S. President-elect Donald Trump could pull U.S. support for Kyiv after he returns to the White House next month. The meeting came as European leaders seek to develop their own plans if Mr. Trump, who has pledged to bring a swift end to the war, pulls support or forces Kyiv to make concessions to Russian President Vladimir Putin to reach a cease-fire. The key topic of Mr. Zelenskyy's meeting with Mr. Rutte was security guarantees, Mr. Zelenskyy's office said. "It is very important to use these two days in Brussels to meet with all our partners and have the same, and very importantly, not divided – the same – common European position on how to secure Ukraine, how to strengthen our people and, of course, make our army stronger," Mr. Zelenskyy said, according to a statement released by his office. Mr. Zelenskyy said earlier on X that he and French President Emmanuel Macron had a "detailed one-on-one discussion" that focused on priorities to further strengthen Ukraine's position. "We continued working on President Macron's initiative regarding the presence of forces in Ukraine that could contribute to stabilizing the path to peace," Mr. Zelenskyy said in an apparent reference to a discussion of boots on the ground raised recently during a meeting between Mr. Macron and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told reporters ahead of the meeting that the priority was to secure the "sovereignty of Ukraine and that it will not be forced to submit to a dictated peace." He said any discussion of boots on the ground would be premature. Mr. Rutte said that Kyiv's allies should focus on ramping up arms supplies to ensure that Ukraine is in a position of strength. Strengthening Ukrainian air defenses especially ahead of the winter was a key topic during Mr. Zelenskyy's meeting with Mr. Rutte, according to the statement from Mr. Zelenskyy's office. "We have to do everything we can

now to make sure that when it comes to air defense, when it comes to other weapons systems, we are doing everything we can to provide everything we can," Mr. Rutte said. Mr. Zelenskyy was expected to again plead for more air-defense systems to try to help stave off Russian barrages against Ukraine's power grid. Organized by Mr. Rutte, the meeting was scheduled to include officials from Germany, Poland, Italy, Denmark, the Netherlands and the European Union's main institutions. Among the potential topics are possible security guarantees offered to Ukraine in the event of a cease-fire and how a cease-fire could be monitored, with one option being an international peace-keeping force. NATO members have rebuffed Kyiv's calls for an invitation to join the alliance right away, sparking speculation that sending peacekeepers could be an alternative. Mr. Rutte also said that he wants to discuss military aid, especially air defenses, with Mr. Zelenskyy, saying Ukraine needs 19 extra air-defense systems to protect the country's energy infrastructure from Russian bombardment. Earlier on December 18, Mr. Rutte announced that a new NATO command in the German city of Wiesbaden has taken up its work to coordinate Western military aid for Ukraine. "The NATO command in Wiesbaden for security assistance and training for Ukraine is now up and running," Mr. Rutte told reporters at NATO's headquarters in Brussels. Dubbed NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU), the command takes over coordination of the aid from the United States in a move widely seen as aiming to safeguard the support mechanism against any moves by Mr. Trump to decrease aid. NSATU is set to have around 700 personnel, including troops stationed at NATO's military headquarters in Belgium and its logistics hubs in Poland and Romania. Russia has condemned increases in Western military aid to Ukraine as risking a wider war. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service, with reporting by AFP, Reuters and dpa)

Kyiv broke up spy network targeting F-16

The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) said it disrupted what it described as the

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Ukraine inches closer to approving multiple citizenship as Verkhovna Rada passes draft law in first reading

by Roman Tymotsko

LVIV – The Ukrainian parliament on December 17 adopted a draft law – initiated by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy – that would allow citizens of the country to also be citizens of other countries.

Members of Ukraine's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, must still consider suggestions and comments from various stakeholders before they can take up a second reading of the bill – No. 11469 On the Introduction of Multiple Citizenship in Ukraine.

Members of parliament also voted to ask Ukraine's Constitutional Court to provide its opinion on the law.

In August, Mr. Zelenskyy submitted the bill on multiple citizenship to parliament.

It seeks to help provide conditions for the return of citizens who were forced to leave Ukraine because of the war and expand opportunities for specific categories of foreigners and stateless persons to acquire Ukrainian citizenship.

The document proposes that multiple citizenship should be allowed in cases involving the birth of a child who has parents with Ukrainian and foreign citizenship; in cases of adoption and marriage when the individuals involved are citizens of Ukraine and a foreign country; and in several other instances.

Multiple citizenship will not be allowed for people with Russian citizenship (i.e., a country recognized by the Verkhovna Rada as an aggressor state) or a state that does not recognize Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

The document is aimed at simplifying the procedure for acquiring Ukrainian citizenship and improving the regulation of the legal status of foreigners and stateless persons who are or have been serving under contract in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the State Special Transport Service, the National Guard of Ukraine, or are married to or care for people in those categories.

The draft law clarifies the conditions for acquiring Ukrainian citizenship by birth, by territorial origin, and the conditions for admission to citizenship. It also revises the grounds for the loss of Ukrainian citizenship. It regulates the possibility for foreigners and stateless persons who served in the military to submit an expired passport document to obtain a temporary residence permit.

The text of the draft law also regulates the legal status of foreigners and stateless persons who, during martial law, provide or have provided shooting, tactical, medical, radio, explosive, and other assistance to the army directly in the areas of hostilities.

On January 22, the president had already submitted a bill on multiple citizenship to the Verkhovna Rada. At the time, it was noted that multiple citizenship could be granted to descendants of Ukrainians who left the country at different times and went to Europe, the United States, Canada, Asia and Latin America. There was also talk about granting Ukrainian passports to foreign volunteers but not Russian citizens.

Following the vote in parliament, the UWC issued a statement welcoming the adoption of the draft law on multiple citizenship in the first reading.

"This draft law is a significant step forward in recognizing the diverse and global nature of the Ukrainian community and Ukraine's integration into the E.U. [European Union]. The UWC has advocated for such legislation for many years, recognizing its potential to enhance Ukraine's global presence and support the rights of Ukrainians living abroad. This legislation will allow Ukrainians to preserve their heritage and identity while contributing to their countries of residence and Ukraine," the UWC statement said.

However, according to the UWC, the current draft requires important changes to fully meet the interests of Ukraine and all of its citizens. In particular, the UWC said that a limited list of recognized countries should be established, excluding those that

pose a threat to Ukraine's security, such as Russia, Belarus, North Korea, Iran and others.

"Applicants for Ukrainian citizenship must declare their loyalty to the Ukrainian state, its sovereignty and territorial integrity. They must demonstrate knowledge of the history of Ukraine, the duties of a Ukrainian citizen, the Constitution of Ukraine, and proficiency in the Ukrainian language," the UWC said.

"The UWC is committed to working closely with the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to ensure these essential elements are included in the final law. These recommendations are critical to ensuring that this legislation meets the highest standards of effectiveness, fairness and security while furthering the interests of Ukraine and Ukrainians worldwide," the statement said.

The UWC also emphasized the benefits that a law on multiple citizenship would bring to Ukrainians. It would encourage Ukrainians to return to defend and rebuild Ukraine by contributing their skills, knowledge and resources to the development and security of the country.

"By allowing multiple citizenship, the law helps to slow the assimilation of Ukrainians living abroad, allowing them to maintain a strong connection to their heritage and culture. With 25 million Ukrainians outside of Ukraine today, preserving their cultural and political identity is critical to the future of Ukraine," the UWC said.

"We don't want Ukrainians who have left the country to be forced to choose between

renouncing their Ukrainian citizenship to acquire the citizenship of their new country or holding dual citizenship. We want them to maintain this vital link with Ukraine, retain their citizenship, and feel part of the Ukrainian state," said Paul Grod, president of the UWC.

Discussions about the draft law on multiple citizenship are not new, but the new bill appears to have the strongest chance of passing.

On February 26, 2021, the National Security and Defense Council instructed the Cabinet of Ministers to draft a bill on dual citizenship. On September 22, 2021, Mr. Zelenskyy proposed granting dual citizenship to Ukrainians living abroad.

In early December 2021, Mr. Zelenskyy submitted draft law No. 6368 on multiple citizenship to the Verkhovna Rada, but the document had not been considered before the start of Russia's full-scale invasion.

Under current law, Ukraine does not recognize cases in which its own citizens also hold citizenship in another country. Many Ukrainians living abroad have already obtained or plan to obtain citizenship in their host countries.

During a presentation to the Verkhovna Rada of the Internal Resilience Plan on November 19, Mr. Zelenskyy said there was a need for his country to adopt a bill on multiple citizenship.

"We have to recognize this reality. Ukrainians are already a global nation, and we should not try to restrict their rights but direct them in the interests of Ukraine," Mr. Zelenskyy told the Rada.

Uzbek man charged with terrorism in high-profile assassination of Russian general

RFE/RL

A court in Moscow charged Uzbek citizen Ahmat Qurbanov on December 19 with terrorism and other charges in the high-profile killing of Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov, who headed Russia's Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Defense Forces.

In addition to the terrorism charge, Mr. Qurbanov has been charged with murder and the illegal possession of weapons and ammunition, according to the Russian state news agency TASS.

Mr. Qurbanov, born in 1995, has been accused of detonating a self-made explosive device concealed in a scooter parked near a residential building in Moscow on December 17.

The blast killed Mr. Kirillov and his assistant. Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) detained Mr. Qurbanov shortly after the attack in cooperation with the Interior Ministry and the Investigative Committee. Investigators claimed that Mr. Qurbanov was recruited by Ukrainian intelligence services.

The Russian authorities released a video in which a man speaking poor Russian introduced himself as Ahmad Qurbanov from Uzbekistan and "confessed" to having committed the attack.

The circumstances in which the video was recorded remain unknown.

During the court hearing on December 19, Mr. Qurbanov requested a translator due to his limited command of the Russian language.

The Uzbek Embassy in Moscow has been actively involved in the case. It commented on Mr. Qurbanov's arrest on Telegram, saying that it was in contact with Russian law enforcement agencies.

The FSB said in a statement on December 18 that the suspect had been recruited and trained by Ukraine's special services and promised money to carry out the attack.

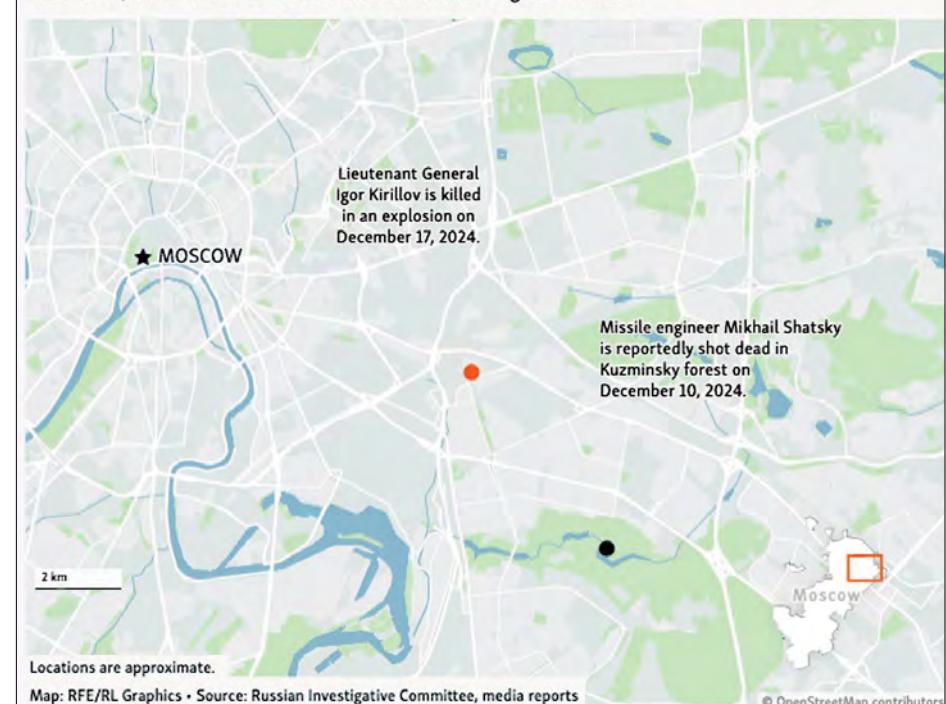
While there has been no formal claim of responsibility for the killing, a source at the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) told RFE/RL that the blast was the result of a special operation by the Ukrainian agency.

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Russian general accused of chemical weapons use in Ukraine killed in blast claimed by Kyiv

Recent High-Profile Assassinations In Moscow

The killing of Igor Kirillov, the head of Russia's Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Defense Forces, follows the reported shooting of Mikhail Shatsky, an engineer who worked on cruise missiles, such as the Kh-59 and Kh-69, which have been used in Russian air strikes against Ukraine.



RFE/RL's Russian Service

A high-ranking officer in charge of Russia's Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Defense Forces (RKhBZ) has been killed in an explosion in Moscow that sources told RFE/RL was carried out by Ukrainian intelligence operatives.

Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov and his assistant were killed by a bomb concealed in a scooter outside the entrance of a Moscow building early on December 17, Russia's Investigative Committee said in a statement.

Mr. Kirillov, 54, is the highest-level Russian military officer to be killed in an apparent assassination since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

While no individual or group officially claimed responsibility for the killing, a source at the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) told RFE/RL that the blast was the result of a special operation by the SBU.

The Kremlin blamed the attack on Kyiv

(Continued on page 39)

Assad's fall is a blow to Russia. Here's what it means for the war in Ukraine.

by Roksolana Bychay and Steve Guterman
RFE/RL

When he launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin apparently believed Russian forces would topple the government within weeks and restore Moscow's dominance over the country after 30 years of independence.

Putin was mistaken, and the war he started rages on nearly three years later. It's hard to imagine Putin didn't mull over his miscalculation when militant-led opposition forces seized Damascus and swept Syrian President Bashar al-Assad from power less than two weeks after launching an offensive.

The Kremlin's focus on the war against Ukraine is one of the factors that fed into the speed and success of the Syrian rebel offensive. Russian warplanes stepped up attacks on rebel-held territory as the offensive took hold, but with its military capabilities in Syria limited and its eyes on

Ukraine, Moscow made no massive effort to stop it.

Now that the Syrian dictator has fallen, what effect will Russia's big Middle East setback have on its war against Ukraine?

On the battlefield, not a huge one, analysts say, though it will depend in part on the fate of Russia's forces and bases in Syria: the airfield at Hmeimim and the naval facility at Tartus.

"A partial or full withdrawal would free up some reconnaissance, air force, special forces and intelligence assets. ... But Russia's presence in Syria is probably only a few thousand troops," Dara Massicot, a military analyst and senior fellow in the Russia and Eurasia Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, told RFE/RL in e-mailed comments.

Andriy Kovalenko, head of the Center for Countering Disinformation at Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, said in a Telegram post that, as of this past summer, "there were about 6,000-7,000 Russian military personnel in Syria," including members of private military companies



tied to the Russian state.

"Even if all these soldiers were transferred to the Russian Federation and then

sent to the war against Ukraine, this would not significantly affect the situation on the front, given the rather high daily losses of the Russian Army in assault operations," Mr. Kovalenko wrote.

The Russian military has suffered massive casualties as it seeks to augment its gains in recent months, particularly in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, ahead of what is widely expected to be an effort by U.S. President-elect Donald Trump to push for peace when he takes office in January.

Analysts pointed out that, if Russian ships based at Tartus leave the Mediterranean, then they cannot enter the Black Sea because Turkey has restricted passage through the Bosphorus.

The departure of warplanes from Syria would be more meaningful because "it could strengthen the aviation group fighting against Ukraine," Kyiv-based military analyst Mykhaylo Samus told RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service. "It is the aviation component that could play a negative role" for Ukraine.

Ivan Kyrychevskiy, an analyst at the consulting firm Defense Express in Kyiv, was more dismissive, saying, "Russia's manipulation of its resources in Syria will in no way affect Ukraine" and that, at this point, "We can't say that the Russians are leaving [Syria] and that's the end of it."

"Russia would be willing to offer a lot to the new coalition in Syria to retain some presence there as a first priority," Ms. Massicot told RFE/RL. "Russia will try to solidify agreements in Libya and Sudan as a partial offset."

Some experts say the reputational blow Russia has suffered in Syria may further sharpen Putin's hunger for control over Ukraine.

"Assad's collapse has ... shaken Putin, making him less inclined to demonstrate flexibility with Ukraine," Tatyana Stanovaya, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, wrote on X. "The war in Ukraine has, to some extent, cost him Syria, which reinforces his unwillingness to compromise."

Ruth Deyermond, a senior lecturer in the Department of War Studies at King's College London, says the events in Syria seem unlikely to affect Russia's determination to prevail in Ukraine.

"Given how tightly Putin's presidency is tied to the war in Ukraine, how far he's been willing to reshape Russian economy and society, how many lives he's been willing to sacrifice for it, and how dependent he's made Russia on other states (China, Iran, North Korea), it's hard to imagine that

THE UKRAINIAN NATIONAL ASSOCIATION SEEKS CANDIDATES FOR AN OPEN SEAT ON ITS CORPORATE BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Pursuant to the provisions found in Article VI, Section 10 of its By-Laws, the Ukrainian National Association is undertaking the process of filling a one-seat vacancy on its Corporate Board of Directors. At their meeting on December 10, 2024, Board members will elect the most qualified candidate to serve on the Board, until the next Convention in 2026.

Candidates should possess proven governance and executive leadership skills and experience. Desired qualities and talents include executive leadership, experience in business management and an ability to think across all disciplines relevant to the UNA.

All candidates must be UNA members in good standing. A full position profile and instructions for applying are on-line at <https://unainc.org/una/leadership-position-openings/>.

The completed forms, a copy of the nominee's detailed Resume and a short statement as to why the nominee would be an excellent candidate must be sent via certified mail on or before December 31, 2024 to:

Ukrainian National Association, Inc.
Attn: Mr. Andrij Cade, Chairman
2200 Route 10
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Parsippany, NJ 07054

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Last foreign radio broadcaster in Ukraine has show canceled, keeps reporting on social media

by Mark Raczkiewycz

CHICAGO – Radio broadcaster Joe Lindsey thought he would last be on air from Ukraine either “with jubilation on victory day” or “with dying breaths in the rubble.” But instead, WGN Radio in Chicago canceled his weekday daily on-the-ground dispatches on December 13.

Doing the job without pay “as a volunteer,” the native North Carolinian abruptly heard the news the following day and was bewildered, especially since he would be the last foreigner providing dispatches to listeners for 10 minutes on WGN Radio’s morning program at 7:20 a.m.

The decision comes as the Russian army continues to advance, particularly in eastern Ukraine. It also comes as a new U.S. presidential administration prepares to take the helm in January and as the future of support for Ukraine appears increasingly uncertain, leaving Kyiv to stress that it will only settle for a just peace with security guarantees for Ukraine.

The cancellation of the show was also surprising, as Mr. Lindsey has proudly not been deterred from reporting throughout the country or from limiting his reporting to safer areas in western Ukraine where Russian bombardment is less frequent.

He provided dispatches from the hotspots in Bakhmut in the Donetsk region, and lived for about a year in Kharkiv amid almost daily shelling in 2023 and early 2024. He was one of the first foreign journalists to visit the southern Dnipro River port city of Mykolayiv when it was liberated in the autumn of 2023.

He also reported from the Zaporizhia region in Nikopol and saw the nuclear power plant that Russia dangerously occu-



Courtesy of Joe Lindsey

Former WGN Radio Ukrainian broadcaster Joe Lindsey is seen on air in Lviv during the beginning stages of Russia’s full-scale invasion of the country.

pies from across the Dnipro River.

“It’s a goodbye I didn’t expect,” Mr. Lindsey said of the corporate decision to cancel his show on the morning program run by veteran radio man Bob Sirott.

Having reported for 1,097 days, “even if I was sick or healthy,” he said, Mr. Lindsey has gained more than 12,000 followers on X (formerly Twitter) and over 10,000 subscribers on his YouTube channel.

“I’m not bitter or angry; ... I’m proud to work every weekday, I’m still going to continue doing minimum 10-minute daily reports in Ukraine,” he told The Ukrainian Weekly in an audio interview from Kyiv, while adding that his broadcasts will continue on X, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube.

The Notre Dame alumnus said WGN’s

management decision was either based on “narrow-minded stupidity” or a reaction to pro-Russian messages he saw the radio station was receiving.

“I’ve noticed an increase in pro-Russian voices putting nasty comments online. ... I hope we could find a resolution at the station. ... I don’t know the details – we [Mr. Sirott and I] made WGN into an outlier,” Mr. Lindsey said about being the last foreign daily radio broadcaster in Ukraine.

Trying to make logical sense of the 10-minute segment’s cancellation, he said “we are on the cusp of chaos with drones spotted in New Jersey and wars through the world like in Syria; Ukraine is more relevant than ever. ... I don’t understand the decision.”

He said that, when it was calmer in the

summer of 2022 after Ukraine repulsed Russia’s advances on Kyiv when 30 percent of the country was originally occupied, Mr. Lindsey reverted to cultural and more human-interest stories. It was a time when he thought it would make sense to cancel the show and when most foreign journalists had already left.

Mr. Sirott, the morning show’s main microphone man from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m., didn’t respond to text messages or an emailed request for comment.

WGN is ultimately owned by Nextar Media Group – a Texas-based company that is the largest owner of television stations in the U.S. It acquired the station for \$4.1 billion in 2019.

“I was sorry to hear about the cancellation of Joe’s reporting segment on WGN. ... It’s not many journalists that would do what he did on a volunteer basis. ... I appreciate Joe’s real journalism that goes beyond the surface,” said Vera Eliashevsky, co-chair of the Kyiv Committee of Chicago Sister Cities Committee.

Mr. Lindsey was in Ukraine before Russia’s all-out invasion began in February 2022, having attended a journalism conference at the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, Ukraine, in 2020, and then stayed behind due to travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A former Fox News employee, he started going on different news programs when Russia invaded and then stayed on WGN for every weekday without any radio broadcasting experience.

“I had to learn a lot,” and he and Mr. Sirott ended up “moving the needle a bit to get media attention” about the full-blown

(Continued on page 15)

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THE UKRAINIAN WEEKLY

Putin's performance of delusion

Russian President Vladimir Putin's latest television address was nothing short of a masterclass in absurdity. From boasting about a faltering economy under crushing sanctions to challenging the United States to a missile "duel," the spectacle revealed a leader more interested in propagating fantasy than confronting reality. In his nearly 25 years in power, Putin has perfected the art of authoritarian theatrics, but his recent performance was a new low – a dangerous mix of bluster, denial and incoherence that underscores the perilous path on which he continues to lead Russia.

Putin's proposal of a "21st-century high-tech duel" involving Russia's Oreshnik hypersonic ballistic missile was both ludicrous and reckless. Daring the U.S. to designate a target in Kyiv for a missile showdown, Putin played to his domestic audience while exposing the hollow bravado of his regime. Analysts have long questioned the capabilities of the Oreshnik missile, and its recent use in Ukraine appears more like a desperate political signal than a demonstration of genuine military might. This posturing only highlights Moscow's diminishing options in the face of its prolonged and failing invasion of Ukraine.

The suggestion of such a duel is not just absurd – it's dangerous. Putin's veiled threats and nuclear saber-rattling have been a recurring theme since his full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Yet his reliance on these tactics signals weakness, not strength. Such grandstanding often reflects an inability to escalate in meaningful ways. Rather than intimidating the West, Putin's rhetoric increasingly resembles the desperate gambit of a leader losing his grip on reality.

In his address, Putin claimed that Russian forces are advancing toward their "primary goals" in Ukraine, though he offered no specifics beyond the vague and long-discredited rhetoric of "denazification" and "demilitarization." This assertion flies in the face of facts on the ground. Despite massive human and material losses, Moscow has been unable to secure decisive victories.

Putin used much of the address to portray an image of strength and control over Russia's political and economic spheres, conveniently glossing over the devastating impact of Western sanctions. His boasts about the Russian economy ring hollow in a country where rising poverty, international isolation and growing domestic dissent paint a different picture. The tightly controlled nature of the question-and-answer session, broadcast across state television, underscored the facade of openness in a system where dissent has been systematically crushed.

The death of Alexei Navalny, Putin's most prominent critic, while imprisoned earlier this year exemplifies the Kremlin's ruthless grip on power. Putin's consolidation of authority through constitutional amendments allowing him to remain in office until 2036 ensures his position as one of modern history's most enduring autocrats. But it also reveals the brittleness of a regime reliant on fear, propaganda and repression.

Putin's address was not just a show for domestic consumption; it was a calculated attempt to project strength to an international audience while masking Russia's vulnerabilities. The West must see through this charade. Putin's calls for negotiations, offered without conditions but laced with ultimatums, are a transparent ploy to freeze the conflict in Ukraine on terms favorable to Moscow. Any concessions to such tactics would embolden an aggressor who has shown no respect for sovereignty, international law or human decency.

Putin's recent address was a stark reminder of the delusional narrative he continues to spin for his people and the world. Behind the bombast lies a leader increasingly isolated, presiding over a faltering economy, a mismanaged war and a society suffocated by authoritarianism. His talk of missile duels and "denazification" reflects not strength but desperation – a dictator grasping at straws to maintain his image as a strongman.

Dec.
29
2018

Turning the pages back...

Six years ago, on December 29, 2018, U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis offered assurances that the U.S. role in Ukraine would not change, and Russia had no cause for concern about a U.S. decision to supply new weapons to the country.

"As long as no one wants to invade Ukraine, hopefully it won't have any big impact," Mr. Mattis said, adding, "They're defensive weapons."

It was the first statement from Mr. Mattis since the U.S. State Department announced on December 22 that it had approved "enhanced defensive capabilities" for Ukraine.

Moscow denounced the move, saying the U.S. had "crossed a line" and was "clearly pushing [Ukraine] towards new bloodshed."

However, the U.S. had not specified what new weapons it would provide to Ukraine, but U.S. media reported that the new weapons could include Javelin anti-tank missiles, which Ukraine had asked for repeatedly. Mr. Mattis said that providing new weapons for Ukraine did not signal any plan to expand the U.S. presence in the country, despite speculation that the move would force the U.S. to get more involved in eastern Ukraine in a military conflict that had at that point killed more than 10,300 people since 2014, when Russia launched a military incursion into Ukraine.

Mr. Mattis characterized the U.S. forces on the ground in Ukraine as trainers, saying they were "helping to train [Ukraine's] army to NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] standards, and that has a lot to do with making certain it serves the needs of the Ukrainian people, in the way democracies' armies do."

Addressing concerns of the U.S. escalating the war, Mr. Mattis said there had not been an increase in the number of trainers in Ukraine in the previous six months, "so the U.S. military role remains the same."

Source: "Mattis on weapons for Ukraine," (RFE/RL, based on reporting by AP and TASS), The Ukrainian Weekly, January 7, 2018.

Russia and Ukraine may agree to ceasefire in 2025, but peace not guaranteed

by Paul Goble

Eurasia Daily Monitor

Over the course of 2024, both participants and observers of Russia's war on Ukraine have frequently changed their assessments of its likely outcome. Some once predicted the victory of one side, then shifted to predicting the triumph of the other, only to reverse themselves again at a later point (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, January 16, July 1). This behavior, of course, was on view even earlier in the war (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, December 13, 20, 2023, January 28.) On the one hand, this pattern reflects changing definitions in Kyiv and Moscow as to what victory would look like (Window on Eurasia, September 1). On the other hand, these shifting assessments are the product of major changes in the performance of the two forces on the battlefield, the domestic situations the two countries find themselves in because of the war, and the changing constellation of forces in the international system. As the war heads into 2025, however, a consensus is emerging that some kind of agreement that will end the fighting can and will be reached in the coming months (The Moscow Times, December 6; Gazeta.ru, December 7).

The evolution of the war during 2024 strongly suggests that achieving even a mere ceasefire would be extremely difficult. Likewise, any accord that does emerge will be, at most, a truce rather than a peace. Both countries would use a ceasefire to rebuild and expand their forces. Russia will do so because President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine has always been about a greater conflict with the West (Window on Eurasia, September 1, November 10). Ukraine will do so because Russia will remain an existential threat to its territorial integrity and sovereignty unless Moscow is fundamentally transformed, something that may not happen anytime soon (The Moscow Times, December 5). Kyiv will have an interest in pursuing a truce – especially if, given the sad history of Western security guarantees beginning with the Budapest Memorandum more than two decades ago, the West does not offer it membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, September 24, 2009, March 10, 2014; Window on Eurasia, November 15, 2022).

Consequently, Moscow and Kyiv will try to present any such agreement as a triumph that will guarantee "peace in our time," something they and their propagandists can be counted on to do. There is every reason to believe that 2025 will be marked both by political scrambles involving all the relevant international parties and by major security moves by Russia and Ukraine, even if the guns fall silent along the front. A ceasefire will in all likelihood result in many assuming that the war is over. This assumption would be fundamentally incorrect, as the duration of the truce would be used by Moscow to test the West's resolve in Ukraine and elsewhere. Similarly, Kyiv would necessarily spend the time preparing to defend itself against future Russian attacks – something made all the more likely by the dwindling mili-

tary assistance it is expected to receive.

The most important change in 2024 has been the scaling back of both sides' definitions of victory. For Putin, the war in Ukraine has always been part of a larger campaign against the West, but it became increasingly apparent over the last 12 months that he is currently more interested in inflicting a massive defeat of the West in Ukraine than full territorial annexation (Window on Eurasia, September 1, November 10). The Kremlin may have even come to recognize that absorbing all of Ukraine would be counterproductive (Window on Eurasia, March 17, 2022). Extracting concessions from the West about what it will and will not do for Ukraine – including promises not to provide Kyiv with arms, admit it to NATO, or continue sanctions against Russia for its aggression in Ukraine – is now more important to the Kremlin leader than simply gaining territory.

In achieving these goals, Putin would show the world and the Russian people that he has the power to compel the West to concede. That will, in turn, impact both the former Soviet republics – which Putin believes should be part of a Russian sphere of influence – and countries further afield. Simultaneously, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy concedes now that Kyiv will not be able to retake all the territories Russia has seized since 2014 by force of arms and will require time to recover from the Russian onslaught (RG.ru, December 9). Consequently, some offer of a security guarantee from the West and the chance to further strengthen Ukraine's defense establishment with Western help would constitute a victory for Mr. Zelenskyy at this point.

If these shifts have changed the underlying negotiating positions of the two sides, developments on the front and the expansion of what constitutes "the battlefield" have also changed what is likely to occur in 2025. The quality and speed of such changes, however, are a reminder that those who expect the future to be a continuation of current trends are likely to be disappointed. In 2024, Ukraine promised a major counterattack but did not carry it out. Instead, it radically expanded its drone attacks on facilities in Russia and even invaded Russia's Kursk Oblast (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, August 14, 15). Moscow threw enough forces at the frontlines to block the much-ballyhooed Ukrainian offensive, recover about half of Kursk's territory occupied by Ukraine, and continue its advance into Ukrainian areas. The Russian offensive proceeds slowly and at great cost in terms of life and treasure, and their forces have shot down many, but far from all, Ukrainian drones targeting Russian territory (The Kyiv Independent, November 11). As each of these events occurred, many commentators in Moscow, Kyiv and the West shifted their predictions, though these predictions were then compelled to change again as the war progressed.

Behind these changes on the battlefield, larger and potentially more important domestic changes have occurred in the two

(Continued on page 11)

OUR NEXT ISSUE

This week's issue of The Ukrainian Weekly is a double issue dated December 22-29, 2024. Our next issue will have a publication date of January 5, 2025.

From 'Ohio with love': Appalachian resistance music immerses itself in Ukrainian 'cultural renaissance'

by Mark Raczkiewycz

CHICAGO – Ohioan Brett Hill fell in love with Ukrainian culture as a musician whose work has been inspired by the Appalachian coalfield protest songs spawned in the mountainous region in the eastern part of the U.S.

Currently part of the multi-country civic Brotherhill movement that he cofounded, Mr. Hill is immersed in what he calls a "cultural renaissance" in Ukraine that is "fiercely identifying" fortitude as a core value needed for the Ukrainian nation to withstand Russia's genocidal war.

Or, as he says, Russia is bent on the "incineration of Ukraine," yet instead the nation is "really forged through fire" and Mr. Hill is "blessed to be a part of the proliferation of Ukrainian culture," he said.

Deriving inspiration from the people's "attitude of resistance," he stayed behind after being stranded in the country due to COVID-19 travel restrictions.

The 33-year-old trained scientist of soil carbon sampling from Dayton, Ohio, is captivated by what he describes as "a hardened nation" that will not bow to Russia's attempts to subjugate the country.

His first exposure to Ukraine came in 2019 when he was involved with the Slavalchia music project that brought together an exiled Belarusian living in Poland away from

his country's tyrannical ruler and other Ukrainian musicians.

The songwriter's collaboration started with Dayton's sister city of Sarajevo in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and it evolved as he ventured into Ukraine where he performed in the Black Sea port city of Odesa in 2021.

The previous year, he visited Lviv and connected with the Torban musical group and was impressed "with what I saw there, ... the spirit of the people, the taste of the food, the attitude of resistance."

Interested "in cross-cultural projects," Mr. Hill then started a fundraising campaign titled "From Ohio with Love" after Russia launched its full-blown invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, when he was back in the U.S.

Some \$100,000 in donations enabled him to purchase and send hundreds of life-saving tourniquets and a vehicle to Ukraine in October 2022. It was his second trip back to the country since the all-out invasion.

He delivered a shipment to front-line troops near the Donetsk regional town of Bakhmut and performed for them with his colleague Benya Stewart of Athens, Ohio.

"This is a global fight everywhere and is affecting the national security of my home, and my mind is with my Ukrainian friends now; ... it's important to me on a personal level," Mr. Hill said.

He ran three fundraising campaigns in the invasion's first year by performing concerts in his home state for medical assistance.

Mr. Hill also was in the Zaporizhia regional town of Nikopol where he saw the Russian-occupied nuclear power plant from across the Dnipro River.

"We had a barbecue for orphans and soldiers in Nikopol" as part of "a random support project we threw together," after which "we went to the front line in Kharkiv to sing" for the troops, he added.

Part of Mr. Hill's musical cooperation is to translate certain lyrics into Ukrainian so that local vocalists or musicians can contribute "in solidarity together," he said.

He is still moving forward on different endeavors.

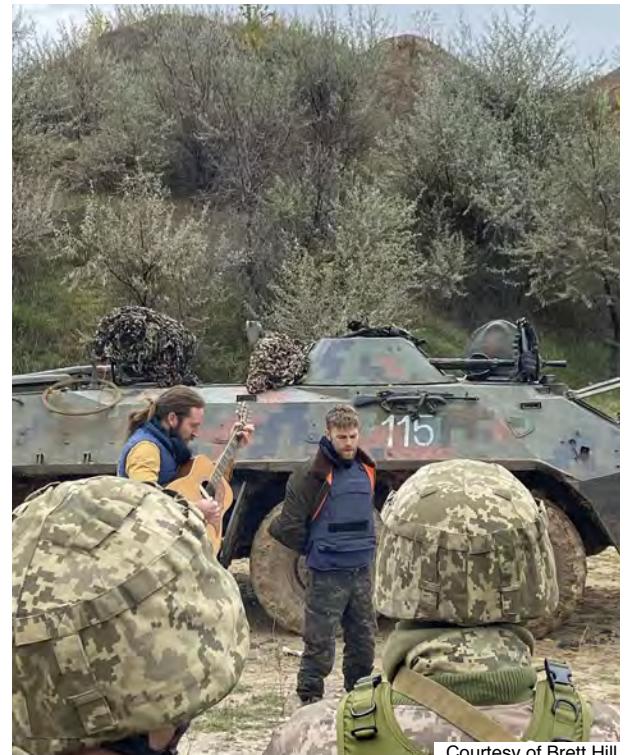
Mr. Hill connected with the MC6 creative residence center in the Lviv regional ski resort town of Slavsk. There, he stages or takes part in a variety of events to "hold pan-Ukrainian" shows that involve Hutsul artists and musicians who interact with other activists, artists and musicians from Odesa, Kharkiv, Kyiv and other regions of Ukraine.

In May 2025, a third "Carpathian Spring" event is scheduled under his guidance that will bring together "Crimean Tartars" and other groups.

"It's important for them to be in the same room together to advocate for Ukrainian culture, including those who are abroad," he said.

He also helped organize an event to assemble accredited psychotherapists, psychologists and legal counselors for retreats with war veterans and soldiers.

"It's not only about decompressing, it's about sharing space and getting them to reintegrate into their communi-



Courtesy of Brett Hill

Brett Hill (flak jacket, listening) takes turns performing before Ukrainian soldiers near the Donetsk regional town of Bakhmut in October 2022.

ties with artists, too," Mr. Hill said.

His last event was with women who had defended the Azovstal steel plant in the now Russian-occupied Azov Sea coastal city of Mariupol. Eleven women participated in the retreat.

At the same time, a dance troupe from Kyiv was staying at the venue and "they [the different groups] interacted," Mr. Hill said.

Unfortunately, the Slavalchia musical collaboration is dormant since Mr. Hill's drummer and bassist are currently in the military fighting Russian aggressors.

As a field scientist, Mr. Hill has a flexible schedule and divides four months out of the year between visiting Ukraine and Poland, where his girlfriend resides.

Speaking from Krakow with The Ukrainian Weekly, he said Lviv is usually his main base of operation when in Ukraine.

"I'm integrated in the cultural community there and I'm trying to do more work in Kyiv as well," he said.

Regarding Ukraine's cultural and arts scene, he said "I've never witnessed anything like it; ... it's a nation that is forged through fire; it's a renaissance."

Mr. Hill, who puts his spoken Ukrainian as a three on a scale out of 10, said, "I could get by" with his language skills in Ukraine. He then praised the wartime phenomenon of what he says is "a powerful thing to advocate for Ukrainian culture" in the country and abroad.



Courtesy of Brett Hill

Brett Hill (second from the left) is seen near the Donetsk regional town of Bakhmut with about 250 life-saving tourniquets, also known as "advanced bleeding control" kits, that were carried inside six U.S. military duffel bags and delivered to Ukrainian soldiers.

Putin sends signals to the West on Ukraine ahead of Trump's new term

by Steve Guterman

RFE/RL

Vladimir Putin's end-of-year question-and-answer session with reporters and the public is billed as a chance for Russian citizens to ask the president about the issues that matter to them most. But while much of the televised marathon focuses on domestic affairs, Putin always uses it to send signals to the West and the rest of the world, too.

This year, Putin's messaging was colored by expectations that U.S. President-elect Donald Trump will push for an end to Russia's war against Ukraine, or at least for a cease-fire, when he takes office on January 20.

He dangled the prospect of Russian concessions before audiences in Washington and the West, saying more than once that Russia was ready for compromise, and headlines abroad reflected those remarks as he spoke for nearly 4 1/2 hours.

But he attached numerous conditions to the idea of compromise, suggesting that Moscow's goal of subjugating Ukraine and winning major security guarantees from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the West remain in place, as well as saying he does not consider Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy a legitimate partner for talks.

'Plenty to talk about' with Trump

Putin said that he has not spoken to Mr. Trump in over four years and is "ready for this, of course, at any time. And I will be ready for a meeting if he wants it. ... I'm sure we will have plenty to talk about."

Putin, as he often does, may have been aiming to portray Russia as a constructive country that is open to dialogue, while at the same time leaving Moscow a path to shut the door on any negotiations and blame others for their failure.

He rejected an assertion from a reporter for the U.S. network NBC that, amid heavy Russian losses in Ukraine and after the downfall of ally Bashar al-Assad in Syria and other setbacks for Moscow, he would be in a weaker position than Mr. Trump in talks.

With Russia making gains on the ground as its full-scale invasion nears the three-year mark, he suggested that Moscow would have little reason to make compromises and that it would approach any peace process from a position of strength.

On the battlefield, where Russian forces have had the upper hand since an unsuccessful Ukrainian counteroffensive in 2023, "the situation is changing dramatically," Putin said. "There is movement along the entire front line. Every day."

Unanswered question

Coughing and clearing his throat repeatedly, Putin tried to exude an unhurried air of calm, asserting that Russia is ready to fight on indefinitely and to keep churning out the weapons it needs to do so while seeking to cast doubt on Ukraine's ability to keep up its defenses for long.

"Soon, those Ukrainians who want to fight will run out, in my opinion – soon there will be no one left who wants to fight. We are ready, but the other side needs to be ready for both negotiations and compromises," Putin said.

He compared Ukrainian recruiting methods to a dogcatcher rounding up strays and said Kyiv is sending unprepared draftees to the front with insufficient training – something that Russia, which has suffered casualties in the hundreds of thousands as it presses for months to take Ukrainian cities it has virtually destroyed, is widely accused of doing itself.

He also trolled both Ukraine and the West in comments when he rejected a suggestion that his claims that a hypersonic intermediate-range missile Russia used against Ukraine last month cannot be shot down were bogus, challenging the United States to a "high-tech 21st-century

(Continued on page 33)

In spirit of St. Nicholas, humanitarian aid missions deliver hope to people of Donbas

UOC of the U.S.A.

SOMERSET, N.J. – On December 6, a humanitarian aid mission to Ukraine, organized by the efforts of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the U.S.A. (UOC of the U.S.A.) and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, was led by Fr. Kostyantyn Kuznetsov and a group of dedicated volunteers to the towns of Sviatohirsk in Luhansk Oblast and Bakhmut in Donetsk Oblast, which both continue to suffer devastation under Russian occupation.

The volunteer team visited a family-type orphanage in Sviatohirsk that houses children who had lost their homes and, in many cases, their loved ones to the ravages of war.



Fr. Kostyantyn Kuznetsov

A boy holds a toy given to him by Fr. Kostyantyn Kuznetsov, who met with children during a humanitarian aid mission to Sviatohirsk in Ukraine's Luhansk Oblast on December 6, the feast day of St. Nicholas. The mission was coordinated by a collaboration between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the U.S.A. and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

With the blessing of Metropolitan Antony, prime hierarch of the UOC of the U.S.A., toys, books, educational games, as well as winter necessities, including fresh citrus fruits, were delivered. The joy was palpable as children received the gifts, which also served as reminders that they are seen, valued and cherished.

In the city of Bakhmut and surrounding villages, where war has displaced thousands of families, the aid mission offers both material relief and spiritual hope. Fr. Kuznetsov coordinated efforts and logistical support to reach the most vulnerable. Nutritional assistance has fed hungry children and families, while gifts of toys have brought smiles to the faces of children whose lives have been upended by war. These small acts of love shine as symbols of hope amidst the darkness of loss and destruction, organizers of the aid mission said.

Russia continues to commit genocidal acts that desecrate the image of God within humanity, Archbishop Daniel said, and those acts are especially felt during the season preceding the celebration of the Nativity. The archbishop also emphasized the resilience of the Ukrainian people, who continue to pray for protection and deliverance.

"Children are our future," said Archbishop Daniel, president of the Consistory of the UOC of the U.S.A. "Their resilience inspires us, but their burdens remind us of our duty as Christians to serve. We cannot replace what they have lost, but we can fill their hearts with love, hope and faith. This is the essence of Christ's calling – to love unconditionally and to give selflessly."

The timing of the visits were particularly significant, as they coincided with the feast of St. Nicholas, the beloved patron saint of children and the destitute. St. Nicholas dedicated his life to acts of kindness and charity, becoming a symbol of Christian love in action.

"St. Nicholas teaches us the power of giving – not just material gifts, but the gift of ourselves," the archbishop said. "In serving others, especially those who can give us nothing in return, we honor Christ himself. Let this feast inspire us to become gifts to one another, just as Christ is the



Courtesy of Fr. Kostyantyn Kuznetsov

Children from Bakhmut in Donetsk Oblast are seen with Fr. Kostyantyn Kuznetsov during a humanitarian aid mission on December 6 that was coordinated by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the U.S.A. and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

greatest gift to the world."

Such a message resonates deeply during the holiday season, a time when the abundance of some can starkly contrast with the lack experienced by others. The children of the region, like so many displaced persons across Ukraine, are enduring a Christmas far from their homes, their traditions and their sense of security. Yet, through the generosity of the faithful, the Church has brought them a taste of joy and the knowledge that they are not alone, the archbishop said.

The UOC of the U.S.A.'s charitable efforts are made possible by the selfless support of its clergy, volunteers and benefactors.

With the blessing of Metropolitan Antony, Archbishop Daniel has visited humanitarian aid centers in Germany and Poland, ensuring that relief efforts remain effective and impactful. These missions, carried out in cooperation with the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, demonstrate the unity of the body of Christ in respond-

ing to the call of those in need, church leaders said.

The collaboration between the UOC of U.S.A. and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine has proven to be a testament to the power of faith and unity. Together, they provide lifesaving support to soldiers, widows, orphans and elderly citizens who bear the brunt of war's devastation. Their efforts call others to reflect on the shared humanity that binds people together, the archbishop said.

"Every gift, every prayer, every act of love strengthens our mission to serve those in need," Archbishop Daniel said. "To see the smiles of these children, to witness their laughter amidst sorrow, is to see the face of Christ. Thank you for being His hands and feet in this broken world."

Individuals who would like to support the UOC of the U.S.A. as it works to provide not only material relief can do so through the organization's website at www.uocofusa.org.

Putin, in annual...

(Continued from page 1)

promises," he said.

However, Putin also admitted that he could not say when Russia would regain full control of the western region of Kursk, where Ukraine launched a shock offensive in August and still occupies territory.

"We will absolutely kick them out. Absolutely. It can't be any other way. But the question of a specific date, I'm sorry, I cannot say right now," Putin said during the event, which often lasts several hours.

Russia has been trending toward authoritarianism since the beginning of Putin's tenure.

But since an election in 2018, that trend has been more firmly entrenched than ever. The already marginalized opposition has been crushed.

Earlier this year, Alexei Navalny, Putin's most prominent critic, died while in a Siberian prison.

A raft of constitutional amendments imposed in 2020 enabled Putin to seek two additional six-year terms, the first of which he secured with a landslide victory in March in balloting that the international community called a "sham" and not "free

and fair."

The 72-year-old Putin, who is set to surpass Soviet dictator Josef Stalin's nearly 30-year reign by the end of his new term to become the longest-serving Russian leader in more than two centuries, could conceivably hold power until 2036.

Putin struck a defiant tone when the subject of weaponry came up during the broadcast. In an apparent trolling of Washington, he suggested a "21th-century high-tech duel."

"Let them determine some target for destruction, say in Kyiv: Concentrate all their air defense and missile defense forces there, and we will strike there with Oreshniks and see what happens," he said.

"We are ready for such an experiment, but is the other side ready?" he asked.

Russia launched the so-called Oreshnik ballistic missile against Ukraine on November 21 in a strike targeting the city of Dnipro.

Putin said at the time that it was part of Moscow's response to Ukrainian attacks on Russian soil with U.S.-supplied ATACMS and British-supplied Storm Shadow missiles.

Analysts have voiced skepticism about the Oreshnik, saying the launching of the new intermediate-range missile was as

much about political messaging as it was about military might.

Putin has been raising the specter of a nuclear strike since long before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and analysts said the Russian leader chose the Oreshnik to send a different signal to Washington.

"It's the kind of signaling you engage in when you can't, in fact, escalate in the way you've been threatening," Ruth Deymond,

senior lecturer in the Department of War Studies at King's College London, wrote on X of the November 21 missile strike.

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RFE/RL Current Time
Russian President Vladimir Putin speaks at his annual question-and-answer show on December 19.

Freeland...

(Continued from page 1)

Cabinet committee on Canada-U.S. relations, which was assembled in response to the protectionist policies of Donald Trump's first presidency and revived two days after his electoral win that will find him returning to the White House on January 20. Ms. Freeland was appointed chair of that Canadian committee.

In her letter to Mr. Trudeau, she cited the "grave challenge" facing Canada from the incoming Trump administration, which "is pursuing a policy of aggressive economic nationalism, including a threat of 25 percent tariffs."

"We need to take that threat extremely seriously," said Ms. Freeland, who noted "that means keeping our fiscal powder dry today" and "eschewing costly political gimmicks."

The economic update she was set to present to Parliament reported that Canada's deficit had ballooned to about \$43 billion, or about \$15 billion more than Ms. Freeland forecasted in her spring 2024 budget released in April.

In November, Prime Minister Trudeau announced a temporary federal sales-tax holiday for certain Christmastime purchases, and tax rebates in the amount of roughly \$174 delivered to about 18.7 million Canadians next spring - a measure not included in the recent fiscal statement.

Dominic LeBlanc, who was first appointed to serve in Mr. Trudeau's Cabinet in 2015 and once babysat the prime minister, four years his junior, was tapped to replace Ms. Freeland as finance minister.

In her letter to Mr. Trudeau, Ms.

Freeland said that Canada needs to push back "against 'America First' economic nationalism" and cited her "strenuous efforts this fall to manage our spending in ways that will give us the flexibility we will need to meet the serious challenges presented by the United States."

On the day of her resignation from Cabinet, Mr. Trump posted on Truth Social about the news.

"The Great State of Canada is stunned as the Finance Minister resigns, or was fired, from her position by Governor Justin Trudeau. Her behavior was totally toxic, and not at all conducive to making deals which are good for the very unhappy citizens of Canada. She will not be missed!!!" he wrote.

In 2018, as Canada's foreign affairs minister, Ms. Freeland led the country's negotiations to revamp the North American Free Trade Agreement into the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement. Then-President Trump said, without naming her at the time, "We don't like their representative very much."

Ms. Freeland has not publicly responded in kind.

Following his November presidential win, she told reporters in Ottawa that in her "experience, President Trump respects strength. He respects people and countries who are strong and clear in defending their countries, in defending their national interest. That's what I've always done and that's what I will continue to do."

During her nine years in Prime Minister Trudeau's Cabinet, Ms. Freeland also demonstrated "steadfast and unequivocal support for Ukraine," said Ukrainian Canadian Congress President Alexandra Chyczij in a December 16 statement.

"Since Russia's full-scale, genocidal inva-

sion of Ukraine, Chrystia Freeland has played a crucial role in securing aid and assistance for Ukraine," said Ms. Chyczij. "As one of the key leaders in the G-7 [Group of Seven] and [the] international community in developing the plan to use frozen Russian assets to support Ukraine, she ensured continued and predictable support for Ukraine's defense of the freedom of Europe."

"Perhaps most importantly, Chrystia Freeland can always be counted on for standing unwaveringly for the principles for which the Ukrainian people fight - democracy, human rights and liberty. Her passionate advocacy for those values is an example for others to follow," Ms. Chyczij said.

As the second person in the chain of command in the Canadian Cabinet, Ms. Freeland was also someone Mr. Trudeau could count on to steadfastly stand at his side in support of him and his government.

"Chrystia and I have worked very closely on some of the biggest files facing Canada - and with great success on renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement," the prime minister said five years ago when he appointed Ms. Freeland to be Canada's 10th deputy prime minister - a position now vacant following her resignation from the Cabinet.

"Our ability to work well together on these issues that quite frankly touch national unity, touch energy and environment, touch relations with all provinces and all regions of this country is going to be an extremely important thing at a time when we see some very different perspectives across the country that need to be brought together," Mr. Trudeau said.

An accomplished journalist, reporting from Ukraine and Russia for such media outlets as the Financial Times, Ms. Freeland entered federal Canadian politics in 2013 as a successful star candidate for the Liberal Party, whom Mr. Trudeau immediately

named to his Cabinet when he became Canada's 23rd prime minister in 2015.

International trade became her first ministerial portfolio, which Ms. Freeland held until 2017 when she was appointed foreign affairs minister.

Following the 2019 Canadian general election, which reduced the Trudeau Liberals from leading a majority government to one with a minority of Commons seats, Ms. Freeland became deputy minister and minister of intergovernmental affairs, tasked with working with the premiers of Canada's 10 provinces and three territories.

When in 2020 Bill Morneau, the prime minister's first finance minister, resigned from his post, Ms. Freeland became his successor while retaining the role of deputy prime minister, a position Mr. Trudeau's late prime ministerial father, Pierre, created in 1977.

Her absence as Mr. Trudeau's chief lieutenant has been quickly felt.

During the week of her sudden departure from Cabinet, Ms. Freeland's Liberal colleagues greeted her with a standing ovation at their caucus meeting and attendees at their annual Christmas party lined up to take pictures with her.

"This will not be the end of the road," Ms. Freeland wrote in a letter to supporters.

Whether she runs to lead the Liberals, many of her fellow Liberal parliamentarians have called for the party's current leader, Mr. Trudeau, to step down.

Ms. Freeland's letter to him was "a vote of non-confidence in the prime minister," Wayne Long, a Liberal MP from the Canadian province of New Brunswick, told CTV News, and drew the comparison of the former Democratic House Speaker credited with helping to convince Joe Biden to end his 2024 presidential reelection bid.

The former deputy prime minister is "our Nancy Pelosi," he said.

Keeping Ukraine...

(Continued from page 2)

Russia. The confusion stems partly from Russia's hybrid war strategy, which has erased any clear-cut distinctions between peace and war. This can further complicate the attainment of consensus in NATO regarding the prerequisites to Ukraine's eventual accession.

Nor is "freezing the war" an option to be exercised unilaterally by Ukraine and its NATO partners. A Russia that has prevailed on the battlefield will likely persist with low-intensity warfare against Ukraine even after a "freeze" is declared. It may prepare for "unfreezing" it when convenient, as seen between the 2014-2015 Minsk armistice agreements and the 2022 all-out invasion.

Absent a political consensus in NATO over Ukrainian membership, certain European allies are holding informal consultations about post-conflict security guarantees to Kyiv by NATO members outside of NATO's framework. French President Emmanuel Macron initiated this process in February with an informal gathering of European heads of state and governments in Paris, which the Biden administration snubbed by sending an assistant secretary of state. Mr. Trump's election in the United States has helped accelerate those discussions among European allies in various overlapping formats. Britain, France, Germany and Poland are the most active participants, while Italy and Nordic countries are also expected to contribute to post-conflict security guarantees for Ukraine. Possible forms of military assistance and defense industry cooperation with Ukraine are also being considered below the level of security guarantees (PAP, November 12, 13; Le Monde, November 25; Die Welt, December 5, 13).

The allies involved are receptive to some of Kyiv's inputs. Options currently under discussion - all hypothetical at this stage in

these formats - include the following: a "coalition of the resolute" to deploy forces to Ukraine as part of a possible armistice package, deterring further Russian attacks; allied troops to enforce an eventual armistice on the Ukrainian side of a demarcation line; non-combat boots on the ground, far from the frontlines, performing logistical and technical assistance tasks to free up the corresponding Ukrainian personnel for frontline combat; and air defenses in allied territory (Poland in this case) to target Russian missiles and drones in certain parts of Ukraine's air space.

These and other proposals had also been discussed in the run-up to NATO's Washington summit, but have made no headway thus far. Those options presuppose acting outside NATO's framework. Allies willing to consider those options believe, however, that they need to be covered by NATO's security guarantees to deter and counter possible Russian retaliation. It seems, in this case, that coalitions of the willing venturing outside NATO's framework cannot, after all, act without NATO's collective consent.

No viable substitute for NATO membership is discernible at this stage for Ukraine, and no alternative for the alliance itself if it is serious about securing Ukraine. To do so, European NATO allies embarking on that task would need to be covered by U.S. extended nuclear deterrence as well as NATO Article Five.

Since 2022, Western allies have understood that any post-war security guarantees to Ukraine must be Western only, excluding Russia. Sequencing the process will be crucial. The guarantees would need to be nailed down by NATO and Ukraine in advance of, not as part of, any negotiations with Russia.

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Plast Chicago branch marks 75th anniversary with evening program

by Irene Artiushenko

CHICAGO – On November 30, under a banner that proclaimed “Where we live, Plast lives,” over 300 members and friends of Plast Ukrainian Scouting Organization gathered to celebrate the 75th anniversary of scouting activity in Chicago.

The hall of the Ukrainian Cultural Center buzzed with laughter, energy and excitement as multiple generations of Plast members reunited and reminisced about their scouting experiences.

As the evening program began, emcee Katrusia Holian welcomed guests who first proudly sang Plast’s anthem, before solemnly bowing their heads for a prayer led by Rev. Roman Artymovych, who is also a member of Plast.

During a minute of silence, attendees, including wounded Ukrainian soldiers who

were guests of the Protez Foundation, honored the memories of all Plast members who have given their lives since 2014 in the fight to maintain Ukraine’s independence and democracy. Their photos appeared in a moving video screened during the evening for guests.

A poignant moment came when the portraits of 30 Plast Chicago branch leaders who served from 1949-2024 were proudly carried into the hall. Their portraits will be placed on a tableau displayed in the branch headquarters to serve as a reminder of the accomplishments that past and present generations have achieved and as an inspiration for those yet to take on the responsibility.

In his remarks, the current head of the Chicago branch, Andrew Kolomayets, first thanked the volunteer committee that, under the leadership of Julie Kashuba,



Courtesy of Julie Kashuba

The celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Chicago branch of Plast Ukrainian Scouting Organization included musical performances by a 75th anniversary chorus ensemble.



Members of the Pobratymy fraternity of Plast Ukrainian Scouting Organization gather for a group photo at the Ukrainian Cultural Center in Chicago on November 30.



Keynote speaker Zoe Ripecka, a native Chicagoan, a member of Plast and the chief operating officer of Razom for Ukraine, recalled the guidance she received from the Plast handbook “Velyka Hra.”

organized the evening and assembled a historical photo exhibit at the Ukrainian National Museum that highlighted Plast Chicago’s activities throughout the previous 75 years.

Mr. Kolomayets then recalled and thanked the branch’s founding members for their dedicated efforts to keep the flame of Ukrainian scouting alive. Those pioneers arrived in the United States with many of the same challenges most immigrants face. Yet, heedless of personal comforts, they had the fearless drive to revive Plast in their new country.

In June 1949, an inaugural meeting was held and work began to build a Plast branch in the city. Regardless of their advanced ages, a number of these original members of the “Greatest Generation” were present at the festivities and received a heartfelt standing ovation from the audience.



Andrew Kolomayets, head of the Chicago branch of Plast, addresses the audience during the group’s 75th anniversary celebration at the Ukrainian Cultural Center in Chicago on November 30.

The evening’s keynote speaker, Zoe Ripecka, a native Chicagoan, a member of Plast and the chief operating officer of Razom for Ukraine, an organization that has supported Ukraine since the beginning of Russia’s war on Ukraine in 2014, recalled the guidance she received from the Plast handbook “Velyka Hra.”

It taught Plast members to overcome challenges and live by the values of self-reliance and self-determination, she said. In today’s struggles in Ukraine, these tenets have served to inspire spirited resilience, fortitude and unwavering hope, she added.

Throughout the evening, several distinguished speakers addressed the guests, including the head of Plast in the United States, Mark Jakubowycz; Consul General of Ukraine in Chicago Serhiy Koledov, President of the Pobratymy Foundation Oleh Skubiak; Chair of the Selfreliance Foundation of Selfreliance Federal Credit Union Victor Wojtychiw; and Director of the Heritage Foundation of First Security Federal Savings Bank Taras Drozd.

The evening’s formal festivities were capped by a spirited sing-a-long led by a talented group of Plast members, both singers and guitarists. The audience recalled evenings spent around campfires enthusiastically singing songs of the majestic Carpathian Mountains, or exhilarating scouting adventures, and the beauty of a distant, but beloved Ukraine.

The evening’s formal program ended with the singing of “Mnohaya Lita” for all those present and the organization they love. In true Plast tradition, a lively dance followed.

A video highlight of the evening is posted on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/qQdG-2KoL3JU>.



Members of the Lisovi Mavky sorority of Plast Ukrainian Scouting Organization gather for a group photo at the Ukrainian Cultural Center in Chicago on November 30.



More than 300 guests and members of Plast Ukrainian Scouting Organization gathered on November 30 to celebrate the branch’s 75th anniversary of scouting activity in Chicago.

Russia and...

(Continued from page 6)

countries most directly involved. In Russia, Putin continues to enjoy public support for his war. Evidence suggests that said support is more broad than deep, with most Russians prepared to say they back Putin's actions, but ever fewer willing to sacrifice anything in support of the war (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, September 10). As a result, the Kremlin has worked hard to treat the war as distant as possible from the concerns of ordinary Russians. In 2024, for example, Moscow was unable to conduct a general mobilization because of popular opposition and the risk of a new emigration by the country's military-age population. Instead, the Kremlin has been forced to pardon criminals who agree to serve, offer ever larger bonuses (several times the average yearly wage in most regions) to get men to sign up, and bring in foreigners to fight its battles (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, October 24). The war has come home and is now affecting ordinary Russians' daily lives. Money that previously went to social programs is being reallocated to military ones, inflation is rising and many goods are no longer available because of sanctions (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, October 3, 21).

The Ukrainian advance into Kursk Oblast and the increasing number of drone attacks deeper into Russia and on Moscow itself has brought the fighting to everyday Russians' doorsteps. The return of Russian men in coffins, the appearance of ever more former soldiers disfigured by war on Russian streets, and the rising number of otherwise healthy veterans with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other psychological conditions may affect Russian society the most (Window on Eurasia, November 23; see Eurasia Daily Monitor, January 19, July 16, 24, November

19, 27). The longer the war goes on, the greater the effects of all these factors will be – and the more problems Moscow will have with a population that is increasingly divided about the war. The Kremlin fears these effects' influence on the war's popularity will persist, making it harder to ignore how many sacrifices have been made with less to show for them than Russian propagandists suggest (Window on Eurasia, December 3).

Ukraine also faces a series of internal problems, including but not limited to difficulties raising enough troops, war weariness and damage to property, particularly housing and hospitals. The rising number of deaths due to the war and emigration exacerbated by the conflict are both intensifying the country's demographic decline and causing difficulties in many sectors of the economy. While these get less attention abroad than the difficulties Russia faces (except in Russian media), they too contribute to issues within Ukrainian society (see Eurasia Daily Monitor July 18, October 18; Window on Eurasia, July 28).

The changing international environment is also having a greater impact on the war than it has previously. Widespread war weariness exists in many Western countries. This has helped power the rise of right-wing populist governments that are more isolationist than their predecessors and willing to defer to regional hegemons such as Russia – especially if they see economic advantages for themselves in doing so (Ukraina.ru, December 8). The election of Donald Trump as U.S. president is part of this trend, as he has pledged to end the war in Ukraine quickly and restart relations with Russia, even if such a move would require putting enormous pressure on Kyiv. For Ukraine, this might mean threats of a major scaling back in or a potential end to U.S. assistance entirely. European countries are trying to devise ways to assist Ukraine

if this comes to pass, but, given the continent's problems, it is uncertain whether they have the ability and/or will to do so (The Kyiv Independent, November 18). These changes have sparked hopes in Russia and fears in Ukraine that the West, in general, and the United States, in particular, will seek a settlement in Ukraine to allow for a drawdown of Western efforts.

Even with all of these developments, reaching a ceasefire will be difficult. Working to ensure that such an accord will, in turn, lead to peace appears to be harder still. The first step toward a ceasefire, the shift in international conversations from total victory or defeat toward cries for ending the bloodletting and sanctions, has already occurred. That being said, as the most thoughtful Russian commentators have noted, Putin is not currently compelled to seek a ceasefire. He has enough resources to continue his war on Ukraine for a long time. In the words of social and economic analyst Sergei Shelin, Putin certainly does not want a truce with Kyiv "but might agree to one" for several reasons: the war is costing more than expected, his imperialism is increasingly at odds with the nationalism of the Russian people, and the population itself is tired of war (The Moscow Times, December 6). Consequently, Putin has the ability to drag his feet, hoping the West will make more concessions to Moscow and force Ukraine to go along with them. After all, the Kremlin leader knows that he will be able to present almost anything he ultimately gets as a Russian victory (Kasparov.ru, December 2). Putin also is aware that, once a ceasefire is in place, the West is likely to redirect its attention elsewhere. This would make it easier for Putin to conduct additional activities across the former Soviet space and, more generally, rebuild his military capabilities.

This is precisely what policymakers in Ukraine fear and why Kyiv will cautiously

approach any talks about a ceasefire, even if there is a desire to bring an end to the war. More than that, precisely because the West appears so ready to make concessions to Moscow and is so reluctant to provide credible security guarantees to Kyiv in the form of NATO membership – a deal killer for Moscow – Ukraine is certain to be forced to consider how it can defend itself in the future (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, July 18, August 6, 7, 14 [1], [2]). This would necessitate strengthening its already powerful drone industry, building up its armed forces, and potentially developing nuclear weapons. That final step is far more unlikely, regardless of Russian propaganda around the possibility of Ukraine rejoining the nuclear club (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, July 8, October 8, November 8, 13, 21). Kyiv will have an interest in expanding the portion of its arsenal that is domestically produced to avoid being subject to a Western veto over how its weapons are used, something that has been a problem up to now (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, June 4).

No shortcut to peace between Russia and Ukraine exists, and a rapid pursuit of a ceasefire by the West in pursuit of peace could backfire, raising the risk of an even larger conflagration in the future (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, October 21). Some Russian commentators are already warning about such a possibility (T.me/dimitriy_savvin, October 31, reposted at Kasparov.ru, November 11; Izvestiya, December 9). Western policymakers' have feared that offering NATO accession to Ukraine risks Russian escalation. On the contrary, a willingness to make concessions in the pursuit of peace could make a broader war with Russia more likely.

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NEWSBRIEFS

(Continued from page 2)

"biggest network" of Russian spies operating within the country who were allegedly collecting intelligence on ally-donated F-16 fighter jets, among other military targets. The December 17 announcement underlines what Ukraine described as Russia's constant spying efforts as it continues to repel Russia's ongoing invasion launched in February 2022. The SBU claimed its military counterintelligence division neutralized the alleged spy network working for Russia's Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) across five Ukrainian regions. In a coordinated operation, the SBU identified 12 Russian agents and informants, including former Ukrainian soldiers who desert-

ed their positions and were later allegedly recruited by Russian intelligence while on the run from law enforcement. The group operated across Ukraine's key regions – Zaporizhia, Kharkiv, Sumy, Mykolayiv and Odesa – under the leadership of a GRU-appointed handler based in the Dnipro-petrovsk region, the SBU said. The group's leader allegedly used forged documents, including fake credentials, to conceal his identity. According to the SBU, the agents were tasked with high-value intelligence missions crucial to the Russian military strategy. These included pinpointing the locations of Ukrainian air-defense systems and secret military airfields where F-16 fighter jets might be stationed and locating Ukrainian companies involved in the production of electronic warfare systems used to counter Russian drones. The SBU report-

ed that the network's operators often used personal contacts, including Ukrainian soldiers in the frontline area, to unwittingly extract sensitive information from them. The focus on F-16 fighter jets underscores Russia's strategic concerns, the agency noted, as Ukraine's acquisition of these Western-supplied jets represents a potential major impact in the nearly 3-year-old full-scale war. The advanced aircraft bolster Ukraine's air capabilities, posing a significant threat to Russian operations. For Moscow, gaining intelligence on their potential deployment locations is critical to preemptively countering their use. The SBU has officially indicted the prominent members of the spy network on charges of state treason and the unauthorized disclosure of military information about the movement and location of Ukrainian forces. Other participants in the operation may face further charges from law enforcement officials. The suspects face prison terms of up to eight years if convicted. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service)

summer havens for families. Local residents painted a dire picture of the shoreline, noting oil-covered birds that cannot fly and stray dogs covered in fuel oil roaming the shore. They also noted the strong scent of oil in the air with many residents complaining of nausea and skin and eye irritations. Almost 300 people, including volunteers with heavy equipment, are working to minimize the consequences of the accident, officials said. Two municipalities have organized operational headquarters for cleaning. Environmentalists, however, warn that the spill's size may already be too big to handle. The chairman of the region's maritime trade unions, Leonid Glushak, told the Kedr website that the overwhelming majority of the fuel oil has already seeped into the sea, exacerbating the eco-catastrophe. According to Mr. Glushak, Volgofleets tankers, intended for river voyages, are inadequate for open seawater such as the Kerch Strait. Moscow has been using a so-called shadow fleet of tankers – a group of old, uninsured oil vessels – to bypass Western sanctions imposed over its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The poor condition of these ships has raised concerns about environmental disasters. Authorities have started criminal investigations into the accident, which Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned could be repeated in other areas of Europe. "Our sea is facing yet another environmental disaster caused by Russia. But there are even larger and more dangerous Russian tankers operating in your seas. Stopping this fleet is not just about cutting off Russia's war funding – it's about protecting nature," he said in a post on X on December 17. Russia illegally annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. (RFE/RL's Russian Service)

Massive oil spills after Russia's tankers sink

Dozens of kilometers of Black Sea coastline in Russia's Krasnodar region have been covered in heavy fuel oil, local authorities and residents reported on December 17, after two oil tankers were heavily damaged during a storm in the Kerch Strait. Regional Gov. Veniamin Kondratyev said cleanup crews were being dispatched to the area as high winds helped spread large amounts of spilled oil along the coastline, raising concerns of an impending environmental disaster in the Black Sea. Social media photos and video showed wildlife covered in dark liquid, the result of the December 15 incident involving two Volgofleets tankers that were carrying thousands of tons of mazut – low-quality heavy fuel oil. The vessels reportedly ran aground in the ecologically sensitive waters off Ukraine's Moscow-annexed Crimean coastline. One of the tankers reportedly capsized and split into two during a severe storm. Waves as high as 3-4 meters, considered dangerous for such vessels, are believed to have caused the accident. Reports of environmental degradation are mounting as more and more oil spreads across the sea and onto shores that are

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said a deal allowing transit of Russian gas through his country will not be extended into 2025, but said he's ready to discuss other methods of providing supplies to Western Europe. "If the European Commission officially approaches Ukraine about

(Continued on page 13)

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the loss in Syria will make much difference because it's hard to see how the Kremlin could take victory in Ukraine more seriously than they already do," she wrote in e-mailed comments to RFE/RL.

Ms. Massicot suggests it will depend on how much of a presence in Syria and the surrounding region Russia manages to salvage.

"If Russia is pushed out entirely from Syria and they are unable to offset with basing elsewhere in the region, such a serious blow to Russian power would probably make Putin more rigid and determined to show control and 'success' in Ukraine," she wrote.

At the same time, Ukrainian commentators say the collapse of a regime that had stood as a symbol of newfound Russian clout abroad could prompt the rest of the world to view Moscow as weaker and more vulnerable than when Mr. Assad's grip on power seemed firm for almost a decade after Russia's military intervention in Syria in 2015.

The "myth that Russia is great, invincible, and so forth – it's all just propaganda. And I think this was seen clearly once again in many capitals, and it will influence all subsequent events," Volodymyr Ohryzko, Ukraine's foreign affairs minister in 2007-

2009 and now the head of a center for the study of Russia, told RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service.

"For us, I think this is a positive moment in our work with Western partners. And we must take advantage of this moment," Mr. Ohryzko said.

"We can use this in Ukraine, showing that nuclear powers can lose. The Soviet Union lost in Afghanistan, the United States essentially lost in Vietnam," Ukrainian political analyst Oleksandr Khara told RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service, adding it could help persuade Kyiv's supporters "that we can win in Ukraine if they help us with the necessary weapons and other things."

"We've seen in the past that the West has been willing to extend further support to Ukraine when they've had military successes against Russia. The Kremlin's inability to take any serious steps to prevent this geopolitical humiliation [in Syria] shows how overstretched they are in Ukraine," Ms. Deymond wrote.

"That and the failure of Putin's recent nuclear threats should encourage NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] members in their support for Ukraine," she said.

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What a Ukraine...

(Continued from page 2)

reportedly floated the idea of 40,000 troops being deployed to Ukraine, and he traveled to Warsaw to discuss the idea with Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk on December 12.

At a news conference after the meeting, Mr. Tusk told reporters that Poland did not intend to send troops to Ukraine, and he said Warsaw would not be forced into doing so.

The proposal for Western peacekeepers also came up five days earlier in Paris, when Mr. Macron hosted a meeting that included Mr. Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. According to The Wall Street Journal, Mr. Trump, who has repeatedly said Europeans should take a more active role in supporting and defending Ukraine, said he wanted European soldiers on the ground to monitor any cease-fire.

Mr. Trump does not want U.S. troops involved, the Journal reported, though he backs some sort of U.S. support for the effort.

Ukraine's leadership, which released a five-point Victory Plan in October, supports Western peacekeepers. But there's little incentive for Moscow to agree, says Oleksandr Khara, a former Ukrainian diplomat.

"Of course, it's good that they're talking about this, but ... there's no basis for the beginning of peace talks to begin," Mr. Khara, now an expert at the Kyiv-based Center for Defense Strategies, told Current Time.

"Since Russia believes that it can still break Ukraine, and the West has wavered, and Mr. Trump is going to put pressure on Ukraine and stop supplying weapons and other aid, why then sit down at the negotiating table when it's possible to seize more Ukrainian territory, kill more Ukrainians, and, in fact ... show that there's no point in [arguing] with Russia?" he said.

North Atlantic allies

One of the Kremlin's original grievances in justifying its February 2022 invasion continues to be one of Kyiv's central demands: North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership.

As recently as December 9, Mr. Zelenskyy repeated his insistence that membership was paramount.

But many NATO members are cool to the idea of Ukraine's membership.

At a summit in 2008, U.S. and European leaders hashed out a weak compromise that pledged eventual membership but didn't actually set up a road map. Some officials and experts have argued that was a mistake that led to Russia's 2022 invasion.

Since the invasion, NATO has expanded, admitting Sweden and Finland. But admitting Ukraine at present would mean admitting a battered, exhausted country partially occupied by a foreign power, which is problematic for many alliance members.

The United States is also cool to the idea. In Paris this week, Mr. Trump reportedly told Messrs. Macron and Zelenskyy that he didn't support Kyiv's membership bid, according to the Journal.

Deferring membership is "capitulation to Russian demands, and this will be a massive win for [Russian President Vladimir] Putin," Mick Ryan, a retired Australian major general, wrote in a blog post. "This will justify in the minds of Putin, and authoritarians like him, that the Russian aggression against Ukraine has worked because keeping Ukraine out of NATO was a core demand of Putin before the war."

Buffer zones

Barring some unforeseen event, Ukraine is all but certain to lose territory to Russia, which currently occupies around 20 per-

cent of Ukrainian land. That includes nearly all of the eastern Donbas region, plus the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea.

For most observers, setting up some sort of no-man's-land, such as the demilitarized zone that has separated North and South Korea for decades, is a model for many.

Putin floated the idea in March after winning reelection.

"I do not exclude that ... we will be forced at some point, when we deem it appropriate, to create a certain 'sanitary zone' in the territories today under the Kyiv regime," he said.

For Ukraine, the tricky part is where that line will be drawn – and how much of its economic base it will lose. Much of Ukraine's mining and heavy industry is in the Donbas occupied by Russia, and about 8 million hectares of Ukrainian farmland is occupied, according to one estimate.

In an audacious move, Ukraine invaded Russia in August, seizing part of the Kursk region. Mr. Zelenskyy later said the aim was to create a buffer zone and to push Russian missiles further away from Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv.

Since that time, however, Russia has ground down Ukrainian troops, taking back nearly half of the Kursk territory initially seized by Ukraine.

Also tricky with such a zone – buffer, sanitary, demilitarized – is surveillance and verification: what each side, or the peacekeepers, would be allowed to do to keep an eye on the other. The explosive evolution of drone warfare could potentially complicate this.

The elephant in the room

The biggest question mark for future talks may be Ukraine's largest weapons supplier: the United States, and the incoming Trump administration.

Mr. Trump has for years complained about the amount of U.S. weaponry sent by the outgoing administration of President Joe Biden and has suggested that Mr. Zelenskyy was a con man. He has also said that his skills as a businessman and real estate developer make him a negotiator capable of reaching a deal with Putin.

Mr. Trump's point man is Keith Kellogg, a retired U.S. Army lieutenant colonel who advised Mr. Trump's vice president during his first term.

In a widely cited paper he co-authored before Mr. Trump's November election, Mr. Kellogg laid out a plan, including freezing the front lines and using both sticks and carrots to get Kyiv and Moscow to negotiate.

For Kyiv, for example, the sticks mean cutting off U.S. weapons. For Moscow, that means things like flooding global markets with oil to drive down prices for the commodity, which Moscow relies heavily on for revenues.

Carrots for Moscow would be lifting Western sanctions or delaying Ukraine's NATO ambitions. For Kyiv, it would be continued military aid, funding for reconstruction, or even nonrecognition of Russian-occupied territories – similar to what Washington did over four decades regarding the Soviet annexation of the three Baltic states.

"We tell the Ukrainians, 'You've got to come to the table, and if you don't come to the table, support from the United States will dry up,'" Mr. Kellogg told Reuters in June. "And you tell Putin, 'He's got to come to the table, and if you don't come to the table, then we'll give Ukrainians everything they need to kill you in the field."

The Kremlin itself – impatient with an invasion that was supposed to be over in just days and that has thrown its economy out of whack – has signaled openness to a new, Trump approach.

But there are doubters. "We don't think [Putin] is serious about

negotiations," a senior NATO official, speaking on condition that he not be identified publicly, told RFE/RL last week.

"He may be willing to talk, but as long as he believes that he is winning, there is no incentive for negotiations. And he continues to believe that time is in his favor."

(With reporting by RFE/RL Europe

Editor Rikard Jozwiak)

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NEWSBRIEFS

(Continued from page 12)

transit of any gas other than Russian, we'll naturally discuss it and are ready to reach an appropriate agreement," Mr. Shmyhal said on Telegram. "Ukraine's agreement with Russia on gas transit comes to an end on January 1, 2025, and won't be extended." When Moscow launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the E.U. was largely dependent on Russia for gas but has since sought alternative supplies. Mr. Shmyhal previously said no extension was planned, but some countries, including Slovakia, had expressed hopes for additional time. Ukraine has said discussions have taken place on the possibility of shipping gas from Azerbaijan to Europe through Ukraine. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service)

Ukraine targets Russian fuel supply lines

Ukraine on December 14 carried out a complex operation targeting fuel supply routes from the Russian-annexed Crimea to occupied areas of Zaporizhia, an informed source told RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service. The operation involved a sabotage mission to detonate railway tracks near Oleksiyivka in the Bilmak district, derailing a train carrying fuel tanks. As the fire spread to the tanks, U.S.-supplied HIMARS rockets struck the locomotive and key railcars to prevent salvage efforts. The attack destroyed the locomotive and 40 tankers, crippling a critical rail line supplying Russian forces, the

source said. The operation was carried out by the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) in collaboration with the country's military intelligence, special operations forces and drone units. Moscow has not commented on the attack. Meanwhile, Russia launched over 100 suicide drones against Ukraine and struck the Kharkiv region with a missile attack overnight, Ukrainian authorities said on December 15. Air defenses downed 56 Shahed-type drones while 49 were "locationally lost," according to the Ukrainian military. Apartment buildings, houses and an unspecified piece of infrastructure were damaged due to falling debris in several regions. Two people were injured in Mykolayiv, according to local authorities. Separately, Kharkiv regional Gov. Oleh Synyehubov said a Russian missile struck the Kyivsky district, injuring a 48-year-old woman. Local media in Russia's Chechen Republic reported that suspected Ukrainian drones had targeted a military camp and a base in the capital, Grozny, on December 15. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service, with reporting by DPA)

Russian troops in Syria lack food, water

Russian military personnel still in Syria are experiencing a lack of food and drinking water as an evacuation of troops and equipment continues, according to the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ukrainian Defense Ministry (GUR). The Russian personnel are experiencing the

(Continued on page 37)



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From Bethlehem...

(Continued from page 1)

widely as possible in their communities. They bring it to various branches and units of the military, volunteer organizations, government agencies, churches, hospitals, etc. And, of course, they organize large events so that the Peace Light can shine in every Ukrainian home.

"As soon as the ceremony was over in Vienna, two Plast girls got into a car and drove the Light to Ukraine all night. Then, by train, the Bethlehem Light traveled across the country for several days to reach every Ukrainian home, hospital and orphanage to remind us all that, even in the darkest times, light has the power to prevail," said Mykhailo Stashuk, the head of the Plast branch in Kyiv.

For over 30 years, Plast has distributed the Bethlehem Peace Light across Ukraine as a symbol of unity and peace, and a reminder of the importance of helping others.

The Peace Light of Bethlehem is an international scouting tradition observed in the weeks before Christmas. It involves spreading a flame that was first lit in Bethlehem as a gesture of peace and hope. The tradition began in 1986 as a charitable initiative to deliver the flame from the birthplace of Jesus to people celebrating

Christmas around the world. Initially supported by scouts in Vienna, it soon expanded to other countries. Plast brought the Peace Light to Ukraine for the first time in 1992.

In addition, friendly meetings with scouts from Slovakia and Poland are held as part of the Bethlehem Peace Light program.

"Today, in these difficult times for our nation, this light should remind us that even the thickest darkness can be dispelled by light. By helping each other, by multiplying this light in our hearts, we will overcome the darkness," said Ksenia Dremliuzhenko, the head of Plast in Ukraine.

The lamp with a lit candle was also presented to Oleksiy Holik, a Plast member and soldier who will help spread the Light to military units along the front line.

"I am glad that our organization, the Plast members, will deliver the Bethlehem Light to the military. This is important for the boys and girls who will celebrate the holidays in the trenches or their military units. It is a reminder of a time before the war, of a home that is now far away. It gives us the feeling that we are waited for and supported," Mr. Holik said.

On December 15, Lviv Plast members placed lamps lit with the Bethlehem Peace Light on Mars Field, a site of solemn burials for Ukraine's fallen defenders. Similar



Markiian Lyseiko

A Ukrainian soldier (left), who is also a member of Plast Ukrainian Scouting Organization, and younger Plast scouts participate in a ceremony to spread the Bethlehem Peace Light at a railway station in Kyiv on December 15.



Press Service of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

Members of Plast Ukrainian Scouting Organization and members of Ukraine's parliament, who are also part of the scouting organization, stand with the Bethlehem Peace Light in the Verkhovna Rada.

ceremonies were held in other cities where Plast members who gave their lives for Ukraine are buried, with local Plast branches honoring their memory.

On December 18, Plast representatives presented the symbolic Bethlehem Peace Light to the leadership of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The Light was handed to Lt. Gen. Anatoliy Bargylevych, chief of the General Staff, who expressed his gratitude to the scouts for their patriotism and active civic engagement. He pledged to deliver the Light to Ukrainian defenders on the front line, helping them feel the warmth and support of people from across Ukraine.

"Your enthusiasm and dedication inspire not only your peers but all of us. The national scouting organization Plast is a good example of fostering patriotism among Ukrainian youth," Mr. Bargylevych said.

On December 17, representatives of Plast passed the Peace Light to members of Ukraine's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada.

Vice Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada Olena Kondratyuk thanked the Plast members for their mission to bring the Peace Light of Bethlehem to every corner of the country. She noted that the Light will give everyone strength, inspiration, wisdom and the will to do good deeds and pass legislation that benefits all of the Ukrainian people.

"This fire brings us hope and a dream that we all share – a sooner victory for Ukraine. I believe that with good thoughts, the power of faith, and a warm heart, we will cope with all the challenges and difficulties together," Ms. Kondratyuk said.

"The Bethlehem Peace Light is special

this year, and our traditions are unchanged. Every year we receive it from the hands of Plast members and carry it to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine," said Yaroslav Yurchyshyn, a member of the Verkhovna Rada and Plast.

"I have special hopes for this fire. It warms and encourages like never before. Today, the Light is so needed – it warms us spiritually. Let's do everything we can to keep the Bethlehem Light of Peace burning throughout our country. I am grateful to the Plast members for visiting us and my colleagues for consistently supporting this tradition," Mr. Yurchyshyn said.

The Bethlehem Peace Light also symbolizes Plast's commitment to helping others. It is distributed to hospitals, orphanages and hospices, often accompanied by gifts and carol singing. Plast members also bring the Light to wounded soldiers and veterans in hospitals.

Plast organized a "workshop of good deeds" at the Kyiv railway station as part of the ceremonial passing of the Peace Light. Volunteers joined efforts to support Ukraine's defenders by donating clothing for those in need, preparing gifts for the military, crafting trench candles and weaving camouflage nets for soldiers' helmets.

"Our country is living in an era of great challenges: war, loss, pain, fatigue, fear. But just as this small flame from Bethlehem will light millions of candles worldwide, each of us can become a source of light and hope for others. This year's slogan is 'Let's overcome darkness with light.' These are not just words; they are calls to action. For us, light is about good deeds. Even the smallest good deed can change reality," Ms. Dremliuzhenko, the head of Plast in Ukraine, said.



Plast Ukrainian Scouting Organization members in Vienna received the Bethlehem Peace Light on December 14.

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NYC Cultural Affairs

Zelenskyy says...

(Continued from page 1)

very beginning of next year, we need very much unity between the United States and E.U. and countries of Europe," Mr. Zelenskyy said.

The meeting comes as Ukrainian cities and infrastructure continue to sustain regular Russian drone and missile strikes while outgunned and outmanned Ukrainian forces are facing increasing difficulties in staving off Russia's increasingly rapid advance in the east.

The E.U. leaders and Mr. Zelenskyy were expected to reaffirm their "unwavering commitment" to supporting Ukraine "for as long as it takes," according to draft conclusions seen by Reuters.

"Russia must not prevail," the E.U. draft conclusions say. The bloc's leaders also stress that no decision must be made on Ukraine's fate without Kyiv's involvement.

Mr. Zelenskyy on December 18 met in Brussels with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) chief Mark Rutte and a group of European leaders who seek to develop their own plans if Mr. Trump, who has pledged to bring a swift end to the war, pulls support or forces Kyiv to make concessions to Russian President Vladimir

Putin to reach a cease-fire.

Organized by Mr. Rutte, the meeting involves officials from Germany, Poland, Italy, Denmark, the Netherlands and the European Union's main institutions.

The key topic of Mr. Zelenskyy's meeting with Mr. Rutte was security guarantees, Mr. Zelenskyy's office said.

"It is very important to use these two days in Brussels to meet with all our partners and have the same, and very importantly, not divided – the same – common European position on how to secure Ukraine, how to strengthen our people and, of course, make our army stronger," Mr. Zelenskyy said, according to a statement released by his office.

Strengthening Ukrainian air defenses particularly ahead of the winter was a key topic during Mr. Zelenskyy's meeting with Mr. Rutte, according to the statement from Mr. Zelenskyy's office.

The Ukrainian president was expected to again plead for more air-defense systems to try to help stave off Russian barrages against Ukraine's power grid.

"We have to do everything we can now to make sure that, when it comes to air defenses, when it comes to other weapons systems, we are doing everything we can to provide everything we can. We know of your request to make sure that 19 [Patriot

air defense] systems are delivered to Ukraine to protect critical infrastructure. So, this will all be on the agenda," Mr. Rutte said.

Mr. Rutte said Kyiv's allies should focus on ramping up arms supplies to ensure that Ukraine is in a position of strength prior to any peace negotiations with Russia.

Meanwhile, Russia attacked Ukrainian regions with 85 drones early on December 19, Ukraine's air force said, adding that 45 drones were shot down while the other 40 were derailed by Ukrainian electronic warfare systems that jammed their navigation systems.

The air force said the attack targeted 10 Ukrainian regions – Poltava, Sumy, Kharkiv, Kyiv, Khmelnytskyi, Chernihiv, Cherkasy, Kirovohrad, Dniproptrovsk and Mykolayiv.

Russia also launched two Iskander-M ballistic missiles and an Kh-59/69 guided missile during the attack, the air force said.

The missile strikes damaged private homes and apartment buildings in the Sumy and Dniproptrovsk regions, with no casualties or injuries reported.

The Ukrainian General Staff separately said that it had struck an oil refinery in

Russia's Rostov region.

"Damage was inflicted to the infrastructure and production facilities of the Novoshakhtinsk Oil Products Plant located in the Rostov Region of the Russian Federation," the General Staff said in a statement, adding that the refinery supplied Russia's military.

Rostov's acting governor, Yuriy Slyusar, said that the region "suffered a massive attack" using 30 drones and three missiles. Russia's Rostov region has repeatedly been targeted by Ukraine.

Separately, Russian officials said Ukraine struck Russia with at least 13 missiles and 84 drones.

In recent months, Ukraine has increased the number of drone attacks on Russian oil refineries and fuel depots that work for Moscow's military.

(With reporting by AFP, Reuters and dpa)

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Last foreign...

(Continued from page 5)

war, the bloodiest in Europe since World War II.

Over time, Mr. Lindsay upgraded his equipment and gear, "travelled often and never took a day off" after initially starting in Lviv before migrating further east closer

to the war's hotspots.

"I often imagined my last broadcast would come with triumph or tragedy," he wrote on social media.

For now, Mr. Lindsey will keep doing what he has done but on different social media platforms.

"Thanks to all who boosted word of my daily WGN Radio Ukraine report," he wrote. "Tune in; let's keep this story alive."

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and a Happy New Year to the hierarchs and leaders
of our Ukrainian Churches, all Ukrainian organizations,
the UNA's members, District Committees and Branches,
as well as readers of the UNA's publications and each
Ukrainian community in the diaspora and Ukraine.***

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!



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 A traditional Ukrainian nativity scene painting (Rudolfina) depicting the Holy Family in a stable with a starry sky and a horse in the background.

Ulyana Nyschuk, "NATIVITY", 2024 | UCU ART COLLECTION

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death - a great light was shown upon them." (Isaiah 9:2)

The radiant light of Christmas reminds us that God comes into the world to bring us love, hope, peace, and salvation.

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*Wishing you and your family
a very Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year!*

Roman, Alex, Juliana and Adriana Hirniak

*Радісних Свят, Різдва Христового і
Щасливого Нового Року!*

Rejoice!

May the blessings of Christ be upon you and your loved ones this season and into the New Year.



Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

*The Miller Family –
David and Jackie,
Jimmy, Emily and Bingo*

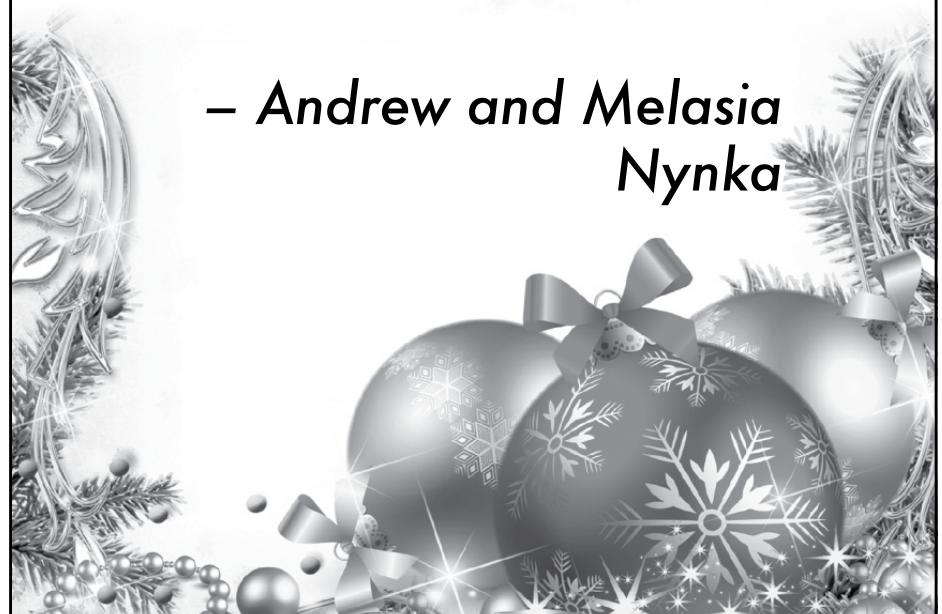
We greet our dear family and friends with a joyful Christmas carol and best wishes for a wonderful New Year!



*– Romana and Andriy Hadzewycz
Markian Hadzewycz
Paul and Christina Hadzewycz*

Wishing you and all of yours a very happy, blessed and merry Christmas

– Andrew and Melasia Nynka



*Wishing a
Merry Christmas
and a
Happy New Year*

to my family and friends.

Eugene Serba



*God's Blessings to All
during this Joyous Christmas Season
and
wishes for a Happy and Healthy New Year*



*Gloria (Paproski) and Donald Horbaty,
children: Roman and Chrystyna
grandchildren: Tristan and Justyna*

Христос Раждается!

**Wishing a Very Merry Christmas
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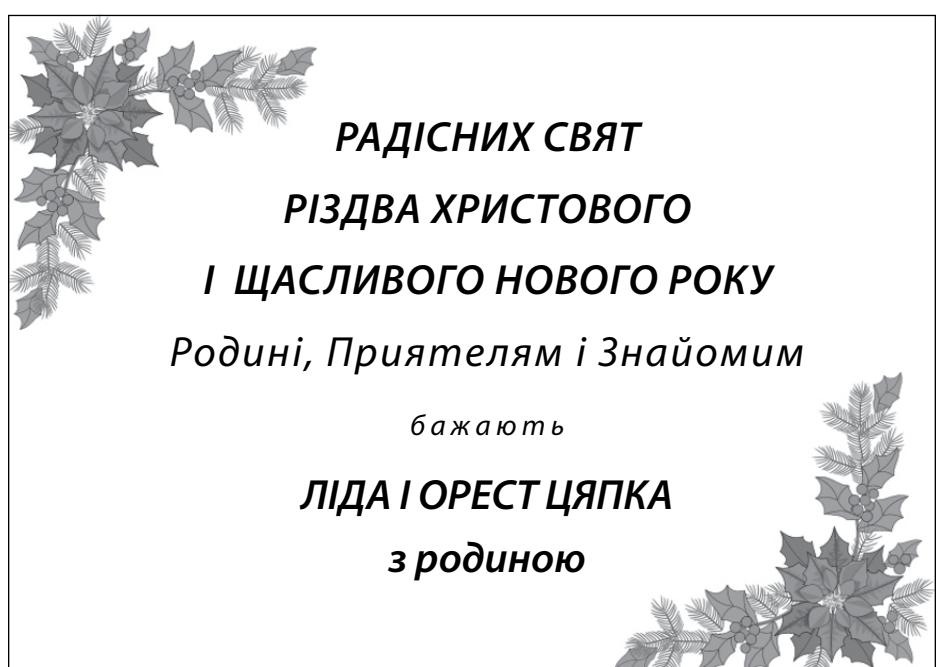
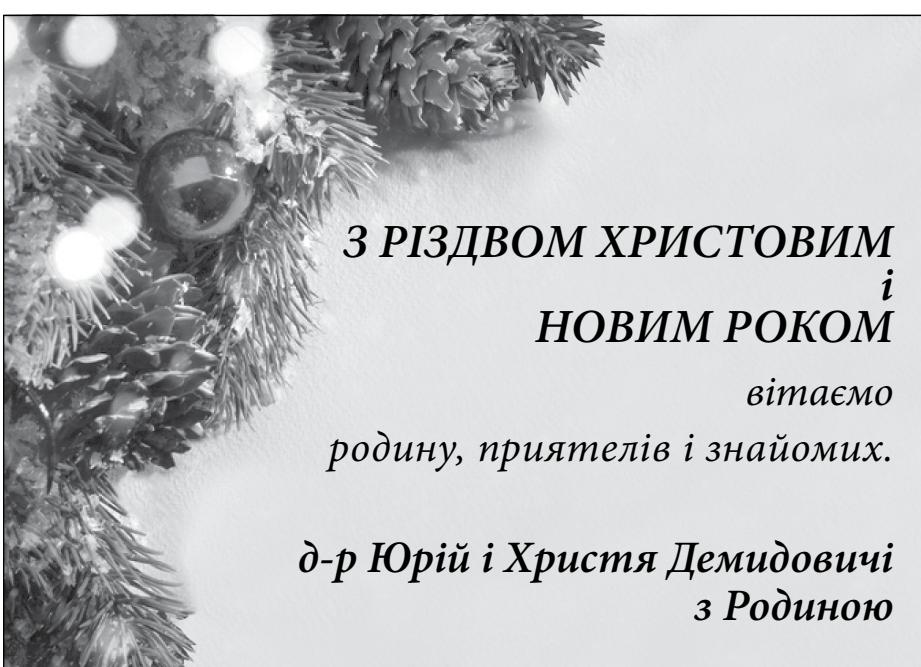
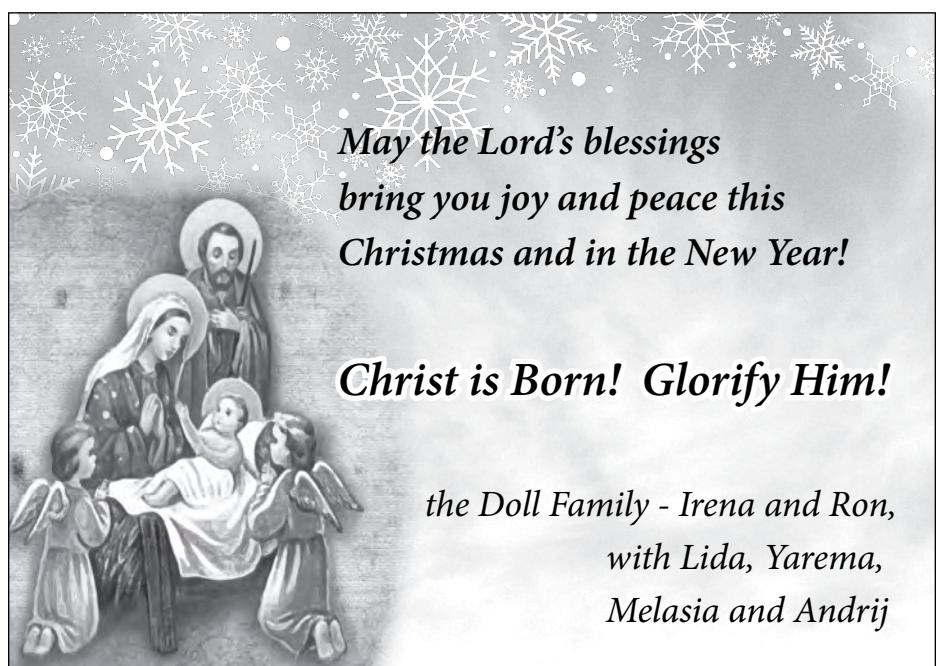
Bohdana, Bohdan and Alexander Puzyk

*May peace fill your home,
may joy fill your heart,
and may God's love fill
your life this Christmas.*



**Wishing you a Merry Christmas
and a Healthy and Happy New Year.**

John, Olya and Marko Czerkas





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we wish a safe Rizdvo!*

*Maria and Jerry Flynn
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Artist: Natałka Rosciszewska

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Ukraine, O my dear Ukraine,



The Taras Shevchenko monument in Borodyanka, Ukraine damaged by the Russian attack, April 2022.

*When I think of you, my homeland,
My heart can only cry...
Whither all the Cossacks
Whither their red coats?
Whither our good fortune
And whither blessed freedom?*

From His 1838 poem "Night of Taras," about a 1630 peasant revolt.

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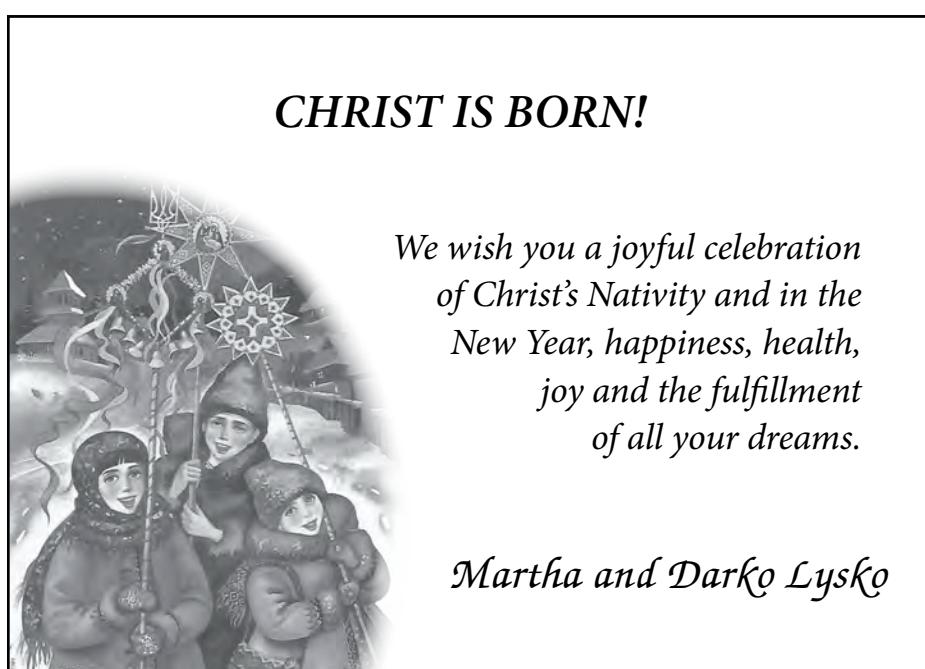
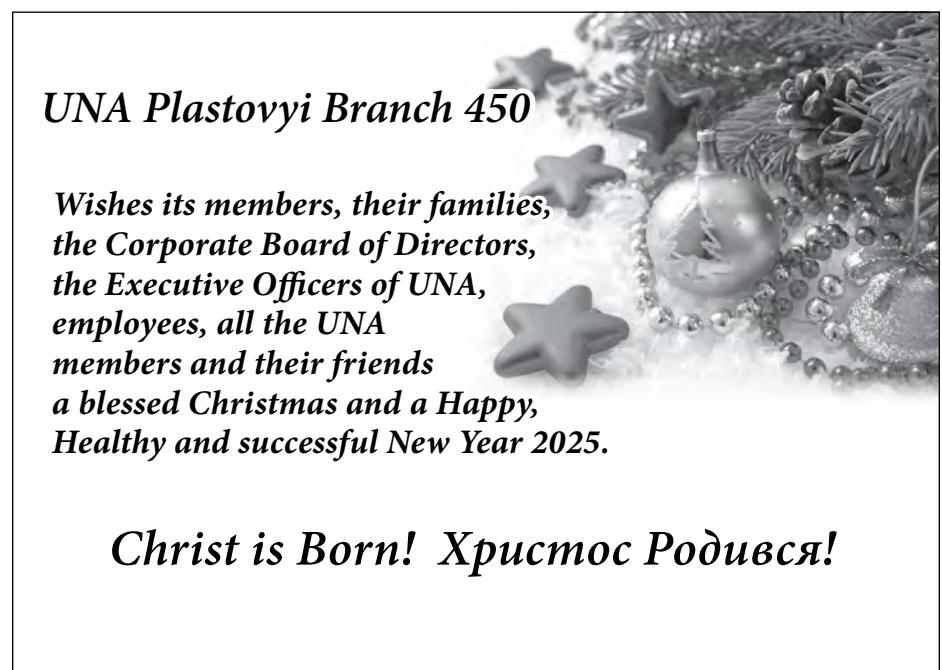
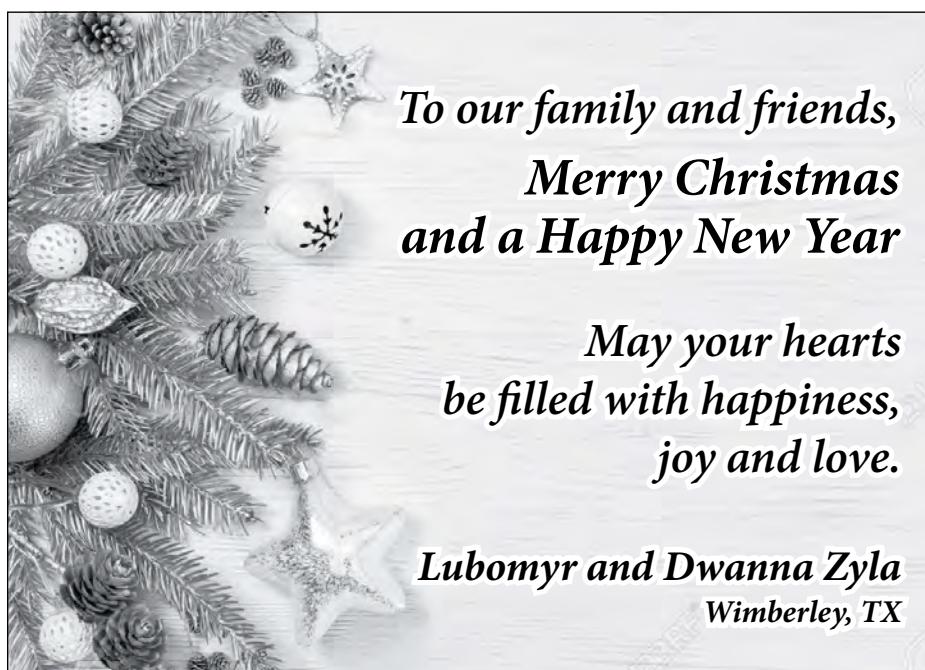
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*Wishing a very
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and a
Happy New Year
to all our family, friends and clients*

Roman Tabatchouk and family



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With this fervent prayer in our hearts and on our lips, we extend our heartfelt greeting this Christmas to His Holiness, Pope Francis, to His Beatitude, Patriarch Sviatoslav Shevchuk, to His Eminence Mykola Cardinal Bychok, to the Most Reverend Hierarchs, Reverend Priests, Dedicated Religious and Faithful of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, to the Honorable President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky and his Staff - as well to all our brothers and sisters in Ukraine - to the Esteemed Representatives of Ukraine in the USA, to the Directors of our diasporan Civic, Charitable, and Educational Institutions and Credit Unions, to the Leaders of our Youth Organizations, the Editors of our Ukrainian newspapers and periodicals, and to the many million members of our Ukrainian diaspora scattered by war to the far corners of the world, wishing all:

May the Christmas blessings of love and peace linger long and bright
in your hearts and in your homes.

Yours in the newborn Christ,

+ Paul. OSBM

+ Paul, OSBM, Eparch
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Thank you to all supporters and friends
May the Christmas feast bring peace to Ukraine
and health, love and hope to your families.
Victory to Ukraine! Slava Ukraini!

Serhiy Kvit, president
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*May this Christmas Season bring Peace,
Harmony and Tranquility, to our members,
all Ukrainians and the troubled world.*



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*У цей Різдвяний час, бажаємо здоров'я,
миру, і спокою дорогому членству,
дорогій Україні та всьому світі.*

MERRY CHRISTMAS



GREETINGS FOR THE NEW 2025 YEAR!

*The Executive Board and Board of Directors of the
United Ukrainian American Relief Committee, Inc
extend their sincerest wishes to
the hierarchy, clergy and religious of our Ukrainian churches,
to our benefactors and donors
and to all our Ukrainian brothers and sisters everywhere.*

*A special Christmas greeting to Ukraine's defenders
and their families.*

*May the Almighty Lord bestow his generous graces upon all
and the newborn Infant Jesus hear our prayers
to grant peace to our beloved Ukraine.*

Christ Is born! Let us glorify Him!



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Merry Christmas!

Wishing you and your family a Merry Christmas
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Committee members from coast to coast!

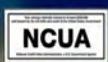
З Різдвом Христовим!

Від усієї команди УФКС, волонтерської Ради
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The Ukrainian American Credit Union Association (UACUA) greets all of you on the joyous holiday of Christmas!

We wish every family abundant warmth and comfort, and may our shared aspiration for victory be fulfilled as soon as possible! We believe in the strength of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and cherish the most precious things we have—our loved ones and our beloved Ukraine! May today be bright, warm, and safe for each of you.

**CHRIST IS BORN!
GLORIFY HIM!**



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Ukrainian American Credit Union Association

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CHRIST IS BORN!

*Greetings from KLK,
the Carpathian Ski Club,*

to all our members, family and friends!

*May you have
the spirit of Christmas, which is Peace,
the gladness of Christmas, which is Hope,
and the Heart of Christmas, which is Love.*

*Merry Christmas
and a Happy, Healthy New Year!*

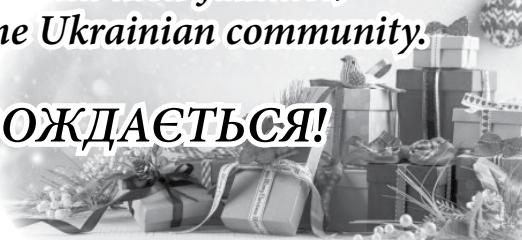


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*Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year
to its students and their families,
supporters and the Ukrainian community.*

ХРИСТОС РОЖДАЄТЬСЯ!



Warmest Wishes

for Christmas and the Holiday Season

to all our Members, their Families, our Friends,
and all the People of Ukraine
from the Board of Directors of
the Ukrainian Institute of America



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**Центральна Управа, Відділи
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проводи членства УНО – Канада,
Фундацію ім. О. Ольжича.

Молимо, щоб Бог Україну хранив, молимося за наш
народ, за збройні сили до закріплення української
соборної самостійної України.

Слава Україні! - Героям Слава!

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З Різдвом Христовим
і Новим Роком
бажаємо Вам веселих свят,
та Україні мир!

Сильно, Красно, Обережно, Бистро!

Пластова Станіця Бостон

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We wish you a
Merry Christmas
 and a
Happy New Year!

We send holiday wishes to all the Ukrainian people in our homeland and in the diaspora, and we pray that we may celebrate victory over the Russian aggressor in the coming year.

We sincerely thank all our branch heads and our entire membership for their hard work and support.

**The National Boards of
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 and
 The Lemko Research Foundation (LRF)**



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*The executive board of the
 Ukrainian Athletic Educational Association
 Chornomorska Sitch
 wishes all its members and supporters
 a Merry Christmas
 and a Happy New Year!*

Христос Рождається!



The war is ravaging Ukraine for a third year. The situation is becoming increasingly bleak. As we attend Christmas parties, mail Christmas cards and celebrate Sviat Vechir with family and friends, let us pause to think of and pray for our brethren in Ukraine, as they face a cruel Christmas Season.



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and

A HAPPY NEW YEAR

to all its members, guests, patrons
and the entire Ukrainian community.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!



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й душевного тепла.
Молимось, щоб Бог
захистив наших воїнів
у їхній боротьбі
за волю України!



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Христос Рождається!
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Різдвом Христовим
і
Новим роком**

Юрий і Зоряна Ставничий

Ukrainian pro sports update

by Ihor N. Stelmach

Svitolina trades tennis racket for rocket launcher

Ukrainian tennis star Elina Svitolina has often used her platform as one of her country's most famous athletes to draw attention to Russia's ongoing war on Ukraine. She recently swapped her racket for a rocket launcher while she was back in Ukraine during the off-season. On December 9, the No. 23 ranked women's player shared pictures of herself handling a rocket launcher and holding a machine gun in Kharkiv, Ukraine.

Writing on Instagram, the 30-year-old said Kharkiv has a special place in her heart. It is where Svitolina began her professional tennis career when she was 12. She called Kharkiv a city that provides warmth and protection during the war. She said that she gets motivation on the court from her country, her Ukrainian people, from Kharkiv and from the heroes fighting on the frontlines of the war.

Svitolina has spent much of her time away from the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) Tour in her homeland, helping Ukraine in its ongoing battle with Russia and primarily raising badly needed funds for Ukrainian children, schools and the Armed Forces. She will soon leave to prepare for the 2025 Australian Open, which is a little over a month away.

She began playing tennis at age 5 in Odesa, Ukraine, where she lived with her parents and older brother Yulian. A family decision to move to Kharkiv for her continued tennis development was temporarily delayed because of her mother's professional bowling career. Once mom finished

her competition schedule, which included participating in national championships, the family joined Svitolina in Kharkiv. For the first few months, she lived alone in a rented apartment in Kharkiv. She was picked up by a tennis coach in the morning and brought back in the early evening before dark.

Lots of long hours and hard work on her own helped her develop not only her tennis skills but also her independence. On weekends, she walked around Kharkiv to find sights in the city she wanted to show her mother when she visited.

Svitolina discussed her life as a 12-year-old living alone in an interesting city, very much unlike her hometown of Odesa. She said the people in Kharkiv were not as open as those in Odesa. Her family suffered through some difficult times, struggling to make ends meet before she started earning some money playing tennis. Her father was in the real estate business with limited income and, when mom finally arrived, most of the family budget went to cover rent and food.

Bayern Munich defeats Shakhtar 5-1 in Champions League

Bayern Munich recovered from an early setback to trounce Shakhtar Donetsk 5-1 at the Veltins Arena in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, on December 10. The sixth leg of the UEFA Champions League saw Oleksandr Zubko play a through ball to the feet of Kevin (Santos Lopes de Macedo), who charged into the box and slid the ball under Daniel Peretz to give the home side a 1-0 lead inside of five minutes.

The shock had not dissipated when a ball inside the Shakhtar box bobbed in the feet of several players before Konrad Laimer smashed the ball past Dmytro Riznyk to even the score. Despite the rapid response, Bayern struggled to break down the home side's stalwart defense. Right before halftime, the visitors started to control the match, and, after three on-target shots were blocked by Shakhtar bodies, Jamal Musiala set up Thomas Muller for the lead.

Valerii Bondar nearly leveled for Shakhtar only to have a Bayern player block his attempt. A Musiala goal was disallowed for a foul in the box, but Michael Olise doubled Bayern's lead in the 70th minute. Musiala did score, banging in a loose ball past Riznyk with minutes left on the clock, and Olise got his second of the night in extra time when he decked Riznyk out of his net.

Shakhtar has lost four of their six matches in the Champions League and face an uphill battle to secure a playoff spot as they sit in 27th place out of 36 teams. Their next match is scheduled for January 22, 2025, at French club Brest.

Ukraine ties for first place in shooting competition

Ukraine tied Serbia for first place in the medal standings and total medals at the 49th Belgrade International Shooting Competition (10-meter) held in Belgrade, Serbia, on December 6-8. Nine European countries competed at the event, which consisted of two separate competitions: Trophy of Belgrade on December 7 and Grand Prix on December 8.

Both Ukraine and Serbia won a total of eight medals



Instagram.com/elisvitolina

Ukrainian tennis star Elina Svitolina is seen after meeting with members of the Khartiya military unit outside of Kharkiv on December 9, when she handled a rocket launcher and a machine gun.

including three gold medals, three silver and two bronze medals. Ukrainian gold medalists were Viktor Bankin (Trophy of Belgrade air pistol), Daria Dudka (Grand Prix air rifle women) and Ihor Solovei (Grand Prix air pistol).

Ukrainian shooters won five medals in Trophy of Belgrade and three additional medals in the Grand Prix.

Usyk on Ukrainian postage stamp

Ukrposhta, Ukraine's postal service, is celebrating undisputed world heavyweight boxing champion Oleksandr Usyk in a most unique way: by releasing a special postage stamp in his honor. Announced on December 12 before his December 21 rematch against Tyson Fury, the stamp pays tribute not only to Usyk's success in the ring but also to his role as a symbol of Ukrainian pride and resilience.

At the official unveiling of the commemorative stamp, Ukrposhta CEO Ihor Smelyansky said, "Usyk's image on the stamp is a message that 'the world loves the strong.' And Ukrainians are famous for their courage and resilience. Strength is not always about muscles, missiles or physical superiority. It is about the character, faith and spirit with which our nation is endowed."

The special stamp is not just a collector's item as proceeds from the sale of the stamps will go to support the Usyk Foundation charity fund, reinforcing Usyk's commitment to giving back.

Smelyansky called Usyk a "symbol of invincibility for millions," saying that the champion has brought international attention to Ukraine. He expressed gratitude to Usyk "for making the Ukrainian flag fly on the screens of millions of people around the world during his appearances in the ring. His achievements are our pride and motivation."

(Continued on page 39)



Ukrainian heavyweight champion Oleksandr Usyk is seen on Ukrainian postage stamps released on December 12 that includes the slogan "The world loves the strong."

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UAF slams FIFA over unacceptable error

by Ihor N. Stelmach

The Ukrainian Association of Football (UAF) has furiously communicated its disgust over an "unacceptable error" made by the Federation of International Football Association (FIFA) during its announcement of the 2026 World Cup qualifying draw.

The glitzy ceremony at the body's headquarters in Zurich, Switzerland, on December 13 included a map displaying the countries of Europe. The map included Ukraine but it did not show the Crimean Peninsula as being within Ukraine's borders. Crimea is internationally recognized as part of Ukraine despite Vladimir Putin's invasion and illegal annexation of the region in 2014.

FIFA decided not to include Crimea as a part of Ukraine and received a scathing letter from Ukraine's governing football association over the move. The document expressed deep concern regarding the infographic map of Europe shown during the television broadcast of the European qualifiers draw for World Cup 2026 that aired on December 13.

"The map which indicated the countries unable to cross borders highlighted the territory of Ukraine without the Autonomous Republic of Crimea," the document said.

"Considering several official decisions and resolutions passed by the FIFA Council and the Union of European Football Associations [UEFA] Executive Committee since 2014, which addressed the territorial integrity of Ukraine and the protection of football stakeholders in our country from the aggressive policies of the Russian terrorist state, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, we emphasize that the version of the map presented by FIFA during the global broadcast to a multi-million audience is unacceptable," the letter said.

"It appears as an inconsistent stance by FIFA and UEFA on this crucial issue, especially in light of the ongoing destructive invasion initiated by Russia against Ukraine in the 21st century, in the heart of Europe," it said.

FIFA responds with explanation for error

On December 15, FIFA responded to the UAF's appeal regarding the incorrect depiction of Crimea and Ukraine. FIFA explained that the map was created by a third party, an external contractor, and stressed that the error occurred unintentionally, the UAF press service said.

FIFA thanked the UAF for bringing the matter to its attention and said they "deeply respect the concerns expressed by the Ukrainian Football Association and understand the sensitivity of the issue."

Upon discovering the issue, FIFA immediately removed the image from circulation and said it is conducting an internal investigation to ensure such errors do not happen again in the future. FIFA expressed regret for any harm the incident may have caused and said it appreciates the UAF's understanding.

Lithuanian athlete disqualified for anti-Russian t-shirt

Kornelija Dudaite, a member of Lithuania's national functional fitness team, was disqualified from competing in the World Championships in Budapest, Hungary, on December 14 for wearing a t-shirt with the words "Make Russia small again." As a result of her disqualification, the Lithuanian team withdrew from the competition in protest.

Dudaite was upset that Russian athletes were allowed to compete under their national flag and not as neutral athletes, so she chose to wear a special t-shirt to remind everyone of Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

Dudaite continued her protest on social media the following day, posting photos on Instagram of herself wearing two t-shirts, one with the face of Kremlin leader Vladimir Putin and the words "D-khead," and the other with "F--k Putin" on it. A friend of hers joined the protest, posing with her in a second photo in a t-shirt bearing the words "Crimea is Ukraine."

(Based on reporting by Mail Online, UNN and Ukrainska Pravda.)



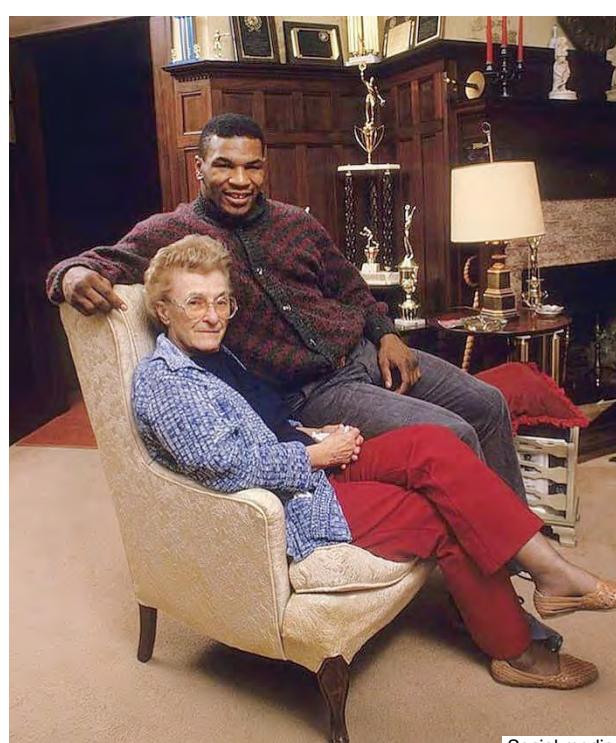
Heorhii Tykhyi, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, discussed on X (formerly Twitter) on December 14 the Federation of International Football Association's error of excluding the Crimea Peninsula from a map of Ukraine during its 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifying draw in Switzerland on December 13.

Mother who adopted and raised Mike Tyson is Ukrainian

by Ihor N. Stelmach

Camille Ewald was born in 1905 in Staromishchyna, a village in the Ternopil Oblast of western Ukraine, daughter to Ignat and Anastasia Pershyn Ewaschuk, who adopted the surname Ewald after the family immigrated to Canada and subsequently to the United States.

Camille met Constantine "Cus" D'Amato in the 1940s and entered into a common-law relationship with him. The two never married but they enjoyed a close friendship that lasted for decades until D'Amato's death in 1985. She supported D'Amato's dedication to befriending and training socially challenged youth. The couple used their home as a halfway house for students, and she fulfilled the role of a mother figure to them. Anticipating Mike Tyson's future athletic success, the pair established legal guardianship over the famed boxer to protect him personally and financially from predators in the boxing world.



Mike Tyson is seen with his adopted mother, Camille Ewald, in their house in Catskill, N.Y., in 1985.

Associations with the local mafia forced D'Amato to leave New York City and he ended up moving into Ewald's home, a Victorian house with 14 rooms in Catskill, N.Y. It became a sanctuary to many promising boxers and D'Amato set up a boxing gym in the attic of a local police station.

Tyson fell into their care at age 13, coming directly from a juvenile delinquent school. While D'Amato was in charge of training, the Ukrainian Ewald kept the discipline by introducing clear rules and responsibilities for the residents of the house. Young Tyson was delegated garbage disposal duty, which he hated so much that he ran away from home three times.

Ewald was not that tough on the children, teaching them basic writing and reading, how to use cutlery and treating them to tasty meals and baked goods. She took care of them and listened to their problems, and she helped Tyson build a cage for pigeons. Keeping the birds was a hobby for Tyson when he wasn't training.

In 1981, Ewald and D'Amato decided to formally adopt the 15-year-old future legend. Tyson's biological mother had neither the time nor the inclination to raise him and she struggled with alcoholism. He never knew his biological father, Purcell Tyson, and a stepfather, Jimmy Kirkpatrick, abandoned the family when he Tyson was two years old.

At age 16 when his biological mother died, Tyson asked permission to call Ewald his mother, to which she readily agreed. In his autobiography, "The Undeniable Truth," Tyson dedicates many pages to his second mom, calling her "a glorious Ukrainian woman." He remembered how Ewald told him to ignore D'Amato's insistence that he get

married in ninth grade, which D'Amato thought would calm Tyson down and make him focus on his boxing career. Tyson heeded her advice and re-focused himself on training for his boxing career.

His Ukrainian mother was next to him during championship bouts, his boxing victories, the ups and downs, in difficult times of imprisonment, allegations of rape, divorce, drug use and depression. She always sought to protect him as if he was her own child. Ewald once chastised the media and outsiders for treating Tyson "like he is a machine, and not a man with a soul." When the entire world seemed to be against "Iron Mike," he always had his room in Ewald's house where he could escape for peace and quiet, even in the middle of the night.

When Tyson started his family, Ewald took on the role of a caring, doting grandmother to his children. Tyson often brought his kids to Catskill for visits. When she passed away at the age of 96, Tyson emphasized that it was thanks to this beautiful woman that he was able to experience motherly love, care, support and blessing.

Thanks to his Ukrainian mother, Tyson has vocally supported Ukraine in its ongoing war with Russia. At a press conference in Kyiv last September, Tyson recalled how it was his Ukrainian mom who taught him discipline and to respectfully communicate with people. She taught and expected him to take care of himself, clean his room and prepare his own food. Tyson said it was Ewald who taught him to be independent.

Tyson has only spoken of Ewald with respect and gratitude, and if anyone questioned why, he always said, "She was my mother."

(Based on reporting by Forum Daily.)

Putin sends...

(Continued from page 7)

duel" between the Oreshnik missile and U.S. missile defenses.

"Let them determine some target for destruction, say in Kyiv," he said.

Despite his show of confidence that Russia will prevail in Ukraine, he left one question in many Russian minds unanswered: When will the war be over?

While he said near the end of the marathon that he will

not be happy until Russian soldiers return home - something tens of thousands or more will never do - he declined to put a timeline on the end of the war or on what he promised would be the ouster of Ukrainian forces from Russia's Kursk region, where they have held territory since a surprise offensive in August.

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NEWSBRIEFS

(Continued from page 13)

problems at military bases in Tartus and Hmeimim and on ships anchored offshore in the Mediterranean Sea, the press service of the GUR said in a statement on Telegram on December 15. The GUR also said that the remaining Russian service members were waiting for military transport planes involved in the evacuation that were supposed to deliver food. The statement said Russia continues to withdraw its contingent from remote areas of Syria. "At the same time, on some routes, the Russians are accompanied by armed groups opposing the Assad regime," the GUR said. The statement added that there are rumors circulating among Russian soldiers that Moscow has agreed to maintain its presence at the two bases, where the number of

military personnel is up to 3,000. RFE/RL was unable to verify the information from open sources. Russian authorities have not commented on this information. The Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry said on Telegram that it had evacuated part of its diplomatic staff from Syria on December 15. It said the withdrawal was carried out by a special flight of the Russian Air Force from the Hmeimim air base. Russian transport planes have departed the Hmeimim air base in recent days as part of the evacuation following the fall of Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad. The longtime ruler was overthrown last week following a lightning offensive led by the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). Mr. Assad fled to Russia, which was his regime's main backer. Satellite images taken on December 13 by the space technology company Maxar appeared to show Russia preparing for the withdrawal of military equipment from the

Hmeimim air base. The images showed what appeared to be at least two Antonov An-124 cargo planes on the tarmac with their nose cones open. Russia also has sent several landing ships and civilian vessels to Syria, according to open-source information. In Damascus, HTS has appointed an interim government, and its leader, Riad al-Asaad, told AFP on December 15 that he is confident the factions that helped topple Mr. Assad will unite as one force. HTS and the transitional government have insisted that the rights of all Syrians will be protected. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with British Foreign Affairs Secretary David Lammy about the situation in Syria, State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said on December 15. Messrs. Blinken and Lammy discussed the situation "and the principles endorsed by the United States and countries in the region that should be upheld during the transition pro-

cess and formation of a new government," Mr. Miller said in a statement. Mr. Blinken on December 14 attended an emergency meeting in Jordan of foreign affairs ministers from the Arab League, Turkey and top officials from the European Union and United Nations. He said after that the United States had made "direct contact" with the HTS and other parties. He declined to discuss details of the contacts but said it was important for the United States to convey messages to the group about its conduct and how it intends to govern in a transition period. Mr. Blinken said a joint statement had been agreed to at the meeting in Jordan that sets out the principles that other countries want to see in Syria's political transition, including inclusivity and respect for minorities and women and ensuring that terrorist groups do not take hold in the country. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service, with reporting by AFP)

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Ukrainian pro...

(Continued from page 32)

As boxing fans eagerly anticipate the rematch with Fury, the stamp serves as a reminder that Usyk's impact extends far beyond boxing. It also represents Ukraine's courage on the world stage.

Real Sociedad dominates Dynamo Kyiv in Europa League

Spanish club Real Sociedad dominated Dynamo Kyiv with two goals from Mikel Oyarzabal and one from Seraldo Becker, establishing the superiority of the La Liga side over the last-place team in the UEFA Europa League, before halftime at Reale Arena in San Sebastian, Spain, on December 12.

The match began slowly with neither squad showing their intentions early on despite a bit of controversy over a penalty not awarded after a dangerous challenge on Dynamo's Eduardo Guerrero. The tide immediately shifted, going from a potential penalty shot for Dynamo to a Oyarzabal goal on a rebound.

The 1-0 lead drove the home side to create chances every time they approached their opponent's penalty area. Becker narrowly missed out on a score from close range after a rebound that was brilliantly saved by Georgiy Bushchan, Dynamo's standout player of the game.

Becker found the net a while later thanks to a shot that caromed off the defense, leaving Dynamo's goalkeeper with no chance to respond. Minutes afterward Oyarzabal struck again, capitalizing on a great pass from Jon Ander Olasagasti to dribble past a defender and beat Bushchan with his weaker foot.

The second half saw Real exert very little effort to maintain their 3-0 advantage. A header on a rare offensive push rattled the post and the end result was a well-deserved victory for Real and a sixth consecutive loss for last-place Dynamo.

World Cup qualifiers revealed with controversy

On December 13, FIFA announced in Zurich, Switzerland, the draw for the group stage of the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers. Ukraine was placed in Group D along with Iceland, Azerbaijan and the winner of the France/Croatia UEFA Nations League playoff.

Fifty-four national teams will compete in the qualifiers, with teams set to battle it out for spots at the 2026 World Cup. The first match in group play for Ukraine is scheduled for September 5, 2025. Group winners qualify for the World Cup, while runners-up will participate in playoff matches with 16 teams in total qualifying for the World Cup finals from Europe.

Forty-eight national teams (12 groups of four) will play in the final round, an increase of 12 from the previous 36 teams. The top two teams from each group and the top eight third-place teams move on to the round of 32. The finals are scheduled from June 11 until July 19, 2026, in Canada, Mexico and the United States.

Controversy erupted at the draw in Zurich after FIFA's map of countries that cannot meet each other in qualifying depicted a map of Ukraine that did not include the Crimean Peninsula within its borders.

Russia names new Olympic chief

Russia named a sports minister sanctioned by the West as its new Olympic chief on December 13, as Moscow continues to face repercussions from international sporting bodies because of its invasion and ongoing war on Ukraine. Mikhail Degtyaryov, a member of the right-wing Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, was elected president of the Russian Olympic Committee after previous head Stanislav Pozdnyakov unexpectedly resigned in October.

Russian sports have faced many crises recently, including a state-sponsored doping scandal and its athletes being banned from taking part in the 2024 Summer Olympic Games in Paris except for 15 Russian athletes who were allowed to compete as neutrals.

In a speech ahead of the election, Degtyaryov said Russian sports were facing external pressure and Russian athletes were facing discrimination. He claimed that "global sport without Russia does not work."

The 43-year-old was appointed sports minister by his friend, Russian President Vladimir Putin, in May. He was sanctioned by the European Union in 2014 for supporting separatist rebels in eastern Ukraine. He was blacklisted by the United States in 2023 for helping conscript Russian citizens to fight against Ukraine.

Sport Shorts

- Ukraine took second place at the 2024 Cerebral Palsy World Cup, losing to Iran 3-0 in the final. Iran avenged their defeat in the 2022 final and Ukraine missed out on winning the competition for a fourth time.

- Kateryna Sadurska set another new world record in freediving without fins, reaching a depth of 84 meters, beating her world record of 82 meters set several weeks ago.

- The winner of the mass start at the Norwegian Biathlon Championship, Endre Stromsheim, competed with a Ukrainian flag decal on his rifle.

- Russian teenage tennis player Mirra Andreeva could not compete at an exhibition match in Russia because her American sponsor, IMG, refused to allow her to play in the country that started a war.

- Four Ukrainians were selected to play in the 2025 Four Nations Face Off hockey tournament scheduled to take place in February 2025: defensemen Colton Parayko and Cale Makar (Team Canada) and the Tkachuk brothers, forwards Matthew and Brady (Team U.S.A.).

- Cleveland Monsters defenseman Denton Mateychuk was named the American Hockey League's Rookie of the Month for November with his five goals, 12 assists and 17 points, helping his team to a 12-1-0 record.

- Andriy Mandzy won a bronze medal at the second stage of the Eberspacher Luge World Cup in Austria on December 9. His time was 0.299 seconds behind winner David Nossler of Germany.

- The University of Massachusetts hired Rutgers defensive coordinator Joe Harasymiw as their new head coach. The Ridgewood, N.J., native takes over the program as it prepares to join the Mid-American Conference in July. He was introduced at a news conference on December 6. Previously, the Ukrainian coached defensive backs at Minnesota for four seasons and was head coach at Maine, where he was the 2018 Football Championship Subdivision coach of the year.

- The Ukrainian men's national judo team defeated the team from Nice, France, by a score of 5-2 in the finals to win the Monaco International Judo Tournament in Monaco on December 8.

- Ukrainian Veronika Matiunina earned the No. 1 ranking in table tennis for U-19 European Girls in November.

- Wladimir Klitschko spoke at the World Boxing Council (WBC) Gala Dinner at the 62nd Convention in Hamburg, Germany, on December 10, saying the war with Russia has made Ukrainians better people. Some 60 boxers have died in the war and Klitschko stressed that Ukraine will never give up and Russia will lose. He encouraged everyone to fight for their dreams.

(Based on reporting by Mail Online, Flash-score, UNN, WBC, Boxing News, Footboom, UNN via UAF and Gulf Times via AFP)

Ihor Stelmach may be reached at ihorgenia@sbcglobal.net.

OUT & ABOUT

December 25 Ottawa	Kutia and Uzvar competition, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Ukrainian Orthodox Church hall, www.ukrainianorthodox.info or 613-728-0856
January 11 Los Angeles	Malanka celebration, with music by Vova from Lviv and Ulyana Malynak, Ukrainian Culture Center of Los Angeles, www.eventbrite.com
January 11 Jenkintown, PA	Malanka celebration, with music by Soloway band, Ukrainian Educational and Cultural Center, www.ueccphila.org
January 12 Philadelphia	Annual festival of Ukrainian Christmas Carols, "Today was Born...," Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchial Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, 215-922-2845
January 14 Chicago	Concert in support of Ukrainian veterans, featuring Lynne Jordan and the Shivers, and Trioda male vocal ensemble, Kyiv Mohyla Foundation of America, City Winery, https://citywinery.com
January 19 Los Angeles	Shchedriy Vechir (Theophany Eve), with special guest Inna Kovtun, Ukrainian Culture Center of Los Angeles, www.eventbrite.com
January 19 Chicago	Caroling Together, St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral, carolingtogether@gmail.com

Entries in "Out and About" are listed free of charge. Priority is given to events advertised in The Ukrainian Weekly. However, we also welcome submissions from all our readers. Items will be published at the discretion of the editors and as space allows. Please send e-mail to mdubas@ukrweekly.com.

Russian general...

(Continued from page 3)

and criticized Ukraine's Western allies for what it called a lack of reaction to the killing.

"The terrorist attack in Moscow was a continuation and development of the spiral of approval by the West of the war crimes of the militants of the Kyiv regime," Foreign Affairs Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova wrote on Telegram.

State Department spokesman Matthew Miller told a briefing that the United States was not involved in the killing or aware of it in advance.

But he added that Mr. Kirillov "was a general who was involved in a number of atrocities. He was involved in the use of chemical weapons against the Ukrainian military."

The SBU has said that Russian forces used chemical weapons almost 5,000 times during the war in Ukraine under Mr. Kirillov's leadership.

The claim could not be independently verified, but Kyiv has reportedly been behind a campaign of targeted assassinations of Russian officials and military officers involved in the invasion of Ukraine.

The incident occurred a day after the SBU reported that Ukrainian prosecutors filed a charge against Mr. Kirillov, accusing him of being responsible for the use of chemical weapons against Ukrainian troops during the war started by Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.

Mr. Kirillov is one of a number of Russian officers and pro-war figures to be killed in Russia and in Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine. His death came a week after a senior official from a Russian company that develops cruise missiles used by Moscow in the war was reportedly shot dead just outside the capital.

Mr. Kirillov figured in footage that was central to an RFE/RL Russian Service investigation that revealed details about a restricted facility outside Moscow that figures in the U.S. assertion that Russia maintains an offensive biological weapons program in violation of the United Nations Biological Weapons Convention.

The investigation focused on Russian state media footage that showed then-

Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu inspecting the facility, which was known for its role in the Soviet Union's biological weapons program and has undergone a major expansion. Mr. Kirillov led Mr. Shoigu during his inspection of the facility, the 48th Central Scientific Research Institute.

The investigative committee said the explosion occurred outside an apartment building on Ryazansky Prospekt, an avenue in the Russian capital that begins some 4 miles southeast of the Kremlin.

Pictures posted on the Russian Telegram channel Astra showed what appeared to be two bodies lying in the snow outside the damaged door of an apartment building.

After analyzing images of a car parked near the apartment building, Astra reported that the vehicle was Mr. Kirillov's.

The RKhBZ are special forces who operate under conditions of radioactive, chemical and biological contamination.

According to his official biography, Mr. Kirillov participated in the creation and adoption of the TOS-2 "Tosochka" heavy flamethrower system by the Russian Army, as well as in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Kirillov and the RKhBZ were placed on Britain, Canada and New Zealand's sanctions list in October for using riot control agents and numerous reports of the use of the toxic choking agent chloropicrin on the battlefield.

Mr. Kirillov and his forces were "responsible for helping deploy these barbaric weapons," Britain said at the time.

The Kremlin has called the accusations "baseless."

Mr. Kirillov, who according to Russian state news agency TASS, was a graduate of Kostroma Higher Military Command School of Chemical Defense, had been appointed to head the RKhBZ in April 2017.

He previously served in the Directorate of the Chief of the Radiation, Chemical and Biological Defense Troops.

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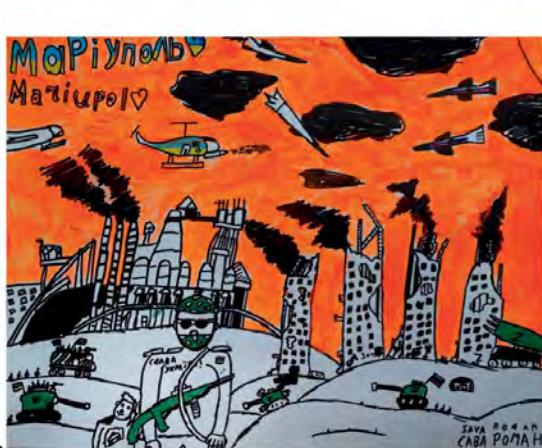
Motria Melnyk, President

Orsia Kossak-Cardoso, Chairperson

UIMA brought the Children of War Exhibit of 150 paintings from Lviv, Ukraine to Chicago. The exhibit was visited by many, shown in the media and written about in various periodical including the New York Times.



Lviv artist Natalia and Yustyna Pavliuk began an art therapy program for refugee children who witnessed the horrors of war.



A young artist painted his recollection of how his city of Mariupol was destroyed.



Docent Elena Smolynets, president Motria Melnyk, and curator Adrienne Kochman, welcomed Secretary of State Antony Blinken at UIIMA.



A young artist's pride and hope that his mother comes back from the war



Docent Elena Smolynets described the symbolism of the children's art to Secretary of State, Antony Blinken and Senator Dick Durbin.



A young artist's father died protecting freedom

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