



Source: Damage estimate analysis of Copernicus Sentinel-1 satellite data by Corey Scher of the CUNY Graduate Center and Jamon Van Den Hoek of Oregon State University. Building outlines from Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) | Note: Damaged buildings are estimated based on satellite data, and damage to individual buildings has not been verified. Data is as of Jan. 9 at 5:52 a.m. Pacific time. Fire perimeter is as of Jan. 10 at 9:35 a.m. Pacific time.

Daunting Task Awaits in Toxic Debris Cleanup

**By MITCH SMITH**

When the flames in Los Angeles County are finally extinguished, the region will face the costly, time-consuming and heart-wrenching task of hauling away tons of toxic rubble. Given the scale of devastation in and around America’s second-largest city, that cleanup could become one of the country’s most complex debris removal efforts ever.

In each of the thousands of ash piles where homes once stood, there are remnants of lives upended. But the photo albums and football cards and family heir-

Remnants of Buildings Laced With Asbestos, Gasoline and Lead

looms are intermixed with a noxious cocktail of asbestos, gasoline and lead, a reality that will make cleanup extremely complicated.

“We kind of treat each of these properties as its own hazardous waste cleanup site,” said Cory Koger, a debris expert with the Army Corps of Engineers who has responded to several major wild-

fires, including the fire that destroyed much of Lahaina, Hawaii, in 2023.

The immediate focus in Southern California is putting out the wind-fueled fires that have burned for days, destroying thousands of structures, scorching thousands of acres and killing at least 24 people. But once the threat has passed, attention will more fully shift to dealing with debris fields in hard-hit areas like Altadena and Pacific Palisades, where homes that stood for decades burned down in minutes and where the charred remains of

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Charred remains of homes in Altadena. The region’s cleanup efforts are expected to ramp up once the fires are extinguished.

U.S. Sent Word To Putin to Halt Sabotage Plan

**By DAVID E. SANGER**

WASHINGTON — After innocent-looking cargo shipments began catching fire at airports and warehouses in Germany, Britain and Poland over the summer, there was little doubt in Washington and Europe that Russia was behind the sabotage.

But in August, White House officials became increasingly alarmed by secretly obtained intelligence suggesting Moscow had a far larger plan in mind: bringing the war in Ukraine to American shores.

The question was how to send a warning to the one man who could stop it: President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia.

In a series of Situation Room briefings, President Biden’s top aides reviewed details of conversations among top officials of the G.R.U., Russia’s military intelligence arm, who were describing shipments of consumer products that burst into flames — in one case, a small electronic massager — as a test run.

Once the Russians understood how the packages made it past air-cargo screening systems, and how long they took to ship, the next step appeared to be sending them on planes bound for the United States and Canada, where they would set off fires once they were unloaded.

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Carnage in Kursk, for a Costly Bargaining Chip

**By MARC SANTORA and LIUBOV SHOLUDKO**

Five months after Ukrainian forces swept across the border in the first ground invasion of Russia since World War II, the two armies are engaged in some of the most furious clashes of the war there, fighting over land and leverage in the conflict.

The intensity of the battles recalls some of the worst sieges of eastern Ukraine over the past three years, including in towns

Moscow Seeks to Claw Back Kyiv’s Leverage

like Bakhmut and Avdiivka, names that now evoke memories of mass slaughter for soldiers on both sides.

The fighting, in the Kursk region of Russia, has taken on a layer of significance for the territory’s potential to play a role in any cease-fire negotiations. Facing

the prospect of an unpredictable new U.S. president — who has vowed to end the war swiftly, without clarifying the terms — Ukraine hopes to use Russian territory as a bargaining chip.

Russia, relying on North Korean reinforcements, hopes to knock that territory out of Ukraine’s grasp.

“Here, the Russians need to take this territory at any cost, and are pouring all their strength into it, while we are giving everything we have to hold it,” said Sgt. Olek.

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Ukrainian soldiers sheltered near the border after returning from the Kursk region inside Russia.

MAGA Forces Push Message Across Europe

**By KATRIN BENNHOLD**

For the last decade or more, Europe’s governments have been trying to resist covert influence operations from adversaries like Russia and China.

Now they have a very different challenge: Fending off overt efforts by Elon Musk and President-elect Donald J. Trump’s MAGA movement to seize territory, oust elected leaders and empower far-right causes and parties.

Even before he retakes office, Mr. Trump is making threats — perhaps serious, perhaps not — to acquire the territory of NATO allies like Canada and Denmark. And Mr. Musk, the president-elect’s biggest financial supporter, is using his social media platform X to bring the far-right Alternative for Germany party into the mainstream and smear the leaders of Britain’s center-left Labour Party.

It is not clear whether Europe’s political immune system has the antibodies to defend against these new incursions.

This is not the first time a Trump ally has attempted to build a bridge with the European far right. In 2018 and 2019, the Trump adviser Stephen K. Bannon held meetings with far-right politicians across Europe. But

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After New Toll In Manhattan, Gridlock Eases

*This article is by Ana Ley, Winnie Hu and Keith Collins.*

The first data for New York City’s new congestion pricing program shows that gridlock lessened in its initial week as fewer drivers traveled into the core of Manhattan, though traffic continued to be heavy in parts of the tolling zone.

In the first six days of the program, officials estimated, there were tens of thousands fewer vehicles entering the busiest parts of Manhattan below 60th Street, which includes some of the city’s most famous destinations like Times Square, the Empire State Building and the High Line.

Congestion pricing aims to lure people out of their cars and onto mass transit. Most passenger cars are now charged \$9 a day to enter the tolling zone at peak hours, with additional fees for trucks and other vehicles as well as overnight discounts.

The program started on a Sunday, which typically has light traffic, but the real test came the next day as many workers returned after the holidays. The average weekday entries into the zone and the highways that surround it fell by 7.5 percent compared with an estimate of an average workday in January before the program, according to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. On Sunday

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