

05/24/21 Monday

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Mali's Military Arrests Interim President, Top Ministers After New Cabinet Unveiled, Source Says by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

A Sputnik correspondent has learned that members of Mali's military have transferred Malian Prime Minister Moctar Ouane and Acting President Bah Ndaw to the military base at Kati, about 15 kilometers outside the capital of Bamako.

The source noted that the Presidential Guard had refused to protect the president, allowing the military to take him away.

Oane told Agence France-Presse earlier that "men from [Acting Vice President Colonel Assimi] Goïta came to pick me up to take me to the president, who lives not far from my residence." Reuters also reported that newly appointed defense minister Souleymane Doucoure had also been arrested.

The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) issued a statement on Monday calling for "calm and the immediate, unconditional release" of those detained.

The US State Department made a similar request.

Earlier this month, the interim government brought to power by an August 2020 military coup announced a new "broad-based" cabinet would soon be appointed, beginning the transition away from military rule that would culminate in new elections set for February 2022. When the new posts were [unveiled on Monday](#), military figures still retained many prominent posts, but former defense minister Sadio Camara and former security minister Colonel Modibo Kone, two central figures in the August coup, had lost their positions.

The transitional government was appointed in September 2020, a month after the [Malian military removed](#) democratically-elected President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita from power amid months of widespread protests stemming from popular anger over the poor economy, the government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, and its [seemingly endless war](#) against Islamist militants, for which Keita's government had partnered with the military of Mali's former colonial ruler, France.

Ndaw was Keita's defense minister at the time and is a former army colonel, and Goïta, who masterminded the coup, is his vice president.

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Hezbollah Drops Plans to Blow Up Old Israeli Bases in Lebanon to Celebrate IDF Pullout Date by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

On May 24, 2000, then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak announced Israeli forces would withdraw from Lebanon, ending its 22-year occupation. The Shiite militant group Hezbollah emerged from the Lebanese Civil War by fighting Israel and its allies in the South Lebanon Army and has been a commanding force in Lebanese politics since.

On Monday evening, folks in southern Lebanon celebrated the 21st anniversary of the end of Israeli occupation in novel fashion: by blowing up six abandoned Israeli military bases.

According to local media reports, Hezbollah will recreate the storming and destruction of six IDF bases on Monday evening using explosives: Ballat, Hardoun, Al-Bayada, Barashit, Shumaria, and Izeyeh. However, the militant group reportedly cancelled their plans at the last minute, after photojournalists were already in position to record the fireworks.

Israel launched an invasion of Lebanon in 1978 to destroy Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) bases in southern Lebanon, eventually occupying all of the country south of Beirut with the intent of putting a pro-Israeli government in power amid the ongoing civil war, and then signing a peace accord with that government.

However, amid steady resistance by Hezbollah and other militias such as Amal, the IDF's grip on the country steadily declined. They withdrew further and further south, until Barak pulled the IDF out entirely amid fears that "Hezbollah would have enjoyed international legitimacy in their struggle against a foreign occupier" if Israel left otherwise, he told the New York Review at the time.

However, the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel continued. In 2006, the IDF launched a new invasion of southern Lebanon, which Hezbollah fought to a standstill, forcing the IDF to withdraw. A United Nations-sponsored peacekeeping force was later dispatched to the area to maintain the peace.

Amid Israel's most recent war with Gaza, which ended last week in a shaky ceasefire, [several rockets](#) were launched toward Israeli territory [from southern Lebanon](#), none of which caused damage. In response, the IDF carried out artillery and airstrikes across the border.

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EU Leaders Task Borrell With Preparing Report on Relations With Russia for EU Summit in June

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

European Union leaders have directed High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Joseph Borrell to prepare a report on the bloc's relations with the Russian Federation for a summit planned for next month.

"The European Council ... condemns the illegal, provocative and disruptive Russian activities against the EU, its Member States and beyond," the executive body said in a Monday statement "It reaffirms the EU's unity and solidarity in the face of such acts as well as its support to Eastern partners ... The European Council expresses its solidarity with the Czech Republic and supports its response."

At the Special Meeting of the European Council [in Brussels on Monday](#), EU leaders expressed their commitment to the bloc's [five guiding principles](#) in relations with Russia laid out by Borrell's predecessor, Federica Mogherini, following the 2014 US-backed coup in Ukraine. These include full implementation of the Minsk agreements; building closer ties with former Soviet republics; strengthening EU resilience to Russian threats; cooperation with Russia on certain issues where interests align; and support for people-to-people contacts.

At the first day of the summit, the EC condemned Russia's "provocative" actions against the EU and its members, and expressed solidarity with its eastern partners. EU members Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were once member republics in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) alongside Russia, and several of the Soviet Union's longtime allies, including Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary are also parts of the EU now. The statement comes in the wake of a [report last week](#) by the Russian government on "foreign states committing unfriendly actions against Russia, citizens of Russia or Russian legal entities" that listed the United States and the Czech Republic. That, in turn, followed Prague declaring 18 Russian diplomats "personae no gratae" in April after claiming they were connected to 2014 explosions in Vrbětice that killed two Czech nationals. Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis, in turn, urged other EU members to [expel "at least one"](#) Russian diplomat each in solidarity with Prague.

The statement also follows a Sunday [incident in Belarus](#), a Russian partner and another former Soviet republic, that resulted in the arrest of a dissident accused of helping facilitate the unrest in the Eastern European nation last August.

A Ryanair airliner flying from Athens, Greece, to Vilnius, Lithuania, was forced to land in the Belarusian capital of Minsk on Sunday due to a bomb threat. While the threat turned out to be false, one of the aircraft's passengers was journalist Roman Protasevich, one of the founders of the Telegram channel Nexta, which has been designated as extremist by the Belarusian authorities. Protasevich was detained along with his companion, Russian citizen Sofia Sapega. EU authorities and those of several member states [have cried foul](#), claiming Protasevich's arrest is unjust and that incident was cooked up as an excuse to arrest him. Earlier on Monday, the EU moved to [bar Belarusian aircraft](#) from EU airspace in response to Protasevich's arrest, and Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki has promised to push the issue of sanctions against Minks in response.

The Belarusian government has promised an investigation of the Ryanair grounding, the results of which will be made public, and invited international experts to participate.

While several Western figures, including US national security adviser Jake Sullivan, have expressed their concerns about the incident to their Russian counterparts, UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab stated on Monday that he didn't "have any clear details" on alleged Russian involvement in the incident.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova has urged Western nations "to refrain from applying 'double standards'" to the Ryanair incident "and to take measures to soberly, without emotion, assess the situation on the basis of all available materials in cooperation with the Belarusian aviation authorities, demonstrating openness and readiness to interact."

The European Council is scheduled to meet next on June 24 and 25.

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US Federal Court Strikes Down Georgia's Anti-BDS Law Used to Bar Journo Abby Martin From 2020 Event
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement was started by Palestinian activists in 2005 to build international pressure compelling Israel to abide by the human rights obligations under international law, comparing the plight of Palestinians under Israeli rule to Black Africans under South African apartheid.

On Friday, a Georgia federal court struck down a state law banning state contracts with persons or groups engaged in a boycott of Israel. It's the fourth such ruling by a US federal court in recent years, even as state laws attempting to ban support for the BDS movement continue to proliferate.

The Partnership for Civil Justice Fund (PCJF), a First Amendment legal defense group, announced on Monday victory in their February 2020 case with the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) against a Georgia law on behalf of independent journalist Abby Martin.

The suit stems from an International Critical Media Literacy Conference originally scheduled to take place February 28-29, 2020, at the Savannah campus of Georgia Southern University, at which Martin was to have been the keynote speaker. She is the creator of the "Empire Files" documentary series and director of the 2019 film "Gaza Fights for Freedom," which documents Israeli violence against Palestinian protesters during the 2018 Great March of Return.

However, in her contract, Martin was required by a 2016 Georgia state law to forswear boycotting the state of Israel for the duration of the agreement. An energetic proponent of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement aimed at putting global economic pressure on Israel to change its policies toward Palestinians under its rule, [Martin told Radio Sputnik](#) at the time that being asked to sign the agreement was "a complete violation of my right to have my personal convictions" and of "my right to engage in peaceful political protest."

Martin refused to sign the contract and the event was eventually cancelled. In February 2020, she sued a group of six officials from the University System of Georgia and Georgia Southern University, charging that her First and Fourteenth Amendment rights had been violated.

Court Finds BDS is Protected Speech

According to the court filing viewed by Sputnik, US District Judge Mark Cohen found that Martin's boycott of Israel is protected speech under the First Amendment and unconstitutionally compels speech by mandating she swear an oath.

"The certification that one is not engaged in a boycott of Israel is no different that requiring a person to espouse certain political beliefs or to engage in certain political associations," Cohen wrote, comparing the issue to a questionnaire about whether an applicant had ever been a member of a communist party.

The ruling also called into question - but did not answer - whether "Georgia's interest in furthering foreign policy goals regarding relations with Israel is a substantial state interest" that could be protected by such a law.

"I am thrilled at the judge's decision to strike down this law that so clearly violates the free speech rights of myself and so many others in Georgia," Martin told Sputnik in a Monday statement.

"My First Amendment [right] was restricted on behalf of a foreign government, which flies in the face of the principles of freedom and democracy. The government of Israel has pushed state legislatures to enact these laws only because they know that sympathy and support for the population they brutalize, occupy, ethnically cleanse and subject to apartheid, is finally growing in popular consciousness - they want to hold back the tide of justice by preemptively restricting the right of American citizens to peacefully take a stand against their crimes," Martin said.

"As the world watches Israeli aggression continue in Jerusalem, the West Bank and against the population it besieges in Gaza, it has never been more urgent to advance the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement against the Israeli regime. The striking of this law is a necessary and timely opening to build this urgent task."

When asked if she now plans to hold the event or to hold another event in Georgia more explicitly focused on Israel, Martin told Sputnik: "I do not have plans as of yet to reschedule."

Widespread BDS Bans Now At Risk

Friday's ruling [joins three other](#) federal court rulings from recent years that also found boycotts of Israel to be protected speech.

As of May 2021, 35 of 50 US states [have passed bills](#) or executive orders intended to interfere with boycotts of Israel. While some are aimed at contracts with BDS proponents, as Georgia's law is, others target businesses that refuse to do business in Israel, including those that specifically refuse to do business in Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Israel's occupation of which the United Nations has deemed illegal under international law.

The most recent, signed into law last month by West Virginia Governor Jim Justice, a Republican, [claims the Appalachian state](#) "has an economic and a humanitarian obligation to denounce and reject the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement against Israel, and to prevent the state or any of its instrumentalities from contracting with companies that engage in the movement."

While proponents of such bans claim they are [fighting anti-Semitism](#) by defending a state ostensibly founded to protect the Jewish people from another genocide, supporters of BDS say their efforts are directed at the policies of the Israeli state and not against the Jewish people as a whole, and they compare BDS to the international boycott movement against [South African apartheid](#) that eventually forced the end of white Boer rule over Black Africans in that country in 1994 and the creation of a multi-ethnic democracy.

In May of last year, the British Supreme Court also [ruled in favor of](#) the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, striking down government regulations preventing Local Government Pension Schemes from divesting from companies that profit from Israel's alleged human rights violations in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip.

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'They Want Help': Saudi Arabia Afraid of Iran, Houthis if US Pulls Troops Out, US General Claims

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

When the Houthis claimed responsibility for suicide drone attacks on two Saudi Aramco oil facilities in September 2019 that paralyzed the country's economy for several days, the US quickly rushed to blame Iran, while they have also accused Tehran of exacerbating the war in Yemen by supporting the Houthis' fight against Riyadh.

The head of US Central Command (CENTCOM) told reporters on Sunday that Riyadh is still asking for US military assistance in deterring Iran. Washington backed out of supporting the Saudi-led war in Yemen earlier this year, but the Biden administration has committed to providing for Saudi Arabia's defense, including increasing the efficiency of its air defenses in shooting down Houthi missiles.

US Marine Corps Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr. told [members of the press](#) that the Saudis "want reassurance that they're going to be helped if they're attacked by Iran, and they want help against the continuing attacks" by Ansarallah, the Yemeni Shiite movement also known as the Houthis.

"I believe our posture in the theater has prevented a state on state attack from Iran," McKenzie said. It's not clear how he determined that, since while the Saudis and Iranians have long been at odds over leadership of the Middle East, there have also reportedly [been several attempts](#) at burying the hatchet since the two nations cut formal relations in 2016.

"The Middle East writ broadly is an area of intense competition between the great powers. And I think that as we adjust our posture in the region, Russia and China will be looking very closely to see if a vacuum opens that they can exploit," [McKenzie told reporters](#). "I think they see the United States shifting posture to look at other parts of the world and they sense there may be an opportunity there."

As the US shifts its strategic focus toward "great power confrontation" with Russia and China, US commanders in regions that once enjoyed greater focus, such as the Middle East and Africa, are raising concerns about the future of their own missions if their manpower is lost to Asian or European bases.

However, McKenzie said that even if the US troop presence in Saudi Arabia is numerically smaller, "far more important is sort of the broad spectrum of capabilities that we give them." He pointed specifically to the Saudi-led war in Yemen as something "we want to help them with," noting that US and Saudi air defense systems have been linked.

Supporting Saudi War Once More?

"They're under constant bombardment from Yemen, with a variety of ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and small UAS (unmanned aerial systems) they're very concerned about," McKenzie said. "They're proxies of Iran, so they're under constant bombardment, so they feel that they are under attack, and they are under attack."

A serious material link between the Houthis and Iranians remains unproven, and evidence used to suggest the Houthis are using [Iranian-supplied weapons](#) is circumstantial. Regardless, the Houthis are at war with the Saudis not because of anything Iran has done, but because Saudi-backed Yemeni President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi fled to Riyadh begging for help after the Houthis, at the head of a mass movement, forced Hadi from power in early 2015.

The Saudis quickly mounted a multinational assault on the Houthis, bringing a number of Sunni nations, including Morocco, Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates, into a coalition that has waged a devastating air war and funneled Western-made arms to anti-Houthi forces inside Yemen. The US also joined this fight, providing logistical services and dispatching Green Berets to destroy Houthi missile sites just across the border from Saudi Arabia.

However, the war has since shifted, and as the Houthis have slowly expanded their control in Yemen and more and more members of the Saudi coalition exit the war, the Houthis have mounted increasingly daring strikes into Saudi Arabia itself, launching cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, and suicide drones against air bases and petroleum infrastructure, the backbone of the Saudi economy.

As the [catastrophic human cost](#) of the war in Yemen became increasingly apparent, with much of the country under threat of starvation and the Saudi-led bombing campaign and blockade bearing a heavy responsibility for the destruction of civilian infrastructure such as hospitals and schools, public opinion demanded the US end its support for the Saudi war in Yemen. However, while federal lawmakers attempted to take action as early as 2019, the [Trump administration blocked](#) their efforts and continued to support the Saudi monarchy.

Earlier this year, after US President Joe Biden took office, he moved to [end US support](#) for Saudi offensive operations, but said the US would continue to support Saudi Arabia's defensive abilities and that he would not categorically refuse to sell offensive weapons to the Saudis, either.

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Video: Body of Missing Spaniard Found Inside Dinosaur Statue
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

A decorative papier-mâché dinosaur statue at the center of a newly-launched death investigation in Spain had been one of the last remaining sculptures in the area meant to advertise a since-closed movie theater.

Authorities in Spain are in the midst of an investigation looking into the death of a 39-year-old man whose body was uncovered inside a statue of a Stegosaurus over the weekend in Santa Coloma de Gramenet, a suburb of Barcelona.

Local media [reports](#) have indicated that the body was discovered on Saturday by a father and son who picked up on a foul smell emanating from the statue. Upon further inspection, the father saw a body inside one of the statue's hollow legs. Local police were subsequently called to the scene.

A spokesperson for the Mossos d'Esquadra, a regional police force, [told](#) The Guardian that the initial reports suggest the incident was an "accidental death," and that there were no indications of violence.

"This person got inside the statue's leg and got trapped," the official revealed, adding that it appeared as though the man "was trying to retrieve a mobile phone, which he'd dropped. It looks like he entered the statue head first and couldn't get out."

Incidentally, the family of the unidentified man had submitted a missing person's report just a few hours before his body was discovered.

Video shared online by local outlet El Mirall captures first responders working to safely remove the body. The statue has also reportedly been removed from the scene.

The spokesperson suggested that the body could have been inside the statue for a "couple of days." Investigators are currently awaiting the results of the autopsy to determine the cause of death.

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EU Moves to Bar Belarusian Aircraft From Entering Bloc's Airspace Over Ryanair Landing
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Earlier, a Lithuania-bound Ryanair flight was grounded in Minsk, Belarus, over a bomb threat that turned out to be fake. However, among the passengers was Roman Protasevich, a Belarusian journalist who co-founded the banned Telegram channel Nexta. Protasevich and his companion, Russian citizen Sofia Sapega, were both detained during the stopover. European leaders condemned the forced weekend landing of a Ryanair flight on Monday and began the process of banning Belarusian airlines from flying over the European Union's airspace or landing in its airports.

A [special meeting](#) overseen by Charles Michel, president of the EU's European Council, further concluded that all EU-based carriers would be banned from flying over Belarus' airspace, as well as calling for a full investigation by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

An urgent ICAO meeting has been scheduled for Thursday; However, the New York Times has [reported](#) that it "may take months to complete" a probe into the weekend events.

Additionally, the bloc called for the "immediate release of Roman Protasevich and Sofia Sapega and that their freedom of movement be guaranteed." Officials are also seeking to compose a list of entities and persons that the council will target with sanctions over the indiscretion.

The measures were backed by all 27 representatives of the EU members.

"What happened yesterday is an international scandal," Michel [told reporters](#) ahead of the meeting. "The lives of civilians, including Europeans, were put in danger. It's a threat to international security and to civil aviation."

Data provided by airspace tracker Flight Radar 24 reveals that flights being operated by airliners British Airways, Air France and KLM Royal Dutch Airlines have already begun to weave their previously scheduled flights to go around the former Soviet state.

Lithuania had already shuttered its airspace to Belarus, and UK airlines were advised to avoid Belarusian airspace. UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab had stated [earlier](#) that Britain would also be pulling its operating permit for Belavia, Belarus' state-owned airline.

Reports [previously suggested](#) that some officials would oppose implementing airspace restrictions over concerns that the move would escalate tensions in the region further, whereas other analysts hinted that the move would create financial setbacks for flights from Europe to Asia.

The latest actions by the European Council are not the group's first against Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. The block previously imposed sanctions against Lukashenko and his associates in 2020 over the violent crackdown that emerged after the country's August elections.

Protasevich's Nexta channel was designated as extremist for reportedly facilitating the unrest that unfolded in the wake of the election results. Since being taken into custody, Protasevich appeared in one video message that was shared on the Telegram app, and in which he states that he has no health issues and is cooperating with the Belarusian investigators.

The German Foreign Ministry recently revealed that it was working alongside US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken to coordinate an adequate response to the Ryanair incident, as the US official travels to the Middle East to push for peace talks amid the Israel-Hamas ceasefire.

It is noticeable that a similar incident took place in 2013, when the plane of Bolivia's then-president Evo Morales was forced by Austria to make an emergency landing at Washington's behest [to search](#) for whistleblower Edward Snowden. The latter turned out not to be on board. The White House, however, has [refused to compare](#) the two incidents.

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'This is Not Ideal': IAEA Extends Nuclear Monitoring Deal With Iran for One Month Amid Vienna Talks

by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

A three-month extension on monitoring practices was struck between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency in February after the Iranian Parliament voted to suspend inspections of the nation's nuclear sites. The December vote was in a bid to prompt signers of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action to provide Iran relief from sanctions.

Negotiators representing Iran and the United Nation's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) agreed on Monday to extend the use of surveillance cameras at Tehran's nuclear sites for one additional month.

The last-minute development effectively buys more time for negotiators in Vienna, who are looking to map out a clear manner in which Iran and the US can both be brought back to the terms outlined under the Iran nuclear deal.

IAEA Director-General Rafael Mariano Grossi told reporters following closed-door discussions with Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), that many obstacles still remain, underscoring that the extension "is not ideal."

"This is like an emergency device that we came up with in order for us to continue having these monitoring activities," Grossi remarked, noting that IAEA officials are still unable to actually access the images taken by cameras at the facilities.

The extended agreement, listed as the "additional protocol," requires the IAEA to collect and analyze images from a variety of cameras installed at Iranian nuclear sites. The effort is done in order to monitor whether Iran is in compliance with the nuclear deal.

When questioned over the events that might unfold after the 30-day period wraps up, Grossi lamented that officials would deal with the situation once it comes to pass.

The IAEA official also took the opportunity to touch on the upcoming Iranian elections, which some analysts believe will see hard-line opponents replace the outgoing Rouhani administration.

"We deal with Iran and the Iranian people will give itself its new government in the next elections," Grossi said. "I'm not worried and I'm confident that whoever comes next will, of course, continue cooperating with the IAEA."

"I think it's in everybody's interests," he noted.

Kazim Gharibabadi, the Iranian representative to the IAEA, acknowledged the newly-announced deal via [Twitter](#) and urged participants of the ongoing Vienna talks to "seize the extra opportunity provided by Iran in good faith for the complete lifting of sanctions in a practical and verifiable manner."

As the monitoring deal now runs through to June 24, Gharibabadi reaffirmed that the material would continue to be held by the AEOL. Alarms had been raised earlier after Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammed Bagher Qalibaf remarked that the agreement to uphold monitoring practices [would be ending](#).

[Negotiations](#) have been ongoing in Vienna since early April and are expected to continue, so long as participants are willing to pinpoint a pathway that will see both Iran and the US resume the 2015 deal.

The US parted ways with the Obama-era agreement in 2018 under the Trump administration over allegations that stipulations had been violated, with Iran subsequently pulling away from its requirements after Washington reimposed a slew of sanctions on Tehran. Both countries have repeatedly called on the other party to act first.

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White House to Host Family of George Floyd as Biden's Deadline for Police Reform Bill Draws Near
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Last month, US President Joe Biden called on Senate Republicans to back the Democrats' 'George Floyd Justice in Policing Act' by May 25. The proposed police reform legislation, which has already been passed in the US House of Representatives, calls for increased accountability, and restrictions for US law enforcement personnel.

A White House official confirmed to reporters on Monday that Biden will host the family of George Floyd - a 46-year-old Minneapolis man whose death, at the hands of Minneapolis officers, triggered nationwide demonstrations against police brutality, and protests for police reform.

"On Tuesday, he will mark the anniversary of the death of George Floyd. We'll have more details on what the plans are for that day soon," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki previously detailed on Friday.

As the White House prepares to host Floyd's family, the US president's deadline is approaching for the US Senate to pass a police reform bill with the late Minneapolis man's namesake.

"My fellow Americans, we have to come together to rebuild trust between law enforcement and the people they serve, to root out systemic racism in our criminal justice system, and to enact police reform in George Floyd's name that passed the House already," Biden told members of Congress during his April 29 joint session.

"We need to work together to find a consensus," he said of the Republicans and Democrats.

"But let's get it done next month, by the first anniversary of George Floyd's death."

At least 10 Republican senators would have to back [the bill](#). GOP lawmakers have raised concerns of the proposed legislation regarding qualified immunity -- a policy that makes it difficult for an individual to sue a law enforcement officer.

The US president's comments came days after a jury found ex-Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin guilty of all three charges related to the May 25, 2020, murder of Floyd.

The ex-Minneapolis officer is facing up to 75 years in prison: up to 40 years for second-degree unintentional murder; up to 25 years for third-degree murder; and up to 10 years for second-degree manslaughter.

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NASA Announces \$433.5 Million VIPER Mission to Explore Moon for Ice, Other Resources
by [Evan Craighead](#)

This new mission by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) comes as part of the US space agency's Artemis Program, an international human spaceflight program formed in 2017 to return humans to the Moon by the mid-2020s. NASA has committed to landing the first female astronaut on the Moon.

NASA has announced that, in 2023, it will be sending its first mobile robot to the Moon to search for ice and other natural resources below the natural satellite's surface.

The robot, dubbed Volatiles Investigating Polar Exploration Rover (VIPER), will be tasked with mapping resources around the Moon's South Pole.

Additionally, VIPER's headlights will allow the lunar rover to explore shadowy regions of the natural satellite.

"The data received from VIPER has the potential to aid our scientists in determining precise locations and concentrations of ice on the Moon and will help us evaluate the environment and potential resources at the lunar south pole in preparation for Artemis astronauts," said Lori Glaze, director for NASA's Planetary Science Division in Washington.

"This is yet another example of how robotic science missions and human exploration go hand in hand, and why both are necessary as we prepare to establish a sustainable presence on the Moon."

Overall, the US space agency has invested at least \$433.5 million in the rover's developmental costs and operations.

"VIPER will be the most capable robot NASA has ever sent to the lunar surface and allow us to explore parts of the Moon we've never seen," VIPER program scientist Sarah Noble expressed in the news release.

"The rover will teach us about the origin and distribution of water on the Moon and prepare us to harvest resources 240,000 miles from Earth that could be used to safely send astronauts even farther into space, including Mars."

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United Airlines Unveils 'Your Shot to Fly' Sweepstakes to Encourage COVID-19 Vaccinations in US

by [Evan Craighead](#)

As COVID-19 vaccination rates have declined in the US, a number of American companies have launched related promotional campaigns. Within recent months, McDonald's, Uber, Krispy Kreme and Shake Shack have all rolled out efforts to encourage Americans to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

United Airlines announced on Monday that it would be offering vaccinated loyalty program members the opportunity to win free flights for a year's worth of travel.

"We're proud to do our part to incentivize people to get their shot," United CEO Scott Kirby said in a quoted statement.

The [promotional campaign](#) comes in support of the multibillion-dollar public education effort launched by US President Joe Biden's administration.

In order to win, new or existing 'MileagePlus' members have to upload their COVID-19 vaccination card to the United mobile app, or website, by June 22.

"Thanks to the vaccine, more and more destinations are opening up for travel – and we know our customers are eager to fly," Kirby added. "We're excited to give people one more reason to get vaccinated so they can reunite with friends and family or take that long-awaited vacation which all could be just one shot away."

The airline joins a number of companies that have launched campaigns encouraging COVID-19 vaccinations, including Shake Shack, McDonald's and OKCupid.

On Friday, Shake Shack [rolled out](#) its 'Get Vaxxed, Get Shack' campaign offering vaccinated patrons free french fries with their sandwich purchase. Customers have to present their COVID-19 vaccine card in order to receive the promotion.

Additionally, McDonald's unveiled its 'We Can Do This' campaign earlier this month - an effort that is backed by US President Joe Biden's administration's multibillion-dollar public education effort.

In addition to offering vaccine-themed packaging on their products, the US-based company will also unveil a pro-vaccine billboard in New York's Times Square.

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Israeli Government Signs \$1.2B Deal With Google, Amazon for Nimbus Cloud Services Project by [MariTi Blaise Lovell](#)

In February, public cloud provider Oracle launched a cloud region from an underground data center in Jerusalem, which came after the Israeli government launched its cloud services project, Nimbus.

The Israeli government signed a \$1.2 billion deal on Monday with Amazon Web Services (AWS) and tech giant Google in an effort to provide cloud services for the country's public sector and military.

"The cloud services will be hosted by local cloud providers," the Israeli Finance Ministry explained, as [reported](#) by Haaretz. "The data stored on them will remain within Israel's borders under strict data security regulations overseen by the relevant government offices."

Israel is one of the major exporters of military equipment in the world, and has more than 150 active defense companies in the country. Cloud sites established in Israel are expected to keep information within its borders and under strict security guidelines, as it will include most of the government's IT infrastructure.

"Project Nimbus is our flagship multi-year plan and the first of its kind. The project is intended to provide the government, the defense establishment and others with an all encompassing cloud solution," the ministry said.

The government expects their shift to cloud services will lead to increased foreign investments in Israel's infrastructure and ecosystem in terms of cloud technology. In 2019, AWS made up over 45% of the entire cloud market, making it the world's largest cloud company.

"AWS and Google – the Rolls-Royce and the Maserati of the cloud world!" [said](#) Shahar Bracha, acting CEO of the Israeli government's information and communications technology authority, in an April statement.

"Two of the world's leading cloud companies will build a cloud center in Israel (Data Center) and provide services to the Israeli government, the public sector, the IDF, and other bodies."

In December, Amazon signed a \$30 million agreement with Israel's AllCloud, and was in talks with Israeli real estate companies to set up a data center. Until now, the Israeli government had been using Microsoft's cloud computing service, but it was reported last year that Amazon was planning to build three data centers in Israel as part of a partnership with Compass-Azrieli. Microsoft and Oracle are [reportedly](#) both appealing the contract award. However, details behind the move are unclear.

In March, the US Department of Defense threatened to pull its \$10 billion JEDI cloud contract with Microsoft over its continued legal battles with AWS. Microsoft has two data centers in the United Arab Emirates dedicated to its cloud computing service, Azure, and has plans to open its first data centers in Israel in 2022.

The latest deal announcement came as Jewish Google employees [called](#) on the company last week to terminate any business contracts that support Israeli violations of Palestinian human

rights. Google workforce issued the call amid the [deadly clashes](#) and rocket exchanges that were unfolding along the Gaza Strip.

Google has recently acquired Israeli-based cloud service technology companies like Aloomo, Elastifile and Velostrata.

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Ousted Myanmar Leader Suu Kyi Defends NLD Party in First Court Appearance Since Military Coup

by [MariTi Blaise Lovell](#)

Earlier, the Myanmar military - Tatmadaw - seized control of the government after having accused the National League for Democracy (NLD) of committing voter fraud after the party managed to secure enough seats to form the country's next government. On Friday, the junta-appointed election commission threatened to dissolve the party over the claims. Civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi made her very first public court appearance on Monday since the February 1 coup d'état saw her arrested and placed on house arrest. The detained official took the opportunity to voice that her party would continue as long as the public supports it. Suu Kyi, who had previously appeared by video link, was determined to defend the integrity of her political party, a member of her legal team said, [according](#) to the New York Times. "Our party grew out of the people so it will exist as long as people support it," the Burmese leader said, one of her lawyers, Khin Maung Zaw, relayed to the outlet.

Courtroom photos show Suu Kyi sitting upright with her hands in her lap and wearing a surgical mask while inside the court dock. Alongside Suu Kyi are ousted President Win Myint and former Naypyitaw Mayor Dr. Myo Aung, as well as two police officers who are seen standing behind the defendants.

Suu Kyi's lawyers have stated that she appears to be in good health after being able to speak with the Burmese official during a 30-minute special meeting. The legal proceeding was held in Myanmar's capital of Naypyidaw, and was subsequently adjourned by the presiding judge until June 7.

The ousted leader has been held under house arrest for 16 weeks, since she was deposed in a pre-dawn raid that resulted in a charge of several violations, including illegally importing handheld radios and breaching COVID-19 rules, as well as allegedly taking bribes.

Suu Kyi was initially held at her villa in Naypyidaw after the raid, however, she was moved - blindfolded - to her current, undisclosed location a week later.

"She doesn't know where she is living now," defense lawyer Min Min Soe said. "She doesn't know anything about what is happening outside."

U Thein Hlaing Tun, the lawyer of her co-defendant Dr. Myo Aung was arrested Monday on incitement charges, according to a Twitter [post](#) by Burmese news company The Irrawaddy. Since Suu Kyi's arrest, many protesters and activists have taken to the street calling for the release of their chosen leader. In fact, a demonstration was held on Saturday outside of the

Embassy of Myanmar in Washington, DC, by the National Unity Government of Myanmar (NUG), which formed in response to the February 1 coup.

Myanmar's military has largely cracked down on pro-democracy protesters since the coup, and is reported to have killed more than 800 people while detaining over 4,000 individuals, [according](#) to the monitoring group Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP).

The latest arrests included American journalist Danny Fenster, who was detained at Yangon International Airport on Monday as he tried to board a flight out of Myanmar, his news organization Frontier Myanmar said in a Twitter [post](#) on Monday.

Additionally, dozens of Myanmar security force members are [reported](#) to have been killed in an anti-junta movement that left 20 officers dead in the town of Moebyel in the Shan state. It is also estimated at least 10,000 people have fled their homes in Kayah, an eastern state in Myanmar that borders Thailand, after the latest violence.

"They fled into nearby forests or nearby villages where their relatives live. We don't have an organised group to help," said an unidentified activist according to [Reuters](#).

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White House Confirms Biden-Putin Summit to Take Place in Geneva on June 16

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - Presidents of the United States and Russia, Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin, will hold their first in-person bilateral meeting on June 16 in Geneva, the White House said on Tuesday.

"President Biden will meet with President Putin in Geneva, Switzerland on June 16, 2021. The leaders will discuss the full range of pressing issues, as we seek to restore predictability and stability to the U.S.-Russia relationship," the White House said in a statement.

The first in-person meeting between the two leaders will take place at the conclusion of Biden's first overseas trip since taking office.

The Kremlin said earlier that both leaders will discuss strategic stability and arms control.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov noted that a summit will be important for the Russia-US relationship.

Biden said in mid-May that he is going to discuss with Putin the recent cyberattack against Colonial Pipeline, which caused fuel shortages along the US East Coast. Washington noted that Moscow bears "some responsibility" for the hackers collective named DarkSide who operating from Russian territory. At the same time, the Kremlin said that Moscow had nothing to do with the hacker group's attacks.

The Biden administration recently expelled 10 Russian diplomats from the United States and imposed sanctions on 32 Russian entities and individuals as part of a new round of sanctions over Moscow's alleged cyberattacks and other hostile acts against US interests.

Moscow has denied the allegations and said the latest US sanctions run contrary to the US administration's rhetoric that it seeks a stable relationship with Russia.

Putin and Biden talked by phone for the first time on January 26, shortly after Biden's inauguration. They reached an agreement on the New START Treaty at that time, signing extensions in February.

The treaty, now set to expire on February 5, 2026, is the only arms control agreement between two countries that is still in force.

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US Envoy Lenderking to Visit Saudi Arabia, Oman for Talks on Yemen Conflict - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - US Special Envoy Tim Lenderking will visit Saudi Arabia and Oman to discuss a comprehensive ceasefire in Yemen amid the ongoing conflict involving the Houthi, the State Department said on Tuesday.

"U.S. Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking will travel to Saudi Arabia and Oman on May 25," the Department said in a release. "Attempting to forestall the devastating consequences of the Houthi offensive on Marib, U.S. Special Envoy Lenderking's discussions will focus on achieving an urgent comprehensive, nationwide, and sustainable ceasefire to ensure the regular and unobstructed delivery of essential commercial goods and humanitarian assistance throughout Yemen and a transition to an inclusive political process."

The Department also pointed out that the US Special Envoy will continue to work on building the international consensus to stop the Houthi offensive on Marib which is considered by Washington as the main obstacle on the way to peace in Yemen.

Yemen has been gripped by an internal conflict between the government forces and the Houthi movement for over six years. Since 2015, the Saudi-led coalition fighting on the government's side has been conducting air, land and sea operations against the rebels, as well as repeatedly blocking the Yemeni waters by its warships. The Houthis often retaliate by firing projectiles and bomber drones on Saudi territory.

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US Allocates \$4.8Bln to COVID-19 Tests For Uninsured - Health Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) – The US earmarked \$4.8 billion from the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue plan to reimburse health care providers for COVID-19 tests of Americans without health insurance, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) said on Tuesday.

"Today, the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), is announcing that it is dedicating \$4.8 billion from the American Rescue Plan (ARP) to support the HRSA COVID-19 Uninsured Program," an HHS press release said. "This funding will allow the program to continue reimbursing health care providers for testing uninsured individuals for COVID-19. As of May 19, 2021, the program has issued nearly \$4 billion in testing reimbursements to providers,"

The funding is dedicated solely to COVID-19 testing. A separate HHS program targets vaccine and treatment access for an estimated 29 million Americans without health insurance, the release said.

The latter program has issued more than \$2.5 billion for treatment of COVID-19 victims and more than \$85 million for vaccinations, according to the release.

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Moderna Says Its COVID-19 Vaccine 100% Effective in Adolescents

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - US pharmaceutical giant Moderna said on Tuesday its COVID-19 vaccine was highly effective in adolescents aged 18 and below based on studies conducted thus far.

"We are encouraged that mRNA-1273 was highly effective at preventing COVID-19 in adolescents," Moderna Chief Executive Stephane Bancel said in a statement, referring to the primary ingredient in the vaccine. "We will submit these results to the US FDA [Food and Drug Administration] and regulators globally in early June and request authorization."

The so-called TeenCOVE study enrolled more than 3,700 participants ages 12 to below 18 in the United States, the statement said.

"No cases of COVID-19 (were) observed after two doses of vaccine using the primary case definition, consistent with a vaccine efficacy of 100 percent," it said, adding: "Safety and tolerability (were) generally consistent with Phase 3 COVE study in adults; no significant safety concerns (were) identified."

Moderna is expected to be the second vaccine that will gain emergency use authorization from the FDA for such use on adolescents aged 12 to 15, after the Pfizer-BioNTech dose was approved on May 11.

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Biden-Putin Summit Set to Take Place June 15-16 in Geneva-Reports

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - The much-discussed bilateral meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his US counterpart Joe Biden is expected to take place on June 15-16 in Geneva, CNN reported on Tuesday.

The first in-person meeting between the two leaders will reportedly take place at the conclusion of Biden's first international trip since taking office, the outlet said citing two US officials.

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RPT - US Says in 'Full Compliance' With New START Treaty After Russia Accuses it of Violation

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) – The United States is in “full compliance” with its New START Treaty obligations despite Russian claims of the opposite, a State Department spokesperson told Sputnik on Monday.

Russian Foreign Ministry said earlier in the day that the US exceeded indicators laid down in the New START deal by 101 units due to launchers and heavy bombers.

“The United States is in full compliance with its treaty obligations and is implementing New START,” the official said. “In order to meet the central limits of the treaty, the United States developed and utilized conversion procedures in full compliance with its treaty obligations.” The United States met the central limits in August 2017, and stands by its conversion procedures, he added.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Monday that Moscow welcomed Washington’s decision to extend the New START Treaty.

In February, Russia and the United States agreed to extend the New START treaty for five more years without renegotiating any of its terms. The treaty, now set to expire on February 5, 2026, is the only arms control agreement between two countries that is still in force.

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RPT - Abolition May Be Necessary to End Police Violence in US - DC Reform Commission Member

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - Abolition may be the only way to stop law enforcement officers in America from killing, injuring and maiming Black people, Washington, DC Police Reform Commission member Ronald Hampton told Sputnik.

Hampton's comments come exactly one year after George Floyd was killed at the hands of a white officer in Minneapolis, and just days after AP released video showing the 2019 police-involved killing of 49-year old Black Man Ronald Greene in Louisiana. These are just two among a long line of police killings the US has seen in recent years.

"I'm in support of abolition because insanity is doing things the same way over and over and expecting a different result," Hampton said when asked about what reforms are needed to stop police violence. "What do we replace police with? If we abolish it, individuals can do other things. There needs to be a concentrated effort to serve people as best we can."

Hampton, a US Air Force and Vietnam veteran, said funding is needed for housing, schools, mental health, and hospitals to address problems in order to replace police.

In Greene's case, authorities for years refused to release footage showing police beating, tazing and dragging him by his legs after a high-speed chase in Monroe, Louisiana. Louisiana state police initially told Greene's family he had died on impact after his SUV crashed into a tree. Later, they released a one-page statement saying Greene struggled with troopers and died on his way to the hospital.

Hampton called the police-involved murder of Greene "business as usual." He was not surprised by what happened in Louisiana or North Carolina, where police officers shot and killed Anthony Brown, Jr. while serving a search warrant.

"I'm not surprised because law enforcement agencies continue to condone this behavior and superiors lie to protect officers," Hampton said. "It took two years for the tape to be released and instead of commenting on how Greene was murdered, they focused on how the tape got out."

Hampton said cases like those of Brown, Floyd, Eric Garner, Ahmaud Arbery, Terrence Crutcher, Philando Castile, Daunte Wright, Mah'Khia Bryant and Alton Sterling - captured by cell phones or police body and dash cams - illustrate the impact and continuing importance of cameras.

"It's an 'I told you so,' moment. For 50 years, we've been saying that things like this was going on but we didn't have the visual proof," Hampton said. "Cameras have been more effective in revealing police misconduct and criminal behavior. We know it's happening and they are covering it up, making false reports, lying and refusing to release videos."

Hampton, who was a police officer with Washington DC's Metropolitan Police Department for 24 years, said in communities across the United States, politicians, policymakers, activists and advocates have been involved with effecting or talking about reform.

He said those seeking police accountability have been highlighting problems and demanding changes to policing for more than 50 years.

"Since the 1994 Crime Bill, they gave police a lot of money. You can't pay people to be right. I haven't seen any changes nor have police officers become more respectful to our people," Hampton said.

Surprisingly, he added, people say they want more police on the streets and think the need for additional training is the issue.

"I'm willing to say that during enslavement and other oppressive situations, there were people who thought it was alright. They adjusted to it," Hampton said. "I believe that we need to invest

in education because some people just don't know. We have endured bad treatment by the police and other institutions. This is not how I am made. It's unacceptable to me. I don't need to be treated like shit and beaten all the time."

Hampton, however, also said he is encouraged by the level of engagement and activity by a significant swathe of people who want to bring change in the wake of Floyd's murder.

In January, DC Police Union Chairman Gregg Pemberton said while the organization supports reforms, defunding departments is not the answer because policing is paramount to providing security and safety to society.

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RPT - US National Guard Troops Left Capitol Hill Grounds, Perimeter Remains Fenced

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - The Capitol Hill grounds in Washington, DC remain closed for visitors with fencing standing along the perimeter of the building and adjacent territory as National Guard troops departed on Sunday after nearly half a year presence, a Sputnik correspondent on the scene reported.

The National Guard troops left on Sunday while the territory around the building housing the US Congress is still behind the fence and it is unknown when it will be removed, Capitol Police officers told Sputnik on Monday.

The National Guard arrived to the Capitol Hill grounds in the wake of massive unrest on January 6 to protect the members of the Congress from any possible attacks on behalf of those dissatisfied with the election results.

In April, the number of the troops around the Capitol made up 2,200, a significant decline from 26,000 initially summoned to Washington, DC after January 6 events and ahead of President Joe Biden's inauguration.

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Biden Administration, EU Coordinating on Response to Ryanair Incident in Minsk

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said he welcomes the European Union's call for sanctions against the Belarusian government over the Ryanair plane's emergency landing and he has instructed his administration to craft options to hold Minsk accountable.

"I welcome the news that the European Union has called for targeted economic sanctions and other measures, and have asked my team to develop appropriate options to hold accountable those responsible, in close coordination with the European Union, other allies and partners, and international organizations," Biden said in a press release on Monday.

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney condemned the diversion of the Irish airliner Ryanair's plane carrying Belarusian journalist Roman Protasevich and the two sides agreed to remain in close coordination on an appropriate response.

State Department spokesperson Ned Price said US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also met with Coveney to discuss the matter and a potential response to the incident.

Moreover, Sullivan notified Belarusian opposition figure Svetlana Tikhanovskaya in a telephone discussion that the United States, European Union, and other partnering nations would work together to hold President Alexander Lukashenko to account over the emergency landing of the Ryanair plane in Minsk.

White House Press Psaki earlier on Monday called the Belarus incident "outrageous" but dodged a reporter's question about why the US did not object to the 2013 forced landing of former Bolivian President Evo Morales' aircraft to search for US whistleblower Edward Snowden on board.

"I think I've given an extensive comment on this specifically, we're working with our partners around the world, I don't think I have anything more for you," Psaki said in response.

The Belarus government designated Protasevich's Telegram channel Nexta as extremist for allegedly facilitating civil unrest in the country in the aftermath of the August presidential election. In November, the Belarusian Investigative Committee filed a request with the Polish Justice Ministry to extradite Protasevich and another Nexta co-founder, Stepan Putilo, to Belarus for criminal prosecution.

The Belarusian government on Sunday diverted the Ryanair aircraft that was traveling from Athens to Vilnius to land in Minsk over a bomb threat which later turned out to have been false. Among the passengers was Protasevich, who was detained by the Belarusian law enforcement during the stopover. His 23-old female companion, Russian citizen Sofia Sapega, was reportedly detained alongside him.

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Changing America Marks Anniversary of George Floyd's Death in Minneapolis

MINNEAPOLIS, May 24 (Sputnik) - Tuesday marks the first anniversary of George Floyd's death in Minneapolis, Minnesota - an event that set the wheels of history to reshape America's present and is reshaping the nation's future as well.

Public outrage against this case of police brutality claimed a prominent place in a centuries-long fight against discrimination on par with victories over slavery and segregation, and is changing vast areas beyond criminal justice - economics, art, foreign policy and education.

BUTTERFLY EFFECT

Floyd, a 46-year-old unemployed African American with a criminal record and drug addiction, paid a pack of cigarettes at a Minneapolis grocery store with a \$20 dollar note. A cashier suspected the note was counterfeit and called the police after failing to resolve the matter on his own.

Floyd, who initially cooperated with officers, had a breakdown once he was placed inside a police vehicle. In an attempt to subdue Floyd, who was 6 feet 6 inches tall and weighed more than 220 pounds, officer Derek Chauvin pressed his knee to Floyd's neck for some 9 minutes, ignoring the handcuffed suspect's pleas that he can not breathe as well as bystanders' attempts to call his attention.

The trial determined it "beyond reasonable doubt" that Chauvin's actions violated police rules of engagement and became a major factor in Floyd's death by obstructing oxygen flow. In April, the former officer was found guilty of a second-degree murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter potentially facing up to 75 years in prison. Chauvin's three colleagues, who participated in Floyd's arrest, will stand trial later this year.

"I CAN'T BREATHE"

"I can't breathe," Floyd's final words, became a rallying cry for many thousands of Americans who took to the streets from coast to coast infuriated by the disturbing video that was made public by a bystander. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project identified more than 7,750 demonstrations in 2,440 locations in all 50 US states and Washington, DC between May 26 and August 22, 2020, when the mostly peaceful street activities started to wind down.

"You went to the streets, Blacks and Whites, young and old, in the middle of the pandemic. Let us not forget that when people marched all over this country they marched risking their health," Al Sharpton, one of the leaders of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, said at a rally in Minneapolis commemorating the anniversary of Floyd's death.

Protesters were mobilized to demand justice for other African American victims of police violence as well. Even as the campaign went on, more names appeared on the remembrance list, including that of Daunte Wright who was shot dead in April after a policewoman apparently mistook her handgun for a taser.

Now that the individuals responsible for Floyd's death are being tried and face lengthy prison terms, the main demand of the campaign is for a sweeping police reform provided for by the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, a bill that is yet to be approved by Congress.

Sharpton said Floyd should not go down in history as just someone with a knee on his neck but as a person who broke the neck of police racism, police brutality and police illegality.

"That how we will put George's name in history," Sharpton said. "It was historic to see a White police officer for the first time be convicted for killing a Black man... But it will go again and again and again acquittals unless we can get a federal law."

The BLM movement said it has a more ambitious goal in mind. It seeks to eradicate the remnants of racist mentality and behavior permeating American society.

Attorney Ben Crump, who legally represents many police brutality victims, urged continuing the fight until a Black baby born to a Black mother has the same exact rights as a White baby born to a White mother.

"No, that's not a case in America today, but I challenge anybody to say that's not a goal we are fighting for," Crump said.

NEW HORIZONS EMERGING

The campaign is moving from the streets to legislatures, workplaces, classrooms and artistic salons. Americans tear down monuments glorifying Confederate leaders, defenders of slavery, demand greater inclusivity from movies and literature, schools and universities review history

books and introduce antiracism studies. Dissenting voices are rare and muffled by what the critics decry as "cancel culture."

The BLM movement endorsed Joe Biden during the 2020 presidential campaign and says he is leaving up to expectations. Apart from appointing the most diverse cabinet in US history, recognizing the existence of the systematic racism in the United States, pushing for police reform and measures to protect minorities, Biden is implementing the socio-economic agenda of the BLM followers, pledging multibillion welfare programs to be funded by tax for increases for wealthy and corporations.

Even the United States foreign policy is not immune to the new trends. Many of the BLM activists recently joined pro-Palestinian protests demanding an end to unconditional US support for Israel and its congressional leaders brought the message directly to Biden during the recent flare-up in Gaza.

"None of us are free until all of us are free," a delegate from a local Muslim community said as she asked BLM to raise its voice against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Her appeal was greeted with applause and cheers at the Minneapolis rally.

Biden is expected to meet with Floyd's family in Minneapolis on Tuesday, where numerous activities - from roundtable discussions to street performances - will be held to celebrate George Floyd's life and legacy.

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Sullivan Tells Tikhonovskaya US, EU Coordinating on Response to Ryanair - White House

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan notified Belarusian opposition figure Svetlana Tikhonovskaya in a telephone discussion that the United States, European Union, and other partnering nations would work together to hold President Alexander Lukashenko to account over the emergency landing of the Ryanair plane in Minsk, the White House said in a press release.

"National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan spoke today with democratic opposition leader Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya of Belarus...Mr. Sullivan made clear that the United States, in coordination with the EU and other allies and partners, will hold the Lukashenka regime to account," the release said on Monday.

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Sullivan, Irish Foreign Minister Condemn Forced Diversion of Ryanair Flight - White House

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney condemned the diversion of the Irish airliner Ryanair's plane carrying Belarusian journalist Roman Protasevich, the White House said in a press release.

"Today, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met with Foreign Minister Simon Coveney of Ireland to discuss our strong bilateral relations and cooperation on a number of shared global challenges," the release said on Monday. "Mr. Sullivan and Foreign Minister Coveney condemned the forced diversion of a flight between two EU member states and the subsequent removal and arrest of journalist Raman Pratasevich in Minsk by the Lukashenka regime, and they agreed to remain in close touch on an appropriate response."
State Department spokesperson Ned Price said US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also met with Coveney to discuss the matter and a potential response to the incident.

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Biden Says Welcomes EU Call for Sanctions on Belarus, Crafting Options over Ryanair Issue

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said he welcomes the European Union's call for sanctions against the Belarusian government over the Ryanair plane's emergency landing and he has instructed his administration to craft options to hold Minsk accountable.

"I welcome the news that the European Union has called for targeted economic sanctions and other measures, and have asked my team to develop appropriate options to hold accountable those responsible, in close coordination with the European Union, other allies and partners, and international organizations," Biden said in a press release on Monday.

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Blinken Says Spoke With UAE Counterpart About Mideast Ceasefire, Gaza Rebuilding Efforts
WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and United Arab Emirates (UAE) Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed in a telephone call discussed the Israeli-Palestinian ceasefire and reconstruction efforts in Gaza, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a press release.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke today with UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed," Price said in the release on Monday. "The Secretary and Foreign Minister expressed their support for the ceasefire between Israel, Hamas, and other parties in Gaza." Blinken thanked the UAE for its efforts to de-escalate the violence between Israel and the Palestinian Hamas faction and the two statesmen discussed the need for new paths to reach peace between the two warring parties, Price said.

Price added that Blinken also highlighted the importance of reconstruction efforts in Gaza. Clashes in East Jerusalem in early May led to the worst violence between Israel and Palestinians in the Gaza Strip in recent years. Palestinian militants launched several thousand rockets toward Israel. In response, Israel fired retaliatory strikes against Gaza. In Israel, 12

people were killed and over 50 were seriously wounded during the hostilities. The death toll among Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, Jerusalem and the West Bank topped 270. Israel and the Hamas movement on Thursday agreed to a ceasefire that was brokered by Egypt.

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Blinken, German Counterpart Talk Ryanair Incident, US Nord Stream 2 Concerns - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his German counterpart Heiko Maas discussed the Ryanair plane's emergency landing in Minsk and the US opposition to the completion of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a press release.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke today with German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas," Price said in the release on Monday. "Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Maas discussed coordination on next steps to respond to events in Belarus...The Secretary also reiterated US concerns about the Nord Stream 2 pipeline."

Blinken and Maas also discussed relief efforts in Gaza and the importance of revitalizing the NATO alliance through an ambitious NATO 2030 process, the release said.

Earlier on Monday, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said the Biden administration was in close coordination with the European Union, OSCE, the United Nations, NATO, and other partners to assess the next steps in a possible response to the Belarusian government's decision to land the Ryanair passenger aircraft in order to arrest Belarusian opposition figure Roman Protasevich, the founder of a Telegram channel that Minsk designated as extremist. Regarding the gas pipeline, the Biden administration on Wednesday announced that it would lift sanctions on Swiss-based Nord Stream 2 AG and its chief executive Matthias Warnig. Blinken told Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Thursday that the move was in Washington's national interest. Germany, the main beneficiary of the Russian-led project, has welcomed the decision.

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Blinken, German Counterpart Talk Ryanair Incident, US Nord Stream 2 Concerns - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his German counterpart Heiko Maas discussed the Ryanair plane's emergency landing in Minsk and the US opposition to the completion of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke today with German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas," Price said in the release on Monday. "Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Maas discussed

coordination on next steps to respond to events in Belarus...The Secretary also reiterated US concerns about the Nord Stream 2 pipeline."

Blinken and Maas also discussed relief efforts in Gaza and the importance of revitalizing the NATO alliance through an ambitious NATO 2030 process, the release said.

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Biden, Egyptian President Talk Humanitarian, Rebuilding Assistance for Gaza - White House

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and his Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi in a telephone call discussed urgent humanitarian needs in Gaza, including rebuilding efforts following the escalation of violence between the Palestinian Hamas movement and Israeli defense forces, the White House said in a press release.

"President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. spoke today with President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi of Egypt," the release said on Monday. "The two leaders consulted on the urgent need to deliver humanitarian assistance to those in need in Gaza and to support rebuilding efforts in a manner that benefits the people there and not Hamas."

Biden praised Egypt for brokering a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, and for ensuring it holds, the release said.

Moreover, Biden acknowledged Egypt's concern over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and Cairo's worry it may restrict access to Nile River waters, the release said, adding that the US president supports a diplomatic resolution that meets the needs of Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia.

The GERD dispute has been marring Sudan's relations with its neighbors Egypt and Ethiopia since 2012, when the construction of what is set to become Africa's largest dam began. Sudan and Egypt fear that Ethiopia's dam will endanger their own water security. The African Union made several attempts to mediate the dispute but in vain.

Biden and Sisi also discussed support for Libya's plan to hold national elections in December, including plans to remove all foreign military and faction forces from the country, the release said. The two leaders also discussed support for the Iraqi government's efforts to strengthen its sovereignty and independence, the release said.

Biden also underscored the importance of a constructive dialogue on human right in Egypt and both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to a strong bilateral partnership, the release said.

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UN Mission in Mali Calls for Immediate Release of President, Prime Minister - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, May 24 (Sputnik) - The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) called to immediately release the country's president and prime minister.

"We are following events closely and remain committed to supporting the Transition. We call for calm and demand the immediate and unconditional release of the President and Prime Minister. Those who are holding them will be held accountable," MINUSMA said via Twitter on Monday. The mission also said that those responsible for holding the officials must ensure their well being.

Mali's interim government resigned earlier in the month, with the country's interim President Ba Ndau, having instructed interim Prime Minister Moctar Ouane to form a new government. The two were arrested earlier on Monday by soldiers and transported to the nearby Kati military base, according to reports.

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US Warns Americans Not to Travel to Japan, Sri Lanka Due to COVID-19 Concerns - State Dept

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - The US State Department issued a travel advisory warning Americans to avoid visiting Japan and Sri Lanka because of novel coronavirus transmission concerns.

"This week, the following Travel Advisories have been assessed and reissued with updates, raised to a Level 4 - Do Not Travel: Japan, Sri Lanka," the State Department said on Monday. In addition, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in a new alert that Americans should avoid all travel to Japan and advised anyone who does have to visit the country get fully vaccinated prior to traveling there.

"Because of the current situation in Japan even fully vaccinated travelers may be at risk for getting and spreading COVID-19 variants and should avoid all travel to Japan," the CDC said. This news comes several months before the Olympic Games are set to be held in Tokyo in July. The Olympics were already postponed once due to the novel coronavirus pandemic.

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Two Ex-Chadian Diplomats Charged in \$2Mln Bribery, Laundering Scheme - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - Two former diplomats from Chad, including Ambassador to the United States Mahamoud Adam Bechir, have been charged for their participation in an international bribery and money laundering scheme involving a Canadian energy company, the US Justice Department said.

"An indictment returned by a federal grand jury in Washington, DC was unsealed on May 20, 2021, charging the Republic of Chad's former Ambassador to the United States and Canada and Chad's former Deputy Chief of Mission for the United States and Canada with soliciting and accepting a \$2 million bribe from a Canadian start-up energy company, and conspiring to launder the bribe payment in order to conceal its true nature," the Justice Department said in a release on Monday.

The Justice Department said Bechir and Takane engaged in the scheme between August 2009 and July 2014 by demanding a bribe from the Canadian start-up energy company in exchange for patronage in obtaining oil rights in Chad, the release said.

Takane's wife and another Chadian individual received shares of the energy company as part of the \$2 million bribe from Naeem Tyab, a Canadian citizen and principal shareholder of the energy company, while the main part of the bribe was paid to Bechir's wife, Nouracham Bechir Niam, via a fraudulent contract for consulting services that she never actually provided, the release said.

The defendants have been charged with conspiracy to commit money laundering, and Bechir, Takane and Niam have also been charged with money laundering and face a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison.

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Cuomo Orders New York Police to Increase Patrols at Jewish Facilities Amid Attacks

NEW YORK, May 24 (Sputnik) - New York Governor Andrew Cuomo said he directed the state police to increase its patrols at various Jewish community facilities after the recent spike in violence against visibly Jewish residents.

"I am directing the New York State Police to increase patrols at synagogues, schools [and] other Jewish community facilities following a spike of violent attacks," Cuomo said via Twitter on Monday. "We will do all we can to help ensure Jewish New Yorkers - and New Yorkers of all faiths - are safe."

In another statement on Monday, Cuomo also decried an attack against an Asian American man who was pushed into subway tracks in Queens and directed the State Police Hate Crimes Task Force to assist in the investigation into the incident.

Last week, Cuomo directed the New York Police Hate Crime Task Force to probe an assault on a visibly Jewish man who was beaten by a group of protesters at a demonstration over the recent Israeli-Palestinian clashes.

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US Says in 'Full Compliance' With New START Treaty After Russia Accuses it of Violation

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) – The United States is in "full compliance" with its New START Treaty obligations despite Russian claims of the opposite, a State Department spokesperson told Sputnik on Monday.

Russian Foreign Ministry said earlier in the day that the US exceeded indicators laid down in the New START deal by 101 units due to launchers and heavy bombers.

"The United States is in full compliance with its treaty obligations and is implementing New START," the official said. "In order to meet the central limits of the treaty, the United States developed and utilized conversion procedures in full compliance with its treaty obligations." The United States met the central limits in August 2017, and stands by its conversion procedures, he added.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Monday that Moscow welcomed Washington's decision to extend the New START Treaty.

In February, Russia and the United States agreed to extend the New START treaty for five more years without renegotiating any of its terms. The treaty, now set to expire on February 5, 2026, is the only arms control agreement between two countries that is still in force.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) -

BELARUS DEVELOPMENTS

* Telegram Nextra channel founder Roman Protasevich, who was detained at the Minsk airport on Sunday, said in a video message circulated by state-run Belarusian media that he had no health problems and was making a confession in a criminal case of mass riots.

* The German Foreign Ministry expressed protest to Belarusian Ambassador in Berlin Denis Sidorenko in connection with the incident with the Ryanair plane and the detention of Protasevich.

* The European Union has an investment and economic package for Belarus in the amount of \$3.6 billion, but it is frozen until Belarus becomes a democratic country, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said ahead of the EU summit in Brussels.

* Russia calls on West to refrain from double standards, assess the incident connected to the emergency landing of a Ryanair plane in Minsk without emotions and cooperate with Belarusian aviation authorities, the Russian Foreign Ministry's spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, said.

* Belarus is ready to invite international experts over the incident with the emergency landing of a Ryanair plane in Minsk, Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei said.

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

* The United States is not ready to announce the date and location of a planned US-Russia summit as both parties are working on the details of the meeting, the White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Monday.

- * US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan raised strong concerns over the Ryanair incident during a discussion with his Russian counterpart Nikolay Patrushev, Psaki said.
- * Sullivan and Patrushev agreed during the talks in Geneva that normalizing relations would be in the interest of both countries and would contribute to global stability, the White House said.
- * Russian President Vladimir Putin may hold the first meeting with his US counterpart, Joe Biden, in Switzerland, Swiss newspaper Tages-Anzeiger reported, citing sources.
- * The Russian Foreign Ministry released on Monday information about the total numbers of strategic offensive weapons under the New START deal owned by Russia and the United States as of March 1, 2021.

MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

- * US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced on Monday that he would travel to Jerusalem, Ramallah, Cairo and Amman to contribute to reducing tensions in the Middle East.
- * The United States hopes that the ceasefire between Israelis and Palestinians will continue to hold in near future, a senior administration official said.

CORONAVIRUS VACCINE

- * Switzerland has not yet received a request from Russia to assess safety of the Sputnik V vaccine, but is ready to study it if there is a relevant offer, Alain Berset, a member of the Swiss Federal Council who is in charge of healthcare, said on Monday.
- * Russia will continue assisting Kyrgyzstan in its fight against COVID-19 and considers the issue of localizing the production of the Sputnik V vaccine in the Central Asian country, President Vladimir Putin said.
- * The Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) announced on Monday that it is launching production of Russia's Sputnik V vaccine in India jointly with Indian pharmaceutical producer Panacea Biotec, with full-scale production due to start this summer.

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Abolition May Be Necessary to End Police Violence in US - DC Reform Commission Member

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - Abolition may be the only way to stop law enforcement officers in America from killing, injuring and maiming Black people, Washington, DC Police Reform Commission member Ronald Hampton told Sputnik.

Hampton's comments come exactly one year after George Floyd was killed at the hands of a white officer in Minneapolis, and just days after AP released video showing the 2019 police-involved killing of 49-year old Black Man Ronald Greene in Louisiana. These are just two among a long line of police killings the US has seen in recent years.

"I'm in support of abolition because insanity is doing things the same way over and over and expecting a different result," Hampton said when asked about what reforms are needed to stop police violence. "What do we replace police with? If we abolish it, individuals can do other things. There needs to be a concentrated effort to serve people as best we can."

Hampton, a US Air Force and Vietnam veteran, said funding is needed for housing, schools, mental health, and hospitals to address problems in order to replace police.

In Greene's case, authorities for years refused to release footage showing police beating, tazing and dragging him by his legs after a high-speed chase in Monroe, Louisiana. Louisiana state police initially told Greene's family he had died on impact after his SUV crashed into a tree. Later, they released a one-page statement saying Greene struggled with troopers and died on his way to the hospital.

Hampton called the police-involved murder of Greene "business as usual." He was not surprised by what happened in Louisiana or North Carolina, where police officers shot and killed Anthony Brown, Jr. while serving a search warrant.

"I'm not surprised because law enforcement agencies continue to condone this behavior and superiors lie to protect officers," Hampton said. "It took two years for the tape to be released and instead of commenting on how Greene was murdered, they focused on how the tape got out." Hampton said cases like those of Brown, Floyd, Eric Garner, Ahmaud Arbery, Terrence Crutcher, Philando Castile, Daunte Wright, Mah'Khia Bryant and Alton Sterling - captured by cell phones or police body and dash cams - illustrate the impact and continuing importance of cameras.

"It's an 'I told you so,' moment. For 50 years, we've been saying that things like this was going on but we didn't have the visual proof," Hampton said. "Cameras have been more effective in revealing police misconduct and criminal behavior. We know it's happening and they are covering it up, making false reports, lying and refusing to release videos."

Hampton, who was a police officer with Washington DC's Metropolitan Police Department for 24 years, said in communities across the United States, politicians, policymakers, activists and advocates have been involved with effecting or talking about reform.

He said those seeking police accountability have been highlighting problems and demanding changes to policing for more than 50 years.

"Since the 1994 Crime Bill, they gave police a lot of money. You can't pay people to be right. I haven't seen any changes nor have police officers become more respectful to our people," Hampton said.

Surprisingly, he added, people say they want more police on the streets and think the need for additional training is the issue.

"I'm willing to say that during enslavement and other oppressive situations, there were people who thought it was alright. They adjusted to it," Hampton said. "I believe that we need to invest in education because some people just don't know. We have endured bad treatment by the police and other institutions. This is not how I am made. It's unacceptable to me. I don't need to be treated like shit and beaten all the time."

Hampton, however, also said he is encouraged by the level of engagement and activity by a significant swathe of people who want to bring change in the wake of Floyd's murder.

In January, DC Police Union Chairman Gregg Pemberton said while the organization supports reforms, defunding departments is not the answer because policing is paramount to providing security and safety to society.

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US Embassy in Mali Warns Americans of 'Increased Military Activity' Amid Apparent Coup

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - Mali is experiencing increased military activity in the capital Bamako amid reports that the military has conducted a coup and US citizens are advised to avoid travel in the city, the US Embassy in Mali said on Monday.

"The US Embassy has received reports of increased military activity in Bamako. US citizens are encouraged to avoid non-essential travel inside the city at this time, and monitor local media for updates," the mission said via Twitter.

Mali's interim government resigned earlier in the month, with the country's interim President Ba Ndau, having instructed interim Prime Minister Moctar Ouane to form a new government. The two were arrested earlier on Monday by soldiers and transported to the nearby Kati military base, according to reports.

Instability in Mali began in August of 2020 when rebels announced the arrest of then-President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and Prime Minister Boubou Cisse. Later, the president announced his resignation and the dissolution of the country's parliament and government.

Former defense minister Ba Ndau was then appointed to be interim president and former foreign minister Moctar Ouane became interim prime minister after the parties agreed to an 18-month transition period.

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US Nuclear Arsenal Upgrade Plans to Cost \$634Bln Over the Next 10 Years - Budget Office

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - The US' plans for their nuclear arsenal will cost approximately \$624 billion over the next decade, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) stated in their mandated 10-year report on the cost of US nuclear forces, released on Monday.

"CBO estimates that plans for US nuclear forces, as described in the fiscal year 2021 budget and supporting documents, would cost \$634 billion over the 2021–2030 period, \$140 billion more than CBO's 2019 estimate for the 2019–2028 period," CBO said.

The Defense Department would incur about two-thirds of the cost, the largest portion going towards ballistic missile submarines and intercontinental ballistic missiles. The Energy Department's costs would primarily be for nuclear weapons laboratories and related activities.

Although that 10-year total is 28 percent higher than the estimate made for the previous 2019-2028 period, the CBO added that roughly half of that increase can be attributed to the fact that the new period now includes two later, and more expensive, years of development in nuclear modernization programs.

The report comes amid congressional action on the matter, with lawmakers Ed Markey and Ed Blumenthal having announced legislation last Thursday that seeks to curb spending on the

refurbishment of the country's nuclear arsenal, a move that would save roughly \$73 billion over the next decade.

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US National Guard Troops Left Capitol Hill Grounds, Perimeter Remains Fenced

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - The Capitol Hill grounds in Washington, DC remain closed for visitors with fencing standing along the perimeter of the building and adjacent territory as National Guard troops departed on Sunday after nearly half a year presence, a Sputnik correspondent on the scene reported on Monday.

The National Guard troops left on Sunday while the territory around the building housing the US Congress is still behind the fence and it is unknown when it will be removed, Capitol Police officers told Sputnik.

The National Guard arrived to the Capitol Hill grounds in the wake of massive unrest on January 6 to protect the members of the Congress from any possible attacks on behalf of those dissatisfied with the election results.

In April, the number of the troops around the Capitol made up 2,200, a significant decline from 26,000 initially summoned to Washington, DC after January 6 events and ahead of President Joe Biden's inauguration.

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Evidence Growing That Novel Coronavirus Originated in Wuhan Lab - Former FDA Chief
WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - Evidence continues to grow that the global coronavirus pandemic originally came out of a laboratory in Wuhan, China following the report that three scientists there were hospitalized in November 2019, former Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Commissioner Scott Gottlieb said on Monday.

"This is consistent with the State Department bulletin, the timing that would put it sufficiently early that it could have triggered this epidemic, the timing of these infections put it within this realm [of possibility]," Gottlieb told CNBC in an interview. "The side of the ledger that said this could have come out of a laboratory has continued to grow."

A year ago, the theory that COVID-19 originated in Nature and was spread from animals to the human population appeared somewhat plausible but no evidence at all to support it had ever emerged, Gottlieb explained.

"We found no evidence of this virus in an animal anywhere. We haven't found the true source of the virus. With MERS and SARS we had found the intermediate host by this point," he said. However, although the circumstantial evidence continued to grow that the outbreak had originated in the Wuhan laboratory, unless a whistleblower emerged, no hard evidence or decisive conclusion was going to appear, Gottlieb concluded.

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Wall Street Has One of Best Days Since Mid-May as US Inflation Fears Cool

NEW YORK, May 24 (Sputnik) - Wall Street had one of its best days since mid-May after a surge in risk appetite and tamped down fears about US inflation lifted industrial and technology stocks.

The S&P 500, which groups the top 500 stocks on the New York Stock Exchange, settled up 42 points, or 1 percent, at 4,198 on Monday. Its previous biggest gain was 1.5 percent on May 14. The Dow Jones Industrial Average, the broadest US equity barometer, closed up 186 points, or 0.5 percent, at 34,394. That matched the 0.5 percent gain on the Dow from May 20.

The Nasdaq Composite index, which includes high-flying tech stocks such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, Netflix and Google, rose 190 points, or 1.4 percent, to finish at 13,661. It was the technology bellwether's biggest one-day win since May 20, when it rose 1.8 percent.

US stocks have mostly fallen this month on fears of inflation as prices of almost all commodities - from lumber to soybeans - rose on the back of an economy recovering from the coronavirus pandemic.

The Federal Reserve has insisted that the higher price pressures were just transitory and will come to pass once bottlenecks in the supply chain dissipate. Investors seemed to buy some of that argument on Monday, with the dollar and yields tied to the 10-year US Treasury note both trading sharply off May's highs.

With Monday's rebound, the S&P 500 is up 1 percent for May while the Dow has risen 0.4 percent. Nasdaq is down 2.5 percent for the month.

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Over 500 Campaign Staffers Urge Biden to Support Palestine

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - More than 500 staff who worked on Joe Biden's 2020 campaign in an open letter urged the US president to hold Israel accountable for their recent actions and to continue working towards lasting rights for Palestinians.

"We appreciate your recent work to broker a temporary peace, and we also acknowledge that a temporary peace is not a suitable long-term resolution. We are firm in our belief that it is time for your administration to take concrete steps to end the occupation in pursuit of justice, peace, and self-determination for Palestinians," the letter, released by Arizona campaign organizer Matan Arad-Neeman, said on Monday.

The letter called on Biden to demand that the Israeli government allow a humanitarian corridor to Gaza, investigate whether Israel's actions violate laws that prohibit US aid from funding

militaries implicated in human rights violations, and to end tax breaks for organizations that fund settlement of Palestinian territory, among other things.

The letter added that those who signed it joined Biden's campaign because they believed in his vision of a nation that believes in the human rights of all people, noting that the current situation deprives Palestinians of peace, security, and self-determination – values praised by Biden.

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US Congressman Fined \$5,000 for Bypassing Security Screening at Capitol Building

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - US Congressman Lloyd Smucker has been fined \$5,000 for bypassing a security screening at the Capitol building last week, the House Ethics Committee revealed in a letter on Monday.

"I write to notify you of a violation of House Resolution 73, on May 19, by Rep. Lloyd Smucker. The member has a \$5,000 fine. The Member has been advised of the fin and of their appeal rights," House of Representative' Sergeant at Arms William Walker said in the letter to House Ethics Committee Chairman Theodore Deutch.

In a separate letter, the US Capitol Police explained that on May 19, the Republican Congressman from Pennsylvania entered the House chamber without being screened by an officer.

Capitol Police said officers tried to get Smucker's attention but the Congressman continued to walk onto the House floor to vote. Smucker failed to go through the metal detector but he went through it when he returned from voting, police said.

Capitol building security has been tightened following the January 6 riot when thousands of pro-Trump protesters violently entered the Capitol grounds to stop Congress from verifying the Electoral College votes to confirm President Joe Biden's win in the 2020 presidential election.

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US Court Sentences Russian National Kriuchkov to 10 Months For Plot to Extort Tesla

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - The US District Court in the state of Nevada on Monday sentenced Russian national Egor Kriuchkov to 10 months in jail with time already served after he pleaded guilty to an attempt to organize a cyberattack against Tesla.

District Judge Miranda Du said she accepted the plea agreement stipulating no more than 10 months of prison, which Kriuchkov had already served while awaiting trial. Kriuchkov will be deported to Russia and face a fine of approximately \$14,800.

During the hearing, Kriuchkov expressed regrets for his activities. "I am sorry for my decision, I regret it," he said through an interpreter.

According to court documents, Kriuchkov conspired to recruit an employee from the company to insert the malware into the company's computer network. Kriuchkov planned to extract data from the network and extort the company for money.

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US Lawmakers Seek \$73Bln Cuts From US Nuclear Weapons Budget – Proposal

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) – Democratic US lawmakers Ed Markey and Ed Blumenauer on Thursday announced the reintroduction of draft legislation that would seek to curb the country's refurbishment of its nuclear arsenal thereby saving \$73 billion over the next decade. "Senator Edward Markey and Congressman Earl Blumenauer today reintroduced the Smarter Approach to Nuclear Expenditures (SANE) Act, which would cancel or reduce nuclear weapons programs over the next decade and generate at least \$73 billion in cost savings," Markey said in a press release.

President Barack Obama, with current President Joe Biden as his vice president, introduced a \$1 trillion nuclear modernization program in 2016; the program was continued by his successor President Donald Trump. Markey and Blumenauer had introduced the same bill in late 2019 but failed to garner the necessary traction to receive a House vote.

The bill would limit the plutonium pit production target to 30 per year - saving \$9 billion, prohibit funding for a nuclear processing facility - saving \$2.6 billion, retire the B83-1 megaton bomb as previously planned - saving \$4.4 billion and prohibit the development of the new W-93 warhead – saving \$7.5 billion, the release said.

The bill would also "cancel the development of a new air-launched cruise missile and ...warhead life extension program saving \$13.3 billion, cancel the development of new intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and a new nuclear warhead saving at least \$13.6 billion and cancel the development of a new submarine-launched cruise missile saving \$9 billion," the release said.

The legislation would ban deploying "low-yield" warheads and any space-based missile defense, remove the nuclear mission from the F-35 and cut the Columbia-class strategic missile submarine fleet from twelve to eight, cut the existing ICBM force from over 400 to 150, and reduce deployed strategic warheads from 1,500 to 1,000 saving \$13.6 billion, the release said.

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months in jail with time already served after he pleaded guilty to an attempt to organize a cyberattack against Tesla.

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US Not Fully Safe With Vaccinations Unless Coronavirus Variants Curbed - USAID

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - The United States is not assured of being fully safe from the coronavirus even with its high rate in vaccination unless it extends the global fight to defeat the variants from the scourge, US Agency for International Development (USAID) COVID-19 Task Force Jeremy Konyndyk said Monday.

"We recognize that no matter how many people we vaccinated at home, the United States will not be fully safe as long as the virus rages on around the rest of the world and continues to replicate and generate new and potentially more dangerous," Konyndyk, who is assisting the Biden administration's global response to the coronavirus pandemic, said.

Konyndyk cited India as an example of the work that needed to be done in subduing mutations of the virus, with President Joe Biden pledging to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi last week a range of emergency assistance, including oxygen-related supplies, vaccine materials and therapeutics.

"[The] variants (and) current surge in South Asia really underscore the devastating consequences and risks of continued global transmission and the urgency of accelerating efforts to end the pandemic," Konyndyk said.

In a speech to Congress last month, Biden said the United States would become "an arsenal of vaccines" for other countries once vaccination targets for Americans were met. Biden said the United States would make 20 million additional vaccines available for other countries by the end of June from its reserves of Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson shots.

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Snowden Says 'Downing' Aircraft to Arrest Dissidents Should Always Be Opposed

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - US whistleblower Edward Snowden said on Monday that grounding of aircraft to arrest dissidents should be opposed no matter which country does it.

"Downing aircraft to pursue the arrest of dissidents has always been outrageous," Snowden said via Twitter. "It is the modern expression of Bush-era 'extraordinary rendition' (international kidnapping by state agents), and should be opposed no matter the flag under which it occurs."

Snowden is referring to the forced landing of a passenger aircraft with Irish airline Ryanair on Sunday that was traveling from Athens to Vilnius. It was grounded in Minsk over a bomb threat which later turned out to have been false. Among the passengers was Roman Protasevich, one of the founders of the Telegram channel Nexta, who was detained by the Belarusian law enforcement during the stopover. His 23-old female companion, Russian citizen Sofia Sapega, was reportedly detained alongside him.

The Belarus government designated Protasevich's Nexta as extremist for allegedly facilitating civil unrest in the country in the aftermath of the August presidential election. In November, the Belarusian Investigative Committee filed a request with the Polish Justice Ministry to extradite Protasevich and another Nexta co-founder, Stepan Putilo, to Belarus for criminal prosecution. Earlier on Monday, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said during a press briefing that President Joe Biden believes the charges against Protasevich and the forced landing of the Ryanair aircraft are outrageous and concerning.

A reporter asked Psaki if the Biden administration were to determine the charges against Protasevich are legitimate as it did in 2013 when former Bolivian President Evo Morales' plane was forced to make an emergency landing in Vienna to search for Snowden, would the United States still object to the method used by the Belarusian government, to which Psaki responded, "I think I've given an extensive comment on this specifically, we're working with our partners around the world, I don't think I have anything more for you."

Psaki said the United States has been in close coordination with partners in NATO, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the United Nations, the European Union, and others, to assess the next steps in response to the incident.

On Sunday, Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Dmitry Polyanskiy in response to US criticism of the Ryanair incident said there should also be an investigation into the forced landing of Morales' aircraft by the United States and European Union in Vienna in 2013 to search for Snowden, who was thought to be onboard.

Snowden fled the United States to Hong Kong and then to Russia where he spent more than a month stranded at a Moscow airport while the United States was trying to have him handed over to face a criminal trial on spying charges. He was granted asylum in Russia and received a three-year residence permit in summer 2014, which was extended and eventually replaced by a permanent one. Snowden's Russian lawyer said last November that the 37-year-old wanted to obtain Russian citizenship.

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US to Assess Next Steps on Ryanair Incident With Partners - White House

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has a process in place for classifying the Ryanair incident, but it is currently in close coordination with partner nations to assess the next steps in response to the matter, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday.

"There certainly is a process about classifying, what it looks like from our standpoint," Psaki said during a press briefing. "I'll also say an important part of our effort is to coordinate closely with our partners around the world, so we've been in touch with them over the last period of time and will continue to be as we assess next steps."

On Sunday, a Ryanair airplane flying from Athens to Vilnius was grounded in Minsk over a bomb threat, which later turned out to have been false. Among the passengers was Roman Protasevich, one of the founders of the Telegram channel Nexta, who was detained by the Belarus authorities during the stopover. His 23-old female companion, Russian citizen Sofia Sapega, was reportedly also detained.

Psaki said the United States has been in close contact its partners in NATO, OSCE, the European Union and the United Nations concerning the incident.

Psaki also pointed out that US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan raised concerns over the Ryanair incident during a discussion with his Russian counterpart Nikolay Patrushev earlier on Monday.

President Joe Biden was briefed on the incident during his daily briefing on Monday, Psaki said. The White House press secretary said the incident is both outrageous and concerning, adding that the United States is calling for an immediate international transparent and credible investigation.

Earlier on Monday, the Belarusian Transport Ministry told Sputnik Minsk plans to notify the ICAO and IATA of its readiness to investigate the Ryanair airplane's emergency landing in the near future. In addition, Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei said on Monday that Belarus is ready to invite international experts.

Protasevich's Nexta is designated as extremist by Belarus for allegedly facilitating civil unrest in the country in the aftermath of the August presidential election. In November, the Belarusian Investigative Committee filed a request with the Polish Justice Ministry to extradite Protasevich and another Nexta co-founder, Stepan Putilo, to Belarus for criminal prosecution. The Polish authorities said in February they were reviewing the request.

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US Warns Americans Not to Travel to Japan, Sri Lanka Due to COVID-19 Concerns - State Dept

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - The US State Department on Monday issued a travel advisory warning Americans to avoid traveling to Japan and Sri Lanka because of the novel coronavirus transmission concerns.

"This week, the following Travel Advisories have been assessed and reissued with updates, raised to a Level 4 - Do Not Travel: Japan, Sri Lanka," the State Department said.

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UN Chief Concerned By Apparent Forced Landing of Plane in Minsk, Backs Probe - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, May 24 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is deeply concerned by the apparent forced landing of the Ryanair plane in Belarus' capital of Minsk, which followed the detention of opposition journalist Roman Protasevich who was on board, and supports calls for a full investigation into the incident, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Monday.

"The Secretary-General is deeply concerned over the apparent forced landing of a passenger aircraft over Belarus on May 23 and the subsequent detention of Mr. Roman Protasevich, a Belarusian journalist who was on board," Dujarric said. "The Secretary-General supports calls for full, transparent and independent investigation into this disturbing incident and urges all relevant actors to cooperate with such an inquiry."

The spokesman said Guterres would like to see Protasevich released, adding that relevant communication with the Belarusian government has been held at different levels.

On Sunday, the plane flying from Athens to Vilnius had to make an emergency landing in Minsk because of a bomb threat, which later turned out to be false. Roman Protasevich, founder of a Telegram channel that Minsk designated as extremist, was aboard the airplane and was detained during the stopover. Protasevich faces up to 15 years in prison for organizing mass unrest in the country among other charges.

The transcript of negotiations between Belarusian air traffic controllers and Ryanair pilots shows there was no pressure on the crew to decide on an emergency landing, Belarusian Transport Ministry Aviation Department Director Artem Sikorsky said on Monday.

Sikorsky said the air traffic controllers acted in accordance with international standards and added that reports about alleged threats of air-to-air missiles against the aircraft were not true.

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ICAO Council Chief Calls Urgent Meeting on May 27 to Discuss Ryanair Incident in Minsk

MOSCOW/WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - Salvatore Sciacchitano, the president of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Council, called for an urgent meeting in connection with the incident involving the Ryanair airplane in Belarus, ICAO said on Monday. "ICAO's Council President has called an urgent meeting of the 36 diplomatic representatives to the ICAO Council, on 27 May, on the incident involving Ryanair Flight FR4978 in Belarus airspace on 23 May 2021. We will post further updates as available," the organization said via Twitter.

The ICAO Council is currently not in session and the next set of meetings have been scheduled for June 7-25.

The announcement comes following an incident on Sunday, when an airplane flying from Athens to Vilnius had to make an emergency landing in Minsk over a bomb threat, which later turned out to be false. Roman Protasevich, founder of a Telegram channel that Minsk designated as

extremist, was aboard the airplane and was detained during the stopover. Protasevich may face up to 15 years in prison for organizing mass unrest, among other charges.

According to ICAO, its secretariat is empowered only to support countries' diplomacy in air transport, and any international investigations and airspace blockades that may arise as a result of this incident would need to be proposed and agreed to diplomatically by the countries concerned.

Questions on a possible probe must await further diplomatic advice from the countries who collaborate through ICAO and decide on such matters. Currently, 36 representatives and ambassadors serve their countries as members of the elected ICAO Council.

Earlier on Monday, the UK government called on the ICAO to discuss the Belarusian authorities' arrest of a journalist who was onboard the Ryanair airplane that had to make an emergency landing in Minsk on Sunday over a bomb threat.

The United States is calling for a full investigation into the Ryanair airplane emergency landing in Minsk and is working closely with the European Union regarding the incident, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

The Belarusian Transport Ministry told Sputnik on Monday that Minsk plans in the near future to notify the ICAO and the International Air Transport Association (IATA) of its readiness to investigate the emergency landing of a Ryanair plane in Minsk.

Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei said on Monday that Belarus is ready to invite international experts over the incident with the emergency landing of a Ryanair plane in Minsk.

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Florida Governor Signs Law Barring Tech Firms' From Deplatforming Political Candidates

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) – Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has signed into law a new law to hold major high tech corporations, especially those based in Silicon Valley accountable by imposing higher standards of transparency and accountability on them, his office announced on Monday.

“Today, Governor Ron DeSantis signed [State] Senate Bill 7072 to hold Big Tech accountable by driving transparency and safeguarding Floridians' ability to access and participate in online platforms,” the office said in a news release.

The bill gives citizens of Florida the right to sue online companies they believe have treated them unfairly and safeguards the rights of Floridians by requiring social media companies to be transparent about their content moderation practices and give users proper notice of changes to those policies, the governor's office said.

“The Attorney General of Florida can bring action against technology companies that violate this law, under Florida's Unfair and Deceptive Trade Practices Act. If social media platforms are found to have violated antitrust law, they will be restricted from contracting with any public entity,” the release stated.

Under the new law, Big Tech is prohibited from de-platforming Floridian political candidates and the Florida Election Commission will impose fines of \$250,000 per day on any social media

company that does so to any candidate for statewide office, and fines of \$25,000 per day for deplatforming candidates for non-statewide offices, the office added.

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UN Chief Concerned By Apparent Forced Landing of Plane in Minsk, Backs Probe - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, May 24 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is deeply concerned by the apparent forced landing of the Ryanair plane in Belarus' capital of Minsk, which followed the detention of opposition journalist Roman Protasevich who was on board, and supports calls for a full investigation into the incident, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Monday.

"The Secretary-General is deeply concerned over the apparent forced landing of a passenger aircraft over Belarus on May 23 and the subsequent detention of Mr. Roman Protasevich, a Belarusian journalist who was on board," Dujarric said. "The Secretary-General supports calls for full, transparent and independent investigation into this disturbing incident and urges all relevant actors to cooperate with such an inquiry."

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UN Aviation Agency to Hold Urgent Meeting on Thursday on Ryanair Incident in Belarus

UNITED NATIONS, May 24 (Sputnik) - The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) said on Monday that it is concerned by the incident involving a Ryanair plane making an emergency landing in Belarus and will hold a meeting about the incident on Thursday.

"ICAO is strongly concerned by the apparent forced landing of a Ryanair flight and its passengers, which could be in contravention of the Chicago Convention. We look forward to more information being officially confirmed by the countries and operators concerned," the UN agency said via Twitter. "ICAO's Council President has called an urgent meeting of the 36 diplomatic representatives to the ICAO Council, on 27 May, on the incident involving Ryanair Flight FR4978 in Belarus airspace on 23 May 2021."

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AP Reporters Pen Open Letter Protesting Firing of Journalist With Pro-Palestinian Views

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - Reporters from the Associated Press (AP) news agency penned an open letter outlining their grievances with the organization's firing of Emily Wilder,

whose departure, they believe, was mishandled, Kat Stafford, a writer and correspondent with the AP announced on Twitter on Monday.

"As employees of The Associated Press, at all levels and across the globe, we strongly believe in our organization's stated commitment to fairness and advancing the power of facts.

Journalists demand transparency from the subjects of our reporting and seek to hold the powerful accountable. That's why we strongly disapprove of the way the AP has handled the firing of Emily Wilder and its dayslong (sic) silence internally," the letter says.

The letter demands clarity about the circumstances surrounding Wilder's departure, in particular, about the disciplinary process and which of her social media posts warranted termination.

Safford added that any and all AP journalists are able to sign the letter in support.

Additionally, the letter also calls for a forum to discuss what AP recommends as best practices for social media, as well as a commitment from the organization to support its journalists who face online harassment campaigns.

Wilder, who joined AP as a news associate in Phoenix back in April, was abruptly fired last week after online conservatives resurfaced old tweets featuring pro-Palestinian views and activism while in university. During that time, she was a leader in Stanford's 'Jewish Voice for Peace and Students for Justice in Palestine', an organization that some allege has ties to Hamas affiliates. **This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

IATA Says Full Probe By International Authorities Needed Into Ryanair Incident - Director

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - The International Air Transport Association (IATA) is urging a full probe into the incident of a Ryanair plane undertaking emergency landing in Minsk, IATA's Director General Willie Walsh said on Monday.

"IATA strongly condemns any interference or requirement for landing of civil aviation operations that is inconsistent with the rules of international law," Walsh said in a statement. "The details of the event with flight FR 4978 are not clear. A full investigation by competent international authorities is needed."

On Monday, the UK government called on the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to discuss the incident in which the Belarusian authorities arrested a journalist on board the Ryanair airplane upon emergency landing in Minsk over a bomb threat.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States has called for a full investigation into the Ryanair incident and is working closely with the European Union on the matter.

Earlier on Monday, the Belarusian Transport Ministry told Sputnik Minsk plans to notify the ICAO and IATA of its readiness to investigate the Ryanair airplane's emergency landing in the near future. In addition, Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei said on Monday that Belarus is ready to invite international experts.

On Sunday, the plane flying from Athens to Vilnius had to make an emergency landing in Minsk because of a bomb threat, which later turned out to be false. Roman Protasevich, founder of a Telegram channel that Minsk designated as extremist, was aboard the airplane and was detained during the stopover. Protashevich face up to 15 years in prison for organizing mass unrest in the country as well as face other charges.

The transcript of negotiations between Belarusian air traffic controllers and Ryanair pilots shows there was no pressure on the crew to decide on an emergency landing, Belarusian Transport Ministry Aviation Department Director Artem Sikorsky said on Monday.

Sikorsky said the air traffic controllers acted in accordance with international standards and added that reports about alleged threats of air-to-air missiles against the aircraft were not true.

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US to Assess Next Steps on Ryanair Incident With Partners - White House

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has a process in place for classifying the Ryanair incident, but it is currently in close coordination with partnering nations to assess the next steps in response to the matter, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday.

"There certainly is a process about classifying, what it looks like from our standpoint," Psaki said during a press briefing. "I'll also say an important part of our effort is to coordinate closely with our partners around the world, so we've been in touch with them over the last period of time and will continue to be as we assess next steps."

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US Not Ready to Announce Date, Location of Biden-Putin Summit – Psaki

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) – The United States is not ready to announce the date and location of a planned US-Russia summit as both parties are working on the details of the meeting, the White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Monday.

"Our national security adviser [Sullivan] did have a call with his [Russian] counterpart [Patrushev], and it was an important step in the preparation for a planned US-Russia summit, the date and location of which we are not ready to announce at this point yet, and we are still working on the details," Psaki said during a briefing.

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Myanmar Coup Opposition Coalescing Into Armed Defense Groups - UN Special Envoy

UNITED NATIONS, May 24 (Sputnik) - UN Special Envoy for Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener said on Monday protesters in the Southeast Asian country have started to form armed groups to protect themselves from the large-scale violence used by security forces.

"We observe now that people are armed and formed a so-called People Defense Force, the PDF. This is formed by local people and the National Unity Government whilst trying to bring them under a single command structure," Schraner Burgener said in a press briefing.

The special envoy said people in the force sometimes use homemade weapons and receive military training from armed organizations.

"We hear every day about explosions,... and this is really scary," Schraner Burgener said. "But, clearly, we also must understand that people wanted to start with self-defense, because still the Tatmadaw, the Army, uses a huge scale of violence."

Schraner Burgener said since the February 1 coup, more than 800 civilians have been killed in state violence and some 5,300 others have been arrested.

Besides, the ongoing violence has displaced some 61,000 people within Myanmar who are in urgent need of assistance.

In a conversation with the country's Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing back in April, Schraner Burgener said she reiterated the concerns previously stated at the UN Security Council regarding the bloodshed in Myanmar following the military coup.

She added the scenario that the army chief will give up his power seemed "very unlikely."

An all-inclusive dialogue bringing together ethnic armed organizations, political parties, civil society, competing authorities and the Tatmadaw could help to resolve the current political crisis in Myanmar, Schraner Burgener said.

To that end, the special envoy said she will travel to Japan on Tuesday to discuss with the Foreign Minister the prospects of ending the ongoing political crisis in Myanmar.

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US National Security Advisor Raises Ryanair Incident With Russian Counterpart- White House

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan raised strong concerns over the Ryanair incident during a discussion with his Russian counterpart Nikolay Patrushev, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday.

"Our National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan also raised our strong concerns on this issue, the actions of the government of Belarus, with his Russian counterpart during their phone call this morning," Psaki said during a press briefing.

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White House Says Biden Briefed on Belarus Ryanair Incident, No Updates to Announce

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday that President Joe Biden was briefed on the Ryanair incident in Belarus, but had no updates to provide on the matter.

"He was briefed this morning during this PDB [President's Daily Briefing] by his national security team," Psaki said when asked about Biden's response to the Ryanair incident in Belarus.

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Biden Administration to Invest \$1Bln in Plans for Extreme Weather Events – White House

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration is going to invest \$1 billion to protect US communities and families from disasters generated by climate change, or extreme weather events, the White House announced on Monday at the cusp of the 2021 hurricane season.

"The administration is announcing it will direct \$1 billion for communities, states, and tribal governments into pre-disaster mitigation resources to prepare for extreme weather events and other disasters and ...the development of next generation climate data systems at NASA [the National Aeronautics and Space Administration]," the White House announced in a fact sheet. Biden is scheduled on Monday to meet with members of his homeland security and climate teams at the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) National Response Coordination Center in Washington, DC to receive an update on preparations for the 2021 hurricane season, the White House said.

"In 2020, the United States experienced a record year for extreme weather, including an unprecedented 30 named storms in the Atlantic Basin. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is anticipating another above-normal hurricane season this year," the fact sheet said.

On May 20, NOAA released its 2021 Atlantic hurricane season outlook predicting a 60 percent chance of an above-normal season between June and November, a 30 percent chance of a near-normal season, and a 10 percent chance of a below-normal season with a likely range of 13 to 20 named storms, of which six to 10 could become hurricanes, the White House said.

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US Supreme Court Declines Case of Inmate Seeking Firing Squad Over Lethal Injection

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court announced on Monday that it will not be hearing the case of Ernest Johnson, a death-row inmate who asked to be executed by firing squad rather than lethal injection due to his medical condition, the court announced on Monday.

By declining to hear the case, the Supreme Court allowed the decision by the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals to stand. The latter denied Johnson's request to be executed by a firing squad or nitrogen gas.

Johnson's claim that he cannot be executed using the standard method of lethal injection due to a seizure disorder that would likely cause him extreme seizures during the process was upheld by the court in 2018.

However, the court ruled the following year the state of Missouri could deny him the use of nitrogen gas as an alternative method of execution because it lacks a proven track record. Johnson then requested to be executed by firing squad, which he argues has such a proven track record.

Supreme Court Justice Sonya Sotomayor wrote in her dissenting opinion that the US state of Missouri is now free to execute Johnson in a manner that is akin to torture given his unique medical condition.

"To dispose of the case more quickly, the Eighth Circuit has sacrificed the Eighth Amendment's chief concern for preventing cruel and unusual punishment," Sotomayor wrote.

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Russian, US Security Chiefs Agree Normalizing Ties Would Contribute to Global Stability

WASHINGTON, May 24 (Sputnik) - US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and the Secretary of the Russian Security Council Nikolay Patrushev held talks in Geneva where both agreed that normalizing ties would be in the interest of both countries and go towards contributing to global stability, released by the White House said on Monday.

"The discussions were held in a constructive manner and, despite outstanding differences, allowed for a better understanding of each other's positions," the statement said. "The sides agreed that a normalization of U.S.-Russian relations would be in the interest of both countries and contribute to global predictability and stability."

The statement pointed out that a meeting was a logical continuation of the latest in Iceland's Reykjavik between Secretary of State Blinken and Foreign Minister Lavrov and a step towards the upcoming summit between the presidents of the two countries.

"The meeting was an important step in the preparation for a planned U.S.-Russia summit, the date and location of which will be announced later," it said.

The two security chiefs discussed various matters and "expressed confidence that mutually acceptable solutions could be found in a number of areas," the statement went on to say.