

**05/25/21 Tuesday**

**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.**

US, Allies Denounce Syria's Forthcoming May 26 Presidential Election as 'Neither Free Nor Fair'

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The US and four of its allies issued a statement on Tuesday rejecting the legitimacy May 26 presidential elections in Syria, which Syrians living in US-occupied parts of the country's east have been barred from participating in by US-aligned forces.

The Tuesday statement, issued by the foreign ministries of the US, UK, France, Germany, and Italy, states their position that "Syria's May 26 presidential election will neither be free nor fair."

"We denounce the Assad regime's decision to hold an election outside of the framework described in UN Security Council Resolution 2254 and we support the voices of all Syrians, including civil society organizations and the Syrian opposition, who have condemned the electoral process as illegitimate," [the five powers said](#).

"As outlined in the Resolution, free and fair elections should be convened under UN supervision to the highest international standards of transparency and accountability. For an election to be credible, all Syrians should be allowed to participate, including internally displaced Syrians, refugees, and members of the diaspora, in a safe and neutral environment," the statement continues.

"Without these elements, this fraudulent election does not represent any progress towards a political settlement. We urge the international community to unequivocally reject this attempt by the Assad regime to regain legitimacy without ending its grave human rights violations and meaningfully participating in the UN-facilitated political process to end the conflict."

The statement cites UN Security Council [Resolution 2254](#), a 2015 document in which the body "expresses its support for free and fair elections, pursuant to the new constitution, to be held within 18 months and administered under supervision of the United Nations, to the satisfaction of the governance and to the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, eligible to participate."

However, the document also calls on member states to "prevent and suppress terrorist acts" by Daesh, al-Nusra, and other al-Qaeda-aligned groups, and urges all parties to maintain a commitment to supporting "Syria's unity, independence, territorial integrity," two things the five nations issuing the statement have adamantly refused to do.

Idlib, Kurdish Areas Refuse Part in Second Vote of Civil War

Wednesday's election will be the country's second since the destructive civil war broke out in 2011, rending much of the country from the central government's control in Damascus, with parts of the country's north and east occupied by Turkish, American, and the Islamist rebel forces they support. Incumbent President Bashar al-Assad, who has ruled since 2000, was reelected in the 2014 elections by 88.7% of the vote.

Assad is heavily favored by observers over the two other candidates: former state minister of parliamentary affairs Abdullah Salloum Abdullah, and Mahmoud Ahmad Marei, who heads the National Democratic Front.

Syrians who have not lived in Syria for more than 10 consecutive years will not be eligible to vote, while the vast majority of the [6.6 million refugees](#) who fled the civil war will not be excluded from participation. In neighboring Lebanon, where more than a million Syrian refugees have waited out the war, they have been casting early ballots for nearly a week, with [local reporters noting](#) widespread and enthusiastic participation.

However, in many Persian Gulf and Western nations, Syrians eligible to vote likely won't be able to do so, due to those nations' governments having [shuttered their Syrian embassies](#) years ago to express their rejection of the Syrian government of Assad.

In Idlib Governorate, which is mostly occupied by Turkish forces and Turkish-backed Islamist rebels, authorities have [refused to allow participation](#) in the election. Demonstrators in the occupied cities of Al-Bab, Idlib, and Azaz rallied against the election last week, with one demonstrator telling Turkish state media [Anadolu Agency](#) "the Syrian revolution will continue until the Assad regime is toppled."

In eastern Syria, the US-backed Syrian Democratic Council has similarly refused to participate in the vote, saying that areas under control of the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces would not take part. Riad Dirar, the council's co-chair, told Erbil-based [Bas News last month](#) that the body "does not have a position on the Syrian presidential elections," but that disagreements over "the constitutional issue" had marred their legitimacy.

**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.**

Mali's Junta Leader Goita Says 2022 Elections to 'Proceed Normally' After Second Coup by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

After the Malian Army suffered dramatic territorial losses in 2012 to a rebellion by the Tuareg people in the country's north, soldiers overthrew then-President Amadou Toumani Touré. However, the coup only worsened the army's losses, and Bamako soon turned to France for help, launching Operations Serval and the ongoing Barkhane.

A day after the prime minister and acting president of Mali were whisked away to a military base outside the capital, Vice President Assimi Goita, who masterminded the August 2020 coup that brought them to power, announced they had been stripped of their duties.

In a statement read on public television on Tuesday morning, Goita said President Bah Ndaw and Prime Minister Moctar Oane had attempted to "sabotage the transition," but noted the original plan "would proceed as normally, and the scheduled elections will be held in 2022."

Goita accused the two of failing to consult him prior to a [cabinet reshuffle on Monday](#) that saw two central coup figures ousted from their positions heading the defense and security ministries. "The president and the prime minister violated the most important clause of the Transitional Charter during the appointment of ministers to the new government by failing to negotiate the

power bloc with the Vice President," Goita said. "As a result, measures were taken in order to protect the basic document of the transitional period."

The Transitional Charter was introduced in October 2020 after a new civilian interim government was announced amid heavy international pressure to restore democracy after the coup.

Authored by Goita, the [document lays out](#) the principles that govern the 18-month period until new elections can be organized.

However, it's not clear how the charter requires their consultation with the vice president when appointing ministers, as Goita has claimed, especially since the National Committee for the Salvation of the People, the group of army officers who oversaw the forcing of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita from office in August 2020, was [dissolved in January](#).

Interior Security Minister Modibo Kone and Defense Minister Sadio Camara, the two ministers [removed from their posts](#) on Monday in what Ndaw called a "broad-based" cabinet reformation, were also members of the former NCSP alongside Goita, who according to the charter is "responsible for defense and security" as vice president. Ndaw, too, is a military man, a colonel-major who was once chief of staff of the Malian Air Force and served as Keita's defense minister prior to the coup.

Ndaw, Ouane, and the newly appointed defense minister, Souleymane Doucoure, were arrested just hours after the new cabinet was announced and taken to Kati Military Base about 15 kilometers outside the capital of Bamako.

Goita's actions have been widely condemned, with statements by the African Union, the United Nations, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and several world powers demanding the release of Ndaw, Ouane, and Doucoure.

Keita's August 2020 removal came after heavy police repression of three months of mass protests in Bamako fanned by a wide variety of factors, including recent parliamentary elections marred by violence, the unpopular ongoing war in the north against Islamist militias in which [French military forces](#) were taking part, Keita's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a poor economy.

The June 5 Movement - Gathering of Patriotic Forces (M5-RFP) emerged from the protests as an umbrella group [uniting disparate sections](#) of Malian politics, including many figures who had once been Keita supporters, such as Imam Mahmoud Dicko, the former head of Mali's High Islamic Council. The group is mentioned alongside the NCSP as one of the key players in the formation of the Transitional Charter. However, [according to Al Jazeera](#), tensions between M5-RFP and the military over the latter's lasting control in the transitional government helped pressure Ndaw to consider the cabinet changes that led to his Monday ouster.

**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.**

Samoa's Opposition Leader Sworn in as Prime Minister in Tent After Gov Locks Her Out of Parliament

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The Pacific Island nation of Samoa was plunged into a political crisis on Monday as Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, leader of the opposition party FAST, was sworn in as prime minister in a tent on the statehouse lawn after Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, who has been prime minister since 1998, ordered the doors of parliament locked.

Mata'afa's prime ministership began on an unexpected note on Monday, taking place inside a tent pitched in the capital city of Apia instead of the dome-shaped Fale Fono, Samoa's Parliament House.

Tuimalealiifano Vaaletoa Saluavi II, Samoa's head of state and a supporter of Tuilaepa, [decreed on Saturday](#) evening that he was suspending Parliament "until such time as to be announced and for reasons that I will make known in due course." However, the following morning, an extraordinary session of the Samoan Supreme Court struck down the ruling, enabling Mata'afa's swearing-in to proceed.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued a [statement on Monday](#) urging "the leaders in Samoa to find solutions to the current political situation through dialogue in the best interest of the people and institutions of Samoa. The United Nations stands ready to provide support to Samoa if requested by the parties."

The court's ruling was the just the latest blow against the rule of Tuilaepa's Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP), which has led the nation of 200,000 for more than 40 years. After April 9 elections split Parliament down the middle with 25 seats to both parties, when the lone independent lawmaker decided to side with FAST, it gave the party the narrowest of majorities, allowing it to form a government. HRPP cried foul and appealed for another seat to be appointed to the legislature; Saluavi obliged them, but the court struck the maneuver down. Mata'afa described the locking of the parliament doors as a "bloodless coup." Tuilaepa, in turn, [called the swearing-in ceremony](#) a "joke," noting that "only the head of state, and no one else, can call parliament meetings and swear people in. None of what they did is legitimate." "This is treason, and the highest form of illegal conduct," he added. "None of what they did is legitimate. The Devil has won and taken over them."

Mata'afa is the daughter of Fiame Mata'afa Faumuina Mulinu'u II, the country's first prime minister after winning independence from a joint UK-New Zealand administration. Her One True God Party (FAST) split from HRPP last summer amid growing criticisms of Tuilaepa's rule, which began in 1998.

FAST's rapid growth was fueled by a collapsing economy as COVID-19 travel restrictions severely impeded the country's tourism and raw material export industries, which required the government to accept [a \\$20 million loan](#) from the Asian Development Bank in July of last year. They have also promised to repeal a [set of unpopular laws](#) passed in December giving significant powers over land ownership and legal proceedings to traditional courts that aren't accountable to the Supreme Court. They also promised to [scrap a proposed](#) \$100 million port expansion in Vaiusu Bay that would be heavily financed by China.

**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.**

Qatar's Chief Diplomat Visits Cairo to Build 'Positive Atmosphere' After Quartet's Doha Embargo

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammad bin Abdulrahman Al Thani paid a visit to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on Tuesday, and invited al-Sisi to visit Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in Doha, which would be his first since coming to power in a 2013 coup.

According to Egyptian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Ahmed Hafez, [the two discussed](#) the "positive developments in bilateral relations between the two countries in light of the Al-Ula declaration," [the January statement](#) by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates in which the "Quartet" agreed to drop their four-year boycott of Qatar and the accompanying 13 demands.

Hafez added that the meeting "tackled the importance of building on this important step, by taking further measures aimed at strengthening the positive atmosphere in the coming period." He did not elaborate further.

The quartet's boycott aimed to force Qatar to distance itself from Iran and Turkey, shut down the state-funded Al Jazeera news outlet, and stop its alleged support for the Muslim Brotherhood, among other demands. Doha has denied accusations it supports the Brotherhood. The demands came in the context of the quartet's [mutual ally, the United States](#), scrapping the 2015 Iran nuclear deal and ushering in a "maximum pressure" campaign aimed at destroying the Iranian economy and isolating the nation politically.

It also came after [a souring relationship](#) between the Saudi and Egyptian governments and the Muslim Brotherhood, a pan-Islamic group considered a terrorist organization in some nations, but which scored a major election victory in Egypt in 2012 when Mohamed Morsi won the country's first democratic elections. El-Sisi, Morsi's defense minister, came to power on the back of a military coup the following year that ousted Morsi - and which Riyadh endorsed.

Some of the nastier aspects of the feud included a Saudi proposal to [dig a canal across](#) the base of the peninsula on which Qatar sits, effectively turning it into an island, and putting a nuclear waste dump on the Saudi-Qatari border.

Despite the quartet's shifting position, Doha isn't likely to politically wander too far from Iran: during the boycott period, the two nations became increasingly economically interdependent. Qatar's access to the [North Dome/South Pars](#) gas condensate field, the world's largest and the basis of Qatar's economy, underneath the Persian Gulf is dependent on cooperation with Iran. However, Qatar is also host to the massive Al-Udeid Air Base, the home of 10,000 US troops and the forward headquarters of US Central Command, meaning the gulf emirate isn't likely to become overly friendly with Tehran, either.

**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.**

US Homeland Security May Soon Require Pipeline Industry to Disclose Cyberattacks After Colonial Hack

by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Earlier, a cyberattack against the Colonial Pipeline caused a series of setbacks that prompted not only gas shortages along the US East Coast, but also saw the average price for regular grade gasoline skyrocket past the \$3 mark for the first time in years. The pipeline provides nearly half of the fuel that is typically dispersed to the region.

The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is expected to issue a directive sometime this week that will require all pipeline companies operating within the US to report any cyberattacks to federal authorities, it was revealed on Tuesday.

The move is being carried out in response to the hack that shuttered Colonial Pipeline operations and triggered a massive shortage in gas supplies along the entire East Coast. Citing senior DHS sources, The Washington Post [reported](#) that the directive will be issued by the agency's Transportation Security Administration (TSA), and will also see a "robust set of mandatory rules" published afterward that outline how companies should safeguard their IT systems. The forthcoming rules are also expected to stipulate what companies should do in the event of a hacking incident.

The Post, which notes that the agency had previously only offered voluntary guidelines for such instances, further indicated that the upcoming directive will see pipelines report any cyber incidents directly to a "cyber official" who will reportedly have a "24/7 direct line" to TSA authorities, as well as those with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.

"This is a first step, and the department views it as a first step, and it will be followed by a much more robust directive that puts in place meaningful requirements that are meant to be durable and flexible as technology changes," an unidentified senior DHS official told the outlet.

Looming regulations will effectively serve as a complete policy shift for federal authorities, as government officials previously relied heavily on working to combat cyberattacks as part of a collaborative initiative.

In a [statement](#) to The Hill, US House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson (D-MS) underscored that the Colonial Pipeline hack highlighted that "there is much more work to be done to protect the nation's pipelines and other critical infrastructure from cyberattacks."

"This TSA security directive is a major step in the right direction towards ensuring that pipeline operators are taking cybersecurity seriously and reporting any incidents immediately," the congressional lawmaker remarked.

The latest development follows earlier statements made by DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, in which he indicated that the Biden administration would be cooking up a response to the Colonial Pipeline hack that would help officials combat and better address similar issues moving forward.

Colonial Pipeline operations were shuttered for a period of several days in the wake of a ransomware attack, later claimed by the cybercriminal group known as DarkSide. Although reports initially indicated that the pipeline's operators would not be paying off the hackers, it was [later confirmed](#) by Colonial Pipeline CEO Joseph Blount that DarkSide had been paid some \$4.4 million.

**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.**

Biden: Sanctions Against Belarus 'in Play' as US Weighs Response to Ryanair Incident  
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Earlier, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken blasted the forced weekend landing of a Ryanair plane, calling the incident a "shocking act" that was purposely done to detain Belarusian journalist Roman Protasevich after the civilian airliner crossed into the country's airspace. US President Joe Biden revealed on Tuesday that economic sanctions against Belarus are still a possibility as he weighs how best to respond to the Ryanair incident.

Asked whether sanctions were being considered at the moment, Biden [told reporters](#) moments before boarding Marine One that the option is "in play." However, he added that he did not wish to "speculate until we get it done."

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki remarked during a Monday briefing that the Biden administration has been in contact with European partners over the incident, namely groups such as the European Union, the United Nations and NATO.

Various discussions have reportedly been held to pinpoint next potential steps. "We have nothing to read out at this point, but we will continue to coordinate closely with them," Psaki told reporters at the time.

Incidentally, the Sunday detour showed a striking similarity to the 2013 incident in which the plane of former Bolivian President Evo Morales was forced to make an emergency landing over the belief that it was carrying American whistleblower Edward Snowden. Asked about the similarities, Psaki [refused](#) to compare the two events.

A [special meeting](#) held by the European Council concluded late Monday that all carriers based within the European Union were banned from flying over Belarus' airspace, and that Belarusian airlines, such as the state-owned Belavia airliner, would be prohibited from flying over EU airspace or using its airports.

Flight tracking software has documented the policy shift, showing various commercial planes steering around the former Soviet state. A number of airlines, including Austrian Airlines, Air France, Finnair and Singapore Airlines have relayed to customers that their scheduled flights will be avoiding Belarus' airspace.

International outcry emerged over the weekend after the Lithuania-bound Ryanair flight FR4978 was diverted to land in Minsk, Belarus, after reports of a bomb threat had emerged. Although the threat was later deemed false, Belarusian authorities took into custody two individuals - Protasevich and companion Sofia Sapega.

Protasevich is one of the co-founders of the Telegram channel Nexta, which was designated as extremist over allegations that it was used to promote national unrest in the eastern European country after the August 2020 presidential election saw the reelection of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.

Protasevich appeared in a video message shared on the Telegram app on Monday, stating that he was healthy, and that he was cooperating with investigators.

The forced landing has been widely condemned by world leaders, as well as Ryanair CEO Michael O'Leary, who [described](#) the incident as a "case of state-sponsored hijacking" during an interview with Irish radio station NewsTalk.

**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.**

Netanyahu Urges US to 'Not' Rejoin Iran Nuclear Deal After Latest Talks With Blinken  
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Since early April, negotiators have been meeting in Vienna to hash out a step-by-step initiative that would allow for the US and Iran to come back under compliance of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). To date, no clear pathway has been drawn out, but officials have stated some progress has been made.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu doubled down on past remarks on Tuesday and urged the US to steer clear of rejoining the Iran nuclear deal, one of US President Joe Biden's leading campaign promises.

Netanyahu issued the commentary following a joint meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who recently traveled to the Middle East in a bid to bolster peace talks amid the still-intact cease-fire between Israeli and Palestinian officials.

"I can tell you that I hope that the United States will not go back to the old JCPOA because we believe that that deal paves the way for Iran to have an arsenal of nuclear weapons with international legitimacy," Netanyahu [said](#), outlining just one of three topics that were discussed between officials.

"We also reiterated that whatever happens, Israel will always reserve the right to defend itself against a regime committed to our destruction, committed to getting the weapons of mass destruction for that end."

Netanyahu noted that additional points of discussion centered around the cease-fire, and the Israeli state's desire to deepen peace treaties signed with regional neighbors, as well as working to normalize ties with countries that have yet to sign an accord with the nation.

The official further indicated that discussions also touched on how best to improve the lives and living conditions of Palestinians. However, with that said, Netanyahu also clarified that should Hamas break the cease-fire, Israeli officials would undertake "very powerful" responses.

While Blinken did not push back on Netanyahu's commentary, he did emphasize that the US would continue to consult with Israel regarding the full resumption of the 2015 nuclear deal.

"We will continue to strengthen all aspects of our long-standing partnership," the secretary of state said. "And that includes consulting closely with Israel, as we did today on the ongoing negotiations in Vienna, around the potential return to the Iran nuclear agreement."

The Tuesday remarks are not the first time that Israeli officials have either accused Iran of building nuclear weapons or of wanting to go down such a path. In 2019, without providing evidence, Netanyahu [claimed](#) that Iran was using a facility near Abadeh to carry out "experiments" that would help to develop nuclear weapons.

More recently, on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Netanyahu [voiced similar](#) remarks yet again, warning that a resumption of the JCPOA would "pave the way" for Iran to stockpile nuclear munitions.

Although Netanyahu and critics have repeatedly suggested that Iran intends to use its uranium supplies to build such weapons, Iranian officials have underscored that they have no intentions to carry out such efforts.

Earlier, negotiators [agreed](#) to extend monitoring practices at Iran's nuclear sites for one additional month after a previous three-month extension had expired. The surveillance measure, stemming from a stipulation under the JCPOA, is done in order to ensure Iran is in compliance with the agreement. However, it's worth noting that UN inspectors have yet to gain access to footage being held by the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran.

**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.**

#### Blast From The Past - Cartoon

World leaders have blasted the forced landing of Ryanair flight FR4978 that saw a Belarusian journalist taken into police custody after the civilian plane made an emergency landing in Minsk, Belarus, over a false bomb threat. European leaders have issued retaliatory actions, such as prohibiting Belarusian aircraft from EU airspace.

The Ryanair landing has recently begun to dredge up events from the past, specifically one incident that saw Austrian forces in July 2013 ground a plane belonging to former Bolivian President Evo Morales at the US' behest.

At the time, the grounding incident took place after reports had emerged that US whistleblower Edward Snowden had been aboard Morales' plane. However, those claims later proved to be unfounded as a search of the aircraft did not turn up the former American contractor.

Asked to address the striking similarities, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki chose to instead [brush off](#) the inquiry made during a Monday press briefing. Incidentally, Psaki served as the spokesperson for the US State Department when the 2013 incident emerged.

Earlier Monday, US President Joe Biden [informed reporters](#) that he was weighing the possibility of issuing sanctions against Belarus over the Ryanair incident, but urged that he did not want to "speculate until we get it done."

**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.**

'Marjorie is Wrong': House Republicans Condemn Rep. Greene's Holocaust Comments  
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Last week, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) spoke out against House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), claiming she was being subjected to "abuse" by having to confirm her COVID-19 vaccination status. Greene also compared the move to "a time in history where people were told to wear a gold star," and were "treated like second-class citizens."

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) issued a statement on Tuesday condemning Greene's continual comparisons of the Holocaust to facemask rules in the US House of Representatives.

"Marjorie is wrong, and her intentional decision to compare the horrors of the Holocaust with wearing masks is appalling. The Holocaust is the greatest atrocity committed in history. The fact that this needs to be stated today is deeply troubling," the Minority Leader wrote.

McCarthy then shifted his focus to Pelosi, arguing that "anti-Semitism is on the rise in the Democrat Party," but is being ignored by the House Speaker.

"Let me be clear: the House Republican Conference condemns this language," he concluded, referring to Greene.

Indeed, Elise Stefanik (R-NY), chairwoman of the House Republican Conference, also issued a statement condemning Greene's language.

"Equating mask wearing and vaccines to the Holocaust belittles the most significant human atrocities ever committed," [Stefanik tweeted](#) Tuesday morning. "We must all work together to educate our fellow Americans on the unthinkable horrors of the Holocaust

Additionally, the office of Minority Whip Steve Scalise (R-LA) came out in opposition, with spokesperson Lauren Fine stating Scalise "does not agree with these comments and condemns these comparisons to the Holocaust."

House GOP leadership's condemnation of Greene's comments comes five days after the US representative from Georgia first began invoking the Holocaust in relation to the US House of Representatives.

"You know, we can look back in a time in history where people were told to wear a gold star and they were definitely treated like second-class citizens, so much so that they were put in trains and taken to gas chambers in Nazi Germany," Greene told David Brody, host of "The Water Cooler." "And this is exactly the type of abuse that Nancy Pelosi is talking about."

Greene has argued on Twitter that she "never compared" the two situations, and is the victim of "left-wing media attacks."

"I never compared it to the Holocaust, only the discrimination against Jews in early Nazi years," [she claimed](#).

**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.**

One Year Later: Americans Remember Floyd on Anniversary of His Death in Police Custody - Photos

by [Evan Craighead](#)

Tuesday, May 25th was heralded in the US as a one-year remembrance of George Floyd, the 46-year-old Black resident of Minneapolis, Minnesota, whose death at the hands of law enforcement proved to be the impetus for national, and global, calls for police reform.

Individuals of all backgrounds descended on the city of Minneapolis on Tuesday to remember the life of George Floyd, and reignite public calls for police reform in the US.

The rallies, captured in part [by Sputnik](#), showed Americans rallying behind the associated racial justice movement.

"He is me, he is my brother, he is my father, he is my uncle, my nephew. He is you. If it were you on the ground I would be doing the same thing," a mourner who identified himself as 'Jay' told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"It's been a troubling year, a long year," Floyd's sister, Bridgett, [remarked](#) in downtown Minneapolis. "But we made it ... The love is here. George is here."

Rev. Tommy Russell expressed to Sputnik that "peace everywhere" is the primary goal of such demonstrations in Minneapolis.

"I spent all the year here at this corner, coming to meet with people, talking with them, ministering, just loving upon them," he said. "Because we could all use a hug and some love right now. But most of all we want to posture peace everywhere."

"Love is greater than hate. I think we are going to be all right," Russell added.

Dr. Andrew Baker, chief medical examiner for Hennepin County, recently testified that, despite Floyd's heart disease and prior drug use, those aspects were not the primary factors that led to his death in 2020.

"My opinion remains unchanged," Baker said as his testimony concluded. "It's what I put on the death certificate last June. That's cardiopulmonary arrest complicating law enforcement subdual, restraint and neck compression."

Derek Chauvin, the Minneapolis officer whose knee was kneeling on Floyd for 9 minutes, 29 seconds, has been found guilty of all three charges related to the May 25, 2020, murder of Floyd.

Chauvin is facing up to 75 years behind bars: 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.

**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.**

Retired NASA Astronaut Peggy Whitson Announced as Commander for Upcoming Commercial Spaceflight

by [MariTi Blaise Lovell](#)

Axiom Space is an American private aerospace company founded in 2016 with plans to launch three commercial missions to the International Space Station (ISS) in 2022. The second commercial flight mission, Ax-2, is set to send four people to the ISS, so long as Axiom Space is able to secure a spot on NASA's next scheduled flight.

Axiom Space revealed on Tuesday that retired NASA astronaut Peggy Whitson and veteran Grand Tour (GT) racer John Shoffner would serve as the commander and the pilot, respectively, of the company's second manned commercial spaceflight to the ISS.

"There is no one better than Peggy – who would be history's second private mission commander to the ISS – to lead the way on a mission so central to that plan, and we are thrilled

to have beside her a pilot as driven and committed to this vision as John to cement this new era," Axiom CEO Michael Struffredini said in a [company release](#) on Tuesday.

Whitson's background includes a 22-year career at NASA that saw her become the first female commander and first science officer on the ISS, all while maintaining the American [record](#) for time spent in space. Her time in the cosmos saw her reach a near total of 666 days.

"I'm thrilled to get to fly to space again and lead one of the first of these pioneering missions, marking a new era of human spaceflight," Whitson said in the release. "But even more than that, I'm eager for the chance on Ax-2 to open space up to the first full generation of private astronauts and directly link John to the research opportunities on the ISS."

"In the time we've already spent together as crewmates, it's clear to me that John will be an excellent pilot and researcher. It's a pleasure to take him under my wing," the veteran astronaut added.

As for Shoffner, he began his career as a pilot at the age of 17 and has logged 8,500 hours of experience with multiple aircraft and helicopters. Though Shoffner holds an impressive resume, according to [CBS News](#), he believes with the help of Whitson, there is more training to be accomplished.

As a pilot Schoffner believes, "we're not just up there riding in an automated vehicle with nothing to do, we have to monitor systems and verify operations," but that when it comes to manning a flight to space, "there are those conditions where you can lose (communication), lose data links or, you know, things go offline, so you have to be able to step in."

For Whitson, she is excited about the trip back into space as it provides the opportunity for expanding the field of space training for different types of travelers, but also maintaining transparency associated with the risks of being in space.

"The level varies depending on the objectives that you want to achieve during the mission, which I think is great because people go for different reasons. And we need to try and find the optimal training level for that," Whitson told the outlet, adding that "there are risks associated with being in space, and I think it's incumbent on every agency (that) is providing that capability to be up front about that."

The Ax-2 mission, which will span eight days, plans to launch four people to the ISS, one of whom will be chosen through a new Discovery channel reality television series, titled "Who Wants to Be an Astronaut?"

On May 18, it was [announced](#) that Discovery had ordered the eight-episode competition series to air in 2022. The series follows regular contestants competing through a variety of challenges designed to mimic the actual training necessary to qualify for the spaceflight and life on board the ISS.

Whitson believes that allowing the opportunity for more space access is important for the future of space flights. "I have always said how important I think it is for more and more people to have access to space. And I think establishing a commercial platform in space is going to offer that and enable it," she said.

Axiom Space is not the first aerospace industry to launch a commercial spaceflight. Roscosmos, Russia's state corporation for space activities, sent 10 wealthy civilian space tourists to the ISS in 2001 at a price of tens of millions of dollars per seat. NASA had recently purchased seats aboard Russian spacecraft to get to and from the ISS before business magnate Elon Musk's SpaceX came into play.

In May, Roscosmos [announced](#) upcoming flights to the ISS onboard a Soyuz spacecraft, which includes an expedition in October to shoot scenes for a science fiction movie starring Russian actress Yulia Peresild.

The first launch of a crew to ISS was onboard a Soyuz spacecraft in 2000, which marked the start of human presence on the orbiting laboratory. Schoffner says that for the Ax-2 mission there is a presented opportunity to test gene sequencing technology built by US biotechnology company, 10x Genomics. For decades, [researchers](#) from the company have been studying how cells react in space to apply single-cell genomics in neuroscience and immunology.

"Researchers have been wanting to have this capability on orbit," Shoffner said, according to CBS News. "They currently orbit and test samples and bring them down and then run them on 10x Genomics equipment on Earth. But the sample fidelity can shift between the launch and the recovery. So, researchers want this."

Axiom's first mission to ISS, Ax-1, is planned aboard the SpaceX Crew Dragon and is scheduled to launch in 2022, sending three wealthy investors for 10 days.

The spacecraft for Ax-2 has not yet been announced and neither has the price, but it is assumed that it will be a SpaceX craft launch since it's currently the only fully private commercial spaceflight. SpaceX seat purchases are [reported](#) to cost over \$50 million.

**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.**

Ghana's LGBTQ Community Calls on Police to Release 21 People Arrested at Hotel in Ho City by [MariTi Blaise Lovell](#)

In February, a community center in Accra, Ghana, named LGBT+ Rights Ghana was shuttered. On May 20, approximately 21 people, including 16 women and 5 men were arrested after gathering for paralegal services training at the Nurses and Midwives Hotel in the Ghanaian city of Ho, for suspicions of unlawful gathering and promoting LGBTQ activities.

Ghana's LGBTQ community has started an online campaign, demanding those who were arrested by security forces last week to be released from police custody and all charges dropped.

A #ReleaseThe21 hashtag was initially launched by organizer but was later suspected of having been blocked Tuesday on Twitter, a development which saw Rightify Ghana, the organization which hosted the May 20 event, pushing forward with the launch of the #ReleaseAllThe21 hashtag.

Alex Kofi Donkor, the head of the LGBT+ Rights Ghana group, [told CNN](#) that a female executive of his organization was among those arrested at the conference, which he says was "invaded" by journalists shortly before police barged in and arrested most of the attendees.

"LGBTQ persons continuously experience indiscriminate arrest and discrimination in Ghana because of their known or perceived sexual orientation... so some organizations chose to train some individuals within their various localities on human rights laws that exist in Ghana and how they can protect themselves and deal with issues of abuses when they arise within their local spaces," Donkor said.

“The event started at 9 a.m. [local time] on Thursday [May 20] with about 25 persons in attendance. Two hours later, some journalists invaded the space and started taking photos and videos,” he said, adding that police “also took away banners and flip charts that were used during the training session.”

Section 104 of Ghana's Criminal Offences Act [criminalizes](#) "unnatural carnal knowledge," which is described as "sexual intercourse with a person in an unnatural manner or with an animal." Individuals convicted of the offense face between five and 25 years in prison.

A spokesman for the regional police of Ghana, Sergeant Prince Dogbatse, has expressed that the 21 individuals were being charged for unlawful assembly, and that no charges have yet been made concerning their affiliation.

“There is freedom of expression and all that, but our criminal offenses act prohibits unlawful assembly,” Dogbatse told CNN on Monday. “We have arrested these persons and preferred the charge of unlawful assembly against them. So, we will allow the court to make a determination on the matter,” he added.

A [release](#) from the Ghana Police Service, which is controlled by the Ministry of Interior, says authorities confiscated several books and flyers with titles such as “Coming Out,” “All About Trans,” and “All About Intersex,” among others, under suspicion that the Ghanaians were “advocating LGBTQI activities.”

Since the arrests, [many](#) activists and human rights organizations have taken to calling out Ghana's government for what they deem to be homophobic attacks on a minority community. The US Department of State called on Ghana's people to preserve the human rights of members of the LGBTQ community in a [statement](#) on Monday.

“We are monitoring the situation closely,” a Department of State spokesperson said. “We urge national leaders in Ghana to uphold constitutional human rights protections and to adhere to international human rights obligations and commitments for all individuals. This includes members of the LGBTQI+ community.”

The detainees are currently being held in four separate police stations around Ho with no bail. On May 24, the Alliance for Equality and Diversity (AfED) Ghana paid solidarity visits to the police stations, and updated the public on their conditions in a Twitter post.

The detainees are scheduled to appear in court on June 4. This is the latest in what some say has been a recent crackdown on LGBTQ rights groups, and comes during a time where Ghana has opened its borders to African Americans and other members of the diaspora.

**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.**

RPT - Biden-Putin Summit Unlikely to Yield Results Beyond Climate Cooperation - Ex-US Officials

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin are unlikely to accomplish much of anything at their summit in Geneva primarily because White House advisers are bound to undermine the talks to ensure relations remain tense, former US and Canadian officials told Sputnik.

On Tuesday, the White House announced the US and Russian presidents would hold a summit in Geneva on June 16, in what will be their first in-person meeting since Biden took office.

"I expect a very perfunctory, meatless summit," former CIA analyst Raymond McGovern, who briefed four American presidents on US-Soviet relations, said. "The two may be able to pledge cooperation [on] Climate Change. Otherwise, [the] summit is likely to fall flat and do more harm than good."

Biden, McGovern added, will be reliant on and constrained by inept advisers, who will not be able to handle the situation.

"Biden is not his own man, and Putin - out of his own experience with recent presidents, knows this all too well," the former CIA official said.

Former Canadian diplomat Patrick Armstrong, who once served as counselor at Ottawa's Embassy in Moscow, echoed this sentiment.

"I do not expect anything to change - the Biden/Harris administration is packed full of the people who fully embrace the numerous Russia conspiracy theories, invented many of them and who made US-Russia relations impossible," Armstrong said.

Biden, he added, wants to show himself statesmanlike, important and in charge, whereas Putin does not have to.

"The only possible interest is to bet whether Putin walks out when Biden starts up with the customary accusations," Armstrong said.

The Kremlin expects the two leaders will discuss issues such as strategic stability and the relationship itself. The White House said Ukraine, Belarus, New START and Iran will be on the agenda.

**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.**

RPT - Floyd-Inspired Reforms Fail to Address Root Causes of Police Violence in US - Activists

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - Policing reforms implemented in the wake of George Floyd's murder will never be fully effective without addressing America's racist power structures, civil rights activists told Sputnik.

Tuesday, May 25, marked the first anniversary of the death of George Floyd, a 46-year old Black man killed after Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on his neck for about nine minutes. Since the incident, some US states have enacted police reform measures, like choke-hold bans, while Congress is at loggerheads over a reform bill named after Floyd.

"There are reforms but they need to be revolutionized," Black Alliance for Peace Coordinating Committee member, Netfa Freeman, said. "It's not just about policing. It's about a system of neo-liberalism, capitalism and extracting more profit and capital from the people."

Despite the reforms, Freeman added, police are still killing Blacks at a high rate in the United States.

"The police can't be reformed because as long as the system exists, the police will act in the interests of the ruling class. The system has to be abolished," Freeman said.

Freeman said the key is accountability, which means that there are consequences for actions.

"Real accountability must imply some power to those most affected," Freeman said.

"Accountability must abide by or be responsive to the people. But they continue to act by increasing budgets and increasing the transfer of weaponry from the Department of Defense."

Freeman said the criminal justice system should have been on trial in the Chauvin case, but Minneapolis authorities successfully reduced Floyd's murder to the actions of one man.

"They had to respond and make concessions to the people because of the uprising and mobilization," Freeman said. "The uprising shook the city to its core. They threw Chauvin under the bus. That was the system adapting to the rising pressure of the people, an uprising call for defunding and abolishing the police."

Social activist David Bowers said it will take a "spiritual, legal and policy battle" in order to prevent similar incidents of police violence.

"At some level, we have to change people's mindsets. We have to fight racism from the boardrooms to the streets," Bowers said. "We know how to fix a broken system: a full ban on chokeholds, ban no-knock warrants, collect data on police misconduct and use of force, create a commission to study race."

Bowers, who has devoted more than 20 years to providing affordable housing for low-income residents in the District of Columbia, said what is often overlooked by the mainstream media and others is the high personal cost Africans Americans pay because of racism and discrimination.

"I was on a call the first week after the incident with members of a 100 Black Men chapter and one of the guys started talking about the stress and the impact," Bowers recalled. "Brothers were talking about the stress and impact, concern for their kids and concern about the price you pay for being a Black man in America. That angered me with how we've lived our lives. These are professional men, Ph.Ds, businessowners, but what do they call you? N\*\*\*\*r. It's a reminder that we're in the same boat. There's a sense of solidarity."

He said the Floyd murder forcefully reminded Black Americans that they were under attack again and pushed them to find coping mechanisms.

**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.**

RPT - Gas Prices to Stay at \$3 Per Gallon Until at Least Early June - Automobile Association WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - US motorists will face higher than usual gas prices at about \$3 per gallon at least until early June, American Automobile Association (AAA) spokesperson Jeanette Casselano told Sputnik.

"It's likely we may see it drop a little in early June, but do expect it to stay near the \$3/gal mark (or higher) for the summer depending on demand and crude oil prices. Today's average is \$3.03, so any decrease will be minimal," Casselano said on Tuesday.

The recent spike gas prices has also been influenced by the ransomware attack against Colonial Pipeline, prompting the company to shut down operations on May 7 with the system not resuming normal operations until May 15.

The average gas price at present is 17 cents higher than last month and \$1.12 higher than last year, the AAA said in a separate statement.

Meanwhile, about 37 million Americans expected to travel, mostly by car and airplane, during upcoming Memorial Day holiday weekend, the AAA added.

The temporary closure of Colonial Pipeline, stretching more than 5,000 miles from refineries on the Gulf of Mexico coast and supplying nearly half the gasoline needed on the US East Coast, contributed to the supply and increase in oil prices. The short supplies combined with panic buying caused many stations to run out of gas.

**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.**

RPT - Hundreds Turn Out for Anniversary Commemoration of George Floyd's Death in Minneapolis

MINNEAPOLIS, May 25 (Sputnik) - Hundreds of mourners knelt in a silent tribute to George Floyd at the Minneapolis intersection where the African American died in police custody a year ago in an incident that sparked a nationwide movement for racial justice.

The mourners gathered to mark the anniversary of Floyd's death and more are expected to come to the spot that has been remembered via a video made public showing Floyd's agony as he was pinned to the ground by an officer and deprived of oxygen to breathe.

"He is me, he is my brother, he is my father, he is my uncle, my nephew. He is you. If it were you on the ground I would be doing the same thing," a mourner who identified as Jay told Sputnik on Tuesday.

The former professional basketball player is responsible for raising plants at the memorial and is respectfully referred to as "the gardener." "That's what all these gardens are for - for everyone who has ever lost a life to violence," he said.

Mourners paused down on their knees for 9 minutes and 29 seconds - the duration of Floyd's torment - to return afterwards to chatting and chanting, taking selfies and buying t-shirts. A Black man played a violin while a group of Indians in colorful dresses danced in front of the makeshift monument - a clenched rusty iron fist surrounded by flowers and pictures of African Americans who died at the hands of the police.

"I spent all the year here at this corner, coming to meet with people, talking with them, ministering, just loving upon them. Because we could all use a hug and some love right now. But most of all we want to posture peace everywhere," Rev. Tommy Russell said.

"Love is greater than hate. I think we are going to be all right," Russell added.

The mourners seemed undeterred by a shooting in the vicinity earlier on Tuesday, a routine event in the troubled neighborhood.

"There was a conflict between some people and it escalated," Russel said. "I wasn't here at the moment. But if I were I would have physically intervened. And I am not afraid."

One person went to a local hospital for treatment of what are believed to be non-life-threatening injuries sustained during the incident while a suspect's vehicle was last seen leaving the area at high speed, Minneapolis police said.

**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.**

#### Floyd-Inspired Reforms Fail to Address Root Causes of Police Violence in US - Activists

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - Policing reforms implemented in the wake of George Floyd's murder will never be fully effective without addressing America's racist power structures, civil rights activists told Sputnik.

Tuesday, May 25, marked the first anniversary of the death of George Floyd, a 46-year old Black man killed after Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on his neck for about nine minutes. Since the incident, some US states have enacted police reform measures, like choke-hold bans, while Congress is at loggerheads over a reform bill named after Floyd.

"There are reforms but they need to be revolutionized," Black Alliance for Peace Coordinating Committee member, Netfa Freeman, said. "It's not just about policing. It's about a system of neo-liberalism, capitalism and extracting more profit and capital from the people."

Despite the reforms, Freeman added, police are still killing Blacks at a high rate in the United States.

"The police can't be reformed because as long as the system exists, the police will act in the interests of the ruling class. The system has to be abolished," Freeman said.

Freeman said the key is accountability, which means that there are consequences for actions.

"Real accountability must imply some power to those most affected," Freeman said.

"Accountability must abide by or be responsive to the people. But they continue to act by increasing budgets and increasing the transfer of weaponry from the Department of Defense." Freeman said the criminal justice system should have been on trial in the Chauvin case, but Minneapolis authorities successfully reduced Floyd's murder to the actions of one man.

"They had to respond and make concessions to the people because of the uprising and mobilization," Freeman said. "The uprising shook the city to its core. They threw Chauvin under the bus. That was the system adapting to the rising pressure of the people, an uprising call for defunding and abolishing the police."

Social activist David Bowers said it will take a "spiritual, legal and policy battle" in order to prevent similar incidents of police violence.

"At some level, we have to change people's mindsets. We have to fight racism from the boardrooms to the streets," Bowers said. "We know how to fix a broken system: a full ban on chokeholds, ban no-knock warrants, collect data on police misconduct and use of force, create a commission to study race."

Bowers, who has devoted more than 20 years to providing affordable housing for low-income residents in the District of Columbia, said what is often overlooked by the mainstream media and others is the high personal cost Africans Americans pay because of racism and discrimination.

"I was on a call the first week after the incident with members of a 100 Black Men chapter and one of the guys started talking about the stress and the impact," Bowers recalled. "Brothers were talking about the stress and impact, concern for their kids and concern about the price you pay for being a Black man in America. That angered me with how we've lived our lives. These

are professional men, Ph.Ds, businessowners, but what do they call you? N\*\*\*\*r. It's a reminder that we're in the same boat. There's a sense of solidarity."

He said the Floyd murder forcefully reminded Black Americans that they were under attack again and pushed them to find coping mechanisms.

**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.**

Canada Advises Air Operators to Avoid Belarusian Airspace - Global Affairs

TORONTO, May 25 (Sputnik) - Ottawa is issuing a warning to Canadian air operators advising them against flying in Belarusian airspace following the Ryanair plane emergency landing in Minsk.

"Transport Canada is issuing a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) advising Canadian air operators and the owners of aircraft registered in Canada to avoid operating at any altitude within Belarusian airspace," Foreign Minister Marc Garneau and Transport Minister Omar Alghabra said in a joint statement on Tuesday, citing security concerns in the aftermath of the incident.

Canada will participate in the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) council meeting dedicated to the incident, Garneau and Alghabra added.

The ministers urged Belarusian authorities to release Roman Protasevich, the founder of a Telegram channel that Minsk has designated as an extremist entity.

Protasevich may face up to 15 years in prison on several charges, including for organizing illegal protests.

The controversy began on Sunday, when a Ryanair flight from Greece to Lithuania was diverted to Minsk, while in Belarusian airspace, over what Belarus says was a bomb threat that turned out to be false.

The Ryanair incident has sparked a strong backlash among journalistic and human rights organizations. A number of airlines, including Lufthansa, Air France, and Scandinavian Airlines, have since announced their intention to suspend operations in the Belarusian airspace.

**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.**

Biden Says US Sanctions Against Nord Stream 2 Would Be 'Counterproductive' - Press Pool

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden told reporters US sanctions against Nord Stream 2 AG would be counterproductive for European relations, according to a White House press pool report.

"To go ahead and impose sanctions now would, I think, be counterproductive in terms of our European relations," Biden was quoted as saying by the press pool on Tuesday. "They know how strongly I feel."

Biden also pointed out that US sanctions against Nord Stream 2 AG would not do anything to stop the project because it is almost done, the press pool report said.

The US administration announced last week that it would waive sanctions on Swiss-based Nord Stream 2 AG and its chief executive, Matthias Warnig. Berlin, which in the past condemned Washington's attempts to disrupt the pipeline's construction, has welcomed the move. However, on Friday, the US administration issued sanctions against 13 Russian vessels and three entities linked to the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

The Russian-led gas project is said to be more than 90-percent complete. Nord Stream 2 is a 745-mile twin pipeline that will carry gas from Russia directly to Germany under the Baltic Sea, passing the territorial waters of Denmark, Finland and Sweden.

**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.**

#### Biden-Putin Summit Unlikely to Yield Results Beyond Climate Cooperation - Ex-US Officials

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin are unlikely to accomplish much of anything at their summit in Geneva primarily because White House advisers are bound to undermine the talks to ensure relations remain tense, former US and Canadian officials told Sputnik.

On Tuesday, the White House announced the US and Russian presidents would hold a summit in Geneva on June 16, in what will be their first in-person meeting since Biden took office.

"I expect a very perfunctory, meatless summit," former CIA analyst Raymond McGovern, who briefed four American presidents on US-Soviet relations, said. "The two may be able to pledge cooperation [on] Climate Change. Otherwise, [the] summit is likely to fall flat and do more harm than good."

Biden, McGovern added, will be reliant on and constrained by inept advisers, who will not be able to handle the situation.

"Biden is not his own man, and Putin - out of his own experience with recent presidents, knows this all too well," the former CIA official said.

Former Canadian diplomat Patrick Armstrong, who once served as counselor at Ottawa's Embassy in Moscow, echoed this sentiment.

"I do not expect anything to change - the Biden/Harris administration is packed full of the people who fully embrace the numerous Russia conspiracy theories, invented many of them and who made US-Russia relations impossible," Armstrong said.

Biden, he added, wants to show himself statesmanlike, important and in charge, whereas Putin does not have to.

"The only possible interest is to bet whether Putin walks out when Biden starts up with the customary accusations," Armstrong said.

The Kremlin expects the two leaders will discuss issues such as strategic stability and the relationship itself. The White House said Ukraine, Belarus, New START and Iran will be on the agenda.

**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.**

**Biden Says US Sanctions Against Belarus in Play, Won't Speculate About Them - Press Pool**

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said US sanctions against Belarus are possible, but he would not speculate further on the matter, according to a White House press pool report.

"That's in play. I don't want to speculate until we get it done," Biden said on Tuesday when asked about possible sanctions against Belarus in relation to the diversion of a Ryanair commercial airplane in Minsk.

The White House said on Monday the United States is in close coordination with the European Union, OSCE, NATO, the United Nations, and other world partners to discuss a potential collective response against the government of Belarus.

A Ryanair commercial plane flying from Greece to Lithuania was diverted to Minsk on Sunday while in Belarusian airspace over what Belarus says was a bomb scare that turned out to be false. Roman Protasevich, one of the passengers and the founder of a Telegram channel which Minsk has designated as extremist, was detained during the stopover at the airport.

Protasevich may face up to 15 years in prison on several charges, including for organizing illegal protests.

The Ryanair incident has sparked a strong backlash among journalistic and human rights organizations. A number of airlines, including Lufthansa, Air France, and Scandinavian Airlines, have since announced their intention to suspend operations in the Belarusian airspace.

**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.**

**US Calls on Taliban to Immediately End 'Undeclared Spring Offensive' - Envoy to UN**  
UNITED NATIONS, May 25 (Sputnik) - The Taliban must immediately stop its undeclared offensive against civilians and civilian structures in Afghanistan, US Acting Alternate Representative for Special Political Affairs to the United Nations Jeffrey DeLaurentis said during a UN Security Council meeting.

"The Taliban, which is largely responsible for the continued violence in Afghanistan, must immediately stop its undeclared spring offensive, refrain from attacks against civilians, and cease its attacks in the vicinity of hospitals, schools, universities, mosques and other civilian areas," DeLaurentis said on Tuesday.

The diplomat pointed out that explicit targeting of civilians and attacks on journalists, human rights defenders, health workers and children undermine progress toward a sustainable peace in the country.

Afghanistan is still witnessing hostilities between government forces and the Taliban, who control large rural territories in the Central Asian country.

In February 2020, the United States and the Taliban signed the first peace agreement in eighteen years, which envisions the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan and the launch of the intra-Afghan dialogue, started in September 2020 in Doha, in an effort to put an end to the armed conflict.

**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.**

Hundreds Turn Out for Anniversary Commemoration of George Floyd's Death in Minneapolis

MINNEAPOLIS, May 25 (Sputnik) - Hundreds of mourners knelt in a silent tribute to George Floyd at the Minneapolis intersection where the African American died in police custody a year ago in an incident that sparked a nationwide movement for racial justice.

The mourners gathered to mark the anniversary of Floyd's death and more are expected to come to the spot that has been remembered via a video made public showing Floyd's agony as he was pinned to the ground by an officer and deprived of oxygen to breathe.

"He is me, he is my brother, he is my father, he is my uncle, my nephew. He is you. If it were you on the ground I would be doing the same thing," a mourner who identified as Jay told Sputnik on Tuesday.

The former professional basketball player is responsible for raising plants at the memorial and is respectfully referred to as "the gardener." "That's what all these gardens are for - for everyone who has ever lost a life to violence," he said.

Mourners paused down on their knees for 9 minutes and 29 seconds - the duration of Floyd's torment - to return afterwards to chatting and chanting, taking selfies and buying t-shirts. A Black man played a violin while a group of Indians in colorful dresses danced in front of the makeshift monument - a clenched rusty iron fist surrounded by flowers and pictures of African Americans who died at the hands of the police.

"I spent all the year here at this corner, coming to meet with people, talking with them, ministering, just loving upon them. Because we could all use a hug and some love right now. But most of all we want to posture peace everywhere," Rev. Tommy Russell said.

"Love is greater than hate. I think we are going to be all right," Russell added.

The mourners seemed undeterred by a shooting in the vicinity earlier on Tuesday, a routine event in the troubled neighborhood.

"There was a conflict between some people and it escalated," Russel said. "I wasn't here at the moment. But if I were I would have physically intervened. And I am not afraid."

One person went to a local hospital for treatment of what are believed to be non-life-threatening injuries sustained during the incident while a suspect's vehicle was last seen leaving the area at high speed, Minneapolis police said.

**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.**

## Gas Prices to Stay at \$3 Per Gallon Until at Least Early June - Automobile Association

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - US motorists will face higher than usual gas prices at about \$3 per gallon at least until early June, American Automobile Association (AAA) spokesperson Jeanette Casselano told Sputnik.

"It's likely we may see it drop a little in early June, but do expect it to stay near the \$3/gal mark (or higher) for the summer depending on demand and crude oil prices. Today's average is \$3.03, so any decrease will be minimal," Casselano said on Tuesday.

The recent spike gas prices has also been influenced by the ransomware attack against Colonial Pipeline, prompting the company to shut down operations on May 7 with the system not resuming normal operations until May 15.

The average gas price at present is 17 cents higher than last month and \$1.12 higher than last year, the AAA said in a separate statement.

Meanwhile, about 37 million Americans expected to travel, mostly by car and airplane, during upcoming Memorial Day holiday weekend, the AAA added.

The temporary closure of Colonial Pipeline, stretching more than 5,000 miles from refineries on the Gulf of Mexico coast and supplying nearly half the gasoline needed on the US East Coast, contributed to the supply and increase in oil prices. The short supplies combined with panic buying caused many stations to run out of gas.

**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.**

## Seven US Public Interest Groups Demand Greater Accountability From Facebook

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - Seven US public interest groups gathered in front of Facebook's headquarters in Washington, DC to demand greater accountability from the company for alleged abuses and failures, Public Citizen, a non-profit advocacy group, said in a release.

"Public interest groups led by Public Citizen gathered today in front of Facebook's federal lobbying headquarters in Penn Quarter to demand accountability for the company's litany of abuses, failures, and betrayals," the release said on Tuesday.

Accountable Tech, Action Center on Race and the Economy, Data for Black Lives, Fight for the Future, Public Citizen and other groups, listed over 70 charges against Facebook, including improper political interference, privacy violations, clear monopolization of markets, facilitating discrimination, spreading hate and misinformation, as well as harms to users, children, advertisers and even the company's own employees, the release said.

The release cited the deputy director of the Action Center on Race and the Economy Ramah Kudaimi who said that Facebook is siding with Israeli authorities to censor Palestinians by removing content and disabling accounts that document Israeli alleged police brutality and war crimes.

In April, the civil rights organization Muslim Advocates filed a lawsuit against Facebook for allegedly misleading Congress about removing "hate speech" content that violates its community standards.

**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.**

**Biden Says US Sanctions Against Nord Stream 2 Would Be 'Counterproductive' - Pool Report**

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden told reporters US sanctions against Nord Stream 2 AG would be counterproductive for European relations, according to a White House press pool report.

The press pool on Tuesday said Biden also said US sanctions against Nord Stream 2 AG would not do anything to stop the project because it is almost done.

**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.**

**Biden Says US Sanctions Against Belarus in Play, Won't Speculate About Them - Press Pool**

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said US sanctions against Belarus are possible, but he would not speculate further on the matter, according to a White House press pool report.

The press pool said on Tuesday the US president told reporters that sanctions against Belarus over the Ryanair incident are in play, but he did not want to speculate on the matter.

**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.**

**IMF Working on Providing Egypt Additional \$1.6Bln in COVID-19 Aid - Statement**

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is working with Egypt on the possibility of providing the North African country additional \$1.6 billion in COVID-19 aid, the IMF said in a statement.

"This agreement is subject to approval by the IMF's Executive Board, which will take place in the coming weeks," the statement said on Tuesday. "Upon approval, an additional SDR 1.16 billion (about US\$1.6 billion) will be made available to Egypt."

SDR, or special drawing rights, is an international reserve asset created by the IMF in 1969 to supplement its member countries' official reserves.

The IMF said the Egyptian authorities' strong performance and commitment over the past 12 months helped achieve the fund's objectives of wanting to see macroeconomic stability and protection of necessary social and health spending, aside from key structural reforms. Notwithstanding the aid under consideration for Egypt, the IMF has a \$5.2 billion so-called Stand-by Arrangement for the country.

**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.**

#### SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) -

##### PUTIN-BIDEN MEETING

- \* Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Joe Biden will meet in Geneva on June 16, the Kremlin said on Tuesday.
- \* Putin and Biden will discuss during their meeting the coronavirus pandemic and the settlement of regional conflicts, the Kremlin said.
- \* Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev positively assessed the agreement to hold the meeting between Putin and Biden, and called US-Russia relations a key for security and stability in the world.
- \* Biden expects to discuss "difficult" issues during his upcoming meeting with Putin, including Ukraine and the Ryanair incident in Belarus, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said.
- \* Russia and the United States will discuss various aspects of the Biden-Putin meeting, including the format, participation of delegations, adoption of documents, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Sputnik.

##### US-CANADA DAIRY DISPUTE

- \* Washington will convene a trade dispute settlement panel under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) to investigate a clash over dairy exports between it and Ottawa, the US Trade Representative's (USTR) office said on Tuesday.
- \* Ottawa is disappointed by Washington's decision to seek a settlement in the trade dispute over dairy products through arbitration under the USMCA, Canada's International Trade Minister Mary Ng said.

##### RYANAIR INCIDENT IN BELARUS

- \* Russian diplomat met with Russian citizen Sofia Sapega, who was arrested in Belarus after being taken from a Ryanair flight and detained together with one of the founders of Telegram channel Nexta, Roman Protasevich, the diplomatic mission told Sputnik on Tuesday.
- \* The reaction of Western countries to the incident with an emergency landing of Ryanair plane in Minsk is a real hysteria, not supported by anything from the point of view of international law, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

\* The United States continues to believe that Russia was not involved in the incident concerning the grounding of a Ryanair airplane in Belarus on Sunday, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said.

\* The Belarusian embassy in Canada will cease operations in Ottawa on September 1 but will halt consular services on July 10, the diplomatic mission said.

\* The EU summit calls for the immediate release of Roman Protasevich and Sofia Sapega, who were detained in Minsk, French President Emmanuel Macron said.

\* Sapega was detained in Minsk on suspicions of committing crimes described in the Belarusian criminal code in August and September 2020, Zakharova said.

\* Belarus invites three international organizations, as well as the EU and US aviation authorities, to come to the country to investigate the recent emergency landing of a Ryanair plane in Minsk, the aviation department of the Belarusian Transport Ministry announced.

#### MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

\* The US will be opposed to any steps that either of the sides of the Israeli-Palestine conflict takes to undermine prospects of the two-state solution, the Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.

\* Blinken said that the United States will provide Palestinians at least \$75 million in development and economic assistance.

\* Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz and Blinken discussed the long-term ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and Iran's nuclear program during a meeting in Jerusalem, Gantz's press office said.

\* Blinken reaffirmed Washington's commitment to strengthening Israel's security and supporting Israel's right to self-defense.

#### INTERNATIONAL TALKS ON UKRAINE

\* The political advisers to the leaders of the Normandy Four will meet in a video conference mode on Wednesday, May 26, a source in the Russian delegation confirmed to Sputnik.

#### POLITICAL CRISIS IN MALI

\* The Russian embassy in Mali told Sputnik on Tuesday that it follows developments after the arrest of the country's interim president and prime minister but has no confirmed information about why the military made this step.

\* Mali's Interim Vice President Assimi Goita has accused interim Prime Minister Moctar Ouane of violating the transition charter, which is why the interim president and prime minister were ousted.

**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.**

#### US Seized More Information Linking Giuliani to Ukraine Officials - Court Documents

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - Investigators seized more evidence than previously thought while executing the warrants on Donald Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani, including

communications with accounts allegedly linked to Ukrainian government officials Yuriy Lutsenko and Roman Nasirov, court documents revealed on Tuesday.

Investigators executed the search warrants against Giuliani on April 28 to gain access to certain accounts and electronic devices related to a case about whether he violated foreign lobbying laws. The faulty redaction method allowed the public to read the case's court documents by copying and pasting the text into a separate document.

"Not only will the seized items reflect the conversations between Giuliani, Toensing and others leading up to the arrests of the defendants, but also the communications immediately following the defendants' arrests," the document said.

The document revealed that the government sought and seized a variety of undisclosed materials from multiple individuals, including the iCloud and e-mail accounts of Giuliani, the iCloud account of attorney Victoria Toensing, an email account believed to belong to former Ukraine Prosecutor General of Ukraine Lutsenko and an e-mail account believed to belong to the former head of the Ukrainian Fiscal Service Nasirov.

In the document, the defendants also requested that the court schedule a status conference, ensure the government performs a review of the contents of all seized materials and orders production of all the information from the searches and seizures for the defendants to review.

**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.**

#### Biden Says 'We Have to Act' on Police Reform After Meeting With Floyd's Family

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) – On the first anniversary of George Floyd's murder, US President Joe Biden in a statement on Tuesday has called upon Congress to act resolutely on the urgent police reform bill to raise the accountability of law enforcement officers.

"We must have accountability when law enforcement officers violate their oaths, and we need to build lasting trust between the vast majority of the men and women who wear the badge honorably and the communities they are sworn to serve and protect," Biden said. "I appreciate the good-faith efforts from Democrats and Republicans to pass a meaningful bill out of the Senate. It's my hope they will get a bill to my desk quickly. We have to act."

Biden pointed out that the protests, which followed the death of Floyd, peacefully unified people of every race and generation to collectively say enough of the killings.

"If you can make federal laws to protect the [national] bird, which is the bald eagle, you can make federal laws to protect People of Color," George Floyd's brother Philonise Floyd told reporters as he left the White House.

George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man was killed by police officer Derek Chauvin, who pressed his knee to his neck for over nine minutes in Minneapolis. A trial determined "beyond reasonable doubt" that Chauvin's actions violated police rules of engagement and became a major factor in Floyd's death.

In April 2021, the former officer was found guilty of second-degree murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter potentially facing up to 75 years in jail.

**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.**

US Police Justified in Death of Black Teen But Missed Chance to De-Escalate - Auditor

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - Washington, DC police were justified in using deadly force in the 2020 shooting of Black teenager Deon Kay even though officers bungled a chance to de-escalate the encounter, city Auditor Kathleen Patterson said in a report on Tuesday.

"Officer Alexander Alvarez fatally shot Mr. [Deon] Kay in self-defense. Beyond that conclusion based on the split-second decision to shoot, however, the case study finds that the Seventh District Crime Suppression Team officers acted recklessly and without a plan, that they "squandered any opportunity to de-escalate the situation," Patterson said in a report to Mayor Muriel Bowser.

Police body camera video released after the 2020 shooting showed Alvarez turning around when chasing an unidentified suspect and encountering 18-year-old Kay holding a gun, according to media reports following the September 2020 shooting.

Alvarez "unnecessarily placed himself in [the] situation," said the report, which also found supervision of the police Crime Suppression Team "largely absent" and concluded that the police department needs to address weaknesses in its system for investigating uses of deadly force.

The report also recommended that police develop policies governing foot chases and more clearly define the roll of crime suppression teams.

The report credited city police Chief Robert Contee with agreeing to implement the auditor's recommendations.

**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.**

Canada Considers More Sanctions on Minsk as Belarus Announces Closure of Embassy in Ottawa

TORONTO, May 25 (Sputnik) - Canada is examining options for imposing additional sanctions on Belarus over the Ryanair airplane emergency landing incident in Minsk, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Tuesday.

"The behavior of the Belarus regime is outrageous, illegal and completely unacceptable..."

Canada has existing sanctions in place against Belarus and will be examining further options," Trudeau told reporters.

Canada's prime minister called Sunday's incident, in which a Ryanair plane en route from Athens to Vilnius had to make an emergency landing in Minsk on Sunday over a false bomb threat, an "attack" on democracy and freedom of the press.

Canadian officials and Western allies maintain that the target of the alleged staged grounding was journalist Roman Protasevich, the founder of a Telegram channel that Minsk has designated as an extremist entity.

Trudeau's comments coincided with Minsk's decision to close Belarusian embassy in Ottawa. "The government of the Republic of Belarus has taken decision to close the Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in Canada," the diplomatic mission said in a statement. "The Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in Canada suspends its activity on September 1, 2021."

The Belarusian embassy did not provide a reason for the decision in its statement, only saying that consular service would be halted on July 10 and consular functions of the diplomatic mission will be performed by the country's consulate in New York thereafter.

Belarus' withdrawal from Canada comes a day after Minsk and Riga expelled the other's ambassadors and diplomatic staff, following a provocation in which Riga Mayor Martins Stakis replaced the Belarusian state flag with a red-white flag used by the country's opposition.

Canada does not maintain a diplomatic presence in Belarus.

The Prime Minister's Office referred Sputnik's request for comment to Global Affairs Canada. The foreign ministry has not responded to Sputnik's query at the time of publication.

**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.**

**US Authorities Charge Eight in Burglaries Targeting Asian Americans – Justice Dept.**

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) – US prosecutors charged eight individuals living in the northeastern states of Pennsylvania and New Jersey with burglaries targeting people of Asian background, the Department of Justice said on Tuesday.

"Eight members of an interstate burglary crew were charged for their roles in a conspiracy that targeted homeowners of Asian descent for residential burglaries ...[and] were charged with conspiracy to commit interstate transportation of stolen property," the Justice Department said in a press release.

In the statement, Acting US Attorney Rachael Honig said the defendants "were part of a sophisticated, multi-state burglary crew that targeted the homes of business owners of Asian descent, intending to steal the cash proceeds of their businesses as well as jewelry, foreign currency, and other property."

Searches of Armour's and Burton's residences revealed tens of thousands of dollars in United States currency and currency from Asian countries, jewelry, family heirlooms, and other valuables that were previously reported stolen by victims, the Justice Department said.

**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.**

**US Judge Approves Steve Bannon's Motion to Dismiss Indictment in Financial Crimes Case**

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - A US federal judge has granted Steve Bannon's motion to dismiss the indictment against him in accordance with the pardon given to him by then-President Donald Trump, according to a court document released on Tuesday.

"Defendant, Steven Bannon, moves to dismiss the indictment against him pursuant to the pardon issued by President Donald J. Trump on January 19, 2021... For the reasons stated below, Bannon's motion is granted," the document said.

Bannon was indicted for his alleged connection to a conspiracy to commit wire fraud and money laundering. However, he received and accepted a pardon from Trump during his days in office. The US District Judge in charge of the case, Analisa Torres, pointed out that US legal history has acknowledged pardons may carry the imputation of guilt, or the acceptance or admission of it, even if someone is not sentenced for a crime.

**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.**

US, European Allies Denounce Syria's Upcoming Election as Neither Free Nor Fair

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - The upcoming presidential election in Syria is neither free nor fair, the top diplomats of the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy said in a joint statement on Tuesday.

"We, the Foreign Ministers of France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States of America wish to make clear that Syria's May 26 presidential election will neither be free nor fair," the statement said. "We denounce the [Bashar] Assad regime's decision to hold an election outside of the framework described in UN Security Council Resolution 2254."

The foreign affairs ministers expressed support for the Syrian opposition and condemned the electoral process as illegitimate.

The United States and its allies insisted on United Nations supervision over the election in Syria and stressed that all Syrians, including the internally displaced persons, should be allowed to participate.

"Without these elements, this fraudulent election does not represent any progress towards a political settlement," they said.

The foreign ministers called the upcoming election Assad's attempt to regain legitimacy and urged the international community to reject it.

President Bashar Assad runs in Syria's second presidential election since the onset of the decade-long conflict against the former Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs, Abdullah Salloum Abdullah and the head of the National Democratic Front, Mahmoud Ahmad Marei.

**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.**

US Says 50% Adult Americans Fully Vaccinated, Working on 70% Target Next

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - The United States will reach on Tuesday its target of fully vaccinating 50 percent of America's adult population against the coronavirus and will aim to hit the next milestone of 70 percent before its Independence Day anniversary on the 4th of July, White House COVID-19 coordinator Andy Slavitt said Tuesday.

"Today, the US will have 50 percent of adult Americans that are fully vaccinated," Slavitt told a media briefing. "This is a major milestone in our country's vaccination efforts. The number was one percent when we entered office, January 20th."

President Joe Biden had announced on his first day of office that he intended to have 100 million vaccines administered within his first 100 days. That target was met in just 58 days and the administration has to date delivered nearly 288 million doses into the arms of Americans for COVID-19.

The United States has three approved vaccines for COVID-19 — the two-shot Pfizer and Moderna, and the one-shot Johnson & Johnson.

Most of the 50 US States are moving towards fully liberate their economies from COVID-related restrictions, including masking and social distancing as infection rates and deaths fall dramatically from highs seen at the start of the year.

Slavitt hailed the pace of the US recovery from the pandemic but warned against complacency, saying those who have yet to be vaccinated or resisted immunization for whatever reason were still vulnerable to the original strain of the virus or the multiple variants and mutants circulating around the world.

He urged all Americans to heed Biden's call of being fully vaccinated before the 4th of July in order to enjoy the backyard barbecuing and socializing which was a tradition for the Independence Day holiday. The administration hopes to have at least 70 percent of the population vaccinated by then.

"You might be seeing all the positive news around, you see cases down, deaths down, friends safely shedding their masks, businesses reopening and you think you're in the clear," Slavitt said. "Unless you're vaccinated, you are at risk. When the virus looks for a place to spread and it doesn't spread to a vaccinated person. It will look for you."

He said there were more than 20,000 locations across the country where one could just walk in without an appointment to get vaccinated.

**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.**

US Senate Confirms Kristen Clarke as Head of Justice Dept. Civil Rights Division - Schumer

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - The US Senate confirmed Kristen Clarke, an attorney and longtime advocate for civil rights, as head of the Justice Department's (DOJ) Civil Rights Division, Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Tuesday.

"The Senate just confirmed Kristen Clarke to serve as head of DOJ's Civil Rights Division. She's a proven civil rights leader," Schumer said via Twitter.

Clarke is the first Black woman to lead the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division. She is a graduate of Harvard University and Columbia Law School, and previously served as the director of the Civil Rights Bureau at the New York State Attorney General's Office.

President Joe Biden nominated Clarke in January but her nomination was initially held up in the Senate Judiciary Committee prior to going for a vote before the full Senate. Clarke was confirmed in the new position with a 51-48 vote.

**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.**

Washington to Convene USMCA Dispute Panel to Address Dairy Quarrel With Canada – USTR

TORONTO, May 25 (Sputnik) - Washington will convene a trade dispute settlement panel under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) to investigate a clash over dairy exports between it and Ottawa, the US Trade Representative's (USTR) office said on Tuesday.

The United States alleges that Canadian dairy import allocations contravene the trade accord, which went into effect on July 1, 2020, and as such has requested and established the dispute settlement panel.

"A top priority for the Biden-Harris Administration is fully enforcing the USMCA and ensuring that it benefits American workers," USTR Ambassador Katherine Tai said in the statement.

"Launching the first panel request under the agreement will ensure our dairy industry and its workers can seize new opportunities under the USMCA to market and sell US products to Canadian consumers."

Washington says that Canadian dairy tariffs rate quotas (TRQs) – allocations for duty-free imports – were reserved for domestic processors, which would undermine the ability of US dairy farmers to export a wide variety of their products north of the border.

Ottawa expressed its disappointment with the decision, with International Trade Minister Mary Ng saying that Canada takes its NAFTA successor pact obligations seriously and is prepared to protect its supply management system.

"Canada is disappointed that the United States has requested a dispute settlement panel... we are confident that our policies are in full compliance with our [USMCA] TRQ obligations, and we will vigorously defend our position during the dispute settlement process," Ng said in a statement.

The standoff over dairy trade is the latest in a line of US-Canada trade disputes, which have either continued or come to light under the Biden administration, despite aspirations in Ottawa for an improvement to bilateral relations, which suffered during former President Donald Trump's time in office.

Speaking to reporters on Tuesday, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that he welcomes closer cooperation with President Joe Biden on certain issues but also highlighted Ottawa's willingness to defend its interests.

"We have seen with the arrival of the Biden administration that there has been a significant change in the United States' engagement towards international rules-based order, towards

multilateralism and, particularly, against climate change... at the same time... we will always defend supply management and our dairy producers amongst others," Trudeau said.

Trudeau added that his government challenged the Trump administration on initiatives and matters that threatened national interests and will be as uncompromising with the Biden administration.

However, since Biden's election, some experts and officials have expressed concern that the Trudeau government is willing to concede on certain Canadian interests, including the Keystone XL extension project, in order to mend bilateral relations.

**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.**

#### US to Move Forward With Re-Opening US Consulate in Jerusalem - Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration will move forward with plans to reopen the US Consulate General in Jerusalem which will resume diplomatic ties with Palestinians in the West Bank, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.

"The United States will be moving forward with the process to reopen our consulate in Jerusalem," Blinken said during a joint press conference with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah.

Blinken said there is no timeline on when the US Consulate General in Jerusalem will officially be open.

The Trump administration recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moved the US Embassy in Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. As a result, in March 2019, the US Consulate General in Jerusalem was merged with the US Embassy to Israel to form a single diplomatic mission.

Palestinians cut off most diplomatic ties with the United States as a result of the Trump administration's decision to merge the consulate with the US Embassy.

Before the Trump era, the US Consulate General in Jerusalem served as a de facto embassy for the Palestinians.

**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.**

#### US, European Allies Denounce Syria's Upcoming Election as Neither Free Nor Fair

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) – The upcoming Presidential election in Syria is neither free nor fair, US, UK, France, Germany, Italy said in a joint statement on Tuesday.

"We, the Foreign Ministers of France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States of America wish to make clear that Syria's May 26 presidential election will neither be free nor fair," the statement read. "We denounce the Assad regime's decision to hold an election outside of the framework described in UN Security Council Resolution 2254."

All signatories expressed support to the Syrian opposition and condemned the electoral process as illegitimate.

**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.**

#### Former US Marine Imprisoned in Russia Contracts COVID-19 - Family Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - Trevor Reed, a former US Marine from Texas who is currently serving a prison sentence in Russia for police assault, contracted COVID-19 behind bars, Reed's spokesperson, Jonathan Franks, said in a statement on Tuesday.

"Today the Reeds learned that Trevor has tested positive for COVID. His symptoms began May 17th as a fever and a cough. Those symptoms progressed throughout the week and yesterday, Trevor also complained of having lost his sense of smell," Franks said.

The Reed family said that they will be holding the Russian government responsible for anything that happens to Jonathan, considering that their request through the embassy to have him vaccinated was denied by officials.

Today marks the 647th day of Reed's imprisonment in Russia. He was arrested in the summer of 2019 and found guilty of assaulting officers while being transported to a police station following a drunken altercation with two women. He was sentenced to nine years in a medium-security prison and ordered to pay \$1,374 in damages to two of the officers.

**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.**

#### Biden Plans California Offshore Wind Energy Initiative to Create Jobs - White House

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is opening the northern and central coasts of California to a new wind energy development program, the White House announced on Tuesday.

"Today, the White House convened National Climate Advisor Gina McCarthy, California Governor Gavin Newsom, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, and Under Secretary for Defense for Policy Dr. Colin Kahl to announce an effort to advance areas for offshore wind off the northern and central coasts of California," a White House fact sheet said.

The Biden plan will open up the Pacific Coast to its first commercial scale offshore clean energy projects as part of the administration's goal to create thousands of good-paying, union jobs through the deployment of 30 gigawatts (GW) of offshore wind by 2020, the fact sheet said.

"These initial areas for offshore wind development in the Pacific Ocean could bring up to 4.6 GW of clean energy to the grid, enough to power 1.6 million American homes," the White House said.

The Interior Department, in coordination with the Defense Department, has identified the Morro Bay 399 Area that will support three gigawatts of offshore wind on 399 square miles off

California's central coast region and the Interior Department is also advancing the Humboldt Call Area as a potential Wind Energy Area off northern California, the fact sheet said.

**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.**

Canada 'Disappointed' by US Call for Arbitration in Dairy Dispute - Minister

TORONTO, May 25 (Sputnik) - Ottawa is disappointed by Washington's decision to seek a settlement in the trade dispute over dairy products through arbitration under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), Canada's International Trade Minister Mary Ng said on Tuesday.

"Canada is disappointed that the United States has requested a dispute settlement panel," Ng said in a statement.

Ottawa remains confident that Canadian dairy tariffs rate quotas - allocations for duty-free imports - are in full compliance under the NAFTA successor trade deal, Ng added.

**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.**

US Hacker Uses Stolen Identities Used to Get Over \$200,000 in COVID-19 Aid - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - A US hacker who received more than \$200,000 in COVID-19 relief using identities he stole from 35 victims faces criminal charges in an indictment that was unsealed on Tuesday, the Justice Department said.

"The indictment alleges that, as part of the scheme, [Keon] Taylor obtained over the internet and elsewhere multiple victims' stolen personal identifying information, or "PII," including victims' names, Social Security numbers, dates of birth, and addresses," the Justice Department said in a press release.

Taylor used the stolen identities to apply for and receive over \$219,000 in fraudulent unemployment benefits, and to submit numerous additional applications seeking other benefits for at least 35 victims, the release said.

The indictment further alleges that Taylor also used false information to fraudulently apply for three Economic Injury Disaster Loans under the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act, a federal law with multiple aid programs for millions of Americans suffering economic damages caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the release added.

The indictment lists multiple charges of wire fraud and aggravated identity theft, according to the release.

**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.**

### Biden to Visit Oklahoma Next Week to Commemorate Tulsa Race Massacre - White House

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden will travel to Tulsa, Oklahoma, next week to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the massacre of up to 300 African-Americans in one of the worst race massacres in US history, the White House said on Tuesday.

"On Tuesday, June 1, the president will travel to Tulsa, Oklahoma to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa Race Massacre," the White House said in a press release.

The Tulsa race massacre, also known as the Greenwood Massacre, the Black Wall Street Massacre and the Tulsa pogrom took place on May 31 and June 1, 1921, when mobs of White residents, many of them armed by city officials, attacked African-American residents and businesses in the Greenwood District of Tulsa.

The pogrom, which included attacks from aircraft, destroyed more than 35 square blocks of the district that was at that time the wealthiest African-American communities in the United States. Officially, 36 people were killed, but a 2001 state commission acknowledged that the death toll may have been as high as 300 with a minimum figure of 39 confirmed dead.

**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.**

### US Downgrades Mexico's Aviation Safety Standards - FAA

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - The United States' Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) announced on Tuesday its conclusion that Mexico does not meet international aviation safety standards, thereby barring carriers from the country from opening new services and routes in the United States

"The Government of Mexico does not meet International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) safety standards," FAA, a unit within the Department of Transportation, said in a statement. While the new rating allows Mexican carriers to continue existing service to the United States, "it prohibits any new service and routes", the FAA said.

"US airlines will no longer be able to market and sell tickets with their names and designator codes on Mexican-operated flights," it said. "The FAA will increase its scrutiny of Mexican airline flights to the United States."

During its reassessment of Mexico's Agencia Federal de Aviacion Civil (AFAC) from October 2020 to February 2021, the FAA identified several areas of non-compliance with minimum ICAO safety standards, assigning it a Category 2 rating. Such a rating means that a country's laws or regulations lack the necessary requirements to oversee its carriers in accordance with minimum international safety standards, or the civil aviation authority is lacking in one or more areas such as technical expertise, trained personnel, record-keeping, inspection procedures, or resolution of safety concerns.

"Both AFAC and FAA share a commitment to civil aviation safety," the FAA said. "Sustained progress can help AFAC regain Category 1."

The downgrade was not the first by the FAA of Mexico's air safety rating. In 2010, the agency did the same on suspected shortcomings within Mexico's civil aviation authority, before restoring the country's top rating about four months later.

**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.**

Democrats Still Hope to Pass Floyd Police Reform With Republican Support - Pelosi

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - US House Democrats remain hopeful they can pass the George Floyd Police Reform Bill into law with bipartisan Republican support, Speaker Nancy Pelosi said on Tuesday on the first anniversary of Floyd's death in police custody in Minneapolis.

"[W]e remain hopeful that we will, in a bipartisan spirit, reach agreement and pass this legislation in its final form," Pelosi said in a press release.

Democratic Senator Cory Booker and Republican Senator Tim Scott were still seeking to reach a compromise version of the proposed legislation while in the House, Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security Chair Karen Bass was also engaged in negotiations, Pelosi said.

Floyd, a 46-year-old unemployed African American with a criminal record and drug addiction died when police officer Derek Chauvin pressed his knee to his neck for nine minutes. A trial determined "beyond reasonable doubt" that Chauvin's actions violated police rules of engagement and became a major factor in Floyd's death.

In April 2021, 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 jail.

**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.**

US Does Not Know If Iran Willing to Return to Full Compliance With JCPOA - Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - The United States still does not know whether Iran is willing and able to make the decision to return to full compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.

"We're about to engage in I think the fifth round of discussions in Vienna and we still don't know the answer to the most important question which is whether Iran is actually willing and able to make the decisions it needs to make to come back into full compliance," Blinken said during a press conference.

Iran has been far closer to producing material for a nuclear weapon in a short period of time since the Trump administration's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, which is not in the interest of other countries, Blinken said. This threat underscores the urgency to see if the United States can get Iran to return to full compliance of the nuclear deal, he added.

The talks in Vienna began in April, shortly after President Joe Biden took office in the United States this year. Three working commissions are negotiating the lift of sanctions, and the return of Tehran and Washington to the deal. They were expected to wrap up talks by the end of May. The JCPOA was signed in 2015 by Iran, China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union, stipulating the removal of international sanctions from Tehran in exchange for it scaling down its nuclear program. However, in 2018, the Trump administration unilaterally withdrew from the deal and reimposed sanctions on Iran. Tehran responded by gradually abandoning its own commitments toward complete withdrawal unless sanctions are lifted.

**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.**

Washington to Convene USMCA Dispute Panel to Address Dairy Quarrel With Canada - USTR

TORONTO, May 25 (Sputnik) - Washington will convene a trade dispute settlement panel under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) to investigate a clash over dairy exports between it and Ottawa, the US Trade Representative's (USTR) office said on Tuesday.

The United States alleges that Canadian dairy import allocations contravene the trade accord, which went into effect on July 1, 2020, and as such has requested and established the dispute settlement panel.

"A top priority for the Biden-Harris Administration is fully enforcing the USMCA and ensuring that it benefits American workers," USTR Ambassador Katherine Tai said in the statement.

"Launching the first panel request under the agreement will ensure our dairy industry and its workers can seize new opportunities under the USMCA to market and sell US products to Canadian consumers."

**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.**

US Opposes Israeli, Palestinian Steps Undermining Two-State Solution Prospects - Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) – The US will be opposed to any steps that either of the sides of the Israeli-Palestine conflict takes to undermine prospects of the two-state solution, the Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.

"Any steps that either side takes that either risk sparking violence or, over time, and ultimately undermine the prospect for returning to the pursuit of two states [solution], we oppose. That includes settlement activity, it includes demolitions it includes evictions, it includes incitement of violence, it includes payment to terrorists," Blinken said during a briefing.

**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.**

#### Biden Expects to Have 'Difficult' Talks With Putin on Ukraine, Belarus - White House

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden expects to discuss "difficult" issues during his upcoming meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, including Ukraine and the Ryanair airplane incident in Belarus, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Tuesday. "We expect they will spend a fair amount of time on strategic stability, where the arms control agenda goes following the extension of the New START," Psaki said. "The President will also raise Ukraine, underscoring America's support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and he will also plan to raise Belarus and convey our grave concerns as he has now done publicly."

The meeting between Biden and Putin will take place in Geneva on June 16.

"President Biden is meeting with Vladimir Putin because of our countries' differences, not in spite of them. It's an opportunity to raise concerns where we have them and, again, to move toward a more stable and predictable relationship with the Russian government," Psaki added. The two leaders will meet amid growing tensions over the Belarus emergency landing a Ryanair airplane due to a false bomb threat and then arrested Roman Protasevich, a journalist onboard the plane who is designated as an extremist by Minsk. However, US officials have stated that they have no reason to believe that Russia was involved in the incident.

The New START treaty is the only active arms control agreement between the United States and Russia, having been extended by five years in February. The accord limits the number of deployed strategic nuclear warheads that either country can maintain.

**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.**

#### Over Half of US Voters Want Commission to Probe January 6 Capitol Riot - Poll

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - A 58 percent majority of likely US voters back calls for forming a commission, modeled on the panel that probed the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, to investigate the January 6 storming of the Capitol by a group of former President Donald Trump supporters, a Rasmussen Reports poll said on Tuesday.

"That includes 42 percent who 'Strongly Approve' of the commission proposal. Thirty-five percent (37 percent) disapprove of the riot commission plan, including 23 percent who 'Strongly Disapprove,'" a press release explaining the poll said.

The US House of Representatives last week voted to create such a commission, but the plan faces opposition in the Senate, where it would likely require at least ten Republicans to go along amid opposition from Minority Leader Mitch McConnell.

A majority of likely Republican voters (57 percent) disapprove of the riot commission, including 40 percent who "Strongly Disapprove," while 78 percent of Democrats back the plan as do 56 percent of voters not affiliated with either major party, according to the poll.

Republican opponents say the plan would add little to multiple investigations underway in Congress plus a criminal probe by the FBI.

**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.**

One Person Injured After Shooting at George Floyd's Death Site in Minneapolis - Reports

MINNEAPOLIS, May 25 (Sputnik) - One person has been accepted in a hospital having sustained injuries after a shooting broke out in Minneapolis near the place where George Floyd died a year ago, Fox News reported on Tuesday.

At least two salvos of gunshots were heard in the morning at the intersection where Floyd took his final breaths, briefly sending people there ducking for cover.

"Information received from callers was that a suspect vehicle was last seen leaving the area at a high rate of speed," the report quoted a spokesman for the Minneapolis Police Department.

Shortly thereafter, one person went to a local hospital for treatment of what were believed to be non-life-threatening injuries, the report said.

The shooting, a routine event in the troubled neighborhood, occurred as people are gathering to commemorate the first anniversary of Floyd's death in police custody.

**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.**

US Does Not Know if Iran Willing to Return to Full Compliance With JCPOA - Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - The United States still does not know whether Iran is willing and able to make the decision to return to full compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.

"We're about to engage in I think the fifth round of discussions in Vienna and we still don't know the answer to the most important question which is whether Iran is actually willing and able to make the decisions it needs to make to come back into full compliance," Blinken said during a press conference.

**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.**

US Not Expecting to Solve Everything in Biden-Putin Meeting, Still Believes it Worthwhile

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - The US does not anticipate that the upcoming meeting between President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin will resolve all the differences between the two countries, but still sees it as being in their interest, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki stated on Tuesday.

"We don't see this meeting as an opportunity to just talk about everything we agree on, we see this as a diplomatic opportunity for the United States, one that's in our national interest, which is to convey areas where we disagree, to have a conversation about concerns we have, and also look for a more stable and predictable path forward. We don't expect everything to be solved at the end of this meeting, but we think that it is in our interest to have the meeting, which is why we proposed it to the president," Psaki said.

**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.**

#### White House Says Does Not Believe Russia Involved in Ryanair Plane Incident

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - The United States continues to believe that Russia was not involved in the incident concerning the grounding of a Ryanair airplane in Belarus on Sunday, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Tuesday.

"I did not give any indication that we had that view yesterday and that has not changed," Psaki told a reporter when asked if President Joe Biden determined that Russia had any role in diverting the Ryanair airplane.

**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.**

#### Biden Expects to Have 'Difficult' Talks With Putin on Ukraine, Belarus - White House

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden expects to discuss "difficult" issues during his upcoming meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, including Ukraine and the Ryanair incident in Belarus, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Tuesday.

"We expect they will spend a fair amount of time on strategic stability, where the arms control agenda goes following the extension of New Start," Psaki said. "The President will also raise Ukraine, underscoring America's support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and he will also plan to raise Belarus and convey our grave concerns as he has now done publicly." The meeting between Biden and Putin will take place in Geneva on June 16. The White House said that they are holding this meeting because of the two nations' differences, not in spite of them.

**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.**

## US Federal Agencies to Work With Pipeline Companies to Defend Against Cyber Threats - DHS

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration will work with private pipeline companies in the United States to better defend against cyber threats following the hack that disrupted Colonial Pipeline operations earlier this month, a Department of Homeland Security spokesperson said on Tuesday.

"The Biden Administration is taking further action to better secure our nation's critical infrastructure," the spokesperson said in a statement to Sputnik. "TSA [Transportation Security Agency], in close collaboration with CISA [Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency], is coordinating with companies in the pipeline sector to ensure they are taking all necessary steps to increase their resilience to cyber threats and secure their systems."

The spokesperson added that the Homeland Security Department will release additional details about its plans in the days ahead.

**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.**

## Fed Expects 'Significant Temporary Dislocation' But Can Fix Inflation - Senior Officials

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - The US economy is expected to experience a significant temporary dislocation as it reopens and any inflationary shocks it experiences will be short-lived given the Federal Reserve's ability to fix such problems, Federal Reserve senior officials said on Tuesday.

"As the economy opens, there will be significant temporary dislocation. It's common to see inflation volatility after a shock; I expect it to be short-lived. If we're mistaken on inflation, we've got the means to fix it," Federal Reserve Board of Governors Vice Chair for Supervision Randal Quarles said.

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020, the Federal Reserve has kept US interest rates at between zero and a quarter percentage point to help the economy get back on its feet. The central bank has also been buying at least \$80 billion per month of Treasury securities and a minimum of \$40 billion per month of agency mortgage-backed securities to stimulate recovery.

Economic data have also shown an increase in inflation via higher consumer and producer prices. Prices of almost everything, from houses to the lumber that goes into building them, have soared, scaring economists into believing that inflation growth in 2021 could be the highest in 35 years.

The Federal Reserve has acknowledged the price pressures arising from bottlenecks in US supply chains struggling to cope with demand in an economy reopening after months of pandemic-suppression.

But the central bank's policy-making Federal Open Market Committee, led by Chairman Jerome Powell, insists that these inflationary pressures are "transient" and will fade as the economy makes a full recovery from the pandemic. The FOMC also does not see the immediate need to raise interest rates.

Quarles reiterated that stance, saying, "Inflationary conditions, in my opinion and that of the Federal Reserve, are most likely to be transitory."

Charles Evans, president of the Chicago Federal Reserve, concurred with Quarles, telling a banking conference that the economy was unlikely to become a victim of the kind of undesirable inflationary effects warned by some economists.

"I have not seen anything yet to persuade me to change my full support of our accommodative stance for monetary policy or our forward guidance about the path for policy," Evans said, signaling his support for the Fed's super-easy monetary policy, in remarks prepared for delivery to a Bank of Japan conference.

**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.**

State Dept. Authorizes Display of Black Lives Matter Flags at US Embassies - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - US Embassies and consulates are now officially allowed to fly Black Lives Matter (BLM) flags and banners according to a directive from Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Foreign Policy reported on Tuesday.

The directive gives the heads of the US diplomatic facilities authorization to display BLM flags and banners. However, the message sent out to them about the directive notes that the authorization is not a requirement.

A State Department spokesperson was reported to have confirmed that the United States remains concerned about the racial and ethnic injustices against people of color and other marginalized communities and encourages its diplomatic missions around the world to focus on eliminating systemic racism and its global impact.

In April, Blinken appointed former diplomat Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley to the State Department's newly created Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer role in an effort to reverse the department's track record on diversity.

**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.**

Belarus Embassy in Canada to Cease Operations on September 1 - Statement

TORONTO, May 25 (Sputnik) - The Belarusian embassy in Canada will cease operations in Ottawa on September 1 but will halt consular services on July 10, the diplomatic mission said on Tuesday.

"The government of the Republic of Belarus has taken decision to close the Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in Canada," the mission said in a statement. "The Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in Canada suspends its activity on September 1, 2021."

The consular functions of the Belarusian embassy in Canada will be performed by the country's consulate in New York, the statement said.

**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.**

US House Republicans Press Government Auditor for Legal Opinion on Border Wall Halt

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - The General Accountability Office (GAO), which serves as the auditing arm of Congress, needs to update Congress on when it will release a legal opinion on the Biden administration's freeze of border wall construction, Republicans on the House Budget Committee said on Tuesday.

"It has now been almost a month since the Committee on the Budget's hearing and two months since the request for an investigation was made and Congress still has no detailed information or any specified timeframe for when GAO will release its opinion," House Budget Committee senior Republican Jason Smith wrote in a letter to the GAO chief, Comptroller General Gene Dodaro.

More than 100 members of Congress first requested a legal opinion on President Joe Biden's freeze on Border Wall construction in March.

In an April 29 testimony, GAO said it expected responses from the Biden administration "mid to late next week" that is needed to draft a legal opinion, the letter said.

"This deadline has passed and therefore, we are requesting a status update on GAO's investigation," the letter added.

The Republican request appears to focus on more than \$1 billion appropriated by Congress for border security during the Trump administration, and not the nearly \$4 billion that the former president transferred from military spending accounts to fund the barrier.

Biden froze money for border wall construction shortly after taking office on January 20.

**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.**

UNSC to Discuss Belarus Airplane Diversion Behind Closed Doors Wednesday - Source

UNITED NATIONS, May 25 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council will discuss in a closed door meeting on Wednesday the grounding of a Ryanair plane in Belarus and the arrest of a dissident journalist Roman Protasevich who was onboard the aircraft, a diplomatic source at the Security Council told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"Yes, France, Norway and Ireland informed the Security Council they intend to raise the issue of plane landing in Belarus on Wednesday under "Any Other Business" agenda," the source said.

"Since the consultations are closed, any issue could be discussed in there, even without giving a notice."

**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.**

US to Rally Global Community to Provide 1.5Mln COVID-19 Vaccines to Palestinians - Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - The United States will work to rally the international community to provide 1.5 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to Palestinians, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.

"We'll work in the United States to rally the international community to provide 1.5 million doses of safe, effective COVID-19 vaccines to the Palestinian people," Blinken said during a joint press conference with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah.

Blinken also said the United States will provide Palestinians at least \$75 million in development and economic assistance, \$5.5 million in immediate disaster assistance for Gaza and an emergency fund of more than \$32 million for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for the Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Blinken visited Jerusalem and Ramallah in wake of the 11-day conflict between the Israelis and Palestinian Hamas movement. Israel and the Hamas Islamist movement on Thursday agreed to an Egypt-brokered ceasefire.

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.

**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.**

Washington, DC Attorney General Sues Amazon for 'Abusing and Maintaining' Monopoly Power

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - Washington, DC Attorney General Karl Racine said on Tuesday that his office has filed an antitrust lawsuit against Amazon, alleging that the company violated local law by maintaining and abusing its monopoly power.

"Today, my office filed an antitrust lawsuit against Amazon for illegally abusing and maintaining its monopoly power by controlling prices across the online retail market and violating [Washington,] DC law," Racine said.

The Attorney General said Amazon has been controlling online retail prices through restrictive contract provisions and policies, requiring third-party sellers to agree that they will not sell their products anywhere else online for a lower price than on Amazon, even on their own websites. Racine said the lawsuit is intended to put an end to what he characterized as Amazon's illegal control of prices across the online retail market.

Washington, DC needs a fair online marketplace that expands options available to its residents and promotes competition, innovation and choice, he added.

**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.**

#### **Blinken Says US Will Provide \$75Mln in Development, Economic Aid to Palestinians**

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday that the United States will provide Palestinians at least \$75 million in development and economic assistance.

"I informed President [Mahmoud] Abbas, and earlier [Israeli] Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu, that the United States will notify Congress of our intention to provide \$75 million in additional development and economic assistance for the Palestinians in 2021," Blinken said during remarks in Ramallah.

Blinken added that the United States will also provide up to \$5.5 million in immediate disaster assistance for Gaza and an emergency fund of more than \$32 million for United Nations Relief and Works Agency for the Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The additional funding brings the total amount of US assistance to the Palestinians to more than \$360 million, Blinken said.

The United States will work with global partners to ensure Hamas does not benefit from US assistance going toward Gaza reconstruction efforts, Blinken said, adding that it is important to ensure rebuilding efforts do not get lost in a conflict if Hamas decides to launch more rockets attacks in the future. The United States welcomes the Palestinian-Israeli ceasefire, but more must be done to build on it toward a positive direction, Blinken said.

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 Islamist movement on Thursday agreed to an Egypt-brokered ceasefire.

**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.**

#### **Canada Mulling More Sanctions on Belarus After 'Outrageous' Ryanair Incident - Trudeau**

TORONTO, May 25 (Sputnik) - Canada is examining options for imposing additional sanctions on Belarus over the Ryanair plane emergency landing in Minsk, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Tuesday.

"The behavior of the Belarus regime is outrageous, illegal and completely unacceptable..."

Canada has existing sanctions in place against Belarus and will be examining further options," Trudeau told reporters in Ottawa.

**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.**

US Tallies Over 10,000 COVID-19 Cases in Vaccinated People, January-April - Health Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - COVID-19 cases in fully vaccinated individuals totaled 10,262 in the first four months of 2021, 10 percent of whom were hospitalized and 2 percent died, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in a report on Tuesday. "Based on preliminary data, 2,725 (27 percent) vaccine breakthrough infections were asymptomatic, 995 patients were known to be hospitalized, and 160 patients died," the report said.

When the breakthrough tally reached 10,262 on April 30, about 101 million Americans had been fully vaccinated, defined as 14 days after the final jab or a one- or two-dose vaccine, the report said.

The median age of patients who died was 82 years, with 28 decedents either asymptomatic or died from a cause unrelated to COVID-19, the report added.

The report cautioned that the tally likely represented a substantial undercount because many persons with vaccine breakthrough infections, especially those who are asymptomatic or who experience mild illness, might not seek testing.

Beginning in May, the CDC said it transitioned from monitoring all reported vaccine "breakthrough" infections to investigating only those among patients who are hospitalized or die.

**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.**

US Homeland Security to Regulate Pipeline Cybersecurity Following Colonial Hack - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will begin efforts to regulate the cybersecurity of the nation's pipelines following the ransomware hack of Colonial Pipeline earlier this month, the Washington Post reported on Tuesday.

The effort will purportedly be led by the Transportation Security Agency (TSA), whose new directive will require pipeline operators to report cyber incidents to both the TSA and to CISA (Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency). It will also require companies to assess their systems' security compared to existing guidelines and to maintain a cyber official with a 24/7 direct line to TSA and CISA in the event of an attack.

"This is a first step, and the department views it as a first step, and it will be followed by a much more robust directive that puts in place meaningful requirements that are meant to be durable and flexible as technology changes," said a senior DHS official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Whereas the Department of Transportation (DOT) is still in charge of ensuring the day-to-day operational success of the US' pipelines, the TSA became responsible for their safety from malign actors in 2002 as part of the nation's post-9/11 security reforms.

The decision to regulate the cybersecurity of the US's pipelines comes after the ransomware cyberattack on the Colonial Pipeline, one of the nation's largest providers of fuel that provides around 45 percent of the gasoline to the country's East coast. Colonial reportedly paid a ransom of about \$5 million to Russia-based hackers, against the advice of the US government, and regained access to their systems.

**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.**

**Blinken Says US Will Provide \$75Mln in Development, Economic Aid to Palestinians**

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday that the United States will provide Palestinians at least \$75 million in development and economic assistance.

"I informed President [Mahmoud] Abbas, and earlier [Israeli] Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu, that the United States will notify Congress of our intention to provide \$75 million in additional development and economic assistance for the Palestinians in 2021," Blinken said during remarks in Ramallah.

Blinken added that the United States will also provide up to \$5.5 million in immediate disaster assistance for Gaza and a more than \$32 million for United Nations Relief and Works Agency for the Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) emergency fund.

**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.**

**Withdrawal of US Forces from Afghanistan 16-25% Complete - Central Command**

WASHINGTON, May 25 (Sputnik) - The US is at least 16 percent complete with its withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) stated on Tuesday.

"U.S. Central Command estimates that we have completed between 16-25% of the entire retrograde process," CENTCOM said in a press release.

The military command wing, responsible for the Middle East and parts of Central Asia, added that the military has removed the equivalent of 160 C-17 military transport planes of material out of the war-torn country and has designated over 10,000 pieces of equipment for disposition. This represents a jump of about 3-11 percent increase in the withdrawal rate since mid-May, when the CENTCOM's estimation was around 13-20 percent.

The withdrawal comes amid a promise made by Biden to complete the withdrawal of US troops from the country by September 11 of this year. Previously, US forces were supposed to have withdrawn from the country by May 1, but that deadline was extended.

Once complete, the withdrawal will mark the end of the longest military engagement in US history. In addition to US forces exiting the country, there are also plans to continue intra-Afghan

dialogues to help bring a peaceful resolution to the conflict between the Taliban, who still control much of the country, and government forces.

**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.**

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

WASHINGTON, May 25 (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.

**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.**

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

WASHINGTON, May 25 (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.

**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.**

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

WASHINGTON, May 25 (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.

**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.**

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

WASHINGTON, May 25 (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.

**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.**

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

WASHINGTON, May 25 (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.

**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.**

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

WASHINGTON, May 25 (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.