

06/07/21 Monday

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Blinken Will Participate in Biden's Bilateral Meeting With Putin in Geneva, State Dept Says by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

When US President Joe Biden travels to Europe later this week to meet with the G7 powers and NATO allies before meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin next week, he will be urging them to form a more united and comprehensive effort against Russia, including in cybersecurity. "Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken will accompany President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. on his June travel to Cornwall, UK; Brussels, Belgium; and Geneva, Switzerland," State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters on Monday, adding that Blinken "will participate in President Biden's bilateral meeting with Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin in Geneva."

Price added that Blinken would also be a part of Biden's bilateral meetings on the margins of the G7 summit in Cornwall, England, set to run from Friday until Sunday. [Biden will then travel](#) to Brussels for meetings with members of the NATO mutual defense alliance on June 14, before meeting Putin in the western Swiss city on June 16.

Since Biden took office in January and appointed Blinken to be his chief diplomatic envoy, the former National Security Council member has energetically traveled and met with US allies to shore up support after the departure of abrasive former US President Donald Trump.

In March, Blinken traveled to Japan and South Korea before joining White House national security advisor Jake Sullivan in Alaska for a 2+2 meeting with their Chinese counterparts. Although Communist Party of China's foreign policy chief [Yang Jiechi said](#) he hoped the meeting would be fruitful in building peace, [Blinken plainly stated](#) prior to the meeting it had little purpose other than for Washington to stake out its positions on various issues relating to China, such as its internal security policies, disputed territorial claims in the South China Sea, and the origins of COVID-19.

On Sunday, [Blinken told Axios](#) on HBO the goal of the meeting was to create a "more stable relationship" between the two countries, but also that he would tell Putin "directly and clearly" there would be retaliation if his government was [found to be behind](#) recent cyber attacks on Colonial Pipeline, the US Agency for International Development, or other institutions.

"I can't tell you whether I'm optimistic or not about the results," Blinken told the outlet. "I don't think we're going to know after one meeting, but we'll have some indications ... We're prepared either way."

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Biden Will Press NATO Allies on Budget Burden-Sharing at June Summit, Sullivan Says

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

As Ukraine pushes for acceptance into the NATO alliance seven years after a US-backed coup brought a right-wing, pro-Western government to power, Washington is pushing other NATO allies to boost their military budgets even further in an attempt to bring maximum pressure against Moscow.

US national security advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters Monday that US President Joe Biden will emphasize the importance of burden-sharing in the NATO alliance and for allies to contribute to NATO exercises and operations at a NATO summit next week.

Later this week, Biden will travel to Europe for meetings with US allies and partners, as well as with Russian President Vladimir Putin, but before he leaves, Biden is hosting NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg at the White House later on Monday.

Summarizing their meeting topic as well as the forthcoming NATO summit, White House Press Secretary [Jen Psaki said](#) on Friday it would include “reinforcing transatlantic security in the face of challenges from Russia and China” as well as “adapting NATO to address threats like cyberattacks and climate change, while continuing to ensure a more equitable sharing of responsibility among Allies.”

Burden-sharing between NATO allies was not created by former US President Donald Trump - that was his predecessor, Barack Obama, under whom Biden served as vice president. It was Trump who used the pledge by NATO members to spend 2% of their gross domestic product on defense as a bludgeon to reduce US costs in overseas operations. [In February, Stoltenberg said](#) he hopes to see fairer burden-sharing as part of his proposed NATO 2030 initiative.

“Spending more money together will be an expression of the strength of our commitment under Article 5, the promise to defend each other. It will also contribute to a fairer distribution of burdens,” Stoltenberg told Norway’s state-owned outlet NRK at the time.

constitutes 39% of all defense spending by all countries on the globe, according to [April 2021 data](#) by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

Biden also had a phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Monday, which Sullivan said gave them “an opportunity to talk at some length about all of the issues in [the] US-Ukraine relationship” before Biden meets Putin next week in Geneva, Switzerland.

The security advisor said Biden told Zelenskyy the US would stand up firmly for Ukraine’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and its aspirations as the two countries go forward - a reference to the US’ support of [Kiev’s bid to join](#) the NATO alliance.

On Monday, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense [Laura Cooper said](#) at an event in Ukraine that the former Soviet republic could join the NATO alliance “in the next decade or so,” provided Kiev carries out [the reforms necessary](#) to satisfy admission.

Biden’s first meeting of his European trip will be with leaders of the G7 nations in Cornwall, England, beginning on Friday, before travelling to Brussels for a NATO summit on June 14, then to Geneva for a summit with Putin on June 16.

The US has long maintained without proof that Moscow is responsible for supporting the breakaway republics in eastern Ukraine, where Russian-speaking minorities rebelled against the right-wing nationalist government that came to power in Kiev in a US-backed coup in early 2014. The US similarly refuses to recognize Crimea’s secession from Ukraine in 2014 for the same reasons and its subsequent democratic referendum to be annexed by Russia, claiming

the move was an aggressive territorial grab and using it as a pretext for a massive new buildup of NATO forces along the alliance's eastern frontier.

More recently, a [wave of cybercrime](#) targeting US corporations and government agencies has been [blamed on Russia](#) by US intelligence services. Sullivan said Monday that at the G7 summit, leaders would discuss "how to deal with increasing the robustness and resilience of our defenses against ransomware attacks collectively ... and then finally how we collectively speak with one voice to those countries, including Russia, that are harboring or permitting cyber criminals to operate from their territories."

Moscow has [denied responsibility](#) for the attacks, saying that the claims are "unfounded and look more and more absurd," and that they are a "false flag" by US intelligence agencies hungry for more funding.

Last month, Press Secretary of the Russian President [Dmitry Peskov told reporters](#) that the Kremlin knew nothing about the attacks before they were reported in the press, and that before Biden and Putin could discuss them "you need to answer: which groups, why are they connected with Russia, what, who attacked, what did it lead to, what was the attack, and how did Microsoft know about it? If you answer all these questions, then you can think about the answer."

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BDS Activists Take #BlockTheBoat Fight to Ports Seeking to Offload Goods From Israeli Ships by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

At several ports around the globe, Palestinian-solidarity activists have targeted Israeli-owned cargo ships, protesting outside the facilities in a bid to pressure dock workers not to unload the ships. The movement takes inspiration from several similar instances that took place during the 11-day war in Gaza last month.

On Saturday, the cargo ship Volans, contracted by Israeli shipping company ZIM, finally gave up after attempting for two weeks to land at the Port of Oakland, California.

According to the Act Now to Stop War and End Racism (ANSWER) Coalition, the group was just one of a vast array of activist groups that set up half a dozen picket lines to block port workers from unloading the Volans. [ANSWER reported](#) that the longshoremen of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 10 refused to cross the picket line, forcing ZIM, which was losing millions of dollars per day sitting in San Francisco Bay, to try and unload elsewhere.

"Due to operational constraints and long delays in the port of Oakland, and in order to meet scheduled departures in the Far East, we will be calling on other US West Coast Ports until further notice," ZIM told [Middle East Eye](#).

ZIM is considered the [10th largest shipping company](#) in the world, carrying 1.6% of global cargo on 96 ships it either owns or charters. Based in Haifa, Israel, [ZIM was founded](#) in 1945 to facilitate the mass shipment of Jewish immigrants to the UK's Palestine Mandate and, after 1948, the newly independent state of Israel.

[ZIM's official schedule](#) for the Volans still says the ship was due to dock in Oakland on May 24 and cross the Pacific to Shanghai by June 26, but [according to the Arab Resource and Organizing Center \(AROC\)](#), the group that called the Oakland protest, Volans is now headed for Vancouver, Canada. There were already solidarity protests in Vancouver, but now AROC has put out a call for supporters to rally near the city's port facilities on Tuesday.

"It warms our hearts in the besieged occupied Gaza Strip and the rest of occupied Palestine that our comrades led by AROC, and with the solidarity of our fellow workers in ILWU Local 10, achieved this great #BlockTheBoat victory against ZIM in Oakland," Elias al-Jelda, member of the executive committee of the Palestine General Federation of Trade Union (PGFTU) in Gaza, said in [a Sunday statement](#).

"We call upon all dockworkers worldwide to intensify the boycott campaign against ZIM ships and all business profiting from apartheid Israel, in solidarity with our people's struggle for freedom and justice in Palestine," the statement continued.

Several ILWU affiliates, including Local 10, also signed [a joint statement](#) last week denouncing "the racism and injustices and again condemn[ing] the violence perpetrated by Israel against Palestine."

A similar incident happened in Oakland in August 2014, during Israel's "Operation Protective Edge" campaign against Hamas in Gaza, but ILWU workers took a neutral position on the issue, and only refused to unload goods from the ZIM vessel Piraeus as long as protesters blocked them. When the Piraeus seemed to leave port only to return a few hours later and dock at a different terminal, the longshoremen unloaded the vessel, [according to KPIX](#). However, the following month, protesters [succeeded at blocking](#) the ZIM Shanghai from unloading in Oakland. A third ship, ZIM Beijing, was deterred the following month by reports of protests while still at sea and [skipped Oakland altogether](#).

In New York harbor on Sunday, another ZIM-owned ship, the Tarragona, met a similar protest, with hundreds of people joining a Block the Boat NY-NJ coalition and their [own picket line](#) outside the Maher terminal in Elizabeth, New Jersey. However, they failed to stop the Tarragona from unloading and it is now bound for Savannah, Georgia, [according to ZIM](#).

Other protests have taken place in Houston, Texas; Tacoma and Seattle, Washington; and Los Angeles, California, although it's unclear if all of them were targeting specific Israeli-owned vessels intending to dock there.

Dock Workers Refuse to Load During War

In early May, weeks of [building tensions](#) in Israel and the Palestinian territories exploded after Israeli police [stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque](#) on the final Friday of Ramadan, injuring more than 300 Palestinian worshippers and 12 police officers. When Hamas launched a [barrage of rockets](#) into Israel, the Israeli Defense Forces responded with airstrikes and artillery fire. In the 11 days that followed, more than 4,300 rockets were fired at Israel and more than 1,500 airstrikes bombed targets in Gaza. The attacks killed 12 people in Israel but more than 250 in Gaza, about 80 of whom were the Hamas militants Israel said it was targeting, [according to local](#) officials.

Protesters around the globe decried the one-sidedness of the conflict, particularly the large number of children killed, all but two of whom were in Gaza. In the US, UK, France, and other countries that support Israel, thousands took to the streets [demanding their governments](#) end that support and calling on Israel to end the war.

In Italy's port cities of Naples and Livorno, the latter [long known](#) for its revolutionary leftist movement, dock workers [refused to load](#) a Singapore-flagged cargo vessel called Asiatic Island after discovering it was to be loaded with munitions bound for the Israeli city of Ashdod.

"Weapons and explosives that will be used to kill the Palestinian population already hit by a severe attack this very night which caused hundreds of victims among the civilian population, including many children," L'Unione Sindacale di Base (USB) said in a May 14 statement. "Work is important, especially in these times, but this cannot make us close our eyes, or worse still, make us complicit in the continuing massacres of the civilian population."

Then on May 20, just hours before the ceasefire between Hamas and the IDF was announced, the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union ([SATAWU](#)) [said its workers](#) would not load the ZIM Shanghai, which was moored in the eastern port of Durban. The union said its decision followed an appeal by the local Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) organization. Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions

The BDS movement was formally [initiated in 2005](#) by a group of Palestinian civil society organizations who were inspired by the international movement in the late 20th century that put pressure on South Africa to end its Apartheid system of racial stratification that relegated Black Africans to second-class citizenship. However, pressure to boycott Israeli-made goods had began as early as 2001, after the Second Palestinian Intifada broke out.

The movement calls for [supporters to refuse](#) to buy Israeli goods or goods made by companies that operate in the West Bank or East Jerusalem, to pressure companies to divest from operations in those territories, and to pressure governments to put sanctions on Israel to pressure it into changing its policies that go against international law, such as the evictions of Palestinian families and construction of settler colonies in the territories.

In recent years, [an anti-BDS movement](#) has emerged claiming that [BDS is anti-Semitic](#), and a number of laws in US states and other countries bar government institutions or officials from supporting BDS. BDS supporters reject the claim their movement is anti-Semitic, saying they are protesting policies of the Israeli state, and not Jews nor Judaism.

Recently, independent journalist [Abby Martin won](#) a federal court case in Georgia, successfully challenging a 2016 law that would have required her to forswear boycotting the state of Israel as a condition of her participation at a Georgia Southern University event. The court found that her boycott is protected speech, and that the government had no basis to compel speech from her in the form of an oath.

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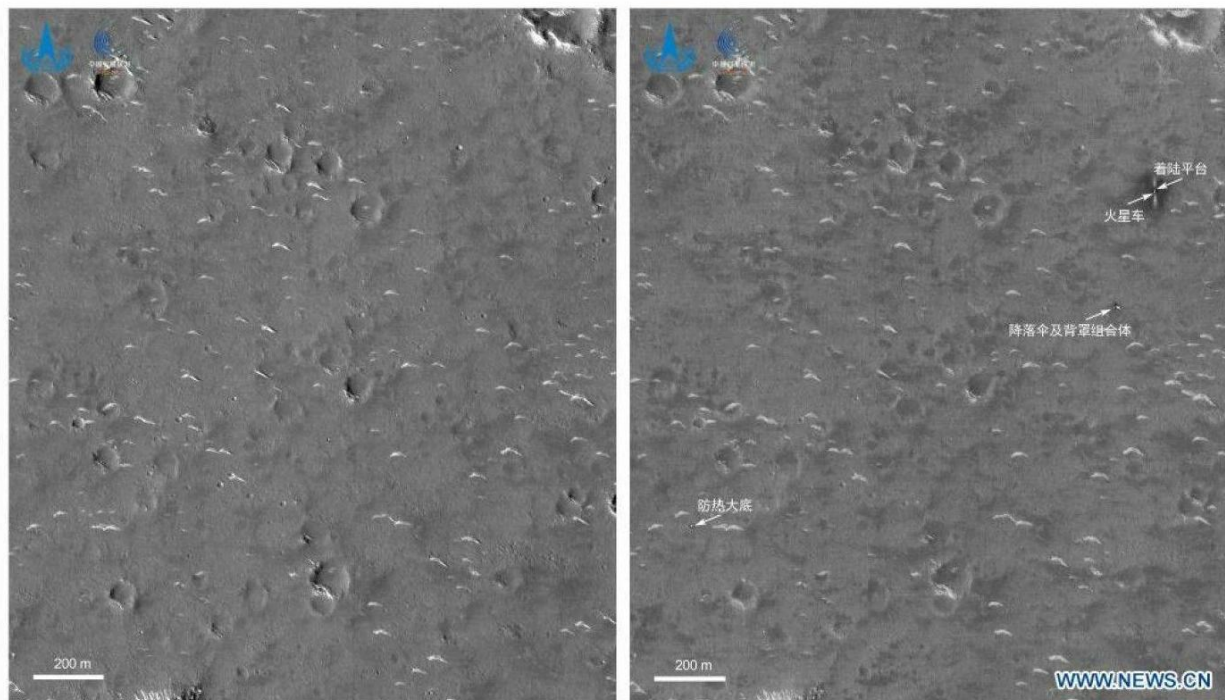
Photo: Chinese Space Agency's Tianwen-1 Reveals Satellite Snapshots of Mars Lander's Site by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Earlier this year, three human spacecraft arrived in Mars orbit, two of which were national firsts: the United Arab Emirates' Hope orbiter and China's Tianwen-1 orbiter and lander. Another US

lander, Perseverance, also arrived and brought a small helicopter to test flying about the thin Martian atmosphere.

The China National Space Administration has released a new image on Monday, showing the location on the Martian surface where its Tianwen-1 probe landed last month.

According to [Xinhua News Agency](#), the photo was taken on June 2 by the Tianwen-1 orbiter and shows the part of Utopia Planitia, a vast, 3,300-kilometer-wide impact basin in Mars' northern hemisphere surrounding where the probe's [lander set down](#) on May 15.



[CHINA NATIONAL SPACE ADMINISTRATION](#)

A new image released by the China National Space Administration (CNSA), taken by a high-resolution camera installed on the orbiter of Tianwen-1 at 6 p.m. on June 2 (Beijing Time), shows the landing platform and the Zhurong Mars rover on the Martian surface. The CNSA on Monday released a new image taken by the Tianwen-1 probe, showing the country's first Mars rover and its landing platform on the red planet's surface.

According to CNSA, the two bright spots in the top-right of the image are the Tianwen-1 landing platform, which had no specific name, and the [Zhurong Mars rover](#). The three spacecraft are China's first orbiter, lander and rover, respectively, to successfully arrive at the Red Planet.

"The dark area surrounding the landing platform might be caused by the influence of the engine plume during landing. The symmetrical bright stripes in the north-south direction of the landing platform might be from fine dust when the landing platform emptied the remaining fuel after landing," [CNSA explained](#). "The bright spots in the center of the image are the back cover of the entry capsule and the parachute jettisoned during the landing. Another bright spot in the lower left of the image is the heat shield of the entry capsule."

The mission is aimed at studying the atmosphere, surface, geological characteristics, and features of the Red Planet's magnetic field. As of June 7, Zhurong has been on the Martian

surface for 24 Martian days, which are about 40 minutes longer than Earth days. Its battery has approximately 90 days' worth of power.

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Fisher-Price Recalls Controversial Baby Soother After Four Infant Deaths
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Between April 2019 and February 2020, at least four infants died in incidents linked to Fisher Price's '4-in-1 Rock 'n Glide Soother.' In all four cases, the babies were unrestrained and initially placed on their backs, but were later found on their stomachs.

The US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and Fisher-Price [have announced](#) a recall of the company's '4-in-1 Rock 'n Glide Soother' and '2-in-1 Soothe 'n Play Glider' over deaths associated with the former product.

"These types of incidents are heart-breaking," acting CPSC Chairman Robert Adler said in a quoted statement. "Loving parents put their babies in these products never expecting a tragedy. Inclined products, such as gliders, soothers, rockers and swings are not safe for infant sleep, due to the risk of suffocation."

The four infant deaths linked to the '4-in-1 Rock 'n Glide Soother' include a four-month-old from Missouri; a 2-month-old from Michigan; a 2-month-old from Nevada; and an 11-week old from Colorado.

No fatalities have been reported in association with the '2-in-1 Sooth 'n Play Glider.'

The two products have also been recalled [in Canada](#).

Some 120,000 '4-in-1 Rock 'n Glide Soothers' have been sold in the US, and another 25,000 were sold in Canada. As for the '2-in-1 Soothe 'n Play Gliders,' approximately 55,000 have been sold in the US, and around 27,000 were sold in Canada.

Per the recall, consumers are eligible for a refund.

"There is nothing more important to Fisher-Price than the safety of our products and the trust that families put in us," Chuck Scothton, General Manager of Fisher-Price, said in a quoted statement. "We are committed to educating parents and caregivers on the safe use of all of our products, including the importance of following all warnings and instructions to ensure the health and safety of babies and children."

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NATO Chief Says Dialogue With Russia Not a Sign of Weakness
by [Evan Craighead](#)

It was announced earlier Monday that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will accompany the upcoming bilateral meeting between US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir

Putin in Geneva, Switzerland. Prior to the June 16 summit, Biden will meet with members of the NATO mutual defense alliance.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Monday that he and Biden came to a consensus that efforts to contain Russia must continue alongside pushes for dialogue.

"We ... discussed Russia. We agree on the dual-track approach meaning deterrence, defense and dialogue with Russia," Stoltenberg expressed after his meeting with the US president.

"Dialogue with Russia is not a sign of weakness."

"We are strong, we are united and then we can talk to Russia. We need to talk to Russia," he added. "Even if we don't believe in a better relationship with Russia we need to manage [the] difficult relationship with Russia – arms control, transparency, risk reductions. All of these issues are important."

"I welcomed the extension of START III," referring to the bilateral nuclear disarmament treaty between the [US and Russia](#). The treaty - extended in February - is now set to end in February 2026.

Stoltenberg and Biden also touched on international terrorism, climate change, cyber threats and China.

"The rise of China poses some opportunities for our economies for trade and we need to engage with China on issues like climate change and arms control," he said, emphasizing that China does not share NATO's values so the alliance must work with Pacific allies, primarily Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and Japan, to curb Beijing's economic growth and investment in advanced military capabilities.

According to the NATO chief, matters related to China will be addressed again when NATO leaders meet with Biden.

Stoltenberg's comments come days after he advocated for NATO to take a "dual-track approach to Russia."

[Stoltenberg: NATO Does Not See China as Adversary, Will Include Beijing in New Strategy](#)

"I cannot tell you today what the language will be and the precise formulations will be in the new Strategic Concept which we will then start to draft after [the summit](#) in a few days' time," the NATO chief said during a virtual panel organized by the Brookings Institution.

"That will be a process where all allies will be involved, but I sense and I know that there is very broad support in NATO for what we refer to as the dual-track approach to Russia."

Stoltenberg has also said NATO is currently pursuing a "deterrence and dialogue" approach to Russia.

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Watch: Boeing MQ-25 Drone Refuels US Navy Super Hornet in Historic Test by [Evan Craighead](#)

Back in 2018, the US Navy awarded Boeing an \$805 million contract to design, develop, test and deliver four MQ-25A Stingray drones. At the time, the service estimated that the carrier-based, unmanned aerial vehicles would achieve initial operational capability

US Naval Air Systems Command and Boeing announced on Monday that their T-1 prototype of the US Navy's [MQ-25A Stingray](#) successfully completed the service's first mid-air refueling of a fighter jet via drone.

The first-of-its-kind test took place at the MidAmerica Airport in Mascoutah, Illinois, last week. Video published this week shows the prototype drone refueling a F/A-18 Super Hornet. The Stingray is seen extending its hose and drogue to deliver fuel to the fighter jet. The maneuver in question required as little as 20 feet (6.1 meters) of separation between the drone and the Super Hornet's refueling probe.

"This team of professionals was integral in the successful flight," said Rear Adm. Brian Corey, overseer of the Program Executive Office for Unmanned Aviation and Strike Weapons. "Over the next few years, we will work side-by-side with Boeing to deliver this capability that will greatly enhance the future carrier air wing."

The successful test came after some 25 test flights with the T-1 prototype. Additional tests are expected to take place later this year.

"This history-making event is a credit to our joint Boeing and Navy team that is all-in on delivering MQ-25's critical aerial refueling capability to the fleet as soon as possible," Leanne Caret, president and CEO of Boeing Defense, Space and Security, said in a [quoted statement](#). The US Navy is set to procure 72 MQ-25As for approximately \$1.3 billion.

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Stormy Daniels Says She Would 'Love' to Testify Against Trump Organization in NY State Probe by [Evan Craighead](#)

It was reported earlier this week that Jeff McConney, senior vice president and controller of the Trump Organization, testified before a special grand jury amid the Manhattan District Attorney's investigation into possible criminal charges against the company, related executives, or even former US President Donald Trump himself.

Stormy Daniels - real name Tiffany Clifford - revealed on Monday that she is willing to cooperate with an ongoing probe by the office of Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Roberts Jr.

"I would tell them everything I know. I would tell them that I was approached," Daniels told CNN on Monday, emphasizing that she has not been contacted to testify.

"I would tell them that I have evidence that the money came from an account set up by Donald Trump or at the direction of Donald Trump," she added.

Daniels, an adult film star, notoriously received a \$130,000 payment from Trump's former longtime lawyer, Michael Cohen, in an alleged hush deal prior to the 2016 US presidential election.

The Trump Organization later reimbursed Cohen for said payment.

Daniels has maintained that she had a one-night stand with Trump.

"I've been very forthcoming since the beginning of all this that I would love nothing more than my day in court and to give a deposition and to provide whatever evidence that they need from me," she said.

"You know, I have all the original forms and e-mails and wire transcripts and all of that stuff, and I'm happy to turn it over to the — anybody who needs it, honestly."

The DA's investigation comes in coordination with an overlapping inquiry launched by New York Attorney General Letitia James.

The probe is said to be investigating the Trump Organization, and its executives, in both a "civil capacity," as well as a "criminal capacity."

Prosecutors, in part, are seeking answers regarding whether the Trump Organization artificially inflated the value of its properties to both lenders and insurers.

The probe will also focus on whether the company offered its employees benefits, rather than higher salaries, in an attempt to dodge taxes.

Trump previously responded to reports of the grand jury's seating, dubbing the ongoing proceedings as "a continuation of the greatest Witch Hunt in American history."

"This is purely political, and an affront to the almost 75 million voters who supported me in the Presidential Election, and it's being driven by highly partisan Democrat prosecutors," Trump remarked late last month.

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'We Turned the Tables': US Recovers 'Majority' of Colonial Pipeline Ransom From Hackers by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The ransomware attack on the Colonial Pipeline in early May prompted several setbacks, including a severe gas shortage along the majority of the US East Coast. The pipeline serves as a critical part of the US petroleum infrastructure in the nation.

The US Department of Justice announced on Monday that investigators recovered millions of dollars in cryptocurrency that was paid to the DarkSide hacking group whose cyberattack shuttered Colonial Pipeline operations.

US Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco [declared](#) at a news conference that the agency had "found and recaptured the majority of the ransom Colonial paid to the DarkSide Network."

"Ransomware attacks are always unacceptable, but when they target critical infrastructure, we will spare no effort in our response. ... Today, we turned the tables on DarkSide," Monaco remarked. "This work is important, because every day, the digital threats we face are more diverse, more sophisticated and more dangerous."

Approximately 63.7 Bitcoins were seized by officials, an amount valued at about \$2.3 million. Citing individuals who were briefed on the development, CNN [earlier reported](#) that the US Department of Justice would be making an official announcement on the matter later Monday. It was noted that the recovery operation was led by the FBI in cooperation with the pipeline's operators.

Although pipeline officials had initially stated they [did not intend](#) to pay DarkSide's ransom, it was later revealed by Colonial Pipeline CEO Joseph Blount that the company did fork over some [\\$ 4.4 million](#) to the cybercriminal group.

However, in that fund exchange, US investigators reportedly used the opportunity to track the payment to a cryptocurrency wallet being used by DarkSide.

Sources informed the outlet that investigators with the FBI had been trying to examine the hacking group's "operational or personal security" in order to pinpoint the identities of the individuals responsible for the cyberattack.

It's worth noting that officials did underscore that the federal government's efforts to amend such actions by cybercriminals is not always possible. "It will take improved defenses, breaking up the profitability of ransomware and directed action on the attackers to make this stop," one of the sources remarked.

In the wake of the May cyberattack, Americans all along the US East Coast experienced an extensive gas shortage for a period of days, even after the pipeline [restarted](#) its operations. At the height of the shortage, the national average for gas prices topped out at \$3 per gallon for the first time in years.

As a response to attack, the Biden administration [announced](#) that it would be implementing a series of new [cybersecurity requirements](#) for the pipeline industry that would force companies to report any cyberattack directly to federal authorities. Prior to the order, such reports were only on a voluntary basis.

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US Lawmaker Accuses Investigator of 'Unlawfully Sneaking' Into His Home to Serve Capitol Riot Suit

by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Since the Capitol riot, various investigations, congressional hearings and arrests have taken place amid attempts by authorities to seek justice over the crimes that unfolded as thousands of Trump supporters stormed the US Capitol. Amid those proceedings has been an effort to serve one lawmaker for allegedly playing a role in the day's events.

US Rep. Mo Brooks (R-AL) recently claimed that an effort by congressional Democrats to serve him with a lawsuit saw a hired private investigator "unlawfully sneaking" into his Alabama home over the weekend.

Brooks initially took to Twitter on Friday to share a mock wanted advertisement with his photo in a bid to ridicule US Rep. Eric Swalwell's (D-CA) effort to serve Brooks with a lawsuit stemming from his appearance at the January 6 rally that preceded the Capitol riot.

However, come Sunday, Brooks got served, and he later took to Twitter once again to announce the development while also claiming that the prosecutor snuck into his home in Alabama, when he handed the legal documents to Brooks' wife, Martha.

"Well, Swalwell FINALLY did his job, served complaint (on my WIFE)," the congressman [wrote](#). "HORRIBLE Swalwell's team committed a CRIME by unlawfully sneaking INTO MY HOUSE & accosting my wife!"

Brooks added that the alleged offense was a criminal trespass, which in the state of Alabama amounts to a year in jail and a \$6,000 fine.

Clay Mills, a spokesperson for Brooks, subsequently [informed](#) the Washington Post that the lawmaker had also filed a complaint with local police officials over the alleged infraction, noting that the private investigator “entered” the home without Martha’s “knowledge and without her consent.”

The spokesperson further stated that the individual “refused to leave when Mrs. Brooks demanded it,” and that there is “video proof” of the incident. In a statement to local outlet AL.com, Brooks relayed that his wife intends to have the server arrested after the individual is “[properly identified](#).”

Brooks’ wife has told the media that she had repeatedly “screamed” at the server to leave the grounds after he entered the garage to serve the legal paperwork.

Philip Andonian, an attorney for Swalwell, has rejected the allegations made by Brooks, [telling CNN](#) on Sunday that the claim is “completely untrue” as “no one entered or even attempted to enter the Brooks house.”

“A process server lawfully served the papers on Mo Brooks’ wife, as the federal rules allow. ... This was after her initial efforts to avoid service. Mo Brooks has no one but himself to blame for the fact that it came to this. We asked him to waive service, we offered to meet him at a place of his choosing,” the lawyer explained.

“Instead of working things out like a civilized person, he engaged in a juvenile game of Twitter trolling over the past few days and continued to evade service. He demanded that we serve him. We did just that.”

The [lawsuit](#) was originally filed on March 5 against Brooks, as well as former US President Donald Trump, his personal lawyer Rudolph Giuliani and his eldest son, Donald Jr. It alleges that the group “defiled” the “peaceful transfer of power.” While the fellow defendants waived service and filed motions in order to dismiss the complaint, Brooks refused to follow along.

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Opposite Day - Cartoon

Since parting with the White House, former US President Donald Trump has mostly stayed away from the spotlight, opting instead to release a variety of releases to the public through his post-presidency office. However, over the weekend, the former commander-in-chief made one of his first public appearances.

Although Trump’s remarks are often the cause of backlash or a series of Twitter threads, it appears his commentary at a weekend convention took a backseat once netizens began to question whether the former president was wearing his trousers backwards.

The [trouser inquiry](#) came as Trump gave a speech at the North Carolina Republican Party’s state convention on Saturday. For some, the location and shape of the wrinkles on the trousers were the source of the claims.

However, after a [lengthy examination](#) conducted by fact-checking website Snopes, it was soon determined that Trump did not have his pants on backwards, much to the [disappointment](#) of some netizens.

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US Centcom Claims China, Russia Trying to 'Exploit' Perceived Decline in American Footprint by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Headquartered in Florida's MacDill Air Force Base, the US Central Command is one of nine unified commands operating under the US Department of Defense. The branch oversees US military interests across much of the Middle East and Northeast Africa.

General Kenneth McKenzie, the commander of the US Central Command, recently claimed that both China and Russia have been attempting to bolster their global reach in areas where the US is seen as receding its presence.

The US commander made the remark on Monday during a [special briefing](#) with reporters that saw a wide variety of issues discussed, including the current status of the US troop removal from war-torn Afghanistan.

"It is evident that China and Russia are seeking greater influence and stronger ties to nations in the region. Both nations try to exploit any perceived decline in US engagement to opportunistically establish and strengthen relationships," McKenzie told reporters, before offering vague details on the matter.

"China engaged with nearly every country in the region in 2020, using exploitative debt traps, the Belt and Road Initiative, and medical diplomacy with their vaccine, which has dubious efficacy, to try to expand its influence."

He added that Russia has been "equally disruptive in the region" as Moscow has allegedly engaged in "largely opportunistic and transactional" engagements.

"Russia seeks ways to position itself as an alternative to the West by offering to mediate regional conflicts, selling arms, offering military expertise, and participating in regional and multilateral organizations to advance their interests," McKenzie continued, touching on Russia's calls for Israeli and Palestinian officials to de-escalate amid recent deadly tensions in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

McKenzie did not further discuss the topic aside from stating that "nearly every country in the region" continues to regard the US as its "preferred partner." The official underscored that "this is true even among the states of Central Asia, where Russia and China have the benefit of proximity to support their efforts to expand their influence."

Apart from the US footprint receding in Afghanistan, it's unclear what "perceived decline" the commander was specifically referring to during the speaking engagement.

Incidentally, the statements came just days after a senior Pentagon official [warned](#) Middle Eastern countries against trying to see what they may be able to gain from the US by testing their own respective cooperation with Russia or China.

'Halfway Finished' With US Troop Removal From Afghanistan

As US military officials continue with troop removal operations, McKenzie revealed during the Monday briefing that the recalling of US soldiers is nearing the end.

“We’re about halfway finished with [removing US troops],” the commander remarked, before adding that ongoing efforts “are on pace and it’s continuing very smoothly.”

“It is our intention to continue to be able to go after [al-Qaeda] and [Daesh] from over the horizon, from other locations in the theater, and we’re working now with friends in the region to establish that capability as we go forward,” he noted.

McKenzie went on to state that US officials are in support of establishing an embassy in Afghanistan, but that such a measure would only be put forth “at the invitation of the Government of Afghanistan.”

The commander’s remark came ahead of statements from the Defense Department that [confirmed](#) the US is weighing the possibility of setting up basing options near Afghanistan in neighboring countries. It had been previously reported that the Biden administration was in talks with Pakistan.

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US to Maintain Sanctions on Iran Even in Case of Tehran’s Return to JCPOA - Blinken

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The United States will maintain “hundreds of sanctions” against Iran even in the event of Tehran’s return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during a congressional hearing on Tuesday.

“I would anticipate that even in the event of the return to compliance with the JCPOA, hundreds of sanctions will remain in place,” Blinken told the US Senate Appropriations Committee.

The Secretary of State pointed out that the sanctions include the restrictions imposed by the previous Trump administration.

“They will remain unless and until Iran behavior changes,” he said.

However, Blinken said the United States does not know Iran’s intentions with respect to the JCPOA.

“We will see if that actually materializes,” he said, adding that the United States’ responsibility in this case would be to lift restrictions in consistence with the JCPOA, but to “resolutely maintain” other sanctions.

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Colonial Pipeline CEO Admits Data Stolen in Ransomware Attack

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - Hackers behind last month’s ransomware attack on Colonial Pipeline stole multiple data from the company, but it was quickly retrieved, CEO Joseph Blount told a US Senate panel on Tuesday.

"As part of the ransomware note they tell you that they have encrypted information, that they have exfiltrated information. So we knew that they had exfiltrated information," Blount said in a testimony to the US Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. The ransomware attack caused a brief shutdown of the key pipeline transporting fuel to the US East Coast and forced Colonial to pay around \$4.4 million to the Darkside hacking group allegedly based in Russia in exchange for encryption tools. More than half of the sum was later retrieved by US law enforcement agencies.

Blount said that hackers stole "a lot of different type of materials" from the company's shared drive.

"The good news is it was retrieved very quickly. It was bright back in. We don't fully understand everything that is in it because where it has been held since it was retrieved. But we have people obviously involved in a combined process who have been looking very closely at that data," he added.

Blount said that the company works on that "very closely" with the FBI which continues the investigation.

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EU, US Will Work Together on Sanctions Against Human Rights Violators – Ambassador

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) – The European Union (EU) will work together with the US on sanctions against those who commit repression and human rights violations around the world, the EU Ambassador to the US Stavros Lambrinidis said on Tuesday ahead of the upcoming EU-US summit next week.

"Protecting people from war and repression, and working together [with US] on sanctions is going to be very important," Lambrinidis said during the event organized by the German Marshall Fund of the US. "You have to make sure that there can be a cost to be paid for that commitment [of human right violation] and that is where the European Union has come also recently in its own human rights sanctions regime that we applied first in the case of Navalny in Russia, but also in other countries."

Lambrinidis pointed out that the main idea behind sanctions is to send a strong message to those who are responsible for human rights violations as well as to impose a cost for it.

The EU-US summit is scheduled to take place on June 15 and will focus on a broad range of issues, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, response to common security threats, and climate change. US President Joe Biden is expected to take part in the summit as well as in the meeting with NATO member states' leaders the day before.

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US April International Trade Deficit Down 8% to \$68.9Bln - Commerce Dept

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The US international trade deficit fell by \$6.1 billion, or 8.0 percent, from a month earlier to reach \$68.9 billion in April, the Commerce Department's Bureau of Economic Analysis said on Tuesday.

"The deficit decreased from \$75 billion in March (revised) to \$68.9 billion in April, as exports increased and imports decreased," the BEA said in a statement.

It said exports in April were at \$205 billion, some \$2.3 billion higher than in March.

Imports were at \$273.9 billion, down \$3.8 billion from the previous month.

Economists polled by US media had forecast an international trade deficit of \$68.7 billion for April, putting the net deficit reported by the BEA virtually on target with expectations.

"The persistent US trade deficit is always negative for GDP but quarter on quarter can add or subtract depending upon and what it does over the three months," economist Greg Michalowski said in a commentary on ForexLive.

The US GDP grew by an annualized rate of 6.4 percent in the first quarter of 2021, after contracting by 3.5 percent for all of 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

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Biden Welcomes 'Historic' Decision to Uphold Conviction of Ratko Mladic

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden on Tuesday praised the United Nations for affirming former Bosnian Serb military chief Ratko Mladic's conviction for war crimes committed in Srebrenica over two decades ago.

"Almost twenty-six years ago, Ratko Mladic ordered the summary execution of some 8,000 unarmed men and boys in Srebrenica," Biden said in a statement. "Today, the United Nations International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals in The Hague affirmed his conviction for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. This historic judgment shows that those who commit horrific crimes will be held accountable."

Biden said he hopes leaders in the Balkans region will respect the conviction and reinforce its importance for the rule of law.

Mladic served as the commander of the army of Republika Srpska during the 1992-1995 conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He was arrested by the Serbian authorities in 2011 after fleeing international justice for 16 years. In November 2017, the UN Criminal Tribunal in The Hague convicted Mladic of war crimes that date back to the 1992-1995 conflict, including for his role in the Srebrenica massacre, which saw many Bosnian Muslims killed. Mladic was sentenced to life in prison.

In August 2018, Mladic's lawyers filed a complaint against the life sentence with the appeals chamber, and the first appeal hearings were held two years later. Mladic's lawyers and family repeatedly emphasized that the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia does not provide them with information on the health condition of the general, while doctors in the remand center in The Hague do not provide proper treatment.

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US to Fight 'Unfair Competition,' Review of Trade Ties With China - White House

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The United States will fight any unfair foreign competition that hurts its supply chains, review its trade with China and work on restoring critical industries hobbled by unfair practices, the White House said on Tuesday.

"While fair competition from abroad is welcome, too often unfair foreign subsidies and other trade practices have adversely impacted US manufacturing and more broadly, US competitiveness," the White House said in a statement. "The US government must implement a comprehensive strategy to push back on unfair foreign competition that erodes the resilience of US critical supply chains and industries."

While the statement did not directly blame China for unfair trade practices, it said "supply chain resilience should be incorporated into the US trade policy approach toward China, including in the ongoing review of US-China trade policy."

On a broader scale, the Biden administration needs to develop a comprehensive strategy to support US competitiveness and said it would "also examine existing US trade agreements to identify ways to strengthen collective supply chain resilience," the statement said.

The White House said these efforts were critical because, as the coronavirus pandemic and resulting economic crisis have shown, structural weaknesses in both domestic and international supply chains threatened US economic and national security.

"While amplified by the public health and economic crisis, decades of underinvestment and public policy choices led to fragile supply chains across a range of sectors and products," the statement said. "Unfair trade practices by competitor nations and private sector and public policy prioritization of low-cost labor, just-in-time production, consolidation, and private sector focus on short-term returns over long-term investment have hollowed out the US industrial base, siphoned innovation from the United States, and stifled wage and productivity growth."

The US Senate is expected to approve by vote later on Tuesday a bill providing more than \$200 billion in funds to help American technology companies to take on the competition from China in an intensifying showdown between the two world powers amid the global shortage of microchips.

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Fauci Urges Americans to Get Vaccinated as Indian 'Delta' Variant Cases Rise in UK

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The rapid rise of the Indian 'Delta' variant of the coronavirus in the UK demonstrates why it is so important for Americans to get vaccinated sooner rather than later as the variant emerges in the US, National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID) Director Anthony Fauci said during a White House COVID team briefing on Tuesday.

"Now what about what's going on in the UK, and why should we learn lessons from this, and always getting back to the situation of why it's so important to be vaccinated. In the UK, the Delta variant is rapidly emerging as the dominant variant, greater than 60 percent... That variant currently accounts for more than 6 percent of the sequenced cases in the United States. This is a situation the way it was in England where they had the [Alpha] dominant and then the [Delta] took over," Fauci said.

Cases of the new variant have been confirmed in 60 countries. The Delta strain has increased transmissibility and hospitalization risk, as well as reduced vaccine effectiveness for those who have only received one dose.

Three weeks after receiving an initial dose of either the Pfizer or AstraZeneca vaccine, the effectiveness is only 33 percent against the Delta variant, whereas it was roughly 50 percent for the original Alpha variant. Receiving two doses of a Pfizer or AstraZeneca vaccine, however, increases the effectiveness against the Delta variant to 88 percent and 60 percent respectively.

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Colonial Pipeline CEO Says Personally Decided to Pay Ransom, Keep It Confidential

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - Colonial Pipeline CEO Joseph Blount told a US Senate panel on Tuesday that he personally made a decision to pay ransom to hackers and keep it confidential seeking to restore the company's operations as soon as possible.

"I made the decision to pay and I made the decision to keep the information about the payment as confidential as possible. It was the hardest decision I made in my 39 years in the energy industry," Blount said in a testimony to the US Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

The ransomware attack caused a brief shutdown of the key pipeline transporting fuel to the US East Coast and forced Colonial to pay around \$4.4 million to Darkside hacking group allegedly based in Russia in exchange for encryption tools. Over half of the sum was later retrieved by US law enforcement agencies.

Blount said the decision to start negotiating with the hackers was made hours after the attack with ransom paid the following day. "I know how critical our pipeline is to the country and I put the interest of the country first," he said.

Blount acknowledged that the US government's general recommendation in such cases is not to pay ransom.

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Biden Effort to Boost US Supply Chains Includes \$4Bln For Food Supply - Agriculture Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) – A Biden administration initiative to address supply chain disruptions that surfaced during the pandemic includes \$4 billion to strengthen food production and distribution, the Agriculture Department (USDA) said on Tuesday.

“USDA will invest more than \$4 billion to strengthen the food system, support food production, improved processing, investments in distribution and aggregation, and market opportunities,” a USDA press release said.

The pandemic led to massive disruptions for growers and food workers, exposing a “food system that was rigid, consolidated, and fragile,” Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said in the release.

The release cited the need for “immediate action” to invest in additional meat processing capacity in small- and mid-size firms, where disruptions hit an industry dominated by a handful of large producers – several forced to temporarily close when their workforces became infected with COVID-19.

The \$4 billion is part of a larger \$17 billion initiative announced earlier by the White House. In addition to food, the effort targets disruptions in a number of critical industries, including semiconductors, battery production for electric cars, pharmaceuticals and other medical supplies.

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URGENT Biden Welcomes 'Historic' Decision to Uphold Conviction of Mladic

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“Almost twenty-six years ago, Ratko Mladic ordered the summary execution of some 8,000 unarmed men and boys in Srebrenica,” Biden said in a statement. “Today, the United Nations International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals in The Hague affirmed his conviction for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. This historic judgment shows that those who commit horrific crimes will be held accountable.”

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Canada's Trudeau Calls Car Crash That Killed Members of Muslim Family 'Terrorist Attack'

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Tuesday denounced the car crash in the Canadian city of London in Southwestern Ontario that resulted in the death of four members of a Muslim family, calling it a “terrorist attack.”

“This was a terrorist attack, motivated by hatred, in the heart of one of our communities,” Trudeau said in a statement in the House of Commons about the June 6 attack in London.

The Prime Minister added that Canada still has work to do in addressing various forms of prejudice.

On Sunday evening, a pickup truck plowed into a family killing four and leaving one surviving victim in hospital with serious but non-life-threatening injuries.

Police said the perpetrator, Nathaniel Veltman, 20, acted with intent and has been charged with four counts of first-degree murder and one count of attempted murder.

However, police have said that there is no information so far that indicated Veltman was affiliated with any specific hate group.

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Blinken Says US Still Has Opportunity to Deal With Nord Stream 2 Pipeline

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a congressional hearing on Tuesday that finishing the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipelines differs from making it operational, and warned that Washington still has opportunities to deal with those who grant operations permits.

"There is a difference between the physical completion of the pipeline and it becoming operational, actually has flowing through it. We are still working on that," Blinken said. "We also of course have opportunities going forward to deal with those who would provide insurance or rather permits for the pipeline to actually become operational. We continue to believe it's a bad idea."

Blinken added that Washington wants to make sure that Europeans take the necessary steps to protect and mitigate any of the adverse consequences of gas going through the pipeline.

Under ex-President Donald Trump, the United States imposed several rounds of sanctions on Nord Stream 2 AG, the Swiss-based operator of the project, and a number of companies that worked on the pipeline's construction.

In May, the Biden administration announced that it would waive sanctions on the pipeline's operator, as well as its chief executive Matthias Warnig, as part of efforts to repair the damage done to US-Europe relations while Trump was in office.

Speaking at SPIEF's plenary session on Friday, Russian President Vladimir Putin stressed that Nord Stream 2 was a purely economic project, adding that he expected the pipeline to be completed and operational in the near future.

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Colonial's Cyber-Defenses Were in Place, But Compromised in Ransomware Attack - CEO

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - Colonial Pipeline has cyber-defense systems in place but they were compromised in a ransomware attack, the US company's CEO Joseph Blount said on Tuesday.

"We had cyber-defenses in place but the unfortunate reality is that those defenses were compromised," Blount told US Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs in a testimony.

He said that hackers from the Darkside group encrypted the company's IT systems by exploiting "the legacy VPN profile that was not intended to be in use."

The ransomware attack caused a brief shutdown of the key pipeline transporting fuel to the US East Coast and forced Colonial to pay around \$4.4 million to hackers allegedly based in Russia in exchange for encryption tools.

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Biden Admin Asks Congress at least \$50Bln to Restore US Microchips Supply

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration said on Tuesday it will be asking Congress for at least \$50 billion to restore the supply of semiconductors disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic, and tens of billions more in spending to boost the electric vehicle industry and fix other broken supply chains.

"We recommend Congress support at least \$50 billion in investments to advance domestic manufacturing of critical semiconductors and promote semiconductor R&D," the White House said in a statement.

It said it will also request that Congress authorize new and expanded incentives to spur consumer adoption of US-made electric vehicles (EVs).

"We recommend Congress support \$5 billion in investments to electrify the federal fleet with US-made EVs, and \$15 billion in infrastructure investment to build out a national charging infrastructure to facilitate the adoption of EVs," the White House said.

Over the longer term, US supply chains have to be monitored and fixed as needed by the Department of Commerce to ensure their resilience, it said.

"We recommend Congress enact a Supply Chain Resilience Program at DOC to create a focal point within the government to monitor and address supply chain challenges," the White House said. "This program should be backed with \$50 billion to make transformative investments in strengthening U.S. supply chains across a range of critical products."

Consultancy firm McKinsey has estimated the cost of global disruption to industries from the pandemic at \$16 trillion and says that a total of \$357 billion needs to be spent over the next decade on preparations that include pathogen surveillance, global immunization and medical supply stockpiles for countries to reduce the likelihood of such supply breakdown.

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US Government Moves to Develop New Lithium Battery, Secure Supplies – Energy Department

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) – The US Department of Energy announced on Tuesday a new strategy to secure the domestic supply chain in materials and technology for making advanced batteries.

"The US Department of Energy today announced new immediate policy actions to scale up a domestic manufacturing supply chain for advanced battery materials and technologies," the department said in a press release.

The new actions include strengthening domestic manufacturing requirements in federally-funded grants, cooperative agreements, and research and development (R&D) contracts and releasing a national blueprint to develop a domestic advanced battery supply chain, the department said.

"We're going to need a significant increase in battery production to supercharge America's clean energy future, which means we urgently need to build up our capacity to research, develop, manufacture, and market batteries right here at home," Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm said in the release.

The Federal Consortium for Advanced Batteries (FCAB) released on Tuesday its national Blueprint for Lithium Batteries 2021-2030 and the Energy Department is also providing financing to the advanced battery supply chain for electric vehicles, the release noted.

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US Marines Order Nearly \$495M in Maintenance Work on Tactical Equipment – Raytheon

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) – The US Marine Corps has ordered almost half a billion dollars in additional maintenance for its combat and tactical ground equipment in a new contract, Raytheon Intelligence & Space announced on Tuesday.

"Raytheon Intelligence & Space... [will provide] Technologies equipment under a five-year, \$495 million contract," the company said in a press release. "The company will deliver more than 10,000 repaired parts per year to sustain the Marines' combat and tactical ground equipment." The equipment to be maintained under the contract includes armored vehicles, ground radars and communications systems, Raytheon said.

The contract is an expansion of work that Raytheon has supported for 17 years and it nearly doubles the anticipated amount of equipment being managed and expands the company's support to every major Marine Corps installation in the world, the release said.

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Canada's Trudeau Calls Car Crash That Killed Members of Muslim Family 'Terrorist Attack'

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"This was a terrorist attack, motivated by hatred, in the heart of one of our communities," Trudeau said in a statement in the House of Commons on the June 6 attack in London, Ontario.

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UNSC Recommends to Appoint Guterres for 2nd Term as Secretary-General - Source

UNITED NATIONS, June 7 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council recommended Antonio Guterres to be appointed as the Secretary-General for the second four-year term starting January 2022, a diplomatic source told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"The Security Council recommended to the General Assembly to appoint Guterres for a second term of office from 1 January 2022," the source said.

The UN Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly based on the recommendation of the UN Security Council.

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Paul Whelan's Brother Says Unsure Whether Biden-Putin Meeting Would Lead to Release

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) – The family of US citizen and ex-marine Paul Whelan, who is serving a 16-year prison sentence for espionage in Russia, would welcome the discussion of his

case during the upcoming Russia-US summit, but doubts it will happen, his brother David Whelan told Sputnik.

"Obviously, I would welcome any discussion of Paul's case if it will lead to his freedom but it is hard to know whether a discussion of Russian convicts in the United States and Americans held in Russia would include Paul's wrongful detention," David Whelan said.

The Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov did not rule out on Monday that Russian and US Presidents Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden could touch upon Russians convicted in the US and Americans convicted in Russia at their meeting, scheduled for June 16.

David Whelan noted that he saw Peskov's comments.

"Perhaps someone will ask President Putin and President Biden at any media availability at the summit for details about what prisoners and how their imprisonment might be resolved," he said. Whelan, who is also a citizen of Canada, Ireland and the United Kingdom, was arrested in Russia in December 2018. A Moscow court sentenced him to a 16-year prison term for espionage last June. Whelan, however, has denied the charges and insisted that he came to Russia for a friend's wedding. Court papers have revealed that he had frequented Russia since 2007.

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UN Calls Discovery of Mass Grave of Indigenous Children in Canada 'Shocking'

UNITED NATIONS, June 7 (Sputnik) - The United Nations found the discovery of the remains of over 200 indigenous children at a former residential school in Canada shocking, the spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"The discovery of 215 bodies of indigenous children near a residential school in Kamloops, B.C. is shocking and re-opens painful wounds," the spokesperson said. "These events provide momentum to reinvigorate the implementation of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019)."

The Tk'emlups te Secwepemc First Nation announced last month that a deep scan of the Kamloops Indian Residential School site with ground-penetrating radar confirmed the discovery of 215 children's remains, with some of the deceased being as young as three years old.

According to Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, released in 2015, roughly 150,000 aboriginal children were forcibly assimilated through the residential schools, such as Kamloops, from 1883 to 1998, in a process equated to "cultural genocide."

The report discovered that around 3,200 died in the schools, with the greatest number of deaths taking place before 1940. Schools also had high rates of tuberculosis and other health incidences in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with death rates remaining high until the 1950s.

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Over 30 US, Russian Groups, Figures Appeal to Putin, Biden to Reduce Nuclear War Risk

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - Several dozen of US and Russian organizations and ex-officials have jointly called on Russian and US Presidents, Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden, ahead of their summit next week to take steps to decrease the threat of nuclear war, advocacy group Arms Control Association announced in a release on Tuesday.

"In advance of the first summit between Presidents Vladimir Putin and Joseph R. Biden in Geneva on June 16, a group of more than 30 American and Russian organizations, international nuclear policy experts, and former senior officials have issued an appeal to the two Presidents calling upon them to launch a regular dialogue on strategic stability, to take meaningful steps to reduce the risk of nuclear war, and to make further progress on nuclear arms control and disarmament," the release said.

The appeal was initiated by the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, the Pugwash Conference on Science and Global Affairs, and the Arms Control Association, according to the release.

The other co-signers of the call are former Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, former US Secretary of Defense William J. Perry, president of the Nuclear Threat Initiative Joan Rohlfing, former Governor of California Edmund G. Brown, as well as former chief of staff of Russian Strategic Missile Forces Colonel General Victor Esin.

"We appeal to you to show the same courage and sense of urgency again when you meet in Geneva. Specifically, we urge you to: Reaffirm the joint statement of Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan: 'A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought,'" the appeal said.

"Commit to a bilateral strategic dialogue that is regular, frequent, comprehensive and result oriented leading to further reduction of the nuclear risk hanging over the world and to the re-discovery of the road to a world free of nuclear weapons."

The Association noted that the statement has already been delivered to both governments on June 7.

In their statement, the signatories expressed hope that the upcoming meeting will contribute to rebuilding mutual respect and cooperation between Moscow and Washington.

They stressed that since the Soviet-US alliance defeated fascism in 1945, Russian and US leaders "have several times channeled the courage to work together to put an end to the greatest risk facing humanity."

"In their cooperation to create the 1968 Nonproliferation Treaty, your predecessors limited the spread of the most dangerous weapons ever invented and committed to their ultimate elimination," the appeal said.

The signatories underscored that bilateral treaties have reduced the number of such weapons by more than 85 percent.

They also praised in the appeal the decision of the two presidents to extend the New START Treaty.

White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said earlier that Putin and Biden are expected to discuss a wide range of bilateral issues related to strategic stability and arms control, including recent cybercrime activity from hacking groups.

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Nearly 4,000 Children Separated From Parents at Border Under Trump Order - DHS

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - Almost 4,000 minors were separated from their families as a result of an executive order issued by former US President Donald Trump, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) revealed in a release on Tuesday.

"In close coordination with NGOs, the Task Force has identified 3,913 children who were separated from their families at the U.S.-Mexico Border between July 1, 2017 and January 20, 2021, based on the 'Zero-Tolerance' policy," DHS said in a press release.

The release was released in connection with the Family Reunification Task Force providing its Initial Progress Report to President Joe Biden.

"Through the support of NGOs, 1,779 children were reunified with their parents in the United States under past court orders," the DHS said in the release. "Over the last 30 days, through the Task Force and NGO coordination, 7 additional children were reunited with their parents, bringing the total number of reunified children to 1,786. There are 2,127 children for whom the Task Force does not have a confirmed record of reunification."

The DHS pointed out that additional reunifications are in process.

"The Task Force has also announced in its report the anticipated 29 additional families to be reunified in the United States in the coming weeks," the release said. "More reunifications are to follow, as nearly 50 requests have been filed with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)."

The DHS noted that 37 of these requests have been reviewed and granted humanitarian parole. "Once they enter the United States, these individuals will be allowed to remain for an initial 36-month period with the opportunity to apply for work authorization," it explained. "This includes individuals from the families who were reunited in May as well as the 29 families that will reunite in the weeks ahead."

President Joe Biden has consistently criticized the Trump administration's hardline immigration policies, especially the controversial zero-tolerance policy under which federal authorities separated children from their families after they illegally crossed the border.

Parents were sent to federal detention centers to await their court hearings while their children stayed in shelters operated by the Department of Health and Human Services. The policy was halted after generating massive backlash and legal defeats, but hundreds of migrant children reportedly still remain separated from their families.

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Biden Admin Securing Supply in Microchips and Other COVID-Hit Sectors - White House

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is taking action to restore supply in semiconductors and other key industries like large capacity batteries, critical minerals and pharmaceuticals which have experienced disruptions from the coronavirus pandemic, the White House announced on Tuesday.

The action is "the first step in a whole-of-government effort to strengthen domestic competitiveness and supply chain resilience", the White House said in a statement. "These efforts are critical because, as the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis have shown, structural weaknesses in both domestic and international supply chains threaten America's economic and national security."

On the microchip front, the Department of Commerce will bolster its partnership with industry to facilitate information flow between semiconductor producers and suppliers and end-users. "Building on the success of recent engagements with Japan and the Republic of Korea, including the announcement of more than \$17 billion in U.S. semiconductor investments by leading companies in ROK, the Administration will strengthen engagement with allies and partners to promote fair semiconductor chip allocations, increase production, and promote increased investment," the White House said.

The White House urged Congress to approve \$50 billion in investments in domestic semiconductor research and development and manufacturing.

"We recommend Congress support at least \$50 billion in investments to advance domestic manufacturing of critical semiconductors and promote semiconductor R&D," the White House said.

On the battery-making side, the Department of Energy will release a "National Blueprint for Lithium Batteries" that will codify the findings of the battery supply chain review in a 10-year, whole-of-government plan to urgently develop a domestic lithium battery supply chain that also aims to combat the climate crisis."

A funding of approximately \$17 billion will be made available under the Advanced Technology Vehicles Manufacturing Loan Program to support the domestic battery supply chain, the White House said.

On the critical minerals front, the Department of Interior, with the support of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, will establish a working group composed of agencies such as the Department of Agriculture and the Environmental Protection Agency to identify sites where critical minerals could be produced and processed in the United States.

Some \$3 billion in loan guarantees were already available to support the creation of efficient end-use energy technologies, such as mining, extraction, processing, recovery, or recycling technologies, of critical materials projects, the White House said.

On the pharmaceuticals end, the Department of Health and Human Services will utilize the Defense Production Act and build on current public-private partnerships to establish a public-private consortium for advanced manufacturing and onshoring of domestic essential medicines production.

"The consortium's first task will be to select 50-100 critical drugs, drawn from the Food and Drug Administration's essential medicines list, to be the focus of an enhanced onshoring effort," the White House said.

It said an initial commitment of approximately \$60 million will be devoted to develop novel platform technologies to increase domestic manufacturing capacity for active pharmaceutical ingredients, or API.

"Greater API production domestically will help reduce reliance on global supply chains for medications that are in shortage, particularly during times of increased public health need," the White House said.

Consultancy firm McKinsey has estimated the cost of global disruption to industries from the pandemic at \$16 trillion and says that a total of \$357 billion needs to be spent over the next decade on preparations that include pathogen surveillance, global immunization and medical supply stockpiles for countries to reduce the likelihood of such supply breakdown.

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US Afghan Withdrawal Now More Than Half Complete – Central Command

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) – The withdrawal of American forces and US allies from Afghanistan has passed the halfway point, Central Command (CENTCOM) said on Tuesday. "US Central Command estimates that we have completed greater than 50% of the entire retrograde process," CENTCOM said in a press release.

Since President Joe Biden's order to withdrawal by September 11, 2021, the 20th anniversary of the Al-Qaeda (banned in Russia) terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, the US Defense Department has retrograded the equivalent of approximately 500 C-17 cargo aircraft loads of material out of Afghanistan and has turned nearly 13,000 pieces of equipment to the Defense Logistics Agency for disposition, the release said.

Also, the US has officially handed over six facilities to the Afghan Ministry of Defense, with plans for additional transfers in support of Afghan defense forces working to defend the nation, the release added.

Future updates will exclude percentage estimates for operational security reasons, according to the release. However, media reports indicate the withdrawal is proceeding at a rate well ahead of levels needed to meet the September 11 deadline.

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US Capitol Police Acknowledge Need to Improve Intel Amid Senate Report on Capitol Riots

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The US Capitol Police (USPC) recognizes the need to boost their intelligence amid a damning report by bipartisan Senate committees, the service said in a statement on Tuesday.

The Capitol Attack Report, published on Tuesday by the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs and the Senate Committee on Rules has uncovered a string of intelligence and security failures leading up to and on January 6 that allowed Donald Trump's supporters to breach the Capitol building.

"As a consumer of federal intelligence, the Department leadership agrees improvements are needed specific to intelligence analysis and dissemination," the statement said. "Law enforcement agencies across the country rely on intelligence, and the quality of that intelligence can mean the difference between life and death. The USCP also acknowledges it must improve how it collects and shares intelligence with its own officers and stakeholders and has made significant changes since the attack on January 6."

The USCP also stressed in the statement that it receives intelligence from every federal agency, however, it did not get any actionable intelligence about a large-scale attack before January 6.

"Neither the USCP, nor the FBI, U.S. Secret Service, Metropolitan Police or our other law enforcement partners knew thousands of rioters were planning to attack the U.S. Capitol," it added. "The known intelligence simply didn't support that conclusion."

The storming became the worst attack on the Capitol in more than two centuries. It interrupted a session that was about to certify Joe Biden's presidential win, sending lawmakers scurrying for shelter as rioters entered the hallways and offices of Congresspeople.

In their 128-page joint report, the Senate Rules and Homeland Security committees established that the FBI, Department of Homeland Security and the US Capitol Police intelligence offices knew about preparations for violence weeks ahead of the attack — including the sharing of Capitol tunnel plans online — but they failed to convey the full scope of threat information they possessed to the USCP leadership.

As a result, the USCP did not have an operational plan for the storming. The USCP leadership also failed to provide front-line officers with protective equipment or training in basic civil disturbance tactics, while "opaque" processes at the USCP board slowed requests for the National Guard support. It began arriving more than four hours after barriers at the Capitol were breached.

As the attack unfolded, the USCP command system broke down spectacularly, leaving front-line officers without information or instructions, while senior officers were directly engaged with rioters and USCP leadership never took control of the radio system.

As one officer noted, "For hours the screams on the radio were horrific[,] the sights were unimaginable[,] and there was a complete loss of control... For hours NO Chief or above took command and control. Officers were begging and pleading for help for medical triage."

Officers said they did not recall hearing USCP chief Steven Sund on the radio at any point during the attack and only heard his deputy, Yogananda Pittman, once — when she ordered a lockdown of the Capitol building.

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RPT - Paul Whelan Needs Assistance in Preparing Clemency Documents

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - US citizen and ex-marine Paul Whelan, who is serving a 16-year prison sentence for espionage in Russia, would be grateful for assistance in preparing documents required for clemency, his brother David Whelan told Sputnik.

"I expect Paul would be grateful for assistance from someone in helping him seek clemency. Perhaps someone who speaks Russian and can order the documents from the Moscow courts," David Whelan said on Monday.

Paul Whelan asked Russian President Vladimir Putin for clemency twice, his brother noted, referring to his brother's conversations with parents.

"What happens to those letters once he gives them to a prison officer is unknown. Many letters Paul sends to family members never arrive either," David Whelan said.

David Whelan also expressed doubts that Russian and US Presidents will discuss this issue during their upcoming summit in Geneva next week.

"I do not expect any decisions related to Paul's wrongful detention to come out of next week's summit. I am glad for both the US and the Russian Federation that President Putin and President Biden will have an opportunity to meet," he said.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said last week on Paul Whelan's letters about clemency that there was a special procedure for this, and that the Kremlin does not comment on other appeals.

Whelan, who is also a citizen of Canada, Ireland and the United Kingdom, was arrested in Russia in December 2018. A Moscow court sentenced him to a 16-year prison term for espionage last June. Whelan, however, has denied the charges and insisted that he came to Russia for a friend's wedding. Court papers have revealed that he had frequented Russia since 2007.

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RPT - US Pursuing Basing Agreements With Afghanistan's Neighbors - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The United States is pursuing basing options with Afghanistan's neighbors after US troops withdraw from that country but there is nothing to announce at present, a Defense Department spokesperson told Sputnik.

US media reported on Sunday that Biden administration officials are in discussions with Pakistani officials to secure bases close to Afghanistan for future operations. The CIA had used a base in Pakistan to execute drone strikes against militants, but was expelled out of the facility in 2011 as bilateral relations soured.

"While we have no basing agreements to announce, we know that Afghanistan's neighbors share our desire to counter the scourge of global terrorism," the Defense Department spokesperson said on Monday.

The United States will continue to pursue options with partners and allies in the region, the spokesperson said.

The Defense Department is evaluating new basing options together with the State Department and the US intelligence community, the spokesperson added.

Earlier on Monday, Central Command (CENTCOM) chief Gen. Kenneth McKenzie said the US military has completed roughly half of its withdrawal from Afghanistan and is on track to meet the September withdrawal deadline.

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RPT - One Person Arrested at Minneapolis Protests Over Killing of Black Man - Police

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - One person was arrested on Sunday night at protests in the US city of Minneapolis following the killing of a Black man by a US Marshals task force, the police department spokesperson John Elder told Sputnik.

Protesters rallied on Sunday a the fourth day in a row after the fatal shooting of 32-year-old Winston Boogie Smith Jr. in Minneapolis' Uptown neighborhood on June 3. Local authorities said on Friday that Smith was wanted on a weapons violation and fired a gun before two deputies shot him.

"One arrest for Disorderly Conduct and no reported injuries," Elder said on Monday.

Unrest in Minneapolis began in May 2019, when a 46-year old Black man George Floyd died 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.

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RPT - Ottawa Says Russia Countersanctions Against Top Canadian Officials Unacceptable, Unfounded

TORONTO, June 7 (Sputnik) - Russian countersanctions against top Canadian officials are unacceptable and baseless, Global Affairs Canada told Sputnik.

Earlier in the day, Moscow leveled sanctions against nine senior Canadian officials in response to sanctions imposed by Ottawa on March 24.

"Russia's sanctions against Canadian individuals, including members of the government, are unacceptable and unfounded," Global Affairs Canada spokesperson Christelle Chartrand said in a statement.

Canada's foreign affairs department emphasized that Ottawa will stand by the officials targeted by countersanctions.

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Biden Discusses With Zelenskyy Need for Reforms, Energy Security - White House

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden in a telephone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy discussed the need for Kiev to implement anti-corruption reforms and close cooperation on energy security, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said. "President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. spoke today with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine. The leaders discussed our strategic partnership in support of President Zelenskyy's plan to tackle corruption and implement a reform agenda, based on our shared democratic values and Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, that delivers justice, security, and prosperity to the people of Ukraine," Psaki said in a press release on Monday.

The two leaders also discussed Russia's activities in the region, the need for close cooperation on energy security and in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. Psaki added that the United States plans to give Ukraine 900,000 doses of coronavirus vaccines.

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NATO Needs to Engage With China on Climate Change, Arms Control - Stoltenberg

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - NATO must engage with China on issues like climate change and arms control, Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters after meeting with US President Joe Biden at the White House.

"The rise of China poses some opportunities for our economies for trade and we need to engage with China on issues like climate change and arms control," Stoltenberg said on Monday.

Stoltenberg noted that China will soon have the biggest economy in the world and pointed out that Beijing is heavily investing in advanced military capabilities.

However, Stoltenberg emphasized that China does not share NATO's values, so the alliance must work with partners in the Asia Pacific, primarily Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and Japan, to counter Beijing's activities.

NATO leaders will meet in Brussels on June 14 to discuss issues related to China, Russia, cyber security, global terrorism, and climate change, Stoltenberg said.

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NATO Supports Dual-Track Approach to Russia, Views Dialogue Not as Weakness - Stoltenberg

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - NATO supports the United States' desire to pursue a double-track approach to Russia combining deterrence with dialogue, which the alliance does not see as a sign of weakness, Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters after a meeting with US President Joe Biden.

"We... discussed Russia. We agree on the dual-track approach meaning deterrence, defense and dialogue with Russia," Stoltenberg said on Monday. "Dialogue with Russia is not a sign of weakness. We are strong, we are united and then we can talk to Russia. We need to talk to Russia. Even if we don't believe in a better relationship with Russia we need to manage difficult relationship with Russia – arms control, transparency, risk reductions. All of these issues are important."

Stoltenberg met with Biden ahead of the G7 and NATO summits in Europe this weekend.

"I welcome the fact that President Biden will meet all NATO leaders before he meets President Putin a few days after," he said.

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FBI Says Recovered \$2.3Mln From Ransom Paid to Colonial Pipeline Hackers

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - US law enforcement agencies seized a stash of bitcoins worth about \$2.3 million believed to be the majority of the ransom proceeds from the Colonial Pipeline cyberattack, the FBI announced.

"FBI San Francisco led a US government operation to seize \$2.3 million in cryptocurrency paid to the ransomware extortionists Darkside, which had targeted Colonial Pipeline resulting in critical infrastructure being taken out of operation," the agency said via Twitter on Monday.

The US Justice Department confirmed the seizure of 63.7 bitcoins currently valued at approximately \$2.3 million. The ransom payment amounted to 75 bitcoins currently worth \$4.3 million, according to the seizure warrant released on Monday.

US Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco said the sum found and recaptured represents "the majority of the ransom Colonial paid to the Darkside network in the wake of the last month's ransomware attack."

Colonial Pipeline CEO Joseph Blount admitted earlier – prior to the bitcoin depreciation - that the company paid \$4.4 million in a cryptocurrency to hackers allegedly based in Russia. The ransomware attack caused a brief shutdown of the key pipeline transporting fuel to the US East Coast.

Monaco hailed the recovery as the first operational success of the Justice Department's recently established Ransomware and Digital Extortion Task Force.

"Darkside and its affiliates have been digitally stalking US companies for the better part of last year and indiscriminately attacking victims that include key players in our nation's critical infrastructure," she said.

"Today we turned the tables on Darkside by going after the entire ecosystem that fuels ransomware and digital extortion attacks including criminal proceeds in a form of digital currency. We will continue to use all of our tools and all of our resources to increase the costs and the consequences of ransomware attacks and other cyber-enabled attacks," Monaco added.

The Justice Department said its operatives were able to identify approximately 63.7 bitcoins as the proceeds of the victim's ransom payment and trace their transfer to a specific address, for which the FBI had the "private key," the rough equivalent of a long password needed to access the bitcoin digital wallet.

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US Pursuing Basing Agreements With Afghanistan's Neighbors - Pentagon

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US media reported on Sunday that Biden administration officials are in discussions with Pakistani officials to secure bases close to Afghanistan for future operations. The CIA had used a base in Pakistan to execute drone strikes against militants, but was expelled out of the facility in 2011 as bilateral relations soured.

"While we have no basing agreements to announce, we know that Afghanistan's neighbors share our desire to counter the scourge of global terrorism," the Defense Department spokesperson said on Monday.

The United States will continue to pursue options with partners and allies in the region, the spokesperson said.

The Defense Department is evaluating new basing options together with the State Department and the US intelligence community, the spokesperson added.

Earlier on Monday, Central Command (CENTCOM) chief Gen. Kenneth McKenzie said the US military has completed roughly half of its withdrawal from Afghanistan and is on track to meet the September withdrawal deadline.

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Blinken Will Participate in Biden's Bilateral Meeting With Putin in Geneva - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will participate in President Joe Biden's meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Geneva on June 16, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a press release.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken will accompany President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. on his June travel to Cornwall, UK; Brussels, Belgium; and Geneva, Switzerland...he will participate in President Biden's bilateral meeting with Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin in Geneva," Price said on Monday.

Blinken will also take part in Biden's bilateral meetings on the margins of the G7 summit in the United Kingdom from June 10-12, Price said.

Price pointed out that Blinken will accompany Biden to the NATO summit on June 14 and the US-EU Summit on June 15, both to be held in Brussels.

White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said earlier that Putin and Biden are expected to discuss a wide range of bilateral issues related to strategic stability and arms control, including recent criminal cyber activity from hacking groups.

Biden will also meet with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Brussels to discuss bilateral issues concerning Syria, Afghanistan, Iran and the significant differences the two countries have on other matters, Sullivan said.

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Car Crash That Left Members of Canadian Muslim Family Dead Likely Hate Crime - Police

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - A car crash in the Canadian city of London in Southwestern Ontario that left four members of a Muslim family dead was likely a hate crime, the London Police Service said.

"There is evidence that this was a planned, pre-meditated act, motivated by hate," London Detective Superintendent Paul Waight told reporters on Monday. "It is believed that these victims were targeted because they were Muslim."

The surviving victim, a young boy, is being treated in hospital for serious but non-life-threatening injuries, Chief Stephen Williams said.

According to police, the perpetrator is 20-year-old Nathaniel Veltman from London. Veltman has been charged with four counts of first-degree murder and one count of attempted murder. The 20-year-old is expected to appear in court later on Monday.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) -

BIDEN-ZELENSKYY TALKS

* US President Joe Biden promised "maximum security guarantees" for Kiev during a telephone conversation with his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Monday, Mikhail Podolyak, an adviser to the head of Ukrainian leader's administration, said.

* Zelenskyy said that he is waiting for his meeting with Biden to discuss ways to expand the US-Ukraine strategic cooperation.

* Biden invited Zelenskyy to visit Washington this summer, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters.

US-RUSSIA SUMMIT

* The US government hopes the summit between President Joe Biden and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on June 16 will create a path toward reducing tensions on strategic stability and arms control, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Monday.

* Sullivan told reporters that the best way to get to know what Russia plans to do is to hear directly from Putin.

* The Kremlin did not see the letter of Viktor Bout's mother, asking the Russian and the US leaders to bring her son back to Russia from the US prison, but believes the issue of Russians serving prison sentences in the United States could be discussed at the upcoming summit.

US RECOVERS \$2.3 MILLION IN RANSOM FROM HACKERS

* The US law enforcement agencies seized \$2.3 million, a majority of the sum paid as ransom to hackers who attacked Colonial Pipeline last month, the FBI announced on Monday.

* The United States would like to see the G7 member states develop a collective plan of action at the upcoming summit this month to counter ransomware, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said.

NORD STREAM 2

*The US sanctions waiver for the company carrying out the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project and its chief executive officer can be rescinded, the Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during a congressional hearing on Monday.

* The US government is actively engaged with Germany on making sure that the Nord Stream 2 pipeline is not used as a coercive tool against Ukraine or any other nation, Blinken said.

LAVROV'S TALKS WITH WESTERN COUNTERPARTS

* Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov discussed conflict settlement in Donbas and the situation in Nagorno Karabakh during a phone conversation with his French and German counterparts, Jean-Yves Le Drian and Heiko Maas, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

* Le Drian said that it is necessary to continue efforts in the Normandy Four format to find a solution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine during his phone conversation with Lavrov, the French Foreign Ministry said.

PUTIN-MICHEL TALKS

* Russian President Vladimir Putin and European Council President Charles Michel on Monday talked over the telephone and called for additional support of the efforts to reach a political settlement in Libya, the Kremlin said.

* Putin and Michel said the Minsk agreements remain the basis for the settlement of the Donbas conflict, the Kremlin said.

* Putin told Michel that the current state of Russia-EU relations is unsatisfactory, the Kremlin said.

* The two leaders discussed the situation in Belarus and in Libya as well as the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and EU-Russia relations, the European Council said.

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Protesters Halt Construction of 337-Mile Pipeline in US State of Minnesota - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - Nearly a thousand protesters convened at the site of a 337-mile pipeline in the US state of Minnesota to halt construction of the project due to environmental concerns, the local media outlet MPR News reported on Monday.

The project, known as the Line 3 oil pipeline, located near Park Rapids in northern Minnesota, is more than halfway complete and will be used to transport some 800,000 barrels of oil from Canada to Minnesota, the report said.

The project, known as the Line 3 oil pipeline, is located near Park Rapids in northern Minnesota is more than halfway complete and will be used to transport some 800,000 barrels of oil from Canada to Minnesota, the report also said.

Environmental groups are opposing the pipeline due to claims that it will be a threat to water resources, which could infringe on several tribes' treaty rights to hunt, fish and gather wild rice in the region, the report added.

Media footage from the site showed a helicopter from the Department of Homeland Security flying very low at the site of the demonstration using its rotor wash to try to disperse protesters.

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US Imposes Visa Restriction on Those 'Undermining' Cameroonian Peace - Blinken

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The United States is imposing visa restrictions on anyone deemed to be instigating or participating in the violence in Cameroon's English-speaking regions, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said Monday.

"I am establishing a policy imposing visa restrictions on individuals who are believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the peaceful resolution of the crisis in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon," Blinken said in a statement.

A four-year secessionist conflict in Cameroon's English-speaking regions has become increasingly deadly and complex, with formal attempts to negotiate a settlement between the government and fighters demanding independence for a so-called "Ambazonia" having stalled. Internationally-led efforts for peace, including those by Washington, are hamstrung by deep divisions within the separatist movement, and by the refusal of the government – which argues that the conflict is an internal affair – to engage with external mediators.

Blinken said the United States was deeply concerned by the conflict, condemning those responsible for human rights violations, abuses and threats against advocates for peace or humanitarian workers in the West African state.

"We continue to call for both the Cameroonian government and separatist armed groups to end the violence and engage in a dialogue without preconditions to peacefully resolve the crisis," he said. "It is important that children can attend school and that humanitarian aid can be delivered. We urge all relevant stakeholders in Cameroon and in the diaspora to engage constructively and seek a peaceful resolution to the crisis."

According to UN estimates, at least 4,000 civilians have been killed in Cameroon's Anglophone regions, a toll that surpasses that of the country's Far North region where Boko Haram has been waging an armed campaign since 2014.

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US Supreme Court Refuses to Pick Up Case Challenging Male-Only Military Draft - Order

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) – The US Supreme Court by its order on Monday has refused to consider a petition by the National Coalition for Men (NCM) that challenges the military selective service criterion requiring only men and not women to register for the draft upon turning 18.

The Supreme Court has denied the petition for writ of certiorari to the US Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit where the case is being currently considered and thus refused to decide upon the issue of gender-based military draft.

Supreme Court Justice Sonya Sotomayor, joined by Justices Stephen Breyer and Brett Kavanaugh, in her statement pointed out that “it remains to be seen whether Congress will end gender-based registration under the Military Selective Service Act” while cautioning against granting review to the Act.

The statement recalled that on March 25, 2020, the National Commission of Military, National, and Public Service, created by Congress in 2016, released its final report, in which it recommended the elimination of male-only registration for the draft.

The petitioners from the NCM supported their claims by stating that as of 2015 there are no longer any positions in the US Armed Forces closed to women while beginning in 1991, thousands of women successfully served in a wide range of combat roles.

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FBI Says Recovered \$2.3Mln From Ransom Paid to Colonial Pipeline Hackers

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - US law enforcement agencies seized a stash of bitcoins worth about \$2.3 million believed to be the majority of the ransom proceeds from the Colonial Pipeline cyberattack, the FBI announced on Monday.

"FBI San Francisco led a US government operation to seize \$2.3 million in cryptocurrency paid to the ransomware extortionists Darkside, which had targeted Colonial Pipeline resulting in critical infrastructure being taken out of operation," the agency said via Twitter.

The Justice Department confirmed the seizure of 63.7 bitcoins currently valued at approximately \$2.3 million. US Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco said the sum found and recaptured represents "the majority of the ransom Colonial paid to the Darkside network in the wake of the last month's ransomware attack."

Colonial Pipeline CEO Joseph Blount admitted earlier that the company paid \$4.4 million in a cryptocurrency to hackers allegedly based in Russia. The ransomware attack caused a brief shutdown of the key pipeline transporting fuel to the US East Coast.

Monaco hailed the recovery as the first operational success of the Justice Department's recently established Ransomware and Digital Extortion Task Force.

"Darkside and its affiliates have been digitally stalking US companies for the better part of last year and indiscriminately attacking victims that include key players in our nation's critical infrastructure," she said.

"Today we turned the tables on Darkside by going after the entire ecosystem that fuels ransomware and digital extortion attacks including criminal proceeds in a form of digital currency. We will continue to use all of our tools and all of our resources to increase the costs and the consequences of ransomware attacks and other cyber-enabled attacks," Monaco added.

The Justice Department said its operatives were able to identify approximately 63.7 bitcoins as the proceeds of the victim's ransom payment and trace their transfer "to a specific address, for which the FBI had the "private key," the rough equivalent of a long password needed to access the bitcoin digital wallet.

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UN Security Council Condemns Human Rights Violations in Central African Republic

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - Members of the UN Security Council condemned violations of human rights and humanitarian law in the Central African Republic (CAR) during a meeting of the council on Monday, Estonian Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Gert Auvaart said in a readout.

"The members of the Security Council strongly condemned ongoing human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law in the CAR, and stressed the need to bring to justice their perpetrators. They called on all parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and ensure safe and unhindered humanitarian access," Auvaart stated.

The Security Council also reiterated that attacks against UN peacekeepers operating in the country may constitute war crimes, calling upon CAR authorities to enhance the safety and security of UN personnel.

Late last month, a clash between CAR and Chadian forces resulted in casualties on both sides. Members of CAR's armed forces chased armed rebels into the neighboring country, where they then attacked an outpost managed by Chadian soldiers.

Additionally, US President Joe Biden issued a national emergency declaration on the situation in the CAR, stating that it poses an unusual threat to US national security and foreign policy. A notice released by the White House characterized the country's condition as filled with intersectorian tension, widespread violence and atrocities, and the use of child soldiers, which threatens the peace, security, or stability of both the CAR and neighboring states.

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Blinken Says Unaware US Steel Industry Almost Entirely Dependent on Russian Coal

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday it was news to him that cheap coal from Russia allegedly undermines the United States' domestic supply and creates a national security threat for the steel industry.

"No, I have to acknowledge this is news to me, not something I focused on, and I very much appreciate you bring it to my attention," Blinken said when Congressman Dan Meuser asked him whether he was aware that 90 percent of anthracite coal used in the US steel industry come from Russia.

During a US House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing, Meuser described the situation with the coal supply in the United States as a threat to national security.

Meuser said over the past five years Pennsylvania anthracite production shrunk by 20 percent while the total sales of Russia anthracite increased from 6 million tones in 2016 to 22 million tones in 2020, or 12 times higher than the domestic usage in the United States.

"I am concerned Russia is attempting to undermine our domestic supply which creates a national security, as well as a threat to our economy, that does in fact need our attention," Meuser said.

The congressman also called upon Blinken to look closer into the matter of allegedly "very questionable" and "illegal" dumping of Russian anthracite in the United States.

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US Republicans Criticize Biden Over Nord Stream 2 Sanctions Waiver

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) – A group of 68 House Republicans penned a letter on Monday criticizing President Joe Biden for waiving sanctions on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. "As the nation recovers from a cyber terrorist attack on the Colonial Pipeline that reportedly originated in Russia, we have strong objections to your decision to waive sanctions for Nord Stream 2AG and effectively ensure the completion of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline," the lawmakers wrote in a letter to the US President Joe Biden.

The completion of the project will be a "gift" to Russia and allow it to increase its geopolitical influence in Europe, they added.

The US lawmakers noted that moving forward with the Keystone XL pipeline will allow Washington to enhance its energy security. "Lifting these sanctions (against Nord Stream 2) prioritizes Russian energy over American energy and Russian jobs over American jobs," the letter read.

"We urge you to rethink your action and fully implement the Congressionally mandated sanctions against all responsible parties and actors to permanently stop completion of Nord Stream 2," the letter concluded.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said earlier today that the US sanctions waiver for the company carrying out the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project and its chief executive officer can be rescinded.

On Friday, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that the construction of the first line of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline was finished, while the second line was in the process of being built. German government spokesman Steffen Seibert said on Friday that negotiations between advisers of US President Joe Biden and German Chancellor Angela Merkel on the Nord Stream 2 project will continue in Washington.

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FBI Says Recovered \$2.3Mln From Ransom Paid to Colonial Pipeline Hackers

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The US law enforcement agencies seized \$2.3 million, a majority of the sum paid as ransom to hackers who attacked Colonial Pipeline last month, the FBI announced on Monday.

"FBI San Francisco led a U.S. government operation to seize \$2.3 million in cryptocurrency paid to the ransomware extortionists Darkside, which had targeted Colonial Pipeline resulting in critical infrastructure being taken out of operation," the agency tweeted.

Colonial Pipeline CEO Joseph Blount said earlier that the company paid \$4.4 million in cryptocurrencies to hackers allegedly based in Russia. The ransomware attack caused a brief shutdown of the key pipeline transporting fuel to the US East Coast.

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US to Make First Donation of 500,000 COVID-19 Vaccines to Guatemala - Harris

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) – The United States will donate the first batch with 500,000 vaccines against COVID-19 to Guatemala as part of the Biden administration's plan to renew relationships around the world, Vice President Kamala Harris said on Monday.

"We are renewing our relationships around the globe and our presence around the world. In fact, just last week I shared with the President [of Guatemala Alejandro Giammattei] that the United States will provide, as a first donation, 500,000 vaccines to Guatemala," Harris said during a joint press briefing.

The donation of vaccines to Guatemala is a part of Biden's global framework to share 80 million coronavirus vaccines by the end of June announced last week. Countries South and Central America are supposed to get 6 million vaccines, manufactured by Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson, according to the plan.

During the joint press briefing with Giammattei, Harris shared a range of steps the two governments have agreed to make to curb the pressing issues of illegal migration and drug

trafficking, including the creation of an anti-smuggling and anti-human trafficking task force, as well as bringing American business to create economic incentives for Guatemalans to stay in their homeland.

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US Attorney General Announces Joint Crackdown on Human Trafficking in Central America

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - US enforcement agencies have joined their peers in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras to launch a Central America-wide crackdown against human smuggling and trafficking and corruption, Attorney General Merrick Garland said Monday.

"The joint efforts we are announcing today will combine investigative, prosecutorial, and capacity-building efforts of both the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security," Garland said in a statement announcing the Joint Task Force Alpha representing the five countries. "Our focus will remain on disrupting and dismantling smuggling and trafficking networks that abuse, exploit, or endanger migrants, pose national security threats, and are involved in organized crime. Together, we will combat these threats where they originate and operate."

The joint task force, which includes the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Drug Enforcement Administration, will focus on the most prolific and dangerous human smuggling and trafficking groups operating in Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, Garland said.

The multi-agency panel will also heighten focus on investigations, prosecutions and asset recoveries relating to corruption in Northern Triangle countries through its Foreign Corrupt Practices Act enforcement program, counternarcotics prosecutions and Kleptocracy Asset Recovery Initiative.

In addition to these, the Office of Prosecutorial Development, Assistance, and Training and the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program, in coordination with the State Department, will assist their counterparts in the Northern Triangle countries and Mexico to support their efforts to prosecute smuggling and trafficking networks in their own courts.

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Canadian Court Sets Deportation Hearing for Ex-Nazi Oberlander on September 7-10

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) will resume deportation hearings against former Nazi Helmut Oberlander on September 7, IRB spokesperson Anna Pape said on Monday.

The deportation proceedings against the former death squad member were put on hold earlier this year after a federal judge ordered a review, citing the defense's arguments regarding health issues and potential civil rights violations.

"The Immigration Division of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada has rescheduled the admissibility hearing in the matter of Mr. Helmut Oberlander. The hearing will be held September 7 through 10, 2021," Pape said in a notice.

The IRB was able to reschedule hearings against Helmut Oberlander after a federal court justice dismissed the former Nazi death squad member's motion to permanently stay proceedings.

The 96-year-old Oberlander has been embroiled in legal battle with the Canadian government since 1995, when the latter began trying to strip Ukrainian-born ex-SS member of his citizenship, citing his failure to disclose his links to death squads. After a lengthy legal battle, Oberlander was stripped of his citizenship for the fourth time and final time in 2017 and Canada's Supreme Court issued a ruling last December that blocked any possibility for Oberlander to appeal this decision.

An adjudicator ruled in October that the IRB has the jurisdiction to pursue the deportation of Oberlander, concluding that no abuse of process had occurred.

Additionally, Oberlander faces legal scrutiny in Russia, where investigators say that Oberlander was complicit in the World War II massacre of 27,000 civilians, including orphaned children, in Russia's Rostov region. Federal Security Service (FSB) files obtained by Sputnik revealed that Oberlander, a former interpreter for the Sonderkommando SS-10A death squad, played a role in the massacre.

Russia's Investigative Committee has sent a request to the Canadian authorities to provide legal materials related to the probe of Oberlander's role in the massacre.

However, in an interview with Sputnik in December, the Russian Embassy in Ottawa said the Canadian government did not request documents related to the case and has refused to cooperate despite Moscow's request for legal assistance. The Russian Embassy added that "influential defenders" are working to delay former Nazi's deportation process.

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US Recovers Millions of Dollars From Colonial Pipeline Hackers - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The US law enforcement recovered millions of dollars paid in cryptocurrency to hackers who were behind the ransomware attack on the Colonial Pipeline last month, CNN reported on Monday.

The Justice Department is expected to announce details of the operation later on Monday, the report said.

The ransomware attack by hackers allegedly based in Russia caused a brief shutdown of the key pipeline transporting fuel to the US East Coast. Colonial Pipeline CEO Joseph Blount told the US media that the company paid \$4.4 million in ransom.

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US Justice Dept. Proposes Tougher Pistol Modification, 'Red Flag' Laws

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The Justice Department proposed on Monday a two-step approach to addressing US gun violence, saying modifications of pistols into short-barreled rifles must be subject to tougher scrutiny and that states be allowed to make their own red flag laws.

"When individuals use accessories to convert pistols into short-barreled rifles, they must comply with the heightened regulations on those dangerous and easily concealable weapons," the department said in a statement.

The department also proposed that states craft extreme risk protection order laws, authorizing courts to temporarily bar people in crisis from accessing firearms.

The Gun Violence Archive reports that since January 1, there have been 244 mass shootings in the United States, as well as an additional 15,814 injuries sustained across all recorded acts of gun violence.

According to the archive, some 18,524 people have died from gun violence this year, of which 8,294 were tied to murder, defensive use or unintentional shootings. The remainder were linked to suicides.

"The Justice Department is determined to take concrete steps to reduce the tragic toll of gun violence in our communities," US Attorney General Merrick Garland said in the statement issued Monday, two months after his pledge to President Joe Biden to find solutions for the epidemic. Breaking down the rationale for its two-step approach, the department said the National Firearms Act imposes heightened regulations on short-barreled rifles because they are easily concealable, can cause great damage, and are more likely to be used to commit crimes.

"But companies now sell accessories that make it easy for people to convert pistols into these more dangerous weapons without going through the statute's background check and registration requirements," it said.

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UN Chief Wants Extension of Syria's Bab al-Hawa Border Crossing Mandate - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, June 7 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres advocates for another year-long extension of Syria's Bab al-Hawa border crossing mandate as he sees no alternative routes to deliver humanitarian aid to the country, United Nations spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters on Monday.

The UN Security Council is expected to vote next month on whether to keep Bab al-Hawa, the only internationally approved crossing uncontrolled by Damascus, open for cross-border shipments from Turkey to Syria's Northwest areas.

"Bab al-Hawa is the last lifeline preventing a humanitarian catastrophe for the millions of people in Syria. Despite the ongoing efforts to deliver a small number of trucks cross-line from Damascus there remains no alternative to delivering aid at this scale and with this scope," Dujarric said during a daily briefing. "This is why the Secretary General has said a large scale cross-border operation for an additional 12 months remains essential to save lives."

Dujarric said that the crossing allows UN teams in Turkey to dispatch every month around a thousand trucks of aid for 2.5 million Syrians.

"A total of 979 trucks crossed in May alone," he added.

Last year, the UN Security Council voted to reduce the number of border crossings to only one. Russia previously argued that the council should return to distributing aid from within Syria.

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US Looking for Biden-Putin Summit to Reduce Tensions on Strategic Stability - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The US administration hopes the summit between President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin will create a path toward reducing tensions on strategic stability and arms control, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Monday.

"On this notion of deliverables on the US-Russia summit, at the end of the day what we are looking to do is for the two presidents to be able to send a clear signal to their teams on questions of strategic stability so that we can make progress on arms control and other nuclear areas to reduce tension and instability in that aspect of the relationship," Sullivan said during a press briefing at the White House.

Sullivan said the best way to realize what Moscow plans to do is to hear directly from Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Biden and Putin will meet in Geneva on June 16 to discuss a wide range of bilateral and global issues. Prior to the meeting, Biden will attend a G7 summit in the United Kingdom from June 11-13 and NATO and US-EU summits in Belgium from June 14-15.

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Canadian Indigenous Group Renews Calls to 'Cancel' Canada Day Amid Gravesite Discovery

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - An indigenous group on Monday renewed calls to "cancel" Canada's national holiday amid outrage about the discovery of the remains of more than 215 indigenous children at a former residential school in the province of British Columbia.

The Tk'emlups te Secwepemc First Nation announced last month that a deep scan of the Kamloops Indian Residential School site with ground-penetrating radar confirmed the discovery of 215 children's remains, with some of the deceased being as young as three years old.

"The recent discovery at Kamloops residential school has reminded us that Canada remains a country that has built its foundation on the erasure and genocide of Indigenous nations, including children. We refuse to sit idle while Canada's violent history is celebrated. We are once again calling on Indigenous land, water and sky protectors and allies to come together and disrupt the celebration," advocacy group Idle No More said in a statement with the hashtag #CancelCanadaDay.

The group is planning to stage protests across the country, including in Vancouver, throughout Ontario and is proposing a blockade of the Trans-Canada Highway. The group is also encouraging residents throughout the country to stage associated protests wherever possible. There have been calls by various groups to cancel the annual Canada Day celebration in commemoration of the country's confederation on July 1 before, however, the grisly discovery has ignited widespread anger throughout the country leading to calls for the country to distance itself from its colonial history.

Kamloops was one of the largest schools in Canada and operated from the late XIX century to the late 1970s as part of the residential school system, which placed indigenous children in state-sanctioned boarding schools where they were to be culturally assimilated.

According to Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, released in 2015, roughly 150,000 aboriginal children were forcibly assimilated through the residential schools from 1883 to 1998, in a process equated to "cultural genocide."

The report discovered that around 3,200 died in the schools, with the greatest number of deaths taking place before 1940. Schools also had high rates of tuberculosis and other health incidences in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with death rates remaining high until the 1950s.

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Biden to Discuss With Erdogan Afghanistan, Syria, Iran During NATO Summit - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden will meet with his Turkish counterpart Tayip Erdogan on the margins of the upcoming NATO summit in Brussels next week to discuss Nagorno Karabakh, Syria, Afghanistan, Iran and other issues, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters on Monday.

"Issues in the region, of course, in the Eastern Mediterranean, Syria, Iran, Nagorno Karabakh," Sullivan said during a press briefing in response to a question about the agenda.

Both leaders also will discuss Turkey's role in the negotiations concerning Afghanistan, he also said.

The US president plans to rise some of the "significant differences" in the US-Turkey bilateral relations, including human rights, Sullivan added.

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US Would Like to See G7 Develop Action Plan to Counter Ransomware - White House

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The United States would like to see the G7 member states develop a collective plan of action at the upcoming summit this month to counter ransomware, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Monday.

"One of the things we would like to see out of the G7 is the start of an action plan that covers a number of critical areas," Sullivan said during a press briefing. "First, how to deal with increasing the robustness and resilience of our defenses against ransomware attacks collectively... and then finally how we collectively speak with one voice to those countries, including Russia, that are harboring or permitting cyber criminals to operate from their territories."

The Biden administration would also like to see the plan of action lay out steps on how G7 countries can share information to better combat ransomware and how to deal with cryptocurrency transactions that fuel the intrusions.

Last week, the White House said it was in touch with the Russian authorities in light of the hacking attack on the meat-producing giant JBS USA, which led to the closure of its facilities in the United States. The Biden administration said it believes some of the members belonging to the hacker groups reside in Russia.

The Biden administration also said Russia-based hackers breached Colonial Pipeline, one of the United States' 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 the hackers to regain access to their systems.

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US to Continue Pressing China on Novel Coronavirus Origins - White House

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The United State will continue to press China to be transparent on the issue of the origins of the novel coronavirus, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters on Monday.

"I don't think we just give up that easily. We will continue to press in coordination with the international community China to be transparent, to be forthcoming with data and information," Psaki said during a press briefing. "We are not going just to stand by and accept they've said they are not going to participate."

Psaki said the United States is engaging and will continue to engage China at the highest levels while also working through the World Health Organization and with international partners to exert pressure on China to release the underlying data.

On Sunday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States needs to delve deeper into the origins of the novel coronavirus and hold China accountable.

Blinken said the Biden administration is determined to get to the bottom of the novel coronavirus origins issue, but noted that China has not "given us the transparency we need" and needs to

be held accountable. The secretary of states called on China to make available all information relating to the pandemic and allow full access for international inspectors.

Speaking at the Saturday GOP convention in North Carolina, former US President Donald Trump blamed the coronavirus pandemic on China, saying that Beijing should pay all countries a minimum of \$10 trillion in reparations.

Trump also accused the Biden administration of blocking a thorough investigation of the origins of the coronavirus.

Biden recently ordered the US intelligence community to produce a report re-examining the origins of the novel coronavirus and to help determine whether the disease leaked from a lab or spread from an infected animal to a human.

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Canadian Court Sets Deportation Hearing for Ex-Nazi Oberlander on September 7-10

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Blinken Looking Into Re-Establishing Office of Special Envoy for Guantanamo Prison Closure
WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) – The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken during a congressional hearing on Monday said that he is looking into re-establishing the office of the special envoy to facilitate the closure of the Guantanamo Bay prison.

"We are working actively on these cases [nine Guantanamo detainees cleared for release] and I want to make sure that the [State] Department has what it needs, both in terms of resources and personnel and including someone who can focus on this full time to do that. So, we are actively looking into doing that, yes," Blinken said.

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US National Security Adviser Says Hearing From Putin Best Way to Understand Russia's Plans

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters on Monday that the best way to realize what Moscow plans to do is to hear directly from Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"We believe that President Biden is the most effective direct communicator of American values and priorities and we believe that hearing directly from President Putin is the most effective way to understand what Russia intends and plans," Sullivan said.

The two presidents are scheduled to meet in Geneva next week.

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Biden Spoke With Ukraine President on Monday - Sullivan

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden spoke with his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskyy and invited him to visit Washington this summer, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters on Monday.

"Actually I have come into this briefing room from the Oval Office where President Biden was on the phone with President Zelenskyy of Ukraine," Sullivan said during a briefing. "This is a call that they have been planning to make in advance of President Biden going to Europe, meeting with President Putin they had an opportunity to talk at some length about all of the issues in US-Ukraine relationship."

Sullivan said the US president told Zelenskyy the United States will stand up firmly for Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and its aspirations as the two countries go forward.

"He also told President Zelenskyy that he looks forward to welcoming to the White House here in Washington this summer after he returns from Europe," he said.

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Top Maldives' Diplomat Abdulla Shahid Elected as President of 76th General Assembly - UN

UNITED NATIONS, June 7 (Sputnik) - Abdulla Shahid, the Foreign Minister for the Maldives, has been elected as President of the 76th session of the UN's General Assembly, current President Volkan Bozkir said on Monday.

"His Excellency Abdulla Shahid of the Maldives received 143 votes. Having gained the necessary majority, Mr. Abdulla Shahid from the Maldives was elected President of the 76th session of the General Assembly," Bozkir said.

Candidates must collect a total of 96 votes to be elected. Shahid's opponent, former Foreign Minister of Afghanistan Zalmay Rassoul, received 48 votes.

Shahid began his career in the Foreign Ministry back in 1983, becoming the head of the presidential administration in 1995 – a position he held for a decade. He was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2007, and again took up the position in 2018.

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US Working With Germany to Prevent Russia From Using Gas Tool Against Ukraine - Blinken

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The US government is actively engaged with Germany on making sure that the Nord Stream 2 pipeline is not used as a coercive tool against Ukraine or any other nation, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during a congressional hearing on Monday.

"Now Germany has come to the table and we are actively engaged with them to look at what can and should, and I believe, must be done to... make sure that the transit fees that Ukraine, at some point in the future, may lose as a result of this pipeline being able to go around Ukraine, that they're made whole, that the ability of Russia to use gas as a coercive tool or weapon against Ukraine or anyone else is eliminated and there are ways to do that, and that we have agreements in place upfront to come back on any activities by Russia that are challenging the economic security of any of these countries that we will in advance agree that we are going to take action against them," Blinken said.

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Melting Ice, Russian and Chinese Presence Boost Importance of Arctic to NATO - Stoltenberg

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - A rise in both Russian and Chinese military presence in the Arctic, as well as the effects of climate change, have increased the importance of the region to NATO, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg told the Atlantic Council on Monday.

"The Arctic region has always been important for NATO. We have five NATO allies which are Arctic nations, and NATO's always been in the Arctic. But the melting of the ice combined with increased Russian military presence - they're reopening some old bases from the Cold War - and increased Chinese interest and presence of course just increases the importance of the Arctic," Stoltenberg said.

Stoltenberg added that potential new sea routes between Europe and Asia, caused by melted ice in the region, also matters to the security of NATO, and as such, countries in the area are investing in submarines and other military tech needed to maintain an Arctic presence.

Earlier this month, Nikolai Korchunov, a senior Russian government and Arctic Council official, told Sputnik that Moscow views the Arctic as a subject where the United States and Russia share mutual interest, describing it as a "promising area" for cooperation.

Russia recently took over the chairmanship of the Arctic Council for the 2021-2023 term. Their stated priorities in the region include developing its environmental, economic, and social sustainability and enhancing cooperation and coordination with regional structures.

In addition, Russia is in talks with international partners, including China, to construct the Snowflake International Arctic Station, an international research facility that runs on renewable energy. The facility is meant to act as a platform for scientists and other researchers to work on problems related to the Arctic region.

The Russian Ministry of Justice in 2019 designated the Atlantic Council think tank as an undesirable non-profit institution on the territory of Russia, whose activity poses a threat to the country's constitutional order and security.

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US Sanctions Waiver for Nord Stream 2 Can Be Rescinded - Blinken

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The US sanctions waiver for the company carrying out the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project and its chief executive officer can be rescinded, the Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during a congressional hearing on Monday.

"A couple of weeks ago, on May 19, we actually sanctioned more entities, 13 ships, four companies that had ever been sanctioned under PEESA [Protecting Europe's Energy Security Acct]. What we also did under the law was issue a national interest waiver, with regard to Nord Stream 2 AG and its CEO. That waiver can be rescinded," Blinken told the US House Foreign Affairs Committee.

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US Approves First Alzheimer's Disease Medication in 18 Years- Food and Drug Administration

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said on Monday that it has authorized use of the Aduhelm drug for Alzheimer's disease, its first such approval in 18 years after it found the medication provided valuable therapies for dementia that outweighed the risks.

"Today FDA approved Aduhelm (aducanumab) to treat patients with Alzheimer's disease using the Accelerated Approval pathway, under which the FDA approves a drug for a serious or life-threatening illness that may provide meaningful therapeutic benefit over existing treatments," the agency said in a statement.

The FDA noted that approval is typically given for drugs likely to produce favorable outcomes when some uncertainty remains about their clinical benefits.

Aduhelm was the first novel therapy approved for Alzheimer's disease since 2003 and was directed at the underlying pathophysiology of the disease, precisely at the presence of amyloid beta plaques in the brain, the FDA said.

"The clinical trials for Aduhelm were the first to show that a reduction in these plaques - a hallmark finding in the brain of patients with Alzheimer's - is expected to lead to a reduction in the clinical decline of this devastating form of dementia," the agency said.

The FDA acknowledged the attention surrounding its approval of the drug in view of the fact the data submitted for review of Aduhelm was highly complex and the expert community had differing views on its benefits.

"As a result of FDA's approval of Aduhelm, patients with Alzheimer's disease have an important and critical new treatment to help combat this disease," it said. "The need for treatments is urgent: right now, more than 6 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's disease and this

number is expected to grow as the population ages. Alzheimer's is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States."

On average, a person with Alzheimer's disease lives four to eight years after being diagnosed, but some patients have lived up to 20 years, the FDA noted.

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US Withdrawal From Afghanistan About 50% Complete, to Meet Deadline - CENTCOM Commander

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The US military has completed roughly half of its withdrawal from Afghanistan, putting it on track to meet the September withdrawal deadline, US Central Command (CENTCOM) head Gen. Kenneth McKenzie said on Monday.

"We are continuing to execute a safe and deliberate withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan at the direction of our President and in concert with our NATO allies and partners. We've completed about half of the entire retrograde process, and we will meet the September deadline to complete the full withdrawal from Afghanistan," McKenzie said.

McKenzie added that the US does plan to maintain an embassy in Afghanistan, at the invitation of the Afghan government, but it is up to local forces to maintain peace in the area. He noted that much of the US's current role in the region is as an advisor to local security in addition to conducting counterterrorism operations.

Although US forces were originally supposed to have exited the country by May of this year, officials struck a deal to extend the withdrawal deadline to September 11th, the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks on the World Trade Center.