

06/08/21 Tuesday

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US, EU Commit to Ending \$18 Billion Tariff War Before End of Year - Reports
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The decision by Washington and Brussels to resolve all outstanding trade disputes before the end of the year comes after the European Union decided in May to waive automatic increases in tariffs on some US-made goods.

The US and EU will commit to ending their trade disputes and removing tariffs on aluminum and steel before the end of 2021, according to Bloomberg News, which viewed a document about the upcoming June 15 EU summit US President Joe Biden will attend.

According to the report, the topics set to be resolved include a [dispute over state support](#) for aircraft maker Airbus by the governments of Spain, France, Italy, and the UK. The World Trade Organization authorized US tariffs against \$7.5 billion in EU exports in 2019, and the EU in turn was authorized to impose \$4 billion of its own tariffs on US goods. In March, the US and EU reached an [agreement to suspend](#) tariffs on Airbus and Boeing for four months.

As early as December 2020, UE officials reached out to US President-elect Joe Biden about a change in trade policy between the US and the 27-member bloc. The dispute dates to 2018, when then-US President Donald Trump imposed a 10% trade penalty on aluminum and a 25% penalty on steel imported from the EU, calling them a threat to national security.

However, in response to the tariffs, the EU imposed its own on US goods in retaliation, including peanut butter, bourbon, denim, orange juice, and motorcycles, among other goods.

Trump imposed similar tariffs on China, not all of which were resolved by the [Phase 1 trade deal](#) agreed to in January 2020. The tariffs were part of his same populist appeal to sections of the US manufacturing sector, to whom he said he was saving American jobs by protecting US industries from foreign competition, which he called "unfair."

Biden Continues Pressure on Nord Stream 2

In May, the Biden administration also decided to [drop sanctions](#) imposed by Trump against Swiss pipelaying firm Allseas for its work on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline that caused the company to withdraw from the project. The 745-mile-long pipeline will carry up to 55 billion cubic meters of Russian natural gas to Germany annually. Washington has claimed the pipeline is a tool for Russia to apply political leverage over Western Europe and a deliberate bypassing of another pipeline through Ukraine, but Moscow has said the venture is purely economic in scope. Russia is the world's second-largest producer of natural gas after the US and the largest provider of European gas. In 2018, Trump successfully [pressured Berlin](#) into building a liquified natural gas (LNG) facility and accepting US exports, and in December 2019 [imposed sanctions](#) on companies working with Russian state-owned firm Gazprom on Nord Stream 2.

However, while Biden dropped the Trump-imposed sanctions, he also imposed blacklisted 13 Russian ships and three Russian firms working on the project. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday the US could also [rescind a waiver](#) given to Nord Stream AG, the

company overseeing construction of the pipeline, if Russia were to "use gas as a coercive tool or weapon against Ukraine or anyone else."

On Friday, Russian President Vladimir Putin revealed the first leg of the \$11 billion pipeline had been completed, in spite of pressure from Washington.

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Video: Syrian Air Defenses Repel 'Israeli Aggression' in Sky Over Damascus, State Media Report

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Syrian President Bashar Assad has repeatedly called on the international bodies to condemn the regular attacks and put pressure on Israel in order to end systematic violations of Syria's sovereignty, saying that such aggressive actions threaten the stability of the entire region. Syrian media reported early Wednesday morning that air defense systems had engaged targets over the capital city of Damascus.

According to a reporter from the Syrian Arab News Agency, the targets came from Lebanese airspace, a typical avenue of attack for Israeli aircraft.

Photos and ate footage from the scene have been shared by SANA online.

Later, the Syrian army confirmed it shot down some missiles fired by Israel, the state media reported.

"Our air defense systems repelled the aggressor's missiles and shot down some of them," SANA quoted a Defense Ministry statement.

In April, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad [Zarif revealed](#) that former US Secretary of State John Kerry had informed him at one point that Israel had carried out more than 200 airstrikes inside Syria against Iranian targets. Israel has also admitted to hundreds of strike inside Syria, claiming it is targeting Iranian forces intent on attacking Israel, although no such attack has ever taken place.

However, one incident that also happened in April involved a Syrian S-200 surface-to-air missile attempting to shoot down an incoming Israeli missile, missing its target, and flying hundreds of miles into Israeli territory until [crashing into the desert](#) near the Shimon Peres Negev Nuclear Research Center. Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz admitted the IDF had attempted to shoot down the missile and failed.

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Socialist Castillo Calls on Peru's Electoral Office to 'Protect the Vote' as Fujimori Alleges Fraud by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Although early polls suggested the right-wing Fuerza Popular candidate Keiko Fujimori was likely to win the presidential elections in Peru on Sunday, as the final votes are tallied, her

left-wing opponent, Pedro Castillo, has pulled ahead. Fujimori has alleged voter fraud by Castillo's party, but international observers have reported no foul play.

Speaking to the press on Monday evening as the steady stream of election results began to shift against her, Fujimori said there was "a clear intention to boycott the will of the people" by Castillo, the socialist teacher running against her.

She accused Castillo's Perú Libre party of attempting to "distort and delay the results which reflect the popular will" by challenging ballot totals in districts she was initially declared to have won. The process is legal under Peru's electoral rules and electoral observer missions, including the Organization of American States (OAS) delegation, which has supported such allegations when made against other leftist candidates in Latin American elections, and has not logged any cases of fraud, [according to El Pais](#).

In response, Perú Libre rejected the accusations and called on the National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE) to "protect the vote."

"We must be vigilant to defend the democracy that is expressed in every vote, inside and outside our beloved Peru. We cannot rest. May this historic vigil allow the rebirth of a new country," Castillo said, [according to TeleSUR](#).

On Tuesday afternoon with 95.96% of all votes counted, Castillo was ahead by just 0.58%, with 50.2% of all votes cast, and Fujimori with 49.7%. [According to TeleSUR](#), Castillo is ahead by just 91,000 votes out of more than 17 million cast.

Fujimorismo Versus Peasant Unionism

Fujimori is the daughter of imprisoned former Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori and has similar neoliberal, pro-business politics, dubbed "fujimorismo." His ten-year rule began with a hyperinflationary [so-called "Fujishock"](#) as neoliberal reforms removed economic controls and privatized large parts of the state sector. After crushing the power of the legislature and judiciary in 1992, he waged a brutal counterinsurgency war against the Maoist Sendero Luminoso movement, which had taken over much of the interior countryside. He fled the country in 2000, after failing to force Congress to let him have a third term.

Fujimori has been imprisoned since 2007 on a 25-year sentence after he was found guilty of violating people's political rights, crimes against humanity, and corruption in a series of successive cases. Keiko Fujimori has said she would [pardon her father](#) if elected, but she has also spent much of the campaign season on a [suspended pretrial detention](#) after she was implicated in another corruption investigation.

By contrast, Castillo is a schoolteacher, union leader and the son of illiterate peasants. "Never again a poor man in a rich country," Castillo said in a speech last month, a common refrain at his rallies. "How is it possible that in such a rich country there is so much misery, so much inequality?"

Castillo often carries a large inflatable pencil as a campaign prop and has promised to emphasize access to education and to healthcare, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

He has also said that the endemic poverty of Peru's large indigenous population is due to "[500 years of pillage](#), exploitation and neglect" after the Spanish conquest of the Empire of the Incas and subsequent colonization of the country.

Castillo has called for expelling the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the closure of US military bases in Peru, as well as withdrawing from the Lima Group, the US-led

group of nations dedicated to overthrowing the Bolivarian government in Venezuela, and supporting the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) over the OAS, according to [Popular Resistance](#). Political ads have accused him of being a communist, and tried to link him to Sendero Luminoso because he was in a peasant self-defense group during the insurgency, but Castillo has clarified that he has no intent to nationalize Peruvian industries.

Ana Maria Cordova, Peru Libre's legal representative, [told Bloomberg](#) in April that Castillo intends "not to expropriate them, not to nationalize or anything, but so that the conditions in some way also favor populations where these industries or mining operations are involved. It is simply renegotiating conditions so that they somehow improve in favor of the population."

Morales Denounces 'Fascist' Fujimori Discourse

On Tuesday, former Bolivian President Evo Morales spoke out about events in Peru, noting their similarities to how the US and OAS fueled a right-wing coup against him in October and November 2019 by making similar claims about supposed electoral fraud.

"The same discourse of the racist, fascist and pro-coup: it denounces 'fraud' without proof and attacks the democracy it claims to defend. [Donald] Trump in the US, [Carlos] Mesa in Bolivia, and Fujimori in Peru repeat the same lie and ignore the people's vote. The result should be respected," he said, [according to Kawsachun News](#).

During the October 2019 vote count, incumbent candidate Morales pulled ahead late in the vote count, similar to how Castillo, the US, Mesa, and other right-wing forces in Bolivia have used it as a pretext to claim that Morales' government had fouled the vote and accused him of making a power grab. While [some academics](#) at the time noted the pattern of voting results was possible without fraudulent counting practices, only several months later did corporate media outlets like the [Washington Post admit](#) their error, after Jeanine Añez's coup government had crushed the resistance of pro-Morales indigenous communities. Añez has since been [arrested and charged](#) with terrorism, sedition, and conspiracy after Luis Arce, a candidate from Morales' Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), defeated her in October 2020 elections.

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Tunisia Weighs Banning Normalization of Relations With Israel in Wake of Gaza War
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

On Tuesday, the Tunisian legislature began discussion of a bill aimed at banning the normalization of relations with Israel, as several other Arab states have done in the last year. Neighboring Algeria has also considered banning advocacy of normalization in the media. The Committee on Rights, Freedoms and Foreign Relations in Tunisia's Assembly of the Representatives of the People was due to take up the issue on Tuesday after a majority of the legislature's political factions came together to demand the illegalization of extending diplomatic recognition to the state of Israel amid the 11-day war in Gaza, according to [The New Arab](#). Tunis has played an interesting role in the struggle between Israel and the Palestinians, having once hosted the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and also having limited relations with

Israel in the 1990s, before cancelling them after the Second Palestinian Intifada broke out in 2000. It also has one of the larger Jewish communities in the Arab world, with about 1,500 still inhabiting the [island of Djerba](#), where one of Judaism's rare pilgrimage shrines is located. Its strong sympathy with the Palestinian struggle was evident in the demonstrations last month as the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) bombarded Gaza with airstrikes and artillery, destroying buildings and killing [more than 250 people](#). Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip, fired more than 4,300 rockets at Israel, most of which were intercepted by air defense systems, but ultimately still killed 12 people in Israel.

According to [Africa News](#), thousands of Tunisians marched down Mohammed V Avenue in Tunis on May 19 demanding the criminalization of relations with Israel.

In 2020, the United States helped broker a series of deals with Arab nations that resulted in them extending diplomatic recognition to Israel and normalizing diplomatic and trade relations. The United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco also penned deals before the year was out, and in return, Israel pledged to hold off on plans to annex part of the Jordan Valley in the West Bank.

When Morocco agreed to formalize their [long-informal relations](#) with Israel in December in exchange for the US recognizing Rabat's claims to rule the non-self-governing territory of Western Sahara, it sent shockwaves through the Maghreb. [Algerian lawmakers pitched](#) a bill that would have banned advocating normalization with Israel, and Algerian and Tunisian leaders denounced the move.

"For Tunisia, the question is not on the agenda," Tunisian Prime Minister Hichem [Mechichi told France24](#) at the time.

"As Tunisia respects the sovereign positions of other countries, it affirms that its stance is principled, and changes in the international scene will never affect it," the Tunisian Foreign [Ministry also said](#).

Normalization of relations with Israel goes against the [so-called "Three No's"](#) of the 1967 Khartoum Declaration. When Arab leaders met in the Sudanese capital in the aftermath of Israel's astounding victory in the Six-Day War in which it seized Gaza, East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula from surrounding Arab nations, they agreed on three principles to govern their joint orientation towards Israel: no peace, no recognition, and no negotiations.

However, in practice this agreement began to crumble almost immediately. As [Sputnik has reported](#), Morocco had already secretly passed to Israel information about a planned Arab attack prior to the Six-Day War, and 11 years later in 1978, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat became the first Arab leader to sign a peace treaty with Israel. Jordan followed in 1994, and several other Muslim nations also [established some degree](#) of relations with Israel in the 1990s and 2000s, including Chad, Mauritania, and Morocco, with many of them later cancelling in response to an attack by Israel against Palestinian forces.

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Pentagon Seemingly Drops Quest for Ship-Based Electromagnetic Railgun

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

In the US Navy's proposed budget for the coming fiscal year, it has dropped funding for the programs developing an electromagnetic railgun and the special hypervelocity rounds it would have fired.

Military technology sites [The War Zone](#) and [Military.com separately](#) reported in the last week that the Navy had cancelled the two programs, freeing up millions of dollars in a [notoriously tightly-pinched](#) budget.

One program, the "Gun Launched Guided Projectile," or hyper-velocity projectile (HVP), was a meter-long dart made of solid metal intended to be flung so incredibly fast at a target that its kinetic energy alone would be explosively released upon impact. Deleting it freed up \$5.9 million from the budget.

Another was the electromagnetic railgun created to fling the hypervelocity round at speeds of up to Mach 7 and distances of up to 110 miles away. According to The War Zone, the two line items related to funding the weapon have been zeroed out in the 2022 budget pitch.

"Railgun technology and knowledge attained will be documented and preserved," the document states, according to the outlet, adding that "railgun hardware will be realigned to maximize its sustainability to facilitate potential future use."

In other words, the Pentagon is halting the effort for now, but not giving up totally.

While the railgun was successfully built and fired, the extreme stress caused by firing it wore out the gun barrel after just a handful of shots. Further, the colossal amount of energy needed to power the electromagnets that accelerated the HVP to 4,500 miles per hour - 20 megawatts of power - is only available on a [handful of naval vessels](#), but only realistically usable on three: the Zumwalt-class destroyers USS Zumwalt, Michael Monsour, and Lyndon B. Johnson. Each is capable of producing 78 megawatts of power.

However, the Navy has already committed to transitioning these huge stealthy warships into conventional missile cruisers, although they may one day carry hypersonic missiles, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike [Gilday said in April](#).

The Pentagon also considered using a modified version of the HVP in place of conventional artillery and deck gun rounds, but never put in much effort towards the process of converting existing hardware to accommodate the new round.

The Chinese People's Liberation Army has also explored arming a warship with a railgun, [installing one on](#) the Type 072II-class landing ship Haiyan Shan in 2018 for testing purposes. In July 2020, the PLA adopted a new [turbo power generator](#) similar in design to those powering the Zumwalts, with the China State Shipbuilding Corporation's (CSSC) 704 Research Institute that each generator can put out 20 megawatts of electricity.

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Hopes of Gold Mine Project Dashed as Alaska Native Corporation Moves to Protect Land
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Weeks before US President Joe Biden took office, the Trump administration blocked a permit for a massive copper and gold project in Alaska. At the time, the US Army Corps of Engineers claimed the company seeking the permit was working "contrary to the public interest," as it failed to present a plan that complied with Clean Water Act guidelines.

The Pedro Bay Corporation (PBC) has finalized an agreement with the Conservation Fund, an environmental nonprofit, to protect its land and promote the conservation of fish and wildlife. Per the agreement, The Conservation Fund has purchased 44,000 acres of surface estate land for some \$18.3 million from the PBC, an Alaska Native group that owns land near Bristol Bay - the easternmost arm of the Bering Sea.

"This transaction supports the values of our community members by protecting their land, their subsistence, and their traditional way of life," said PBC CEO Matt McDaniel in a quoted statement.

The deal covers three areas near Knutson Creek, Iliamna River and Pile River.

"This is an opportunity that will provide our community benefits and economic value in perpetuity," McDaniel added. "After years of consideration, the shareholders have now made an informed decision on how to manage and protect their privately held ancestral lands."

The deal was backed by 90% of PBC shareholders.

Sarah Thiele, a PBC board member, highlighted that the fish, wildlife and land are a major part of the identity of Alaska Natives.

Larry Selzer, President and CEO of the Conservation Fund, said that the protection of Bristol Bay - the largest salmon fishery in the world - is not only an environmental move.

"Protecting this magnificent, vital landscape with our Alaska Native partners will not only conserve over 44,000 acres of the world's most critical salmon habitat, it also will honor the Indigenous guardianship and sustainable subsistence practiced by the people of Pedro Bay for generations," Selzer said in a quoted statement. "Getting this project across the goal line will require a strong, collective commitment from people across the United States."

The agreement comes as a final blow to a proposed Pebble Mine that has been opposed by the administrations of both former US President Donald Trump and current President Joe Biden.

Back in November, the US Army Corps of Engineers decried the massive gold and copper project as "contrary to the public interest." According to the service, Pebble Limited Partnership, the company behind the proposed project, did not comply with Clean Water Act guidelines regarding rocks and other fill that would be displaced.

The mining company has pledged to appeal the decision.

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US Senate Approves More Than \$200Bln for Tech Competition With China
by [Evan Craighead](#)

WASHINGTON (Sputnik) - The US Senate approved more than \$200 billion in funds to help technology companies take on the competition from China in an intensifying showdown between the two world powers amid a global shortage of microchips.

With a 68-32 vote, the US Senate has moved to advance the United States Innovation and Competition Act of 2021 (USICA), a bill aimed at supporting US chipmakers and science research. It is one of the few bills being negotiated in so-called bipartisan spirit, with both Democrats and Republicans supporting it.

USICA, also known as [S.1260](#), calls for the establishment of various programs and activities to strengthen US innovation and leadership in key technological areas, such as artificial intelligence and high-performance computing.

Some \$200 billion are committed under the proposed legislation, with nearly \$120 billion for US science and technology development and some \$53 billion for semiconductor chip production and research, among others.

Following its Tuesday passage in the Senate, the bill now progresses to the US House of Representatives. The House [is reportedly](#) expected to vote matter in late June, or July. Lawmakers' recent focus on computer chips and the tech industry comes amid growing tensions between the US and China, as well as recent chip shortages in the states.

On Friday, US President Joe [Biden signed](#) an Executive Order blacklisting 59 Chinese military and surveillance firms from US investments. Prior to the move, only 44 Chinese companies had such a designation.

Per the order, the listed Chinese companies "undermine the security or democratic values" of the US and its allies.

The White House has also announced a [supply chain review](#) that intends to look into expanding the US production of lithium batteries, semiconductors, rare earth minerals and active pharmaceutical ingredients.

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Trump's Niece Says 45's Children Could Cooperate With NY Prosecutors, Despite His Expectations

by [Evan Craighead](#)

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

Psychologist Mary Trump, estranged niece of the 45th US president, asserted on Monday that she does not believe her uncle would waver if New York prosecutors came after his children -- her cousins.

"What would it mean to Donald Trump if they came after his kids? Would that change his disposition, do you think? Would he take one for his kids?" CNN's Chris Cuomo questioned.

"No, he wouldn't," Mary Trump replied.

Trump's eldest sons - Eric Trump and Donald Trump Jr. - are presently employed by the Trump Organization.

She went on to claim that Trump would expect his children "to take the hit for him, to benefit him."

"What he probably doesn't understand is that's not really how it works. You know, they always try to get people to flip so they can go after the bigger target," Mary Trump said, referring to the ongoing probe into the Trump Organization and its executives.

Mary Trump expressed that while Trump could think his children would not cooperate with prosecutors, she is "fairly sure they would."

"So if that indeed happens, it's going to be fascinating, because he would never do anything to protect them if it were at his expense," she added.

It's worth noting that Mary Trump's comments come as part of her press run for a new book, "The Reckoning," which, in part, claims the US is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, that cannot be repaired by "a new leader alone."

Months prior to Mary Trump's CNN interview, it [was announced](#) that she would be joining the board of directors for LPAC, an LGBTQ+ and womens' rights-focused super political action committee (PAC).

The super PAC's overarching mission is to get more female, LGBTQ+-identified politicians elected to public office.

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Watch: Russian Sailors Rescue Lost, Stranded Samoyed From Floating Arctic Ice

Svetlana Chereshneva, the owner of the one-year-old Samoyed, told Russian media that the fluffy white pooch had been missing since he ran through the open door of her home on May 21. Crewmembers of the Alexander Sannikov icebreaker are being heralded as heroes after successfully executing a rescue operation to save Aika, a one-year-old Samoyed, from the Russian Arctic coast village of Mys Kamenniy.

The mission, carried out earlier this month, was captured on video after Gazpromneft-Yamal workers first spotted the fluffy white pooch.

Despite ice shard damage to her paws, Aika can be seen wagging her tail as the vessel approaches her slab of Arctic ice.

A ramp was then extended for the dog to climb aboard.

"We investigated all options for lifting the animal from the ice, and placed a ceremonial ladder which the dog used to get on board," said Yevgeny Nagibin, assistant to the captain of the icebreaker.

"Later we used mobile communications to contact locals, found the dog owner, and a few hours later the animal was safely returned to the village."

Aika has since been transported back to her Mys Kamenniy home.

[Chereshneva confirmed](#) to Russian outlets that she has reunited with her once-lost companion.

"But after all these adventures she doesn't go far from us and doesn't rush to go outside," she said, noting that Aika's appetite returned after resting during the first day back.

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RPT - Pushkin Marathon Unified Thousands in Universal Values of Love, Freedom - Organizer

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The online marathon dedicated to the legacy of the iconic Russian poet Alexander Pushkin unified thousands from all continents in universal values of love, freedom and beauty, President of the Pushkin for the Whole World foundation, Julian Henry Lowenfeld, told Sputnik.

The Pushkin online marathon, organized by the foundation, took place on June 6 and celebrated the great poet's 222nd birthday.

"People all over the world had fun, heard the poetry of Pushkin, heard music to his verses. They heard Pushkin in at least 12 languages," Lowenfeld said.

Lowenfeld, a renowned translator of Pushkin from Russian into English and promoter of his global legacy, called the marathon a celebration of poetry and unity, as well as the best what the Russian culture has.

"For me, one of the most moving moments in this marathon was when we had a young girl from Israel reading one portion of the Pushkin fairy tale 'Tzar Saltan', and then just right after her, just a few kilometers down the road, a Palestinian boy read," Lowenfeld noted. "Maybe their parents are shooting each other – I hope not – but these children unified in love of poetry and through Pushkin. I think it is an amazing moment."

He found it difficult to provide an exact number of participants but noted that thousands of people from dozens of countries and all continents took part in the marathon.

"For many of us, we realized we were not alone, and I think this is the most important thing. The universal values that matter to everyone around the globe, and we all basically have a need for love, freedom, harmony and beauty," he added.

The Pushkin for the Whole World foundation was undertaking the online marathon to raise funds to provide bilingual educational materials to the Russian diaspora around the world, and also to assist children with special needs.

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

WASHINGTON, June 8 (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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RPT - UN Calls Discovery of Mass Grave of Indigenous Children in Canada 'Shocking'

UNITED NATIONS, June 8 (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.

"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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RPT: PREVIEW - Biden Travels to Europe for Meetings With G7, NATO, Putin

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Wednesday is embarking on his first overseas trip to reconnect with G7, NATO, European Union leaders and will crown his eight-day tour across Europe with a closely watched summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The White House said that the trip with stops in the United Kingdom, Belgium and Switzerland will highlight the United States' commitment to restoring alliances, revitalizing the transatlantic relationship, and working in close cooperation with allies to address global challenges.

On Wednesday, June 9, Air Force One will land at Royal Air Force Mildenhall where Biden will meet with US Air Force personnel. The following day Biden is scheduled to meet with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson "to affirm the enduring strength of the special relationship" between both states.

On Friday, June 11, and Saturday, June 12, US President attends the G7 Summit in Cornwall, the group's first in-person summit in two years. Ending the pandemic, jumpstarting economic recovery, curbing the climate crisis through global clean energy transition are expected to top the agenda. On Sunday, June 13, Joe Biden and his wife Jill will meet Queen Elizabeth at Windsor Castle.

On Monday, June 14, Biden will speak at the NATO summit in Brussels.

"I will affirm the United States' unwavering commitment to Article 5 [NATO's collective defense clause] and to ensuring our alliance is strong in the face of every challenge, including threats like cyberattacks on our critical infrastructure," he wrote in an opinion-editorial piece.

According to the White House, NATO leaders will discuss "how to orient the alliance to future threats and ensure effective burden sharing."

Biden will also meet with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to discuss "the full range of bilateral and regional issues," likely including US opposition to Turkey's purchase of Russian S-400 air defense systems.

On Tuesday, June 15, while still in Brussels, Biden will meet with the leadership of the European Union. This will be the first US-EU Summit since 2014.

"We will focus on ensuring that market democracies, not China or anyone else, write the 21st-century rules around trade and technology. And we will continue to pursue the goal of a Europe whole, free and at peace," Biden said.

The leaders will discuss "a common agenda to ensure global health security, stimulate global economic recovery, tackle climate change, enhance digital and trade cooperation, strengthen democracy, and address mutual foreign policy concerns," the White House said.

US media has also warned of possible thorny issues on the agenda, including the Trump-era steel and aluminum tariffs or disputes over subsidies to Airbus and Boeing.

In Brussels Biden will also meet with King Philippe of Belgium and Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo.

Biden will then travel to Geneva, Switzerland, where he will hold a bilateral summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday, June 16. The US President has said repeatedly he wants a more stable and predictable relationship with Russia, but will not hesitate to respond to what Washington deems are adversarial activities.

"The United States does not seek conflict. We want a stable and predictable relationship where we can work with Russia on issues like strategic stability and arms control," Biden said.

"At the same time, I have also imposed meaningful consequences for behaviors that violate US sovereignty, including interference in our democratic elections. And President Putin knows that I will not hesitate to respond to future harmful activities," he added.

Moreover, Biden underscored the importance of having a meeting with Putin after "high-level discussions with friends, partners and allies who see the world through the same lens as the United States, and with whom we have renewed our connections and shared purpose."

While in Geneva Biden will also meet with Swiss President Guy Parmelin and Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis.

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RPT - Biden Unlikely to Agree to Exchange Russian, US Prisoners - Lawyer

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will unlikely agree to release Russian citizens convicted in the United States, even in exchange to Americans imprisoned in Russia, partner at Marks & Sokolov LLC, former Pennsylvania State Senator Bruce Marks told Sputnik.

"Recently, there have been renewed discussion about the United States releasing Victor Bout and Konstantin Yaroshenko in return for Americans in prison in Russia," Marks said on Tuesday. "Dating back to the exchanges of Cold War spies, well documented in the Tom Hanks movie Bridge of Spies, this would not be difficult legally from the American point of view because they were convicted of federal crimes."

US leader could commute their sentences and order them deported to Russia in exchange for similar treatment of Americans, such as Paul Whelan and Trevor Reed, he added.

In the meantime, the former lawmaker expressed doubts that the US President will consider the opportunity of a prisoner exchange.

"While the means by which the US arrested Bout and Yaroshenko are certainly controversial, and serious issues of entrapment existed in both prosecutions, it seems unlikely that Biden will agree to their release at this early stage in his dialogue with Putin," he said.

Russian businessman Viktor Bout was arrested in Thailand at the US' request in 2008 as a result of an operation of US special services and handed over to the US. Bout has already served half of a 25-year sentence in a US prison on charges of conspiracy to murder US citizens and financially supporting terrorism.

Konstantin Yaroshenko, a Russian pilot, was arrested in Liberia in May 2010 on suspicion of drug trafficking. A year later, he was extradited to the US and sentenced to 20 years in prison on accusations of plotting a delivery of large quantities of drugs to the US territory. Yaroshenko has repeatedly protested the conditions of his imprisonment, noting that his health has greatly deteriorated.

Former US Marine Trevor Reed was sentenced to nine years in prison in July 2020 for assaulting police officers who were called for during Reed's drunken row with two women in a

Moscow street. Prosecutors said he assaulted the officers in the police car while they were taking him in for questioning, nearly causing a crash.

Whelan, who is also a citizen of Canada, Ireland and the United Kingdom, was arrested in Moscow 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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PREVIEW - Biden Travels to Europe for Meetings With G7, NATO, Putin

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Wednesday is embarking on his first overseas trip to reconnect with G7, NATO, European Union leaders and will crown his eight-day tour across Europe with a closely watched summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The White House said that the trip with stops in the United Kingdom, Belgium and Switzerland will highlight the United States' commitment to restoring alliances, revitalizing the transatlantic relationship, and working in close cooperation with allies to address global challenges.

On Wednesday, June 9, Air Force One will land at Royal Air Force Mildenhall where Biden will meet with US Air Force personnel. The following day Biden is scheduled to meet with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson "to affirm the enduring strength of the special relationship" between both states.

On Friday, June 11, and Saturday, June 12, US President attends the G7 Summit in Cornwall, the group's first in-person summit in two years. Ending the pandemic, jumpstarting economic recovery, curbing the climate crisis through global clean energy transition are expected to top the agenda. On Sunday, June 13, Joe Biden and his wife Jill will meet Queen Elizabeth at Windsor Castle.

On Monday, June 14, Biden will speak at the NATO summit in Brussels.

"I will affirm the United States' unwavering commitment to Article 5 [NATO's collective defense clause] and to ensuring our alliance is strong in the face of every challenge, including threats like cyberattacks on our critical infrastructure," he wrote in an opinion-editorial piece.

According to the White House, NATO leaders will discuss "how to orient the alliance to future threats and ensure effective burden sharing."

Biden will also meet with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to discuss "the full range of bilateral and regional issues," likely including US opposition to Turkey's purchase of Russian S-400 air defense systems.

On Tuesday, June 15, while still in Brussels, Biden will meet with the leadership of the European Union. This will be the first US-EU Summit since 2014.

"We will focus on ensuring that market democracies, not China or anyone else, write the 21st-century rules around trade and technology. And we will continue to pursue the goal of a Europe whole, free and at peace," Biden said.

The leaders will discuss "a common agenda to ensure global health security, stimulate global economic recovery, tackle climate change, enhance digital and trade cooperation, strengthen democracy, and address mutual foreign policy concerns," the White House said.

US media has also warned of possible thorny issues on the agenda, including the Trump-era steel and aluminum tariffs or disputes over subsidies to Airbus and Boeing.

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US Vice President Harris, Mexican President Discuss Addressing Root Causes of Migration

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris said in a press conference that she spoke with Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador about addressing the root causes of mass migration from Central America to the United States.

"If we are to address the issues that impact the southern border of the United States, and I've had a conversation with President Lopez Obrador about also the southern border of Mexico, we have to have the ability to address the root causes of why people leave," Harris said on Tuesday.

Harris said most migrants are fleeing their home in the countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras due to crime or poverty.

The two leaders also discussed issues related to easing travel restrictions between the two countries and whether Mexico will increase temporary work visas for migrants.

Harris noted that she and Lopez did not discuss the Trump-era policy known as Title 42, which allows the US government to immediately turn back asylum-seeking migrant adults and families at the southern border due to coronavirus concerns.

Hundreds of thousands of migrants have been migrating to the United States illegally to request asylum in recent months, according to data from US Customs and Border Protection.

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Harris Says Talked With Mexican President About Migrant Travel Restrictions, Work Visas

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamal Harris said during a press conference she discussed with Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador issues related to travel restrictions between the two countries and whether Mexico will boost temporary work visas for migrants.

"So we had discussions that were about the need, for example, to re-examine travel restrictions...there was a discussion about also what Mexico will do in terms of increasing its temporary work visas for people entering Mexico through its southern border," Harris said on Tuesday. "There were no promises made or any commitments."

Harris added that she and Lopez did not discuss the Trump-era policy known as Title 42, which allows the US government to immediately turn back asylum-seeking migrant adults and families at the southern border due to coronavirus concerns.

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Harris Calls on US Government to 'Strengthen Legal Pathways' for Incoming Migrants

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The US government must address the current situation at the United States' border with Mexico by bolstering the pathways for legal entry, Vice President Kamala Harris said.

"We also must, of course, tackle the issues that are inherent in the situation at the border, and what we must do to strengthen legal pathways for people to enter the United States," Harris said on Tuesday.

Harris made the remarks following bilateral meetings with Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador. It is Harris's first trip abroad as Vice President, with her visit to Mexico City following meetings in Guatemala.

Harris said migration to the United States is a complex, multi-faceted problem that consists both of the situation at the border itself and the "root causes" in the countries from which migrants are coming. She added that most people do not want to leave their home countries and US government should give people hope that they can stay where they want to stay.

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UPDATE - US State Dept. Will Soon Nominate Permanent Ambassador for Ukraine - Blinken

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The US State Department plans to fill soon the position permanent ambassador to Ukraine that has been vacant since the departure of the previous ambassador in 2019, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during a congressional hearing. "We are trying to move forward on that [nomination] as quickly as possible," Blinken told the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee on Tuesday. "It is a priority for us and for the President [Joe Biden]. I want to make sure that we have the strongest possible person leading the strongest possible team in Ukraine."

Blinken pointed out that there is a special procedure of moving forward with an ambassador nomination in the State Department and they are in the midst of nominating a new diplomat for Ukraine.

The last US ambassador for Ukraine Marie Yovanovitch was removed from her post in Kiev by former President Donald Trump in May 2019. Trump never gave a clear explanation for this action, but her dismissal came at a time when his lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, was investigating Joe Biden, then a Democratic presidential candidate, and his son Hunter Biden over their involvement in Ukraine during the Obama administration.

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US Senate Approves More Than \$200Bln for Tech Competition With China

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The US Senate approved more than \$200 billion in funds to help technology companies take on the competition from China in an intensifying showdown between the two world powers amid a global shortage of microchips.

The Senate voted out 68 to 32 in favor of the "United States Innovation and Competition Act of 2021" (USICA), aimed at supporting US chipmakers and science research. It is one of the few bills being negotiated in so-called bipartisan spirit, with both Democrats and Republicans supporting it.

More than \$200 billion are committed under the bill, with nearly \$120 billion for US science and technology development and some \$53 billion for semiconductor chip production and research, among others.

The bill was approved against the backdrop of a growing US-China tussle for global technology dominance and a crippling shortage of semiconductors that has clobbered American automakers, home appliance manufacturers and phone producers.

The Democrat-majority US House of Representatives is working on its own version of a bill to boost US tech competition against China. Any differences between the two bills would have to be negotiated before both chambers pass a final act to send it to President Biden for his signature.

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Trudeau, Ukraine President Discuss Ryanair Incident, Belarus - Statement

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy discussed over the telephone the Ryanair incident and Belarusian affairs, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said.

Belarus has been in the international spotlight after a Ryanair flight from Greece to Lithuania was diverted to Minsk over what Belarusian authorities say was a bomb threat that turned out to be false.

"The Prime Minister and the President... discussed the situation in Belarus following the forced landing of Ryanair Flight 4978 in Minsk under false pretenses and the subsequent arrest of journalist [Roman] Pratasevich," the PMO said in a readout of the conversation on Tuesday. Belarus asserts that it alerted the flight crew to a bomb threat on board. Meanwhile, Western officials maintain that Protasevich, the founder of a Telegram channel which Minsk has designated as an extremist entity, was the target of the alleged staged grounding.

The Prime Minister also emphasized Canada's "unwavering support" for Ukraine's sovereignty, security and territorial integrity and the two leaders discussed the ongoing civil conflict in the Donbas region, the readout said. Trudeau added that Canada continues to support Kiev's Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

Furthermore, the two leaders discussed the latest developments concerning the downed Ukrainian International Airlines flight PS752 after a Canadian court ruled last month that Iran had deliberately downed the Ukrainian airliner - deeming the incident an act of terror under the Criminal Code of Canada.

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US Charges 17 Foreigners With Providing Encryption Devices to Criminal Groups

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - A two-day FBI sting using a fake company that sold encryption devices and resulted in hundreds of arrests worldwide culminated with a US indictment of 17 foreign nationals that sold the equipment to criminal syndicates, the Justice Department said.

"For the first time, the FBI operated its own encrypted device company, called 'ANOM,' which was promoted by criminal groups worldwide," Justice said in a press release on Tuesday.

"These criminals sold more than 12,000 ANOM encrypted devices and services to more than 300 criminal syndicates operating in more than 100 countries."

Buyers included Italian organized crime, Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs, and various international drug trafficking organizations, according to court records cited by the Justice Department.

The indictment unsealed late on Tuesday followed a wave of more than 500 arrests that began in Australia and stretched across Europe, the Justice Department said.

The indictment charges 17 alleged distributors of the FBI's ANOM devices with conspiring to violate the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO), the Justice Department added.

During the investigation, criminal groups used ANOM equipment to plan drug deals, launder money and sometimes issue threats, believing that their communications were hidden from law enforcement, according to the Justice Department.

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Blinken Says US Informed Ukraine of Its Intentions Toward Nord Stream 2 Pipeline Project

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The United States informed Ukraine about its intentions to waive sanctions imposed on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project in Europe, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during a congressional hearing.

"For the record, we did share with our Ukrainian partners our intentions when it came to the [Nord Stream 2] pipeline and maybe that information didn't get directly to the President [of Ukraine Volodymyr] Zelenskyy, it certainly should have," Blinken told the US Senate Foreign Affairs Committee on Tuesday.

Blinken also said that US President Joe Biden had invited the Ukrainian leader to Washington in the coming weeks.

On Sunday, an American news outlet Axios published an interview with Zelenskyy in which he expressed surprise and disappointment over the fact that he was not informed about the US intentions to waive the sanctions on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline in advance after Biden supposedly had offered him "direct signals" that Washington was preparing to block the project.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) -

US-MEXICO RELATIONS

* The United States has pledged \$130 million over the next three years to support Mexican workers' protections, US vice presidential senior adviser and spokesperson Symone Sanders said in a statement on Tuesday.

* The United States and Mexico have committed to a new partnership to address the root causes of migration from Central America, Sanders said.

US POLICY ON IRAN

* Iran's decision to take steps to limit the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) verification and monitoring activities at its nuclear sites will complicate efforts for Washington and Tehran to return to compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), US Charge d'Affaires in Vienna Louis Bono said on Tuesday.

* The United States will maintain "hundreds of sanctions" against Iran even in the event of Tehran's return to the JCPOA, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

RATKO MLADIC VERDICT

* Judges of the Appeals Chamber of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) on Tuesday affirmed the life imprisonment sentence of the former commander of Bosnian Serbs, Gen. Ratko Mladic.

* The Hague-based IRMCT has confirmed its anti-Serbian stance after affirming the life imprisonment sentence of the former commander of Bosnian Serbs, Gen. Ratko Mladic, Republica Srpska President Zeljka Cvijanovic said.

* Judges of the IRMCT did not consider arguments of the defense team in the case of Mladic, his lawyer Branko Lukic told Sputnik.

* President Joe Biden praised the United Nations for affirming Mladic's conviction for war crimes committed in Srebrenica over two decades ago.

NORD STREAM 2

* US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a congressional hearing on Tuesday that finishing the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline differs from making it operational and

warned that the United States still has opportunities to deal with those who grant operations permits.

* The date for issuing permits for gas supplies via Nord Stream 2 cannot yet be determined as it is necessary to carry out preparatory work and numerous tests, the Energy Ministry of German state Mecklenburg-Vorpommern told Sputnik.

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

* Russia will seek the Council of Europe's (CoE) adequate reaction to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's bill that excluded Russians from the list of indigenous people of Ukraine, Russia's Permanent Representative to the CoE Ivan Soltanovsky said on Tuesday.

* Relocating the Donbas conflict settlement talks from Minsk to another location will not affect Kiev's reluctance to adhere to Minsk agreements, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko said.

* The Russian delegation will certainly initiate a discussion of Ukraine's bill that removes Russians from the list of Ukraine's indigenous peoples both in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Leonid Slutsky, the head of the Russian lower chamber's international affairs committee, said.

WORLD BANK UPDATED FORECAST

* The World Bank upgraded its forecast for the 2021 global economic growth to 5.6 percent, 1.5 percentage points up from its January report.

* The World Bank improved its 2021 US GDP growth forecast to 6.8 percent, 3.3 percentage points up from the January report.

* The World Bank expects the Russian economy to see a 3.2 percent growth in 2021 and 2022, and the forecast takes into consideration both, US sanctions and the key rate increase.

* The World Bank improved its forecast for the 2021 eurozone GDP growth to 4.2 percent, from 3.6 percent in its January report.

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Two-Thirds of Aging Current US Fleet Still to Be in Service Through 2030 – Navy Chiefs

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) – More than two thirds of the current US Navy fleet of just over 300 ships will still need to be in service by the end of this decade, acting Assistant Secretary of the Navy Frederick Stefany and Deputy Chief of Naval Operations James Kilby told Congress on Tuesday.

“Nearly 70 percent of today's fleet will be in service through 2030,” Stefany and Kilby told the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC)'s Subcommittee on Seapower in their joint written testimony. The subcommittee was reviewing the Biden administration's appropriations request for the Navy for Fiscal Year 2022.

Because of the increasing age of the deployed fleet, the navy is placing more emphasis on improving its rate of meeting deadlines in surface ship maintenance programs, Stafany and Kilby acknowledged.

"... (A)ccelerating the momentum of on-time delivery for ships, submarines and aircraft coming out of maintenance availabilities remains a priority for the Department [of the Navy]," they testified.

The Department of the Navy was using available data to provide better predictability, improve performance, share lessons learned, and reduce costs to grow the operational capacity of the Navy in a healthier way over time, Stefany and Kilby testified.

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Russia Insists on Full Medical Examination of Ratko Mladic's Cognitive Functions

UNITED NATIONS, June 8 (Sputnik) - Russia strongly insists on a complete and independent medical examination of convicted earlier on Tuesday Ratko Mladic to establish whether the former commander of Bosnian Serbs has retained his cognitive abilities, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Gennady Kuzmin told the UN Security Council. Earlier in the day, judges of the Appeals Chamber of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals affirmed the life imprisonment sentence of Mladic for the crimes committed during the Yugoslav wars.

"A full independent examination and certification, including whether he [Mladic] has retained his cognitive function, has still not been conducted," Kuzmin said during a council's meeting. "We strongly insist on this kind of examination being conducted."

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Russia Sees Mladic's Verdict as Continuation of 'Politicized Approach' Adopted by Tribunal

UNITED NATIONS, June 8 (Sputnik) - Russia believes the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals' (IRMCT) conviction of Ratko Mladic is the continuation of a politicized approach adopted by the preceding Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Gennady Kuzmin said on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day, judges of the Appeals Chamber of the IRMCT affirmed the life imprisonment sentence of the former commander of Bosnian Serbs Mladic. At the same time, the Mladic was not found guilty of genocide of around 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys in the town of Srebrenica.

"The publicized verdict against Ratko Mladic is the continuation of the politicized approach adopted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia," Kuzmin said during a

UN Security Council meeting on the issue. "It has become a vivid stain on the reputation of the Residual Mechanism [IRMCT] now."

"Pretty soon, it will be 30 years that we have seen a biased and costly Hague machinery of justice methodically grind the lives of the participants of the Balkan war," he added.

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New York City Board Votes to End Solitary Confinement in City Prisons – Mayor

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) – The oversight board for New York City prisons voted unanimously to end solitary confinement as a punishment for rule violations by inmates, Mayor Bill de Blasio said on Tuesday.

"New York City is going further than any jail system in America to ban solitary confinement once and for all," de Blasio said in a press release. "Through our work with our Board of Correction, we have found a plan that will provide a safe and humane environment for those who are incarcerated and officers alike."

The decision will replace solitary confinement, often used to punish prisoners for violent acts, with a Risk Management Accountability System (RMAS), the release said.

The new system will provide lawyers to represent inmates at disciplinary hearings, require that prisoners spend 10 hours outside cells daily and provide counseling, the release added.

Solitary confinement – a long-practiced form of punishment – typically locks prisoners in cells for 20 to 24 hours each day, according to the release.

The new rules, which take effect in the fall of 2021, build on reforms in 2015 that ended solitary confinement for 16- to 21-year-old inmates, the release said.

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US Eases COVID-19 Travel Warning to Japan Ahead of Olympics - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) – The United States eased COVID-19-related travel restrictions to Japan ahead of the upcoming Olympics, the State Department said in a notice on Tuesday.

"Reconsider travel to Japan due to COVID-19," the notice read.

Before traveling to Japan, Americans are urged to discuss upcoming trips with their healthcare providers and be aware of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) warning, as well as avoid contact with sick people.

"The CDC has issued a Level 3 Travel Health Notice for Japan due to COVID-19, indicating a high level of COVID-19 in the country," the notice said.

The new announcement replaced the previous one from May 25, where the State Department urged Americans "do not travel" to Japan.

This comes several weeks before the Olympic Games are set to kick off in Tokyo on July 23. The Olympics were postponed from last year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

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US, Mexico to Work Jointly in Central America to Address Root Causes of Migration

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The United States and Mexico have committed to a new partnership to address the root causes of irregular migration from Central America, US Vice President's senior adviser Symone Sanders said on Tuesday.

"To address root causes of migration in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, the United States joined Mexico in a new strategic partnership to share information and strategies and co-manage new programs to foster economic opportunity through agricultural development and youth empowerment," Sanders said in a press release.

The United States has also pledged to provide \$130 million over the next three years to support Mexican workers' protections.

The White House said in a separate press release that the United States and Mexico also vowed to hold high-level talks to discuss trade and security matters of mutual interest. The two countries agreed to schedule a high-level meeting in September to discuss expanding bilateral trade cooperation and collaboration, including on supply chain resiliency.

Moreover, the release said the United States will aim to create \$250 million in new investment and sales for the local economy in southern Mexico.

These commitments are part of a memorandum of understanding signed between the two countries earlier on Tuesday during Harris' trip to Mexico City to attend a bilateral meeting with Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador.

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US Pharmacist Gets 3 Years in Prison for Trying to Ruin COVID-19 Vaccines - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - A hospital pharmacist who admitted he was skeptical about COVID-19 vaccines received a 3 year jail sentence for tampering with a batch of Moderna inoculations by removing them from refrigeration, the Justice Department said on Tuesday.

"According to court documents, [Steven] Brandenburg purposefully removed a box of COVID-19 vaccine vials manufactured by Moderna - which must be stored at specific cold temperatures to remain viable - from a hospital refrigeration unit during two successive overnight shifts in late December 2020," the department said in a press release.

According to his plea agreement, Brandenburg stated that he was skeptical of vaccines in general, and the Moderna vaccine specifically, and had communicated his beliefs about vaccines to his co-workers, the release said.

In pleading guilty, Brandenburg acknowledged that after leaving the vaccines out for several hours each night, he returned the vaccines to the refrigerator to be used in the hospital's vaccine clinic the following day, the release added.

Before the full extent of Brandenburg's conduct was discovered, 57 people received doses of the vaccine from the affected vials, according to the release.

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White House Says Tax Returns Leak Illegal, Under Investigation

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said on Tuesday that the media leak of wealthiest Americans' tax returns was illegal and is under investigation. ProPublica, a self-described nonprofit newsroom that investigates abuses of power, claimed earlier that it obtained a vast trove of Internal Revenue Service (IRS) data allegedly showing that billionaires pay a tiny fraction of what their fortunes grow each year in income taxes, if any at all.

"Any unauthorized disclosure of confidential government information by a person with access is illegal and we take this very seriously. The IRS Commissioner said today that they are taking all appropriate measures including referring the matter to investigators," Psaki said during a press briefing.

Psaki refused to comment on the specifics of the case, but in a broader context said that the Biden administration is aware there is more to be done to ensure that US corporations and individuals with the highest income pay their "fair share."

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Senate Republicans Press Biden to Keep Palestinian Missions Closed - Letter

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - A group of 16 US Republican Senators led by Marco Rubio on Tuesday sent a letter to President Joe Biden urging him to refrain from opening a mission of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in Washington as well as a US consulate to serve Palestinians in Jerusalem.

"Secretary of State Antony Blinken's recent announcement that the US will move to reopen the Consulate General in Jerusalem that oversaw relations with the Palestinians as well as reports that your administration plans to re-open the Mission of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in Washington, DC are deeply concerning," the letter said. "We urge you to adhere to US law and ensure both of these diplomatic missions remain closed."

The authors of the letter claim there are no legal grounds for PLO to be opened in the US since the Promoting Security and Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act of 2019 requires an American court's consent to re-establish an office of PLO or Palestine Autonomy.

The senators put the blame for the recent conflict between Israel and the Palestinians on Hamas and noted that they remain committed to work with Biden administration on constructive ways to engage with the Palestinian people.

Israel and Gaza Strip were locked in a conflict for 11 days that ended with a ceasefire on May 20. The hostilities came after days of clashes between the Arab population and the Israeli police in East Jerusalem over an Israeli court's decision to evict several Palestinian families from a neighborhood in the city.

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US Commits \$130Mln to Support Mexican Worker Protections - VP Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The United States has pledged \$130 million over the next three years to support Mexican workers' protections, US vice presidential senior adviser and spokesperson Symone Sanders said in a statement on Tuesday.

"The United States has also committed approximately \$130 million over the next three years to support Mexican workers' protections and the implementation of Mexico's historic labor reform," Sanders said after the meeting between US Vice President Kamala Harris and Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador.

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US, Mexico to Jointly Work in Central America to Address Root Causes of Migration- Sanders

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The United States and Mexico have committed to a new partnership to address the root causes of irregular migration from Central America, US Vice President's senior adviser Symone Sanders said on Tuesday.

"To address root causes of migration in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, the United States joined Mexico in a new strategic partnership to share information and strategies and co-manage new programs to foster economic opportunity through agricultural development and youth empowerment," Sanders said in a press release.

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US to Assess Potential Offshore Wind Opportunities in Gulf of Mexico - Interior Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is going to study opportunities to boost clean and renewable energy development in the Gulf of Mexico and generate thousands of new jobs there, the US Interior Department said in a release on Tuesday.

"The Department of the Interior today announced its intent to assess potential opportunities to advance clean energy development on the Gulf of Mexico Outer Continental Shelf (OCS)," the release said.

The move was part of the Biden administration's goal to create thousands of jobs through the deployment of 30 gigawatts of offshore wind by the end of this decade, the release explained.

"We know that offshore wind development has the potential to create tens of thousands of good-paying, union jobs across the nation. This is an important first step to see what role the Gulf may play in this exciting frontier." Secretary of Energy Deb Haaland said in the release.

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management will publish a request for interest in the Federal Register on Friday to assess interest in potential offshore wind development in the OCS focused on offshore regions of the states of Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi and Alabama, the release added.

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Canadians Say Catholic Church Bears Responsibility for Residential School Abuse - Poll

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - Canadians by a nearly two-to-one margin believe the Catholic Church bears responsibility for abuse in the residential school system, which has been described as an institution that perpetuated cultural genocide upon the country's indigenous peoples, a Leger poll revealed on Tuesday.

"66% of Canadians think the Church should bear the responsibility for the tragedies committed at residential schools, while 34% think the Government of Canada should be held responsible," the Leger study found.

Additionally, the poll found that 80 percent of Canadians believe that the discovery in Kamloops is "tip of the iceberg" and similar sites will be uncovered throughout the country. The vast majority of Canadians – 77 percent – also say that the federal government should conduct similar studies at all of the former residential school sites, but efforts should be indigenous-led.

Calls have grown from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and members of his cabinet for a formal papal apology for the Church's role in the residential school system in the aftermath of 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.

On Sunday, Pope Francis expressed his "sorrow" at the grisly discovery, however, top Canadian officials, including Trudeau, have said that this does not go far enough and continue to press for a formal acknowledgment.

Kamloops was one of the largest schools in Canada and operated from the late 19th 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.

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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Man Charged With Claiming to Be Trump Family Member in Fraud Scheme - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - US federal authorities have charged a Pennsylvania man with using the identities of members of former President Donald Trump's family to perpetuate an online fraud scheme, the Justice Department said on Tuesday.

"Joshua Hall allegedly used social media and a crowdfunding website to defraud hundreds of victims," the Justice Department said in a press release. "[Hall faces charges of] fraud and identity theft offenses for impersonating family members of the then-President of the United States on social media."

Hall sought to fraudulently raise funds for a fictitious political organization and led hundreds of people to believe they were donating to an organization that didn't exist by pretending to be someone he was not, the release added.

Hall was arrested on Tuesday morning and was due to be presented later in the day in Harrisburg federal court in the US state of Pennsylvania before Magistrate Judge Susan Schwab, according to the release.

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White House Reviewing Senate Capitol Attack Report - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The White House is currently reviewing a congressional report on security failures related to the Capitol Hill riots, Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day, two US Senate committees published a joint report that uncovered a string of intelligence and security failures that allowed then-President Donald Trump's supporters to breach the Capitol building on January 6.

"As it relates to the report, our team is currently reviewing the report and its findings to inform our ongoing effort to ensure something like that can never happen again and what role, of course, the federal government can play," Psaki said.

Psaki said US President Joe Biden upon taking office asked his team to review how they can improve the federal government's response to the threat of domestic terrorism.

"We'll be releasing that broader strategy soon as well," she said.

According to the 128-page report, 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.

As a result, the report said, the USCP did not have an operational plan for the storming and as the attack unfolded, the Capitol police command system broke down.

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UN Chief Calls Killing of Muslim Family in Canada 'Heinous Attack'

UNITED NATIONS, June 8 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Tuesday that he is "appalled" at the murder of a Muslim family in a targeted car crash attack in the Canadian province of Ontario and calls upon the world to stand united against such hatred.

"I am appalled by the targeted and heinous attack on a Muslim family in Ontario, Canada," Guterres said in a statement. "My heart goes out to the victims, surviving family and loved ones - and the community. We must stand united against Islamophobia and all forms of hatred, now more than ever."

Earlier on Tuesday, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau denounced the car crash in the Canadian city of London in Southwestern Ontario, calling it a "terrorist attack motivated by hatred," in a statement in the House of Commons in Ottawa.

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.

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Pentagon to Give Biden Afghan Anti-Terror Plans This Summer - Deputy Chief

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon is currently preparing plans to project counterterrorism operations into Afghanistan after the US troop withdrawal, Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks said on Tuesday.

"We will have, over the course of this summer, proposals to give to the president in terms of what that 'over the horizon' capability should be," Hicks said at a virtual think tank event. "It's for counterterrorism - not an 'over the horizon' capability to do all things to operate as the United States was operating in Afghanistan, but outside of it."

The overriding goal of the new plans, Hicks said, would be to prevent any terrorist organization from using Afghanistan to launch future attacks on the American homeland.

Hicks made her comments at the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) 2021 National Security Conference.

The withdrawal of American forces and US allies from Afghanistan has passed the halfway point, Central Command (CENTCOM) said on Tuesday.

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US Says Iran's Blocking of IAEA Monitoring Will Complicate Efforts to Reach Deal on JCPOA

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - Iran's decision to take steps to limit the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) verification and monitoring activities at its nuclear sites will complicate efforts for Washington and Tehran to return to compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), US Charge d'Affaires in Vienna Louis Bono said on Tuesday.

"Iran's steps to limit the IAEA's verification and monitoring activities, including under its Additional Protocol, will only make it harder to re-establish pragmatic diplomacy and reach the outcome Iran says it seeks," Bono said. "IAEA verification is a cornerstone to the nonproliferation regime and the foundation on which the JCPOA is built. Iran should not undermine that foundation at the very time we all seek a mutual return to compliance."

Iran continues to produce quantities of and enrichment levels of uranium that are beyond the JCPOA's limits, reaching 60 percent U-235, Bono said.

The United States wants to partner with other United Nations member states to ensure the IAEA is able to continue its work in Iran, he added.

On Monday, the head of the IAEA, Rafael Grossi, said Iran has not revealed the source of uranium particles discovered at three undeclared locations. He said Iran's refusal to give the agency clarity on the nuclear material present seriously affects the agency's ability to guarantee the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program.

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Biden Unlikely to Agree to Exchange Russian, US Prisoners - Lawyer to Sputnik

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden will unlikely agree to release Russian citizens convicted in the United States, even in exchange to Americans imprisoned in

Russia, partner at Marks & Sokolov LLC, former Pennsylvania State Senator Bruce Marks told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"Recently, there have been renewed discussion about the United States releasing Victor Bout and Konstantin Yaroshenko in return for Americans in prison in Russia," Marks said. "Dating back to the exchanges of Cold War spies, well documented in the Tom Hanks movie Bridge of Spies, this would not be difficult legally from the American point of view because they were convicted of federal crimes."

US leader could commute their sentences and order them deported to Russia in exchange for similar treatment of Americans, such as Paul Whelan and Trevor Reed, he added.

In the meantime, the former lawmaker expressed doubts that the US President will consider the opportunity of a prisoner exchange.

"While the means by which the US arrested Bout and Yaroshenko are certainly controversial, and serious issues of entrapment existed in both prosecutions, it seems unlikely that Biden will agree to their release at this early stage in his dialogue with Putin," he said.

Russian businessman Viktor Bout was arrested in Thailand at the US' request in 2008 as a result of an operation of US special services and handed over to the US. Bout has already served half of a 25-year sentence in a US prison on charges of conspiracy to murder US citizens and financially supporting terrorism.

Konstantin Yaroshenko, a Russian pilot, was arrested in Liberia in May 2010 on suspicion of drug trafficking. A year later, he was extradited to the US and sentenced to 20 years in prison on accusations of plotting a delivery of large quantities of drugs to the US territory. Yaroshenko has repeatedly protested the conditions of his imprisonment, noting that his health has greatly deteriorated.

Former US Marine Trevor Reed was sentenced to nine years in prison in July 2020 for assaulting police officers who were called for during Reed's drunken row with two women in a Moscow street. Prosecutors said he assaulted the officers in the police car while they were taking him in for questioning, nearly causing a crash.

Whelan, who is also a citizen of Canada, Ireland and the United Kingdom, was arrested in Moscow 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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Five-Year Old Migrant Child Abandoned at US Southern Border - Immigration Enforcement

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) released video footage on Tuesday showing a five-year-old migrant child abandoned on the United States' side of its border wall with Mexico this week.

"US Border Patrol (USBP), San Diego Sector agents encountered an unaccompanied 5-year-old child along the border wall, Monday morning," the CBP said in a press release.

"Agents observed a small child being dropped off near the end of the border wall near San Ysidro, Calif[ornia]."

The release said the child is from Guatemala and informed agents that her parents are in the United States but she had no contact information for them. Moreover, the child said she has a seven-year-old cousin still in Mexico with an unknown man, the release said.

Immigration enforcement agents have been overwhelmed on the US southern border as hundreds of thousands of migrants have been flowing to the United States to request asylum, according to published reports.

Thousands of children are smuggled into the United States alone, without a parent or guardian, each month so that they are not turned away when apprehended at the border. Many asylum-seeking migrant families have been turned away at the border under a Trump-era policy known as Title 42 that authorizes US immigration enforcement to do so due to coronavirus concerns.

The United States currently has about 17,000 unaccompanied migrant children held in temporary federal care facilities. The children are eventually released within several days to family members in the United States.

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Guterres Takes Note of UN Court Decision to Affirming Mladic's Sentence - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, June 8 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday took note of the decision by the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) to reaffirm the conviction of Ratko Mladic for war crimes committed during the 1992-95 conflict in the former Yugoslavia, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a statement. Earlier on Tuesday, judges of the Appeals Chamber of the IRMCT affirmed the sentence of life in prison for the former commander of Bosnian Serbs. At the same time, the Mladic was not found guilty of genocide of around 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys in the town of Srebrenica. "The Secretary-General takes note of today's delivery by the [IRMCT] of the appeal judgment in the case against Mr. Ratko Mladic, former commander of the Bosnian Serb armed forces," Dujarric said. "It is another vital step towards coming to terms with the past to build a more resilient, secure and hopeful future for all citizens and residents of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region."

Dujarric said Guterres stood with the victims and survivors of the genocide and crimes against humanity for which Mladic had been found guilty.

The UN chief also called on those in the position of power to refrain from denying the seriousness of the adjudicated crimes, stressing that accountability is an essential step toward reconciliation in the Balkans, Dujarric added.

Mladic, 78, served as 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. In November 2017, the UN Criminal Tribunal in the Hague convicted Mladic of war crimes and sentenced him to life in prison.

On May 26, the former president of Republika Srpska and former Bosnian Serb wartime leader, Radovan Karadzic, was transferred from the Hague to a prison in the south of England to serve out his life sentence for war crimes.

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US Says Iran's Blocking of IAEA Monitoring Will Complicate Efforts to Reach Deal on JCPOA

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Congress Should Authorize IRS to Collect Information from Crypto Industry - US Tax Chief

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The US Congress needs to give tax collectors clear authority to collect information from the cryptocurrency industry, Internal Revenue Service Commissioner Charles Rettig said Tuesday as the use of digital payments for ransom increases authorities' pursuit of the dark industry.

"Most crypto, virtual currencies are designed to stay off the radar screen," Rettig said during a Senate Finance Committee hearing. "We get challenged frequently, and to have a clear dictate from Congress on the authority of us to collect that information is critical."

The IRS chief's remarks came a day after Colonial Pipeline, which operates the largest US fuel delivery network, said government investigators recovered most of the \$4.4 million ransom in cryptocurrencies that the company paid in May to free its pipeline from digital hackers.

Separately, the Biden administration has proposed laws requiring cryptocurrency brokers, including exchanges, to report information on their customers, including on indirect foreign investors.

Businesses should also report when they receive crypto assets valued at more than \$10,000, just like how they would with regular currency, the administration says.

Rettig said the IRS currently issues summonses to third parties to get information on cryptocurrency users.

The agency is also active in both civil and criminal enforcement of virtual currencies, but needs more tools and resources, especially Congress authorization to collect information, he said.

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US Levies \$881,670 Penalty on Biotech Over False Grant Applications - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - Bio-Adhesive Alliance, a US biotechnology company, was ordered to repay \$881,670 to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the National Science Foundation for false statements in grant applications to the two agencies, the Justice Department said on Tuesday.

"United States District Court Judge Catherine C. Eagles of the Middle District of North Carolina ordered Bio-Adhesive to pay restitution in the amount of \$562,500.00 to the National Science Foundation and \$319,199.69 to the Environmental Protection Agency," the Justice Department said in a press release.

The penalty includes an unspecified additional assessment, plus a five-year probationary term for the company. The firm pleaded guilty in March 2021 to two counts of making false statements, the release said.

Bio-Adhesive applied for and received multiple grant awards totaling \$1,375,000 between 2013 and 2016, of which \$881,669 was distributed. The applications contained misrepresentations regarding the company's eligibility, the release added.

The company makes a non-petroleum based adhesive from swine manure for the construction industry.

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Pushkin Marathon Unified Thousands in Universal Values of Love, Freedom – Organizer

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) – The online marathon dedicated to the legacy of the iconic Russian poet Alexander Pushkin unified thousands from all continents in universal values of love, freedom and beauty, President of the Pushkin for the Whole World foundation, Julian Henry Lowenfeld, told Sputnik on Tuesday.

The Pushkin online marathon, organized by the foundation, took place on June 6 and celebrated the great poet's 222nd birthday.

"People all over the world had fun, heard the poetry of Pushkin, heard music to his verses. They heard Pushkin in at least 12 languages," Lowenfeld said.

Lowenfeld, a renowned translator of Pushkin from Russian into English and promoter of his global legacy, called the marathon a celebration of poetry and unity, as well as the best what the Russian culture has.

"For me, one of the most moving moments in this marathon was when we had a young girl from Israel reading one portion of the Pushkin fairy tale 'Tzar Saltan', and then just right after her, just a few kilometers down the road, a Palestinian boy read," Lowenfeld noted. "Maybe their parents are shooting each other – I hope not – but these children unified in love of poetry and through Pushkin. I think it is an amazing moment."

He found it difficult to provide an exact number of participants but noted that thousands of people from dozens of countries and all continents took part in the marathon.

"For many of us, we realized we were not alone, and I think this is the most important thing. The universal values that matter to everyone around the globe, and we all basically have a need for love, freedom, harmony and beauty," he added.

The Pushkin for the Whole World foundation was undertaking the online marathon to raise funds to provide bilingual educational materials to the Russian diaspora around the world, and also to assist children with special needs.

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US Energy Agency Expects Crude Oil Prices to Stabilize, Decline as Production Increases

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The global oil benchmark Brent is expected to stabilize this summer and then decline as oil production increases in the coming months, the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) said on Tuesday.

"EIA forecasts in the June release of its Short-Term energy Outlook that global Brent crude oil prices will stabilize in mid-2021 and average about \$68 per barrel (b) in the third quarter before decreasing to an average of \$60/b in 2022," the agency said in a press release.

Brent crude oil prices averaged \$68 per barrel in May, a 25 percent increase from prices in January, the release said.

The release noted that global demand for oil is expected to grow by six percent in 2021 and another four percent in 2022 to reach about 101 million barrels per day.

US oil production will average nearly 12 million barrels per day in 2022 and OPEC production is expected to increase to nearly 29 million barrels per day by next year, the release added.

US gas prices are expected to average about \$2.92 per gallon through September, reaching a peak price of \$3.03 per gallon this month, the release said.

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US Charges Former Slovenian Figure Skater With COVID-19 Relief Fraud – Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - Luka Klasinc, a retired Olympic figure skater from Slovenia, faces charges of bank fraud from an attempt to get \$1.5 million in COVID-19 relief from the US Small Business Administration (SBA), the Justice Department said on Tuesday.

"Klasinc used false documents to try and obtain over a million dollars in funds intended to help hard working Americans," US Attorney Audrey Strauss said in a press release. "He will now be held accountable for his alleged brazen lies."

Between July 2020 and September 2020, accounts of a company operated by Klasinc that sponsors ice-themed events received 11 Economic Injury Disaster Loans totaling \$1,595,800 from the SBA, the release said.

In late September 2020, an unnamed bank froze those accounts after identifying potential fraud and requested additional information from Klasnic, the release added.

Klasinc then provided a falsified document purporting to be a letter from the U.S. Small Business Administration in an attempt to persuade the bank to release the funds, according to the release.

Klasnic then traveled from Slovenia to the US earlier this month and appeared at the bank's New York City branch in a bid to obtain the money. He was arrested Monday afternoon and is due to appear before federal Judge Kevin Fox later on Tuesday, Justice said.

Klasinc participated in the 1992 Winter Olympics in Albertville, France.

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Olympic Committee Names 29 Refugee Athletes to Participate in Tokyo Games - Statement

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - Organizers have announced the names of the 29 athletes who will participate in the upcoming Tokyo Summer Olympic Games in Japan as part of the Refugee Team, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said on Tuesday.

"The IOC have revealed the names of the athletes who will represent the Refugee Olympic Team at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games in 2021," the committee said in a news release. "The final 29 athletes ... come from 11 countries, and were selected by the IOC's Executive Board." During the Opening Ceremony of the Tokyo 2020 Games on July 23, the team will enter the brand new Japan National Stadium with the Olympic flag in second position, immediately after Greece, the IOC said.

"The refugee athletes are an enrichment for all of us in the entire Olympic community. The reasons we created this team still exist. We have more forcibly displaced people in the world right now," IOC President Thomas Bach said in a virtual ceremony podcast from Lausanne in Switzerland.

The team will stay in the Olympic village, like all the other 206 National Olympic Committees taking part, and continue to receive IOC support after the Olympic Games, the release said. The participating athletes are from Afghanistan, South Sudan, Syria, Iran, Cameroon, Eritrea, Congo and Venezuela.

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US Job Openings Hit Record High of 9.3Mln in April - Labor Department

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - US job openings hit a record high of 9.3 million in April, the Labor Department said Tuesday, presenting more evidence of recovery from COVID-19 disruptions despite some 8 million jobs lost during the pandemic still not having returned.

"The number of job openings reached a series high of 9.3 million on the last business day of April," the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a unit within the Labor Department, said in a statement. It said there were 9,286,000 openings in all for April versus 8,288,000 in March. In terms of hires, there were 6,075,000 versus the March level of 6,006,000.

More than a year into the COVID-19 crisis, restoring job growth remains one of the biggest challenges of US policymakers.

The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April 2020, at the height of business lockdowns forced by the coronavirus.

The United States saw 559,000 new jobs in May and the unemployment rate fell to 5.8 percent, the Labor Department said. But the jobs gain were at least 90,000 short of economists' expectations, making what the Labor Department reported somewhat disappointing.

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Reliance on China Threatens Disruption to US Supplies of Critical Materials - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The concentration of global supply chains for strategic and critical materials in China risks disrupting their flow to the United States, the US Defense Department said in a Strategic and Critical Materials 100-day Sector Review released on Tuesday.

"The concentration of global supply chains for strategic and critical materials in China creates risk of disruption and of politicized trade practices, including the use of forced labor," the report said. "The civilian economy would bear the brunt of the harm from a supply disruption event."

The Defense Department warned that much of the US strategic and critical materials sector has already moved offshore.

"Other countries have deliberately put a hand on the scale to capture market-share, and our industry has followed close behind - in a global race to the bottom," the report said.

The Biden administration will assemble a consortium of public health experts including emergency medicine and critical care to review the Essential Medicines list and recommend 50-100 drugs that are most critical to have available at all times for US patients, the report added.

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UN Human Rights Chief, Genocide Prevention Adviser Welcome Mladic's Conviction

UNITED NATIONS, June 8 (Sputnik) - UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet and Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Prevention of Genocide Alice Wairimu Nderitu on Tuesday welcomed the decision by the UN's International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) to uphold the conviction and life sentence against Ratko Mladic for war crimes committed during the Yugoslav Wars.

Earlier in the day, judges of the Appeals Chamber of the IRMCT affirmed the life imprisonment sentence of the former commander of Bosnian Serbs Mladic. At the same time, Mladic was not found guilty of genocide of around 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys in the town of Srebrenica in 1995.

"The Mechanism's verdict highlights the determination of the international justice system to ensure accountability no matter how long it may take – in Mladic's case, nearly three decades after he committed his appalling crimes," Bachelet said.

Nderitu added the conviction sends an important message throughout the regions that see increasing genocide denial and the glorification of invited criminals.

Bachelet and Nderitu called on officials and media organizations in the Western Balkans to avoid using revisionist narratives and incitement of hatred that can exacerbate tensions between the communities and states in the region.

The UN officials also noted that while justice alone cannot lead to reconciliation, the Mechanism's decision represents an essential step on the path to it and constitutes a critical component of prevention.

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. Mladic was sentenced to life in prison.

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

WASHINGTON, June 8 (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 8 (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 8 (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 8 (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 8 (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 8 (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 8 (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 8 (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 8 (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

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden on Tuesday praised the United Nations for affirming 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

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Canada's Trudeau Calls Car Crash That Killed Members of Muslim Family 'Terrorist Attack'
WASHINGTON, June 8 (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 8 (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 8 (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 8 (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 8 (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 \$495Mln in Maintenance Work on Tactical Equipment – Raytheon

WASHINGTON, June 8 (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'

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) – Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Tuesday denounced the car crash in the Canadian city of London in Southwestern Ontario that left four members of a Muslim family dead, 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 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 8 (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 8 (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 8 (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 8 (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 8 (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 8 (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 8 (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 8 (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.