

**2/2/22 Wednesday**

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Chinese Researchers Stumble Upon 'Godsend' Synthetic Antibody That Could Neutralize  
Omicron Variant  
By - Morgan Artyukhina

Scientists in Shanghai believe they have found a powerful new synthetic antibody that can beat the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. The news comes as the US Food and Drug Administration moves to shut down production of older antibody drugs that have little effect on the variant.

When the Omicron variant burst onto the scene in November 2021, it created uncountable headaches for health professionals around the globe as it seemed to evade every defense used to limit the spread of previous variants of the virus, including masks, vaccines, and antibody treatments. However, a group of researchers at Fudan University in Shanghai believe they have found a recipe for a synthetic antibody that could turn the tide against Omicron.

Their work was described in the article “Combating the SARS-CoV-2 Omicron variant with non-Omicron neutralizing antibodies,” which was [published on the bioRxiv](#) preprint website and has not been peer-reviewed.

Professor Huang Jinghe, a Fudan instructor and lead scientist in the study, told the [South China Morning Post](#) he had stumbled upon the antibody by accident, synthesizing it from two different natural antibodies produced by human immune cells in response to encountering SARS-CoV-2. Individually, both natural antibodies stood little chance of stopping Omicron, but in this new form, the man-made antibody was able to breach the virus’ defenses using what Huang described as a series of “combo moves,” comparing it to the complex string of moves possible in video games like “Street Fighter.”

“There are very few antibodies that can neutralize Omicron in the world. I feel like I’ve been hit by God’s grace,” she said, calling the find a “godsend” and saying it could put humans “a step ahead of the race” against the ultra-transmissible virus.

Ironically, Huang said she wasn’t trying to develop an anti-Omicron antibody, but was working on another infectious disease, saw its effectiveness, and decided to try it out against Omicron, too.

Antibodies are [Y-shaped proteins](#) produced by “attack” cells in the human immune system and wander through the bloodstream until encountering a foreign body, which they mark as a target for other immune cells and then attack themselves. Different types of antibodies are produced for different types of pathogens, helping serve as a collective “memory” for the immune system that allows it to adapt as it encounters new viruses or bacteria.

The antibodies developed at Fudan attack SARS-CoV-2 in groups of up to eight, each using different techniques to increase the effectiveness of the others. For example, one action Huang described to the SCMP was that an antibody would fasten itself to the Omicron virus with one

arm, then use its other to flatten the virus' spike protein, creating additional surface area for other antibodies to latch on.

According to their paper, the "combo moves" of the antibody are effective against other versions of SARS-CoV-2, as well as SARS-CoV-1, a related disease better known as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). They theorize it will be effective against future variants, too. A key aspect of immunology is the ability to "teach" our immune system about a pathogen ahead of time using vaccines, or to give it an extra boost once we're already infected, by using antibody treatments. Monoclonal antibody [drugs like Regeneron](#) have helped with earlier variants of COVID-19, but last week, the FDA [pulled its authorization](#) for use of Regeneron, citing its low effectiveness in treating people infected by the Omicron variant, in comparison to the considerable side-effects taking the drug can have.

However, Huang said this new antibody could put humans ahead of the virus for a change.

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With Over 96% Vaccination Rate, US Army Will Begin Discharging Soldiers Who Refuse Covid Shot

By - Morgan Artyukhina

The US Army said on Wednesday that soldiers who refuse to be inoculated against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, will be discharged from the service if they don't have a special waiver.

"Army readiness depends on soldiers who are prepared to train, deploy, fight and win our nation's wars," US Army Secretary Christine Wormuth said in [a Wednesday statement](#).

"Unvaccinated soldiers present risk to the force and jeopardize readiness."

The Army began mandating Covid vaccination [last September](#), giving active duty soldiers until December 15, 2021, to get fully vaccinated and National Guard units, the US Army's militia reserve force, until June 30, 2022. By the [December deadline](#), 96% of the 478,000-strong active duty force had elected to get their Covid inoculation shots.

Moreover, across the 1.4 million active duty members of [all US service branches](#), an even higher vaccination rate of 98% had been reached by that time.

While the Army has relieved [two battalion commanders](#) and four other Regular Army leaders of their command posts, and issued general officer written reprimands [to 3,073 other soldiers](#), the service hasn't parted with anyone solely for refusing a Covid vaccine shot. However, now that will begin to change.

A new Army directive lays out for commanders the process of discharging those who refuse to comply with the mandate "as expeditiously as possible."

"Service members separated due to refusal of the COVID-19 vaccination order will not be eligible for involuntary separation pay and may be subject to recoupment of any unearned special or incentive pays," the Army said. "As an exception, Soldiers who will complete their separation or retirement, or begin transition leave, on or before July 1, 2022, will be granted a temporary exemption and will be permitted to complete their separations or retirements."

The Army's timetable has lagged behind other services, which had earlier vaccination deadlines and [began kicking out](#) refusals last year.

While the number of vaccine refusals in the US military is small at 1-2% of the force - much smaller than in the US population at large, where about 15% have still not gotten a single shot - the phenomenon has nonetheless attracted the attention of academics.

An article published by the [Council on Foreign Relations](#) policy think tank on December 30 of last year highlighted some trends among the vaccine-hesitant in the US military, including that young, junior service members are the most likely to refuse a shot and women and non-Hispanic Black service members were both less likely to initiate vaccination themselves. The article found several reasons for the hesitancy, including misinformation, mistrust of public institutions, both military and nonmilitary, and personalization of risk - that is, how dangerous they consider their inaction to be.

However, while studies across the US public have highlighted distinct [disparities in vaccination rates](#) by political affiliation, with almost 91% of Democrats being vaccinated but only about 60% of Republicans, the CFR explicitly rejected that finding, claiming "there is no data to support that assumption."

"Most of those who are hesitant appear to be making a personal statement, not a political one, in refusing the vaccine, which comports with historical experience. From smallpox vaccine hesitancy in the eighteenth century to anthrax vaccine hesitancy in the late twentieth century, American service members have demonstrated a history of skepticism that predates today's hyperpoliticized environment," the article said.

The US Department of Defense requires [a wide array of vaccinations](#) of its service members, many of which are common in US society, such as chickenpox, measles, mumps, rubella, tetanus-diphtheria, and meningitis, but also vaccination against various other more exotic or uncommon illnesses, depending on the risk and occupation. Some of those can include anthrax, rabies, smallpox, typhoid fever, yellow fever, and Haemophilus influenzae type B.

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Aid Groups Warn 15 Million in Horn of Africa Need Food Aid After Successive Failed Rainy Seasons

By - Morgan Artyukhina

A severe water shortage in eastern Ethiopia and Somalia has already been blamed for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of cattle, and aid workers are warning that the number of people in need of aid is rising quickly. This comes amid another humanitarian crisis in the north caused by 14 months of war.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has warned of severe drought in Ethiopia's lowland regions of Afar, Oromia, the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' (SNNPR) Region, and the country's eastern Somali Region. Much of the area hasn't seen sufficient rain for more than a year, causing wells to dry up and creating severe food and water shortages.

“The impact of the drought is devastating,” UNICEF Ethiopia Representative Gianfranco Rotigliano said in a [Wednesday news release](#). “Children and their families are struggling to survive due to loss of livelihoods and livestock, and it is projected that more than 6.8 million people will be in need of urgent humanitarian assistance by mid-March 2022. We are also witnessing major displacement out of affected areas.”

“In drought-affected areas in Oromia and Somali, around 225,000 malnourished children and over 100,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women need urgent nutrition support,” Rotigliano added. “The lack of clean water is further exacerbating the situation for children and women. If children are forced to drink contaminated water, it puts them at risk to various diseases, including diarrhea, which is a major cause of deaths among children under five.”

Earlier this month, Ethiopian news outlet [Borkena reported](#) that more than 160,000 cattle in the Somali Region had already perished. Livestock is a staple of pastoral society in the region, with the regional cross-border livestock trade supporting tens of millions of people. In neighboring Somalia, livestock exports account for 80% of the country’s total exports, [according to the US Agency for International Development](#).

The Horn of Africa typically gets two wet seasons per year: one from March through May and another from October through December. According to UNICEF, the region has seen three consecutive failed rainy seasons, going back to 2020.

The Horn isn’t alone in struggling against drought and famine, either: in September, Malagasy President Andry [Nirina Rajoelina pleaded](#) for help before the United Nations General Assembly, warning that four consecutive dry years threatened Madagascar with a massive famine. He identified the dry spell, triggered by changes in the monsoon-creating El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycle, as being influenced by man-made climate change.

According to [a Tuesday report](#) by the UN World Food Program, international aid had succeeded in pulling all Malagasy out of the worst stage of famine, despite another failed rainy season, but warned that nearly 1.5 million people remain in the second- and third-highest classifications of famine.

UNICEF said Tuesday that it has sent \$31 million to Ethiopia for food relief, but that at least 10 times that were still required, as more than 2 million people remain vulnerable. In December, [Oxfam pointed](#) the finger at climate change for the Horn’s drought as well.

“We did not receive rain for two seasons,” Maryan Abdulaahi, a farmer in Somalia who lives in Dudumaale, near the border with Ethiopia’s Somali Province, told Oxfam. “Our livestock and own lives are in danger. In Dudumaale, we use to fetch water from berkedes [cisterns], but all berkedes are empty right now. A drum of water costs \$4, which we cannot afford.”

In its own [statement on Tuesday](#), the Somalia NGO Consortium, the coordinator of myriad relief groups that work in Somalia, warned that 7.7 million people in that country needed food relief, but that groups had received just 2% of the funding needed to address that need.

Ethiopian Prime Minister [Abiy Ahmed visited](#) the Somali State capital of Jigjiga last week to witness the scale of the crisis, promising to send aid, as well as to invest in longer-term water management projects, such as building dams and scaling up lowland water management schemes.

On Wednesday, Mustafe Omer, president of Somali State, tweeted photos of dozens of trucks of animal feed that he said had been sent by Amhara Regional State President Yilikal Kefale.

“Given the serious humanitarian [situation] in Amhara region following the TPLF aggression, their decision to support the drought-affected Somali people is a gesture of generosity, which is an example of the brotherly cooperation between the peoples of the two regions in the post-TPLF era,” Omer said. Between July and December of last year, Amhara and Afar states became battlefields after the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) launched an offensive from the northern Tigray state into the surrounding provinces, making a drive on the capital of Addis Ababa before being pushed back in a December counteroffensive.

The TPLF ruled all of Ethiopia for 27 years before losing power in 2018 when Abiy, an Oromo, came to power at the head of a movement by Ethiopia’s other ethnic groups who had tired of decades of TPLF rule that privileged Tigray over other provinces. When the TPLF repudiated Abiy’s government and attacked Ethiopian forces in November 2020, it triggered a war that drew in neighboring Eritrea, displaced [more than 4 million people](#), and triggered its own food crisis for more than [9.4 million people](#).

The TPLF has claimed the crisis is Abiy’s creation, but the group has been accused of seizing international food aid and using it as a coercive enlistment tool, and when the group launched [another new offensive](#) into Amhara and Afar late last month, it disrupted the plans of a massive WFP aid convoy en route to Tigray that was forced to turn back to Djibouti.

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Hundreds of Closely Guarded Letters of James Joyce Donated to UK Uni by Author’s Late Grandson

By - Morgan Artyukhina

In the centennial year of the publication of James Joyce’s epic modernist novel “Ulysses,” a trove of his highly-guarded personal letters is slated to be handed over to academics at a British university.

In February 2020, Stephen James Joyce, the Irish author’s last surviving direct descendant, [passed away](#). His 1932 birth was the subject of a poem by his grandfather, the author of “Ulysses” and “Finnegan’s Wake,” titled, [“Ecce Puer”](#) (“behold, the young boy,” in Latin).

Whether out of gratitude or simply a desire to protect his family’s affairs, Stephen ensured that the world remained largely aloof about his grandfather’s private life.

“I am not only protecting and preserving the purity of my grandfather’s work, but also what remains of the much abused privacy of the Joyce family,” he told [The New Yorker](#) in 2006.

That is, until his own death, when in his will he bequeathed a trove of some 800 of the author’s personal letters, telegrams, and even Christmas gifts to the University of Reading. According to the [UK Telegraph](#), the documents will enter the university’s public collection this year, on the [100th anniversary](#) of the publication of “Ulysses,” an irreverent and iconoclastic novel that is [widely considered](#) one of the best in the Western canon.

Guy Baxter, the head of archives at the University of Reading, told the paper he was pleased at Stephen’s change of heart after spending much of his life blocking his grandfather’s work from being quoted or celebrated, even by the Irish government.

"We were approached by Stephen Joyce a few years ago. He was getting into his 80s then and was looking at making arrangements for this material. He made what some would call controversial decisions during his life. He was focused on the family side. He wasn't interested in the Joyce of academia. I think it's great that in the end, he wanted that stuff to go to a public collection. It's material that has never been seen before," the archivist told the Telegraph.

Wednesday was the author's 140th birthday.

According to the paper, the documents primarily come from the 1920s and 30s, between the success of "Ulysses" and the publication of the surreal "Finnegan's Wake" in 1939, including when he and his wife Nora were married and when his two children, Giorgio and Lucia, were born. He died in 1941 from complications of a severe stomach ulcer.

The trove includes manuscripts of poems written for his family members, including "Ecce Puer," but also one written for his wife, Nora, for Christmas in 1909. It also includes correspondences between him and other modernist authors of his day, such as Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis, and between Joyce [and his benefactor](#), the wealthy heiress-turned-communist [Harriet Weaver Shaw](#).

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US National Archives Readying Release of Former VP Pence's Records to Jan. 6 Panel  
By - Evan Craighead

Marc Short, who served as chief of staff for former US Vice President Mike Pence, responded to a subpoena last week and testified before the House Select Committee probing the deadly US Capitol riot on January 6, 2021. As the 9-member panel continues to hold sessions with key witnesses, it remains unclear whether Pence will testify.

The US National Archives is readying the release of former Vice President Mike Pence's White House records to the US House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol, the body investigating the deadly US Capitol riot, according to a memo issued approximately two weeks after former US President Donald Trump's records were released to the panel.

While some vice presidential records do qualify for certain restrictions "they are not subject to claims of the presidential communications privilege," noted White House counsel Dana Remus, who ordered the release.

"Many of the records as to which the former President has made a claim of privilege in this set of documents, however, were communications concerning the former Vice President's responsibilities as President of the Senate in certifying the vote of presidential electors on January 6, 2021," Remus wrote.

Unless blocked via court order or presidential intervention, the records will be delivered 30 days after the memo (March 3, 2022).

David S. Ferriero, the 10th Archivist of the United States, [alerted Trump of the intended transfer](#).

Pence is considered a crucial witness in the House Select Committee investigation, as it is partly looking into the details surrounding Trump's hours-long absence from public view amid the chaos created by his supporters.

The decision comes days after Trump unsuccessfully attempted to block the release of [more than 100 documents](#), citing executive privilege.

The [US Supreme Court promptly rejected the request](#), with the majority declaring, "whether and in what circumstances a former president may obtain a court order preventing disclosure of privileged records from his tenure in office, in the face of a determination by the incumbent president to waive the privilege."

Although it was made clear that some supporters were threatening violence against Pence, who was leading the Senate in the certification of Electoral College votes, it remains unclear whether the former vice president will voluntarily cooperate with the panel's investigation.

Citing sources said to be familiar with Pence's feelings on the matter, the New York Times reported last month that the former VP has grown increasingly disillusioned with the idea of assisting with the probe, due to the 9-member panel's partisan divide, and potential criminal referrals to the US Department of Justice.

At the same time, informal conversations between the House Select Committee and Pence's lawyers have been ongoing since the panel's formation last summer.

Short, Pence's former chief of staff, testified before the panel on Wednesday, January 26, in response to the group's subpoena. While details about his hourslong session remain unknown, it is known that Short was inside the US Capitol building with Pence on January 6, 2021, as both had to be evacuated during the incident.

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US, Allies Hunting for Surplus Gas to Fuel Europe in Event of Ukraine Conflict

By - Evan Craighead

A senior Biden administration official told reporters last month that the US was exploring options to secure natural gas for European allies in the event of a conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Washington has threatened additional sanctions on Russia in the event that Moscow slashes its oil and gas exports.

As fears of a possible Ukraine military conflict persist, the US has reached out to China to inquire about surplus natural gas supplies, according to a new Bloomberg report citing individuals familiar with the matter.

Sources noted that talks with China have been limited of late, and have not resulted in any official agreements.

Additionally, US and European officials from allied nations have reached out to several other Asian countries, including Japan, South Korea, and India, to inquire about potentially diverting surplus natural gas supplies to Europe.

The hunt for natural gas in the current market is a difficult task, as no producer has expressed the ability to extract additional fuel at a short notice.

As a result, Amos Hochstein, the US State Department's senior adviser for energy security, is leading the Biden administration in soliciting gas consumers about potentially forgoing fuel deliveries that could be diverted to Europe.

Hochstein previously served as a Special Envoy for Coordinator for International Energy Affairs during the Obama administration.

Washington's plans are based on a fear that Russia could invade Ukraine, a move that has repeatedly been denied by Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin.

Nevertheless, the US and some of its European allies continue to insist that Moscow may carry out such an attack, and respond to retaliatory economic sanctions by eliminating or slashing natural gas exports to Europe. Europe relies on Russia for approximately 40% of its fuel supplies.

News of the US reportedly reaching out to China about fuel supplies comes a week after the search was announced, and just days after US President Joe Biden [claimed the US was "ready no matter what happens" with regard to Ukraine](#).

"We've been working to identify additional volumes of non-Russian natural gas from various areas of the world from North Africa and the Middle East to Asia and the United States," a senior Biden administration official told reporters last week.

"If Russia decides to weaponize its supply of natural gas or crude oil, it wouldn't be without consequences to the Russian economy," claimed a second official.

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Trump Reportedly Considered Issuing Blanket Pardons for Jan. 6 Rioters Before Leaving White House

By - Evan Craighead

Speaking to a crowd of supporters near Houston on Saturday, former US President Donald Trump proclaimed that he would consider pardoning defendants charged in connection with the deadly US Capitol riot on January 6, 2021. Per a new report, it appears this is not the first time Trump mulled such a move.

Between January 6 and January 20—the date of Biden's inauguration—Trump made three separate phone calls to discuss the idea of issuing a blanket pardon for rioters involved in the deadly insurrection at the US Capitol building, according to a new Politico report.

"Do you think I should pardon them? Do you think it's a good idea? Do you think I have the power to do it?" recounted one of Trump's advisers, summarizing the three conversations.

Another adviser informed the outlet that Trump began to get inquisitive about how rioters may be charged criminally, as well as how much protection a blanket pardon would provide them.

"He said, 'Some people think I should pardon them.' He thought if he could do it, these people would never have to testify or be deposed," the second adviser recounted.

However, Trump's questions were met with discontent from the White House counsel's office, which "forcefully" told Trump the limits of his presidential powers.

"There was a dangling threat that if he pushed too hard, [White House counsel Pat] Cipollone would leave," one adviser said.

Questions also arose about how he would issue a pardon with individuals not being formally charged with a crime yet.

"Is it everybody that had a Trump sign or everybody who walked into the Capitol?" Trump reportedly asked an adviser.

Politico granted both ex-Trump advisers anonymity.

Trump's previously unreported conversations are being made known just days after he told a crowd of supporters that he would consider such a move if he ran a successful presidential campaign in 2024.

"If I run and if I win we will treat those people from January 6 fairly," Trump told rally attendees in Canoe, some 40 miles from Houston, Texas. "And if it requires pardons we will give them pardons because they are being treated so unfairly."

His comments immediately received pushback from the House Select Committee probing the investigation, as well as GOP leadership.

"I would not be in favor of shortening any of the sentences for any of the people who pleaded guilty to crimes," McConnell said earlier this week.

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US Panel Finds 'Some' Havana Syndrome Symptoms Were Likely Caused by Directed Energy  
By - Nevin Brown

A US intel panel claims that the Havana Syndrome symptoms experienced by government officials and spies, in a few instances, were caused by pulsed electromagnetic energy. The panel's findings were full of caveats and focused on close to two dozen cases out of 1,000, where a hostile action could not be ruled out.

The panel [came to the conclusion](#) that "pulsed electromagnetic energy plausibly explains" a select few cases, but conceded that "information gaps exist."

The findings did not identify any known device capable of pulsating electromagnetic energy at targets, but believes the technology to do so exists. The panel also concluded that the primary symptoms of the "Anomalous Health Incidents" (AHI) cannot be attributed to any known medical condition or psychological syndrome.

The panel's executive summary stated that, "although some signs and symptoms of AHIs are common in known medical conditions, the combination of the four core characteristics is distinctly unusual and unreported elsewhere in the medical literature, and so far have not been associated with a specific neurological abnormality."

Those deemed to have been attacked showed "cellular injury to the nervous system," and their symptoms aligned with those who have suffered accidental exposure to microwaves.

The panel's conclusions align with a longstanding suspicion that a foreign adversary is responsible for causing the symptoms of the Havana Syndrome in American officials and spies abroad.

The scope of attack is also believed to be much smaller than previously thought. Most of the suspected cases came from 2016 when US diplomats and spies in Cuba began to report abnormal sounds and sensations. The group then suffered symptoms with an unexplainable origin. Symptoms included hearing and vision impairment, memory and balance issues, headaches and nausea.

In the years since, close to 1,000 US government officials overseas reported Havana Syndrome symptoms, but a CIA investigation, and now this panel, have ruled that many of those had explainable origins not linked to microwave radiation.

US intelligence officials have long suspected Russia to be the culprit, but no credible evidence has materialized and Moscow has long denied the claims.

US Congressman Adam Schiff (D-CA) issued a statement on the panel's findings.

"I appreciate the work of the IC Experts Panel appointed by the DNI and Deputy Director of CIA to provide scientific and medical perspectives on the potential causes of the health incidents that have afflicted U.S. personnel."

Schiff added: "Though this and other recent IC efforts have helped to answer important questions we have these incidents, much more remains to be done - and must be."

On Tuesday, the Biden administration announced the appointment of an Anomalous Health Incidents (AHI) Interagency Coordinator who would continue to study the mysterious Havana Syndrome.

The White House National Security Council said the findings would, "inform intensive research and investigation moving forward as we continue our government-wide effort to get to the bottom of AHI."

For some of the nearly 1,000 government officials who reported effects thought to be due to Havana Syndrome the panel stated that their symptoms, "could be due to hypervigilance and normal human reactions to stress and ambiguity, particularly among a workforce attuned to its surroundings and trained to think about security."

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CNN Zuck Up - Cartoon

By - Nevin Brown

CNN President Jeff Zucker announced his resignation early Wednesday after it was revealed that he had failed to disclose a relationship between him and a colleague.

[In a memo](#), Zucker stated: "As part of the investigation into Chris Cuomo's tenure at CNN, I was asked about a consensual relationship with my closest colleague, someone I have worked with for more than 20 years."

"I acknowledged the relationship evolved in recent years. I was required to disclose it when it began but I didn't. I was wrong," he added. "As a result, I am resigning today."

The unnamed colleague is Allison Gollust, CNN's executive vice president and chief marketing officer. Gollust was briefly former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's communications director. Gollust will be staying on at CNN.

According to reports, Zucker wanted to stay on at CNN to help facilitate a transition to a successor; however, WarnerMedia, CNN's parent company, was adamant that he had to step down immediately.

The fallout from Cuomo's sexual misconduct allegations continues. Cuomo's brother, Chris, who also served as the former host of the CNN program Cuomo Prime Time, left CNN after it was revealed that he had helped craft a narrative around the allegations of sexual abuse at the workplace directed at his brother.

CNN's investigation into the matter brought Zucker's relationship with Gollust to the forefront. Rumors around the relationship had been circulating for years.

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UK Ministry of Defense Report Cites 'Exo-Atmospheric Nuclear Attack' as Greatest Threat in Space War

By - Nevin Brown

A United Kingdom Ministry of Defense (MOD) report suggests an "exo-atmospheric nuclear attack" could "permanently kill" the UK space presence. The report touches on the significance of space to military, economic, and daily life in the commonwealth, and the need to increase space defense.

The report, named "Defense Space Strategy: Operationalising the Space Domain," does not go into detail about what an exo-atmospheric nuclear attack entails. It's worth noting that exo-atmospheric kill vehicles (EKV) were originally designed as part of missile defense systems. An EKV is boosted by a rocket before separating and autonomously striking an incoming missile.

The suggestion of an exo-atmospheric nuclear weapon in space suggests that the technology can be used to target adversarial satellites, rendering a modern military without technology they have come to rely on.

The graphic that lists "exo-atmospheric nuclear attack" as a "permanent kill" shows a continuum of threats with "Counter-ISR" and "Electronic Warfare" as posing a temporary denial.

[The 36-page report](#) lays out the UK vision for the future of its space defense and further suggests how to "become a meaningful actor in space."

The report claims that UK space ambitions support, "all four of the Integrated Review's (IR)2 objectives to: strengthen security and defence at home and overseas; build resilience; sustain strategic advantage through science and technology; and shape the international order of the future."

Control of space is now critical for modern life and military capability, according to the MOD.

They list, "global communications, secure banking transactions, transport, meteorology and navigation," as all highly-dependent on technology deployed in space.

The MOD goes as far as to say that space has become the fifth military domain, joining "cyber, maritime, air and land" and is "fundamental to our aspiration to integrate across those five domains."

According to the report, space is an increasingly competitive domain rife with environmental, human, and adversarial factors. The report concedes, however, that environmental hazards remain the primary obstacle.

The report warns, “hostile actors and competitors seek to maximise their relative advantage in the domain. We must therefore work to both protect and defend the UK’s equities in space and the services derived from space assets.”

To bolster and maintain UK status in space, a further £1.4 billion, over the next ten years, will be invested.

The MOD report says the UK’s Skynet 6 program will be delivered in the next decade. The next-generation satellite program purports to “enhance the UK’s secure Satellite Communications capability and ensure the continued capacity to move large volumes of data to support Defence tasks and government activities.”

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Solar Flare Capable of Disturbing Radio Communications to Reach Earth Wednesday  
By - Nevin Brown

A powerful solar flare is set to reach Earth on Wednesday. The so-called M1 solar flare occurred on Saturday and was caused by a powerful explosion known as a coronal mass ejection (CME) near the sun’s surface.

An M1-class solar flare can cause “weak or minor degradation of HF radio communication on sunlit side, occasional loss of radio contact,” and “low-frequency navigation signals degraded for brief intervals,” according to the NOAA Space Weather Scales.

The solar flare is considered to be a [medium-sized space weather event](#). The event, at four hours in length, was particularly long-lasting, originating from a sunspot called AR2936.

The CME hit the Earth’s magnetic field on Tuesday, but the impact did not cause a significant geomagnetic storm. The CME could still produce a weak, Category G1, geomagnetic storm.

Solar flares are a common solar event. A standard solar cycle is around 11 years, and minor flares occur approximately 2,000 times per cycle. A flare is an intense eruption of electromagnetic radiation into the sun’s atmosphere.

Geomagnetic storms can spark wide-ranging atmospheric auroras, often called northern lights.

The current solar cycle has produced more and stronger solar flares than expected. Solar Cycle 25, as astronomers call it, began in 2020 and was expected to be a more mild cycle.

[Astronomers believe the cycle should peak around July of 2025](#), although predicting the activity of a solar cycle is difficult.

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## 'Reprehensible': SUNY Professor Placed Under Review After Video Showed Him Defending Pedophilia

By - Mary Manley

Newly surfaced footage has prompted authorities at the State University of New York at Fredonia to place a tenured professor "under review" after the official was documented defending pedophilia.

Professor Stephan Kershner of the State University of New York at Fredonia defended pedophilia in a video uploaded onto the YouTube channel "Brain in a Vat." In the recording, Kershner equated the idea of a child consenting to sex to a child agreeing to play kickball or preparing for their Bar Mitzvah.

Kershner is known for such [publications](#) as "Pedophilia and Adult-Child Sex: A Philosophical Analysis" and "A Liberal Argument for Slavery."

"Imagine that an adult male wants to have sex with a 12-year-old girl. Imagine that she's a willing participant. A very standard, very widely held view is there's something deeply wrong about this. And it's wrong independent of it being criminalized," he said in the [video](#).

"It's not obvious to me that is, in fact, wrong. I think this is a mistake. And I think that exploring why it's a mistake will tell us not only things about adult-child sex and statutory rape, but also about fundamental principles of morality," he added.

SUNY Fredonia President Stephen Kolison has condemned the video, writing in a [tweet](#): "SUNY Fredonia is aware of a video posted online involving one of its professors. The views expressed by the professor are reprehensible and do not represent the values of SUNY Fredonia in any way, shape or form. They are solely the professor's views. The matter is being reviewed." Though SUNY Fredonia's account has disabled the option for people to publicly comment on the tweet, hundreds are sharing the tweet with dissatisfied comments.

"@FredoniaU WTF is wrong with your school? Employing a sadistic pig who advocates for pedophilia and child r\*\*\*. This is totally unconscionable," wrote Twitter user Rose [Alders](#).

Many are also pointing out the fact that Kershner's record has been lenient toward the idea of pedophilia for several years, and suggesting that the school must have been aware of his record before he was hired, as he has worked for the institution for the past 23 years. Kershner is also a tenured professor, which means he will have the right to a hearing before he is terminated.

"Oh my word it's even in his bio... 'Kershner has written one hundred articles and book chapters on such diverse topics as abortion, ADULT-CHILD SEX....' But sure, go ahead [@FredoniaU](#) and say it doesn't represent your values 'in any way, shape or form,'" Twitter user [@DanBartkowiak](#) wrote.

In the condemned video which was posted on Sunday, Kershner also made such egregious claims by saying that "the notion that it's wrong [to have sexual relations] even with a one year-old, it's not quite obvious to me." He pointed out that "n "at least one culture," there are reports of grandmothers allegedly "fellating their baby boys to calm them down," though he says he doesn't know if this cultural phenomenon is even true.

The [YouTube](#) channel "Brain in a Vat" claims to post videos which are "thought experiments and discussions with philosophers," and is hosted by Mark Oppenheimer and Jason Werbeloff. The channel has a little over 2,000 followers.

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NASA to Crash International Space Station Into Pacific Ocean After Retirement in 2030

By -- Mary Manley

The International Space Station (ISS), a project which has been working with other international space agencies since 2000, will be retiring at the end of 2030. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) plans to crash the ISS into the South Pacific Ocean once it retires and will replace it with commercially-operated platforms.

NASA published their [transition](#) plans in January, detailing that the space station is fated to crash into the South Pacific Ocean, specifically targeting a spot called Point [Nemo](#). The report estimates that the ISS will join other space debris in the oceanic graveyard where other countries like Russia, Japan, and the US have already sunk over 263 pieces of space debris since 1971.

The ISS is a multinational project that has united five major countries, including Russia, Japan, Canada, and the European Union, as well as international organizations in their developments and scientific achievements in space. NASA says commercially-operated platforms will replace the ISS, which has collaborated with more than 200 astronauts from 19 different countries. In early December 2021, NASA signed agreements with three US-based commercial space industries based in an attempt to "enable a robust, American-led commercial economy in low-Earth orbit," their statement [read](#).

Those agreements are worth a total of \$415.6 million, and the chosen companies are Blue Origin of Kent, Washington, Nanoracks LLC of Houston, Texas, and Northrop Grumman Systems Corporation of Dulles, Virginia.

"With commercial companies now providing transportation to low-Earth orbit in place, we are partnering with US companies to develop the space destinations where people can visit, live, and work, enabling NASA to continue forging a path in space for the benefit of humanity while fostering commercial activity in space," said NASA Administrator Bill Nelson.

The [ISS](#) has aided in a multitude of [accomplishments](#), such as generating more than 700 scientific publications, discoveries in physiology and nutrition, cancer drugs, climate change, the understanding of dark matter, DNA sequencing and educating over 43 million students from 49 countries.

However, despite the space station's assistance in scientific experiments, the station's technical lifetime is limited, even with maintenance help from the Canadian Space Agency, European Space Agency, and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency.

But before it retires, the ISS still has almost a full decade left to its future. "The International Space Station is entering its third and most productive decade as a groundbreaking scientific platform in microgravity," Robyn [Gatens](#), director of the International Space Station at NASA Headquarters, said in the statement.

"This third decade is one of results, building on our successful global partnership to verify exploration and human research technologies to support deep space exploration, continue to

return medical and environmental benefits to humanity, and lay the groundwork for a commercial future in low-Earth orbit.”

“We look forward to maximizing these returns from the space station through 2030 while planning for transition to commercial space destinations that will follow,” Gatens added.

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Patriots Owner Reportedly Threw ‘Significant Temper Tantrum’ After Tom Brady Snubbed Team  
By - Mary Manley

Robert Kraft, the owner of the New England Patriots, reportedly threw a “temper tantrum” after champion quarterback Tom Brady failed to mention the Pats in his initial retirement announcement earlier this week, it has been revealed.

Ted Johnson, who previously served as a linebacker for the Patriots, spilled the beans on the alleged incident during an appearance on NBC Sports’ “Boston Sports Tonight.”

“I was told earlier tonight, you guys, that Robert Kraft, it was an unpleasant day today at the executive offices in Foxboro,” said [Johnson](#). “And that Robert Kraft, when he initially first heard the news, was very upset, and he was screaming and he was yelling, and then there was a significant temper tantrum that he threw after he read this IG post.”

However, as it turns out, Kraft was not the only member of the Pats Nation who took offense to the post.

Scott Zolak, who played as a quarterback with the New England team between the 1991 and 1998 seasons, [said](#) on Tuesday on his radio show 98.5 The Sports Hub that Brady’s retirement announcement effectively served as a big “f you” to the Pats family.

“He’s either one cold, calculating son of a b\*\*\*\* to where you can release that and say, ‘That’s it, that part of my life is done. This is my new venture. And it was Tampa Bay and now I’m just gonna thank those [people]. I already did New England, now I’m doing you’... this massive ‘f you to the fans,” Zolak said.

“Tom is very calculated in everything he does. Everything is pre-programmed, pre-thought out. Tom doesn’t just omit someone for ‘Oh I forgot that. I’m going to come back and thank that person again.’ No. This is all pre-calculated.”

Kraft released his own statement on [Tuesday](#) in response to the quarterback’s retirement in which he relayed that “words” simply could not “describe the feelings” he had for the former star Patriots player.

“Words cannot describe the feelings I have for Tom Brady, nor adequately express the gratitude my family, the New England Patriots and our fans have for Tom for all he did during his career,” the team owner said. “A generation of football fans have grown up knowing only an NFL in which Tom Brady dominated.”

But the love was snubbed in the Instagram [post](#) by the seven-time Super Bowl champ, who made repeated mentions of and thanked the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, to whom he signed a two-year contract after quitting a 20 season-long relationship with the Pats in 2020. Brady also

thanked the Glazer family, Bruce Arians, Jason Licht, and others within the Tampa Bay organization.

The missing mention of the Patriots did not go unnoticed, in fact, netizens were more than quick to highlight the elephant in the room. However, in the end, Brady issued a separate statement that made full mention of his time with the Patriots team.

Brady first signed to the New England Patriots in 2000, going on to win six Super Bowls with the team. He announced his retirement on Tuesday at the age of 44.

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US Jobless Claims Drop 2nd Week in Row - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - US unemployment claims fell for the second week in a row, according to Labor Department data on Thursday.

"In the week ending January 29, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 238,000, a decrease of 23,000 from the previous week's revised level," the department said in a news release. Claims for jobless benefits fell for the first time during the week to January 22, after rising over three previous weeks to reach a three month high during the week ended January 15.

The weekly snapshot of unemployment came ahead of Friday's non-farm payrolls report from the Labor Department that will give a comprehensive picture of the jobs situation for all of January.

After staggering unemployment triggered by the outbreak of the novel coronavirus in 2020, the labor market picked up last year, showing a jobless rate of 3.9% in December from a record high of 14.8% in April 2020. The Federal Reserve regards a jobless rate of 4% or below as "maximum employment".

Still, jobs growth has not been even, with gains for some months coming in way below economists' expectations.

That has complicated the task of the Federal Reserve, which is closely watching numbers on employment, as well as those on inflation, to determine the timing and gravity of the first pandemic-era interest rate hike. The central bank slashed rates to almost zero after the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis in March 2020, and has kept them there since.

The Federal Reserve now says the United States probably needs a series of rate hikes to counter inflation, as prices have soared from the lows of the pandemic due to trillions of dollars of federal relief spending, higher wage payouts and supply chain disruptions. The Fed's target for inflation is 2% per year. But the US Consumer Price Index, an important barometer for inflation, grew by 7% in the year to December, expanding at its fastest rate since 1982.

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## UNICEF Says 6 Children Killed in Heavy Violence in Northwest Syria Overnight

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - At least six children were killed in the town of Atmeh in northwestern Syria overnight during heavy violence, UNICEF said on Thursday, as the United States announced it had eliminated the Islamic State terrorist group (IS, banned in Russia) leader in an operation in the area.

"UNICEF confirms that at least six children were killed and one girl was badly injured overnight in the border town of Atmeh in the northwest of Syria due to heavy violence," Bertrand Bainvel, acting UNICEF regional director for the Middle East and North Africa, said in a statement. He added, citing reports, that "civilian-populated areas were severely damaged."

Bainvel noted that since the beginning of the year violence has escalated significantly in and around Idlib, with many families internally displaced.

The current increase in violence takes place in record sub-zero temperatures in the Arab republic.

"At least five Syrian children died in the north of Syria due to harsh winter conditions in the past two weeks alone," Bainvel said.

President Joe Biden said on Thursday that the United States eliminated IS leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi in a military operation in northwestern Syria last night.

Biden added that all Americans have returned safely from the operation.

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## US AFRICOM Doesn't See China in Coups, Says Russia May Have 'Invisible' Hand

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The United States has seen no sign of China behind any of the recent coups in Africa, but believes Russia may have had an "invisible" hand in one or two of them, Gen. Stephen J. Townsend, who leads US Africa Command, said on Thursday.

"You've asked about the involvement of the Russians and the Chinese in these coups, generally we have not seen that. I have not seen any involvement by the Chinese in any of these coups. I don't think they are doing that," Townsend said. "With Russia I think it's a little less clear. I have received reports of Russian involvement at least in Sudan in not too distant past."

"I don't think China is behind any of these coups, and I don't really think that Russia is the main emanating force behind most of them but the hand of Russia may be invisible in one or two of these," the commander argued.

Russia has firmly denied its involvement in paramilitary activities in Africa, saying the presence of Russian instructors in foreign countries is official and done at the request of their governments.

Townsend noted that the main reasons for these coups are likely a lack of good governance and corruption.

"The simple question is no, I cannot tell you why there are so many coups ... My guess is that it has to do with insufficient governance, the lack of good governance and corruption. I think that's

probably the most of it," Townsend said when asked why there are so many coups occurring in Africa.

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Seventh Plane With 85 Tonnes of US Military Aid Lands in Ukraine - Defense Minister

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - A seventh plane carrying 85 tonnes of US military aid has arrived in Ukraine, Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov announced on Thursday.

"The 7th bird landed in Boryspil! This time - 85 tons of combat ammunition for grenade launchers. So, its great news, but most importantly - this is not the end! To be continued," Reznikov tweeted.

The protracted tensions around Ukraine have intensified in recent weeks, with NATO raising concerns over Russia's alleged military buildup near the Ukrainian border and urging allies to enhance their military support for Kiev. The United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the Baltic states have already supplied several batches of arms to Ukraine, mainly handguns, ammunition and anti-tank weapons.

Russia has repeatedly denied the allegations of prepping for an invasion of Ukraine and has criticized NATO's provocative military buildup in the region.

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UK Drug Regulator Approves Novavax COVID-19 Vaccine

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The UK drug regulator on Thursday authorized a COVID-19 vaccine developed by US pharmaceutical company Novavax.

"Novavax ... today announced that the [UK] Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has granted conditional marketing authorization (CMA) for Nuvaxovid™ COVID-19 Vaccine (recombinant, adjuvanted) for active immunization to prevent COVID-19 caused by SARS-CoV-2 in individuals 18 years of age and older in Great Britain," the company said in a statement.

The vaccine is the first protein-based vaccine to be approved for use in the UK.

"We thank the agency for its thorough review process and are tremendously grateful to the clinical trial participants and trial sites in the U.K., as well as the Vaccines Taskforce, for their ongoing support and vital contributions to this program," CEO Stanley Erck said.

Meanwhile, UK Health Secretary Sajid Javid said he wants Britain to become the best place in which to conduct clinical trials.

"It's a testament to the country's first-rate research and development capabilities for vaccines – with tens of thousands of people taking part in clinical trials here in the UK, contributing to the invaluable research that shows our vaccines are safe and effective," he said.

The next step for Novavax will be consideration by the independent Joint Committee on Immunisation and Vaccination for inclusion in the UK COVID-19 vaccination program. In December, the World Health Organization recommended Nuvaxovid, a COVID-19 vaccine developed by Novavax, for emergency use. The company says that it has begun work on developing an "Omicron-specific construct" of the antigen in its COVID-19 vaccine as part of a two-pronged strategy to curb the spread of the new coronavirus variant.

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**Biden Says IS Leader al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi Eliminated in Operation in Northwest Syria**

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The United States eliminated Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, the leader of the Islamic State terrorist group (banned in Russia), in a military operation in northwestern Syria, President Joe Biden said on Thursday.

"Last night at my direction, U.S. military forces in northwest Syria successfully undertook a counterterrorism operation to protect the American people and our Allies, and make the world a safer place. Thanks to the skill and bravery of our Armed Forces, we have taken off the battlefield Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi—the leader of ISIS," he said.

Biden added that all Americans have returned safely from the operation.

"I will deliver remarks to the American people later this morning. May God protect our troops," he stated. Biden says us military removed from battlefield ISIS leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, in Wednesday's operation in northwest Syria

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**RPT - NFL Washington Team Picks Name That Will Raise No Red Flags - Ex-Player**

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The new name chosen by the National Football League (NFL) team from Washington, DC will raise no red flags on a racial basis, former NFL player Ilya Jarostchuk told Sputnik.

The team's initial name and logo - Washington Redskins - have long been a source of controversy, given that they were regarded by many as being derogatory to Native Americans. After a long search, its owners announced earlier on Wednesday that the new name will be Washington Commanders.

"The new name Commanders has no link to any racial group. It will not [cause] any controversy from any people who are fighting for the civil rights of individual groups. They will not raise any flags there," said Jarostchuk, who is the only player with Russian heritage in NFL history. He said he would prefer another name, such as Warriors, instead of Commanders, but it is up to the team's owners and fans to choose.

The player expressed doubts on why the team and the NFL decided to move away not only from the old name but from championing the proud history of the Native Americans as well.

"If I was a Native American, I would be very proud to have a team named after my people," he added.

However, Jarostchuk noted, it depends on how people feel with different names.

"For example, I am of a Russian background, and if you call my team Communists or something like that, I might be offended by that name," he said. "But if you call us Bogatyrs [Strongmen], or something associated with our culture in a positive way, I would be proud to have our team named in such a way."

Jarostchuk, an American-born Russian, played in the NFL from 1987-1992 as a linebacker for the St. Louis Cardinals, Miami Dolphins, Arizona Cardinals, New England Patriots and San Francisco 49ers.

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Biden, Macron Discuss Russia-Ukraine Crisis, Coordinating With NATO, EU - White House (Adds US troop movement context in para 2, background in 5-7)

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron during a telephone call discussed Russia's military activity near its border with Ukraine and the two leaders agreed to stay in close consultations, including with NATO and EU partners, on a common approach to address the matter, the White House said.

Earlier in the day, the Pentagon announced the deployment of additional US forces to Poland, Germany, and Romania in the next few days. US officials said the deployment is designed to reinforce NATO's eastern flank amid the Ukraine crisis.

"President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. spoke today with President Emmanuel Macron of France regarding Russia's continued military build-up on Ukraine's borders," the White House said in a press release on Wednesday. "The two leaders affirmed their support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and reviewed our ongoing coordination on both diplomacy and preparations to impose swift and severe economic costs on Russia should it further invade Ukraine."

The White House further said Biden and Macron agreed the two sides will stay in close touch, including in consultation with NATO and EU partners, on a coordinated approach to managing the situation at hand.

The precarious situation around Ukraine has worsened over the past several months after Russia was accused of building up troops near the Ukrainian border and allegedly preparing for an invasion. Moscow has denied the accusations, pointing to NATO's military activity near Russian borders, which it deems a threat to its national security.

Moscow has also said Russia has the right to move troops within its national territory and that it is not threatening anyone.

Russia has also warned Western countries that military deliveries to Kiev may encourage the latter to use them against the breakaway Russian-speaking region of Donbas. The United States has been in the process of delivering \$200 million worth of security assistance approved by President Joe Biden in December.

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Travel Groups Ask Biden to End Covid Testing for Vaccinated US-Bound Passengers - Letter

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - A coalition of travel and aviation organizations in a letter urged the Biden administration to terminate the pre-departure testing requirement for US-bound travelers that are vaccinated against the novel coronavirus disease.

"On behalf of the many sectors of the travel and aviation industries, we urgently request that the Administration remove the requirement for pre-departure testing for vaccinated passengers traveling to the United States," the organizations said in a letter to White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator Jeffrey Zients on Wednesday.

The letter includes support from Airlines for America, US Travel Association, the US Chamber of Commerce, Airlines for Europe, Global Business Travel Association, among others.

The letter underscores that a decision to roll back testing requirements for vaccinated travelers would be justified considering increased immunity, higher vaccination rates, new COVID-19 treatments, and the pervasiveness of novel coronavirus cases in all US states.

Travel and aviation industries cannot fully recover unless the US government takes steps to remove travel restrictions that appear to no longer be needed, the letter said.

The Biden administration in December tightened travel restrictions for US-bound travelers amid the spread of the Omicron variant, requiring a negative COVID-19 test a day before passengers depart to the United States.

The Trump administration previously required US-bound travelers have a negative COVID-19 test at least three days before a flight to the United States.

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#### US Reports 36% Decrease in 7-Day Average of COVID-19 Cases - Health Agency

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The US health authorities reported a 36 percent decline in the seven-day average of coronavirus cases, but the number of virus-related deaths increased over the past week, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Rochelle Walensky said.

"The current seven-day average of cases is about 436,400 cases per day, a decrease of about 36 percent over the previous week," Walensky said during a virtual press briefing on Wednesday.

The seven-day average of COVID-19-related deaths is about 2,300 per day, which is 4 percent more than the previous week, Walensky said.

The number of hospitalizations decreased by 14 percent to 17,000 per day, Walensky also said. The United States sees a better situation with respect to the coronavirus pandemic but hospitalizations still remain high in some parts of the country, she added.

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#### Facebook Parent Meta Platforms Sees 20% Share Plunge on Missed Earnings

NEW YORK, February 2 (Sputnik) - Shares of Facebook's parent company Meta Platforms Inc plunged more than 20% in after-hours trade as its fourth quarter earnings widely missed analysts' profit expectations.

Meta's shares fell 22.6% to \$249.90 on Wednesday after the company said it earned \$10.29 billion, or \$3.67 per share, on a revenue of \$33.67 billion in the last three months of 2021. Analysts, on average, were expecting earnings of \$3.85 per share on a revenue of \$33.36 billion.

If the drop in the share price does not recover at Thursday's market open, Facebook will stand to lose nearly \$200 billion in overall market capitalization.

Meta Platforms said its fourth quarter profit suffered due to privacy changes on Apple Inc's operating systems which made it harder for brands to target and measure their ads on Facebook and Instagram, the company's other major social platform, used largely by youngsters.

Supply-chain disruptions triggered by the coronavirus pandemic also affected bottomline as a whole, it said.

Meta Platforms also sounded a wary note in its profit guidance for the current quarter, saying increased competition for users' time as well as the buy-in time needed for new features like its short video offering Reels could generate less revenue.

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#### NFL Washington Team Picks Name That Will Raise No Red Flags - Ex-Player

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The team's initial name and logo - Washington Redskins - have long been a source of controversy, given that they were regarded by many as being derogatory to Native Americans. After a long search, its owners announced earlier on Wednesday that the new name will be Washington Commanders.

"The new name Commanders has no link to any racial group. It will not [cause] any controversy from any people who are fighting for the civil rights of individual groups. They will not raise any flags there," said Jarostchuk, who is the only player with Russian heritage in NFL history. He said he would prefer another name, such as Warriors, instead of Commanders, but it is up to the team's owners and fans to choose.

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Jarostchuk, an American-born Russian, played in the NFL from 1987-1992 as a linebacker for the St. Louis Cardinals, Miami Dolphins, Arizona Cardinals, New England Patriots and San Francisco 49ers.

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#### Yellen Tells Brazil Economy Minister She Backs Nation's Invitation to Join OECD - Treasury

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen told Brazilian Economy Minister Paulo Guedes that she supported the Organization for Economic

Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s invitation for Brazil to become a full member of the global body, the Treasury Department said in a readout of the conversation.

"Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen spoke to Brazilian Economy Minister Guedes today to express her support for the decision of the OECD to invite Brazil to formally begin the process of accession," the readout said on Wednesday.

Yellen discussed the importance of initiatives, including market-based solutions, to address Brazil's challenges in protecting the Amazon Basin, the readout said.

The Treasury Secretary also noted that she looked forward to continued bilateral cooperation on climate change and infrastructure, according to the readout.

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IMF Approves \$1Bln Disbursement for Pakistan - Statement

(Update adds details, quotes, background in paras 4-8)

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a disbursement of approximately \$1 billion to Pakistan to help the country's economy, the fund said in a statement.

"The Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund concluded the 2021 Article IV consultation and the sixth review of the extended arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) for Pakistan. The completion of the review allows the authorities to draw the equivalent of SDR 750 million (about US\$1 billion), bringing total purchases for budget support under the program to SDR 2,144 million (about US\$3 billion, or 106 percent of quota)," the IMF said on Wednesday.

Economic activity in Pakistan rebounded strongly from the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic but pressures are starting to build, reflected in the country's widening deficit and inflation, the IMF said. The recent policy efforts were appropriate to safeguard economic and debt sustainability, the IMF added.

Strong efforts to advance electricity sector reform are needed to restore the sector's financial viability and address adverse spillovers on the budget, financial sector and real economy, IMF Executive Board Deputy Managing Director and Acting Chair Antoinette Sayeh said in the statement.

Reforms in the areas of tax administration and public financial and debt management are also expected to further improve the fiscal framework, Sayeh said.

"Ambitious steps to remove structural impediments and facilitate structural transformation remain essential to boost growth and job creation and improve social outcomes," Sayeh added.

"The authorities are focused on state-owned enterprises reform, fostering the business environment and reducing corruption, promoting financial inclusion; and addressing the challenges posed by climate change."

The approval comes as the IMF and Pakistan had struggled with coming to an agreement with the country fighting external and current account deficits, a depreciating currency, and rising inflation.

Pakistan's parliament passed a mid-year budget in January that will end exemptions on sales tax as part of measures to secure the IMF funds.

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#### IMF Approves \$1Bln Disbursement for Pakistan - Statement

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a disbursement of approximately \$1 billion to Pakistan to help the country's economy, the fund said in a statement.

"The Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund concluded the 2021 Article IV consultation and the sixth review of the extended arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) for Pakistan. The completion of the review allows the authorities to draw the equivalent of SDR 750 million (about US\$1 billion), bringing total purchases for budget support under the program to SDR 2,144 million (about US\$3 billion, or 106 percent of quota)," the IMF said on Wednesday.

Economic activity in Pakistan rebounded strongly from the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic but pressures are starting to build, reflected in the country's widening deficit and inflation, the IMF said. The recent policy efforts were appropriate to safeguard economic and debt sustainability, the IMF added.

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#### Blinken, Austin Pledge to Resume Discussion of Mistakes in Afghanistan - US Senator

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - US Secretaries of State and Defense, Antony Blinken and Lloyd Austin, have promised to return for another congressional hearing on the challenges in Afghanistan following the US withdrawal in August, US senator Jim Inhofe's office said in a press release.

"We still face a lot of real challenges in Afghanistan even though our troop presence is gone. Secretary Blinken and Secretary Austin spoke to a number of these challenges today," Inhofe said as quoted by the release on Wednesday. "I secured commitments from both Secretary Blinken and Secretary Austin to return for a public hearing on Afghanistan."

Blinken and Austin were invited to testify before a closed Senate hearing on the US policy in Afghanistan that took place on Wednesday.

Inhofe was not satisfied with the provided testimonies since they did not contain details regarding the nature of the terrorist threat in Afghanistan today as well as Blinken's and Austin's counterterrorism plans for the future.

The senator believes that learning from the US mistakes in Afghanistan is a way forward to deter Russia's alleged aggression in Europe or an alleged Chinese economic offensive, according to the release.

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#### Fauci Says Reports Claiming COVID-19 Vaccination Impairs Fertility 'Misinformation'

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Antony Fauci said the reports about negative impact of COVID-19 vaccines on fertility are misinformation.

"New data and the previous studies indicated that the COVID-19 vaccination does not negatively impact fertility. CDC [US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] and professional medical organizations emphasize that there is no evidence that vaccination impairs fertility," Fauci said in a virtual press briefing on Wednesday.

Fauci also said that the common misperception about the alleged negative effects on fertility came about as a result of misinformation, he added.

However, Fauci acknowledged that COVID-19 infections reduce male fertility. The problem is temporary and related to the disease itself, but not to vaccination, he said.

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#### FBI Says Black College Bomb Threats Being Probed as Hate Crimes

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - US federal authorities are investigating the recent rash of bomb threats directed at more than a dozen Black colleges and universities as possible hate crimes, the FBI said in a statement.

"These threats are being investigated as racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism and hate crimes," the agency said on Wednesday.

Earlier, NBC reported, citing an official, that the FBI has tracked down and identified six minors who it says are suspected of being behind the more than dozen bomb threats.

The official said the FBI has located the juveniles living in different parts of the country. They appear to be "tech savvy," employing sophisticated approaches in an attempt to conceal the source of the threats, which appear to be racist in intent, the official said according to the report. University officials and the FBI said Jackson State University in Mississippi, Alcorn State, Kentucky State University, Howard University, the University of the District of Columbia, Morgan State University, Coppin State University, Fort Valley State, Xavier University, and a number of other HBCUs reported bomb threats.

Morgan State University President David Wilson confirmed in statements and interviews that the university had received threats. After a search of the campus, police officers found no bombs.

He encouraged students to "stay strong, remain resilient, and continue to prepare yourselves to grow the future and lead the world because our nation and world desperately need more leaders steeped in the values we teach here at Morgan." he said.

The university, Wilson added, has embraced the values of leadership, integrity, innovation, diversity, excellence and respect and hate is not one of them, he said.

He said he hoped the FBI would aggressively investigate the case.

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**US Lawmaker Says Senate Committee Close to Agreement on Preemptive Russia Sanctions Bill**

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The US Senate Foreign Relations Committee is close to agreement on a piece of legislation that would impose preemptive sanctions on Russia for the actions it has taken so far on the Ukraine border despite not having launched an actual invasion, Senator Jeanne Shaheen said.

"We are very close to having agreement between the Chair and Ranking Member on the Foreign Relations Committee on a bill that would look at preemptive sanctions, ones that we can put in place that respond to what we've already seen from Russia in terms of their aggressive behavior," Shaheen said in an interview with the Center for Strategic and International Studies on Wednesday.

Shaheen noted that she was part of a bipartisan group of US Senators that recently visited Ukraine and met with the country's leadership, including with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The lawmakers reaffirmed their support for Ukraine and explored ways to further assist the country, Shaheen said.

The congressional trip took place amid allegations of Russian troops build-up near the Ukraine border as a preparation for an invasion. Moscow has denied the accusations, pointing to NATO's expansion and military activity near Russia's borders, saying it poses a threat to its national security.

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**US Successfully Launches National Reconnaissance Office Surveillance Satellite - SpaceX**

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The United States successfully launched a new National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) classified spy satellite NROL-87 into orbit from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, SpaceX displayed in a live podcast.

A Falcon-9 booster launched the NROL-87 mission on schedule at 12:27 p.m. Pacific Time [8:27 p.m. GMT] from launch pad SLC-4E at the Vandenberg Air Force Base on Wednesday.

After the launch, the Falcon's first stage booster successfully landed back at Vandenberg as planned and is due to be used again in another National Reconnaissance Office satellite launch, according to published reports.

No details were published on the NROL-87 satellite apart from its official description as a "national security payload." It was the third of three such satellites launched by SpaceX by the National Reconnaissance Office under a contract signed in 2019 for \$297 million. The previous two launches took place in 2021 from Vandenberg and from NASA's Wallops Flight Facility in Virginia.

The National Reconnaissance Office is the super-secret US government agency that develops, builds, launches and operates US spy satellites that provide intelligence data to the 18 agencies comprising the US intelligence community and the Defense Department. The National Reconnaissance Office projects at least six more launches this year to place carrying more than ten payloads into orbit.

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#### SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) -

#### PUTIN'S VISIT TO CHINA

\* Russia and China are preparing a number of agreements in the gas sector ahead of President Vladimir Putin's visit to China on February 4, Kremlin aide Yury Ushakov said on Wednesday.

\* China supports Russia's demand for security guarantees, Ushakov said, two days ahead of Putin's visit to Beijing.

\* Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping plan to adopt a joint statement on international relations and hold a face-to-face meeting during the Russian leader's visit to Beijing on February 4, Ushakov said.

#### US TROOPS IN EUROPE

\* The Pentagon is sending 2,000 US troops to Europe in the next several days in response to the Ukraine crisis, spokesman John Kirby said.

\* The United States will send forces to Romania, Poland and Germany soon and these deployments will be temporal, Kirby confirmed.

\* The United States will send additional 1,700 troops to Poland, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said on Wednesday.

\* NATO welcomes Washington's decision to deploy additional US forces to Germany, Poland and Romania, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said.

#### RUSSIA'S SECURITY PROPOSALS

\* The United States did not make its responses to the Russian security proposals public, but the publication of the document confirms that Washington wants to negotiate and reach a solution, Defense Department spokesperson John Kirby said on Wednesday.

\* Russia is not very enthusiastic about the essence of the United States and NATO responses to Russian proposals on security guarantees as Washington suggests focusing on secondary issues, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said.

\* France has taken note of the letter from Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on the indivisibility of security and intends to continue the dialogue with Moscow on the security proposals formulated earlier by NATO and the United States, a French Foreign Ministry spokesperson said on Wednesday.

\* A NATO representative has declined to comment on the publication of the responses of the alliance and the US to Russia's security guarantees proposals by Spain's El Pais earlier in the day, media reported.

\* The Russian Foreign Ministry neither confirmed nor denied the authenticity of the US and NATO responses to Moscow's proposals published in the media, redirecting the question to Washington.

#### UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

\* Russian President Vladimir Putin and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson discussed the crisis in Ukraine and Moscow's proposals on security guarantees during a phone conversation on Wednesday, the Kremlin said.

\* Johnson expressed concern to Putin over the situation at the Ukrainian border, the Prime Minister's office said.

\* Kiev is ready to hold a meeting with Moscow in any format to find a diplomatic solution to a "conflict," Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said on Wednesday.

\* UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, who tested positive for COVID-19 in late January ahead of her visit to Ukraine, is planning to reschedule her trip to Kiev soon and visit Moscow shortly, the UK Foreign Office said.

\* The United States has been engaged in discussions with Ukraine on an economic aid package for that country, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said.

#### ENERGY MARKETS

\* The overall level of OPEC+ compliance with production cuts was 122% in December, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said on Wednesday.

\* Polish oil and gas company PGNiG said it had received a lawsuit from Gazprom over dividends on the profits of EuRoPol Gaz, the owner of the Polish part of Yamal-Europe gas pipeline.

\* The United States and the European Union are in talks with China and other natural-gas importers in Asia about sending their fuel to Europe if a conflict erupts in Ukraine, Bloomberg reported,

\* The OPEC+ alliance will increase oil production in March by 400,000 barrels per day as planned, according to a communique.

#### IMF POLICY ON UKRAINE

\* The International Monetary Fund has about \$2.2 billion to disperse to Ukraine through June, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Wednesday.

\* The IMF is ready to help if the Ukraine conflict begins having a spillover effect on the finances of other countries, Georgieva said.

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Biden Says US Troop Deployment to Europe 'Totally Consistent' With What He Told Putin  
(Updates with new attribution, more information and context in paras 2-10)

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has said that his decision to deploy several thousand more troops to Europe over the Ukraine crisis is "totally consistent" with that he has told Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Earlier in the day, the US Defense Department announced the extra US forces will deploy to Poland, Germany and Romania in the next several days.

Biden said that his order is "totally consistent" with that he has told Putin since the beginning, according to the White House.

"As long as he's acting aggressively, we are going to make sure we reassure our NATO allies in Eastern Europe that we're there and Article 5 is a sacred obligation," Biden said.

The Defense Department is sending 2,000 US troops to Europe in the next several days in response to the Ukraine crisis, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said on Wednesday.

Most of the 2,000 troops will be deployed in Poland and the deployment will be temporal, he said.

Moreover, Kirby added that approximately 1,000 US troops currently based in Germany will be moved to Romania at the invitation of Bucharest.

At the same time, the Defense Department does not exclude that a decision will be made to transfer additional US forces to Eastern Europe or to redeploy military contingents within Europe in the coming days or weeks, Kirby said, adding that the decision will depend on the development of the situation on the Ukrainian border with Russia.

Kirby also underscored that all newly announced troop deployments in Europe are separate from the 8,500 US troops being already on heightened alert since late January.

The US military is sent to Eastern Europe not to fight in Ukraine, but to ensure the defense of the NATO allies and partners, he added.

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Omicron Pandemic Surge Caught Artemis Mission Planners by Surprise - NASA Officials

A WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The Omicron variant surge has significantly slowed progress on the unmanned Artemis-1 test mission, senior NASA officials told a press conference on Wednesday.

"Omicron has affected all of us: In general work force shortages are a real thing," NASA Deputy Associate Administrator for Exploration Systems Development Tom Whitmeyer told the podcast

press conference. "Everyone is seeing the logistical challenges. We have certain parts availability. Sometimes we have to refocus what we work on."

NASA Kennedy Space Center Exploration Ground Systems Program Manager Mike Bolger acknowledged that mission planners and technicians had been taken by surprise by the impact of both the Delta and Omicron variant surges during the COVID-19 pandemic over the past six months.

"I think that caught everyone off guard. It has slowed us down some. The Delta virus had a more significant impact. It absolutely is a concern on the supply chain. It has affected the program we are working our way through it," he told the press conference.

The first integrated Artemis mission sending an unmanned Orion capsule on a Northrop Grumman-built Space Launch System (SLS) had been expected in February or March but planners are now looking at launch windows in April and May instead, the NASA officials told the press conference.

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Republican Senators Oppose Biden's Decision to Deploy 3,000 More Troops to Eastern Europe  
WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - Republican Senators Mike Braun and Josh Hawley said on Wednesday they oppose the Biden administration's decision to send an additional 3,000 troops to Eastern Europe in support of Ukraine.

"Sending more American troops to Europe is a mistake," Hawley said in a statement. "We need to send the opposite signal - that the crisis in Ukraine shows Europeans must do more in their own defense."

Hawley further said he supports providing Ukraine with security assistance, adding that it is the United States' interest to maintain Ukraine's independence but it's not a critical enough interest to draw the United States into a war with Russia.

The senator emphasized that the Biden administration should focus its efforts on confronting China's influence in the Indo-Pacific, warning that if Beijing is able to control the region's resources, it could restrict the United States' access to many crucial world markets.

Earlier in the day, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said Hawley may be repeating Russia's talking points.

Hawley in response to Psaki's statement said the Biden administration is to blame for potentially bringing Europe to the brink of war.

"This from an Administration that has coddled Russia from Day One and now brought Europe to the brink of war - giving the Russians Nord Stream 2, refusing Ukraine military aid last year, and conducting a disastrous evacuation of Afghanistan that emboldened our enemies worldwide," Hawley said in a response to Psaki's comment.

The precarious situation around Ukraine has worsened over the past several months after Russia was accused of building up troops near the Ukrainian border and allegedly preparing for an invasion. Moscow has denied the accusations, pointing to NATO's military activity near Russian borders, which it deems a threat to its national security.

Sen. Braun also opposes sending additional American forces to Eastern Europe, explaining that the United States should avoid defending countries that should defend themselves in order to prevent dragging the United States into another conflict after it just ended its 20-year war in Afghanistan.

Republican Senate leaders Mitch McConnell and Lindsey Graham said they support Biden's decision to send additional troops to Eastern Europe.

Earlier in the day, the Pentagon announced plans to deploy an additional 2,000 troops from the US to Eastern Europe over the next few days. Most of the 2,000 troops will deploy to Poland, and some 1,000 troops stationed in Germany will relocate to Romania.

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NASA Projects Possible April Launch Window for First Unmanned Artemis Mission - Official

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - NASA has tentatively scheduled a two-week window in April for the first test launch of the integrated but still unmanned Artemis-1 system, an official said at a press conference on Wednesday.

"Information on April is pretty solid," Lead Flight Director Mike Sarafin said. "The April window opens on April 8 and closes on April 23. If we need May, it would open on the 7th and close on the 21st."

The mission was originally scheduled to be launched into space this month. But after some delays, NASA engineers and technicians are now working on preparatory tests to prepare the Artemis spacecraft and its 365-foot high Space Launch System (SLS) built by Northrop Grumman for the April or May launch, Kennedy Space Center, Exploration Ground Systems program manager Mike Bolger said.

"We're focusing on the rollout. We really don't know until we do the wet dress rehearsal to see how the vehicle performs in an integrated fashion. We really want to see the results of that test before we can predict with a decent amount of confidence when we will lift off, Bolger said.

Artemis 1 will be an unmanned mission of NASA's new Orion spacecraft around the Moon during a weeks-long flight. The Orion capsule will be launched by the first SLS megarocket generating 8.8 million pounds of thrust. If the mission is successful, Artemis-2 will carry four astronauts around the Moon, probably in 2024, according to published reports.

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Biden Mulling Laws That Could Reopen Scrutiny of TikTok - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is mulling new laws that could reopen US scrutiny of TikTok and other Chinese-owned social media applications, months after

revoking restrictions on such apps set by his predecessor Donald Trump, The Washington Post reported Wednesday.

The Commerce Department under the Biden administration is gathering public comments on new rules that would expand government oversight of apps that could be exploited "by foreign adversaries to steal or otherwise obtain data", the Post reported, citing language commonly used by Trump during his trade battles with China.

"The Biden administration believes certain countries, including the People's Republic of China (PRC), seek to leverage digital technologies and Americans' data in ways that present unacceptable national security risks while advancing authoritarian controls and interests," The Post quoted Saloni Sharma, a spokeswoman for the National Security Council, as saying in a statement to the publication.

Trump started a trade war with China a year after he took office in 2017, and later targeted TikTok, which he accused of helping Beijing to spy on ordinary Americans via the personal information they used to register on the app. At the height of his campaign against TikTok, Trump tried to get the app shut down or sold off to a US-owned firm. However, before any of that materialized, he lost the presidency to Biden in the November 2020 election.

Biden, whose term began in January 2021, dropped all pending US action against Tiktok, telling a local court in July to dismiss Trump's case against the app and its parent company ByteDance.

Biden has, however, had his own rocky relationship with Beijing, and has even left intact some of Trump's original tariffs against China, indicating he might use them to pressure Beijing into making concessions on trade and other issues.

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#### US Intelligence Concludes Havana Syndrome Cases Likely Caused by Directed Energy

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - A US Intelligence Community Experts Panel on Wednesday released its report on anomalous health incidents (AHIs, also known as Havana Syndrome), which found that the cases could plausibly be explained by external stimuli such as pulsed electromagnetic energy.

"Today we are pleased to share the declassified executive summary of the IC Experts Panel report. We convened the panel last year to examine—from a scientific, technical, and medical perspective—potential causal mechanisms for AHIs," Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines and CIA Director William Burns said in a statement. "Based on a defined methodology, the Experts Panel issued six findings... Pulsed electromagnetic energy, particularly in the radiofrequency range, plausibly explains the core characteristics of reported AHIs, although information gaps exist," they said in attached material.

The IC Experts Panel included members with backgrounds in acoustics, biology, radiation, psychiatry, and medicine. The group received dozens of briefings and over 1,000 classified documents on the matter in order to develop their assessment.

The IC Experts Panel report found that a subset of AHIs cannot be easily explained by environmental or medical conditions. It identified ultrasound as plausible only in close-access scenarios, and ruled out ionizing radiation, chemical and biological agents, and infrasound as implausible.

The group recommended the US government collect more data, identify new biomarkers for diagnosis, and coordinate communications strategy to inform and educate the workforce about AHIs.

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**Biden Sees Fighting Cancer as Presidential Priority, Says 'We Can Do This'**

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Wednesday that improving the fight against cancer is now a presidential priority.

"I committed to this fight [against cancer] when I was Vice President... this is a Presidential White House priority. Period," Biden said during an event at the White House.

He expressed confidence in final success in this battle and conveyed a message to all people affected by cancer.

"We can do this," Biden said.

Biden announced the creation of a special presidential "cancer cabinet" with medical professionals who will make major decisions in efforts to fight the disease.

The White House said earlier in the day that the Biden administration has set a goal of reducing the death rate from cancer in the country over the next 25 years by at least half. The US also is reviving the Cancer Moonshot initiative Biden launched in 2016 as vice president with a view to making progress against cancer.

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**White House Stops Calling Ukraine Invasion 'Imminent,' Says Putin's Decision Unknown**  
(Adds background in paras 4-5)

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration recently stopped using the word "imminent" to describe the possibility of a Russian "invasion" of Ukraine because they are unsure whether President Vladimir Putin has decided to attack, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Wednesday.

"I used that [word] once, I think others have used that once, and then we stopped using it because I think it sends a message that we weren't intending to send, which was that we knew that President Putin had made a decision. I would say the vast majority of times I've talked about it we said he could invade at any time. That's true. We still don't know that he's made a decision," Psaki said when asked about her use of the word. "I think I used it once last week. I haven't in over a week."

Russia has repeatedly denied US allegations of prepping an invasion of Ukraine, and has criticized NATO's provocative military buildup in the region.

Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council Secretary Oleksiy Danilov in January urged officials and media to reduce tensions since it is not completely clear that there is any reason for panic.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy likewise said in January that he sees the current escalation of tensions as no worse than it was before and believes that the severity of the situation is being exaggerated.

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**Biden Says US Troop Deployment to Europe 'Totally Consistent' With What He Has Told Putin**

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden told CNN his decision to deploy several thousand more troops to Europe over the Ukraine crisis is "totally consistent" with that he has told Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Earlier in the day, the Pentagon announced the extra US forces will deploy to Poland, Germany, and Romania in the next few days.

According to CNN correspondent Kaitlan Collins, Biden told her that his order is "totally consistent" with that he has told Putin since the beginning.

"As long as he's acting aggressively, we are going to make sure we reassure our NATO allies in Eastern Europe that we're there and Article 5 is a sacred obligation," he said, as quoted by the reporter.

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**US Offers \$5Mln Reward for Bolivia Narco-War Chief Who Smuggled Cocaine - State Dept.**

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The US government is offering a \$5 million reward for information leading to the capture and conviction of the former head of Bolivian drug war Special Forces who was secretly a major cocaine smuggler himself, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said on Wednesday.

"The Department of State is announcing a reward of up to \$5 million for information leading to the conviction of Maximiliano Dávila Perez, a Bolivian national," Price said in a statement.

"Davila is the former Director of the Bolivian Special Forces for the Fight Against Drug Trafficking (Fuerza Especial de Lucha Contra el Narcotráfico, or FELCN)."

During his time as FELCN Director, Davila is believed to have used his position to safeguard aircraft used to transport cocaine through third countries for distribution in the United States, Price said. Both before and during his time as FELCN director, Davila was allegedly involved in narcotics trafficking and money laundering, he added

The reward is offered under the Department of State's Narcotics Rewards Program (NRP), which the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) manages in close coordination with US federal law enforcement partners and other government agencies, the State Department said.

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US State Department Confirms Authenticity of Leaked Response to Russian Security Proposals

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) – The State Department confirmed on Wednesday the authenticity of the leaked documents containing US responses to Russia's security proposals. Earlier in the day, Spain's El Pais newspaper published the text of the alleged US response to the Russian proposals.

"I have seen nothing to suggest these [leaked] documents are not authentic," spokesman Ned Price told a press briefing.

Pentagon press secretary John Kirby has also confirmed that the published documents are authentic.

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US Capitol Rioter Dressed as Caveman Pleads Guilty to Disorder Charges - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - A New York man who helped storm the US Capitol last January while dressed as a caveman has pleaded guilty to charges of civil disorder and stealing government property, the Justice Department said on Wednesday.

"A New York man pleaded guilty today to charges related to the breach of the US Capitol on January 6, 2021," the department said in a press release. "Aaron Mostofsky, 35, of Brooklyn, New York pleaded guilty to a felony charge of civil disorder and misdemeanor charges of theft of government property and entering and remaining in a restricted building or grounds."

According to court documents, Mostofsky dressed as a caveman and joined a group of rioters pushing against a police line that was attempting to limit the crowd's access to the Capitol. Mostofsky used his weight and strength in the effort to break the police line, the release said. He picked up a Capitol Police bullet-proof vest and put it on.

Mostofsky will be sentenced on May 6 and faces up to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. In the year since the Capitol riot, more than 725 individuals have been arrested in nearly all 50 states for crimes related to the breach of the building, including over 225 individuals charged with assaulting or impeding law enforcement. More than 165 individuals have pleaded guilty to federal charges, including 22 to felony offenses, the Justice Department said.

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US Still Hopes for Further Diplomatic Engagement with Russia - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The United States remains hopeful there will be an opportunity for further diplomatic engagement with Russia over the Ukraine crisis, Department of State spokesman Ned Price said on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, President Vladimir Putin said that the West's written responses to Russia's security proposals ignored Moscow's fundamental concerns and demands, including NATO's non-expansion. Russia is carefully reviewing the US and NATO responses, the president added. "It remains our hope, as Foreign Minister [Sergey] Lavrov seemed to indicate yesterday, that there will be an opportunity ... for further diplomatic engagement," Price told a briefing. "We don't yet know the form, we don't yet know the timing. What we do know is that any further diplomatic engagement, which we hope occurs, will be done for our part in the closest coordination with partners and allies. We hope it is done in good faith by the Russian Federation," he added.

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UN Chief to Meet Chinese, Other Officials During Winter Olympics in Beijing - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, February 2 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres intends to hold meetings with world leaders, including with the Chinese authorities, while attending the 2022 Winter Olympic Games in Beijing, United Nations spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Wednesday.

Guterres will leave for Beijing later in the day to participate in the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympic Games on Friday and will return to New York on February 6.

"While in Beijing, he [Guterres] will meet with the President of the International Olympic Committee, Thomas Bach. He does expect to meet with some of the other leaders while he's there," Haq said.

When asked whether Guterres will hold a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who will also be traveling to Beijing, to address, among other issues, the military build-up near Ukraine, Haq said the focus of Guterres' trip is the Olympics.

However, Haq did not exclude the possibility of Guterres engaging in a bilateral conversation with the Russian president.

"We do expect that some of the arrangements will pan out but we'll disclose the meetings once they're confirmed," Haq said.

Last week, Guterres urged all parties to conflicts around the world to observe the Olympic truce tradition for the duration of the event.

The Olympic Games will be held from February 4-20 and the Paralympic Games from March 4-13.

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White House Says Biden Wants Record Debt to Be Lower, Blames Trump for Current Situation

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden wants a responsible fiscal policy and lower national debt despite the record high debt of more than \$30 trillion that the Biden administration attributes largely to former President Donald Trump, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Wednesday.

"The President believes we need to have a sustainable and responsible fiscal policy, which is why he put forward ways to pay for his major proposal," Psaki said during a press briefing. "I'd also note that this stands in significant contrast from the previous administration. As we look to the debt, which obviously the President wants to be lower, it's important to note that more than 95% of the national debt was incurred before he took office."

Psaki noted that the national debt increased by \$7.8 trillion during the Trump presidency and it accounts for about 30% of its total.

The national debt reached a record high of over \$30 trillion, according to recent US Treasury Department data. The debt rose almost \$7 trillion since late January 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent public health measures first impacted the US economy, the data showed.

Financial experts interviewed by US media said the record debt was reached several years earlier than was anticipated as a result of the trillions of dollars spent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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UNSC Will Discuss North Korea's Launch Friday Afternoon - Source

UNITED NATIONS, February 2 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council will in close consultations on Friday afternoon discuss the latest ballistic missile launch by North Korea, a diplomatic source at the United Nations told Sputnik on Wednesday.

"The Security Council will discuss North Korea's launch in closed consultations on Friday [at] 3:00 p.m. [EST]," the source said.

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White House Says Stopped Describing Russian Attack as 'Imminent,' Putin's Decision Unknown

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration recently stopped using the word imminent to describe the possibility of a Russian invasion of Ukraine because they are unsure whether President Vladimir Putin has decided to attack, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Wednesday.

"I used that [word] once, I think others have used that once, and then we stopped using it because I think it sends a message that we weren't intending to send, which was that we knew that President Putin had made a decision. I would say the vast majority of times I've talked about it we said he could invade at any time. That's true. We still don't know that he's made a decision," Psaki said when asked about her use of the word. "I think I used it once last week. I haven't in over a week."

Russia has repeatedly denied US allegations of prepping an invasion of Ukraine, and has criticized NATO's provocative military buildup in the region.

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Pentagon Says Moving Extra 2,000 Troops From US to Europe in Next Several Days

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The Defense Department is sending 2,000 US troops to Europe in the next several days in response to the Ukraine crisis, spokesman John Kirby said on Wednesday.

"We are moving an additional force of approximately 2,000 troops from the United States to Europe in the next few days," Kirby told a press briefing.

Kirby explained that the US troops will be sent to three NATO countries - Poland, Germany and Romania - to strengthen NATO's Eastern flank amid tensions between Ukraine and Russia. Most of the 2,000 troops will be deployed in Poland and the deployment will be "temporal," he said.

Moreover, Kirby added that approximately 1,000 US troops currently based in Germany will be moved to Romania at the invitation of the country's government.

At the same time, the Defense Department does not exclude that a decision will be made to transfer additional US forces to Eastern Europe or to redeploy military contingents within Europe in the coming days or weeks, Kirby said, adding that the decision will depend on the development of the situation on the Ukrainian border with Russia.

"We are not ruling out the possibility that there will be more [US troops] coming up [to Europe] in future days and weeks," he said.

Kirby also underscored that all newly announced troop deployments in Europe are separate from the 8,500 US troops being already on heightened alert since late January.

The US military is sent to Eastern Europe not to fight in Ukraine, but to ensure the defense of the NATO allies and partners, he said.

"These are not permanent moves. They are moved to respond to the current security environment. Moreover, these forces are not going to fight in Ukraine, they are going to ensure the robust defense of our NATO allies," Kirby said.

Notably, the Defense Department has said it still does not know whether Russia will undertake any military actions against Ukraine.

"We don't know if Russia made the final decision to invade Ukraine... [yet] Russia clearly has the capability to invade Ukraine," Kirby added.

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US 'Hopeful' Putin Would Not Invade NATO Ally, But Taking Steps to Reassure Region - Psaki

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is hopeful that Russian President Vladimir Putin will not invade a NATO country but is also taking steps to reassure allies in Europe of the US commitment to them, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Wednesday.

"We're certainly hopeful he would not, but the president wants to take steps to reassure our countries in the region that are part of the NATO alliance," Psaki said during a press briefing when asked if Biden is worried about Putin invading a NATO ally.

The United States on Wednesday announced the movement of thousands of US troops to countries on NATO's eastern flank as part of a force posture adjustment in response to the buildup of Russian forces near Ukraine.

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UN Chief Urges Actors in Guinea-Bissau to Show Restraint After Coup Attempt - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, February 2 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres calls on all actors in Guinea-Bissau to demonstrate restraint and prevent any escalation following an attempted military coup in the West African country, United Nations spokesman Farhan Haq said in a press briefing on Wednesday.

"The Secretary-General... encourages all stakeholders, particularly defense and security forces, to exercise restraint and take all necessary measures to prevent any actions that could undermine peace and stability in Guinea-Bissau," Haq said.

The spokesman also said the UN chief continues to closely follow the developments in Guinea-Bissau and urges the authorities to ensure that investigations into the coup attempt are carried out in full compliance with human rights standards.

On Tuesday, a group of people in civilian clothes, armed with machine guns and grenade launchers, attacked the house of the government in the capital Bissau, where a meeting of the Council of Ministers was being held.

According to reports in media, at least six people have been killed in the armed attack.

Guinea-Bissau's President Umaro Sissoco Embalo said that the shooting in Bissau lasted five hours, resulting in "many deaths," while not providing a specific number. Embalo also said he was safe and located at the presidential palace, adding that the situation in the city is under control.

The Russian embassy in Guinea-Bissau told Sputnik that rebels had taken Embalo hostage. After a fierce five-hour firefight, he was liberated and brought to the presidential palace.

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**White House Says US Engaged in Talks With Ukraine on Economic Assistance Package**

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The United States has been engaged in discussions with Ukraine on an economic aid package for that country, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Wednesday.

"We have been discussing with the Ukrainians a package of economic assistance," Psaki said during a press briefing. "The package in discussion has been underway obviously at the leader level but also beyond. At this point in time, I think the discussion is with other counterparts from our government and theirs about next steps."

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**US to Keep Pressure on Myanmar Military for Country to Return to Democracy - State Dept.**

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The United States is working on increasing the pressure on the Myanmar military to reverse course and put the country back on the path to democracy, US State Department Counselor Derek Chollet said on Wednesday.

"We are working to increase pressure on the junta to put Burma [Myanmar] back on the democratic path. And we will continue to hold the regime accountable for its actions and violence," Chollet said during a discussion at the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank.

Chollet explained the United States has restricted the Myanmar military's revenue while trying to avoid exacerbating the dire humanitarian situation in the country and intends to continue with this approach.

"The United States has sanctioned 65 individuals and sanctioned or placed export controls on an additional 26 organizations with close regime ties, and we're not done," Chollet said. Moreover, the United States is utilizing other tactics to support the return to an inclusive democracy in the Myanmar, Chollet also said.

Specifically, the United States is involved in supporting the civilian democratic opposition and helping to alleviate the humanitarian suffering of the people in close cooperation with its partners, Chollet added.

On February 1, 2021, the Myanmar military seized control of the country in a coup, prompting nationwide protests. The military said it had to act because of election fraud committed by the ruling party and placed senior officials, including the democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi, under arrest.

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### White House Says 5 States Intend to Deploy More Troops to Reinforce NATO's Eastern Flank

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - Five additional countries, including the United Kingdom and France, are set to deploy additional troops to boost NATO's eastern flank over the Ukraine crisis, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Wednesday.

"I would note that a number of our NATO allies have recently announced troop movements as well, similar to what was announced this morning," Psaki said. "The United Kingdom, France, Spain, Denmark and the Netherlands have an intent to deploy additional forces to reinforce NATO's eastern flank,"

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### US Private Sector Jobs Down 301,000 in January in Weak Start to 2022 - Payrolls Processor

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - US private sector jobs fell by 301,000 in January, marking a weak start for employment in 2022 although the negative impact was likely to be temporary due to a surge in Omicron cases of the coronavirus, private payrolls processor ADP said on Wednesday.

"Private sector employment decreased by 301,000 jobs from December to January," ADP said of its report, issued ahead of Friday's non-farm payrolls report for December from the US government that will include jobs numbers in both the public and private sectors.

Economists polled by US media are expecting the Labor Department to say that non-farm payrolls grew by 150,000 in December from 199,000 in November.

For ADP's January report, the forecast had been for a growth of 184,000 private sector jobs, making it a big miss on expectations.

"The decline is a surprise versus the expectations," economist Adam Button said in a post on the ForexLive platform. "However there has been a lot of chatter even from Fed officials (that) the employment report this month would be weaker than expectations due to Omicron. That seems to be playing out."

Uneven jobs growth since the outbreak of the COVID-19 has complicated the task of the Federal Reserve, which is closely watching numbers on employment, as well as those on inflation, to determine the timing and gravity of the first pandemic-era interest rate hike. The central bank slashed rates to almost zero after the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020, and has kept them there since.

The Fed now says the United States probably needs a series of rate hikes to counter inflation, as prices have soared from the lows of the pandemic due to trillions of dollars of federal relief spending, higher wage payouts and supply chain disruptions. The Fed's target for inflation is 2% per year. But the US Consumer Price Index, an important barometer for inflation, grew by 7% in the year to December, expanding at its fastest rate since 1982.

After staggering unemployment triggered by the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, the labor market picked up last year, showing a jobless rate of 3.9% in December from a record high of 14.8% in April 2020. The Fed regards a jobless rate of 4% or below as "maximum employment".

ADP said the majority of US industry experienced job losses as 2022 began, marking the most recent decline since December 2020.

"The labor market recovery took a step back at the start of 2022 due to the effect of the Omicron variant and its significant, though likely temporary, impact to job growth," ADP chief economist Nela Richardson said in Wednesday's statement. "Leisure and hospitality saw the largest setback after substantial gains in fourth quarter 2021, while small businesses were hit hardest by losses, erasing most of the job gains made in December 2021."

Aside from shifting job numbers, the United States is experiencing one of the greatest transformations of its employment market as COVID-19 measures upended labor supply and work trends, putting employees' demands above those of employers.

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**FBI Says Bought Access to Controversial Pegasus Spyware in 2019 'for Evaluation Only'**

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The FBI has confirmed to The Guardian that it obtained access to Israeli NSO Group's Pegasus spyware in 2019, but did so only for product testing and evaluative purposes.

In a statement to The Guardian, the FBI said it had purchased a limited license to "stay abreast of emerging technologies and tradecraft."

"There was no operational use in support of any investigation, the FBI procured a limited licence for product testing and evaluation only," the statement read.

Israel's NSO Group has been embroiled in a massive scandal after an international media investigation revealed in July that its Pegasus spyware, which is used by the Israeli authorities to track terrorists, was also utilized to spy on the phones of about 50,000 other targets, including politicians, businessmen, activists, journalists and opposition figures around the world.

In December, The Washington Post reported, citing alerts from Apple, that the spyware was used to hack the iPhones of 11 US diplomats. The attacks were focused on US officials working in East Africa, the report said.

The White House National Security Council then said that the Biden administration was acutely concerned the Pegasus software posed a serious counterintelligence and security risk to US personnel. The administration placed several companies involved in the development and proliferation of Pegasus on the Commerce Department's entity list.

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**White House Says US Has Been in Talks With Allies on Troop Deployment for Several Weeks**

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The United States has been in discussions with allies in Europe regarding troop deployments for several weeks, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Wednesday.

Earlier in the day, the Pentagon confirmed the US will be sending 2,000 American troops to Europe in the next few days in response to the Ukraine crisis.

"I would not read this as a decision made based on any events over the last 48 hours or a couple of days," Psaki told a briefing. "We've been in discussion with our partners and allies in the region where these troops are going for several weeks now."

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**US to Stand Up for Israel as Country Defends Itself From Hezbollah - Pentagon Official**

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The United States is going to defend Israel against Hezbollah and ensure the country has everything it needs to restore stability and security on the northern border, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Dana Stroul said on Wednesday. "When it comes to a scenario in which Hezbollah, who's been able to massively arm itself and embed those precision guided munitions in civilian areas, the United States is going to stand up for its partner and make sure that Israel has what she needs to defend herself and restore security and stability on the northern border," Stroul said during a virtual discussion organized by the Institute for National Security Studies.

Stroul pointed out that the recent so-called normalization agreements between Israel and a number of Arab countries are the game changer for the entire region in terms of security, tourism, business and commerce opportunities, agriculture and education.

Hezbollah, formed in 1982 promotes the idea of building a state in Lebanon based on the Islamic Shiite principles of governance. The organization is recognized as a terrorist group in a number of countries, including Canada, Israel, Germany and the United States.

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**US Capital's Football Club Changes Name to 'Washington Commanders' - Statement**

WASHINGTON, July 13 (Sputnik) - The National Football League (NFL) club from Washington, DC announced in a statement on Wednesday that it has changed its name to "Washington Commanders."

"Going into our 90th year, we are excited to celebrate the history of the Burgundy and Gold while also paving the way for new traditions as the Washington Commanders," the statement said.

The club's officials explained that in the process of selecting a new name they received more than 40,000 submissions from fans and conducted numerous surveys and focus groups, the statement said.

"[T]his 18-month rebrand process has been a collaborative effort with our fans, alumni, players and local DMV community, all leading to today as we embark on a new chapter in our legacy as the Washington Commanders," the club co-owner Tanya Snyder said.

The club's officials have started celebrating the new name, logo and brand and are organizing a variety of surprise events in the US capital area to bring the new brand to the fans, the statement added.

Some of the live events and digital experiences will include branded cars that will canvas the area to surprise fans with visits from alumni handing out swag and new team gear, according to the statement.

The team's initial name and logo - Washington Redskins - have long been a source of controversy, given that they were regarded by many as being derogatory to Native Americans. **This material is distributed by Ghebi LLC on behalf of Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency, and additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.**

#### Key Witness in Trump Impeachment Over Ukraine Call Sues Trump Jr, Giuliani - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - Former White House National Security Council official, retired US Army Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, who served as a key witness in the impeachment proceedings against President Donald Trump in 2019, filed a lawsuit against Donald Trump Jr., Rudy Giuliani and other former White House officials for allegedly conspiring against him, CNN reported on Wednesday.

Vindman argues that Donald Trump's family, his attorneys, right-wing media and other former White House officials conspired to retaliate against him for agreeing to testify against the former President over his controversial telephone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the report said citing the complaint.

Vindman is also targeting former White House Deputy Chief of Staff Dan Scavino and former Breitbart editor Julia Hahn, who also held a position at White House, the report said.

Vindman is seeking an unspecified amount in damages, the report added.

Vindman was a key witness in the US House impeachment proceedings against then-President Donald Trump. Trump allegedly threatened to freeze aid to Ukraine if Kiev failed to probe then-Democratic presidential hopeful Joe Biden and his son Hunter Biden allegedly corrupt business dealings. Trump has rejected all allegations of wrongdoing.

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#### Ex-Vice President Pence Papers on US Capitol Riot Opened to Public - National Archives

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The US government has opened the private papers of former Vice President Mike Pence to the House Select Committee investigating the events at US Capitol on January 6, 2021, as the House of Representatives was confirming the result of the November 2020 presidential election, the National Archives announced on Wednesday. "After consultation with the Counsel to the President and the Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Legal Counsel, and as instructed by President Biden, I have determined to disclose to the House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6 Attack on the US Capitol the Vice Presidential records from our December 8, 2021," Chief US Archivist David Ferriero wrote in a cover letter to the Select Committee.

The released documents are the first set of records related to Pence's office that the Archives has cleared for release to the committee. The Supreme Court previously rejected former President Donald Trump's claim of executive privilege to keep the documents confidential. Current President Joe Biden has stated that executive privilege does not extend to keeping these documents closed to congressional scrutiny.

Many of the records were communications concerning Pence's then-responsibilities as President of the Senate in certifying the vote of presidential electors on January 6, 2021, Dana Remus, Biden's White House counsel, wrote in a letter to the Select Committee.

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#### **Biden Administration Aims to Reduce Cancer Death Rate by 50% Over Next 25 Years**

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration has set a goal of reducing the death rate from cancer in the country over the next 25 years by at least half, the White House said on Wednesday.

In a statement, the White House said that President Joe Biden is reviving the Cancer Moonshot initiative he launched in 2016 as vice president with a view to making progress against cancer. "Because of recent progress in cancer therapeutics, diagnostics, and patient-driven care, as well as the scientific advances and public health lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic, it's now possible to set ambitious goals: to reduce the death rate from cancer by at least 50 percent over the next 25 years," the statement read.

This program will allow people with cancer or those who have survived cancer and their families to improve their lives, and, "by doing this and more, end cancer as we know it today."

The Biden administration will also take action to jumpstart cancer screenings missed as a result of the pandemic, the statement read.

Other steps include diagnosing cancer sooner and preventing the disease.

"Today, we know cancer as a disease we have people and families too few good ways to prevent. But now, scientists are asking if mRNA technology, used in the safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines to teach your body to fight off the virus, could be used to stop cancer cells when they first appear," the statement added. "And we know we can address environmental exposures to cancer, including by cleaning up polluted sites and delivering clean water to American homes, for example, through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law."

The White House also called for action to speed up progress in fighting the most deadly types of cancer, including childhood cancers, and provide additional support to patients, caregivers and survivors.

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#### CNN President Jeff Zucker Resigns Over Undisclosed Relationship With Colleague

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - CNN President Jeff Zucker said on Wednesday he is resigning from his position at the news network due to the development of a relationship with an unnamed work colleague.

"As part of the investigation in Chris Cuomo's tenure at CNN, I was asked about a consensual relationship with my closest colleague, someone I have worked with for more than 20 years. I acknowledged the relationship evolved in recent years. I was required to disclose it when it began but I didn't. I was wrong. As a result, I am resigning today," Zucker said in a letter.

Although Zucker did not name the colleague in his letter, CNN Chief Marketing Officer Allison Gollust released a statement admitting that she and Zucker had an undisclosed relationship that developed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Gollust said that she looks forward to continuing work at CNN.

Zucker in the letter thanked the network's employees and said that his nine-year tenure at CNN was "an amazing run" even though he wishes it could have ended differently.

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#### Fifty-One Percent of US Voters Favor Biden Nominating Black Woman to Supreme Court - Poll

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - A little over half of voters in the United States favor the course of action announced by President Joe Biden to nominate a Black woman to be the next US Supreme Court justice, a new Morning Consult/Politico poll revealed on Wednesday.

The poll revealed that 28 percent of all voters strongly support Biden's decision to nominate a Black woman to replace Justice Stephen Breyer on the Supreme Court, while 23 percent said they would somewhat support such a nomination.

Some 68 percent of Black voters said they support Biden in nominating a Black woman, the poll results showed.

The poll also showed that while 47 percent of independents and 82 percent of Democrats favor Biden's decision, 52 percent of Republicans oppose it.

The poll was conducted on January 28-30 among a representative sample of 2,005 registered voters, according to Morning Consult.

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US Cyber Chief Says Helping Ukraine Defend Southern, Digital Borders on Table in EU Visit

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - Top US cyber official Anne Neuberger said on Wednesday that the focus of her discussions in Europe is how to help Ukraine defend both its southern and digital borders.

On Tuesday, Neuberger visited Brussels to discuss how to boost NATO's resilience in cyber space.

"The purpose of this ... our discussion is to underscore the unity of the alliance and to work closely with Ukrainians to harden their defense to ensure that they are able to defend themselves - southern borders and digital borders," she said.

Neuberger added that Russia has a capable cyberprogram. However, Ukrainians are making "great progress in addressing cyber incidents and recovering from them," she added.

Brussels was the first stop on Neuberger's European tour. She is due to travel to Warsaw to meet with Polish and Baltic officials as well as members of the Bucharest Nine group, which brings together Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

Tensions between Russia and the West have increased recently over allegations of a Russian military buildup near Ukraine. Moscow dismisses the claims as a pretext for NATO to deploy more military hardware and troops closer to Russian borders. Russia says it is not threatening anyone, and has the right to move troops within its national territory.

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US Cyber Chief Says on Europe Tour to Enhance NATO's Cyber Resilience Amid Ukraine Crisis

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - Top US cyber official Anne Neuberger said on Wednesday that she is traveling to Europe this week to explore ways of boosting national and alliance resilience in cyber space against the backdrop of the Ukraine crisis.

"The current tensions in Ukraine and a potential for malicious cyber activity to be a core element of any escalation is a reminder to all countries of the importance of network defense and partnership. And as much we can do to build on the progress we've made in our countries, NATO has made ... in cyber defense to use this crisis to accelerate our progress. That's the reason for my meetings in Brussels, meetings with my EU counterparts, consultation with the North Atlantic Council to enhance national and alliance resilience in cyber space," Neuberger told a telephone briefing.

The focus of all her engagements is to ensure that the United States and its allies and partners are prepared for any cyber-related contingency in the current environment, and to discuss how to support Ukraine and each other if such incidents occur, she added.

Overall, the US is focused on three areas.

"First, continue working with Ukraine and neighboring states to shore up cyber defenses. Second, working with allies and partners including through NATO to shore up defenses and coordinate responses to further Russian aggression if needed," Neuberger said. "And last but not least, encouraging each country to shore up defenses at home as we are working in the United States," she continued.

In January, Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesman Oleg Nikolenko said the ministry's websites and those of several other government agencies were down due to malicious cyber activities. The website of the Education Ministry displayed a message about an alleged leak of Ukrainians' personal data.

Following the reported cyber attacks against Ukraine, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told CNN in an interview that claims of Russian involvement are groundless, and Moscow "has nothing to do with these cyber attacks."

Last week CNN reported, citing a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) intelligence bulletin, that Russia may conduct a cyberattack on the US if it concludes that its national security is threatened as a result of a US or NATO response to potential escalation in the Ukraine conflict. DHS was said to have distributed a memo to critical infrastructure operators and state and local governments in the US, warning them of potential cyber threats.

The US and NATO continue to accuse Russia of preparing a military invasion of Ukraine. Moscow dismisses the claims as a pretext for the alliance to deploy more military hardware and troops closer to Russian borders.

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US to Send Jets, Destroyer to UAE to Defend Against Houthi Attacks - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The United States is planning to send advanced jet fighters and a guided-missile destroyer to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to support the country's efforts to protect itself against attacks from Houthi rebels in Yemen, the Wall Street Journal reported on Wednesday.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin already informed Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan about the United States' intention to increase its military support to the UAE, the report said.

The report also said the United States intends to deploy its guided missile destroyer Cole to cooperate with the UAE Navy.

In addition, the United States will provide UAE with early-warning intelligence to allow it to identify Houthi launch sites, according to the report.

The conflict between Yemen government forces and the Houthis has been aggravated by the participation of a military coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE on the side of the government. The coalition has conducted since 2015 air, land and sea operations against the Houthis, creating the arguably worst humanitarian disaster in the world.

The UAE previously announced it would end its participation in the military operations in Yemen, but it has left military personnel at bases at Yemen's ports.

In recent weeks, the UAE took part in government-led operations against the Houthis in several provinces and helped return some areas under government control. However, the Houthis announced the return of control over a number of positions in Shabwa, claiming that the Yemen's military suffered 515 casualties.

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IMF Ready to Help If Ukraine Conflict Has Spillover Effect on Other Nations - Georgieva

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund is ready to help if the Ukraine conflict begins having a spillover effect on the finances of other countries, Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said Wednesday.

"It's quite clear over the next months, if we are in a situation in which there are spillover impacts that require more engagement from the IMF for other countries, of course, we would be there," Georgieva said during a live-streamed interview with The Washington Post.

"We still have about \$700 billion of lending capacity. But the most important role we play and we will continue to play is in assessing what are the impacts of action or inaction and then making prudent policy recommendations on how best to handle the situation as it is as it evolves. So you can be sure that we are keeping a watching eye and, of course, thinking about the possible consequences of what can be done," she added.

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US Not Ruling Out More Troop Movements in Europe in Days, Weeks – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) – The United States is not ruling out more troop deployments in Eastern Europe in the coming days or weeks amid Ukraine tensions, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said on Wednesday.

"We are not ruling out the possibility that there will be more [US troops] coming up [to Europe] in future days and weeks," Kirby told a press briefing.

Kirby clarified that all newly announced troop deployments in Europe are separate from the 8,500 US troops being already on heightened alert since late January.

Pentagon confirmed on Wednesday the US will be sending 2,000 American troops to Europe in the next few days in response to the Ukraine crisis.

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#### US Did Not Make Responses to Russia Public, But Document Confirms US Stances - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The United States did not make its responses to the Russian security proposals public, but the publication of the document confirms that Washington wants to negotiate and reach a solution, Defense Department spokesperson John Kirby said on Wednesday.

Spain's El Pais newspaper published the response a day earlier that the United States is ready to discuss with Russia the issues of the indivisibility of security and its interpretation.

"We did not make this document public, now it confirms to the entire world what we are saying [that] if Russia wants to negotiate a solution, this document makes clear that there is a part to do so," Kirby said.

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#### IMF Has About \$2.2Bln to Disperse to Ukraine Until June - Chief

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund has about \$2.2 billion to disperse to Ukraine through June, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said Wednesday.

"We have about \$2.2 billion available to disburse to Ukraine between now and June," Georgieva said during a live-streamed interview with The Washington Post.

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#### Additional US Troops in Europe Not to Fight But Ensure Defense of NATO Allies - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The additional US forces set to be deployed in Europe will not fight in Ukraine, but will ensure protection of the NATO allies, Defense Department spokesperson John Kirby said on Wednesday.

"These are not permanent moves. They are moved designed to respond to the current security environment," Kirby said during a press briefing. "Moreover, these forces are not going to fight in Ukraine, they are going to ensure the robust defense of our NATO allies."

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#### Pentagon Says Moving Extra 2,000 Troops From US to Europe in Next Few Days

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon is sending 2,000 American troops to Europe in the next few days in response to the Ukraine crisis, spokesman John Kirby said on Wednesday.

"We are moving an additional force of approximately 2,000 troops from the United States to Europe in the next few days," Kirby told a press briefing.

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US Deploying Troops to Romania at Invitation of Romanian Government - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - A deployment of American troops to Romania comes at the invitation of the Romanian government, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said on Wednesday, while announcing that the US is sending an extra 2,000 troops to Europe in response to the Ukraine crisis.

"This move is coming at the expressed invitation of the Romanian government," Kirby told a press briefing.

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US Unaware If Russia Made Final Decision to 'Invade' Ukraine - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The United States is unaware if Russia has made the final decision to advance on Ukraine, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said on Wednesday, while announcing additional US troop deployments to Europe.

"We don't know if Russia made the final decision to invade Ukraine... [yet] Russia clearly has the capability to invade Ukraine," Kirby told a briefing.

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Pentagon Confirms US Will Soon Send Forces to Romania, Poland, Germany

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) - The United States will send forces to Romania, Poland and Germany soon over the Ukraine crisis, and these deployments will be temporal, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby confirmed on Wednesday.

"As part of this commitment and to be prepared, we'll soon send forces to Romania, Poland and Germany," Kirby said, adding that the deployment will be "temporal."

He added that the current situation in Europe demands that the US "reinforce NATO posture on the eastern flank."

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**US Talks With China About Sending Gas to Europe in Case of Ukraine Conflict – Reports**

WASHINGTON, February 2 (Sputnik) – The United States and the European Union are in talks with China and other natural-gas importers in Asia about sending their fuel to Europe if a conflict erupts in Ukraine, Bloomberg reported on Wednesday, citing people familiar with the matter. While the Biden administration's engagements with China about potential natural gas deliveries to Europe have been limited, US and EU officials are discussing possible options with several major importers in Asia, including Japan, South Korea, and India, the report said. EU officials are discussing possible swaps of long-term gas contracts with Asian countries in case Russia reacts to additional sanctions over Ukraine by reducing gas flow to European consumers, the report added