

2/22/22 Tuesday

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Ukrainian Opposition Party Demands Zelensky Resign for Failure to Return Donbass to Kiev's Control

By - Morgan Artyukhina

On Tuesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin said he recognized the independence of the two Donbass republics the day prior because the Minsk Protocol for peace in the region had been "killed" by Kiev's inaction.

On Tuesday, the party Opposition Platform - For Life issued a statement calling on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to resign. The centrist opposition party has 44 seats in the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's parliament, and opposes the decommunization and Ukrainization policies of the post-2014 nationalist coup government.

"The situation that is now developing around the Donbass is a terrible result of the inactivity and lack of will of the authorities. In the elections, two-thirds of Ukrainian voters voted for peace, the return of Ukraine to Donbass and Donbass to Ukraine. But the government, which had a huge credit of public trust, failed to cope with this task of national importance," [the statement reads](#).

"For two and a half years, despite the calls of Ukraine's foreign partners, the Ukrainian opposition, the demands of citizens, and Ukraine's international obligations, not a single step has been taken towards the implementation of the political part of the Minsk agreements, peace and unity," the statement continues.

"On the contrary, the representatives of the authorities repeatedly declared that they were unprofitable, demanded that they be revised and simply refused to comply. In the end, the followers of [former Ukrainian President Petro] Poroshenko's policy ignored the international contractual framework for the return of Donbass and led the country to a serious escalation of the conflict."

"Opposition Platform - For Life believes that the government, which failed the task of restoring peace and returning Donbass, should leave. The country and its citizens should not pay for the cowardice, ambitions and irresponsibility of politicians. The defeat of Zelensky's government should not be a defeat for the country."

A former television actor and comedian, Zelensky hails from the Russophone Ukrainian city of Kryvyi Rih and is a native Russian-speaker. He won an unlikely bid for the presidency in April 2019 running on a platform of peace in the Donbass, winning a landslide against Poroshenko, the incumbent leader who had been president since May 2014.

"I think that we will have personnel changes. In any case, we will continue in the direction of the Minsk [peace] talks and head towards concluding a ceasefire," [Zelensky said at the time](#).

The Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics in the Donbass region declared independence from Ukraine in April 2014, following a US-backed coup by nationalists in Kiev, who set about attempting to remove the status of Russian as a national language of Ukraine. About one-third of Ukrainians speak Russian as a first language and most Ukrainians speak Russian in their

daily lives; however, two predominantly Russophone regions - Crimea and the Donbass - took up arms and declared independence from Kiev. Crimea then voted to join the Russian Federation, but the Donbass republics fought Kiev for autonomy in a war that has claimed at least 14,000 lives.

The Minsk Protocol, agreed to by Ukraine, Russia and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), was supposed to pave the way for peace in the region. On Monday, following a severe decline in the situation in the Donbass, Putin honored the requests of the two Donbass republics and of the Russian State Duma to recognize the republics as independent states. He said the following day that the [Minsk agreement was dead](#) and had been for a long time.

On Tuesday, a draft resolution was introduced to the Rada to declare martial law in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions and to close all transport links with the Russian Federation and Belarus.

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Biden Announces 'First Tranche' of Sanctions Targeting Russia's Sovereign Debt, State Dev. Banks

By - Morgan Artyukhina

US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that he was imposing the first tranche of economic sanctions against the Russian Federation in response to Moscow's recognition of the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics and deployment of peacekeeping forces to the Donbass. "Russia just announced that it is carving out a big chunk of Ukraine," Biden said on Tuesday, saying Russian President Vladimir Putin was "setting up a rationale to take more territory by force."

"This is the beginning of a Russian invasion of Ukraine, as he asked permission for in his Duma," he continued.

"Who in the Lord's name does Putin think gives him the right to declare new so-called countries on territory that belonged to his neighbors?" Biden asked. "This is a flagrant violation of international law and it demands a firm response from the international community."

The US president announced the first tranche of sanctions against Russia, which target VEB Development Bank, Promsvyazbank Public Joint Stock Company (PSB), and 42 of their subsidiaries; Russia's sovereign debt; and imposes sanctions on Russian "elites and their families." He also said he had worked with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz to ensure that the [Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline](#), which would have brought liquefied natural gas from Russia to German, will not open.

"We are implementing comprehensive sanctions on Russian sovereign debt. That means we have cut off Russia's government from Western financing. It can no longer raise money from the West and cannot trade in its new debt on our markets or European markets either," Biden said. "Today's actions, taken in coordination with our partners and allies, begin the process of dismantling the Kremlin's financial network and its ability to fund destabilizing activity in Ukraine

and around the world," US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in an Office of Foreign Assets Control ([OFAC](#)) [news release](#) announcing the details of the new sanctions.

"We continue to monitor Russia's actions and if it further invades Ukraine, the United States will swiftly impose expansive economic sanctions that will have a severe and lasting impact on Russia's economy," she added.

The sanctions are slated to take effect beginning on Wednesday. Biden said the US was prepared to implement sanctions "far beyond" those in 2014 if Russia attacks Ukraine. He also revealed that US troops would be shifted from elsewhere in Europe into the Baltic States in response to Russian troops remaining in Belarus. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are all members of the NATO alliance.

Citing a US official, Reuters reported that this included 800 troops from Italy, 20 Apache attack helicopters presently stationed in Germany, and 12 Apache helicopters being sent to Poland from Greece.

"When all is said and done, we're going to judge Russia by its actions, not its words. Whatever Russia does next, we're ready to respond with unity, clarity and conviction," Biden said. "I'm hoping diplomacy is still available."

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told reporters afterward that Putin did not watch Biden's speech, as he was in a working meeting at the time.

On Monday, [Putin announced](#) he was moving to recognize the independence of the Lugansk People's Republic and the Donetsk People's Republic, two breakaway states in the Donbass region that declared independence from Ukraine in 2014, following the US-backed coup in Kiev. He [explained on Tuesday](#) that the Minsk Protocol, which was supposed to lead to peace in the Donbass conflict, had long been killed by Kiev, which refused to implement the deal reached with Russia and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The decision came as Ukrainian forces dramatically escalated their attacks on the Donbass republics last week, sending tens of thousands of civilians fleeing to safety in Russia's Rostov region. However, the US [claimed the attacks were fake](#) and part of a provocation planned by Moscow to justify intervention in Ukraine.

The attacks came in the larger context of NATO claiming that Russian troops drilling near the Ukrainian border were preparing an invasion of Ukraine. Moscow has denied any intent to invade, but said that the situation would be considerably less tense if NATO took certain actions to respect [Russia's security concerns](#), including halting its eastward expansion, writing off letting Ukraine join the alliance, and promising not to station offensive weapons near Russia's borders. So far, those requests have largely fallen on deaf ears.

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Let's Talk About the Kievan Rus, Who the US' Kiev Embassy Memed About on Tuesday
By - Morgan Artyukhina

Kiev's nickname may be the "Mother of Rus' Cities" due to its ancient role as the cradle of Ukrainian, Russian and Belarusian civilization, but it's Moscow that earned the moniker of The Third Rome. Both are part of a single proud history.

The US embassy in Ukraine - which is presently located in Lvov - tweeted a meme on Monday that highlighted the great age of Ukraine's capital of Kiev as compared to Moscow. The post is intended to be a "one-up" on Russia following [comments by Russian President](#) Vladimir Putin about the historic unity of Russia and Ukraine, and how the Bolsheviks tried to sever that by forming Ukraine into a separate republic.

"Since time immemorial, the people living in the southwest of what has historically been Russian land have called themselves Russians and Orthodox Christians. This was the case before the 17th century, when a portion of this territory rejoined the Russian state, and after," Putin said. Indeed, the Dnieper valley served as a cradle of much of Russian cultural identity, including the foundation of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Old East Slavic language, the ancestor of the Ukrainian, Russian, Belarusian, and Rusyn languages.

However, there's some fact and some fiction in attempting to reverse the order of things and claim that Ukrainian culture predates Russian culture.

Kiev and many of the other small states composed of Slavic tribes rose to their greatest prominence under the rule of the Rurikid princes, who were Norse or "Varangian" warlords from a people called the Rus', who conquered their way down the rivers of Eastern Europe along which they had once traded. Rurik of Ladoga was the first, who was invited in 860 CE to rule over Novgorod as prince, along with his brothers Sineus in Beloozero (Belozersk) and Truvor in Izborsk.

When Rurik died, Prince Oleg, the regent for his young son Igor, led a military expedition down the Dnieper and in 882 conquered the city of Kiev, then ruled by a Jewish Turkic empire called the Khazars. Oleg proclaimed Kiev the "Mother of Rus' Cities" and made it his new capital. Oleg later laid siege to Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, and while he failed to capture the metropolis, the attack raised the emperor's awareness of the Rus' and he sent missionaries to try and convert them to Orthodox Christianity.

Although Olga of Kiev, the empire's first female ruler, converted to Orthodoxy during a visit to Constantinople in the 950s, it wasn't until Volodymyr the Great converted in 998 and "baptized" the city of Kiev that Christianity took hold in the region. According to one legend, Volodymyr consulted with Christian, Jewish, and Muslim religious leaders about each of their faiths before making his decision, but ultimately rejected the latter two.

It was Volodymyr who ordered the construction of the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin in 996, which the US embassy's tweet mentions. He may also have ordered construction of St. Sophia's Cathedral in 1011, although it may also have been Yaroslav the Wise, who is said to have built the church to commemorate his victory over the Pechenegs, a nomadic Turkic people from the Pontic steppe, in what is today southern and eastern Ukraine.

Yaroslav's grandson, Vsevolod I, established the Vydubychi Monastery in 1070, although it was partially reconstructed in the 17th century in the Ukrainian baroque style. Vsevolod's successor, Sviatopolk II of Kiev, built St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery in 1108, near St. Sophia's Cathedral. It was demolished during the Soviet period, but rebuilt after the USSR's dissolution in 1991, as were many halls of worship across the former USSR.

From Kiev, the Rurikids ruled a vast empire that stretched from the Black Sea in the south to the White Sea in the far north, and from the Carpathian mountains in the west to the Volga near modern-day Nizhny Novgorod in the east. Although in reality, that "empire" was a loosely collected group of principalities that were beset by internal rivalries and strife.

By the time the Mongols mounted their all-out invasion of Eastern Europe in 1237, the Kievan Rus were a shadow of their former selves, and the Mongols conquered nearly all of the Rus' states except Novgorod. The 1240 siege of Kiev devastated the city, with the Mongols burning most of the city and slaughtering or enslaving nearly all of its inhabitants.

Moscow's first mention in the historic record was around 1147, and when the Mongols invaded 90 years later, it was still an insignificant trading outpost ruled by Vladimir-Suzdal. However, it soon fell under the rule of Alexander Nevsky, the infamous Prince of Novgorod, who used his friendly relationship with the Mongolian Golden Horde to win appointments as the Grand Prince of Vladimir and later even of Kiev.

Alexander's son Daniel inherited Moscow, which enjoyed a unique political stability as other Rus' principalities fell apart, and it grew wealthy and powerful after winning an important concession from the Golden Horde to be the sole collector of taxes from the other Rus' principalities. By 1480, Moscow had assembled a kingdom strong enough to take on the Mongolian armies and win, and its de facto victory on the River Ugra, when the Mongols fled instead of trying to cross the river and end Moscovite defiance, meant Moscow would become the "gatherer" of the Russian lands into a new and greater empire, as one historian has put it. That "gatherer," Grand Prince Ivan III, was the first to unofficially call himself Tsar (Caesar) after he married Sophia Palaiologina, the daughter of the last Byzantine emperor, whose empire had been destroyed by the Ottoman Empire. In 1492, the Metropolitan Patriarch of Moscow, Zosimus, declared Ivan "the new Tsar Constantine of the new city of Constantine - Moscow." The rest, as they say, is history.

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Dow Plummets Nearly 500 Points After US Announces 'First Tranche' of New Sanctions Against Russia

By - Evan Craighead

Crude oil prices surged and global stock markets tumbled on Tuesday after the US announced its "first tranche" of sanctions against Russia following Moscow's decision to recognize the independence of the People's Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 482.57 points (1.41%), to 33,596.61 on Tuesday, falling for its fourth straight session.

The S&P 500 dropped 1.02%, to 4,304.76, while the Nasdaq Composites shed 1.23%, to 13,381.52.

Both the Dow and S&P 500 closed at their lowest levels for 2022.

The US stock market was closed on Monday, the previous day, due to President's Day—a federal holiday in the US.

Earlier Tuesday, US President Joe Biden announced that the US would impose sanctions on Russian financial institutions, oligarchs, and sovereign debt. At the time, Biden described Putin's recognition of DPR and LPR as "the beginning of a Russian invasion of Ukraine."

Across the pond, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson told House of Commons lawmakers that the country's first round of sanctions would target three individuals of high net worth, as well as five Russian banks: Promsvyazbank, Black Sea Bank, IS Bank, Rossiya and General Bank.

Robert Schein, an investor for the rich, [told Yahoo Finance](#) that believes "the risk of a Russian invasion of Ukraine is overstated, as war invasions are not typically telegraphed in advance and there is usually an element of surprise."

That is "clearly not the case with Russia-Ukraine," he told the outlet, noting that the market is currently in what he characterized as a 'wait-and-see' mode.

Washington claims that the uptick in shelling by Ukrainian forces, which prompted mass evacuations in the DPR and LPR, is part of a staged provocation by Russia to justify its peacekeeping mission in the Donbass.

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Two Black Hawk Choppers Crash During Utah National Guard Winter Survivability Training Exercise

By - Evan Craighead

The Utah National Guard confirmed in a Tuesday morning tweet that two UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters were involved in a "winter survivability and mobility training" accident at around 9:30 a.m., local time. The incident is said to have occurred near Utah's Mineral Basin ski area.

No crew members were injured in the Tuesday morning crash, Utah National Guard's Aviation Public Affairs Officer Jared Jones confirmed to reporters during a same-day afternoon press conference.

"Aviation is an inherently dangerous business," said Jones, who said pilots were operating in "white-out" flying conditions. "It was a blessing that everyone was okay."

The National Guard official detailed that the first Black Hawk chopper crashed to the ground and kicked up snow, causing portions of the aircraft's main rotor blades to become dislodged upon impact.

Bits of the rotor blade ultimately struck the second Black Hawk chopper, causing it to go down soon after.

No hydraulic fluid leaked during the crash, according to officials.

Jones noted that there may be possible "minor injuries" in association with the event.

The crash site is located approximately 150 yards (137 meters) from a Snowbird Resort property. The ski resort has since shut down guests operations for several areas, including its aerial tram, Little Cloud and Mineral Basin ski areas.

Brief footage published by ABC 4 Utah showed skiers departing the crash site.

Officials claim the pilots in command were very experienced and do not believe there was any negligence. However, the situation remains under investigation, and all Utah National Guard training flights have been suspended until further notice.

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Israel Strikes Syria's Quneitra Province, Material Damages Reported - State Media
By - Evan Craighead

Material damage has been reported in the vicinity of the southwestern Syrian governate of Quneitra, following the launch of several hostile projectiles from the Golan Heights. Citing a military source, the [Syrian Arab News Agency detailed in a translated post](#) that Israeli forces were behind a number of surface-to-surface missiles that caused material losses in the Quneitra province around 12:30 a.m. local time on Wednesday. Israeli officials have yet to confirm responsibility for the reported incident. [Per early reports](#), damaged sites include an unspecified building and an observation post near the Quneitra Governorate village of Ruwaihinah. No deaths or injuries have been reported in relation to the strike.

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Waste Not, Want Not: Africa CDC to Request Pause in COVID-19 Vaccine Donations
By - Evan Craighead

According to officials, logistical concerns, as well as COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy and reluctance, all factor into the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's decision to request a delay in shipments. The move comes after Africa launched a campaign to encourage young people to get vaccinated against the contagious disease. Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director John Nkengasong, is set to request that COVID-19 vaccine donations be suspended until the second half of the year, according to recent comments the continent's top health official. "It makes sense to say, 'Look, let's pause and avoid the risk of sending so much that it gets expired, and then clear this and put our efforts in taking these ones up so we can now see how many people have actually been immunized — and then maybe now you can look at the next wave of donations,'" he told Politico. As of this article's publication, more than 11.3 million COVID-19 infections have been reported in Africa since the pandemic began, along with at least 247,000 associated deaths, [per Reuters](#). Countries reporting the most new daily infections, based on a seven-day average, include Tunisia (3,494 daily infections), Réunion (3,101 daily infections), South Africa (2,399), Egypt (2,054), and Libya (1,948).

With the exception of Réunion, all of the aforementioned countries are observing a decrease in their seven-day averages.

Nkengasong emphasized that the decision to request a delay in vaccine shipments is not to say that the donations are not important or needed.

"It's like buying a whole basket of foods and just to put it on your kitchen counter," Africa's top health official said. "If you cannot use any, it will rot. But if you do that in smaller pieces, then you still get to the end goal with the same amount of food on your kitchen table — but at least you don't have any waste."

The possible emergence of new COVID-19 variants, and other factors, were taken into account before arriving at the decision, Nkengasong said.

'Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance,' an organization co-leading COVAX, told the outlet that vaccine distribution is moving at a "sophisticated" pace amid a shift in supply and demand.

"Dose-sharing will remain an important aspect of the global vaccination effort as we strive to close the vaccine equity gap," a Gavi spokesperson told the outlet, noting that "not a single dose has been shipped without first being accepted by the recipient country."

The decision comes weeks after the [Africa CDC director launched a campaign](#) to enlist youth to be vaccinated. The campaign, dubbed 'African Youths for COVID-19 vaccination: Initiative for Saving Lives, Saving Livelihoods,' encourages younger Africans "to play an active role" in increasing inoculations, as the median age of the continent's population is 19.5.

At the time, 64% of the 597 million COVID-19 vaccine doses provided to Africa have been administered.

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US Lawmakers Urge Biden to Get Congressional Approval Before Involving Troops in Ukraine Crisis

By - Evan Craighead

On Tuesday, US President Joe Biden announced the movement of US troops and equipment to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The latest movement of US troops already in Europe comes in addition to the deployment and repositioning of some 6,000 service members to Germany, Poland and Romania.

A bipartisan group of lawmakers issued a memo on Tuesday to US President Joe Biden reminding the commander-in-chief that he had previously pledged to not send US troops into Ukraine, although he said the decision could change.

"I'm urging Pres Biden to follow the Constitution and the law and receive authorization from Congress before involving US forces in Russia-Ukraine conflict," said Rep. Peter DeFazio "The American people deserve to have a say before we become involved in yet another foreign conflict."

Reps. Nancy Mace (R-SC), Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), Cori Bush (D- MO) Pramila Jayapal (D-WA), Ilhan Omar (D-MN), Matt Gaetz (R-FL) and Warren Davidson (R-OH) are among the 43 lawmaker-signees.

At the moment, Biden has ruled out deploying US troops to Ukraine, although he has ordered some US forces to be repositioned to NATO's eastern flank. Ukraine is not a NATO member. "Today, in response to Russia's admission that it will not withdraw its forces from Belarus, I have authorized additional movements of US forces and equipment already stationed in Europe to strengthen our Baltic allies, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania," Biden said earlier Tuesday, amid Western assertions that Russian President Vladimir Putin would carry out a large-scale attack on Ukraine.

Per the reported order issued by US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, 800 US troops and 20 Boeing AH-64 Apache choppers already in Europe were to be moved to the Baltic region. Biden noted that Washington would continue to provide defensive assistance to Kiev.

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'This is Only the Start': Australia Files Sanctions Against Russia Over Recognition of LPR, DPR

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced on Wednesday that he would file the nation's own set of sanctions against Russia following Moscow's recognition of the independence of the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics (DPR, LPR).

The prime minister detailed during his Wednesday announcement that sanctions would be imposed immediately, underscoring that the initiative would include travel bans and strikes against eight members of Russia's security council.

Additionally, there would be penalties against entities tied to Moscow, as well as against Russian banks, transport, energy, telecommunications, oil, gas and minerals.

Morrison did not name the sanctioned individuals, opting to state that they were the same individuals that had been blacklisted by the UK and US.

"Australians always stand up to bullies and we will be standing up to Russia, along with all of our partners," Morrison remarked. "I expect subsequent tranches of sanctions, this is only the start of this process."

The move comes hours after US President [Joe Biden](#) and UK Prime Minister [Boris Johnson](#) announced sanctions against Russia over the Kremlin's Monday decision to recognize the LPR and DPR's independence from Ukraine.

Sanctions that have already been imposed against Crimea, which voted to join the Russian Federation in a 2014 referendum, are also set to be extended. Morrison has stressed that the declaration would "ensure there are severe costs" to what he sees as "Russian aggression." The sanctions, the prime minister noted, will target "the perpetrators and beneficiaries of this violence [in the Donbass regions.]"

"We will be adding names to the list," he continued. "And we'll be ratcheting it up further to potentially other areas of economic activity."

The prime minister went on to state that some 1,400 Australians are presently in Ukraine, and that he hoped China would join Australia and company in filing sanctions against Russia. Shortly after Russia's Monday announcement to recognize the independence of the LPR and DPR, Washington quickly changed the narrative by asserting that Russian President Vladimir

Putin's acknowledgement and subsequent peacekeeping mission in the Donbass regions proved the allegations of a looming invasion.

Peacekeeping operations in the breakaway regions were launched in the wake of dramatically escalated attacks by Kiev forces that ultimately prompted the evacuations of tens of thousands of civilians.

The US and its allies have claimed as far as November 2021 that an invasion against Ukraine by Russian forces was "imminent" without providing evidence. US and NATO officials solely used ongoing Russian military drills in the region to explain what they characterized as a "troop build-up."

Russia has repeatedly rejected claims that it intends to carry out an invasion, and stated that tensions would not currently be so high if NATO acknowledged Russia's own security concerns about the continued eastward expansion of the western military bloc.

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Arizona State House Proposes Bill to Make Recording Police Actions Illegal
By - Nevin Brown

An Arizona state House committee has passed a proposed bill that would make video recordings of police, in certain situations, illegal within eight feet. The vote broke down to 7-5, with no Democrats voting on the measure. The bill will go to the state Rules Committee to determine its constitutionality before heading to the House floor.

[The bill](#), brought by GOP Rep. John Kavanaugh, is an [amendment to a bill proposed earlier](#) that would have made video recordings of police without their consent illegal within 15 feet.

The bill states that making a video recording of a police action would be unlawful if "the person making the video recording does not have the permission of a law enforcement officer."

The proposed bill does not bar individuals from video documenting police, even without their consent, in some instances.

The bill states that individuals "may record the encounter if the person is not interfering with lawful police actions, including searching, handcuffing or administering a field sobriety test. The occupant of a vehicle who is the subject of a police stop may record the encounter if the occupant is not interfering with lawful police actions."

Constitutional First Amendment advocates note that, if passed, the bill would infringe on an individuals' rights and would limit the ability to hold police accountable.

The National Press Photographers Association has written an open letter in opposition to the proposed bill.

"We are extremely concerned that this language violates not only the free speech and press clauses of the First Amendment, but also runs counter to the 'clearly established right' to photograph and record police officers performing their official duties in a public place," [the letter reads](#).

Kavanagh, who authored the bill, is convinced of its constitutionality, saying, "I think this fully conforms with constitutionality and weighs officer safety with the citizens' right, the public's right, to see law enforcement officers in action."

Unlawfully recording an officer, under the proposed bill, would be classified as a petty offense, escalated to a minor offense for continuing to record when asked to stop by a cop. It is unclear whether video documenting police actions, if illegally obtained under the proposed law, would be admissible evidence in court.

The bill passed through its committee by a vote of 7-5, with no Democratic support. It will still need to pass an Arizona House vote. The house is split [31 to 29 in favor of Republicans](#).

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Truth Trump's Twitter - Cartoon
By - Nevin Brown

Former US President Donald Trump launched a social media platform named 'Truth Social' on Monday. For its first 24 hours, the app, claimed to be an alternative to Twitter, has faced technical difficulties resulting in a waiting list of hundreds of thousands.

In January 2021, Twitter banned Trump from its platform for posts the latter made in support of the deadly January 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol. In October 2021, the Trump Media & Technology Group and the Digital World Acquisition Corporation [released a statement](#) over the creation of its 'Truth Social' app.

"I created TRUTH Social and TMTG to stand up to the tyranny of Big Tech. We live in a world where the Taliban has a huge presence on Twitter, yet your favorite American President has been silenced. This is unacceptable. I am excited to send out my first TRUTH on TRUTH Social very soon. TMTG was founded with a mission to give a voice to all. I'm excited to soon begin sharing my thoughts on TRUTH Social and to fight back against Big Tech. Everyone asks me why doesn't someone stand up to Big Tech? Well, we will be soon!" Trump said in a prepared statement at the time.

Months later, Truth Social has finally hit the app store. The run-out, however, has been far from smooth. Due to an initial crash, the website posted that many had been put on a waiting list to join the site, in numbers reportedly running into the hundreds of thousands, while others were fed error messages when trying to set up an account to enter the site.

Devin Nunes, formerly a Republican congressman representing California, left his office to become the company CEO. He said that the site was expected to be fully operational by the end of March, at the latest.

The Trump-branded social media app, however, was handicapped directly out of the gate. Additionally, the app joins an already-crowded online presence as right-leaning social media platforms have gained momentum over the past two years.

When Trump was banned from Twitter he could boast nearly 90 million followers. Twitter currently has 330 million active users.

On its first day, 170,000 people downloaded the Truth Social app. It's unclear, however, whether anyone has been able to use it.

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'This is Genius': Trump Praises Russia's Recognition of DPR & LPR's Independence
By - Nevin Brown

Former US President Donald Trump described Russian President Vladimir Putin's move to recognize the sovereignty of the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic as "genius."

Trump made his remark while appearing on "The Clay Travis and Buck Sexton Show." When asked about Russia recognizing the two breakaway states, Trump had nothing but praise for Putin.

"I went in yesterday and there was a television screen," Trump noted, adding, "and I said, 'This is genius.'"

The former president continued, "Putin declares a big portion of the [sic] Ukraine — of Ukraine. Putin declares it as independent. Oh, that's wonderful," [Trump said](#).

He added: "So, Putin is now saying, 'It's independent,' a large section of Ukraine. I said, 'How smart is that?' And he's gonna go in and be a peacekeeper. That's strongest peace force... That's the strongest peace force I've ever seen. There were more army tanks than I've ever seen. They're gonna keep peace all right. No, but think of it. Here's a guy who's very savvy... I know him very well. Very, very well."

Later in the interview, Trump voiced his belief that if he were still president, the situation in Ukraine would be different due to his personal relationship with Putin and the latter's strong stance.

"This would never have [sic] happened if we were there. But he did... How come there was none of this was happening during the Trump administration? I knew Putin very well. I got along with him great. He liked me. I liked him. I mean, you know, he's a tough cookie, got a lot of the great charm and a lot of pride. But the way he — and he loves his country, you know? He loves his country. He's acting a little differently I think now," Trump continued.

Trump's remarks drew a response from the White House.

Jen Psaki, White House press secretary, [said at a press briefing](#) hours later: "As a matter of policy, we try not to take advice from anyone who praises President Putin and his military strategy, which I believe is what happened there."

Psaki also championed US President Joe Biden's tactics regarding the situation in Ukraine, over the suggestions of Trump.

"So there's a bit of a different tactic, a bit of a different approach, and that's probably why President Biden, and not his predecessor, was able to rally the world and the global community in taking steps against Russia's aggression," she noted.

The Tuesday interview also saw Trump talk about the Biden presidency, immigration, COVID-19, the economy, inflation, and hinted again without speaking openly of a possible run for the White House in 2024.

Trump's remarks came as Biden announced the US' "first tranche" of sanctions against Russia over its recognition of the LPR and DPR. Similar sanction efforts have since been followed by the UK, Australia, Japan and Canada.

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Japanese Embassy Staffer Was Temporarily Detained By Chinese Authorities, Officials Reveal
By - Nevin Brown

A staffer at the Japanese embassy in Beijing was detained for hours by Chinese authorities on Monday afternoon, according to the Japanese Foreign Ministry.

The Japanese Foreign Ministry claims the staffer was temporarily detained while on official business despite having disclosed his status at the embassy. After exchanges between the ministry and Chinese authorities, the staffer was released.

Reports indicate the staffer was not physically harmed. At present, the reasons for their detention remains unknown.

The Japanese government is said to have made a complaint through diplomatic channels. Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters, "We cannot overlook (the incident) and will never accept it."

Takeo Mori, Japan's vice foreign minister, summoned Yang Yu, an interim Chinese diplomat within the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo, to Japan's Foreign Ministry on Tuesday night as a result of the incident.

Mori insisted that China apologize for the detainment and take measures to avert a recurrence. Japan's Foreign Ministry said the incident was a violation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

The Japan Times [reported](#) that the a similar incident took place in 2002, when a Japanese defense attache was detained by Chinese official for over 10 hours.

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US Navy: Four Dead After Naval Contractor Crashes Chopper in Hawaii
By - Nevin Brown

On Tuesday, four people died in a helicopter crash on the Hawaiian island of Kauai, according to the United States Navy. The aircraft crashed at the Pacific Missile Range Facility shortly after 10 a.m., local time.

The crash had no survivors and the names of those killed are not yet available, according to the service, although it has been reported that they were military contractors, not US soldiers. The helicopter was identified as a [Sikorsky S-61N](#) and was being flown by Croman Corp. in support of a training operation. The National Transportation Safety Board and the missile range facility are investigating the cause of the crash.

Sikorsky S-61Ns were manufactured between 1959 and 1980 by Sikorsky Aircraft. The aircraft was designed to carry a significant payload and for use over water. Versions have been used by all branches of the US military. The Connecticut-based company was bought by Lockheed Martin in 2015.

Kauai county police and firefighters assisted the military following the crash, according to a county spokesperson.

The Pacific Missile Range Facility is on the western edge of Kauai. The military tests missile defense technology and conducts exercises out of the island.

Kauai is geologically the second-oldest Hawaiian island and the state's fourth largest. It's called the "Garden Isle" as it is covered by rainforest. The island has been featured in over 70 major Hollywood films.

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Hostage Situation at Amsterdam Apple Store Officially Ends, Dutch Police Reveal

By - Mary Manley

After hours of attempting to put an end to a hostage take-over at an Apple store in Leidseplein, police say in a tweet that they were able to stop the man by "hitting him as he ran out". A video posted to Twitter shows the man being hit with a police car.

"We managed to stop the hostage-taker by hitting him as he ran out. Violent images of that collision can be seen. We now know that the suspect had no explosives on his body and medical personnel are now taking care of him," the police said in a tweet.

A Twitter user posted a video of the alleged hostage-taker to Twitter, which shows the man being hit by a police car.

Police, who have been reluctant to release details about the investigation as it is still ongoing, also apologized to local residents for use of a helicopter around 11:00 p.m.

Several people had been released from the armed hostage situation at the Amsterdam Apple store leading up to the suspect's capture. What is suspected to be an armed robbery had taken place at the brand's location in Leidseplein at around 5:40 p.m. according to reports.

Police tweeted around 9 p.m. that several people had been able to leave the Apple store which was taken hostage on Tuesday afternoon around 5:40 p.m. The person in question has been seen in social media posts and videos wearing a black hooded sweatshirt, camouflage pants while brandishing a gun and holding a victim in a headlock position.

Close to 9 p.m. Amsterdam police tweeted, "Since the start of the hostage situation in the Apple Store on Leidseplein, several people have been able to leave the building. We do not want to share any information about the situation in and around the building at the moment."

The police did not identify the store as Apple at first, but images and videos posted to social media involving the scene show an armed person inside the store. The police wrote to their Twitter account at the time of the incident that they were at the scene with "many (specialized) units to bring the situation under control."

In an attempt to control the safety of the hostage situation, Amsterdam police asked residents to avoid the scene and stay inside, "We ask local residents, entrepreneurs and employees at Leidseplein not to come and look outside and to stay inside," they wrote in a tweet shortly after arriving on the scene.

At around half past seven AT5 reported that the police escorted civilians who were in buildings near/around the Apple store away from Leidseplein, in an attempt to mitigate the situation. Amsterdam police have said that they will use any photos or videos posted to social media as a part of their on-going investigation, but were reluctant to post detailed updates out of fear of disrupting their investigation as well as other safety efforts.

A Twitter user posted a video of the scene, writing that locals were seemingly unphased by the unfolding crime, as they can be seen biking around the special police units and flashing lights, unaware, "Locals unimpressed, biking around. Probably getting used to 'incidents' in our peaceful, loving capital. 'Gaaf Land' as we say," wrote user [@SBergsma](#).

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Tonga's Internet Restored Five Weeks After Deadly Volcanic Eruption
By - Mary Manley

Tonga's internet connection has finally been restored following a volcanic eruption that occurred five weeks ago, which shredded the Pacific nation's undersea cable. Residents of the Pacific island nation reported services coming back online, as well as calls coming in from family members whom they had been disconnected from.

Tonga, a nation that is made up of some 170 South Pacific islands, has a population of 105,000 residents, a majority of those live on its main island Tongatapu.

The island nation uses telecom providers Digicel and TCC, who said connection had been restored after the 92 km (57 mile) long cable had finally been fixed. "YES! TCC is restoring fiber cable internet services," the company wrote to [customers](#). The cable is the island's main source for reliable internet.

Connections to the major island of Tongatapu have been restored, but Tonga Cable chief executive James [Panuve](#) says outlying islands will have to wait six to nine months before their cable connection is restored.

"We are delighted to see that our customers are connected to the outside world again," said Digicel Tonga chief executive Anthony Seuseu.

The school chaplain for the island, Reverend Penisimani Akauola Tonga, was one of the lucky firsts to get back online for the first time in over a month. "First post on Facebook since January 15th! So Blessed for the opportunity! Malo Tonga Cable & Tonga government!" the reverend wrote.

The violent eruption of the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcano caused the highest plume ever [recorded](#). The giant cloud of ash which was measured at 31 km (19 miles) high, covered the islands in heaps of ash, disrupted the island's supply of clean water and damaged crops at an estimated \$17 million, as well as causing difficulty in rescue supply efforts.

Repairing the cable had proved to be difficult. The repair ship used for the important project took 20 days to replace the 92 km (57 mile) long section of the underwater cable. However, that hasn't been the worst of it.

Last week, Tonga's prime [minister](#) said that residents have been struggling to cope with the traumatic experience of the natural disaster. "We recognise that even though we might start rebuilding some of the houses like next month or so, the mental side of it will take a bit longer," said Prime Minister Hu'akavemeiliku Siaosi Sovaleni, who has been in his leadership role for less than a year.

The prime minister recounted the horrifying memory of the volcano's eruption. "We were at home that night, and you know that explosion was like nothing - I mean I haven't heard something like that. It was terrible - and then all of a sudden, it was [nightfall](#)."

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'Women Were Disposable': Ex-Playboy Employees Allege They Were Sexually Assaulted in Docu-Series

By - Mary Manley

The A&E docu-series "Secrets of Playboy" revealed in an episode aired on Monday that two former employees of Playboy were sexually assaulted because the magazine condoned an environment of misogyny and sexual harassment.

P.J. Masten worked as a corporate Bunny [Mother](#) from 1975 to 1982. Bunny Mothers were responsible for acting as mentors and supervising Playboy Bunnies. In an episode titled "The Corporate Game," Masten recalls a top-ranking executive raping her.

"He started kissing me, and he started grabbing me," [Masten](#) said. "This was a big executive, and I said, 'Please don't do this.' And he said, 'Why do you think you came to work in corporate? You have to play the game if you want to do anything in corporate.' I was not an active participant. He just did what he had to do and turned around... raped me and walked out," says Masten in a terrifying recollection of her time at Playboy.

Masten says she was transferred to a corporate office located in Chicago. "It was a male dominated atmosphere where someone could fondle you, someone could grab you..." She says that the general manager, who was appointed to the location, had control "over everyone of us, and he didn't know what bunnies were."

Masten recalls the underqualified general manager at the Chicago location asking Playboy Bunnies sexually inappropriate questions, as well as touching them without consent, as it was a part of the 'Mad Men era' which Playboy encouraged, she [says](#).

"We didn't have a voice, women were disposable," says Masten.

Miki Garcia was another employee of Playboy who became a victim of sexual assault. Garcia says she was raped twice by a prominent actor at an auto show event where she was employed as a Playmate to sign autographs. She says she didn't come forward with the allegation because she didn't want to be perceived as a "whiner."

"I didn't want to become a problem to Playboy," Garcia said. "I didn't want them to perceive me as a whiner or a person that couldn't handle the job. And so the tough part of me kicked in. I knew this is the way it was going to go and that was it."

Garcia says she worked to gain power in the company so that "no woman had to put up with that kind of behavior from any man just because she had a rabbit head logo on her."

Garcia was the first female director of promotions, working for Playboy between 1973 and 1982, and used her power to make sure her rapist would never work with Playboy again.

"So, when my rapist ordered up a Playmate for a job, I simply instructed my secretary to tell him to never call again, never," she said. "He would never, never, ever get a model from Playboy. Never."

On the show's website, A&E [writes](#) that "Secrets of Playboy" explores the "hidden truths behind the fable and philosophy of the Playboy empire through a modern-day lens." The show is said to investigate sexual abuse, drug abuse, and bestiality within the Playboy world. The show has new episodes available every Monday.

In a separate episode, former Playboy bunny Holly [Madison](#), 42, said that her time at Playboy Mansion was "cult-like."

"The reason I think the mansion was very cult-like looking back on it is because we were all kind of gaslit and expected to think of Hef as, like, this really good guy," Madison explained. "And you started to feel like: 'Oh he's not what they say in the media, he's just a nice man.'"

Madison, who dated Hefner from 2001 to 2008, explains that there was a curfew rule, as well as an allowance rule for the women in the house. Hefner, who passed away in 2017, even told Madison to quit her waitressing job because he didn't want her to have a backup plan in case they broke up.

Prior to the series' premiere, the Playboy company released an open letter condemning the actions of the company under Hefner's power.

"First and foremost, we want to say: we trust and validate women and their stories, and we strongly support the individuals who have come forward to share their experiences," the letter began. "As a brand with sex positivity at its core, we believe safety, security and accountability are paramount, and anything less is inexcusable."

"Today's Playboy is not Hugh Hefner's Playboy," the letter [said](#).

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Kuleba Has 'No Comment' on Whether Kiev Will Cut Off Diplomatic Ties with Russia

UNITED NATIONS, February 22 (Sputnik) - Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba declined to comment on Wednesday on whether the country would sever diplomatic relations with Russia.

On Tuesday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Kiev is considering cutting off diplomatic relations with Moscow, after the latter recognized the breakaway republics of Donbas as independent.

"No comment," Kuleba said, when asked by Sputnik.

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Giuliani to Cooperate With January 6 House Panel - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) – Rudy Giuliani, Donald Trump's former attorney and a key member of his inner circle, is poised to provide documents and answer the questions of the US House Select Committee investigating the January 6 Capitol riot regarding the former president's efforts to return himself to office, The Guardian reported on Wednesday, citing sources.

Giuliani previously declined to provide any testimony to the panel, like many other Trump allies, but reportedly may now appear before the committee in a cooperation deal that could be struck within weeks.

Trump's former attorney has expressed his readiness to provide documents and answer questions as well as reveal his contacts with Republican members of Congress who were part of the attempt to overturn the results of the 2020 election, according to the report.

Giuliani may also share details of Trump's alleged pressure on former Vice President Mike Pence to stop the certification of Joe Biden's victory, the report said.

At the same time, the former president's attorney agreed to cooperate as long as his appearance before the panel is not pursuant to a subpoena and if he does not have to provide records or discuss his communications with Trump in breach of executive and attorney-client privileges.

The select committee subpoenaed former Trump attorneys Giuliani and Sidney Powell last month to provide information on their roles in the January 6, 2021 events by February 1. In an interview with Newsmax earlier in February, Giuliani claimed the house select committee is "illegal" and does not have the power to subpoena people.

On January 6, 2021, a group of Trump supporters entered the US Capitol to protest the certification of the 2020 election results from several US states that Trump claimed were fraudulent.

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State Department Urges US Citizens in Ukraine to Provide Information About Themselves

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The US Department of State has urged Americans currently in Ukraine to provide information about themselves.

"U.S. citizens in Ukraine should complete this online form so we can communicate with you. U.S. citizens seeking to depart Ukraine can also call 1-833-741-2777 (in the United States) or 1-606-260-4379 (from overseas) for immediate assistance," the message published on the main website page of the department said.

The United States has repeatedly called on Americans in Ukraine to leave over alleged threats of "Russian military action." In addition, the country relocated its diplomatic staff from Kiev to Lviv. Russia has repeatedly denied any intention of "invading" its neighbor.

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More Than Two-Thirds of US Voters Support Federal Gasoline Tax Holiday - Poll

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - Around 70% of US voters favor temporarily suspending the federal tax on gasoline to the end of this year in order to combat inflation and stimulate the economy, a new Morning Consult poll said on Wednesday.

"As gas prices continue to ratchet up, the White House and Democratic lawmakers are weighing a suspension of the federal gas tax," the polling company said. "New Morning Consult/Politico data found that the proposal is a very popular one, with nearly 7 in 10 registered voters saying they would support a temporary break."

Some 68% of voters said they supported the gas tax suspension or holiday until the end of this year with 42% approving it "strongly" and only 16% of voters opposed the idea, Morning Consult said.

"(A) gas tax holiday is backed by majorities in both parties: 74 percent of Democrats and 65 percent of Republicans, as well as 62 percent of independent voters," the pollster said.

Current federal taxation on gasoline runs at 18.4 cents per gallon. The proposed federal gas tax suspension, which would last through January 1, 2023, was introduced by six Senate Democrats, four of whom are facing re-election in the midterm congressional elections in November, the report noted.

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Most US Voters Disapprove of Biden's Foreign Policy Course, But Divided on Ukraine - Poll

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - Over a half of American voters disapprove of President Joe Biden's handling of foreign policy, but tend to give better marks to his tackling of the Ukraine crisis, according to a Morning Consult/Politico survey out Wednesday.

"Thirty-seven percent of voters approve of Biden's handling of foreign policy, up 3 percentage points from a low in Morning Consult/Politico tracking reached a month ago, while 52 percent disapprove, roughly in line with figures in surveys conducted since his administration's chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan," the press release said.

The survey showed that 40% of voters approve of how Biden is dealing with the situation in Ukraine, while 45% disapprove.

"The numbers are better than perceptions of his handling of Afghanistan at the dawn of that crisis, when 51 percent disapproved and 31 percent approved," the release noted.

On Monday, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed decrees recognizing the independence of the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. Under the new treaties, Moscow pledges to ensure the security of the Russian-speaking republics.

The decision came after a deterioration of the situation on the line of contact between Ukraine and the breakaway regions.

On Tuesday, President Joe Biden described the developments as the beginning of a Russian "invasion" of Ukraine. He announced a new set of US sanctions against Russia's financial sector, while the Pentagon ordered 800 troops and 20 AH-64 helicopters already present in Europe to the Baltic region.

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US Imposes \$18Mln Penalty on Baxter International Company - Securities Commission

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) said in a press release that it has imposed an \$18 million penalty and settled charges against the multinational health care company Baxter International for improper intra-company foreign exchange transactions that resulted in the misstatement of the company's net income.

"The SEC's order against Baxter finds that the company violated the negligence-based anti-fraud, reporting, books and records and internal accounting controls provisions of the federal securities laws," the release said on Thursday. "From at least 1995 to 2019, Baxter used a convention to convert non-US dollar denominated transactions and assets and liabilities on its financial statements that was not in accordance with... generally accepted accounting principles."

The SEC said in the release that beginning in 2009, the company exploited the convention to enter into intra-company foreign exchange transactions for the sole purpose of generating foreign exchange accounting gains or avoiding foreign exchange accounting losses.

The SEC also announced it settled charges against Baxter's former treasurer and assistant treasurer, Scott Bohaboy and Jeffrey Schaible, respectively, for their misconduct related to these transactions.

Baxter as well as Bohaboy and Schaible did not admit or deny the SEC's findings, but agreed to cease and desist from future violations, the release said.

Bohaboy agreed to pay a civil penalty of \$125,000 and Schaible agreed to pay a civil penalty of \$100,000, repay \$76,404 and also pay a prejudgment interest of \$12,955, the release added. The settlement creates a fair fund for distribution of settlement proceeds to investor harmed by Baxter's activities, according to the release.

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China's Embassy Decries 'Double Standard' in Depiction of Hong Kong, Ottawa Protests

TORONTO, February 22 (Sputnik) - China's diplomatic mission in Canada slammed Ottawa for the "stark double standard" in the way the the government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau portrayed the Freedom Convoy in Canada and the violent protests in Hong Kong.

Over the weekend, the Ottawa leg of the Freedom Convoy protests was routed by law enforcement after the Trudeau government granted itself new, sweeping emergency powers to quell what it termed an "occupation" and "blockade" of the nation's capital that presented a "threat to democracy." This characterization stood in stark contrast to Ottawa's support for the unruly protests that swept Hong Kong in March of 2019 and ended several months later.

"In the eyes of some people in Canada, similar protests and demonstrations should be referred to differently in different places. In Hong Kong, they are 'human rights movement,' but in Canada they are 'a threat to democracy.' Such stark double standard is unacceptable," China's Embassy in Canada said in a statement via Twitter on Tuesday.

China's diplomatic mission noted that Canadian police used a variety of crowd control weapons, including pepper spray, stun grenades and batons, to violently disperse the peaceful protesters that set up base in Ottawa's downtown core.

The wave of protests across Canada began in mid-January, with tens of thousands of truckers and other Canadians converged peacefully on Ottawa to seek the government to scrap the COVID-19 vaccine mandates. The protest eventually united large swaths of Canadian society and evolved into a demonstration against Trudeau and his government.

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WRAP UP - US Announces New Set of Sanctions Against Russia, Troops Deployment to Baltics

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden announced a new set of US sanctions against Russia's financial sector following Moscow's decision to recognize the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics (DPR and LPR).

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed decrees on Monday recognizing the independence of the DPR and LPR. Under the new treaties, Moscow will ensure the security of the two Russian-speaking republics.

"We are implementing full blocking sanctions on two large Russian financial institutions, VEB and their military bank. We are implementing comprehensive sanctions on Russian sovereign debt. That means we have cut off Russia's government from Western financing. It can no longer raise money from the West and cannot trade in its new debt on our markets or European markets either," Biden said during remarks at the White House.

The US Treasury Department said the United States will allow transactions with Russia's Vnesheconombank, or VEB, until March 24 as part of the wind down period. The Treasury Department explained that it issued a license allowing certain bond servicing transactions with the VEB bank for bonds issued before March 1, 2022.

The Treasury Department said it also sanctioned 42 subsidiaries belonging to VEB bank and the Promsvyazbank Public Joint Stock Company (PSB).

Also designated are Russia's Central Sport Club of the Army (CSKA) and the Russian Export Center, which are VEB subsidiaries, according to the Treasury Department.

In addition, the Treasury Department said it designated five vessels owned by a subsidiary of the PSB.

Biden pointed out that the United States is sanctioning Russia's sovereign debt that will prohibit the country from receiving Western financing.

Biden also said sanctions will be imposed on Russia's elite and the Treasury Department unveiled new sanctions against the children of Russia's FSB chief Alexander Bortnikov, First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Office Sergei Kiriyenko and former Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov.

Alexander Bortnikov's son, Denis Bortnikov, is currently the Deputy President of VTB Bank and Chairman of the VTB Bank Management Board. Sergei Kiriyenko's son, Vladimir Kiriyenko, used to be Rostelecom's vice president and is currently the CEO of VK Group, and Mikhail Fradkov's son, Petr Fradkov, serves as the chairman and CEO of PSB.

A senior Biden administration official told reporters that banning Russia from the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) system is not in the first batch of sanctions, but that option remains on the table.

More sanctions against Russia will be announced if the situation with respect to Ukraine escalates further, the official added.

Biden announced that he had approved the deployment of US troops already stationed in Europe to the Baltic region in order to bolster NATO's eastern flank.

The Pentagon later detailed that 800 US troops will be sent from Italy to the Baltic region. Moreover, 20 Apache attack helicopters will be sent to the Baltic region, up to eight F-35 fighter jets will be sent to other unnamed locations on NATO's eastern flank, and 12 Apache helicopters will be sent to Poland.

Russia's decision to recognize the DPR and LPR came after the situation on the line of contact between Ukraine and the breakaway republics seriously deteriorated amid interference by the West. Russia has repeatedly denied having any intention of invading Ukraine.

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Canada Deploying Additional 460 Troops to Eastern Europe Amid Ukraine Tensions - Trudeau (Updates with more details, background in paras 4-6)

TORONTO, February 22 (Sputnik) - Canada will deploy up to 460 additional troops to Eastern Europe amid escalating tensions following Russia's recognition of the breakaway Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said.

"Today, I am authorizing a deployment of up to 460 members of the Canadian Armed Forces to Operation Reassurance," Trudeau told a news conference on Tuesday.

The deployment will see Latvia receive an additional contingent of 30 Canadian soldiers, Defense Minister Anita Anand said.

Most of the 460 soldiers will be housed aboard the frigate Halifax that is due to arrive in the region by the end of March, while the rest will be split between an artillery battery and a maritime patrol aircraft, Anand added.

On Monday, President Vladimir Putin signed decrees recognizing the independence of the breakaway people's republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. Under new treaties, Moscow pledged to ensure the security of the two Russian-speaking republics.

Russia's decision to recognize them came after the situation on the line of contact between Ukraine and the breakaway republics significantly worsened.

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Canada to Impose Sanctions on Russian Sovereign Debt, Lawmakers – Trudeau
(Updates with more details, background in paras 4-8)

TORONTO, February 22 (Sputnik) - Canada will impose sanctions on Russia's sovereign debt and on lawmakers in response to Moscow's recognition of the independence of the breakaway Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said.

"We will sanction members of the Russian parliament, who voted for the illegal decision to recognize these so-called republics. We will ban Canadians from engaging in purchases of Russian sovereign debt," Trudeau said during a press conference on Tuesday.

Trudeau said Ottawa will bar Canadians from all financial engagements with the two breakaway republics.

The Prime Minister explained that the Canadian government will apply sanctions against two "state-backed Russian banks" without clarifying which banks will be affected.

Earlier on Tuesday, the United States announced sanctions against Vnesheconombank (VEB) and Promsvyazbank Public Joint Stock Company (PSB).

Moscow has indicated its readiness to take the sanctions in stride, however, Trudeau emphasized that the embargoes will have real "feelings" and "impacts" on the Russian people and economy.

Canada's Foreign Minister Melanie Joly added that Russia's Central Bank, National Wealth Fund and Ministry will all be targeted and underscored that the current sanctions package is "just the beginning."

On Monday, President Vladimir Putin signed decrees recognizing the independence of the breakaway people's republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. Under new treaties, Moscow pledged to ensure the security of the two Russian-speaking republics.

Russia's decision came after the situation on the line of contact between Ukraine and the breakaway republics significantly worsened.

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Western Institutions May Invest in Russian Equities Amid New Sanctions - US Investor

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - Most western institutions will now stay away from Russia's sovereign debt amid the newly announced US sanctions, however, they may invest in Russian equities, Gary Korolev, CEO of Sovereign Wealth Management, told Sputnik.

"The vast majority if not all western institutions will now stay away from Russian debt, but may invest in Russian equities that trade on many western exchanges," Korolev said.

Korolev noted that international investors are generally jumpy and on the fence about investing in Russia.

"Only deep value investors who are collecting health Russian company dividends understand the true value of these companies are going to be able to withstand this type of volatility that is happening in the Russian markets right now," he said. "Most 'macro tourist' type investors who may have been in the trade as a contrarian bet against a longer conflict in Russia slash Ukraine are likely to jump ship in the short run."

Earlier on Tuesday, US President Joe Biden said the United States is imposing full sanctions on Russia's two major financial institutions - Vnesheconombank (VEB) and a military bank, in response to Moscow's decision to recognize the breakaway republics of Luhansk and Donetsk.

"These sanctions appear to be about as expected. VEB bank has been under sanctions starting in 2014 so these new additional sanctions are not a shock," Korolev said. "These sanctions seem to be incremental rather than anything revolutionary."

Korolev also said he believes that the impact of the sanctions on the Russian economy will be negative in the near term.

"Liquidity and credit are the oil which greases the wheels of an economy and any further restriction on already a severely credit starved economy such as the Russian economy will further impact Russia's GDP and employment prospects," he said. "These effects are short and medium term. Longer term however the positive side to such sanctions is the development of alternative financing resources other than reliance on western banking institutions."

When asked about the US sanctions on Russia's elites, Korolev said one of the consequences would be Russian oligarchs and their families moving assets increasingly outside of the western financial system.

"On the one hand it could further strengthen the Russian economy by discouraging capital flight, on the other hand it could turn a lot of powerful people within the Russian financial/political system against the Putin administration creating a lot of friction and reducing the effectiveness of the Putin administration," he said.

Korolev went on to say that the sanctions do not come near to having a significant impact on the world economy.

"They will certainly make it more difficult for the Russian economy to finance itself in the short run but in the longer run there may be a silver lining in terms of increasing Russia's independence from the western financial system while at the same time reducing capital flight out of Russia," he said. "If Russian oligarchs realize they could have their assets frozen in the

West they will be more amenable to the risks that exist in keeping the funds in Russia comparatively speaking."

On Monday, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed decrees recognizing the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics. Under new treaties, Moscow pledged to ensure the security of the Russian-speaking republics.

The decision came after a deterioration of the situation on line of contact between Ukraine and the breakaway regions. Moscow has repeatedly denied any intention of invading Ukraine.

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Ottawa's Sanctions Will Not Impact Moscow's Intention to Ensure Peace in Donbas - Envoy

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - Canada's newly announced sanctions on Russia over the recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk republics will not change the situation on the ground or Moscow's intention to ensure peace in Donbas, Russian Ambassador in Ottawa Oleg Stepanov told Sputnik.

"All other sanctions were predictable, they will not affect the situation on the ground and Russia's determination to ensure peace in Donbas," Stepanov said on Tuesday.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said earlier in the day that Ottawa would impose sanctions on Russian lawmakers who supported Donbas' independence, bar Canadians from all financial dealings with the breakaway republics, and prohibit its citizens from engaging in purchases of Russia's sovereign debt.

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Canada's Sanctions on Russian Lawmakers Over LPR, DPR Recognition 'Ridiculous' - Envoy

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador in Canada Oleg Stepanov blasted Ottawa's decision to impose sanctions against all Russian lawmakers who supported independence of the breakaway Donetsk and Luhansk republics.

"The announcement of the Canadian side that it is sanctioning all the Russian legislators who voted for the recognition of the independence of the LPR and DPR, that is, the entire composition of the Federation Council and the State Duma - this is simply ridiculous, this is some kind of novella in the context of international policy implemented by the Canadian liberal democracy," Stepanov told Sputnik on Tuesday.

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US Investor on Russian Sovereign Debt Sanctions: Moscow Immunized From Such Measures

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The United States' sanctions on Russia's sovereign debt are more evolutionary than revolutionary given that Moscow has immunized itself from such measures, Gary Korolev, CEO of Sovereign Wealth Management, told Sputnik.

"Russia has partially immunized itself from such sanctions since 2014 when they really hurt," Korolev said. "Given Russia's cash flow positive situation they are not too reliant on foreign debt issuance. These sanctions are going to bite but they are more evolutionary rather than revolutionary."

Earlier on Tuesday, US President Joe Biden said the United States is imposing new sanctions on the Russia's sovereign debt due to Moscow's actions in Ukraine. Biden explained the United States is implementing comprehensive sanctions on Russia's sovereign debt, meaning that Russia's government will be cut off from Western financing and will not be able to raise money from the West nor trade in its new debt on US or European markets.

"There's not a lot of detail about them, but in the past Russian debt was sanctioned by the West in the initial public offering however it could be held bought and sold in the secondary market in many situations," Korolev said. "Now it looks like it may not be legal to hold Russian debt whether in the primary or secondary markets."

Korolev noted that this is negative for financing of the Russian economy, however, it is positive that it is discouraging further leveraging up the economy thereby reducing debt dependence.

"It also encourages creation of other financing avenues for Russian sovereign debt which are not reliant on the West," he said.

Korolev also noted that there will not likely be any significant impact on the global economy from the Western sanctions.

On Monday, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed decrees recognizing the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics. Under newly signed treaties, Moscow will ensure their security of the Russian-speaking republics.

The decision followed a deterioration of the situation on line of contact between Ukraine and the breakaway republics. Russia has repeatedly denied any intention of invading Ukraine.

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Russian Envoy to Ottawa Stepanov on Visit to Foreign Ministry: It Was Political Demarche

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador in Ottawa Oleg Stepanov told Sputnik that his meeting with Canada's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Marta Morgan was a "political demarche."

Earlier on Tuesday, Stepanov was invited to the Global Affairs Canada for a meeting with Morgan following Moscow's decision to recognise the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics.

"It was a political demarche - a political presentation from Canada's First Deputy Foreign Minister Marta Morgan," Stepanov said. "They made a presentation to me, in fact, laying out the position of the Canadian government along the lines as it was already addressed yesterday in the statements by Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Foreign Minister Melanie Joly."

Stepanov went on to say that he stated Russia's position and its perception of the situation.

"In particular, I emphasized that - when they said that Russia's yesterday steps meant, among other things, a violation of international law - I said that a violation of international law is, first of all, Ukraine's failure to comply with UN Security Council Resolution 2202 of 2015, which approved the Minsk Package of Measures," he said. "The resolutions of the UN Security Council are binding for all states in the world."

Stepanov said it is regrettable that Ukraine did not comply with them during all seven years and a number of countries, especially Western countries that have a special interest in what is happening inside and around Ukraine, could not force it to do so.

"The situation that we are seeing today is the result of Kiev's refusal to fulfill its obligations under the Minsk package of measures," he said.

The Russian ambassador noted that the meeting took only 15 minutes.

"I told them that Russia is not looking for any confrontation or rivalry with Canada, we look at it as an Arctic neighbour," he said.

Stepanov also noted that while the issue of sanctions was not directly raised, it was noted that the Canadian government felt compelled to take certain measures in coordination with its allies.

Soon after Stepanov's visit to the the Foreign Ministry, Ottawa announced a new round of sanctions against Russia.

On Monday, President Vladimir Putin signed decrees recognizing the independence of the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. Under the new treaties, Moscow will ensure the security of the two Russian-speaking republics.

Russia's decision came after the situation on the line of contact between Ukraine and the breakaway republics significantly worsened.

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Two Salvadorans Plead Guilty to Transporting Illegal Alien in US - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - Two nationals of El Salvador entered guilty pleas to a charge of transporting an illegal alien within the United States, the US Justice Department said. "Two El Salvadoran nationals pleaded guilty to the federal felony offense of unlawful transportation of an alien within the United States," the Justice Department said in a press release on Tuesday.

According to court documents, Jairo Levi Rivera-Ayala, 27, and Herberth Anton Rodriguez-Ayala, 34, were arrested on September 14, 2021 in Harrison County, the release said.

"Both Rivera-Ayala and Rodriguez-Ayala pleaded guilty to unlawful transportation of an alien within the United States. ... Each man faces a maximum penalty of five years in prison, a \$250,000 fine and three years of Supervised Release as well as a \$100 special assessment and a \$5,000 additional special assessment," the release said.

After completing any sentence of incarceration, each man also is subject to Department of Homeland Security proceedings to remove him from the United States, the release added. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the US Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors, according to the release.

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Biden-Putin Meeting Would Have Been Discussed at Canceled Blinken-Lavrov Talks - Psaki

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - A potential meeting between US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin would have been a possible topic of discussion if the now canceled talks between Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov took place as scheduled, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said during a press briefing. "The door to diplomacy still remains open, and as I think our Secretary of State conveyed, it isn't the appropriate time, as Russia is taking escalatory steps and preparing to invade, for him to meet with the Foreign Minister. It had always been the intention that any engagement with President Putin would be discussed there and potentially follow there, but there were never any specific plans or timelines really in the works for that, so it was really going to be discussed at that meeting," Psaki said on Tuesday.

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Nigerian Man Admits Role in Payroll Deposit Cyber Fraud Scheme - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - A Nigerian national has entered a guilty plea to a charge of participating in a scheme to conduct cyber intrusions to steal payroll deposits, the US Justice Department said in a press release.

"Damian Williams, US Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that Charles Onus pled guilty to computer fraud in connection with a scheme to conduct cyber intrusions... to steal payroll deposits from multiple user accounts maintained by a company that provides human resources and payroll services," the release said on Tuesday.

Onus was previously arrested on April 14, 2021 in San Francisco while traveling to the United States from Nigeria and has been detained since his arrest. He entered his guilty plea on Tuesday before US District Judge Paul Gardephe, the release said.

"Charles Onus admitted to participating in a scheme to steal hundreds of thousands of hard-earned dollars from workers across the United States by hacking into a payroll company's system and diverting payroll deposits to prepaid debit cards he controlled," the release added. From July 2017 through at least in or about 2018, Onus participated in a scheme to conduct cyber intrusions of multiple user accounts maintained by a company that provides human resources and payroll services to employers across the United States, according to the release.

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Putin-Biden Summit 'Certainly Not in Plans' at This Point – White House

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - A summit between US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin is "certainly not in the plans" now amid escalated tensions over Ukraine, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said during a press briefing.

"At this point, that is certainly not in the plans," Psaki told reporters when asked if a meeting between Biden and Putin was still possible.

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Canada Deploying Additional 460 Troops to Eastern Europe Amid Ukraine Tensions - Trudeau

TORONTO, February 22 (Sputnik) - Canada will deploy up to 460 additional troops to Eastern Europe amid escalating tension following Russia's recognition of the breakaway Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said.

"Today, I am authorizing a deployment of up to 460 members of the Canadian Armed Forces to Operation Reassurance," Trudeau told a news conference on Tuesday.

The deployment will include added troops in Latvia as well as the movement of a Canadian frigate and patrol aircraft to the region, Trudeau said.

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UN Chief Says Does Not Think Genocide Happening in Donbas

UNITED NATIONS, February 22 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he did not share Russia's position that genocide was taking place in the Donbas region.

Russia's Investigative Committee has opened a criminal case after the discovery of mass graves of civilians in Donbas. These civilians - the remains of at least 295 of whom were exhumed - died as a result of indiscriminate shelling by the Ukrainian armed forces in 2014, according to investigators.

"Genocide is a crime that is clearly defined and whose application must be done in line with international law. I do not think it is the case," Guterres said on Tuesday when asked whether he shared Russian President Vladimir Putin's assessment that genocide took place in Donbas. The situation in Donbas region has escalated in recent days, with the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics (DPR and LPR) reporting increased shelling by Ukrainian forces and ordering general mobilization in anticipation of an offensive by the Ukrainian military. The evacuation of Donbas citizens to Russia began late last week.

On Monday, Russian President Vladimir Putin recognized the independence of DPR and LPR, saying the decision was long overdue.

In 2014, the Ukrainian authorities launched a military operation against DPR and LPR after they declared independence and refused to recognize the new central government in Kiev as it was installed by the United States via a coup. Early clashes escalated into a protracted military conflict that claimed thousands of lives, including 3,095 civilians, and displaced more than 2 million Ukrainians. A ceasefire was reached in 2020, but skirmishes along the line of contact continued.

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Other Russian Elites, Family Members Can Also Be Sanctioned Over Ukraine – White House

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The list of Russian individuals who were sanctioned by the United States earlier on Tuesday can be supplemented with other Russian officials and their

family members related to the situation in Ukraine, US Deputy National Security Advisor Daleep Singh said.

"We have fully sanctioned a group of Russian elites and their family members. These individuals share in the corrupt gains of the Kremlin and they will now share in the pain. Other Russian elites and their family members are now on notice that additional actions can be taken on them as well," Singh said during a press briefing on Tuesday.

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Canada to Impose Sanctions on Russian Sovereign Debt, Lawmakers – Trudeau

TORONTO, February 22 (Sputnik) – Canada will impose sanctions on Russia's sovereign debt and lawmakers in response to Moscow's recognition of the independence of the breakaway Donetsk and Luhansk republics, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said.

"We will sanction members of the Russian parliament, who voted for the illegal decision to recognize these so-called republics. We will ban Canadians from engaging in purchases of Russian sovereign debt," Trudeau said at a news conference on Tuesday.

Ottawa will also bar Canadians from all financial engagements with the breakaway republics, Trudeau added.

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Russia May Hit US With Cyber Attacks in Response to Sanctions - Cybersecurity Agency Chief

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - A top US cybersecurity official warned that Russia could possibly retaliate to new US sanctions with cyber actions that target critical infrastructure and urged organizations to take steps to reduce their potential risks.

"While there are no specific or credible threats to the US at this time, Russia may consider taking retaliatory action in response to sanctions that may impact our critical infrastructure," Director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency Jen Easterly said via Twitter on Tuesday.

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Wall Street Down 4th Day in Row on Escalation of Ukraine Tensions, Russia Sanctions

NEW YORK, February 22 (Sputnik) - Wall Street fell broadly for a fourth day in a row, closing down more than 1% on Tuesday, as investors exited stocks on concerns of escalating tensions in Ukraine and US sanctions implemented against Russia.

"Geopolitical tensions will continue to undermine economic growth and that should keep equities very choppy until the Russia-Ukraine crisis has a clear conclusion," Edward Moya, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said, as US stocks headed for a second straight month of losses.

Wall Street's three major indices - the Dow Jones Industrial Average, the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq Composite - closed down more than 1% each on Tuesday, recovering from the earlier lows of the day that sent US stocks down as much as 2%.

Russia recognized the two breakaway people's republics of Donetsk and Luhansk and the country's parliament approved sending troops for peacekeeping operations there. US President Joe Biden, however, termed the action an "invasion of Ukraine" and announced sanctions on two Russian banks, elites and family members as well as on Russia's sovereign debt.

At Tuesday's close on Wall Street, the mostly industrial stocks-based Dow index was down 1.4% on the day and 4.4% for February, aside from a 7.5% decline on the year.

The S&P 500, which groups the top 500 US stocks, settled down 1% on the day. For February, it was down 4.7%, while for the year, it showed a 9.7% loss.

Nasdaq, made of highly-valued tech stocks such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Nasdaq and Google, again led losses, finishing Tuesday down 1.2%. It was down 6% for the month and 14.5% for 2022.

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Kuleba Says Put Forward Proposal for Land-Lease Program Similar to One During World War II
WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dymtro Kuleba said he proposed during his visit to the United States creating a land-lease program similar to the strategy used by the allies in World War II in order to bolster Ukraine's military capabilities.

"One of the proposals that we put forward today is designing a program similar to the Land-Lease [program] implemented during the World War 2 to support the war efforts of the allies in Europe," Kuleba said on Tuesday during remarks in Washington alongside US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. "This program will help to ensure sustainability and will improve efficiency in strengthening the capacity of Ukraine to defend itself."

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UN Chief Says Russia's Decision to Recognize DPR, LNR Breaches Ukraine's Integrity

UNITED NATIONS, February 22 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the decision by Russia to recognize the independence of the breakaway Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics is in a "violation of the territorial integrity" of Ukraine.

"Let me be clear: the decision of the Russian Federation to recognize the so-called "independence" of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions is a violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine," Guterres said on Tuesday.

Guterres added, "Such a unilateral measure conflicts directly with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations - and is inconsistent with the so-called Friendly Relations Declaration of the General Assembly which the International Court of Justice has repeatedly cited as representing international law."

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UN Chief Calls Russia's Recognition of DPR, LNR 'Death Blow' to Minsk Accords

UNITED NATIONS, February 22 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called Russia's recognition of the independence of the breakaway Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics a "death blow" to the Minsk agreements.

"It is a death blow to the Minsk Agreements endorsed by the Security Council. The principles of the UN Charter are not an a la carte menu. They cannot be applied selectively," Guterres said on Tuesday.

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UN Chief Calls for 'Immediate' Ceasefire in Eastern Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS, February 22 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for an immediate called in eastern Ukraine and urged all actors to refrain from any actions or statements that can further escalate the situation.

"At this critical moment, I call for an immediate ceasefire and re-establishment of the rule of law. We need restraint and reason. We need de-escalation now. I urge all to refrain from actions and statements that would take this dangerous situation over the brink," Guterres said on Tuesday. "Any additional Russian military deployments into Ukraine would only further inflame tensions. It is high time to return to the path of dialogue and negotiations," he added.

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US Approves \$1Bln Military Complex Sale to Kuwait - Defense Security Agency

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has approved a \$1 billion construction project to build a new Ministry of Defense headquarters for Kuwait, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said.

"The State Department has made a determination approving the potential Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Kuwait of Design and Construction of the Kuwait Ministry of Defense Headquarters Complex and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$1 billion," the DSCA said in a press release on Tuesday.

The DSCA delivered the required certification notifying Congress of the possible sale on Tuesday, the release said.

"The Government of Kuwait has requested the design, construction, and associated procurement of Kuwait Ministry of Defense (KMOD) Headquarters Complex in Kuwait. This includes provisions for all physical building and infrastructure construction costs. ...The estimated total cost is \$1 billion," the release added.

The overall project includes over twenty facilities, including primary headquarters facilities for both civilian and military leadership, as well as all engineering studies, designs and construction services, according to the release.

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US Remains Committed to Diplomacy With Russia to Resolve Conflict in Ukraine - Blinken

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) – The United States remains committed to finding a diplomatic solution to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said after announcing he was canceling a planned meeting with Russian top diplomat Sergey Lavrov.

"The United States and I personally remain committed to diplomacy if Russia is prepared to take demonstrable steps to provide the international community with any degree of confidence that it's serious about de-escalating and finding a diplomatic solution," Blinken said during a joint press briefing with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba on Tuesday.

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UN Chief Says World Facing Biggest Global Security Crisis In Recent Years Over Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS, February 22 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the world is facing the biggest global peace and security crisis in recent years as the situation in eastern Ukraine continues to escalate.

"I have cut short an overseas visit – including a very important summit of African leaders - to rush back to UN headquarters," Guterres said on Tuesday. "Our world is facing the biggest global peace and security crisis in recent years – certainly in my tenure as Secretary-General. We face a moment that I sincerely hoped would not come."

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Blinken Says 'Does Not Make Sense' to Proceed With Meeting Lavrov This Week

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he does not see any sense in proceeding with the meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov this week amid escalation in the conflict around Ukraine.

"Last week, I agreed to meet Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov this week on February 24 to discuss our countries' respective concerns about European security but only if Russia did not invade Ukraine. Now that we see the invasion is beginning and Russia has made clear its wholesale rejection of diplomacy, it does not make sense to go forward with that meeting at this time," Blinken said during a joint press briefing with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba on Tuesday.

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Colonial Pipeline Hires Information Security Chief After Ransomware Attack - Statement

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The pipeline system Colonial Pipeline announced that it has hired a Chief Information Security Officer after suffering a ransomware attack last year that paralyzed its operations and forced it to pay ransom.

"Today we welcome Adam Tice as Colonial's Chief Information Security Officer," Colonial Pipeline said in an announcement via Twitter on Tuesday. "In his new role, he will oversee and be responsible for the company's information and data security program."

Tice previously held leadership roles in cyber security at the privately-held Silicon Valley Bank and Equifax Inc., the announcement said.

Hackers linked to a group known as DarkSide, were able to breach Colonial Pipeline's computer system in the June 2021 cyber attack by using a virtual private network.

The incident forced Colonial Pipeline to shut down operations temporarily, halting flows of gasoline to the US East Coast. Operations were only resumed after the company agreed to pay a ransom in the cryptocurrency Bitcoin. The FBI succeeded in recovering part of the paid funds.

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US Sanctions Russia's CSKA Sports Club, Export Center as VEB Bank Subsidiaries - Treasury

WASHINGTON February 22 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed sanctions against Russia's Central Sport Club of the Army (CSKA) and the Russian Export Center as they are subsidiaries of the newly-sanctioned Vnesheconombank (VEB), the US Treasury Department said.

"The property and interests in property of the following VEB subsidiaries are blocked: ... JSC Russian Export Center is an export-related company located in Russia," the Treasury Department said in a statement on Tuesday. "JSC PFC CSKA is a sporting activities company located in Russia."

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Canada Summons Russian Ambassador Following DPR, LNR Recognition - Foreign Minister

TORONTO, February 22 (Sputnik) - Ottawa has summoned Russia's ambassador to Canada after Moscow recognized the independence of the breakaway Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics, Foreign Affairs Minister Melanie Joly said.

"I have directed my Deputy Minister to summon the Russia Ambassador to explain Russia's continued aggression, violation of international law, and disregard for Ukrainian sovereignty," Joly said in a statement via Twitter on Tuesday.

Joly vowed to impose severe sanctions in response to the move and reiterated that Ottawa's support for Ukraine.

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US Adds Russia's Central Bank, Finance Ministry to Non-SDN Menu-Based Sanctions List

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The US Department of the Treasury announced that Russia's Central Bank, Finance Ministry, and National Wealth Fund have been added to the Office of Foreign Assets Control's (OFAC) non-blocking menu-based sanctions list.

The Treasury said on Tuesday that the three entities have been added to OFAC's Non-Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons Menu-Based Sanctions List due to the situation in Ukraine.

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US Authorizes Limited Transactions With Russia's VEB Through March 24 - Treasury

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The United States has authorized certain transactions with the newly-sanctioned Russia's Vnesheconombank (VEB) until March 24 as part of a wind down period, the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) said. Certain transactions involving State Corporation Bank for Development and Foreign Economic Affairs Vnesheconombank (VEB) and related entities are authorized through 12:01 a.m. eastern daylight time, March 24, 2022," OFAC said on Tuesday. OFAC also issued a license allowing certain bond servicing transactions with VEB for bonds issued before March 1, 2022.

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SWIFT Not Targeted in Sanctions Against Russia, But Option Not Off Table - US Official

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - Russia's access to the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) payment system is not targeted in the first package of sanctions rolled out by the United States and its European allies in response to the recognition of the two breakaway republics in eastern Ukraine but the option is not off the table, a senior Biden administration official said.

"SWIFT is not part of the first package of sanctions that we've rolled out," the official said during a press briefing on Tuesday. "But we are not taking SWIFT off the table, it will remain an option that we can deploy depending on how Russia makes its next move."

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US Defense Chief Orders 800 Troops, 20 Helicopters to Baltic Region - Senior Official (Updates with more details in para 4, changes attribution)

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin ordered 800 troops and 20 AH-64 helicopters to the Baltic region amid increasing tensions between Russia and Ukraine, a senior Defense Department official said.

The force movement authorization came as a response to Russia's decision to retain troops in Belarus, President Joe Biden said during remarks at the White House on Tuesday. The United States will also continue to provide defensive assistance to Ukraine, Biden added.

The senior official said the United States is also sending eight F-35 jets from Germany to NATO's eastern flank and 12 Apache helicopters from Greece to Poland.

The moves are temporary in nature and meant to reassure NATO allies and deter any potential aggression, the official added.

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Blinken to Make Announcement Tuesday About Meeting With Lavrov - Senior US Official

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will make an announcement later in the day about a potential meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov on Thursday, a senior Biden administration official said during a press briefing.

"With respect to the potential discussions between Secretary Blinken and Minister Lavrov, I would just refer you to the State Department. Secretary Blinken is about to give remarks and I think we'll have more to say on that," the official said on Tuesday.

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US Not Aiming to Max Out Sanctions on Russia, But to Prevent Invasion of Ukraine- Official

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The new US sanctions imposed on Russia are not an end in themselves, but rather a way to prevent a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a senior Biden administration official said during a press briefing.

"No one should think that our ultimate goal is to max out on sanctions. They are not an end of themselves. Sanctions are meant to serve a higher purpose, which is to deter and prevent. We want to prevent a large scale invasion of Ukraine that involves the seizure of major cities, including Kiev," the official said on Tuesday.

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US Sanctions Children of FSB Director, Kremlin Deputy Chief of Staff, Ex-Premier Fradkov

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The United States has imposed sanctions against children of Russia's FSB chief Alexander Bortnikov, First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Office Sergei Kiriyyenko and former Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov, the Treasury announced on Tuesday.

"Aleksandr Bortnikov's son, Denis Aleksandrovich Bortnikov (Denis Bortnikov), is currently a Deputy President of Russian-state owned financial institution VTB Bank Public Joint Stock Company (VTB Bank) and a Chairman of the VTB Bank Management Board, " the Treasury said in a release.

"Today, OFAC redesignated Aleksandr Bortnikov and designated his son Denis Bortnikov pursuant to E.O. 14024 for being or having been leaders, officials, senior executive officers, or members of the board of directors of the GoR [Government of Russia]," it said.

Sergei Kiriyyenko's son, Vladimir Kiriyyenko, used to be Rostelecom's vice president and is currently the CEO of VK Group, the Treasury noted.

"Today, OFAC redesignated Sergei Kiriyyenko and designated his son Vladimir Kiriyyenko pursuant to E.O. 14024 for being or having been leaders, officials, senior executive officers, or members of the board of directors of the GoR," the release said.

The Treasury went on to say that Petr Fradkov, the chairman and CEO of PSB since 2018, has worked "to transform PSB into a bank that services the defense industry and supports state defense contracts."

"Petr Fradkov is also the General Director of Joint Stock Company Russian Export Center, which was blocked today as a subsidiary of VEB. Today, Petr Fradkov was designated pursuant to E.O. 14024 for operating or having operated in the defense and related materiel and financial services sectors of the Russian Federation economy," it added.

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Halting Nord Stream 2 'Turning Point' for World's Energy Dependence on Russia- US Official

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The decision by Germany to halt the certification of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline in response to Russia's recognition of the two breakaway republics in eastern Ukraine is a turning point for the world's energy dependence on Russia, a senior Biden administration official said.

"After consultations overnight with Germany, Russia's Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline will not become operational. That's an 1 billion dollars investment in appraised gas pipelines controlled by Russia that will now go to waste," the official said during a press briefing on Tuesday. "But it's not just about the money. This decision will relieve Russia's geo-strategic chokehold over Europe, their supply of natural gas and it's a major turning point in the world's energy independence from Russia."

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No Russian Financial Institution Safe if 'Invasion' of Ukraine Proceeds – US Official

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) – No Russian financial institution can feel safe if the "invasion" of Ukraine proceeds, with the United States standing ready to take further action against the largest Russian banks, including Sberbank and VTB, a senior US administration official told a press briefing.

"No Russian financial institution is safe. If this invasion proceeds, we are ready to press a button to take further action on the very largest Russian financial institutions, including Sberbank and VTB, which collectively hold almost \$750 billion in assets or more than half the total in Russia as a whole," the official said on Tuesday.

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US Has All Options on Table Including Possibly Sanctioning Putin - Senior Official

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The United States is considering all options, including possibly sanctioning Russian President Vladimir Putin, if the situation in Ukraine continues to escalate, a senior US administration official said on Tuesday.

"With respect to President Putin, I'll just repeat what the president has said: all options remain on the table," the official said when asked if the United States will sanction Putin.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) -

RUSSIA RECOGNIZES DPR, LPR

* The Russian State Duma ratified treaties of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance with the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DPR and LPR) during a plenary session on Tuesday.

* Russian President Vladimir Putin signed federal laws on cooperation and friendship between Russia and DPR and LPR.

* Moscow has called on all countries to follow its example in recognizing the LPR and DPR, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

* Ukraine's Charge d'Affaires in Russia Vasily Pokotilo was recalled to Kiev for consultations due to Moscow's decision to recognize the LPR and DPR, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry said.

* The Ukrainian parliament adopted a statement calling on Russia to withdraw the recognition of the DPR and LPR.

* Russia is establishing diplomatic relations with the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics starting from Tuesday, the Foreign Ministry said.

WESTERN SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

* EU head of missions (COREPER II) at a meeting in Brussels on Tuesday said that they had reached a common position on the reaction to Russia's decision to recognize the independence of the LPR and the DPR, these will be targeted measures against individuals and organizations that the union considers "involved" in the latest decisions, the French delegation to the EU said in a statement.

* US President Joe Biden said that his administration is going to make sure the new sanctions against Russia will have negative consequences only for the Russian economy without inflicting losses for the American one.

* The United States is imposing full sanctions on Russia's two major financial institutions - Vnesheconombank (VEB) and a military bank, in response to the decision to recognize the LPR and DPR, Biden said.

* Biden said that the United States will impose sanctions on Russia's elites and their families starting on Wednesday due to the situation in Ukraine.

* The European Union sanctions against Russia will target 351 lawmakers of the parliament's lower house, the State Duma, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said.

NORD STREAM 2 PIPELINE

* German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said he had instructed the country's Ministry of Economy to take a "necessary administrative step" in order to suspend the certification of Nord Stream 2 pipeline operator.

* German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said the certification process of the Nord Stream 2 operator has been frozen as a part of sanctions against Russia.

* The German Federal Network Agency (Bundesnetzagentur) told Sputnik that no new forecast or changes have occurred in the procedure of the resumption of certification of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline's operator company.

* The United States and Germany are working together to ensure that the Nord Stream 2 pipeline from Russia will not move forward, President Joe Biden said.

* Russia regrets Scholz's statement about halting the certification of the Nord Stream 2 project, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

AUSTIN-KULEBA MEETING

* A full blown war in Ukraine can still be avoided, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said during a meeting with Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba on Tuesday.

* The United States is going to continue working in lockstep with its allies and Kiev to prevent any further conflict in Ukraine following Russia's recognition of the self-proclaimed republics of Luhansk and Donetsk as independent, Austin said.

PUTIN-ALIEV TALKS

* Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Azerbaijan counterpart Ilham Aliyev reaffirmed during a meeting in Moscow on Tuesday the importance of the fulfillment of all agreements reached with regard to Nagorno-Karabakh.

* Aliyev invited Putin to Baku when he can schedule such a visit and when the COVID-19 situation allows it.

* Putin and Aliyev agreed to deepen military cooperation between their respective countries.

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US Sanctions Against Russia's PSB Bank Also Target 5 Vessels Owned by Subsidiary

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The United States sanctions against Russia's Promsvyazbank also target five vessels owned by its subsidiary, the Treasury announced on Tuesday.

"As part of the designation of PSB, OFAC also took action against five vessels that are owned by PSB Lizing OOO, a designated subsidiary of PSB. All five vessels were identified pursuant to E.O. 14024 as blocked property in which PSB Lizing OOO has an interest," the Treasury said in a release.

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US Sanctions Russia's VEB, PSB Banks, Along With 42 of Subsidiaries - Treasury

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The United States has targeted Vnesheconombank (VEB) and Promsvyazbank Public Joint Stock Company (PSB), as well as 42 of their subsidiaries in the latest round of sanctions over Ukraine, the Treasury confirmed on Tuesday.

"Today Treasury is targeting Russia's ability to finance aggression against its neighbors by sanctioning the Corporation Bank for Development and Foreign Economic Affairs Vnesheconombank (VEB) and Promsvyazbank Public Joint Stock Company (PSB), along with 42 of their subsidiaries," the Treasury said in a press release.

"All assets under U.S. jurisdiction will be immediately frozen and U.S. individuals and entities are prohibited from doing business with these institutions unless authorized by OFAC," it added.

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US Defense Chief Orders 800 Troops, 20 Helicopters to Baltic Region - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin ordered 800 troops and 20 AH-64 helicopters already in Europe to the Baltic region amid increasing tensions surrounding the situation between Russia and Ukraine, Reuters reported on Tuesday.

The force movement authorization came as a response to Russia's decision to retain troops in Belarus, President Joe Biden said during remarks at the White House. The US will also continue to provide defensive assistance to Ukraine, Biden added.

The US is also sending eight F-35s from Germany to NATO's eastern flank and 12 Apache helicopters from Greece to Poland, according to media reports.

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US Approves \$122Mln Sale of Air Transport Defense Measures to Australia - Security Agency

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has approved the sale of infrared countermeasures equipment to protect military airlift transports operated by Australia, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Tuesday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Australia of LAIRCM Line Replaceable Units (LRUs) and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$122 million," the DSCA said in a press release.

The DSCA delivered the required certification notifying Congress of the possible sale on Tuesday, the release said.

"The government of Australia has requested the possible sale of AN/AAQ 24(V)N Large Aircraft Infrared Countermeasures (LAIRCM) component systems required to support an ongoing upgrade of its large Air Mobility Platforms, which include C-17As, KC-30As, and C-130Js," the release said.

Australia has requested to buy 27 LAIRCM system processor replacements and 30 Guardian laser turret assemblies as well as LAIRCM control indicator unit replacements, the release added.

The principal contractors will be Northrop Grumman and Boeing, according to the release.

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Moderna Says on Phase 3 Trial of RSV Vaccine Candidate, to Be Combined With COVID Booster

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - American drugmaker Moderna said Tuesday it had begun the Phase 3 clinical trial of its Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) vaccine which it intends to administer in combination with the COVID-19 booster vaccine.

"RSV is one of the most widespread respiratory viruses, causing severe disease and hospitalization in older adults, and yet there is no vaccine available on the market," CEO Stephane Bancel said in a statement. "Our ultimate goal is to combine our RSV vaccine with our COVID-19 and flu boosters into a single dose booster."

According to Moderna, RSV is a common respiratory virus that generally causes cold-like symptoms.

While most people who contract RSV recover in approximately one to two weeks, the virus can be serious for young children and older adults.

For these higher-risk groups, RSV is a leading cause of severe respiratory illness, including pneumonia and respiratory distress.

Bancel said Moderna's RSV vaccine, based on messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA) science, had potential to protect against over 1 million infections globally each year, insulating especially those at high-risk of becoming infected and reducing the burden on health care systems.

"An mRNA vaccine against RSV could have a positive impact on individuals, communities, and global public health," he said.

Moderna said the burden of illness caused by RSV was substantial, with an estimated \$3 billion in annual medical costs in the United States. RSV causes approximately 177,000 US hospitalizations and 14,000 deaths in adults 65 and older each year.

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Biden Tells Kuleba US Will Continue Providing Security, Macroeconomic Aid to Ukraine

WASHINGTON February 22 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden during his meeting with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba in Washington on Tuesday affirmed that his administration would continue providing security assistance and macroeconomic support to Kiev, the White House said in a statement.

"Biden updated Foreign Minister Kuleba on the United States' response to Russia's decision to recognize the purported 'independence' of the so-called DNR and LNR [Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics] regions of Ukraine, including the Executive Order issued last night and new sanctions announced today. He also affirmed that the United States would continue providing security assistance and macroeconomic support to Ukraine," the statement read.

Biden reaffirmed US' commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. He also confirmed Washington's readiness to cooperate with allies in order to respond "swiftly and decisively to any further Russian aggression against Ukraine," the statement added.

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Russian Envoy Says He Was Invited to Canadian Foreign Ministry to Meet Deputy Minister (Adds background in paras 3, 4)

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador in Ottawa Oleg Stepanov told Sputnik that he has been invited to the Global Affairs Canada for a meeting with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Marta Morgan on Tuesday.

"I was invited to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to see Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Morgan at 3PM EST [20:00 GMT]," Stepanov said.

On Monday, President Vladimir Putin signed decrees recognizing the independence of the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. Under the new treaties, Moscow will ensure the security of the two Russian-speaking republics.

Russia's decision came after the situation on the line of contact between Ukraine and the breakaway republics significantly worsened.

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Canadian Court Denies Bail to Leading Freedom Convoy Protest Organizer - Judge

TORONTO, February 22 (Sputnik) - Bail has been denied bail to Tamara Lich, a leading organizer of the protests in Ottawa against the COVID-19 vaccine mandates, Ontario Court of Justice judge Julie Bourgeois said on Tuesday.

"You have had plenty of opportunity to remove yourself and even others from this criminal activity but obstinately chose not to and persistently counselled others not to either," the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation quoted Bourgeois as saying as she addressed Lich's request for bail.

Bourgeois explained she reached the decision to deny bail because she was not convinced that Lich would return home in the province of Alberta nor cease protest-related activities.

The wave of protests across Canada began in mid-January, with tens of thousands of truckers and other Canadians converged peacefully on Ottawa to seek the government to scrap the COVID-19 vaccine mandates. The protest eventually united large swaths of Canadian society and evolved into a demonstration against the government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. The Ottawa leg of the protests were routed by law enforcement over the weekend after the Trudeau government granted itself sweeping new powers through invocation of the previously unused Emergencies Act.

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US Implementing Sanctions on Russia's Sovereign Debt - Biden

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The United States is imposing new sanctions on the Russia's sovereign debt due to Moscow's actions with respect to Ukraine, US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday.

"We're implementing comprehensive sanctions on Russian sovereign debt, that means we cut off Russia's government from Western financing," Biden said during remarks at the White House. "It can no longer raise money from the West and cannot trade in its new debt on our markets or European markets either."

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Biden Says US Sanctions to Target Russia Economy, Not American One

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that his administration is going to make sure the new sanctions against Russia will have negative consequences only for the Russian economy without inflicting losses for the American one.

"I'm going to take robust action to make sure the pain of our sanctions is targeted Russian economy not ours. We are closely monitoring energy supplies for any disruption," Biden said during his remarks on the situation in Ukraine.

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Biden Says US Will Continue to Provide Defense Aid to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue to provide Ukraine with defensive assistance amid escalating tensions between Moscow and Kiev, President Joe Biden said on Tuesday.

"As Russia contemplates its next move, we have our next move prepared as well. Russia will pay an even steeper price if it continues its aggression, including additional sanctions. The United States will continue to provide defensive assistance to Ukraine in the meantime," Biden said at the White House during remarks on the situation between Russia and Ukraine.

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Biden Says US, Germany Working to Ensure Nord Stream 2 Does Not Move Forward

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The United States and Germany are working together to ensure that the Nord Stream 2 pipeline from Russia will not move forward, President Joe Biden said on Tuesday.

"Because of Russia's actions, we've worked with Germany to ensure that Nord Stream 2 will not, as I promised, move forward," Biden said at the White House during remarks on the Russia-Ukraine situation.

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Two US Blackhawk Combat Helicopters Collide in Training Accident - National Guard

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - Two US Army National Guard Blackhawk helicopters have collided during a training accident and suffered damage, the Utah National Guard said on Tuesday.

"We can confirm that two Utah National Guard UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters were involved in a training accident at approx. 9:30 am [local time] near Mineral Basin," the Utah National Guard said in a statement via Twitter.

There were no casualties from the incident, the statement said.

"No crew members were injured in the accident. Both UH-60s were damaged. The incident is under investigation," the statement added.

The collision occurred in the Cottonwood Canyon near the Snowbird Ski Resort, SLC Scanner reported in a message via Twitter.

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Biden Says US Has No Intention of Fighting Russia

WASHINGTON February 22 (Sputnik) – President Joe Biden said on Tuesday the United States has no intention of fighting against Russia.

"We have no intention of fighting Russia," Biden said in his remarks on Ukraine. "We want to send an unmistakable message: the United States together with our allies will defend every inch of NATO territory."

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Biden Says Authorized Additional Movement of US Forces in Europe to Baltic States

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - US forces already located in Europe will move to reinforce the Baltic nations in response to the ongoing situation between Russia and Ukraine, President Joe Biden said on Tuesday.

"Today, in response to Russia's admission that it will not withdraw its forces from Belarus, I have authorized additional movements of US forces and equipment already stationed in Europe to strengthen our Baltic allies, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania," Biden said during remarks at the White House on the Russia-Ukraine situation.

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Russian Envoy Says He Was Invited to Canadian Foreign Ministry to Meet Deputy Minister

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to Canada Oleg Stepanov told Sputnik that he has been invited to the Global Affairs Canada for a meeting with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Marta Morgan on Tuesday.

"I was invited to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to see Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Morgan at 3PM EST [20:00 GMT]," Stepanov said.

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US Imposing Full Blocking Sanctions on Russia's VEB, Military Bank – Biden

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) – The United States is imposing full blocking sanctions on Russia's two major financial institutions, VEB or Vnesheconombank and a military bank, in response to the decision to recognize the self-proclaimed republics of Luhansk and Donetsk as independent, President Joe Biden said on Tuesday.

"We are implementing full blocking sanctions on two large Russian financial institutions, VEB and their military bank. We are implementing comprehensive sanctions on Russian sovereign debt. That means we have cut off Russia's government from Western financing. It can no longer raise money from the West and cannot trade in its new debt on our markets or European markets either," Biden said during his remarks on the situation in Ukraine.

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US to Impose Sanctions on Russia's Elites Starting Wednesday - Biden

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that the United States will impose sanctions on Russia's elites and their families starting on Wednesday due to the situation in Ukraine.

"Starting tomorrow and continuing in the days ahead, we'll also impose sanctions on Russia's elites and their family members," Biden said during a speech at the White House.

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Biden Describes Donbas Recognition as Beginning of Russian 'Invasion' of Ukraine

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that the recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics as independent is the beginning of a Russian "invasion" of Ukraine.

"This is the beginning of a Russian invasion of Ukraine," Biden stated.

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Biden Says Putin's Donbas Move Means Russia 'Carving Out Big Chunk of Ukraine'

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - Russia's latest decisions on the Donbas republics amount to "carving out a big chunk of Ukraine," US President Joe Biden stated on Tuesday. "To put it simply, Russia just announced that it is carving out a big chunk of Ukraine last night," Biden argued.

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US Stocks Down as Much as 2% on Escalation of Ukraine Tensions

NEW YORK, February 22 (Sputnik) - US stocks fell broadly for a fourth day in a row and were down as much as 2% in Tuesday's intraday trade as investors exited on concerns of escalating tensions in Ukraine.

The three major US stock indices — The Dow Jones Industrial Average, the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq Composite — fell between 1.9% and 2.0% by 2:24 p.m. ET (19:24 GMT).

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Iowa Governor Says 'Grateful' to Deliver Response to Biden's State of Union Address

Washington, February 22 (Sputnik) - Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds said she is honored to give the Republican response to President Joe Biden's State of the Union address on March 1 after Congressional Republican leaders Kevin McCarthy and Mitch McConnell announced she was selected for the task.

"I'm very honored and grateful for this opportunity to speak to the American people," Reynolds said via Twitter on Tuesday.

Reynolds is the first woman elected as governor of Iowa and has served in that position since 2017.

US Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina delivered the Republican response to Biden's address to a joint session of Congress last year.

All 535 members of Congress have been invited to attend this year's State of the Union address, but will be required to wear face masks or they will be invited to leave or be fined, according to media reports.

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US Opposes Canada's Proposed Digital Services Tax, Files Grievance With Ottawa - Statement

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The United States opposes Canada's digital services tax proposal and has filed a grievance with Ottawa over the matter, the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) said on Monday.

The proposed digital services tax (DST), first unveiled in the 2020 Fall Economic Statement, would see Ottawa impose a 3 percent levy on multinational technology giants earning revenue off the distribution of Canadian content.

"The United States urges Canada to abandon any plans for a unilateral measure and instead redouble its commitment to the rapid implementation of Pillar One of the October 8 OECD/G20 agreement and the negotiation of a multilateral convention," the USTR said in a statement. The USTR also expressed its concern regarding the different set of standards the new law would create for US-based firms and their Canadian analogues, the statement said. The agency reiterated that it would "examine all options" should the digital services tax be implemented. OECD finalized in October an international tax deal aimed at revamping the global tax system by imposing certain restrictions on tax competition and ensuring fair revenue distribution. A major guarantee of the proposed deal was the joint implementation of a minimum 15% tax for multinational enterprises.

The international community intends to sign the multilateral convention sometimes in 2022 in the hope to put it into practice the following year.

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Guterres to Make Statement at 22:30 GMT After Canceling Trip to DRC Over Ukraine
(Updates with more details, background in paras 3-6)

UNITED NATIONS, February 22 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will make a statement at around 5:30 p.m. EST (22:30 GMT) on Tuesday after canceling his trip to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and returning to New York due to the escalation of the situation in eastern Ukraine, spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

"The Secretary-General is somewhere over the Atlantic, he will be landing back shortly in New York. I expect him to speak to you around 5:30 or so at the Security Council stakeout," Dujarric said in a press briefing.

On Monday, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed decrees recognizing the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics. Under the new treaties, Moscow will ensure the security of the two Russian-speaking republics.

Following the announcement, Guterres said Russia's decision to recognize the independence of the republics is a violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine and is inconsistent with the principles of the UN Charter.

Later on Monday, the UN Security Council convened an emergency meeting at 9:00 p.m. (EDT) on the situation in eastern Ukraine.

Russia's decision came after the situation on the line of contact between Ukraine and the breakaway republics significantly worsened amid the interference by the United States and its allies. Russia has repeatedly denied having any intention of invading Ukraine.

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UN on Putin's Statement: Minsk Frameworks Exist, Should Be Used to De-Escalate Conflict

UNITED NATIONS, February 22 (Sputnik) - The United Nations believes that the Minsk agreements are still valid and should be used to de-escalate the situation in eastern Ukraine, spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday, after Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that the accords "no longer exist."

Earlier in the day, Putin said the Minsk agreements had been killed by Kiev's actions long before Moscow's recognition of the breakaway Donetsk and Luhansk republics.

"For us, they are diplomatic frameworks that exist, that remain, and they should be used as an avenue for de-escalation," Dujarric said in a press briefing.

Putin signed decrees recognizing the independence of the breakaway regions of Ukraine on Monday.

The situation in the Donbas region has escalated in recent days, with the DPR and LPR reporting increased shelling by Ukrainian forces and ordering general mobilization in anticipation of an offensive by the Ukrainian army. The evacuation of Donbas citizens, first of all, women, children and the elderly, to Russia began late last week.

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US to Continue Working in Lockstep With Ukraine, Allies to Avoid Further Conflict – Austin

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) – The United States is going to continue working in lockstep with its allies and Kiev to prevent any further conflict in Ukraine following Russia's recognition of the self-proclaimed republics of Luhansk and Donetsk as independent, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said on Tuesday.

"We will continue to work closely with you and remain in lockstep with our allies and partners and trying to find a way to avoid further conflict," Austin said at the start of bilateral talks with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba.

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US Defense Secretary Says 'Full Blown' War in Ukraine Can Be Avoided

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - A full blown war in Ukraine can still be avoided, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said during a meeting with Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba on Tuesday.

"We will continue to work closely with you and remain in lockstep with our allies and partners in trying to find a way to avoid further conflict. Mr. Putin can still avoid a full blown, tragic war of choice," Austin said.

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UN Chief Hopes Lavrov-Blinken Talks Will Go Ahead Later This Week in Geneva - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, February 22 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres hopes that Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will go ahead with their meeting slated for February 24, spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

"What the Secretary General supports is dialogue, diplomacy," Dujarric told a noon briefing.

"We've seen that there are still planned talks between the United States and the Russian Federation, hopefully, later this week in Geneva. We hope those go ahead."

When asked about President Vladimir Putin's comments that the Minsk agreements had been "killed" by Kiev long before Moscow recognized the Donbas republics, Dujarric said that the United Nations continues to believe there are existing diplomatic frameworks that should be used "in the best possible sense" to de-escalate the situation in eastern Ukraine.

Earlier in the day, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said his meeting with Lavrov, planned for February 25, was canceled.

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US to Impose Unilateral Restrictions on Imports of Afghan Heritage Materials - State Dept.

WASHINGTON February 22 (Sputnik) - The United States is imposing unilateral import restrictions on trade deals related to archaeological and other materials from Afghanistan, the US Department of State said in a statement on Tuesday.

"As part of its inter-agency coordination responsibilities for the preservation of cultural heritage, the US Department of State announces the imposition of unilateral restrictions on the importation of certain categories of Afghan archaeological and ethnological material into the United States," the statement said.

Earlier on Tuesday, the US Customs and Border Protection, Department of Homeland Security and Department of the Treasury published the import restrictions and they became effective immediately, the statement said.

The US authorities have thus created additional barriers for illicitly trafficked materials from entering the country's art market, the statement added.

The additional measures also will help to prevent a pillage of Afghanistan's cultural heritage, according to the statement.

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Taiwan Needs Asymmetric Military Capabilities to Defend From China - Foreign Minister
WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - Taiwan needs to develop asymmetric military capabilities to defend from a potential attack by China and the best safeguard for the island nation would be a free trade agreement with the United States, Taiwanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu said on Tuesday.

"We need to develop our asymmetric warfare so that Taiwan is able to defend ourselves [from China]," Wu said during a virtual event organized by the McCain Institute. "We think that Taiwan is strategically important for the United States. The best safeguard for Taiwan, economically, will be an FTA [free trade agreement] between Taiwan and United States."

Wu said Taiwan currently does not see any signs of relaxation of tensions with China as Taipei believes Beijing is convinced it can take over the country militarily.

Taiwan is going to continue its policy of close engagement with the United States in order to deter China "coming too close" to the country's territorial waters and thus preventing a major military conflict.

Taiwan has been governed independently from mainland China since 1949. Beijing views the island as its province, while Taiwan maintains that it is an autonomous country but has stopped short of declaring independence.

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Ukraine's Top Diplomat Arrives at Pentagon Tuesday Amid Escalation of Situation in Region

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba arrived at the US Defense Department on Tuesday afternoon to meet with defense officials amid the new developments involving his country.

Kuleba was greeted by US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin outside the Defense Department. Kuleba's visit comes after Russia decided to recognize the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics.

On Monday, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed decrees recognizing the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics. Under the new treaties, Moscow will ensure the security of the two Russian-speaking republics.

The decision followed a deterioration of the situation on the line of contact between Ukraine and the breakaway republics amid interference by the West. Russia has repeatedly denied having any intention of invading Ukraine.

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Guterres to Make Statement at 22:30 GMT After Canceling Trip to DRC Over Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS, February 22 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will make a statement at around 5:30 p.m. EST (22:30 GMT) on Tuesday after canceling his trip to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and rushing back to New York over the escalation of the situation in eastern Ukraine, spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

"The Secretary-General is somewhere over the Atlantic, he will be landing back shortly in New York. I expect him to speak to you around 5:30 or so at the Security Council stakeout," Dujarric said in a press briefing.

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US-Ukraine Business Council Expects No Major Impact From Donbas Sanctions

WASHINGTON February 22 (Sputnik) – New US sanctions against the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk would not significantly affect business relations between the United States and Ukraine, US-Ukraine Business Council (USUBC) President and CEO Morgan Williams told Sputnik on Tuesday.

On Monday, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed decrees recognizing the independence of the republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, saying that the decision was long overdue. The US and the European Union have vowed "significant" sanctions on Russia.

"The sanctions that have been imposed against the self-proclaimed republics in Donbas do not have a major impact directly on the entire US-Ukraine business contact. They will impact indirectly as they add to the overall negative business environment," Williams said.

Williams noted that American companies operating in Ukraine do not have significant business in Donbas. At the same, he pointed to a "dramatic and severe impact" which the ongoing tensions have had on the economy of Ukraine and on American businesses present there.

"There is a very negative, disruptive, unsettling, scary business environment now. Businesses have had to put their investment and growth plans on hold, they have put into operation crisis management plans, moved some top employees out of the country, beefed up cyber-security protections, moved some operations to western Ukraine," he said.

President Joe Biden issued an executive order on Monday banning any new investment in and trade with the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics. More measures are expected to

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US Consumer Sentiment Dips in Early February Due to Inflation Concerns - Research Group

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - US consumer sentiment extended its declines from January into early February as concerns about inflation depressed the buying appetite of Americans although robust economic trends should alleviate this, the Conference Board research group, which publishes the Consumer Confidence Index, said on Tuesday. "Consumer confidence was down slightly for a second consecutive month in February," Conference Board Senior Director of Economic Indicators Lynn Franco said. "Concerns about inflation rose again in February, after posting back-to-back declines. Despite this reversal, consumers remain relatively confident about short-term growth prospects." The Consumer Confidence Index was at 110.5 at its February 16 reading, versus 111.1 at the end of January.

The decline came amid data showing inflation growing at its fastest pace in 40 years as the United States emerged from the ravages of the coronavirus pandemic measures. After a 3.5% contraction in 2020 forced by the pandemic measures, the economy grew 5.7% in 2021. But inflation grew faster, expanding by 5.8% in the year to December, the highest rate since 1982, according to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) published by the US Commerce Department.

Franco said since January, the Conference Board's Consumer Confidence Index showed a drop in the proportion of Americans planning to purchase homes, automobiles, major appliances and vacations over the next six months.

"Despite this reversal, consumers remain relatively confident about short-term growth prospects," Franco said. "While they do not expect the economy to pick up steam in the near future, they also do not foresee conditions worsening. Nevertheless, confidence and consumer spending will continue to face headwinds from rising prices in the coming months."

The Conference Board has forecast that the US economy will grow 3.5% this year, consolidating from 2021's expansion from the pandemic. The Federal Reserve has said that it expects a growth of 4% in 2022.

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Biden Administration Discussing Russia Sanctions Package With Asian Nations - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is in talks with Asian nations to join Western efforts to implement a sanctions package on Russia in response to their actions regarding Ukraine, Foreign Policy reports on Tuesday, citing three US sources.

Singapore, Japan and Taiwan have so far supported export control measures on Russia, the sources reportedly said. The countries are major producers of important technological exports including semiconductors and computer chips, the report added.

The United States, its partners and allies have been developing a sanctions package against Russia to implement in the event of a Russian invasion of Ukraine, prompted by the alleged buildup of Russian forces near the Ukrainian border.

The situation evolved on Monday when Russian President Vladimir Putin recognized the breakaway Donetsk and Luhansk regions, eliciting condemnation from Western leaders and the start of still more sanctions, including Germany halting certification of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project.

Russia denies accusations that it intends to invade Ukraine and points to its own concerns about NATO activity in Eastern Europe. Putin said on Tuesday that the best solution to the current situation would be for Ukraine to abandon NATO membership plans and adhere to neutrality.

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Trump Says Developments in Ukraine Would Never Have Happen During His Administration

WASHINGTON February 22 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that the current developments in Ukraine would never have happened during his administration. "If properly handled, there was absolutely no reason that the situation currently happening in Ukraine should have happened at all. I know Vladimir Putin very well, and he would have never done during the Trump administration what he is doing now, no way!" Trump said in a statement. On Monday, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree recognizing the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics (DPR and LPR) and also signed treaties of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance with them. The Russian parliament ratified the documents on Tuesday. Several Western countries and European Union officials have threatened to impose new sanctions against Russia, while the United Kingdom sanctioned five Russian banks and three businesspeople earlier in the day.

Trump has accused the Biden administration of making Russia "very very rich" because of high oil prices.

"The weak sanctions are insignificant relative to taking over a country and a massive piece of strategically located land. Now it has begun, oil prices are going higher and higher, and Putin is not only getting what he always wanted, but getting, because of the oil and gas surge, richer and richer," he said.

Trump noted that the United States was energy independent under his administration and maintained low oil prices.

Russia's decision to recognize DPR and LPR followed a deterioration of the situation on the line of contact between Ukraine and the breakaway republics. Russia has repeatedly denied having any intention of invading Ukraine.

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State Dept. Official, Ex-Husband From Russia Sentenced for Citizenship Fraud – DOJ

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) – A former married couple, a California woman and a Russian-born man, were sentenced to prison terms of 15 and 6 months respectively, for their involvement in a conspiracy to gain US citizenship by fraud, the US Department of Justice said Tuesday.

"Laura Gallagher, 32, a Foreign Service Officer with the U.S. Department of State, and Andrey Kalugin, 36, originally of Russia, conspired to fraudulently obtain lawful permanent resident status and citizenship for Kalugin through his marriage to Gallagher," the Department of Justice press release said.

Prosecutors said the defendants met in law school in 2013 where Kalugin was studying in the US on a student visa. The visa was set to expire in July 2015 and the defendants married in June 2015 and applied for Kalugin to get a green card. The pair moved from California to Virginia in March 2016 but split up soon after. Although they did not live under the same roof, they continued with the immigration process.

Gallagher and Kalugin provided false statements on an application and Kalugin also lied during an interview on February 5, 2018, with an adjudicating officer at the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). After Kalugin received his citizenship, he used false information to apply for and receive US diplomatic and tourist passports. Not long after, Gallagher filed for divorce. The pair was convicted on September 10, 2021. The district court judge overseeing the trial ordered that Kalugin's naturalization status be revoked.

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Biden to Provide Update on Russia, Ukraine on Tuesday at 1 p.m. - White House
(Updates with more details, background in paras 3-6)

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will deliver a statement on Russia and Ukraine on Tuesday afternoon, according to the White House schedule.

"2:00 p.m. The President provides an update on Russia and Ukraine," the schedule said but the term was later revised to 1:00 pm EST.

Biden will speak about US and Western sanctions with regard to Russia's move into the Luhansk and Donetsk people's republics, the Washington Post reported.

Biden's address will be the first one since Russia decided to recognize the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics.

On Monday, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed decrees recognizing the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics. Under the new treaties, Moscow will ensure the security of the two Russian-speaking republics.

The decision followed a deterioration of the situation on the line of contact between Ukraine and the breakaway republics amid interference by the West. Russia has repeatedly denied having any intention of invading Ukraine.

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Jury Finds 3 Men Convicted in Ahmaud Arbery Murder Guilty on Federal Hate Crimes Charges

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - A US jury on Tuesday delivered a guilty verdict in the federal hate crimes case against the three men convicted in the murder of 25-year-old Black man Ahmaud Arbery in the state of Georgia.

The jury found Travis McMichael, Greg McMichael and William Bryan guilty of violating Arbery's civil rights and also found the McMichaels guilty on related firearms charges.

A judge sentenced the three men to life in prison in January after a jury found them guilty of shooting and killing Arbery in February of 2020. The incident gained widespread attention after footage of the murder went viral three months later. The three men used pick-up trucks to pursue Arbery, who was jogging in the area, having suspected him of theft and murdered him in the subsequent altercation.

Arbery's mother thanked the Justice Department for their work on the case during remarks outside the courthouse, but she also criticized attempts to reach a plea deal with the defendants. In February, a judge in the case rejected the deal, which would have enabled Travis McMichael to spend 30 years of his sentence in federal prison, where conditions are generally better than in state prisons.

Civil rights attorney Ben Crump also said outside the courthouse that he will continue to work to hold accountable those who were responsible for the what he claims was a cover up of Arbery's murder.

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Biden's Remarks on Russia, Ukraine Moved to Earlier Time of 18:00 GMT - Official

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will deliver remarks on Russia and Ukraine earlier than previously scheduled on Tuesday afternoon, an administration official said.

"Remarks are now at 1 PM," the official said, as quoted by the White House press pool.

The White House schedule earlier said that Biden would deliver his speech at 2:00 p.m. EST.

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Pentagon Says Analyzing Request to Help Control Traffic as DC Gears Up for Truck Protest

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon is analyzing a request for assistance from the US Capitol Police and other authorities to help controlling traffic during a trucker protest expected in Washington on March 1, Press Secretary John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"The Department is analyzing a request for assistance from the US Capitol Police and the DC Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency," Kirby said in a statement. "Those agencies have asked for National Guard personnel to provide support at traffic control points in and around the District to help the USCP and DC government address potential challenges stemming from possible disruptions at key traffic arteries."

No decision has been made yet to approve these requests, Kirby said.

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Former Trump Advisor Urges US to Prepare for Ukrainian Government in Exile – Reports

WASHINGTON February 22 (Sputnik) – Former US President Donald Trump's national security advisor, Robert O'Brien, has urged the current administration to design a plan of cooperation with a Ukrainian government in exile should President Volodymyr Zelenskyy be deposed by "Russian troops," Axios reported on Tuesday.

O'Brien told the news outlet he does not see "any circumstance" in which Zelenskyy could stay in power if Russia "invades" Kiev. He also urged President Joe Biden against recognizing any "Russian puppet government" in Ukraine.

Trump's former advisor believes that in the event of such a development, steps should be taken to preserve Ukraine's seat in multilateral institutions, as well as access to Ukrainian assets and diplomatic facilities. International institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, should deal only with the Ukrainian government in exile, according to O'Brien.

This Ukrainian cabinet could set up an office in London, Warsaw or another friendly European capital, and would likely have to rely on foreign aid, O'Brien said. The West should support rebels opposing Russia from inside Ukraine, he added.

On Monday, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed decrees recognizing the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics, saying that the decision was long overdue. Under the new treaties, Moscow will ensure their security of the Russian-speaking republics.

The decision followed a deterioration of the situation on line of contact between Ukraine and the breakaway regions. Moscow has repeatedly denied any intention of "invading" Ukraine.

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Jury Finds 3 Men Convicted in Ahmaud Arbery Murder Guilty on Federal Hate Crimes Charges

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - A US jury on Tuesday delivered a guilty verdict in the federal hate crimes case against the three men convicted in relation to the murder of black man Ahmaud Arbery

The jury found Travis McMichael, Greg McMichael and William Bryan guilty of violating Arbery's civil rights. They also found the McMichaels guilty on related firearms charges.

A US judge in January sentenced the three men to life in prison after a jury found them guilty on charges including murder for shooting and killing Arbery in February, 2020. The incident gained widespread attention after footage of the murder went viral in May 2020. The three men pursued Arbery, who was purportedly jogging in the area, in their trucks before murdering him in the altercation.

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Biden to Provide Update on Russia, Ukraine on Tuesday at 2 p.m. - White House

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will deliver a statement on Russia and Ukraine on Tuesday afternoon, according to the White House schedule. "2:00 p.m. The President provides an update on Russia and Ukraine," the schedule said.

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US Supreme Court Rejects Dakota Access Appeal, Paving Way for Environmental Review - Order

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court has rejected an appeal by the operator of the Dakota Access pipeline to prevent an environmental review of a section opposed by Native American nations in the area, a legal order announced on Tuesday.

"Dakota Access, LLC vs. Standing Rock Sioux et.al. The petition for a writ of certiorari is denied," the Supreme Court order said.

Conservative Justices Samuel Alito and Brett Kavanaugh took no part in the consideration or decision of the petition, the order added.

The Standing Rock, Yankton, Oglala and Cheyenne River Sioux Tribes have sought to prevent the construction and operation of the more than 1,100 mile (nearly 1,900 km) pipeline carrying oil out of the Bakken shale basin south to the state Illinois. The disputed section lies on federal property under Lake Oahe, an artificial reservoir on the Missouri River. The tribes use water from the lake and look on the Missouri River as sacred.

The issue has become a political football: Democratic President Barack Obama's administration said it would review the original go-ahead for the pipeline but in 2017 his successor President Donald Trump upheld the plan to build it. Current President Joe Biden has supported a 2020 court ruling to block the project.

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G7 Nations to Impose Sanctions on Russia Over Donbas Recognition - Ottawa

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The top diplomats of G7 countries agreed on Tuesday morning to introduce sanctions against Russia following its recognition of the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, Melanie Joly, the Canadian minister of foreign affairs, said. "The G7 foreign ministers met this morning to discuss Russia's blatant disregard for Ukrainian sovereignty," Joly said. "We are united in our resolve to support Ukraine and will be imposing sanctions against Russia for these actions."

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US, 6 Allies Release Plan for 2031 Combined Space Operations Vision - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 22 (Sputnik) - The United States, its four allies in the "Five Eyes" electronic surveillance and intelligence sharing program, along with Germany and France, have released a joint space operations plan to counter other major nations over the next decade, the US Defense Department announced on Tuesday.

"The United States joins Australia, Canada, France, Germany, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom in the joint release of the 'Combined Space Operations (CSpO) Vision 2031' today," the Defense Department said in a press release.

The Defense Department described the CSpO as an initiative to address the overarching need to encourage responsible use of space, recognizing challenges to space sustainability, threats presented by technological advances and what it called the increasingly comprehensive and aggressive counter-space programs of other nation states.

"The 'CSpO Vision 2031' outlines the initiative's overarching purpose and highlights its guiding principles, including: freedom of use of space, responsible and sustainable use of space, partnering while recognizing sovereignty, and upholding international law," the release said. These guiding principles will be supported by developing and operating resilient, interoperable architectures, fostering responsible military behaviors in space and sharing intelligence and information with the goal of pursuing a safe, secure and sustainable space domain, the release added.