The US Supreme Court heard arguments on Monday for a case in which the conservative court could set new limits on the regulatory power of US federal government agencies. The case is known as West Virginia v. Environmental Protection Agency, but it consolidates several other similar cases against the EPA brought by 18 other states, as well as several fossil fuel companies. At stake is an already-revoked regulation limiting the carbon dioxide emissions of coal-burning power plants, which are the most pollutive power generation facilities in terms of global warming-fueling greenhouse gasses. The Biden administration bailed on a chance to try and re-implement the Obama-era Clean Power Plan (CPP) just one month into his administration. The path to that situation is a convoluted one. In 2015, then-US President Barack Obama created the CPP in an attempt to move the US away from coal-fueled power plants and significantly reduce US carbon emissions. However, the following year, the US Supreme Court ordered the plan’s implementation halted while a separate court battle over its legality was being fought out. Fortunately, the electrical generation industry followed the trends begun by the CPP’s brief life, and by 2019, the level of emissions reductions the EPA expected by 2030 under the plan had already been achieved without it. In 2019, the Trump administration scrapped the plan entirely and the EPA, then headed by former coal industry lobbyist Andrew Wheeler, introduced the Affordable Clean Energy Rule. The rule tried to claim that the 1963 Clean Air Act, the US’ primary air quality law, sets clear and unambiguous limits on the EPA’s ability to regulate structures and installations. On the last day of the Trump administration, a US federal appeals court struck down that rule, calling it a “fundamental misconstruction” of the relevant law based on a “tortured series of misreadings.” That was one month before US President Joe Biden’s February 2021 decision not to use the opportunity created by the courts to try and revive the CPP. So why would conservative states bother to challenge the CPP in the nation’s highest court? According to NPR, their goal is to get the conservative-majority Supreme Court to issue a broader ruling that could hobble US federal regulatory power. According to one lawyer who spoke with the radio station and who fought the CPP in West Virginia, the plaintiffs believe that Congress hasn’t explicitly given the EPA the regulatory power to “reshape[e] the energy economy by determining what mix of clean power and coal-operated power we should have.” However, the high court has also sent signals that it doesn’t believe Congress has that power, either, with Associate Justices Neil Gorsuch and Clarence Thomas invoking the so-called “non-delegation” argument in past court opinions. Under that principle, they argued that the
nation’s Founding Fathers had rejected the idea that Congress could delegate its powers to regulatory agencies.

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50 Years Since Shanghai Communique Laid Out Program for Peaceful Coexistence Between China, US

At the conclusion of then-US President Richard Nixon’s historic trip to the People’s Republic of China in 1972, he and Chinese premier Zhou Enlai issued a joint statement promising peace, cooperation, and mutual coexistence. Half a century later, those lofty promises seem further than ever.

From February 21 until February 28, 1972, Nixon, his entourage, and the American press corps visited Beijing, Hangzhou and Shanghai, and Nixon’s meetings with Zhou and Mao Zedong, chairman of the Central Military Commission and of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC), paved the way for the formal normalization of relations seven years later in 1979.

In 1949, the communists established the People’s Republic of China in Beijing after emerging victorious in the long civil war over the old Republic of China. While the Red Army succeeded at conquering all of mainland China, it was unable to cross the Taiwan Strait, so the RoC persisted as the government in Taiwan, even as the PRC claimed Taiwan as a Chinese province in rebellion. The US, staunchly anticommunist, continued to support the RoC’s claim to be the legitimate government of all of China.

However, by the early 1970s, the global political stage had changed considerably, and Henry Kissinger, Nixon’s national security adviser and a shrewd practitioner of realpolitik, thought it would be to Washington’s advantage to change its position toward China.

A similar attitude was also emerging in Beijing. The fracturing of the alliance between China and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), originally over different visions for how to build socialism and which of the two nations should lead the growing global community of socialist states, became increasingly bitter as the 1960s wore on, and Mao eventually conceived of Moscow as the greater threat to China than Washington was.

Kissinger called his strategy “triangular diplomacy,” taking advantage of the contradictions in the intra-communist rivalry between the PRC and the Soviet Union in order to keep them from resolving their differences. If Beijing and Moscow ever became reunited, Kissinger realized, their combined power could deny Washington the ability to behave hegemonically in Eurasia and the Pacific.

At times, this meant encouraging Detente with the Soviet Union and weighing the option of airstrikes on Chinese nuclear test facilities to keep them from developing nuclear weapons; at others, it meant Kissinger sneaking into China via Pakistan in order to hold a secret meeting with Zhou Enlai that would reverse 30 years of pro-Taiwan diplomacy.

That secret operation, codenamed “Operation Marco Polo,” took place in July 1971 and was such a resounding success that it paved the way for Nixon’s highly publicized February 1972
visit, at the end of which he and Mao signed the communique at the Jiangjiang Hotel in Shanghai.
The communique was issued at the close of Nixon’s seven-day tour, and saw the two nations lay out their visions for how to achieve “a just and secure peace,” as the American side put it. Mao and Nixon expressed their regrets at having severed relations for so long, and pledged to work toward normalization of relations as they both believed it was in the best interest of all of humanity.
“There are essential differences between China and the United States in their social systems and foreign policies,” the joint statement said.
“However, the two sides agreed that countries, regardless of their social systems, should conduct their relations on the principles of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states, non-aggression against other states, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. International disputes should be settled on this basis, without resorting to the use or threat of force. The United States and the People’s Republic of China are prepared to apply these principles to their mutual relations.”
On the topic of Taiwan, Beijing asserted that the island is an inalienable part of China and its liberation was solely an internal affair. “The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China,” the communique reads. “The United States Government does not challenge that position. It reaffirms its interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves.”
The format of stating the two sides’ positions separately, as well as noting their areas of agreement, was Zhou’s idea, not Kissinger’s. According to the South China Morning Post, Kissinger had presented a draft for a single, united statement of joint beliefs, which Zhou found insulting.
“This is useless: this is a typical diplomatic document that papers over differences. It’ll have no credibility, because how can two nations that have hated each other and fought each other and been isolated from each other for 22 years, suddenly put a document out like this that suggests they’re friends?” Zhou asked Kissinger.
It took another seven years of negotiation before China and the US opened embassies in each others’ capitals in March 1979, and another two communiques before economic, social, and cultural ties were cemented, and all the relevant issues relating to the US’ relationship with Taiwan were addressed. However, the US has notably not kept a key part of the final communiqué in 1982, in which it pledged to end weapons sales to Taiwan.

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Women’s Health Protection Act, Which Would Codify Abortion Rights in US Law, Voted Down by Senate

A bill that would have made the right to an abortion part of US law, instead of being dependent on a US Supreme Court ruling, has failed to pass the US Senate. Democrats have rushed to
pass the bill as the high court seems poised to hinder or strike down legal abortion access nationwide.
The Senate voted 46-48 on Monday on a motion to bring the Women's Health Protection Act to a vote in the Senate, meaning the bill has died.
The bill passed the Democratic-majority House in late September, several weeks after the US Supreme Court decided not to stop the implementation of a Texas law that bans abortions at roughly five weeks after conception, when most women do not even know they are pregnant.
However, in the evenly-split Senate, where Vice President Kamala Harris casts a tie-breaking vote and where Republicans can use the filibuster rule to stop objectionable bills from even getting to be voted on, the WHPA stalled for months.
The Senate has been the graveyard of many key parts of US President Joe Biden’s agenda since he took office in January 2021, including the Build Back Better Act, the Equality Act, and the John Lewis Voting Rights Act. The stonewalling has led some liberals to call for revising the filibuster rule, but Biden has never supported the effort.
In November and December, the US Supreme Court heard several cases concerning the Texas abortion law, known as SB 8, as well as another very restrictive anti-abortion law in Mississippi, but has declined to move against them thus far. In one case, Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, the state of Mississippi asked the court to not just consider its ruling in the 1992 case Planned Parenthood v. Casey, but also its 1973 ruling in Roe v. Wade. The latter case saw the court deem abortion a legal practice, protecting access to the procedure under a woman’s right to privacy, but also laying out a structure in which abortion could be regulated.
The Roe decision provoked a strong backlash among religious conservatives, whose anti-abortion program has become one of the bellwethers of Republican Party politics. With a 6-3 conservative majority, Democrats now fear that the high court is both capable and willing to reverse its decision in Roe.

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Russian Church Vandalized in Canada’s Calgary Over Ukraine Crisis - Archbishop

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - A church belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCOR) was vandalized in the city of Calgary, while another in Toronto faced an outside protest due to the crisis in Ukraine, archbishop of Montreal and Canada Gabriel (Chemodakov) told Sputnik.
"[On Sunday] there were protesters outside our church in Toronto. Our church in Calgary was vandalized, they splashed red paint over the doors, these kinds of things are also going on, which is unacceptable," archbishop Gabriel said.
He recalled that ROCOR represents a mix of Russians, Ukrainians and many other peoples, and has always been mindful of all aspects of the situation.
"Of course, I know many people were upset, they came yesterday to the church, they were upset that this is going on," Gabriel noted.
The archbishop expressed regret that Western media is promoting a very one-sided, anti-Russian position. He expressed the belief that Russia does not want war, but was forced to take action.

"I would go further and say, that the West is responsible for this, because they did not have any intention of meeting Russia’s demands with regard to the problem that exists," he said. 

Asked what the church can do in this situation, the archbishop noted that it has to be more concerned with the spiritual life, not political. He said that Russians and Ukrainians are one people and historically were united.

"As Christians, we have to understand that we can not allow these divisions among us because we came from the one group of people," Gabriel noted. "We can not allow these political divisions. As St. Paul says, there are no Jews, no Greeks, no pagans, but everyone united by Christ. We are also united by Christ through our religion."

On Thursday, Russia began a special operation to demilitarize and "denazify" Ukraine, responding to calls from the Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics for help in countering the aggression of Ukrainian forces. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger. Moscow says it has no plans to occupy Ukraine.

The move has elicited condemnation from Western leaders and the start of still more sanctions.

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UN Seeks $1.7Bln to Support People in Ukraine, Refugees in Neighboring Nations

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The United Nations launched an appeal on Tuesday for $1.7 billion to provide humanitarian aid to people in Ukraine and refugees in neighboring nations.

"The United Nations and humanitarian partners today launched coordinated emergency appeals for a combined US$1.7 billion to urgently deliver humanitarian support to people in Ukraine and refugees in neighbouring countries," the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) said in a press release. "The escalation of conflict has triggered an immediate and steep rise in humanitarian needs as essential supplies and services are disrupted and civilians flee the fighting."

The United Nations estimates that 12 million people inside Ukraine will need assistance, and more than 4 million Ukrainian refugees may need help in neighboring countries in the coming months, the release said.

The UNHCR noted that the Flash Appeal requests $1.1 billion to help 6 million people inside Ukraine over the first three months.

"The programme includes multipurpose cash assistance for the most vulnerable people, food assistance, water and sanitation, support to health care and education services, and shelter assistance to rebuild damaged homes," it explained. "The plan also aims to deliver support to authorities to maintain and establish transit and reception centres for displaced people and prevent gender-based violence."
The agency underscored that aid groups will need safe and unimpeded access to all areas impacted by the conflict.

"With more than half a million refugees having fled Ukraine to neighbouring countries in the past five days alone, and many more expected, support is also required to meet the critical needs of those seeking protection outside the country," the release went on to say. "An inter-agency Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for the Ukraine situation asks for a preliminary $550.6 million to help refugees in Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, as well as in other countries in the region in order to help host countries provide shelter, emergency relief items, cash assistance, and mental health and psychosocial support to those who fled Ukraine, including people with specific needs, such as unaccompanied children."

According to the UN, the hostilities in Ukraine have displaced at least 660,000 civilians. Last Thursday, Russia began a special operation in Ukraine, responding to calls from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics for help in countering the aggression of Ukrainian forces. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger. Moscow says it has no plans to occupy Ukraine.

The same day, the UN allocated $20 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund to immediately scale up humanitarian assistance for civilians in Ukraine.

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PREVIEW - Biden's First State of Union Address to Focus on Tackling Inflation, Countering Russia

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden in his first State of the Union address is expected to layout his plan to tackle rising inflation in the United States and the United States' geopolitical tensions with Russia with respect to Ukraine. According to Article II, Section 3 of the US Constitution the president "shall from time to time give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union, and recommend to their Consideration such Measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient."

The US president delivers the State of the Union address annually before a joint session of the US Congress. Traditionally, the president outlines the US economic and security situation and discusses the administration's legislative agenda.

Biden is scheduled to begin delivering the address at 9:00 p.m. EST on Tuesday evening (2:00 a.m. GMT on Wednesday).

Biden will deliver his first State of the Union address in a chamber before a full joint session of Congress after last year's was limited to 20 percent capacity due to the novel coronavirus pandemic.

All members of Congress are invited to attend the State of the Union address this year, if they test negative for COVID-19 and wear a face mask, but no guests will be allowed to be present as is usually tradition.
Biden's address will occur amid a 40.8 percent job approval rating, according to the latest average of ten polls tallied by Real Clear Politics.

US-RUSSIA GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS

White House Press Secretary told reporters on Monday that she expects Biden’s remarks with respect to national security will focus on the state of the United States' role on global stage and its geopolitical competition with Russia, especially in light of the military operation in Ukraine.

"But I think the speech for everyone's expectation for tomorrow is more about laying out efforts to the American people that the United States has undertaken to rally the world for democracy and against Russian aggression," Psaki said.

Senior Biden administration officials told reporters that the US economy will make up a significant portion of Biden's address but some of his remarks will be spent talking about recent events in Ukraine.

The United States and its European partners recently imposed sanctions targeting several major Russian banks and high-level Russian government officials, including President Vladimir Putin, and ousting Russia from the SWIFT financial system.

The United States and its partners have also enhanced initiatives to get additional lethal security assistance to Ukraine in the last few days.

On Thursday, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine, acting in response to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics against the intensifying aggression of Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation was solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and emphasized that the civilian population is not in danger.

Since then, hostilities have been taking place on the territory of Ukraine and the breakaway republics.

ECONOMY IN CRISIS

Biden will also discuss efforts to lower costs for Americans amid concerns over rising inflation in the country, Psaki said.

Consumer prices in the United States have increased by 6.1 percent.

"Let me say the President will absolutely use the word 'inflation' tomorrow and he will talk about inflation in his speech" Psaki said. "Of course, that is a huge issue on the minds of Americans."

The White House said in a press release on Monday that Biden will reiterate his call for Congress to make progress on efforts to pass legislation that could lower costs for childcare, elder care, prescription drugs.

Biden will propose plans to lower costs for Americans, especially by increasing the number of goods made in the United States, strengthening supply chains and promoting fair competition in the US economy, the release said.

After contracting 3.5% in 2020 from disruptions forced by the COVID-19 measures, the US economy expanded by 5.7% in 2021, growing at its fastest pace since 1982.

But inflation grew even more. The Personal Consumption Expenditure Index, a US inflation indicator closely followed by the Fed, rose by 5.8% in the year to December and 6.1% in the 12 months to January. Both readings also indicated the fastest growth since 1982.

In addition, US media reported that Biden may also lay out his administration's goal to improve 65,000 miles of roads and 1,500 bridges in the United States with funding provided through the bipartisan infrastructure bill that was signed into law in November.
Hollywood Increasingly Asks What Really Happening in Ukraine - US-Ukrainian Film Director

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - People in Hollywood are unaware of the real situation in Ukraine but are increasingly asking about what is happening in the country, Ukrainian-born US film director Igor Lopatonok told Sputnik.

"Unfortunately, there is a lot of unawareness in Hollywood, but we should let people understand the situation first," Lopatonok, who was born in Ukraine during the Soviet Union and is now resident of the United States since 2008, said.

Lopatonok expressed regrets of what he called a Ukraine-run massive information influence operation, but noted that when people learn the actual facts they will understand the entire picture.

"The initial reaction was to support Ukraine in its fight. But more and more of my friends are asking me about what is truly happening in Ukraine - now they are in the process of understanding," he said.

Lopatonok, who produced "Ukraine on Fire" in partnership with Oliver Stone, said the famous US movie producer and director is very well aware of and concerned about the developments in Ukraine.

"What we predicted practically in our films, especially in "The Revealing of Ukraine," we were talking about exactly the same situation that is happening now," he said.

Lopatonok pointed out that the conversation with Stone started in 2014 as the US- and EU-supported coup resulted in installing of a new government with numerous right-wing radicals and extremists in it, some professing the Nazi ideology and openly discriminating against Russian-speaking residents in the east of Ukraine.

"Now in 2022, I understand that everything that was since built on lies and hypocrisy and on the blood of innocent people will end as World War II ended in Berlin, when Russian troops came and put their flag on the Reichstag and that turned things to the tribunal in Nuremberg." Lopatonok urged Western audiences to be more discerning about what they are being told and check the facts.

"Attempts to present the Ukrainian regime of Zelenskyy as innocent sheep is a very dangerous mistake because they are not innocent. They are closing TV channels, they are prosecuting people, they kill them, they are running the civil war in the country," he said.

On February 24, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine, responding to calls from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to help defend against intensified attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation was solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and emphasized that the civilian population is not in danger.
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Maidan Events of 2014 Coming to Their Logical End Now - US-Ukrainian Film Director
WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The current crisis in Ukraine shows that the events that took place on Maidan square in 2014 are coming their logical end, Ukrainian-born US film director Igor Lopatonok told Sputnik.

"Now, eight years after Maidan, we are looking at how that story is coming to the end, and I believe it is a logical end," Lopatonok, who made his first film about Ukraine - "Maidan Massacre" in 2014 - said.

Between November 2013 and February 2014, Kiev's Maidan square witnessed pro-EU protests sparked by then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych's refusal to sign the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement. In February 2014, the government was toppled by a US- and EU-supported "color revolution" that resulted in a coup that claimed the lives of some 100 civilians.

Lapotonok expressed the confidence that current tensions between Russia and Ukraine could have been avoided.

"But that is what is going on now in Ukraine is that we understand the Russians can not stand the absence of security guarantees internationally, and especially from NATO," he said.

The director, who was born in the Soviet Union, grew up in Ukraine and worked in Russia and currently lives in the United States, expressed sadness over the recent developments.

Lopatonok emphasized that Western mainstream media is portraying those who took power in Ukraine in 2014 as "freedom fighters" who overthrew a corrupt government and who want to live together with the nations of the European Union.

"However, the reality it is totally different. These people, who overthrew the government in the 2014 coup are not freedom fighters, but pose a danger to many people in the country. They are the instruments for the civil war in the East [of Ukraine], and did everything to blame Russia because the only one thing that could stop them is Russia," he said. "They were paramilitary divisions shipped to Kiev from the Western part of Ukraine, who are ultra-nationalists and radicals."

Lopatonok said he blames the supporters of the regime in Kiev for genocide in the Donbass and specifically for the horrific massacre in the city of Odessa in May of 2014, along with openly wearing Nazi insignia. He noted that in his films he has tried to bring alternative perspective to the Western audience on all events in Ukraine during the past eight years since the coup.

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Freeland Says 'Cautioned' Russia's Central Bank Governor Not to Allow War in Ukraine

TORONTO, February 28 (Sputnik) - Canada's Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said she had warned Russia's Central Bank Governor Elvira Nabiullina 12 days ago to head off any military endeavors by Moscow.
"Twelve days ago, I urged the governor of the Russian Central Bank not to allow her government to launch an illegal and unprovoked war. I cautioned her that if Russia took this horrible step it would be... worse than a crime, a mistake," Freeland told a news conference on Monday.

Freeland emphasized the sanctions would be "swift, coordinated, sustained and crushing" and called Russian efforts to stabilize their currency, the Ruble, "vain."

Earlier on Monday, Ottawa issued a ban on engagements between Canadian financial institutions and Russia's Central Bank.

Last Thursday, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine, responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics against the intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation was solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and emphasized that the civilian population is not in danger.

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US States Impose Restrictions on Russia in Response to Ukraine Military Operations

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - US states have begun imposing their own sanctions on Russia in addition to the federal restrictive measures in response to Russia's ongoing special operation in Ukraine, including banning Russian-made alcohol and reviewing deals with Russian businesses.

North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper on Monday signed an executive order directing the state government agencies and departments to review all existing contracts and terminate any agreements that directly benefit Russian entities.

"This order sends a strong message and helps ensure no public dollars or operations from North Carolina will benefit Russia and its unjustified aggression," Cooper said in a press release.

The order includes the North Carolina Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission, which was directed to review its list of approved products and suspend the approval of those made by Russian entities.

Earlier on Monday, the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board likewise ordered all Russian-made products removed from shelves.

New York Governor Kathy Hochul similarly said her state will divest funds from Russia-linked businesses, directing the state Comptroller's Office to conduct a review of state investments. The state will also refrain from similar investments in the future, Hochul said.

Several other states, including Colorado, Connecticut, New Jersey and Virginia, have also ordered similar reviews and actions.

In addition, Maryland Governor Larry Hogan took symbolic action by terminating a Sister State partnership between Maryland and the Leningrad region, first signed in 1993.

On Thursday, Russia undertook a special operation in Ukraine after the republics of Donetsk and Luhansk asked for help to defend themselves from intensified attacks by Ukraine troops.
The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation is directed solely against the Ukrainian military infrastructure and emphasized that civilians should not fear the Russian military.

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General Motors Suspends Vehicle Exports to Russia Over Conflict in Ukraine - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - US automaker General Motors has suspended all vehicle exports to Russia amid the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine, the company told FOX Business in a statement.
The suspension will last until further notice while the automaker is working to safeguard its staff in Russia as it analyses the implications of the sanctions on the business in the country, the statement said on Monday.
"We continue to monitor developments and take action to implement mitigation strategies as appropriate," the statement said.
General Motors ceased manufacturing cars in Russia back in 2019 after it had made a decision to divest itself from a joint venture with Russian automaker AvtoVAZ.
Last Thursday, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics against the intensifying aggression of Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation was solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and emphasized that the civilian population is not in danger.

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Canada Says Sending Anti-Tank Weapon Systems, Rockets to Ukraine

TORONTO, February 28 (Sputnik) - The Canadian government announced it is sending military lethal aid to Ukraine in the form of anti-tank systems and thousands of missiles amid the ongoing Russian special operation in the country.
"We will be supplying Ukraine with anti-tank weapons systems and upgrade ammunition," Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told a news conference on Monday.
The shipment will include 125 Carl-Gustaf anti-tank weapons and 2,000 missiles, Defense Minister Anita Anand said. The lethal aid is being drawn from the Canadian Armed Forces inventory, Anand added.
Earlier on Monday, Ottawa announced an additional $20 million in military aid to Ukraine that includes equipment such as helmets, body armor, gas masks and night vision gear.
The Canadian government had previously approved lethal military aid to Ukraine in the amount of $6.1 million as well as a loan of up to $393 million amid rising tensions with Russia.
Last Thursday, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics against the intensifying aggression of Ukrainian
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Antonov on US Expulsion of Diplomats: This Is Hostile Attack Against Our Country
(Updates with more information in paras 4-6)
WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The US decision to expel 12 Russian diplomats from the United Nations mission is a hostile attack against Russia, Ambassador Anatoly Antonov to the United States said.
"These action of the [US] administration cause a feeling of deep disappointment and complete rejection. The US government once again has violated its commitment to provide normal conditions for representatives of foreign states with the global organization," Antonov said on Monday. "This is a hostile attack against our country.

Earlier on Monday, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said the US government has declared 12 diplomats from Russia's Permanent Mission to the United Nations personae non gratae and demanded that they leave the United States by March 7.
Antonov said the US government's actions are not directed to improving the international situation and maintaining the necessary level of bilateral relations between the great powers, which bear special responsibility for global peace and security.
"Such a responsibility is needed now more than ever in conditions of current turmoil in the globe," he said.

White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said during a press briefing that the Russian diplomats at the United Nations expelled by the United States earlier Monday were intelligence operatives engaged in espionage activities.

Russia Will Provide All Needed Aid to Ukrainians in Areas Freed From Radicals - Nebenzia
UNITED NATIONS, February 28 (Sputnik) - The Russian military will provide humanitarian assistance to the Ukrainian people in the territories freed from radicals, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia told the UN Security Council.
"The Russian military will provide any needed humanitarian assistance to the Ukrainians in the territories that have been freed from the radicals," Nebenzia said on Monday.

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Antonov on US Expulsion of Diplomats: This Is Hostile Attack Against Our Country
WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) – The US decision to expel 12 Russian diplomats from the UN mission is a hostile attack against Russia, Ambassador Anatoly Antonov said on Monday.

“These action of the [US] administration cause a feeling of deep disappointment and complete rejection. The US government once again has violated its commitment to provide normal conditions for representatives of foreign states with the global organization,” Antonov said. “This is a hostile attack against our country.

Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said earlier in the day that the US government has declared 12 diplomats from Russia’s Permanent Mission to the United Nations personae non gratae and demanded that they leave the United States by March 7.

Trudeau Says ‘It is Clear’ Canada Not Sending Troops Into Ukraine

TORONTO, February 28 (Sputnik) - Canada will not be sending troops to Ukraine amid the Russian military operation in that country, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said.

"It is clear, we are not going to be sending troops into Ukraine," Trudeau told a news conference on Monday.

On February 24, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine, responding to calls from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics for help from intensifying attacks by Ukraine troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation was solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and emphasized the civilian population is not in danger.

US Stock Exchanges Say Temporarily Halting Trading in Russian Stocks

(Updates with more details, background in paras 1, 2, 5)

NEW YORK, February 28 (Sputnik) - The New York Stock Exchange and the Nasdaq bourse for technology stocks said on Monday they have temporarily halted trading in Russian stocks following the sanctions imposed on Russia over the Ukraine crisis.

The New York Stock Exchange said on its website that it had curbed trading of Russian telecom operator Mobile TeleSystems PJSC, mining and steel company Mechel PAO and online real-estate classifieds company Cian PLC due to what it called was a "regulatory concern."

Nasdaq said it had halted trading in six stocks, comprising of two issues of Nexters Inc, with the tickers GDEVW and GDEV; HeadHunter Group PLC ADS (HHR); Ozon Holdings PLC (OZON); QIWI plc ADR (QIWI) and Yandex N.V. (YNDX).

"The trade halts are temporary," Peter Gau, associate vice president of corporate communications at Nasdaq, told Sputnik.
The trading restrictions came amid a raft of new sanctions leveled at Russia by the West as its special military operation in Ukraine entered its fifth day.

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Biden, Allies Discuss Punishing Russia While Keeping Energy Prices Down - White House

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden held a secure conference call with US allied leaders to discuss ways of penalizing Russia over its military intervention in Ukraine while keeping energy prices stable, the White House announced in a readout of the conversation.

"President Joseph Biden hosted a secure conference call today with Allies and partners about our unified response to Russia’s unjustified and unprovoked war on Ukraine," the readout said on Monday. "They also discussed their coordinated efforts to impose severe costs and consequences to hold Russia accountable while working to maintain global economic stability, including with regard to energy prices."

The White House said the leaders discussed their continued support for Ukraine, including security, economic and humanitarian assistance.

Biden was joined in the call by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, European Council President Charles Michel, President Emmanuel Macron of France and Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany, the White House added.

Prime Minister Mario Draghi of Italy, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, President Andrzej Duda of Poland, President Klaus Iohannis of Romania and Prime Minister Boris Johnson of the United Kingdom also participated in the call, according to the White House.

US Anticipates No Interruption in Space Station Operations Over Ukraine Crisis - NASA

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The United States anticipates no interruption in regular joint US-Russian operations running the International Space Station (ISS), NASA Human Exploration and Operations Mission Directorate Associate Administrator Kathy Leuders said.

"Our [US and Russian] control centers are operating normally together," Leuders told a NASA press conference on Monday. "We have gotten the support we needed. We are continuing to operate normally."

NASA officials continued to anticipate that US astronaut Mark Vande Hei would return to earth on schedule as planned on a Russian space ship from the ISS, Leuders said.

"We are [still] planning on getting Mark ready to return. All the normal operations are in place for us to do so. … We have operated in these situations of political uncertainty) before and both sides always operated at [a] level of professionalism," Leuders said.
Both US and Russian space agency astronauts, cosmonauts and ground-based officials and engineers have always understood the importance of continuing to maintain peaceful relations in space, Leuders added.

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Canada to Ban Import of Russian Crude Oil - Trudeau

TORONTO, February 28 (Sputnik) - Canada will ban the import of Russian crude oil in response to the country's military operation in Ukraine, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said.
"Today, we are announcing as well our intention to ban all import of crude oil from Russia," Trudeau told a news conference on Monday.
On February 24, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine, responding to calls from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics for help from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation was solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and emphasized that the civilian population is not in danger.

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France, Mexico to Present UNSC Resolution for Civilian Protection, Aid Access in Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS, February 28 (Sputnik) - France and Mexico will present a draft UN Security Council resolution demanding the protection of civilians in Ukraine and unhindered humanitarian access across the country, French Ambassador to the United Nations Nicolas de Riviere said during a UN Security Council meeting.
"France with Mexico will present a draft resolution to the council calling for full respect of international humanitarian law, the protection of civilians and unobstructed humanitarian access in order to respond to the urgent needs of the Ukrainian population," de Riviere said on Monday.
Earlier in the day, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths said he was able to receive "the beginning of some assurances" from all the parties to the conflict in Ukraine that humanitarian movements there will be protected.
Last Thursday, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine, acting in response to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics against the intensifying aggression of Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation was targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only, stressing that the civilian population is not in danger.

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No-Fly Zone in Ukraine Would Result in Conflict With Russia – White House

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The introduction of a no-fly zone over Ukraine would lead to a military conflict between the United States and Russia and President Joe Biden does not want American troops to fight with Russia, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said during a press briefing.

"President [Biden] has been very clear that he is not intending to send US troops to fight a war with Russia," Psaki said on Monday. "A no fly zone would require implementation. It would require deploying the US military to enforce, which would be a direct conflict, potentially a direct conflict and potentially war with Russia, which is something we are not planning to be a part of."

White House Says 12 Russian UN Diplomats Expelled Over Espionage Activities

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The Russian diplomats at the United Nations expelled by the United States earlier Monday were intelligence operatives engaged in espionage activities, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said during a press briefing.

"Today's action has been in the works for several months. We have informed the United States and informed the United Nations and the Russian mission to the United Nations that we are beginning the process of expelling 12 intelligence operatives from the Russian mission who had abused their privileges of residency in the United States by engaging in espionage activities that are adverse to our national security," Psaki said on Monday.

Pick Up in Global Inflation Widespread, Persistent, Not Peaking - Fitch Ratings

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - Global inflation has been widespread, persistent and showing few signs of having peaked, Fitch Ratings said in a report on price pressures as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

"CPI inflation has increased in virtually every Fitch 20 country in the past three months and is now elevated relative to pre-pandemic rates and inflation targets in many of the major economies," the global ratings agency said in a statement on Monday.

With producer price inflation rates continuing to rise, there were few signs yet in the data of inflation peaking and starting to decline, Fitch said.

"High and rising inflation has been an enduring feature of economic recoveries in many major economies, shifting the outlook for monetary policy and contributing to recent increases in bond yields," Fitch said. "Meanwhile, labor market recoveries continue to strengthen."
More than half of emerging market and developing economies experienced above-target inflation in 2021, prompting central banks to increase policy rates, according to the World Economic Forum (WEF) said. WEF added that inflation was expected to remain elevated in 2022.

UNITED NATIONS, February 28 (Sputnik) - The US government has declared 12 diplomats from Russia's Permanent Mission to the United Nations personae non gratae and demanded that they leave the United States by March 7, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said.

"Just received information that the US authorities have undertaken another hostile action against the Russian Mission to the United Nations, grossly violating their commitments on the [UN-US] Host Country Agreement that they undertook, telling us that they're announcing 12 people from the personnel of the Russian Mission personae non gratae, and demanding that they leave by the 7th of March," Nebenzia said on Monday. Nebenzia was at the beginning of his press briefing to mark the end of the Russia's UN Security Council presidency when he received a phone call informing him about the latest US government move.

"This is sad news and again another demonstration of gross disrespect of the Host Country Agreement, ... within the framework of the obligations ... under the UN Charter," he added. A few minutes later, US Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Richard Mills told the UN Security Council that the United States' decision was taken in full accordance with the agreement as the affected Russian diplomats were engaged in activities that were not in accordance with their responsibilities and obligations as diplomats.

"They have been given a request to depart this country, so they do not harm the national security of the host country," Mills said.

UNITED NATIONS, February 28 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday will launch a humanitarian appeal to support the growing humanitarian needs of people who became displaced inside and outside Ukraine amid hostilities in that country, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths said.

UN Chief to Launch Humanitarian Appeal for Ukraine on Tuesday - Griffiths
"Tomorrow, the Secretary-General will launch a humanitarian appeal for this process with two components: the three-months flash appeal for the situation inside the country and a regional response plan for the situation outside under the leadership of Filippo Grandi and his office [UN Refugees Agency, UNHCR]," Griffiths told the UN Security Council on Monday.

The launch of the event for international humanitarian appeals will begin on Tuesday in Geneva at 9:00 a.m. (EDT).

According to the United Nations, the hostilities in Ukraine have already displaced at least 660,000 civilians.

On February 24, the United Nations allocated $20 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund to immediately scale up humanitarian assistance to civilians in Ukraine.

Last Thursday, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine, acting in response to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics against the intensifying aggression of Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation was solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and emphasized that the civilian population is not in danger.

US Not Ruling Out Ban on Sale or Purchase of Russian Gas - White House

WASHINGTON, February 29 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration has not ruled out imposing a ban on the purchase or sale of Russian gas, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday.

"We haven't ruled out that," Psaki said when asked if the United States would prohibit the sale or purchase of Russian gas.

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

* Negotiations between the delegations of Russia and Ukraine in the Gomel region in Belarus have ended, and the parties identified some priority topics, an adviser to the head of Ukrainian presidential office, Mikhail Podolyak, said on Monday.

The delegations of Russia and Ukraine agreed at a negotiation on Monday to hold a new round of talks on the Belarusian-Polish border in the next few days, the head of the Russian delegation, presidential aide Vladimir Medinsky, said.

* Russia did not begin hostilities in Ukraine and is actually seeking to end the war unleashed by Kiev against the residents of Donbas, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Monday.
* With its special military operation in Ukraine, Russia is exercising its right to self-defense against a "regime" seeking to gain access to nuclear weapons, Nebenzia said.
* Volodymyr Zelenskyy has signed a formal request for Ukraine to join the European Union amid Russia's military operation, the Ukrainian parliament said.
* Lawmakers of the Ukrainian parliament will soon come up with a draft law on confiscation of all the Russian property in Ukraine, the chairperson of the legislature a said on Monday.

WESTERN MILITARY AID TO UKRAINE
* The European Union intends to increase military support to Ukraine, all its member states agree with this, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Monday.
* Ukraine asked for space intelligence data, and a satellite center in Madrid will "work on that" request, Borrell said.
* UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson told Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy over the telephone that the United Kingdom would send more military support to Ukraine "in the coming hours and days," Downing Street said in a statement.
* The United States expects new security assistance from the recently-approved $350 million package to arrive in Ukraine in the next couple of days, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said.
* NATO is not planning to introduce a no-fly zone over Ukraine or move its troops into the country amid Russia's ongoing military operation, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg told NBC.

* Budapest will not permit transit of lethal weapons to Ukraine through Hungary to ensure security of the country and its citizens, Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto said on Monday.
* Poland is the center of disinformation that is being spread about Russia's military operation in Ukraine, and the United States distributes these "fake news" through its propaganda system, the head of the Russian upper chamber's commission for the protection of state sovereignty, Andrey Klimov, said on Monday.

SANCTIONS
* UK regulator Ofcom said it had launched 15 investigations into RT news programs, the agency said in a statement.
* The Anglo-Dutch petroleum giant Shell said it had decided to withdraw from joint ventures with Gazprom and Gazprom Neft, including the Sakhalin 2 project, and to terminate its participation in the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project, the company said in a statement.
* Ottawa is banning Canadian financial institutions from engaging in transactions with the Russian central bank in response to Russia's military operation in Ukraine, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Monday.
* The International Football Federation (FIFA) and the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) have suspended Russian teams and clubs from participating in all international competitions, according to a joint statement by the organizations published on the FIFA website.
* The US technology stocks exchange Nasdaq has temporarily halted trading in Russian stocks following the sanctions imposed on Russia over the Ukraine crisis, exchange spokesman Peter Gau said Monday.
* The European Space Agency (ESA) said on Monday that it was fully implementing all sanctions imposed on Russia by member states of the organization amid the country's military operation in Ukraine.
* Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree "On the application of special economic measures against the United States and countries that have joined it," the Kremlin said.

RUSSIA, FRANCE, TURKEY TALKS on UKRAINE
* Russian President Vladimir Putin and French President Emmanuel Macron held a serious and thorough exchange of views on all aspects of the situation around Ukraine, the Kremlin said on Monday.
* Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin discussed with Kremlin aide Yury Ushakov the situation in Ukraine over the phone on Monday, and the sides stressed the importance of successful completion of diplomatic initiatives, Turkish newspaper Star reported.

US, RUSSIA NUCLEAR POSTURE
Americans should not be worried about a nuclear war starting in light of the conflict in Ukraine, President Joe Biden said on Monday.
* The US Defense Department has "nothing to confirm" reports of Russia changing its nuclear posture, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said.
* The United States is seeing no threats from Russia that would invoke Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, Kirby said.
* The United States is ready to escalate the Russia sanctions or calibrate them in the other direction if the measures change Moscow's behavior, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.
The United States has no change to its nuclear posture and at this time it believes there is no need to change it, Price said.

US-RUSSIA CONSULAR RELATIONS
* Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov expressed strong protest to US Ambassador in Moscow John Sullivan over hostile actions near the Russian Embassy in Washington, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Monday.
* Washington has declared 12 diplomats from Russia's Permanent Mission to the United Nations personae non gratae and demanded that they leave by March 7, Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said.
* The United States had recent engagements with Russia about US embassy operations in Moscow, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

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US Has Ongoing Talks With Saudis, OPEC+ Nations on Surging Oil Supplies - White House
WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The United States has ongoing discussions with Saudi Arabia and other OPEC+ countries about surging energy supply in light of Russia's military operation in Ukraine, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday. Psaki said "we have been in touch" and there has been an "ongoing discussion" when asked if the United States has asked Saudi Arabia and other OPEC+ members to surge supplies considering the current situation.

US Says Has No Desire for Confrontation With Russia, No Reason to Change Nuclear Posture

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The United States and NATO have no desire for a confrontation with Russia and Washington is currently assessing President Vladimir Putin's directive to place deterrence forces on high alert, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday. "Neither the United States nor NATO has any desire or intention for conflict with Russia ... We are assessing President Putin's directive and at this time, we see no reason to change our own alert levels," Psaki said during a press briefing.

Over 500,000 People Left Ukraine, 160,000 Internally Displaced Since Russia Operation - UN

UNITED NATIONS, February 28 (Sputnik) - More than 500,000 people have left Ukraine since the start of Russia's military operation, and about 160,000 have become internally displaced, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths told the UN Security Council on Monday. "According to the latest figures from the UN Refugee Agency, more than half a million people have already crossed the international borders, mostly towards Poland. An additional 160,000 have been internally displaced. This is likely a significant underestimation as the numbers are changing by the hour," Griffiths said.

US Expects New Security Aid to Arrive in Ukraine in Next Couple of Days - White House
WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The United States expects new security assistance from the recently-approved $350 million package to arrive in Ukraine in the next couple of days, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Monday. "We expect equipment to start arriving within the next couple of days from this [$350 million] package," Psaki said during a press briefing.

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NASA Continues Working With Roscosmos on Ongoing ISS Safe Operations - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - NASA continues to work with Roscosmos in the ongoing operations of the International Space Station (ISS) despite US and Western sanctions imposed on Russia, NASA spokesperson Daniel Huot told Sputnik on Monday. "NASA continues working with all our international partners, including the State Space Corporation Roscosmos, for the ongoing safe operations of the International Space Station," Huot said. The new export control measures will continue to allow US-Russia civil space cooperation, he noted, adding that no changes are planned to the space agency's support for ongoing in-orbit and ground station operations.

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Reports of Shelling in Kharkiv, Explosions in Kiev May Not Be Credible - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, February 28 (Sputnik) - Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Monday reports of shelling of Kharkiv and explosions in Kiev may not be credible and should be verified. "The reports ... may not be credible at all. We have regular briefings by our Ministry of Defense which maintains that we are not targeting civilian objects in Ukraine nor the cities as such. So these reports about bombing of Kharkiv or explosions in Kiev should be verified," Nebenzia said when asked what Russia is doing to prevent deaths among civilians in Ukraine amid reports of casualties from alleged shelling of Kharkiv. When asked about video footage depicting a residential building in Kiev hit by an airstrike, Nebenzia said that Russia does not bomb residential areas. "I do not have this information. We saw some footage of buildings partly destroyed. But it was then said and confirmed by our military that was not our missiles, but either a plane of Ukraine or a ... missile that went into that building. We didn't bomb residential areas of Kiev," Nebenzia said.
Biden Says Americans Should Not Be Worried About Nuclear War

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - Americans should not be worried about a nuclear war starting in light of the conflict in Ukraine, President Joe Biden said on Monday.

"No," Biden said when asked if Americans should be worried about a nuclear war. On Sunday, President Vladimir Putin ordered that Russia's deterrence forces be put on high alert.

Pentagon Has Nothing to Confirm Reports of Russia Changing Nuclear Posture - Spokesman

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) – The Pentagon has "nothing to confirm" reports of Russia changing its nuclear posture, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said on Monday.

"On the nuclear question, I have nothing to confirm reports that they have changed their staffing," Kirby said.

Pentagon Says Cannot Rule Out Additional Re-Positioning of US Forces in Europe

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The United States cannot rule out the additional re-positioning of US forces in Europe in response to Russia's military operation in Ukraine, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said on Monday.

"There's no additional requests for allied support that I'm tracking, but obviously this is a dynamic situation. We're in constant touch with our allies and partners, and we'll certainly continue to talk about that. I would not rule out, in coming days, additional re-positioning in Europe as appropriate," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Federal Reserve Needs Bigger Interest Rate Hike in March if Inflation Stubborn - Bostic
WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - US interest rates might have to go up by a half-point percentage in March instead of the widely-expected quarter-percent if inflation remains stubborn, Federal Reserve bank of Atlanta President Raphael Bostic said on Monday. "If month-over-month inflation trends down, I am comfortable with 25 basis-points," Bostic said, referring to the quarter-percentage point increase forecast for the Federal Reserve’s first expected interest rate hike in two years in March. However, Bostic added that if inflation "persists at elevated levels, I am going to have to look at a 50 bps move for March." The Fed slashed US interest rates to nearly zero after the coronavirus outbreak in March 2020 and kept them there to enable economic recovery. After contracting 3.5% in 2020 from disruptions forced by the COVID-19 measures, the US economy expanded by 5.7% in 2021, growing at its fastest pace since 1982. But inflation grew even more. The Personal Consumption Expenditure Index, a US inflation indicator closely followed by the Fed, rose by 5.8% in the year to December and 6.1% in the 12 months to January. Both readings also indicated the fastest growth since 1982. The US central bank could raise rates by a maximum seven times this year with hikes of as much as a quarter- to half-percentage point at each round, economists have said.

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US Has No Deconfliction Mechanism With Russia for Ukraine, Exploring Options - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The United States is exploring options to establish a deconfliction mechanism with Russia given the ongoing security situation in Ukraine although nothing has been created yet, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said on Monday during a press briefing. "There is no deconfliction mechanism in place right now, but certainly we understand the importance of deconfliction, particularly now that the airspace over Ukraine is contested, and some of the airspace butts right up against NATO territory. And we’re exploring options, should there be a deconfliction mechanism, what would that look like, how would that be run. We’re exploring those options," Kirby said. There is no indication from Russia that they would be interested in exploring those options, Kirby added.

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US to Calibrate Russia Sanctions in Both Directions Depending on Its Actions - State Dept.
WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The United States is ready to escalate the Russia sanctions or calibrate them in the other direction if the measures change Moscow's behavior, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday. "These [sanctions] measures would be calibrated accordingly. If that does not happen, if Russia continues to escalate, these measures will be calibrated accordingly. We are prepared to escalate further. We are also prepared to calibrate in the other direction, if these measures have their intended effect," Price said during a press briefing.

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US Sees No Threats From Russia That Would Invoke Article 5 of NATO Treaty - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The United States is seeing no threats from Russia that would invoke Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said on Monday. "We are not," Kirby told reporters, when asked about seeing threats that would invoke Article 5.

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US Still Backs Diplomacy as Only Responsible Way to End Ukraine Conflict - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The US government continues to support diplomacy as the only responsible way to end the Ukraine conflict, Department of State spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday. "We still believe in diplomacy," Price told reporters. "We know that diplomacy is the only responsible, sustainable means by which to end this conflict. It is precisely why we are supporting our Ukrainian partners as they engage in those talks ... [I]f we need to engage with the Russian Federation, we have the ability to do so ourselves whether it is through the State Department, whether it is through the Defense Department, whether it is through any other channel we have with the Russian Federation."

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State Dept. Says Had Recent Engagements With Russia About US Embassy Operations

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The United States had recent engagements with Russia about US embassy operations in Moscow, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.
"I couldn't speak to whether there has been direct contact within the past 24 hours but there has been recent engagement on areas that are in our national interest and that includes issues ... of our staffing presence in Moscow," Price said during a press briefing when asked if there has been engagement between the United States and Russia in the last 24 hours.

US Declarers 12 Russian Diplomats From Mission to UN Personae Non Gratae - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, February 28 (Sputnik) - Washington has declared 12 diplomats from Russia's Permanent Mission to the United Nations personae non gratae and demanded that they leave by March 7, Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Monday.

"Just received information that the US authorities have undertaken another hostile action against the Russian Mission to the United Nations, grossly violating their commitments on the [UN-US] Host Country Agreement that they undertook, telling us that they're announcing 12 people from the personnel of the Russian Mission personae non gratae, and demanding that they leave by the 7th of March," Nebenzia said.

US Has No Change to Nuclear Posture, at This Time Does Not See There's Need - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The United States has no change to its nuclear posture and at this time it believes there is no need to change it, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

Blinken Thanks Turkish Foreign Minster for Maintaining Montreux Convention - State Dept.
WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke by telephone with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and expressed the United States' appreciation for continuing to implement the Montreux Convention, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"Secretary Blinken expressed his appreciation for Turkey's continued implementation of the Montreux Convention and Foreign Minister Cavusoglu's recent comments on this issue," Price said in a readout of the call.

The Montreux Convention was adopted in 1936 to ensure the freedom of passage through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits for merchant ships, both in times of peace and war. The document limits the period warships of non-Black Sea states may stay in to three weeks. In emergency situations, Turkey has the right to prohibit or restrict the passage of military ships through the straits.

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US State of Pennsylvania Orders All Russian-Made Products Banned - Order

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The US state of Pennsylvania has ordered all Russian-made products, including wines and vodka, removed from the shelves of all stores stocking and selling them, the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board (PLCB) announced on Monday.

"The PLCB [has] instructed all Fine Wine and Good Spirits stores and licensee service centers to remove Russian-made products from shelves as a show of solidarity and support for the people of Ukraine," the announcement said.

Russian-made special order products are also no longer available, the PLCB said.

"Although some producers give their vodkas Russian-themed monikers and marketing because many consumers often associate vodka with Russia, few products carried by Fine Wine & Good Spirits are actually sourced from Russia," the PLCB added.

In fact, only two products stocked in stores - Russian Standard and Ustianochka 80-proof vodkas - and about a half-dozen Special Order brands come from Russia, according to the PLCB.

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Airbnb Fund Announces new Plans to House 100,000 Ukrainian Refugees - Statement

WASHINGTON, February 28, (Sputnik) - The Airbnb housing charity for refugees has announced new plans to temporarily provide housing for up to 100,000 refugees fleeing the Ukraine conflict, the organization said in a news release on Monday.
“Airbnb.org and Airbnb are announcing that Airbnb.org will offer free, short-term housing to up to 100,000 refugees fleeing Ukraine,” the release said. “These stays will be funded by Airbnb, donors to the Airbnb.org Refugee Fund, and the generosity of hosts through Airbnb.org.”

Airbnb is a nonprofit organization dedicated to facilitating temporary stays for people in times of crisis around the world. It was created in 2007 and has since grown to 4 million hosts who have welcomed more than 1 billion guest arrivals across over 220 countries and regions.

“Also on Monday, Airbnb co-founder and CEO Brian Chesky, Airbnb co-founder and Airbnb.org Chairman Joe Gebbia and Chief Strategy Officer and co-founder Nathan Blecharczyk sent letters to leaders across Europe, starting with Poland, Germany, Hungary and Romania, offering support,” the release said.

Airbnb.org also said it was committed to working closely with governments to best support the specific needs in each country, including by providing longer-term stays. Last week, the organization announced that it had provided housing to 21,300 Afghan refugees.

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March 30 Launch Planned for First Axiom Crew Mission to Space Station - NASA Official

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - Axiom's first private sector manned mission to the International Space Station (ISS) carrying 26 new scientific experiments is on schedule to blast off in a month's time on March 30, NASA Human Exploration and Operations Mission Directorate Associate Administrator Kathy Leuders said on Monday.

"We have been working on this for a while," Leuders told a podcast press conference.

“Launching [is on schedule] for March 30 and the spacecraft will reach the International Space Station (ISS) and dock on March 31.”

The space mission, with an international crew of four, will carry 26 scientific experiments as part of its payload to be performed on the ISS, Leuders said.

“This is a historic mission: This is the first completely private mission to the ISS. We are very excited. This is our very first mission [as a company for NASA. Axiom President Michael Suffredini said. Axiom had already contracted a further three missions to carry out on behalf of NASA to the ISS, Leuders added.

The four crew members will be commanded by veteran Spanish-American astronaut Michael Lopez-Alegria. They will be carried on a SpaceX Dragon spacecraft launched on top of a Falcon 9 rocket, Axiom and NASA officials told the press conference.

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Twitter to Label Share Links to Russian State-Affiliated Media Websites
WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The Social media company Twitter is planning to introduce special labeling system for share links associated with Russian state-affiliated media websites in the coming week, Site Integrity at Twitter head Yoel Roth said on Monday.

"Today, we're adding labels to Tweets that share links to Russian state-affiliated media websites and are taking steps to significantly reduce the circulation of this content on Twitter. We'll roll out these labels to other state-affiliated media outlets in the coming weeks," Roth said in a tweet. The new labels will say - "This Tweet links to a Russia state-affiliated media website" - and will be placed on top of a link in a tweet.

The move comes on amid Russia's special operation to demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine, responding to calls from the Donetska and Luhanska people's republics for help in countering intensifying aggression of Ukrainian troops.

On Sunday, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen announced the European Union’s intention to ban state-owned Russian media outlets, including RT, Sputnik and their subsidiaries, as part of new sanctions imposed on Russia. According to von der Leyen, the European Commission is currently developing necessary tools to take the measure.

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Biden Concludes Call With US Allies on Russia After Over 1 Hour - White House

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden began his scheduled call with US allies to discuss Russia's ongoing special operation in Ukraine shortly after 11:30 a.m. EST and concluded it before 1:00 p.m., the White House said on Monday.

"President Biden’s call with Allies and partners to discuss Russia’s unprovoked war on Ukraine began at 11:32 EST," the White House said in a pool report. "President Biden’s secure call with Allies and partners concluded at 12:54 EST."

Participants of the call included NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, French President Emmanuel Macron, Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida and others, the White House said.

Western nations have increased defense coordination and sanctions pressure on Russia after it launched a special operation in Ukraine following requests for assistance from the Donetska and Luhanska people's republics to defend from intensifying attacks from Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation solely targets the military infrastructure of Ukraine and emphasized that the civilian population is not in danger. Moscow says it has no plans to occupy Ukraine and the purpose of its operation is to demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine.

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US Tech Exchange Nasdaq Temporarily Halts Trading in Russian Stocks - Spokesman
NEW YORK, February 28 (Sputnik) - The US technology stocks exchange Nasdaq has temporarily halted trading in Russian stocks following the sanctions imposed on Russia over the Ukraine crisis, exchange spokesman Peter Gau said Monday. "The Trade Halts are [for the] companies listed below," Gau said in an email to Sputnik that listed six stocks altogether. The affected stocks were two issues of Nexters Inc, with the tickers GDEVW and GDEV; HeadHunter Group PLC ADS (HHR); Ozon Holdings PLC (OZON); Qiwi plc ADR (QIWI) and Yandex N.V. (YNDX).

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Canada’s Top Diplomat Says Heading to Poland on Tuesday to Discuss Ukrainian Refugees

TORONTO, February 28 (Sputnik) - Canada's Foreign Minister Melanie Joly on Monday announced that she will visit Poland to discuss the influx of displaced Ukrainians amid a Russian military operation. "I’m heading to Poland [on Tuesday] to be able to reach out and meet with my colleague on this [refugee] issue," Joly told a news conference. Canada’s top diplomat added that "Ukrainians seeking refugee have a place to stay in Canada." The United Nations estimates that more than 500,000 refugees have fled from Ukraine into neighboring countries since the start of Russia’s military operation. On February 24, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine, responding to calls from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to help defend against intensified attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation was solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and emphasized that the civilian population is not in danger.

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Trump Says 'Would Be No NATO' If Not for Him, He Provided Ukraine With Javelins

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump said on Monday that there would be no NATO alliance without his actions while in office, and highlighted his administration’s delivery of Javelin anti-tank missiles to Ukraine. "There would be no NATO if I didn't act strongly and swiftly. Also, it was me that got Ukraine the very effective anti-tank busters (Javelins) when the previous Administration was sending blankets," Trump said in a statement. Trump also mentioned his efforts to get "delinquent" NATO members to pay their dues to the alliance, which amounted to hundreds of billions of dollars.
The statement came amid Russia's military operation in Ukraine, which was launched in response to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics against the aggression of Ukrainian forces. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only, stressing that the civilian population is not in danger. The operation prompted troop movements and heightened readiness by NATO and allied forces. US President Joe Biden has pledged not to send American troops to fight in Ukraine, but reaffirmed the country's commitment to protecting NATO territory.

UN Warns of Impending 'Catastrophe' Due to Inaction on Climate Change - Report

UNITED NATIONS, February 28 (Sputnik) - A new report warns that the world must urgently move to stave off a melange of devastating problems caused by global warming and climate change, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) said in a report on Monday.
"The scientific evidence is unequivocal: climate change is a threat to human well-being and the health of the planet," IPCC Working Group II co-Chair Hans-Otto Portner said in a statement on the report. "Any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure a livable future."

The IPCC Working Group of 270 scientists from 67 countries said they agree with the research that indicates the consequences of inaction on environmental issues will ratchet up global warming, severe food and water insecurity, more frequent floods, heat waves and drought. The scientists warned that a significant number of people around the world will be affected by the forecast climate changes, the statement said.

The report points out that climate, ecosystems, biodiversity and human beings are inexorably linked and that damage to one segment affects all, the statement said.

The scientists expressed concern that climate change is triggering "non-climatic global trends" such as "biodiversity loss, overall unsustainable consumption of natural resources, land and ecosystem degradation, rapid urbanization, human demographic shifts, social and economic inequalities and a pandemic," the statement added.

The report said the most vulnerable are the low-income communities, islands and locales in low-lying areas at risk of rising sea levels and they being least able to cope will be the hardest hit, according to the statement.

Canadian Cable Companies Pull Russian Broadcaster RT From Airwaves - Minister

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TORONTO, February 28 (Sputnik) - Major Canadian cable companies are pulling yet the Russian broadcaster RT from their television packages, Pablo Rodriguez, Minister of Canadian Heritage, said on Monday.

"I applaud TELUS for joining Canadian broadcasters in giving RT the boot. Canadians stand with the people of Ukraine," Rodriguez said in a statement via Twitter after Telus, one of Canada's big three telecommunications companies, announced it would no longer carry the broadcaster.

Bell Canada, Rogers Communications and Shaw Communications have also removed RT from their lineup.

Earlier, Rodriguez said Canada is looking at all options to address the presence of the Russian broadcaster in Canada.

In the early hours of February 24, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine, responding to calls from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics for help against intensified attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation was solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure, emphasizing that the civilian population is not in danger.

A number of jurisdictions, including the European Commission, have decided to censor Russian media and affiliated journalists.

RT Editor-in-Chief Margarita Simonyan said the Western countries always wanted to get rid of Russian media because they provided balanced reporting and are using Russia's special operation in Ukraine as an excuse to do so.

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UNITED NATIONS, February 28 (Sputnik) - Russia did not begin hostilities in Ukraine and is actually seeking to end the war unleashed by Kiev against the residents of Donbas, Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Monday.

"I wish to state that the Russian Federation did not begin these hostilities. That hostilities were unleashed by Ukraine against its own residents, the residents of Donbas ... Russia is seeking to end this war," Nebenzia told a special emergency meeting of the UN General Assembly.

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UNITED NATIONS, February 28 (Sputnik) - With its special military operation in Ukraine, Russia is exercising its right to self-defense against a "regime" seeking to gain access to nuclear weapons, Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Monday.
"During the special military operation, Russia has been exercising its right to self defense from a regime that had been striving to gain access to nuclear weapons," Nebenzia told an emergency meeting of the UN General Assembly.

Guterres Calls Russian Decision to Put Nuclear Forces on High Alert 'Chilling Development'

UNITED NATIONS, February 28 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres during a UN General Assembly emergency session on Monday called Russia's decision to put nuclear forces on high alert a "chilling development."

On Sunday, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and the Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov to put the deterrence forces of the Russian army to a special mode of combat duty.

"We are facing a tragedy for Ukraine, but also a major regional crisis with potentially disastrous implications for us all," Guterres said. "Yesterday, Russian nuclear forces were put on high alert. This is a chilling development. The mere idea of a nuclear conflict is simply inconceivable. Nothing can justify the use of nuclear weapons."

Last Thursday, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine, acting in response to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics against the intensifying aggression of Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation was targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only, stressing that the civilian population is not in danger.

Blinken to Give Remarks at UN Human Rights Council on Threat Posed by Russia - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will deliver remarks to the UN Human Rights Council on the alleged threat posed by Russia due to its ongoing special operation in Ukraine, State spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"On March 1, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken will deliver remarks to the assembled Council and will use that opportunity to spell out clearly the threat posed by Russia, while noting that Ukraine is far from the only part of the world where the Council's attention is needed," Price said in a statement.

The events in Ukraine underscore the importance of a credible body dedicated to documenting violations and abuses of human rights, the statement said.

The United States' return to the UN Human Rights Council reflects the centrality of human rights to the Biden administration's foreign policy, the statement added.
US Trade Deficit Jumps 7% in January to Record High of Nearly $108Bln - Commerce Dept.

WASHINGTON, Feb 28 (Sputnik) - The US trade deficit in goods jumped 7% in January to a record high of almost $108 billion, the Commerce Department reported Monday as businesses increased imports to stock up on supplies amid continued supply chain strains caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

"The international trade deficit was $107.6 billion in January, up $7.2 billion from $100.5 billion in December," the department said in a news release.

December was already a record high for the trade deficit, which has been growing for months due to supply chains severely stretched by the pandemic.

US import of goods rose 1.8% in January to $262 billion, a record by itself, the data issued Monday showed.

Exports of US-manufactured goods, in contrast, fell 1.8% to $154.8 billion in January.

The US trade deficit has been trending higher in recent years due to the relatively better performance of the American economy versus that of its trading partners, which encouraged the country to import more. The outbreak of the COVID in March 2020 and the greater divergence in US recovery versus the world has caused the deficit to explode over the past year.

After contracting 3.5% in 2020 from disruptions forced by the pandemic, the economy rebounded by 5.7% in 2021 for its fastest growth in four decades.

Canada Prohibits Transactions With Russian Central Bank - Trudeau
(Updates with background in para 4)
TORONTO, February 28 (Sputnik) - Ottawa is issuing a ban on engagements between Canadian financial institutions and the Russian Central Bank in response to Russia's special operation in Ukraine, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Monday.

"Effective immediately, all Canadian financial institutions are prohibited from engaging in transactions with the Russian Central Bank - eliminating its ability to deploy Russia's international currency reserves and further restricting [Russian President Vladimir] Putin's ability to finance his war of choice," Trudeau said in a statement via Twitter.

In addition, the Canadian government is freezing the assets of Russian sovereign wealth funds and issuing a ban on engagements with the entities.

Last Thursday, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine, responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics against the intensified aggression of Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation was solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and emphasized that the civilian population is not in danger.
Canada Sending Additional $20Mln in Military Aid to Ukraine - Foreign Ministry

TORONTO, February 28 (Sputnik) - Ottawa is sending an additional $20 million in military aid to Ukraine in response to Russia’s special operation in Ukraine, Canada’s Foreign Ministry announced on Monday.

"Melanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Anita Anand, Minister of National Defence, announced that Canada will be sending an additional C$25M [US$20 million] in military aid to support Ukraine in its efforts to retain sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence," Global Affairs Canada said in a statement.

The shipment will include equipment such as helmets, body armor, gas masks and night vision gear, the statement said.

In addition, the Canadian Armed Forces will deploy two tactical transport jets and a crew of 40-50 soldiers to oversee the delivery through NATO in Europe, the statement said.

Previously, the Canadian government had approved lethal military aid to Ukraine in the amount of $6.1 million as well as a loan of up to $393 million amid tensions with Russia.

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Less than Half of Americans Say World Views US Favorably - Poll

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - Slightly less than half of Americans say they believe the world sees the United States in a good light, a new Gallup poll revealed on Monday.

"Just under half, 48%, believe their country rates favorably in the eyes of the world. This is similar to sentiment a year ago (49%) and is the lowest since the first year of Trump’s presidency, when 42% thought the U.S. was viewed favorably," a release on the poll said.

Most Americans said they thought their country used to have a favorable image in the international community over many years, the release said.

"Before 2017, this measure was below 50% only during George W. Bush's second term, and that carried over into a low reading at the start of Obama’s presidency in 2009," the release said.

Only 37% percent of Americans said they are satisfied with the US position in the world, which is well below the 53 percent who thought that in 2020.

The results of the poll did not take into consideration current tensions in Ukraine.
"At the time of that survey, the slight majority of Americans already saw the Russia-Ukraine conflict as a critical threat to US vital interests. That has likely only increased in the days since. How the invasion affects Americans' perceptions of the United States' global status will largely hinge on how they perceive the Biden administration's response," the release said.

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NATO Chief Rules Out No-Fly Zone Over Ukraine

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - NATO is not planning to introduce a no-fly zone over Ukraine or move its troops into the country amid Russia's ongoing military operation, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg told NBC.

On Thursday, Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he had requested during a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron that a no-fly zone be established over Ukraine.

"We have no intentions of moving into Ukraine. Neither on the ground or in the airspace," Stoltenberg said, when asked to comment on the call for a no-fly zone.

"I think we have to understand that it's a brutal conflict that is taking place in Ukraine now. At the same time, we have a responsibility to make sure that this doesn't spiral out of control and escalate even further and becomes a full fledged war in Europe involving NATO allies," he added.

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UNGA President Calls for Immediate Ceasefire in Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS, February 28 (Sputnik) - The president of the UN General Assembly, Abdulla Shahid, called for an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine as he opened an emergency special session on Monday.

"We are all gravely concerned about the fast-deteriorating situation and ongoing military action in Ukraine," Shahid said. "Today, I renew my call for an immediate ceasefire; for all parties to exercise maximum restraint; and for a full return to diplomacy and dialogue."

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