China Accuses US Taiwan Delegation of Undermining ‘Peace, Stability’, Says Support Efforts 'In Vain'

The day after the 50th anniversary of the Shanghai Communique, which outlined a program for peaceful coexistence between China and the US and the end of US support for Taiwan, Washington sent a new delegation to Taipei to express its support for the island nation. US President Joe Biden has sent a group of former high-ranking security officials on a visit to Taiwan on Tuesday in an effort to demonstrate Washington’s support for the autonomous island. According to Reuters, which broke the news based on reports from anonymous senior administration officials, the delegation includes the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mike Mullen, former Deputy National Security Advisor Meghan O’Sullivan, and Michele Flournoy, a former undersecretary of defense who was once considered Biden’s top pick to head the Pentagon. Two former National Security Council senior directors for Asia, Mike Green and Evan Medeiros, are accompanying them.

The group met with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, Foreign Minister Joseph Wu, Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng, and other senior officials in Taipei.

At a press conference earlier on Tuesday, Taiwanese Premier Su Tseng-chang said the US visit underlines “the importance of Taiwan-US relations,” “Taiwan’s important status,” “the US’ emphasis on regional peace, and its firm support for Taiwan.”

Beijing had few kind words about the visit, as it views Taiwan as a Chinese province in rebellion and thus Washington’s continued support for Taipei as a meddling in Chinese internal affairs. The Taipei government is all that remains of the old Republic of China, which lost the Chinese Civil War to the communists in 1949. On the mainland, the communists founded the People’s Republic of China, but the RoC persisted on Taiwan, which the Red Army could not invade.

“The Chinese people are firmly determined and resolved to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin told reporters on Tuesday.

“The attempt by the US to show support to Taiwan will be in vain, no matter who the US sends. China urges the US to abide by the one-China principle and stipulations in the three China-US joint communiqués, stop all forms of official interactions with Taiwan, and handle Taiwan-related issues in a prudent manner, lest it should further undermine the larger interests of China-US relations and peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait,” Wang added.

The US visit comes just one day after China commemorated the 50th anniversary of the signing of the first of those joint communiqués, the Shanghai Communique, on February 28, 1972. US President Richard Nixon and Chinese leader Mao Zedong signed the joint statement in Shanghai, during the first visit to the PRC by any US leader.

The communique laid out the two nations’ commitment to peaceful coexistence and mutual respect, but also saw Washington move toward ending its diplomatic recognition of Taiwan as
the legitimate Chinese government. However, it took another seven years before the US formally changed that recognition, acknowledging Beijing’s position that Taiwan is part of China, in a second communique in 1979. A third communique, in 1982, included an agreement that the US would move toward ending its military support for Taiwan.

The visit also comes just days after a US warship, the guided-missile destroyer USS Ralph Johnson, sailed *through the Taiwan Strait* - an action Washington routinely performs under the guise of Freedom of Navigation but that many consider to be a demonstration of its contempt for Beijing’s claiming of the strait.

Wang said the “true intention” of the US is “to embolden the ‘Taiwan independence’ forces,” which includes Tsai’s pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP).

“If the US tries to intimidate and pressure China in this way, then we have this stern warning: the so-called military deterrence will be reduced to scrap iron when facing the steely great wall of the 1.4 billion Chinese people,” the spokesperson also said.

It also comes amid a military operation by Russia in Ukraine, where Moscow says it is chasing down neo-Nazi forces responsible for years of war against the Russian-speaking population of the Donbass region. The operation was preceded by Moscow’s recognition of the Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics in the Donbass, and includes the demands that Ukraine forswear membership in NATO, as it would create according to Moscow an intolerable and existential threat to the Russian Federation.

Following Russian President Vladimir Putin’s recognition of the Donbass republics, former US President Donald Trump predicted that China would “go after Taiwan” next - but added that when he was in the White House, neither country would have made such a move.

Last month, Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping met in Beijing and issued a joint statement on the two nations’ friendship, predicting a “redistribution of power in the world” away from the US and Western Europe and toward multipolarity. However, *the New York Times*, the United States’ “paper of record,” denounced the statement as “A New Axis,” claiming the China-Russia relationship aimed to “make the world safe for dictatorship” and comparing it to the Hitlerite alliance between fascist forces that immediately preceded World War II.

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US Stocks Fall by 597 Points as Oil Prices Skyrocket

Indices at the New York Stock Exchange fell sharply on Tuesday, driven down by a sharp spike in petroleum prices caused by Western sanctions against Russia for the latter’s special operation in Ukraine.
At the closing bell on Tuesday, the Dow Jones was down by 597.65 points, a 1.76% decline, bringing it to 33,294.95. The S&P 500 fell by 67.68 points, a 1.55% decline, putting it at 4,306.26. The Nasdaq also fell by 1.59%, declining by 218.94 points, to finish at 13,532.46. Crude oil prices crossed $100 a barrel on Tuesday, driven upward by expectations of lost supply from Russia, which has seen its economy targeted by punishing economic sanctions from NATO powers and their allies in recent days. Russia is the world's largest exporter of fossil fuel products and the second-largest exporter of crude oil, after Saudi Arabia. That price spike came despite a release of 30 million barrels from the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve by US President Joe Biden. On Tuesday, White House National Economic Council Deputy Director Bharat Ramamurti leaned on US oil producers to increase production. The prices of other major Russian export commodities also spiked on Tuesday, including wheat futures, which hit the maximum 5.4% increase allowed by the Chicago Board of Trade, reaching $9.84 a bushel. According to CNBC, that is its highest price since 2008. Other economic forces are also at play as US investors remain wary of rising inflation and the Federal Reserve's anticipated response of increasing interest rates. The price of gold rose by 1.9% on Tuesday, and the yield on the 10-year US Treasury note fell to 1.726% on Tuesday from 1.836% a day prior, due to investors expecting a weak response from the Fed, according to the Wall Street Journal.

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CDC Estimates 140 Million Actual US Covid Cases, Almost Double Reported Amount

A recent study by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has found that more than three in five Americans have been infected by SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19 - nearly twice the officially reported number. The information comes from the federal health agency's infection-induced antibody seroprevalence surveys, which are based on blood tests collected across the country. The most recent update was posted on February 25, but only includes data through late January 2022, when the US was averaging about half a million new COVID-19 cases per day, indicating that the number is likely even higher. According to estimates based on those test results, a shocking 140 million Americans have had COVID-19, amounting to 43% of the US population. Moreover, 58% of children under the age of 17 showed SARS-CoV-2 antibodies, meaning a majority of US adolescents have gotten the disease. These numbers contrast sharply with official case numbers, which are based on tallied positive COVID-19 tests. According to that data pool, the US has seen just 78.7 million cases of the highly infectious respiratory virus. However, the data gets even more interesting. Infection rates decline in older age cohorts, with just 37% of those between the ages of 50 and 64 having had the virus, as opposed to 23% in those over the age of 65.
Together, those age cohorts account for 92% of all COVID-19 deaths in the United States, despite their lower infection rates: people between the ages of 50 and 64 accounting for 18.5% of deaths and those over 65 accounting for 73.5% of deaths.

Earlier this month, the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington calculated that 73% of the US population was immune to the Omicron variant of COVID-19, a highly infectious version of the already-infectious virus that is responsible for the latest and worst outbreak in the US. They predicted that by March, that number could be 80%.

A reported 945,688 Americans have died of COVID-19, according to CDC data, but that number is also a significant underestimate. A recent study published in The Economist found that worldwide excess mortality during the pandemic is between two and four times that of the 5.5 million officially recorded deaths.

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‘Thinking for You’: Experts Denounce EU For Silencing Russian Media With ‘Disinformation’ Label

On Monday, Twitter added new labels to tweets by Russian journalists as well as a warning against posts linked to Russian media outlets. Sputnik denounced the move as “a witch hunt and a direct persecution of our journalists.”

After European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on Sunday called for Russian news outlets Sputnik and RT to be banned from the EU for spreading “toxic and harmful disinformation in Europe,” Google and Facebook quickly moved to block the outlets from their platforms, including on Instagram and YouTube.

"[W]e will ban in the EU the Kremlin's media machine. The state-owned Russia Today and Sputnik, as well as their subsidiaries, will no longer be able to spread their lies to justify Putin's war and to sow division in our union," von der Leyen said.

In response, Sputnik quipped that the political bloc “not stop at half measures and just ban the Internet outright.”

While Western crackdowns on Russian media outlets for reporting on events and perspectives in a different way are nothing new, the latest drive for an outright ban has come after Moscow launched its “neutralization” military operation in Ukraine on Thursday. The military action aims to stop an eight-year war in the Donbass, where Ukrainian military assets and reported neo-Nazi “voluntary battalions” integrated into its ranks have waged war since 2014 against two Russian-speaking regions that are now recognized as sovereign states. Moscow recognized the two republics for the first time, just last month.

Sputnik spoke with several media experts about the censorship drive and what it means in the context of the West's values of freedom of speech and of the press.

‘Patronizing in the Extreme’

"I am, in principle, opposed to censorship, the only exceptions being when the media promote outright hatred and hostility against specific groups," Dr. Ellis Cashmore, a visiting professor of
sociology at the UK’s Aston University and a media analyst and independent commentator, told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"My organizing view of the world is that most people are thoughtful enough and have enough basic intelligence to make up their own minds. I do not underestimate the power of the media in influencing the way we think and form opinions, but I maintain we, as sentient humans, can think as individuals," he said.

"Adults should not be treated as children and should not be protected from information they do not agree with, or even find loathsome. They are able to reject it just as easily as they accept alternatives. I interpret the banning of RT and Sputnik websites in the EU (not in the UK, thankfully) as patronizing in the extreme: the unwritten message is, ‘You are too immature to think for yourselves, so we are doing the thinking for you and preventing you from looking at and listening to material which provides an alternative perspective from the one you are probably receiving from other media.’"

"As for 'European values,' I do not believe there are common values that cover the whole continent. There has for long been a commitment to freedom of speech and freedom of the media; these are often regarded as crucial to the kind of liberal democracy observed in Western Europe. By censoring news, the EU is effectively engaging in a practice it has maintained prevailed in the former Soviet Union for decades," Cashmore said.

He noted that neither US or UK media has been silenced during many of their wars over the last 30 years, although suggesting that the ubiquitousness of social media in 2022 might be a mitigating factor. However, the downside to relying on social media instead of respected news organizations is that it lacks fact-checking, balance, and sophistication.

"Social media, by its nature, is under the control of its users," he said. "So, while I understand the proprietors of social media organizations have promised restrictions, in practice, they will never succeed. Is this such a bad thing? Again, I return to my central concept: people should be allowed to learn as many different perspectives as they wish and then make critical decisions on who and what to believe for themselves. That includes social media - which, frankly, are full of bizarre and wholly implausible material, anyway. People do not, I suspect, depend on social media for truth: they seek raw material that they can process themselves."

"In sum, I think the world’s population should be able to decide for themselves whether Russia is committing an act of atrocity or offering an army of liberation. Like other humans, I follow the news and, like other humans, I can think for myself."

More Sources, Not Less

"The EU move to block RT and Sputnik is a disgrace! It's proof that the defense of Ukraine is not progressive at all, but an effort that will lead to greater and greater coercion and authoritarism throughout the 'democratic' west," said independent journalist, author and writer Daniel Lazare.

"Now more than ever, people need free debate and a free exchange of ideas. Yet that is precisely what people like Ursula von der Leyen are trying to choke off."

"I believe that criticism of [Russian President Vladimir] Putin is more than warranted at this point. But we need to know what the US and NATO did to create this mess in the first place and what needs to be done to bring the conflict to a halt. But we can’t do so if all we have are government mouthpieces like the New York Times and the London Government baying for Russian blood. We need more sources of information and more points of view rather than less," he added.

'European Values Are Buried in the Rush to War With Russia'
“The banning of RT and Sputnik websites by members of NATO in the EU is a concerted effort to ensure conformity of an anti-Russia narrative across all platforms and to deny the EU public the diverging views or context that may lead them to better understand Russian military action in Ukraine,” said Vanessa Beeley, an independent investigative journalist who specializes on the Middle East and Syria.

“This is part and parcel of the rising fascism and totalitarianism in the EU, particularly in France and Germany so it is inevitable that they will come to the aid of Nazi, fascist elements in Ukraine that are under attack from Russia determined to denazify Ukraine. All this while laying claim to ‘democracy’ [and] ‘human rights’ while demonstrating an alarming white supremacism in their reporting on the Ukraine crisis, invoking our sympathy for Ukrainians because they are more ‘like us’ than the ‘brown people’ NATO member states have been bombing, invading, occupying, pillaging and ethnically cleansing for decades,” Beeley noted.

“The NATO member states’ aligned media will of course benefit greatly from the absence of any challenge to their already-proven fake news reports on the Russian military operations,” she added. “Western media outlets are now nothing more than an extension of western intelligence and security agencies, therefore the entire anti-Russia project will profit from the 'disappearance' of objectivity, balance and counter-evidence which will allow people to approach their analysis of events rationally and calmly.”

"Of course no country that has been targeted by NATO member states has had the power to silence western media, one of the most powerful weapons of mass destruction in the imperialist arsenal. What these NATO states are doing to shut down effectively the Russian equivalent of the BBC is an act of war and they are well aware of that,” Beeley asserted.

“Facebook - or rather META - is in full support of the fascist and Nazi complex operating inside Ukraine with support from the West and Israel since before 2012, coming to power in 2014, facilitated by another US-manufactured regime change. It is amplifying 'Ukrainian' far-right propaganda while silencing what is described as 'pro-Russia' discourse. The fact that Russia sits on the UN Security Council seems to have escaped their notice.”

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Anti-Vaccine Mandate Rally Flops as DC-Bound 'People's Convoy' Hits Roadbumps Ahead of Biden's SOTU

By-Evan Craighead

Oklahoma’s Will Rogers Turnpike was briefly shut down on Sunday due to a crash involving two pickup trucks linked to a US trucker convoy en route to Washington, DC, to protest COVID-19 vaccine mandates and related federal public health requirements. The rally was reportedly inspired by a recent Canadian trucker protest against government overreach.

Roadblocks and speedbumps are accompanying some American truckers hoping to protest US President Joe Biden’s pandemic-era mandates by bringing a 'Freedom Convoy' that blocked roads in Canada to Washington, DC, on Tuesday, March 1—the date of Biden’s first State of the Union address.
It appears a number of the convoy hopefuls have had their hopes dashed after learning that their employer is not along for the ride. Penske, a US-based trucking company, reportedly wants no part of the protest, according to Texas resident Jeff Sandberg, who claims he was left sidelined after Penske remotely shut down his rented big rig.

"We're just trying to show what the people who back us believe—and our own beliefs—of what our country needs to go back to," Sandberg told the New York Times last week.

Penske reportedly canceled the rental shortly after Sandberg was featured in the article, which noted that the truck was covered in banners emblazoned with slogans like, "We Will Not Comply!!" and the anti-Biden "Let's Go Brandon" meme.

The People's Convoy, the leading convoy, allegedly raised some $1.5 million by the time it began the trek from Adelanto, California, last week. The group notably used motorways in Missouri, Oklahoma, and Illinois, despite prior warnings from state authorities.

"A planned event designed to impede normal traffic flow is dangerous to the innocent motoring public," said Col. Margaret McGreal, of the Illinois State Police's Division of Patrol. "Those who choose to participate in events that intentionally endanger the public and violate Illinois law will be subject to the enforcement of applicable laws and could potentially be held liable for traffic crashes occurring as a result of their actions."

While a number of stops were planned along the way, organizers of the smaller 'Freedom Convoy USA' had to reroute their jaunt and combine with the People's Convoy after only five big rigs showed up at the convoy's second stop in Las Vegas, Nevada.

This particular group was attempting to make it to Washington, DC, by Biden's March 1 SOTU address to the US public.

When it came time for a 'Stage of Freedom' rally staged for truckers and convoy-affiliated demonstrators, there was a noticeable lack of social media activity from organizer Kyle Sefcik.

Federal and local authorities have been activated in the nation's capital in anticipation of any staged demonstration, but these possible events are not expected to occur within DC proper.

US Capitol Police confirmed on Sunday that, out of an abundance of caution, security fencing erected around the US Capitol building ahead of the January 6 insurrection would be reinstalled prior to the SOTU address. Additionally, the Pentagon has authorized as many as 700 National Guard personnel to assist with Metropolitan Police and Capitol Police affairs in an unarmed capacity.

The demonstrators believe that the US government should immediately cease the national emergency that provides Biden's government with powers to streamline a federal COVID-19 response. Some of the protesters have demanded congressional hearings into the origin of the pandemic.

"I think people are tired of being told what to do and we need our constitutional rights back again," trucker Thomas Traphagan complained to St. Louis outlet Fox 2 Now. "We need the mandates to go away."

Vishal Singh, who documented the days-long inception of the US Freedom Convoy protest, noted American, Canadian, and Trump flags were among the banners flown by protesters. Far-right flags were also seen, including those associated with the Three Percenters, an American and Canadian anti-government militia.

Three Percenters, or Threepers, tout gun rights and back the baseless claim that only 3% of American colonists fought against the British during the American Revolution.
Supporters of the convoy were seen waving flags and cheering on truckers from an overpass in Oklahoma. Oklahoma authorities have linked at least one highway accident to the US trucker convoy.

The original 'Freedom Convoy' demonstration in Ottawa, Canada, ended last month after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau invoked the Emergency Act granting the Canadian government a 30-day period of extraordinary powers, including the authority to prohibit public assembly and movement, as well as the use of identified property. The 1988 law was revoked by Trudeau shortly after riot gear-clad officers arrested nearly 200 people in the streets near the Parliament building. Some protest participants have also seen their bank accounts frozen.

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US Announces Emergency Release of 30 Mln Barrels of Crude Oil From Strategic Petroleum Reserve
By - Evan Craighead

The move follows a joint International Energy Agency (IEA) meeting in which the US and 30 other member-nations agreed on the release of 60 million barrels of oil from the nation's emergency reserves. Sanctions-related disruptions to Russian oil trade have created a market "under threat" that demands global attention, the group says.

US President Joe Biden has authorized Washington to release 30 million barrels of oil from strategic petroleum reserves in an effort to stabilize global energy markets disrupted by the military attacks in Ukraine, US Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm said in a Tuesday evening statement.

"Today, I chaired an emergency ministerial meeting of the [IEA] ... where the United States and 30 other member countries, supported by the European Commission, agreed to collectively release an initial 60 million barrels of oil from strategic petroleum reserves," Granholm wrote. "This decision reflects our common commitment to address significant market and supply disruptions related to President Putin's war on Ukraine."

The IEA reportedly considered releasing up to 70 million barrels of oil during the emergency discussions.

"In line with this decision, President Biden authorized me to make an initial commitment on behalf of the United States of 30 million barrels of oil to be released from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve," Granholm said.

Washington is committed to blocking Putin from "attempts to weaponize energy supplies" and will continue the advancement of "ongoing efforts to accelerate Europe's diversification of energy supplies away from" Moscow, the US energy secretary noted.

The US believes modern-day investment in clean energy is useful in reducing domestic and international dependence on Russian oil and gas, particularly as a means to safeguard energy supplies from "volatile prices and markets."
Granholm noted that the US backs "ambitious" clean energy goals, such as the pursuit of a net-zero emissions economy by 2050—a timeline that has been panned as insufficient by many climate experts.

At the same time, critics of the Biden administration have argued that Washington's progressive climate change policies have contributed to a decline in US energy production and the present energy situation.

The US announcement comes shortly after the Paris-based International Energy Agency (IEA) approved the release via an emergency meeting, amounting to the fourth instance the group has moved to tap into its emergency stockpiles. This particular release comes second to the IEA's release amid the first Gulf War in 1991.

A hike in oil prices, as well as a commercial inventory drought rivaling the lows of 2014, comes as the US, Japan, and European IEA countries seek to send a "unified message" to oil producer Russia regarding what they refer to as its "special operation" in Ukraine.

Crude oil traded above $100 a barrel on Tuesday, with price spikes that represented eight-year highs. Per the Wall Street Journal, prices were sitting at $106 a barrel (up 8.1% that day) following the IEA announcement.

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Biden: US Will Close American Airspace to All Russian Flights, Aircraft

By - Evan Craighead

As the US continues to pursue a pressure campaign against Russia over the situation in Ukraine, foreign policy is expected to be a major topic in US President Joe Biden's first State of the Union address at the US Capitol building at 9 p.m. ET. The 46th president of the US was expected to take a hard stance against Moscow while flexing NATO unity.

Russian flights will no longer be permitted in American air space as the US continues to take aggressive actions to counter Moscow's recent military actions in Ukraine, Biden announced during his SOTU.

"We will join our allies in closing off American air space to all Russian flights—further isolating Russia—and adding an additional squeeze—on their economy," he announced, touting losses in Russian stocks and a decline in value for the Russian ruble.

The US Department of Transportation and Federal Aviation Administration have since specified that orders blocking Russian aircraft and airlines from entering and using American airspace will take effect by the end of Wednesday.

The directive applies to all aircraft owned, certified, operated, registered, chartered, leased, or controlled by (or for the benefit of) any Russian citizen. Passenger and cargo planes are among the flights prohibited, "effectively closing U.S. air space to all Russian commercial air carriers and other Russian civil aircraft," the memo detailed.

"He has no idea what's coming," Biden said of Putin, claiming the Russian economy is "reeling" due to Putin alone.
The US president clarified that American forces will not be engaging in armed conflict within Ukraine, as they are stationed in Europe to provide assistance to NATO allies. US forces would only take up arms if NATO allies were attacked by Russian forces pushing further west, Biden said.

Biden also took time to publicly announce that the US and its allies have moved to release 60 million barrels of crude oil from the strategic petroleum reserves—with the US committing to 30 million barrels.

In an uncommon move, Biden’s opening was heavily focused on foreign policy, including repeated praise of US allies and other strategic partners that have moved to place sanctions on Russia.

"Together, along with our allies, we are right now enforcing powerful economic sanctions," he said, highlighting the imposition of new restrictions on Russia by the European Union, the UK, Canada, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Switzerland, New Zealand.

The forthcoming US air space restrictions follow similar measures taken by European and Canadian authorities. The EU decision came amid a slew of other penalties against Russia, including the purchase and delivery of weapons to forces in Ukraine.

"Our airspace will be closed to every Russian plane—and that includes the private jets of oligarchs,” European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Sunday.

Moscow responded to the move by announcing retaliatory airspace prohibitions against western-based air carriers earlier this week.

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Anti-Russia & Anti-Progressive: Biden Praises NATO, Counters Democrats in State of the Union Address
By -- Evan Craighead

Amid uncertainty regarding the ongoing situation in Ukraine, US President Joe Biden's first State of the Union address focused less on domestic unity and stalled legislation on key issues — like voting rights — and more on praising NATO allies and other strategic partners that have joined Washington in sanctioning Moscow and backing Kiev’s forces.

Biden opened his address by recognising Oksana Markarova, Ukraine’s ambassador to the US since February 2021. Audience members in the chamber gave the flag-bearing diplomat a standing ovation as she appeared to get emotional.

First Lady Dr Jill Biden invited Markarova to the exclusive national address. The diplomat previously served as Ukraine’s finance minister.

While in Washington, DC, Markarova notably requested additional weapons and humanitarian aid for the country, noting that Kiev expects to run out of FIM-92 Stinger air defence missiles and FGM-148 Javelin anti-tank missiles.

President Putin, Oligarchs, and the Kremlin
Claiming that Russian military movements were "premeditated and unprovoked", the US president argued that Putin and the Kremlin "rejected" attempts at diplomacy, assuming the West and NATO would not react.

On Saturday, the Kremlin noted that the Russian president had temporarily halted military forces operating in Ukraine on Friday due to expected negotiations between Moscow and Kiev. The pause lasted from Friday to Saturday afternoon, with the Ukrainian leadership failing to come to the table, according to Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov.

"He thought he could divide us here at home", Biden proclaimed, loosely referring to claims of Moscow interfering in US elections.

Biden also announced that, beginning Wednesday night, Russian flights will no longer be permitted in American airspace. The move follows similar actions by the EU and Canada. The US Department of Defence has authorised as many as 700 National Guard personnel to assist with Metropolitan Police and Capitol Police affairs in an unarmed capacity.

Federal, state, and local authorities were notably working on a "security plan to prevent any disruption to the important work of Congress" in the days leading up to the national address, per Capitol Police Chief Tom Manger.

COVID-19

Biden's public health messaging may have sounded eerily familiar to the pandemic-era arguments of small-government conservatives and pro-Trump Republicans who opposed government overreach and federal mandates intended to mitigate the spread of the contagious disease.

"We've reached a new moment in the fight against COVID-19", he said, noting that the disease should not be a partisan dividing line.

He went on to declare that children "need" to get back into public classrooms, despite US officials having yet to approve a COVID-19 vaccine for that particular age group.

Furthermore, the push for in-person learning alongside a novel contagious disease that lacks longitudinal evidence could result in long-term respiratory health effects for children.

In addition to the anticipated naming of the US Department of Justice's chief prosecutor for pandemic-related fraud claims, the US president touted to a maskless crowd that Americans can finally unite after "COVID-19 kept us apart".

Voting Rights & 'Defund the Police'

After lauding American allies for rallying against Russia, the US president appeared to then turn his sights to progressive members of his own Democratic Party, which controls both of Congress' legislative chambers.

Since the police killing of George Floyd on 25 May 2020, many protesters organising against police brutality and the misdirection of community funds have rallied behind the so-called "Defund the Police" movement, which, in most cases, refers to the idea of redirecting a portion of exorbitant police budgets to local community-based solutions that function without armed individuals.

While Biden and his administration are aware of the actual meaning behind the polarising protest slogan, he flat-out rejected the notion, and instead called for additional police funding. "We should all agree the answer is not to defund the police", Biden claimed. "It's to fund the police".
"Let's come together and protect our communities, restore trust, and hold law enforcement accountable", Biden said, arguing that the decision is not about choosing "between safety and equal justice".

He did note that the American Rescue Plan includes $350 billion that "cities, states, and counties can use to hire more police and invest in more proven strategy".

Meanwhile, the voting rights bill intended to expand access to the ballot box and make US elections both inclusive and safer was only briefly mentioned, despite the topic being a major issue ahead of a competitive midterm election season.

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World Monument's Watch Releases Biennial List of Endangered Historical Sites Around the Globe
By - Mary Manley

On Monday, the World Monuments Watch released their biennial list of 25 culturally significant landmarks and sites that are considered endangered. A project belonging to the World Monuments Fund (WMF), the World Monuments Watch highlights and aids in the conservation of historical cultural sites that are severely threatened.

Since 1965, the WMF has aided over 700 sites in 112 different countries, according to their website. Some of these sites include Chile's Easter Island, Iraq's Mosul Cultural Museum, and Cambodia's Angkor Archeological Park. The independent organization notes that most of the sites are critically endangered due to climate change, imbalance tourism, and even terrorism.

Headquartered in New York City, the organization's list for 2022 includes 25 sites including the Hitis, or Water Fountains of the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal, considered to be one of the greatest technological achievements of the Kathmandu Valley civilization. These historical drinking fountains date back to 550 AD.

In the last two decades, some of the intricately carved spouts in Hitis have either gone dry or been lost. The spouts, which provide public drinking water, are made of various materials, typically stone, and are carved into the legendary creatures Hitimanga or Makara, from Hindu mythology.

The agency is hoping to protect this network of water fountains, as well as improve the management of their aquifers.

Additionally, the royal pyramids of the ancient Kingdom of Kush, in Nuri, Sudan are included in WMF's 2022 list. The ancient African pyramids are found throughout the Nile valley, and have largely been forgotten due to their competition with the much larger pyramids in Giza, Egypt, which stand at 455 feet tall. The endangered Nubian pyramids are much smaller, between 30 and 100 feet tall.

WMF says that in order for tourists to enjoy these archaeological treasures, conservationists have to address the sand which is eroding the surfaces of the sandstone structures, as well as rising groundwaters that have flooded the burial chambers beneath the pyramids. The reason
for this is unknown to the organization, whose best guesses are irrigation for agricultural purposes as well as climate change.

"This year’s Watch demonstrates that heritage preservation can offer innovative solutions to contemporary global challenges," said Bénédicte de Montlaur, president and CEO of the WMF. "We urge the world to stand with communities and save these places of extraordinary cultural significance. Heritage sites are an incredible resource for addressing larger issues facing society as well as local needs of recognition, access, participation, and economic opportunity." The full list of endangered historical sites is available on the organization’s website.

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New Zealand Woman Forced to Sell Home After Conman Nightmare Takes Thousands From Her
By - Mary Manley

Jordan Alexander was left heartbroken, as well as fiscally broken, after her initially blazing but long-distance romance came to a crashing end. The mother of two was forced to sell her home after a so-called ‘Tinder Swindler’ conned her out of $100,650.

The conman posed as a wealthy railway consultant named ‘James’. Jordan Alexander was moved by the sad but ultimately baseless tale that James told her, claiming that he was a widower who was raising a teenage son.

Alexander was touched, thinking the supposed fellow single parent had pure intentions. ‘James’ told Alexander he had been single since his wife had died from cancer.

“It wasn’t love at first sight, but he was attractive in a distinguished way. I told myself to be open-minded if this online dating thing has to work,” the 54 year-old told 7Life. She had first signed up for the dating site in 2012.

“He was raising his teenage son, ‘Michael’, similar in age to my girls at the time and he thought the world of him,” she added. “He seemed very keen to integrate our families, family was always important to him.”

‘James’ showered Alexander with attention, fed her lies about being a devoted dad, and impressed her with a successful job.

“His accent was very exotic, I couldn’t place it,” said Jordan. “It was like a cross between a Spanish and South African accent with odd words coming out now and again.”

A seasoned scammer, ‘James’ first worked to build Alexander’s trust. Then he asked the salon owner for large sums of money. First, for $10,065 so he could buy work supplies. Jordan sent her love connection the money and he quickly reimbursed her.

Soon after, ‘James’ asked his unaware money pot for another $26,842. That amount was returned to her just a few days later.

To prove to Alexander that he was a legitimate millionaire, ‘James’ granted her access to his personal bank accounts where she saw his fortune of AUD $12,218,664, in black and white, according to Alexander, who was impressed by how much her new beau trusted her.
“It was odd, especially since he had so much money in there, but he didn’t seem like he had anything to hide.”
Things came to a head, however, when James continued to ask for more and more money from Alexander, causing her to take out loans against her house to aid her new and as yet-unmet boyfriend.
Finally, the two planned to meet in Hawaii. But he never showed. He texted her various bizarre excuses as a reason for the delay, saying a ‘job in Sri Lanka’ was holding him up.
“I need to get to know you more than words on a page. I cannot make promises and commitments to someone that I have never met. I have unanswered questions that I need answers to. We started as a fairy tale – I am such a hopeless romantic – I grew intoxicated by your words.” Alexander sent him the text when she learned her flame wouldn’t show.
He sent her texts trying to distract her with more false promises, telling her he loved her and that he would make it up to her, and to “give him some more time to make things right.”
He never showed, and they never met. What did happen, however, was that Alexander had previously handed over some $140,000 to ‘James’. With her day spa business, the single mom was forced to sell her family home to the banks that had previously lent her the money to give to the scammer.
“I had to deal with my kids, the spa staff and work commitments. I didn’t really focus on the debt and how I would repay it,” Alexander admitted.
Two years later, when Alexander was diagnosed with uterine cancer, she would tell her family the horrifying story, and now she has decided to write a book in order to bring attention to catfishing and dating scams. The experience is eerily similar to the Tinder Swindler, Shimon Hayut, who is currently being sued by the Leviev family whom he claimed to be a member of.
“It is really easy to throw stones and be judgmental when you hear about romance scams,” Alexander said. “I think The Tinder Swindler’ starts the conversation about how elaborate these scammers are. If we start talking about scams with our friends, families and work colleagues, it shines a light on the issue.”

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Whoops! Biden Stumbles, Confuses 'Iranian' With 'Ukrainian' in First SOTU Address
By - Mary Manley

During his first State of the Union address, US President Joe Biden, in a move he is notorious for, fumbled his words, confusing "Iranian" for "Ukrainian".
The remarks came as the American commander-in-chief spent the first roughly 11 minutes of his speech dedicated to US foreign policy, specifically the ongoing Ukrainian crisis.
"Putin may circle Kiev with tanks, but he'll never gain the hearts and souls of the Iranian people," US President Joe Biden said during his first State of the Union address on Tuesday.
"He'll never extinguish their love of freedom, and he will never weaken the resolve of the free world." Biden meant, of course, to say "Ukrainian" and not "Iranian".
In a video cutaway during the event, US Vice President Kamala Harris is seen making a slightly confused expression in response to the verbal gaffe, and applause in the House Chamber was scattered. The stumble was not missed by netizens tuned into the late night speech - not by a long shot. Twitter user @DevinDrover responded to the mix-up, writing, "An unfortunate slip-up, which I'm sure everyone will jump on, but the point itself is right on — people should do better than to try to take advantage of this tragedy to score domestic political points." Others were not as forgiving, saying "I really doubt if the president can tell the difference between Iran and Ukraine." Or betting that the President would make a gaffe, as he has often done in the past.

The US president has made many amusing gaffes in his storied career, going so far as to refer to himself in 2018 as a "gaffe machine." Incidentally, the speech came shortly after a new poll by ABC News/The Washington Post saw that more than half of surveyed Americans were questioning the president's "mental sharpness," and unsure if he is fit to lead the nation.

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'It Was So Scary': Courteney Cox Sold Her Los Angeles House Because It Was Haunted
By - Mary Manley

Courteney Cox, promoting her upcoming horror-comedy TV series, shared a chilling ghost story on Monday during an episode of "Jimmy Kimmel Live". Kimmel asked the "Friends" star if she’s ever had a supernatural experience, prompting her to share a story of a haunted Los Angeles house in which she formerly lived.

The haunted house in question lies in the notorious Laurel Canyon, in Los Angeles, and previously belonged to the 1950s burlesque performer, Gypsy Rose Lee, who died in 1970 from lung cancer. The house was also owned by singer-songwriter Carole King, who warned Cox about the ghost.

King visited Cox at one point and tried to warn her about her new home. "She said there had been a divorce that was really ugly, and there was a ghost in the house," the 57 year-old said. "And I was like, ‘Yeah, whatever.’"

The actress couldn't stay skeptical for long, though, as more and more friends informed her of a poltergeist.

“But other people who had stayed there with me, like friends of mine, said they felt an encounter with a woman who was sitting on the edge of the bed.”

She said that King, purportedly invited first, came to her house to do a seance; a meeting in which people attempt to contact the dead. But Cox was so captivated by the 1970s music star, she didn't pay attention. And despite everything her friends told her, Cox still wasn't completely convinced.

Until a delivery driver came to her door, and told her something absolutely hair-raising.
"I was at the house one day - not being a believer. And the doorbell rang, it was a UPS guy or something. And I opened the door and he said, 'Do you know this house is haunted?" Cox said. "And I go, 'Yeah, why? Why do you think that?' And he goes, 'Because there is someone standing behind you.'" Cox retold the terrifying story and made a fearful face while the audience gasped. "I was like, 'let's sell!" Kimmel jokingly reprimanded the UPS driver for his bad manners.

"Why would you say that to somebody?!", the television host laughed.

The Hollywood star said the spooky interaction was enough to make her put the house back on the market.

"It was so scary, I couldn't sleep there alone ever again. You don't think of it the same way," the 'Scream' actress said. "You start seeing things." Cox will be starring alongside Greg Kinnear and Mira Sorvino in a horror-comedy series called "Shining Vale", premiering on March 6, in which she plays a woman who is being haunted, all too similar to Cox's real experience in her haunted Laurel Canyon house.

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US Praises South Korea for Imposing Sanctions on Russia Over Ukraine - Blinken

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The United States welcomes the decision of South Korea to impose sanctions on Russia over the latter's special operation in Ukraine, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement on Wednesday.

"The United States and the Republic of Korea (ROK) are standing shoulder-to-shoulder in support of Ukraine by responding to Russia's premeditated, unprovoked, and unjustified attack," Blinken said. "The ROK's announcement of economic actions against Russia will help defend the freedom, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of Ukraine and illustrates the ROK's commitment to preserving the rules-based international order."

On Monday, the South Korean Foreign Affairs Ministry said the country has decided to join international sanctions and ban the export of strategic materials to Russia amid the situation in Ukraine, among others.

Blinken said South Korea's support for denying selected Russian banks access to the SWIFT system, along with its commitment to block financial transactions with major Russian banks and impose other financial and export controls, will support international efforts to isolate Russia from the international financial system and technology trade.

"At the same time, the ROK's commitment to release additional petroleum from its strategic reserves will help our shared efforts to stabilize the global energy market," he said.

In addition, the United States also welcomes South Korea's commitment to help the people of Ukraine by committing an additional $10 million in emergency humanitarian aid," Blinken said. "Our joint actions demonstrate the unity and resolve of the United States, the ROK, and our allies and partners to stop Russia's aggression in Ukraine," he added.
Western nations have rolled out a comprehensive sanctions campaign against Russia after it launched a special operation in Ukraine last Thursday, following requests for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to defend from intensified attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation was solely targeting the military infrastructure of Ukraine and emphasized that the civilian population was not in danger. Moscow said it has no plans to occupy Ukraine and the purpose of its operation is demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine. Delegations from Russia and Kiev are expected to hold another round of talks in the coming hours.

US Crude Oil Hits Decade Highs, Brent at June 2014 Peak Based on Russia-Ukraine Crisis

NEW YORK, March 1 (Sputnik) - Oil prices extended their rally on Wednesday, with US crude hitting the highest level in a decade and global crude benchmark soaring to a June 2014 peak on worries about supplies amid a raft of international sanctions targeting oil producer Russia. By 9:30 a.m. Eastern US (14:30 GMT), a barrel of US crude's benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) oil was at $109.73. WTI hit $112.47 earlier in the session, its highest since its previous peak of $114.18 on May 2011.
Global crude benchmark Brent traded at $111.69 a barrel. Brent earlier reached $113.93, marking a new peak since its June 2014 high of $115.71.
WTI has jumped some 46% this year and Brent 44%, responding to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Western governments have imposed numerous sanctions against Russia over the past week as its special operation in Ukraine continued and oil traders said the measures could severely impact the flow of oil from Russia, which provides about 10% of the world's crude supply. Domestic demand for US oil has also ramped up since the start of 2022 as the world's largest economy rebounded from the effects of the coronavirus pandemic measures.

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US Private Employers Added 475,000 Jobs in February, Some 100,000 Above Forecast - ADP

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - Private employers in the United States added 475,000 jobs in February, some 100,000 more than predicted, as the labor market in the world's largest economy continued to recover from the two-year long coronavirus crisis, data by private payrolls surveyor ADP showed Wednesday.
"Hiring remains robust but capped by reduced labor supply post-pandemic," Nela Richardson, chief economist at ADP, said in a statement. "Last month large companies showed they are well-poised to compete with higher wages and benefit offerings, and posted the strongest reading since the early days of the pandemic recovery."
But small companies found it hard to keep pace with soaring costs, Richardson said. "Small companies lost ground as they continue to struggle to keep pace with the wages and benefits needed to attract a limited pool of qualified workers," she added.

US unemployment reached a record high of 14.8% in April 2020, following the loss of some 20 million jobs in the aftermath of the COVID-19 breakout. Since then, jobs have picked up on most months, with unemployment declining to 3.9% in January, just below the 4% that the Federal Reserve defines as "maximum employment".

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US Ban on Russian Airlines Using American Airspace Begins at 2:00 GMT Thursday - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The United States' ban on Russian airlines using American airspace will begin at 9:00 p.m. EST on Wednesday (02:00 GMT on Thursday), CNN reported. The ban applies to all Russian aircraft, including charters and leases, a CNN reporter said in a Twitter message.

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US May Intercept Russian Planes, Detain Crew After Ban on Airspace Use - FAA

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - Russian airplanes may be intercepted and their crew members detained if they enter American airspace after the ban goes into effect on Wednesday evening, the Federal Aviation Administration said on Wednesday.
"Aircraft operators subject to this notam who do not comply with these instructions may be intercepted and their pilots and other crewmembers detained and interviewed by law enforcement or security personnel, as appropriate," the FAA said in a notice, posted by a CNN reporter, said.

US March Rate Hike Appropriate, Ukraine Crisis to Be Watched Closely - Fed Chair

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve expects to go ahead with the first US rate hike in two years in March although the impact of the Ukraine conflict on the American economy remains highly uncertain and needs to be monitored closely, Chairman Jerome Powell said Wednesday.

"With inflation well above 2 percent and a strong labor market, we expect it will be appropriate to raise the target range for the federal funds rate at our meeting later this month," Powell said in the text of a speech he is to deliver as part of his testimony to the US Congress later on Wednesday.

The Fed chair, however, said the Russia-Ukraine crisis had unknown ramifications for the American economy and the central bank would be monitoring the situation closely.

"The near-term effects on the U.S. economy of the invasion of Ukraine, the ongoing war, the sanctions, and of events to come, remain highly uncertain," he said. "Making appropriate monetary policy in this environment requires a recognition that the economy evolves in unexpected ways. We will need to be nimble in responding to incoming data and the evolving outlook."

The Fed slashed US interest rates to nearly zero after the coronavirus outbreak in March 2020 and kept them there to enable economic recovery. But economists say the central bank might have to raise rates by a maximum seven times this year to catch up with inflation growing way more than the economy.

After contracting 3.5% in 2020 from disruptions forced by COVID-19, 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 Fed's policy-making Federal Open Market Committee, or FOMC, will meet March 15-16 and another six times through December 13-14. Each meeting could lead to a rate hike of between a quarter and half percentage points, economists say.

US Sanctions on Russian Businessmen to Be 'More Complicated' Than EU's - Reports
WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The US administration is working to expand the number of Russian businessmen subject to sanctions over the Ukraine crisis, with America's restrictions expected to be "more complicated" than Europe's, The Washington Post reported on Wednesday, citing sources.
The US sanctions will target not only businessmen themselves, but their families members and companies they own, according to the report.

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WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has delivered his first State of the Union address with a major accent on the situation around Ukraine and Russia, and infrastructure modernization.
On Tuesday evening, Biden delivered his annual State of the Union Address on the most pressing issues of domestic and foreign policy, and made a number of proposals and legislative initiatives.
The annual State of the Union address provides the US president with an opportunity to outline the administration's agenda and priorities while underscoring achievements before a joint session of Congress.
UKRAINE
Ukraine has predictably become one of the main topics of the message, given the actively developing events in this country with Russia launching a special military operation last week. The American leader reaffirmed his plans to continue supporting Ukraine in its conflict with Russia, including the provision of various types of assistance.
"Together with our allies we are providing support to the Ukrainians in their fight for freedom. Military assistance. Economic assistance. Humanitarian assistance. We are giving more than $1 billion in direct assistance to Ukraine. And we will continue to aid the Ukrainian people as they defend their country and to help ease their suffering," Biden said.
At the same time, Biden completely ruled out any present or future participation of US troops in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.
"Let me be clear, our forces are not engaged and will not engage in conflict with Russian forces in Ukraine," Biden said on Tuesday.
RUSSIA
The US President devoted particular attention to the new package of sanctions against Russia in response to its actions in Ukraine while urging Americans not to panic over it.
"And I know the news about what's happening can seem alarming but I want you to know that we are going to be okay," Biden said.
Biden vowed to do everything to make sure that the sanctions on Russia will not have any negative consequences on the American economy.
"I'm taking robust action to make sure the pain of our sanctions is targeted at Russia's economy. And I will use every tool at our disposal to protect American businesses and consumers," Biden noted.

He also announced the US Department of Justice is assembling a task force to go after Russian businessmen in a joint effort with European allies to seize their yachts, luxury apartments and private jets.

The United States has joined the dozens of mainly European states in closing its airspace for all Russian flights to create an additional pressure on its economy in response to the Ukraine conflict and underscored that US allies and partners are ready "extensively and carefully" to counter Russia over Ukraine.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND CHINA

The next topic of the address was American infrastructure, which, according to Biden, should get a new life after the adoption of the infrastructure bill.

"America used to have the best roads, bridges, and airports on Earth. Now our infrastructure is ranked 13th in the world. We won't be able to compete for the jobs of the 21st Century if we don't fix that... And tonight, I'm announcing that this year we will start fixing over 65,000 miles of highway and 1,500 bridges in disrepair," Biden said.

Biden believes that a radical infrastructure upgrade could put the United States in the lead in its competition with China in the 21st century.

"It [infrastructure bill] is going to transform America and put us on a path to win the economic competition of the 21st Century that we face with the rest of the world - particularly with China," Biden said.

COVID-19

Biden voiced his optimism regarding the situation with the novel coronavirus pandemic in the country and noted that severe cases are down to a level not seen since last July.

Starting next week Americans will be able to order more free rapid tests which will be delivered to their homes.

The American leader did not rule out that new variants of the coronavirus may appear, but he is confident that the United States will be able to cope with them with the help of new vaccines that will be released within 100 days.

"We must prepare for new variants. Over the past year, we've gotten much better at detecting new variants. If necessary, we'll be able to deploy new vaccines within 100 days instead of many more months or years," Biden said.

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RPT - US Activists Planning Protest Against NATO Expansion Amid Russia-Ukraine Crisis

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - US activists are planning a rally to explain to Americans that the current crisis in Ukraine was caused by NATO's expansion further eastward and the West's support of the 2014 coup in Kiev, Phil Wilayto, co-founder of the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality, told Sputnik.
There already have been protests in more than 70 cities in the US, including four in the Navy center of Norfolk in Virginia. We are now speaking with our allies in the region about holding a larger protest as soon as it can be organized," Wilayto said.

He expressed the belief that NATO's expansion eastward and US support of the 2014 change of power in Ukraine were the two causes of the current crisis.

"These two factors - the steady eastward expansion of NATO to the very borders of Russia, and support for the 2014 coup, are what have led to, and are responsible for, the present crisis," he noted.

Speaking of NATO's enlargement, Wilayto recalled that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the alliance pledged not to move toward Russia, but did not fulfill the commitment. "Two of the six countries bordering Russia - Latvia and Estonia - are now NATO members. Ukraine, with its 1,200-mile border with Russia, has stated in its constitution its desire to join NATO. Meanwhile, it has been acting as a NATO member in all but name," he said.

Last Thursday, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine, responding to calls from the Russian-speaking republics of Donetsk and Luhansk for help in countering the aggression of Ukrainian forces, which they had been fighting since 2014. 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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RPT - US-Backed EU Sanctions on Russia Will Backfire, May Create Recession in Europe - Expert
WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The European Union's latest sanctions and economic retaliation against Russia over Ukraine will backfire and may throw the continent into a massive recession, Eurasia Center Vice President Earl Rasmussen told Sputnik.

In response to Russia's military operation in Ukraine, the EU, the US, the United Kingdom and allies rolled out comprehensive sanctions. The EU, like the US, has banned transactions related to the management of Russian Central Bank assets and reserves, and closed European airspace to Russian air carriers. The bloc also moved to exclude select major Russian banks from SWIFT.

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen described the measures as "the largest sanctions package" in EU history. She admitted it "will come at a cost for our economy too," but stressed the need to stand up against "aggression" and "invest" in "freedom and independence."

"These sanctions against Russia by Europe will thrust Europe into a historical recession," Rasmussen said.

On top of the measures, Anglo-Dutch petroleum giant Shell said it is withdrawing from joint ventures with Gazprom and Gazprom Neft, including the Sakhalin II project, and terminating its participation in the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project, whose certification was halted earlier by Germany. BP said it will dump its stake in Rosneft.
The decision by Berlin, strongly pressured by the Biden administration, will send energy costs spiraling wildly out of control not just in Germany but in surrounding nations too, Rasmussen warned.

"Energy markets will peak. My colleagues in Europe tell me that prices are already up 30%. They will go much higher, perhaps twice as high, maybe more," he said.

Despite repeated assurances from President Joe Biden, the United States is in no condition to replace Russia’s plentiful and cheap supplies of natural gas to Europe with any alternative energy supply that is remotely comparable in either scale or cost, Rasmussen stated.

"How will Europe replace Russia’s gas? It will not! Welcome global austerity!" he said.

Russia is one of the world’s top natural gas exporters and top gas reserves, Rasmussen pointed out.

"EU leaders have made a huge mistake. Russian gas will not be replaced - impossible. Also, the gas [to be] replaced will be significantly more expensive, perhaps two to four times more expensive," he said.

The economic consequences of the sanctions against Russia would be felt by both the United States and Europe, Rasmussen believes.

"We will be facing dire times ahead: Hopefully not a full-scale war which could go nuclear very rapidly but a significant global economic crisis regardless," he said.

The inevitable long-term result would be that the United States would see the central role it had taken for granted in the global economy for so long significantly reduced, according to Rasmussen.

"Even if we make it through, the economic system has been severely shaken by the arrogance of the United States, and the European powers which will shift more rapidly away from the dollar as a trading/currency reserve," he said.

Economic disruptions from the new sanctions and moves to punish Russia would certainly spread across both Western and Eastern Europe, Rasmussen said.

"Ukraine, Europe and to some degree Russia will be challenged as well as the United States. China will likely gain the most," he added.

By blocking the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, US and German leaders have taken a step that may cause havoc across their own and neighboring economies and societies at every level, Rasmussen continued.

"Energy is essential: It impacts industrial production directly as well as the consumer. I am not sure when they will be able to recover," he explained.

Nor would the United States itself be immune from the destructive economic forces it sets in motion, Rasmussen pointed out.

"US prices will also increase. Perhaps a lag, but they will. Gasoline prices will easily rise over $5 per gallon and maybe close to $6. The blocking of Russian energy exports would have a disastrous effect on economic recovery and prospects for growth for the entire world, Rasmussen observed.

"Russia is the one of the largest gas and oil producers. The magnitude of their reserves and export capacity is nearly impossible to replace and a replacement will be significantly more expensive," he concluded.

Moscow began a special operation to demilitarize and "denazify" Ukraine on Thursday, responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics in countering
intensifying attacks by Ukrainian forces. The Russian Defense Ministry said that the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger.

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RPT - Ex-Reagan Adviser Says US, Russia Need Each Other Like Never Before

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - US writer and scholar on Russia, Suzanne Massie, who was an adviser to President Ronald Reagan, told Sputnik that the United States and Russia need each other in the current global situation like never ever before. 

"I am absolutely and always sure that Russia and the US never before have needed each other so much. You need us, we need you," said Massie, who received Russian citizenship by decree of President Vladimir Putin in late December. 

She expressed hope that both Washington and Moscow can be united in overcoming the current crisis in Ukraine. 

"I hope so. We can work together very well, and we should," she said. 

Massie has pointed out that she is not a politician and unaware of real reasons for tensions around Ukraine. 

"We simply do not know enough about what is going on," she said. 

Massie confirmed her belief of the importance of the alliance between the United States and Russia. 

"It is very important that we find a way to get together, and it is more important than ever because of what is happening now," she added. 

Massie advised Reagan on Russia from 1984-1988 and played a significant role in the final years of the Cold War. She taught the president a Russian proverb, "trust, but verify," which he famously used during nuclear disarmament talks with the Soviet Union. 

Massie is fluent in Russian and has written numerous books on Russian history and culture, including bestsellers Land of the Firebird: The Beauty of Old Russia, as well as Trust but Verify: Reagan, Russia and Me.

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RPT - Canadians Call to Russian Church in Calgary to Apologize After Act of Vandalism - Priest

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - Many everyday Canadians are calling to the All Saints Russian Orthodox church in Calgary after its building was vandalized on the wave of tensions between Russia and Ukraine, the church's rector protopriest Dmitry Grigoriev told Sputnik. 

"We are receiving a lot of calls from local media, many everyday Canadians are apologizing for what has happened and say they are not supporting such things," father Dmitry said.
Saturday night, when people left the church after a Vigil, an unknown man jumped over the
fence, approached the building, and splashed red paint over the door. He was wearing a mask
and glasses, and had a headdress pulled over the eyebrows.
"We have found it out Sunday morning when we came to the liturgy. The police reacted very
quickly, we talked to the officer from the hate crime unit and provided him with footage from our
security camera," father Dmitry said.
The incident received wide publicity, and even Premier of Alberta Jason Kenney promised to
fund additional security camera installations in churches, he added.
Shock was the first reaction of parishioners after they learned about what happened. The priest
asked them during the sermon to pray for this person.
"Probably he had mental issues or was obsessed, because no one in clear mind would go to
church to fight with God. Perhaps he had an emotional breakdown from everything that
happened," he said.
The clergy and flock are asking the Lord to give this person a chance to repent, the priest noted.
"If he wants to bring an act of repentance, we are ready to forgive him. Let him come to the
church and paint the door, which he vandalized – we will accept him and pray along with him,"
Father Dmitry said.
The priest reminded that the church always stays outside of politics and should pray for
everybody. "Our parish was founded in 1930 by the Russians, Ukrainians, Greeks, Moldovans,
Belarusians and many others. We pray for peace and well-being of all people," he added.
All Saints church in Calgary is a part of the Russian Church Abroad (ROCOR). Archbishop of
Montreal and Canada Gabriel (Chemodakov) told Sputnik earlier this week that another Russian
church – in Toronto - faced an outside protest due to the crisis in Ukraine.
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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REVIEW - Biden Delivers His State of Union Address, Emphasizes Situation in Ukraine

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Union address with a major accent on the situation around Ukraine and Russia, and
infrastructure modernization.
On Tuesday evening, Biden delivered his annual State of the Union Address on the most
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initiatives.
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UKRAINE

Ukraine has predictably become one of the main topics of the message, given the actively developing events in this country with Russia launching a special military operation last week. The American leader reaffirmed his plans to continue supporting Ukraine in its conflict with Russia, including the provision of various types of assistance.

"Together with our allies we are providing support to the Ukrainians in their fight for freedom. Military assistance. Economic assistance. Humanitarian assistance. We are giving more than $1 billion in direct assistance to Ukraine. And we will continue to aid the Ukrainian people as they defend their country and to help ease their suffering," Biden said.

At the same time, Biden completely ruled out any present or future participation of US troops in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

"Let me be clear, our forces are not engaged and will not engage in conflict with Russian forces in Ukraine," Biden said on Tuesday.

RUSSIA

The US President devoted particular attention to the new package of sanctions against Russia in response to its actions in Ukraine while urging Americans not to panic over it.

"And I know the news about what’s happening can seem alarming but I want you to know that we are going to be okay," Biden said.

Biden vowed to do everything to make sure that the sanctions on Russia will not have any negative consequences on the American economy.

"I'm taking robust action to make sure the pain of our sanctions is targeted at Russia's economy. And I will use every tool at our disposal to protect American businesses and consumers," Biden noted.

He also announced the US Department of Justice is assembling a task force to go after Russian businessmen in a joint effort with European allies to seize their yachts, luxury apartments and private jets. The United States has joined the dozens of mainly European states in closing its airspace for all Russian flights to create an additional pressure on its economy in response to the Ukraine conflict and underscored that US allies and partners are ready "extensively and carefully" to counter Russia over Ukraine.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND CHINA

The next topic of the address was American infrastructure, which, according to Biden, should get a new life after the adoption of the infrastructure bill.

"America used to have the best roads, bridges, and airports on Earth. Now our infrastructure is ranked 13th in the world. We won't be able to compete for the jobs of the 21st Century if we don't fix that... And tonight, I'm announcing that this year we will start fixing over 65,000 miles of highway and 1,500 bridges in disrepair," Biden said.

Biden believes that a radical infrastructure upgrade could put the United States in the lead in its competition with China in the 21st century.
"It [infrastructure bill] is going to transform America and put us on a path to win the economic competition of the 21st Century that we face with the rest of the world - particularly with China," Biden said.

COVID-19

Biden voiced his optimism regarding the situation with the novel coronavirus pandemic in the country and noted that severe cases are down to a level not seen since last July. Starting next week Americans will be able to order more free rapid tests which will be delivered to their homes.

The American leader did not rule out that new variants of the coronavirus may appear, but he is confident that the United States will be able to cope with them with the help of new vaccines that will be released within 100 days.

"We must prepare for new variants. Over the past year, we've gotten much better at detecting new variants. If necessary, we'll be able to deploy new vaccines within 100 days instead of many more months or years," Biden said.

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Biden Says US Must Secure Border, Fix Immigration System
(Adds details, Republican response in paras 4-6)

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The United States must secure its borders and fix its immigration system in order to advance liberty and justice, President Joe Biden said during his State of the Union address to the Congress.

"And if we are to advance liberty and justice, we need to secure the border and fix the immigration system. We can do both," Biden said on Tuesday evening.

The US is putting in place dedicated immigration judges to hear the cases of families fleeing persecution and violence, and securing commitments from South and Central American countries to host more refugees and secure their own borders, Biden added.

Biden said the United States has set up joint patrols with Mexico and Guatemala border officers in an effort to catch more human traffickers.

In addition, Biden also called on Congress to provide a pathway to citizenship for so-called Dreamers who are temporarily protected immigrants that were brought to the United States before the age of 16. Biden also called for a pathway for citizenship for migrants on temporary status, migrant farm workers, and essential migrant workers.

In the Republican rebuttal after the president's address, Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds said the Biden administration has refused to provide the resources to stop human trafficking and the staggering influx of deadly drugs coming into American neighborhoods.

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Biden Urges Congress to Pass Law Supporting Vets Exposed to Toxins in Iraq, Afghanistan
WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden during his first State of the Union Address called on Congress to pass legislation that will provide comprehensive healthcare for veterans who were exposed to toxic chemicals during their service in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I'm also calling on Congress: pass a law to make sure veterans devastated by toxic exposures in Iraq and Afghanistan finally get the benefits and comprehensive health care they deserve," Biden said during his speech on Tuesday night.

Biden also announced that his administration is expanding the eligibility to US veterans suffering from nine respiratory diseases.

Biden believes his son Beau Biden may have died from brain cancer because of toxins he was exposed to in the smoke of waste pits at military installations in Iraq.

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US Ban on Russian Airlines to Be Fully Effective by End of Wednesday - Transportation Dept

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The United States' ban on Russian airlines and aircraft in US airspace will go into effect by the end of Wednesday, the Department of Transportation and Federal Aviation Administration said in a joint statement.

"The US Transportation Department and the Federal Aviation Administration will block Russian aircraft and airlines from entering and using all domestic US airspace," the statement said on Tuesday night. "The Notice to Air Missions (NOTAM) will apply to all aircraft certified, operated, registered or controlled by any person connected with Russia. This includes charter flights."

US media reported that the new rule will go into effect by the end of Wednesday.

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Biden Says US Must Secure Border, Fix Immigration System

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"And if we are to advance liberty and justice, we need to secure the border and fix the immigration system. We can do both," Biden said on Tuesday evening.

The US is putting in place dedicated immigration judges to hear the cases of families fleeing persecution and violence, and securing commitments from South and Central American countries to host more refugees and secure their own borders, Biden added.
Biden Says Funding Police Key to Protecting US Communities, Opposes Defunding

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden during his first State of the Union Address said he opposed defunding the police and emphasized that funding the police is key to protecting US communities.

"We should all agree: The answer is not to defund the police. The answer is to fund the police with the resources and training they need to protect our communities," Biden said during his speech on Tuesday night.

Biden also called on Congress to pass legislation to reduce gun violence and provide universal background checks.

Biden also called for a ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines and to repeal the liability shield that protects gun manufacturers from being sued.

The US president said these measures would not infringe on the US amendment that gives Americans the right to bear arms.

Biden Says US Must Hold Social Media Platforms Accountable

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The United States must hold social media platforms accountable for their actions and its impact on the nation's children, President Joe Biden said during his State of the Union address.

"As Frances Haugen, who is here with us tonight, has shown, we must hold social media platforms accountable for the national experiment they're conducting on our children for profit," Biden said on Tuesday evening.

Haugen, a former product manager at Facebook, now known as Meta, leaked internal documents and told the US Congress that the company was allegedly aware it inflicted harm on the mental health of teenagers, but did not do much to prevent content promoting hate and division, choosing to put profit over users' safety.

US Justice Dept. Assembling Task Force to 'Go After' Russian Businessmen - Biden

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Justice is assembling a task force to go after Russian businessmen, President Joe Biden said during his first State of the Union Address.
"The US Department of Justice is assembling a dedicated task force to go after the crimes of Russian oligarchs," Biden said during his speech on Tuesday night.

Biden Says to Use Every Tool to Protect American Businesses From Anti-Russia Sanctions

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said in his State of the Union address that he is going to use every tool at his disposal to protect American businesses and consumers from the impact of the new sanctions on Russia amid the conflict in Ukraine.

"I'm taking robust action to make sure the pain of our sanctions is targeted at Russia's economy. And I will use every tool at our disposal to protect American businesses and consumers," Biden said on Tuesday.

Biden Says US Closing Off American Air Space to All Russian Flights

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The United States is closing its airspace to all Russian flights to create pressure on its economy amid the military conflict in Ukraine, President Joe Biden said in his State of the Union address.

"Tonight, I am announcing that we will join our allies in closing off American air space to all Russian flights further isolating Russia and adding an additional squeeze on their economy," Biden said on Tuesday.

Biden Tells Congress US Will Continue Assistance to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue to provide Ukraine with assistance amid its ongoing conflict with Russia, President Joe Biden said during his State of the Union address to the Congress.

"Together with our allies we are providing support to the Ukrainians in their fight for freedom. Military assistance. Economic assistance. Humanitarian assistance. We are giving more than $1 Billion in direct assistance to Ukraine. And we will continue to aid the Ukrainian people as they defend their country and to help ease their suffering," Biden said on Tuesday evening.
WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The United States is on its way to win the economic competition with China in the 21st century thanks to the infrastructure bill, President Joe Biden said in his State of the Union address.

"It [infrastructure bill] is going to transform America and put us on a path to win the economic competition of the 21st Century that we face with the rest of the world - particularly with China," Biden said on Tuesday. "As I've told [the leader of China] Xi Jinping, it is never a good bet to bet against the American people."

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden in his first State of the Union Address said Americans should not panic over sanctions recently imposed against Russia.

"And I know the news about what's happening can seem alarming but I want you to know that we are going to be okay," Biden said during his speech on Tuesday with respect to the Western sanctions imposed on Russia recently.

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The United States will begin repairing over 65,000 miles of highway and 1,500 bridges in 2022, President Joe Biden said during his State of the Union address.

"America used to have the best roads, bridges, and airports on Earth. Now our infrastructure is ranked 13th in the world. We won't be able to compete for the jobs of the 21st Century if we don't fix that... And tonight, I'm announcing that this year we will start fixing over 65,000 miles of highway and 1,500 bridges in disrepair," Biden said on Tuesday evening.
Biden Says US Forces Not Engaged, Will Not Be Engaged in Conflict With Russia in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The US forces are not and will not be engaged in a conflict between Russia and Ukraine, President Joe Biden said in his State of the Union address. "Let me be clear, our forces are not engaged and will not engage in conflict with Russian forces in Ukraine," Biden said on Tuesday.

The annual State of the Union address provides the US president with an opportunity to outline the administration's agenda and priorities while underscoring achievements before a join session of Congress.

Biden Says US, Allies Prepared 'Extensively and Carefully' to Counter Russia Over Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden during his first State of the Union Address said the United States and its allies prepared extensively and carefully to counter Russia's military operation in Ukraine. "We prepared extensively and carefully," Biden said during his speech on Tuesday.

Boeing Says Suspending Parts, Maintenance, Technical Support Services for Russian Airlines

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The aerospace company Boeing said it is suspending its parts, maintenance and technical support services for Russian airlines. "We have suspended major operations in Moscow and temporarily closed our office in Kyiv," the company said in a statement on Tuesday. "We are also suspending parts, maintenance and technical support for services for Russian airlines. As the conflict continues, our teams are focused on ensuring the safety of our teammates in the region."

Canada Refers Situation in Ukraine to ICC - Statement
TORONTO, March 1 (Sputnik) - Canada has referred Russia’s military operation in Ukraine to the International Criminal Court (ICC) over allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity, Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly announced.

"Canada has decided to refer the situation in Ukraine to the International Criminal Court (ICC). We are working with other ICC member states to take this significant action as a result of numerous allegations of the commission of serious international crimes in Ukraine by Russian forces, including war crimes and crimes against humanity," Joly said in a statement on Tuesday.

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

Canada Imposes Sanctions on Russian Security Council Effective Immediately - Statement

TORONTO, March 1 (Sputnik) - Canada has imposed sanctions against all of the Russian Security Council's 18 members in response to Moscow's military operation in Ukraine, Global Affairs Canada said.

"Canada is imposing new sanctions in response to Russia's unprovoked and unjustified invasion of Ukraine. The new amendments impose restrictions on 18 members of the Security Council of the Russian Federation responsible for these actions," the statement issued on Tuesday read.

While Canada announced personal sanctions against Russian President Vladimir Putin, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and a few other senior official last week, the new decree affects the entirety of the Security Council, including Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu and Moscow Mayor Sergey Sobyanin.

Furthermore, Ottawa is expanding the scope of the sanctions against the Russian Central Bank, National Wealth Fund and Ministry of Finance.

The sanctions go into effect immediately, according to Global Affairs.

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

Biden to Announce Ban of Russian Aircraft in US Airspace During SOTU Address - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden is expected to announce that he will impose a ban on Russian aircraft in US airspace during his State of the Union Address tonight, CBS reported.
The report said on Tuesday that this decision had been considered over the last several days, and some flights between the United States and Russia are already being canceled.

ExxonMobil to Discontinue Operations at Sakhalin-1, Vows Not Invest in New Developments

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - Energy company ExxonMobil will discontinue operations at its Sakhalin-1 project in Russia and end investments in Russian developments in response to the country's ongoing military operations in Ukraine, the company said in a press release. "ExxonMobil operates the Sakhalin-1 project on behalf of an international consortium of Japanese, Indian and Russian companies. In response to recent events, we are beginning the process to discontinue operations and developing steps to exit the Sakhalin-1 venture," the company said on Tuesday. The company will also not invest in any new developments in Russia given the current situation, the press release added.

US Expected to Ban Russian Aircraft From American Airspace - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is expected to ban Russian aircraft from US airspace, the Wall Street Journal reported. The order is expected to be issued within the next 24 hours and will apply to all Russian-owned-and-operated aircraft, the reports said on Tuesday, citing sources familiar with the matter.

Canadians Call to Russian Church in Calgary to Apologize After Act of Vandalism - Priest

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - Many everyday Canadians are calling to the All Saints Russian Orthodox church in Calgary after its building was vandalized on the wave of tensions between Russia and Ukraine, the church's rector protopriest Dmitry Grigoriev told Sputnik. "We are receiving a lot of calls from local media, many everyday Canadians are apologizing for what has happened and say they are not supporting such things," father Dmitry said.
Saturday night, when people left the church after a Vigil, an unknown man jumped over the fence, approached the building, and splashed red paint over the door. He was wearing a mask and glasses, and had a headdress pulled over the eyebrows. 

"We have found it out Sunday morning when we came to the liturgy. The police reacted very quickly, we talked to the officer from the hate crime unit and provided him with footage from our security camera," father Dmitry said.

The incident received wide publicity, and even Premier of Alberta Jason Kenney promised to fund additional security camera installations in churches, he added.

Shock was the first reaction of parishioners after they learned about what happened. The priest asked them during the sermon to pray for this person. 

"Probably he had mental issues or was obsessed, because no one in clear mind would go to church to fight with God. Perhaps he had an emotional breakdown from everything that happened," he said.

The clergy and flock are asking the Lord to give this person a chance to repent, the priest noted. 

"If he wants to bring an act of repentance, we are ready to forgive him. Let him come to the church and paint the door, which he vandalized – we will accept him and pray along with him," Father Dmitry said.

The priest reminded that the church always stays outside of politics and should pray for everybody. "Our parish was founded in 1930 by the Russians, Ukrainians, Greeks, Moldovans, Belarusians and many others. We pray for peace and well-being of all people," he added.

All Saints church in Calgary is a part of the Russian Church Abroad (ROCOR). Archbishop of Montreal and Canada Gabriel (Chemodakov) told Sputnik earlier this week that another Russian church – in Toronto - faced an outside protest due to the crisis in Ukraine.

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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**China Heading to Land-Based Nuclear Superiority Over US After Breakout** - STRATCOM Chief

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - China is on course to achieve superiority over the United States in land-based strategic nuclear forces unless Washington invests heavily to modernize its land-based long-range missile force, Strategic Command (STRATCOM) chief Adm. Charles Richard told Congress.

"The discovery of three new ICBM missile fields in the last year demonstrates the value the PRC [People's Republic of China] places on land-based forces," Richard told the US House Armed Services Committee Strategic Forces Subcommittee on Tuesday. "If we choose not to continue
investing in the land-based leg of our triad, the PRC will soon have a superior, modernized nuclear force with elevated day-to-day readiness."

Richard recalled he had previously warned that China's nuclear and conventional military forces had reached a new level of capability amounting to a strategic "breakout" that changed the global balance of power.

"In September 2021, I formally declared the strategic breakout of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to the Secretary of Defense... The PRC continues the breathtaking expansion of its strategic and nuclear forces with opaque intentions as to their use," Richard said.

China's recent test of an intercontinental ballistic missile-launched hypersonic glide vehicle with fractional orbital bombardment was another example of those growing capabilities, Richard added.

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China Probably Aiming to Have 1,000 Nuclear Warheads by 2030 - Senior Pentagon Official

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - China is driving ahead, far faster than US Defense Department analysts anticipated in expanding its strategic nuclear warhead arsenal and appears to be aiming to have at least 1,000 warheads deployed by 2030, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Sasha Baker told a congressional hearing.

"This accelerated nuclear expansion may enable the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to field over 700 nuclear warheads by 2027," Baker told the US House Armed Services Committee Strategic Forces Subcommittee on Tuesday. "The PRC [People's Republic of China] likely intends to have at least 1,000 warheads by 2030, greatly exceeding previous Department of Defense estimates."

China's ongoing ambitious expansion of its nuclear forces is a growing factor in how Defense Department policy makers assess the US nuclear posture, Baker told the hearing.

"As recently as 2020, the Department of Defense assessed that the PRC would at least double the size of its nuclear stockpile, then estimated in the low-200s, within the decade," Baked said. China has commenced building at least three solid-fueled intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) silo fields, which will cumulatively contain hundreds of new ICBM silos and these developments marked a departure from Beijing's previous minimum deterrence posture for its nuclear forces, Baker added.

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US Senate Passes Bill Requiring Infrastructure Operators Report Cyberattacks Within 3 Days

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/02/2022 1:28:51 PM
WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The US Senate passed legislation that would require operators of critical infrastructure in the United States to report cyberattacks to the federal government within 72 hours.
The US Senate on Tuesday passed the Strengthening American Cybersecurity Act by unanimous consent.
The bill requires the owners and operators of critical US infrastructure to report to the federal government within 72 hours if they are experiencing a substantial cyberattack and within 24 hours if they make a ransomware payment.
The legislation now is headed to the US House of Representatives for consideration.

Artemis Lunar Program Costs More Than Twice NASA Estimates - Inspector General
WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The total cost of the Artemis program to return US astronauts to the Moon will exceed twice the $21 billion NASA has projected for it, the US space agency's Inspector General Paul Martin told a congressional hearing.
"When aggregating all relevant costs across Mission Directorates, we projected NASA will spend $93 billion on the Artemis effort from FY [Fiscal Year] 2012 through FY 2025," Martin told a US House Committee on Space, Science and Technology on Tuesday.
Martin said for Fiscal Years 2021 through 2025, NASA is relying on a rough cost estimate for the first three Artemis missions that exclude $25 billion it is planning to spend for key activities related to planned missions beyond Artemis III.
"[B]ecause NASA decided not to classify Artemis as a formal program under the Agency’s Space Flight Program and Project Management Requirements, Artemis officials were not required to develop an official Artemis-wide full life-cycle cost estimate," he said.
Martin also noted that NASA had so far failed to agree to an Artemis program-wide cost estimate that would provide a benchmark against which the space agency would assess its cost saving initiatives.

Wall Street Tanks on Risk Implosion Over Russia

NEW YORK, March 1 (Sputnik) - US stocks tumbled across the board as the West’s targeting of Russia over the crisis in Ukraine and fears of reprisals that could come sapped the investor appetite for equities.
Wall Street's three major stock indexes - the Dow Jones Industrial Average index, the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq Composite - closed down between 1.6% and 1.8% on Tuesday after ceasefire negotiations between Russian and Ukraine forces failed.
Traders worried that international sanctions against Moscow would lead to an implosion of exports from a country that is the heart of global energy markets. Oil prices closed at 7.5-year highs, with global crude benchmark Brent settling at $104.97 a barrel.

"Investors struggle to go long [on] risk as the Russia-Ukraine crisis intensifies and surging oil prices threaten economic growth prospects," said Ed Moya, analyst at online trading platform OANDA. "Wall Street is hitting the 'sell button' on everything except for energy stocks. Traders are trying to reduce their exposure to anything that has exposure to Russia and some are getting concerned that a prolonged economic slowdown is here. Stagflation risks have never been greater and that should continue to fuel the many commodity super cycles that are running hot."

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, made up mostly of industrial stocks, closed down 1.8%. The Dow has lost almost 8% since the year began.

The S&P 500, which groups the top 500 US stocks, fell 1.6% on the day. For the year, it was down nearly 10%.

The Nasdaq Composite, made of highly-valued tech stocks such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Nasdaq and Google, also settled down 1.6%. It has lost almost 14% so far for 2022.

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Shipping Companies MSC, Maersk Halt Cargo Bookings to, From Russia

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - Two of the world's largest shipping companies, Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC) and Maersk Line, said they will temporarily halt cargo bookings to and from Russia in light of the Western countries' sanctions measures.

"MSC Mediterranean Shipping Company is introducing as of 1 March, with immediate effect, a temporary stoppage on all cargo bookings to/from Russia, covering all access areas including Baltics, Black Sea and Far East Russia," the Swiss-based company said in an advisory on Tuesday.

However, MSC added that it will continue to accept and screen bookings for deliveries of essential goods such as food, medical equipment and humanitarian goods.

The Dutch-based Maersk said in a separate press release on Tuesday that bookings within ocean, air and intercontinental rail to and from Russia will be temporarily suspended due to the sanctions, expect for food, medical and humanitarian supplies.

On Thursday, Russia began a special operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine as it responded to calls from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and emphasized the civilian population is not in danger.

The United States, United Kingdom, members of the European Union and several other countries imposed comprehensive sanctions against Russia, including closing their airspace to Russian aircraft and sanctioning a number of Russian banks and officials. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree authorizing counter sanctions.
First Artemis Manned Mission to Moon Will Not Launch Until 2026 - NASA Officials

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The Artemis 3 manned mission to the Moon will not take place until 2026 and may be as late as 2027, senior NASA officials told a hearing of the US House of Representatives Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics.

"[G]iven the time needed to develop and fully test the HLS [Human Landing System] and NASA's next-generation spacesuits needed for lunar exploration, the date for a crewed lunar landing likely will slip to 2026 at the earliest," NASA Inspector General Paul Martin told the hearing on Tuesday.

Over the past six years, NASA has increasingly relied on public-private partnerships and alternative acquisition approaches to further its deep space exploration and Artemis ambitions but now these projects face multiple technical, financial, and programmatic challenges, Martin said.

The window for the manned landing, originally scheduled for 2024, might even have to be put back until 2027, American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics Executive Director Daniel Dumbacher told the committee.

"We think it's certainly attainable in the 2025 to 2027 time frame," he said.

With Artemis II, NASA is facing additional schedule delays - until at least mid-2024 - due to the second mission's reuse of Orion components from Artemis I, according to NASA.

Romania Joins US, Other Allies in Signing Artemis Space Accords - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - Romania has signed the Artemis Accords for the peaceful development of space, joining the United States and 15 other US allies in doing so, the State Department announced in a media note.

"At a virtual ceremony, Romania became the 16th nation to sign the Artemis Accords. President and CEO of the Romanian Space Agency Marius-loan Piso signed the Accords on behalf of Romania," the State Department said on Tuesday.

Piso's actions were witnessed and welcomed by NASA Administrator Bill Nelson, US Embassy in Romania Charge d'affaires David Muniz and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs Jennifer Littlejohn, the State Department said.

"The Artemis Accords are a set of nonbinding commitments, grounded in the Outer Space Treaty of 1967, to facilitate the peaceful and safe exploration of outer space ... [and] lay out certain principles to guide civil space actors," the State Department added.
The other signatories of the Artemis Accords are Australia, Brazil, Canada, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, and the United States, according to the State Department.

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World Bank Preparing $3Bln Ukraine Support Package - Statement

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The World Bank is preparing a $3 billion support package for Ukraine in the coming months and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is soon considering requests for emergency financing, World Bank Group President David Malpass and IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on a statement.

"Our institutions are working together to support Ukraine on the financing and policy fronts and are urgently increasing that support. We have been in daily contact with the authorities on crisis measures... At the World Bank Group, we are preparing a $3 billion package of support in the coming months, starting with a fast-disbursing budget support operation for at least $350 million that will be submitted to the Board for approval this week, followed by $200 million in fast-disbursing support for health and education," the statement said on Tuesday.

The IMF Board could consider Ukraine’s request for emergency financing through the Rapid Financing Instrument as early as next week, the statement also said. The IMF is also continuing to work on Ukraine’s Stand-By Arrangement program, under which an additional $2.2 billion is available between now and the ended of June, the statement added.

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Senate Democrats Block Republican Bill to Boost Aid for Ukraine, Sanction Russian Energy

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - US Senate Democrats blocked a Republican effort to pass legislation to bolster support for Ukraine and impose additional sanctions on Russia, including the country’s energy sector.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member Jim Risch on Tuesday requested to have his Never Yielding Europe’s Territory (NYET) Act set up for a final vote, however, Senate Democrat Chris Murphy objected, blocking the measure from advancing any further.

Risch said the Republican bill would impose sanctions on Russia’s mining, mineral and oil and gas sectors. The measure would also sanction Russian government and military officials, 12 of Russia’s largest banks, he added.

Moreover, the bill would increase funding for military assistance for Ukraine and other eastern European countries, and it would establish a new Ukrainian resistance fund to help the country resist Russia’s military operation, Risch said.

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However, Murphy said he opposed the bill because it would de-unify the United States’ multilateral effort with European partners to respond to Russia. On Thursday, Russia began a special operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine as it responded to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and emphasized that the civilian population is not in danger. In response, the United States, United Kingdom, members of the European Union and several other countries imposed comprehensive sanctions against Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree authorizing counter sanctions.

US Automaker Ford Suspends Operations in Russia 'Effective Immediately' - Statement
WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - US automaker Ford said it is suspending its operations in Russia immediately in response to the military operation in Ukraine. “Given the situation, we have today informed our JV [joint venture] partners that we are suspending our operations in Russia, effective immediately, until further notice,” Ford said in a press release on Tuesday. Ford said its operations in Russia focused on commercial van manufacturing and Russian sales through a minority interest in the Sollers Ford joint venture.

US Defense Chief Says Spoke With Ukraine Counterpart, Offered Support to Repel Russia
WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced that he spoke with Ukrainian counterpart Oleksii Reznikov about support for his country amid the ongoing Russian special operation. “Today, I spoke with my Ukrainian counterpart [Oleksii Reznikov] to offer our continued support for Ukraine’s courageous efforts to repel Russia’s unprovoked and unlawful invasion,” Austin said via Twitter on Tuesday. Austin emphasized that the United State and its allies and partners stand united in their resolve to support Ukraine, the Defense Department said in a readout of the call. Austin and Reznikov also committed to continuing close coordination during the conflict, the readout said. Engagement between US and Ukrainian officials has increased recently due to the Russian special operation in Ukraine. The Biden administration and Congress have been developing both offensive and defensive aid packages to Ukraine, in addition to imposing sanctions against Russia.
On Thursday, Russia announced that it undertook a special operation to demilitarize and
denazify Ukraine after the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics asked for help to defend
from intensifying attacks from Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said it is targeting
solely Ukrainian military assets and civilians are safe.

Ex-Reagan Adviser Says US, Russia Need Each Other Like Never Before

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - US writer and scholar on Russia, Suzanne Massie, who
was an adviser to President Ronald Reagan, told Sputnik that the United States and Russia
need each other in the current global situation like never ever before.
"I am absolutely and always sure that Russia and the US never before have needed each other
so much. You need us, we need you," said Massie, who received Russian citizenship by decree
of President Vladimir Putin in late December.
She expressed hope that both Washington and Moscow can be united in overcoming the
current crisis in Ukraine.
"I hope so. We can work together very well, and we should," she said.
Massie has pointed out that she is not a politician and unaware of real reasons for tensions
around Ukraine.
"We simply do not know enough about what is going on," she said.
Massie confirmed her belief of the importance of the alliance between the United States and
Russia.
"It is very important that we find a way to get together, and it is more important than ever
because of what is happening now," she added.
Massie advised Reagan on Russia from 1984-1988 and played a significant role in the final
years of the Cold War. She taught the president a Russian proverb, "trust, but verify," which he
famously used during nuclear disarmament talks with the Soviet Union.
Massie is fluent in Russian and has written numerous books on Russian history and culture,
including bestsellers Land of the Firebird: The Beauty of Old Russia, as well as Trust but Verify:
Reagan, Russia and Me.

Canada, Allies Preparing More Sanctions Against Russia in Coming Days - Freeland

TORONTO, March 1 (Sputnik) - Canada and its allies are preparing additional sanctions against
Russia over the ongoing special operation in Ukraine that will be announced in the coming days,
Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said.
“I want to assure all Canadians and I want to assure Russia that we are preparing additional measures and we will announce them in coming days,” Freeland told a news conference on Tuesday.

Last Thursday, Russia launched a military operation in Ukraine responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics to 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.

Canada Reviewing Holdings of Russian ‘Oligarchs,’ Firms in Country - Finance Minister

TORONTO, March 1 (Sputnik) - Canada and Western allies could experience adverse effects on their economies in the aftermath of the sanctions placed on Russia in response to Moscow’s military operation in Ukraine, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said at a press conference.

“If we are truly determined to stand with Ukraine... I have to be honest with Canadians, that there could be some collateral damage,” she said on Tuesday.

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

Global Oil Benchmark Brent Settles at August 2014 Highs Amid Russia-Ukraine Crisis

NEW YORK, March 1 (Sputnik) - Global oil markets settled at 7.5-year highs after ceasefire talks between Russian and Ukraine forces failed, prompting traders to push crude prices higher
on worries that Western sanctions against Moscow would severely impact the country’s energy exports.
The most-actively traded contract in global crude benchmark Brent settled up $3.98, or 4%, at $104.97 a barrel on Tuesday for its highest closing since August 2014. It spiked to as high as $107.97 during the session, also marking a 7.5-year peak.
US crude’s West Texas Intermediate, or WTI benchmark, settled up $7.69, or 8%, at $103.41 a barrel on its most-active contract. WTI hit an intraday $106.75 during the session, also its highest since 2014.
Crude prices rose even after the Paris-based International Energy Agency announced the coordinated release of 60 million barrels from the emergency reserves of consuming countries to provide some relief to the expected squeeze on oil from the Russia-Ukraine conflict.
The Paris-based EIA said it intended "to send a unified and strong message to global oil markets that there will be no shortfall in supplies as a result of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine."
Talks for a halt to the conflict failed to produce an immediate breakthrough on Tuesday and fighting raged anew between the two sides, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy urging the West to enforce a no-fly zone for Russian aircraft over his country.
The latest developments intensified worries about how the world would cope without a steady supply of oil from Russia, which provides a tenth of global needs for crude.
On Tuesday, the UK government added to the world’s move to isolate Russia by launching an urgent review of Britain’s exposure to Russian gas and energy groups, the Financial Times reported.
Britain’s giant BP had earlier said on Sunday that it was withdrawing its $14 billion stake in Russian oil giant Rosneft.
Anglo-Dutch owned Shell has said it will exit all its Russian operations, including a major liquefied natural gas plant.
The IEA also said it will release on Thursday a 10-point plan on how European countries can reduce their reliance by next winter on Russian gas supplies, which provide about 40 percent of the EU’s needs.
"Ministers also discussed Europe’s significant reliance on Russian natural gas and the need to reduce this by looking to other suppliers, including via LNG [liquefied natural gas] and to continue to pursue a well-managed acceleration of clean energy transitions," the IEA statement from Tuesday said.
Roughly a third of the gas burned in Europe are from Russia's Nord Stream 1 and Yamal gas pipelines. Speculation is rife that higher exports of US LNG will be needed to compensate for any drop in Russian gas flows to Europe.
US natural gas futures closed up 3.5% at 4.57 per thermal unit on Tuesday.
The West had taken pains initially not to target Moscow’s energy exports with sanctions due to its own reliance on Russian oil and gas.
But that mindset changed over the weekend, with the United States, Britain, Europe and Canada blocking the access of various Russian banks to the SWIFT global interbank payment system - squeezing the billions of dollars that Russia trades a day in oil and other commodities.
EU officials affirmed on Monday their plan to wean the bloc from its dependence on Russian energy, while being prepared to suffer spiraling oil and gas costs in the short-term. Crude prices have risen more than 35% since the year began, while US natural gas has gained about 23%.
The latest rally in energy prices came ahead of Wednesday’s meeting of global oil producer alliance OPEC+, which is expected to stay with its gradual output increase strategy, ignoring calls from consuming nations under the IEA.

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Canadian Sanctions to Stay Until Russia Withdraws Troops From Ukraine - Trudeau

TORONTO, March 1 (Sputnik) – Canada will maintain sanctions against Russia until the latter withdraws its troops from Ukraine, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Tuesday.
"We will keep the sanctions in place right up until Russia recognizes and admits they made a huge mistake and withdraws its soldiers from Ukrainian soil," Trudeau told the House of Commons during the day’s Question Period session.
Canada has imposed multiple rounds of sanctions against Russia following President Vladimir Putin’s approval of a military operation in Ukraine, including a ban on all engagements with the Russian central bank, a freeze on Russian sovereign fund assets and personal sanctions against top Russian officials.
Last Thursday, Russia launched a military operation in Ukraine, responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics in countering 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.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik)

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS
* The access of Ukrainian troops to the Sea of Azov is completely blocked, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov told reporters on Tuesday.
* The Russian army has destroyed 1,325 military infrastructure facilities in Ukraine, Konashenkov said.
* Russia will strike at the information warfare and psychological operations center of the Ukrainian armed forces and technological facilities of the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) in Kiev, and calls on citizens living nearby to leave the areas, Konashenkov told reporters.
* Poland is not going to send fighter jets to Ukraine, Polish President Andrzej Duda said.
* NATO is not going to deploy troops in Ukraine, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE TALKS
* Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba told an online briefing on Tuesday that negotiations with Russia were needed, but Kiev would not agree the talks if Moscow only puts forward its ultimatums there.
* The second round of the negotiations between Russia and Ukraine on the Belarusian-Polish border may be held on March 2, Belarusian political expert Yury Voskresensky, who is close to the talks’ co-organizers, told Sputnik.
* Russian President Vladimir Putin has been informed about the results of the talks between the Russian and Ukrainian delegations, yet it is too early to give any assessments, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.
* There are no plans so far for a conversation between Putin and Zelenskyy following the Moscow-Kiev talks in Belarus, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

**BIDEN-ZELENSKY TALKS**
* US President Joe Biden spoke by telephone with Volodymyr Zelenskyy and emphasized sustained US deliveries of security assistance and economic support amid the conflict with Russia, the White House said on Tuesday.
* Zelenskyy said that he had spoken with Biden and discussed sanctions against Russia and defense assistance to Ukraine.

**SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA**
* Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said that Ankara did not plan to impose sanctions against Moscow in order to keep the channel with Russia open.
* Western sanctions are immoral, have no legal basis and are unrelated to the current situation, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.
* Canada bans Russian ships and fishing vessels from entering its ports and internal waters, Minister of Transport Omar Alghabra said.
* The Mexican government will not join the sanctions and intends to maintain good relations with the Russian government, Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said.
* The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development said its Board of Directors voted for the adoption of sanctions against Russia and Belarus in connection with the military operation in Ukraine, pending Governors’ approval.

**ENERGY MARKETS**
* Europe needs to reduce its reliance on Russian natural gas and look for alternative sources of energy that include renewables, ministers from the International Energy Agency (IEA) said on Tuesday after announcing an emergency release of crude reserves due to concerns over supply amid the Russia-Ukraine crisis.
* Oil consuming nations will release 60 million barrels from their emergency crude reserves under a coordinated action to ensure no shortfall in supplies due to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, the IEA said.
* Gas futures prices in Europe jumped above $1,400 per thousand cubic meters, up more than 20%, then slightly retreated in a highly volatile trade, according to the London-based ICE Futures exchange.
* Russian President Vladimir Putin held a phone conversation with Deputy Supreme Commander of the United Arab Emirates Armed Forces and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and discussed the progress of the OPEC+ agreements, the Kremlin said.

US EXPELS RUSSIAN DIPLOMATS FROM UN
* United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric confirmed on Tuesday that the United States has decided to expel a Russian employee working at the UN Secretariat in New York.
* Moscow will respond to the US expulsion of 12 diplomats from the Russian permanent mission to the United Nations, the measures will not necessarily be symmetrical, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

RECAST - Apple Says Paused All Product Sales in Russia, Apple Pay And Other Services Limited
(Recasts to fix the headline)
WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - Apple said on Tuesday that it is pausing all product sales in Russia and has limited Apple Pay and other services in the country due to the military operation in Ukraine.
"We have paused all product sales in Russia," Apple said in a statement. "Last week, we stopped all exports into our sales channel in the country. Apple Pay and other services have been limited. RT News and Sputnik News are no longer available for download from the App Store outside Russia."

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Canada's Official Opposition Calls on Trudeau Government to Expel Russian Ambassador

TORONTO, March 1 (Sputnik) - Canada's official opposition Conservative Party on Tuesday called for the government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to expel Russia's ambassador over Moscow's military operation in Ukraine.

"Will the government expel the Russian ambassador and recall our ambassador back to Canada?" Interim Conservative Party Leader Candice Bergen asked Trudeau during a parliamentary debate in the House of Commons.

Trudeau deflected, saying that Canada's foreign minister has already summoned Russian Ambassador Oleg Stepanov to express "extreme concern and disagreement" with the military operation and that Ottawa will use all tools at its disposal to bring the conflict to an end.

Stepanov was summoned after Canada leveled a range of sanctions against Moscow. The diplomat called the sanctions "completely useless" in a conversation with Sputnik and emphasized that Russia reserves the right to "react both symmetrically and asymmetrically" to the measures.

The Russian ambassador noted that while Canada-Russia ties are in "serious crisis" diplomatic channels remain open.

Stepanov told Sputnik on Monday that there are currently no plans in place to withdraw Russia's diplomatic presence from Canada.

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

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US House Panel Subpoenas Trump Allies Who Helped Push 2020 Election Fraud Claims

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The US House committee investigating the January 6 Capitol riot said on Tuesday that it issued six subpoenas against Trump allies that helped promote voter fraud claims in the 2020 presidential election.

"Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) today announced that, as part of its investigation into the January 6th attack on the US Capitol and its causes, the Select Committee has issued subpoenas to six individuals who promoted false claims that the 2020 presidential election was fraudulent and participated in, or encouraged, various actions based on those false claims," the committee said in a press release.

The committee subpoenaed Cleta Mitchell, Kenneth Chesebro, Christina Bobb, Katherine Friess, Kurt Olsen, and Phillip Kline, the release said.

Each individual must provide request documents relevant to the investigation by March 15 and they are scheduled to appear before the panel for a disposition between March 22 to 29, according to the release.
Over a year ago, a group of Trump supporters entered the US Capitol to protest the certifying of the 2020 presidential election results from several US states that President Donald Trump claimed were fraudulent. US authorities have arrested more than 750 individuals in nearly all 50 states for criminal offenses relating to the riot.

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US Fears Russia May Arrest Americans in Retaliation for Ukraine Sanctions – Reports

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is concerned Russia might arrest American citizens residing in the country and use them as leverage in retaliation for sanctions imposed over its military operation in Ukraine, NBC News reported on Tuesday, citing US officials.

Moscow might target Americans doing business in Russia, including employees of US companies if they comply with new sanctions, the report said.

Moreover, the Biden administration reportedly has already started notifying major US companies in Russia that President Vladimir Putin might soon start “taking Americans hostage.”

The officials said there is no evidence the Biden administration has any specific reasons to believe Russia could resort to such measures but the risk-mitigating discussions involved multiple American national security agencies as well as US Special Envoy for Hostage Affairs Roger Carstens.

Concerns that American citizens can be prevented from leaving Russia were among the reasons the State Department urged US citizens to leave the country immediately, the report said.

On Thursday, Russia began a special operation to demilitarize and “denazify” Ukraine in response to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian forces. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger.

The move sparked condemnation from Western leaders and a wave of sanctions against Russia.

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World Will See ‘Very Serious’ Impact on Energy Amid Ukraine Crisis - UAE Envoy to UN

UNITED NATIONS, March 1 (Sputnik) - United Arab Emirates (UAE)Permanent Representative to the United Nations and President of the UN Security Council for March Lana Nusseibeh said on Tuesday the world will in the coming months face the surging energy prices amid the conflict in Ukraine and sanctions imposed against Russia.
"In the coming months, I think, we are going to see... very serious consequences on the global economy, on energy supply on the prices of oil and gas that we use in our everyday lives. And that's going to affect everyday people here and around the world," Nusseibeh said in a press briefing.

The diplomat said the issue was discussed earlier on Tuesday in a phone call between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan. Nusseibeh also said that during the discussion, the UAE side called for de-escalation in Ukraine.

Global oil prices, measured by the Brent crude benchmark, settled at 7.5-year highs on Tuesday as the Russia-Ukraine crisis intensified and oil traders worried that Western sanctions against Moscow would severely impact the country's energy exports.

In response to Russia's military operation in Ukraine, the EU, the US, the United Kingdom and allies rolled out comprehensive sanctions. The EU, like the US, has banned transactions related to the management of Russian Central Bank assets and reserves, and closed European airspace to Russian air carriers. The bloc also moved to exclude select major Russian banks from SWIFT squeezing billions of dollars that Russia trades daily in oil and other commodities.

Moscow began a special operation to demilitarize and "denazify" Ukraine on Thursday, responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics in countering intensifying attacks by Ukrainian forces. The Russian Defense Ministry said that the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger.

Global Oil Benchmark Brent Settles at August 2014 Highs Amid Russia-Ukraine Crisis

NEW YORK, March 1 (Sputnik) - Global oil prices, measured by the Brent crude benchmark, settled at 7.5-year highs on Tuesday as the Russia-Ukraine crisis intensified and oil traders worried that Western sanctions against Moscow would severely impact the country's energy exports.

Brent's most-actively traded contract settled up $3.98, or 4%, at $104.97 a barrel, the highest closing for the global oil benchmark since August 2014.

Earlier, the contract rose to as high as $107.53 in intraday trade, also marking a 7.5-year high, after the first round of talks between Russia and Ukraine did not bring specific results, prompting traders to push crude prices higher.
WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - House and Senate Republicans introduced legislation to try and bolster US energy independence amid concerns about the rising price of gas due to the ongoing situation between Russia and Ukraine, the lawmakers said on Tuesday.

"Energy costs were already skyrocketing due to President Biden's disastrous policies that have made us more reliant on energy from places like Russia. Putin's unprovoked attack on Ukraine will make matters worse for energy costs at home. Now more than ever, we need to reclaim our energy independence," Senator Chuck Grassley said in a press release accompanying text of the bill. "That's why I'm proud to support the American Energy Independence Act, which will take critical steps to lower gas prices and unleash energy production right here in the United States."

The bill would assert as official US policy the goal to achieve full energy independence, the press release said. It would also ease regulatory burdens on companies engaged in fracking and restore the permit for the Keystone XL Pipeline among other measures, the press release added.

Grassley introduced the legislation in the Senate alongside Senators Josh Hawley, Bill Hagery and Tommy Tuberville. A House version of the bill was also introduced by Representatives Daniel Webster, Bruce Westerman and Cathy McMorris Rodgers.

Global oil prices, measured by the Brent crude benchmark, settled at 7.5 year highs on Tuesday as the Russia-Ukraine crisis intensified and oil traders worried that Western sanctions against Moscow would severely impact the country's energy exports.

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Texas Man Arrested for Forcibly Entering Capitol During January 6 Riot – DOJ

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - A 37-year-old Texas man was arrested Tuesday on charges related to the riot at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, the Justice Department said. In a criminal complaint filed in the District of Columbia, Samuel Shough, of Austin, is charged with civil disorder and related offenses.

"Shough ... was captured on video waving a Texas flag and wearing a jacket over what appeared to be a body armor vest, a ballistic-style helmet, goggles, and hard-knuckle gloves," the Justice Department said. "He was ... among the first few individuals to breach a line of uniformed U.S. Capitol Police officers attempting to keep rioters from entering. The rioters, including Shough, overwhelmed the officers and forcibly entered the building."

The FBI identified Slough after seeking the public's help in identifying those who took part in the riot which sought to disrupt a joint session of Congress where members were tabulating and counting electoral votes from the 2020 presidential election.

In the 13 months since January 6, more than 750 people from almost all 50 states have been arrested for crimes related to the Capitol riot. To date, more than 235 people have been charged with assaulting or impeding law enforcement. The investigation continues.
WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - Legislation in the US Congress to fund the government is experiencing complications over disagreements between the parties about money in support of Ukraine in its conflict with Russia, Senate Republican Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said on Tuesday during a news conference.

"We are working on an omnibus appropriation bill here, and we hit a snag that you should ask the other side about when they come out. They're willing to ask for a supplemental for non-defense diplomacy and that sort of thing, but on the defense part of the supplemental, they want to take that out of the topline we've already agreed to on defense, which includes parity between defense and non-defense," McConnell said. "We're not going to do that. This is an emergency. It's eligible for a supplemental and defense ought to be treated just like non-defense in the supplemental."

Congress and the Biden administration have been developing sanctions against Russia and programs in support of Ukraine since the buildup of Russian forces near Ukraine began several months ago. The situation has escalated in recent days over Russia's decision to begin military operations in Ukraine in defense of the self-declared Donbas republics.

Biden in February signed legislation to avert a government shutdown through March 11. The Congress must pass further funding legislation in order to avoid a shutdown after that date.

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - Sweden and Finland ought to join NATO as early as tomorrow if they are ready and willing, US Senate Republican Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said on Tuesday.

"Sweden and Finland, two countries that have never belonged to NATO, are thinking about joining, and I think we ought to sign them up tomorrow if they're ready to join," McConnell said during a new conference.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on Thursday invited Sweden and Finland to attend a NATO virtual summit on the situation in and around Ukraine on Friday. On the same day, Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin said that Finland will be ready to join NATO "if the issue of national security becomes acute."

The countries' interest in NATO membership emerged as a result of Russian military operations in Ukraine, which Russian President Vladimir Putin said aims to demilitarize and de-nazify the country in defense of the self-declared republics in the Donbas region.
Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Friday that Moscow will have to respond if Sweden and Finland become NATO members.

US Senate Majority Leader Says Sweden, Finland Ought to Join NATO Tomorrow if Ready

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"Sweden and Finland, two countries that have never belonged to NATO, are thinking about joining, and I think we ought to sign them up tomorrow if they're ready to join," McConnell said during a new conference.
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The countries' interest in NATO membership emerged as a result of Russian military operations in Ukraine, which Russian President Vladimir Putin said aims to demilitarize and de-nazify the country in defense of the self-declared republics in the Donbas region.
Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Friday that Moscow will have to respond if Sweden and Finland become NATO members.

US Indicts Two British Nationals in $99Mln Loan Fraud Scheme - Justice Dept.

Washington, March 1, (Sputnik) - Two British men were indicted in a Brooklyn federal court for lying to their victims and encouraging them to invest in a $99 million fraud scheme involving loans using valuable bottles of wine as collateral, the Justice Department said on Tuesday.
"Unlike the fine wine they purported to possess, the defendants' repeated lies to investors did not age well. As alleged, these defendants duped investors by offering them an intoxicating investment opportunity collateralized by valuable bottles of fine wine that turned out to be too good to be true," US Attorney Breon Peace said in a press release.
Stephen Burton and James Wellesley are charged with wire fraud conspiracy, wire fraud and money laundering conspiracy for their involvement in a scheme pulled off through their company, Bordeaux Cellars, the trade name for two private limited companies, Bordeaux Cellars, Limited and Bordeaux Cellars London Ltd., registered in Hong Kong and London, England respectively, the release added.
Prosecutors said from at least between June 2017 through February 2019, the pair posed as executives of Bordeaux Cellars where they solicited investors, including residents of the Eastern District of New York, at investor conferences held in the United States and overseas. They told investors Bordeaux Cellars brokered loans between investors and high-net worth wine collectors that would covered by the wine collections. Wellesley and Burton promised the investors that they would receive regular interest payments from the borrowers, and Bordeaux Cellars would hold the wine pledged as collateral while the loans were outstanding. However, the high-priced wines did not exist.

Law enforcement arrested Wellesley on February 4, 2022 in the United Kingdom and Burton has so far evaded custody.

Ukraine Envoy to US to Join First Lady During State of Union Address Tuesday Evening

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - Ukraine Ambassador to the United States Oksana Markarova will joint US First Lady Jill Biden in the viewing box during the State of the Union address delivered by President Joe Biden, the White House revealed in a release on Tuesday. "The Second Gentleman, Mr. Douglas Emhoff, the President’s sister, Valerie Biden Owens and the Ambassador of Ukraine to the United States, Oksana Markarova, will also join the First Lady in the viewing box," the White House said.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on US President Joe Biden to deliver a special message on Ukraine during his State of the Union speech later on Tuesday.

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.

Article 2 of the US Constitution requires the US president to time give Congress information on the State of the Union and recommend to their consideration such measures as he deems to be necessary and expedient.

The US president delivers the State of the Union address annually before a joint session of 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.

Canada’s Bernier Decries Trudeau as ‘Fascist Psychopath,’ Brands Freeland as ‘Nazi’

TORONTO, March 1 (Sputnik) - People’s Party of Canada (PPC) leader Maxime Bernier on Tuesday leveled some of the harshest criticism at Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Deputy
Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland since Trudeau's declaration of national emergency and the crackdown on the peaceful Freedom Convoy protests. In late February, Trudeau invoked the previously unused Emergencies Act to quell weeks-long peaceful protests against vaccine mandates prompting widespread outrage and claims of government overreach.

"Canada has a fascist psychopath as prime minister and a [N]azi as deputy prime minister. They recently gave themselves extraordinary powers to crush peaceful dissidents," Bernier said in a statement via Twitter.

Bernier also expressed his dissatisfaction with the much-maligned mainstream media coverage of the protests and his party, saying the PPC has been falsely painted as a "threat to Canadian democracy" despite the Trudeau government’s heavy-handed tactics.

Freeland, who also serves as Canada’s finance minister, drew the ire Bernier and many others after being pictured at a demonstration holding up a scarf bearing the colors of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (an extremist organization banned in Russia) with a popular nationalistic phrase emblazoned on it.

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

The Ottawa leg of the protests were routed by law enforcement at the end of February after the Trudeau government granted itself sweeping new powers through the declaration of national emergency.

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Harris Reviews Upcoming US, NATO Force Posture Changes With European Leaders - White House

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - US Vice President Kamala Harris in calls with the leaders of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania discussed the upcoming US and NATO force posture adjustments in eastern Europe, the White House said on Tuesday.

"[T]he Vice President and the European leaders reviewed recent and upcoming US and NATO force posture adjustments in Europe, including the deployment of thousands of US troops and critical capabilities to reinforce our deterrence posture and collective defense," the White House said in a press release.

Harris also discussed with each leader the United States' efforts to support Ukraine's security and economy, the release said.

Last week, Russia began a special operation to demilitarize and "denazify" Ukraine, responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics in countering the aggression of Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger. Moscow has repeatedly stressed that it has no plans to occupy Ukraine.
In response, the United States, the United Kingdom, members of the European Union and several other countries imposed comprehensive sanctions against Russia. Some of them closed their airspace to all Russian flights, sanctioned a number of Russian banks and officials. They are also seeking to disconnect Russia from SWIFT, and the international payment system confirmed on Tuesday that it will obey the law on sanctions once it gets the legal order.

Biden in Call With Zelenskyy Underscores Sustained US Security Aid - White House

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden spoke by telephone with Volodymyr Zelenskyy and emphasized sustained US deliveries of security assistance and economic support amid the conflict with Russia, the White House said on Tuesday.
"President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. spoke today with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine to discuss the United States’ continued backing for Ukraine as it defends itself against Russian aggression. President Biden underscored the United States’ sustained help for Ukraine, including ongoing deliveries of security assistance, economic support, and humanitarian aid," the White House said in a press release.

UNGA to Vote on ‘Aggression Against Ukraine’ Resolution Wednesday Morning - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, March 1 (Sputnik) - The UN General Assembly on Wednesday will vote on the draft resolution demanding Russia to withdraw its forces from Ukraine, Paulina Kubiak, spokesperson of the President of the General Assembly, said during a press briefing on Tuesday.
The UN General Assembly has been holding its Emergency Special Session on the situation in Ukraine since Monday.
"The resolution will be up tomorrow at 10:00 a.m. [EDT] and then there might be explanation of vote forewords," Kubiak said.
The resolution, dubbed “Aggression Against Ukraine,” demands that Russia immediately cease using force against Ukraine and to refrain from any further threat of use of force against any United Nations member state.
The resolution also deplores Russia’s recognition of the status of certain areas in eastern Ukraine - Donetska and Luhansk people’s republics - and calls on Russia to immediately and unconditionally reverse the decision.
A similar resolution in the UN Security Council was not adopted last Friday due to a veto by Russia.
In the 193-member UN General Assembly, the passage of a resolution requires a simple majority and no member state has the right to use veto.

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Oil Consuming Nations Eye 60Mln Bbls Reserves Release, Less EU Reliance on Russia - IEA

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - Oil consuming nations will release 60 million barrels from their emergency crude reserves under a coordinated action to mitigate supply shortfalls from the Russia-Ukraine conflict, ministers from the International Energy Agency (IEA) said on Tuesday. Europe will also reduce its reliance on Russian natural gas and look for alternative sources of energy that include renewables, the IEA said in a statement.

"The 31 member countries of the Governing Board of the International Energy Agency agreed to release 60 million barrels of oil from their emergency reserves to send a unified and strong message to global oil markets that there will be no shortfall in supplies as a result of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine," the statement said.

The United States will provide half of the barrels to be released under the plan from its Strategic Petroleum Reserve, the White House said in a separate statement.

"As part of this agreement, President Biden will authorize the Department of Energy to release 30 million barrels from the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said.

The IEA and White House statements came as global oil markets rallied as much as 11% on Tuesday after ceasefire negotiations between Russian and Ukraine forces failed, prompting traders to push crude prices higher on worries that international sanctions against Moscow would severely crimp the country’s energy exports. Russia provides about 10% of the world’s oil supply.

On Thursday, IEA also said it will release on a ten-point plan on how European countries can reduce their reliance by next winter on Russian gas supplies, which provide about 40% of European Union’s needs.

Roughly a third of the gas burned in Europe comes from Russia’s Nord Stream 1 and Yamal gas pipelines. Speculation is rife that higher exports of US LNG will be needed to compensate for any drop in Russian gas flows to Europe.

US natural gas futures rose about 4% on Tuesday to trade at above $4.57 per thermal unit.

The West had taken pains initially not to target Russia’s energy exports with sanctions due to its own reliance on Russian oil and gas.

But that mindset changed over the weekend, with the United States, Britain, Canada and the European Union blocking the access of various Russian banks to the SWIFT global payment system - squeezing billions of dollars that Russia trades daily in oil and other commodities.

EU officials affirmed on Monday their plan to wean the bloc from its dependence on Russian energy, while being prepared to suffer spiraling oil and gas costs in the short-term. Crude prices have risen more than 35% since the year began, while US natural gas has gained about 23%.
The latest rally in energy prices came ahead of Wednesday's meeting of global oil producer alliance OPEC+, which is expected to stay with its gradual output increase strategy, ignoring calls from consuming nations under the IEA.

UN Spokesman Confirms US Decides to Expel Russian Staff Member

UNITED NATIONS, March 1 (Sputnik) - United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric confirmed on Tuesday that the United States has decided to expel a Russian employee working at the UN Secretariat in New York.

"I can confirm that the US mission to the United Nations informed the Secretariat on 28 February ... of its decision to take action under Section 13 (b) of the UN-US Headquarters Agreement with respect to a staff member in the Secretariat," Dujarric said when asked to confirm reports of the expulsion of a Russian staffer.

"We regret that we find ourselves in this situation but are engaging with the host country [US]," he added.

Dujarric declined to disclose the name and a position of the affected employee in deference to the privacy of the individual and the "sensitivity of the matter."

The spokesman said the staff member was scheduled to end his assignment with the United Nations on March 14.

On Monday, the United States decided to expel another 12 Russian diplomats from the Permanent Mission to the United Nations for allegedly "engaging in espionage."

US, Australian Defense Officials Discuss Support for Ukraine, AUKUS - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks and her Australian Defense Secretary Greg Moriarty discussed Canberra's decision to provide lethal aid to Ukraine, Pentagon said on Tuesday.

"Deputy Secretary of Defense Dr. Kathleen Hicks met yesterday with Australian Secretary of Defence Greg Moriarty to advance the United States-Australia Alliance and compare perspectives on managing national defense enterprises," Pentagon said in a press release.

"Secretary Moriarty conveyed to Deputy Secretary Hicks the Australia government's decision to provide lethal and non-lethal aid to Ukraine."

The two officials also discussed the progress made in the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) trilateral security partnership, including governance processes for the partnership and efforts to bolster information-sharing.
On Thursday, Russia began a special operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine in response to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to defend from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and the civilian population is not in danger. The move sparked condemnation from Western leaders and a wave of sanctions against Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a decree authorizing counter sanctions.

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Biden to Outline Agenda to Combat Mental Health Crisis in US - White House

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is expected to announce a strategy to tackle the mental health crisis in the United States in his first State of the Union address, the White House said on Tuesday. "The President will outline a unity agenda consisting of policy where there has historically been support from both Republicans and Democrats, and call on Congress to send bills to his desk to deliver progress for the American people," a White House fact sheet said. "As part of this unity agenda, he will announce a strategy to address our national mental health crisis." Biden has said previously that the United States faces an unprecedented mental health crisis among people of all ages. Two of every five adult Americans report suffering from either anxiety or depression, with minority communities disproportionately undertreated. The COVID-19 pandemic measures have exacerbated the problem with rates of depression and anxiety ratcheting higher as the physical isolation, grief, trauma and media information saturation have taken a toll on the populace. Biden will discuss steps to strengthen the capacity of the United States' mental health system, connect more of those in need to the resources to help them heal and cope, and construct a continuum of support that will transform the country's health and social services infrastructure, according to the White House.

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Biden Holds 30-Minute Call With Zelenskyy - White House Official

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden spoke to Volodymyr Zelenskyy by phone on Tuesday for over half an hour, a White House official said. "President Biden held a call with President Zelenskyy of Ukraine today and they spoke for just over 30 minutes," the official said.
WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The United States military commanders have not been in direct communication with their Russian counterparts regarding the conflict in Ukraine, a senior US Defense Department official said on Tuesday.

"We are not in direct communication with Russian tactical commanders on the ground [in Ukraine] or involved in this operation. I have no new conversations to speak to either between General [Mark] Milley and General Valery Gerasimov or between Secretary [Lloyd] Austin and [Russian] Minister [of Defense] Shoigy. There has been no communication," the official said during a press briefing.

On Thursday, Russia began a special operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine in response to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to defend from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger.

The move sparked condemnation from Western leaders and a wave of sanctions against Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a decree authorizing counter sanctions.

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - Volodymyr Zelenskyy said "we'll see" when asked by CNN on Tuesday whether Russia is ready for "principal things" in peace talks amid the ongoing military operation in Ukraine.

"I think there are principal things you can do and that is very important moment. If you'll do these [things] and if that side is ready, it means that they are ready for peace. If they don't, really it means that we are, you know, just wasting time," Zelenskyy said during an interview from his alleged bunker in Kiev.

"We'll see," Zelenskyy added when asked whether Russia is ready for the "principal things" or Ukraine is wasting time.

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"We'll see," Zelenskyy added when asked whether Russia is ready for the "principal things" or Ukraine is wasting time.
WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on US President Joe Biden to deliver a special message on Ukraine during his State of the Union speech later on Tuesday. "Ukraine is the heart of Europe, and now I think Europe sees Ukraine is something special for this world. That's why [the] world can't lose this something special," Zelenskyy told CNN and Reuters.

Canada Bans Russian Ships, Fishing Vessels From Ports, Internal Waters- Transport Minister
(Updates with more details, background in paras 3, 4)
TORONTO, March 1 (Sputnik) - Canada will ban Russian ships and fishing vessels from entering its ports and internal waters in response to that country’s special operation in Ukraine, Minister of Transport Omar Alghabra said on Tuesday. "Today... Omar Alghabra, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Melanie Joly, and the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard Joyce Murray, announced that the government of Canada intends to ban Russian-owned or registered ships and fishing vessels in Canadian ports and internal waters. The ban is expected to be in effect later this week through orders made pursuant to the Special Economic Measures Act," the statement said. Transport Canada said the ban will come into effect later in the week. 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.

US to Provide Half of 60 Mln Barrel Release From Global Crude Reserves - White House
WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The United States will provide half of the 60 million barrels to be released by oil consuming countries from their reserves to limit the impact of the shortfall in oil supplies owing to the Russia-Ukraine crisis, the White House announced on Tuesday. "As part of this agreement, President Biden will authorize the Department of Energy to release 30 million barrels from the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve," White House press secretary Jan Psaki said in a statement on the Coordinated IEA Release to Support Global Energy Security. Earlier, the 31-member IEA, or International Energy Agency, said it would release a total of 60 million barrels from the emergency crude reserves of its members under a coordinated action to mitigate the supply squeeze expected from the Russia-Ukraine crisis.
WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The European Union’s latest sanctions and economic retaliation against Russia over Ukraine will backfire and may throw the continent into a massive recession, Eurasia Center Vice President Earl Rasmussen told Sputnik.

In response to Russia’s military operation in Ukraine, the EU, the US, the United Kingdom and allies rolled out comprehensive sanctions. The EU, like the US, has banned transactions related to the management of Russian Central Bank assets and reserves, and closed European airspace to Russian air carriers. The bloc also moved to exclude select major Russian banks from SWIFT.

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen described the measures as "the largest sanctions package" in EU history. She admitted it "will come at a cost for our economy too," but stressed the need to stand up against "aggression" and "invest" in "freedom and independence."

"These sanctions against Russia by Europe will thrust Europe into a historical recession," Rasmussen said.

On top of the measures, Anglo-Dutch petroleum giant Shell said it is withdrawing from joint ventures with Gazprom and Gazprom Neft, including the Sakhalin II project, and terminating its participation in the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project, whose certification was halted earlier by Germany. BP said it will dump its stake in Rosneft.

The decision by Berlin, strongly pressured by the Biden administration, will send energy costs spiraling wildly out of control not just in Germany but in surrounding nations too, Rasmussen warned.

"Energy markets will peak. My colleagues in Europe tell me that prices are already up 30%. They will go much higher, perhaps twice as high, maybe more," he said.

Despite repeated assurances from President Joe Biden, the United States is in no condition to replace Russia’s plentiful and cheap supplies of natural gas to Europe with any alternative energy supply that is remotely comparable in either scale or cost, Rasmussen stated.

"How will Europe replace Russia’s gas? It will not! Welcome global austerity!" he said.

Russia is one of the world’s top natural gas exporters and top gas reserves, Rasmussen pointed out.

"EU leaders have made a huge mistake. Russian gas will not be replaced - impossible. Also, the gas [to be] replaced will be significantly more expensive, perhaps two to four times more expensive," he said.

The economic consequences of the sanctions against Russia would be felt by both the United States and Europe, Rasmussen believes.

"We will be facing dire times ahead: Hopefully not a full-scale war which could go nuclear very rapidly but a significant global economic crisis regardless," he said.
The inevitable long-term result would be that the United States would see the central role it had taken for granted in the global economy for so long significantly reduced, according to Rasmussen.

"Even if we make it through, the economic system has been severely shaken by the arrogance of the United States, and the European powers which will shift more rapidly away from the dollar as a trading/currency reserve," he said.

Economic disruptions from the new sanctions and moves to punish Russia would certainly spread across both Western and Eastern Europe, Rasmussen said.

"Ukraine, Europe and to some degree Russia will be challenged as well as the United States. China will likely gain the most," he added.

By blocking the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, US and German leaders have taken a step that may cause havoc across their own and neighboring economies and societies at every level, Rasmussen continued.

"Energy is essential: It impacts industrial production directly as well as the consumer. I am not sure when they will be able to recover," he explained.

Nor would the United States itself be immune from the destructive economic forces it sets in motion, Rasmussen pointed out.

"US prices will also increase. Perhaps a lag, but they will. Gasoline prices will easily rise over $5 per gallon and maybe close to $6. The blocking of Russian energy exports would have a disastrous effect on economic recovery and prospects for growth for the entire world, Rasmussen observed.

"Russia is the one of the largest gas and oil producers. The magnitude of their reserves and export capacity is nearly impossible to replace and a replacement will be significantly more expensive," he concluded.

Moscow began a special operation to demilitarize and "denazify" Ukraine on Thursday, responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics in countering intensifying attacks by Ukrainian forces. The Russian Defense Ministry said that the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger.

Pentagon Says Can Not Confirm Presence, Use of Thermobaric Weapons in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The United States is not able to confirm the presence or the use of Russian thermobaric weapons, also known as vacuum bombs, in Ukraine, a senior US Defense Department official said on Tuesday.

"We have not seen, we cannot confirm that thermobaric weapons are actually in Ukraine and we cannot confirm the use of thermobaric weapons, but we have seen inside Ukraine the kinds of launchers that could be used for those weapons," the official said during a press briefing.

On Monday, Ukraine's Ambassador to the United States Oksana Markarova claimed Russia had used a thermobaric weapon during its special operation in Ukraine. Markarova did not provide any evidence to support her claim.
On Thursday, Russia began a special operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine, responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics to defend against intensifying attacks by Ukrainian forces. The Russian Defense Ministry said that the special operation is solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and the civilian population is not in danger.

Around 500,000 Ukrainians Trying to Leave Country in Wake of Crisis - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The US administration estimates that around 500,000 Ukrainians are trying to leave the country in the wake of the crisis, a senior Pentagon official said on Tuesday.

"We assess that somewhere in the nature of 500,000 Ukrainians have or are trying to leave the country," the official said.

The official added that in the past 24 hours just under 70 American citizens have moved into Poland.

Last Thursday, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine in response to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics against intensifying attacks by Ukrainian forces. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger.

The move sparked condemnation from Western leaders and a wave of sanctions.

Canada Bans Russian Ships, Fishing Vessels From Ports, Internal Waters - Minister

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) — Canada bans Russian ships and fishing vessels from entering its ports and internal waters, Minister of Transport Omar Alghabra said on Tuesday.

"Today... Omar Alghabra, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Mélanie Joly, and the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard Joyce Murray, announced that the Government of Canada intends to ban Russian-owned or registered ships and fishing vessels in Canadian ports and internal waters. The ban is expected to be in effect later this week through orders made pursuant to the Special Economic Measures Act," the statement read.

US Sanctions 4 South Africa-Based Islamic State Financial Facilitators - Treasury
WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The United States imposed sanctions against four financial facilitators of the Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) who are based in South Africa, the US Department of the Treasury said in a statement on Tuesday.

"Today, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated four Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and ISIS-Mozambique (ISIS-M) financial facilitators based in South Africa," the statement said.

The designated - and their associates - have played a central role in facilitating the transfer of funds from the the Islamic State to its supporters across Africa.

Treasury Under Secretary Brian Nelson expressed hope that imposing sanctions will allow the United States to disrupt and expose key Islamic State supporters who use South Africa's financial system in order to reach their criminal goals.

"The United States is working with our African partners, including South Africa, to dismantle ISIS financial support networks on the continent," Nelson said.

The Treasury Department said one of the designated, Farhad Hoomer, helped organize and begin operations of a terrorist cell based in the South African city of Durban. In addition, Siraaj Miller, who leads a group of Islamic State supporters in Cape Town, has provided financial assistance to the terror group by training members to conduct robberies.

The United States also sanctioned Abdella Hussein Abadigga, who recruited young men in South Africa and sent them to a weapons training camp, and Peter Charles Mbaga, who facilitated funds transfers from South Africa.

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IEA Ministers Discuss Need to Reduce Europe's Reliance on Russian Natural Gas - Statement

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - Europe needs to reduce its reliance on Russian natural gas and look for alternative sources of energy that include renewables, ministers from the International Energy Agency (IEA) said on Tuesday after announcing an emergency release of crude reserves due to concerns over supply amid the Russia-Ukraine crisis.

"Ministers also discussed Europe's significant reliance on Russian natural gas and the need to reduce this by looking to other suppliers, including via LNG (liquefied natural gas), and to continue to pursue a well-managed acceleration of clean energy transitions," the Paris-based IEA said in a statement.

The IEA secretariat will release on Thursday a 10-point plan on how European countries can reduce their reliance on Russian gas supplies by next winter, the statement added.

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Canada Allots $79Mln in Humanitarian Assistance for Ukraine - Foreign Ministry
TORONTO, March 1 (Sputnik) - Canada has allotted nearly $79 million in humanitarian aid to Ukraine amid Russia's special operation in the country, Canada's Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday.

"Canada stands united with those affected by the conflict in Ukraine, which is why we're announcing an additional C$100 million [US$78.82 million] in humanitarian assistance to help experienced partners address the most pressing humanitarian needs on the ground in Ukraine and neighboring countries," Global Affairs Canada said in a statement.

The humanitarian aid package will provide health services, water, food and sanitation to those affected by the conflict, the statement said.

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

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Schumer Urges Senate to Work on Strong Bipartisan Aid Package for Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The US Senate must pass a strong bipartisan aid package for Ukraine to address the country's humanitarian and security needs, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said on Tuesday.

"In the weeks to come, the Senate must work on a bipartisan basis and in lockstep with the Biden Administration to pass a strong aid package providing both humanitarian aid and security assistance to Ukraine," Schumer said. "I hope our Republican colleagues in this chamber will work with us and the administration to stay unified with a strong aid package."

On Thursday, Russia began a special operation to demilitarize and "denazify" Ukraine, responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics in countering intensifying attacks by Ukrainian forces. The Russian Defense Ministry said that the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger.

The move sparked condemnation from Western leaders and a wave of sanctions.

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Oil Consuming Nations to Move 60Mln Bbls From Reserves Due to Russia-Ukraine Crisis - IEA

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - Oil consuming nations will release 60 million barrels from their emergency crude reserves under a coordinated action to ensure no shortfall in supplies.

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due to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said on Tuesday. "The 31 member countries of the Governing Board of the International Energy Agency agreed to release 60 million barrels of oil from their emergency reserves to send a unified and strong message to global oil markets that there will be no shortfall in supplies as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine," the IEA said in a statement.

New Security Assistance Flowed Into Ukraine Over Last 24 Hours - Senior US Official

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - New security assistance has been delivered to Ukraine over the last day, a senior US Defense Department official said on Tuesday. "Security assistance has flowed into Ukraine over the last 24 hours," the senior official said.

US Has No Indication Belarusian Troops Entering Ukraine - Senior Official

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - The US administration sees no signs that Belarusian troops are entering Ukraine, a senior Pentagon official said on Tuesday. "There is no indication that Belarusian troops are entering Ukraine," the official said.

Only Third of Americans Approve of Biden’s Approach to Russia-Ukraine Situation - Poll

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - Only one third of Americans approve of US President Joe Biden's approach to the situation between Russia and Ukraine, a new Washington Post/ABC News Poll revealed on Tuesday. Thirty-three percent of people said they approve of the way Biden is handling the situation between Russia and Ukraine. Another 47 percent said they disapprove and every fifth of the respondents said they have no opinion, the poll results showed.

Asked about their attitude toward Russia, only 1 percent of respondents said that they consider it a US ally and 12 percent called Russia a friend. At the same time, 39 percent said they think Russia is an unfriendly country, and 41 percent say Russia is an enemy, the poll results showed. About three thirds of respondents are supporting the idea of economic sanctions imposed on Russia, while only 18 percent opposed sanctions, according to the poll results.
The poll was conducted by telephone February 20-24 among 1,011 adults and has a margin of error of plus or minus four percentage points for the overall results and larger among subgroups.

Oil Jumps 8% to Above $105 Per Barrel as Russia-Ukraine Ceasefire Talks Fail

NEW YORK, March 1 (Sputnik) - Global oil markets jumped about 8% on Tuesday after ceasefire talks between Russia and Ukraine failed, prompting traders to push crude prices higher on concerns that Western sanctions against Moscow would severely affect the country's energy exports.

By 10:35 a.m. Eastern US (15:35 GMT), the most-active contract in global crude benchmark Brent was up $7.40, or 7.6%, at $105.35 per barrel.

US crude's West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, benchmark, was up $7.59, or 7.9%, at $103.31.

The United States, Britain, Europe and Canada blocked the access of various Russian banks to the SWIFT global interbank payment system - squeezing the billions of dollars that Russian trades a day in oil and other commodities.

The West had taken pains initially not to target Russia's energy exports with sanctions due to its own reliance on Russian oil and gas.

But that mindset seems to have changed, with EU officials affirming on Monday their plan to wean the bloc from its dependence on Russian energy, while being prepared to suffer spiraling oil and gas costs in the short-term. Crude prices have risen more than 35% since the year began.

Negotiations for a halt to the Russia-Ukraine conflict failed to produce an immediate breakthrough on Tuesday and fighting intensified between the two sides, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy urging the West to enforce a no-fly zone for Russian aircraft over his country.

Blinken Says UN Should Send Unified Message to Russia to Send Troops Back From Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday urged the United Nations to send a unified message to Russia to immediately withdraw its troops from Ukraine, just as leading UN officials have said individually.

"We must send a resolute and unified message the President Putin should unconditionally stop this unprovoked attack, as the Secretary General [of the United Nations] and the High
Commissioner [on Human Rights] have done and immediately withdraw Russian forces from Ukraine," Blinken told the Human Rights Forum.

Blinken virtually addressed the 49th session of the UN Human Rights Council at the European headquarters of the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland.

On Thursday, Russia began a special operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine, responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics in countering intensifying attacks by Ukrainian forces. The Russian Defense Ministry said that the special operation is solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and the civilian population is not in danger.

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Canada Economy Grows 4.6% in 2021 Failing to Offset 2020 Contraction, Short of Forecasts

TORONTO, March 1 (Sputnik) - The Canadian economy grew by 4.6 percent in 2021 falling well short of the anticipated near 6 percent growth and not enough to overturn the 5.2% coronavirus pandemic-induced contraction in 2020, Statistics Canada announced on Tuesday.

In its first budget in two years last April, the Canadian government projected that the economy would grow by 5.8 percent in 2021, with the country’s GDP and employment levels to reach pre-pandemic levels at some point during the year.

"Real GDP posted a strong 4.6% growth in 2021, after the COVID-19 pandemic-induced decline (-5.2%) in 2020," Statistics Canada said in its quarterly GDP report.

Canada’s economic output rose by 1.6% in the fourth quarter of 2021, however, again, well short of the 5% projected by the government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

The growth was led by home ownership transfer costs and business investment in technology, Statistics Canada said. The country’s financial sector also had a strong year, with net operating surplus up 15.9%.

The Canadian economy experienced no change in December 2021, with growth in services-producing industries (+0.1%) offsetting a decline in goods-producing industries (-0.1%).

The Canadian government has said it expects the economy to grow by 4% in 2022.

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Blinken Calls on UN to Release Report on Human Rights in China’s Xinjiang

WASHINGTON, March 1 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday called on the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet to publish its report on the situation concerning human rights of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, China.
“In China, the government continues to commit genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang against predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and other minority groups. We urge the High Commissioner to release without delay her report on the situation there,” Blinken said.

Blinken was addressing the 49th session of the UN Human Rights Council at the European headquarters of the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland.

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is the largest province in China with a population of 25 million people from various ethnic groups, but about 43% of them are Uyghurs, most of whom are Muslim. The region, bordering seven countries, including Afghanistan and Pakistan, has been considered an epicenter of terrorism and extremism for many years.

At the end of August 2018, experts from the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination reported that up to 1 million ethnic Uyghurs could be in so-called "re-education camps" in China’s Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

Beijing has denied the existence of "re-education camps" on numerous occasions, insisting that the country is fully complying with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.