3/2/22 Wednesday

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US Test Launch of Minuteman III Ballistic Missile Postponed, Pentagon Says

The aging LGM-30G Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) forms the backbone of the land-based US nuclear triad. Introduced in 1970, they are expected to last until 2050. However, leaders at US Strategic Command have cast doubts on that goal.

A scheduled test launch of a Minuteman III has been postponed, the Pentagon announced on Wednesday.

"Last weekend, Putin directed special alert of Russian nuclear forces. We saw this as dangerous and irresponsible. Such provocative rhetoric is unacceptable. The US has not taken any similar steps. In an effort to demonstrate that we have no intention to engage in actions that could be misunderstood, our Minutemen III test launch will be postponed from this weekend," Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby told reporters.

The launch was scheduled for this coming weekend, but will not be performed due to high tensions with the Russian Federation, where nuclear forces have been placed on high alert.

The Pentagon conducts several test-launches of the long-range weapons each year, firing them from silos in the continental United States toward a testing ground in Kwajalein Atoll, in the South Pacific. The missiles are typically armed with a single thermonuclear warhead each, but the test-launches are performed without warheads.

The Minuteman III has been in service since 1970 and is presently the only land-based US ballistic missile. The Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent is expected to begin replacing them by 2030, but recent cost-savings schemes have attempted to keep the Minuteman in service until 2050. However, Adm. Charles Richard, the head of US Strategic Command, said last year that such a goal was practically unattainable, the missiles are already so old.

Kirby said the decision to postpone the launch does not affect the US' nuclear posture or deterrence. He added it was "not tied to a specific action or inaction" by Russian President Vladimir Putin, but said the US would like to see Moscow reciprocate on nuclear posture.

On Sunday, Putin ordered Russian nuclear forces put on high alert status, following comments by UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss that if Russia's military operation in Ukraine were not stopped, it would lead to conflict with NATO.

In response, the US and NATO both indicated they saw no reason to increase their own nuclear alert status. Three NATO allies - the US, UK and France - possess nuclear weapons, and several European NATO members have special agreements with Washington to be armed with American nuclear bombs in the case of conflict.

The Russian special operation in Ukraine began on February 24 and aims to "neutralize" the country amid fears it could serve as a platform from which NATO could attack Russia. The operation also aims to eliminate neo-Nazi forces responsible for driving the eight-year-long war
against ethnic Russians in the Donbass region, where last month Putin extended diplomatic recognition to two republics that broke away from Kiev in 2014.

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Off Sides

On Monday, the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) and its European counterpart, UEFA, made the unprecedented move to indefinitely suspend Russian teams from the league, in response to the Russian special military operation in Ukraine that began on Thursday.

"Football is fully united here and in full solidarity with all the people affected in Ukraine. Both Presidents hope that the situation in Ukraine will improve significantly and rapidly so that football can again be a vector for unity and peace amongst people," said the joint FIFA-UEFA statement. FIFA often suspends teams, but typically for corruption or government meddling in club affairs. Only twice has it acted politically: in 1961, when South Africa was suspended because its Apartheid government insisted on only fielding all-white teams; and in 1992, when Yugoslavia was suspended amid the Yugoslav Wars following United Nations sanctioning.

The suspension of Russia for its military intervention in Ukraine stands out due to FIFA's deafening silence during many other military operations, including the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, which was followed by an eight-year-long occupation war that killed up to 400,000, according to estimates. In addition, the November games are hosted by Qatar, an absolute monarchy with a brutal human rights record and where the construction of facilities for the games has been marred by accusations of slave labor and the deaths of over 6,500 migrant workers. FIFA doesn’t “stand with” people in the Middle East?

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‘Callous Reaction’: Twitterers Blast Pelosi for ‘Bizarre’ Clap When Biden Mentioned Iraq Burn Pits

US President Joe Biden used his speech to a joint session of Congress on Tuesday to request a new law expanding healthcare coverage to US veterans who suffered ill health effects after being exposed to toxic burn pits during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Biden’s Tuesday night State of the Union address was in many ways like any annual review of the nation’s affairs by a US head of state: the president laid out his political agenda for the coming year and gave shoutouts to special guests, as every sentence or two was punctuated by applause. However, sometimes folks get a little thrown off, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), who sat behind Biden in a position that enabled television cameras to see her every move, got
caught making a very awkward response after Biden switched to an especially grim topic: the death of his son. 

"[O]ur troops in Iraq and Afghanistan have faced many dangers. One being stationed at bases, breathing in toxic smoke from burn pits. Many of you have been there. I've been in and out of Iraq and Afghanistan over 40 times. These burn pits that incinerate waste, the waste of war — medical and hazardous material, jet fuel and so much more," Biden told the assembled houses of Congress. 

He later suggested a possible link between the toxic pits and the death of his son, US Army Maj. Beau Biden, of brain cancer, pledging additional support for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and calling on Congress to pass a bill that would expand healthcare coverage for US veterans whose health has suffered due to their exposure to burn pits. 

However, Pelosi's reaction to this appeared to be a bit...confused. She seemed to think it was time to clap, and then very awkwardly and slowly sat back down as she realized the inappropriateness of her response. 

As one might expect, folks on Twitter took her to task, with many suggesting that she was intoxicated and it had affected her judgment, while others joked that the reaction exposed her as "actually a f**king demon." 

Pelosi wasn't the only one to get confused about clapping that night, though, as Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) also stood up too early, looking around somewhat embarrassedly for a few seconds before sitting down and immediately leaping back up with other lawmakers when it was actually time to clap. 

The awkward applause brings to mind another clapping incident by Pelosi in 2019, during a State of the Union address by US President Donald Trump. In that instance, Pelosi's leaning clap, seemingly directed specifically at the Republican leader, was interpreted as sarcastic or patronizing by observers, although Pelosi later claimed the clap had no additional meaning. 

US Senators Name Anti-Russia Sanctions Bill After Ukrainian Nazi Collaborator Slogan

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US Senators Name Anti-Russia Sanctions Bill After Ukrainian Nazi Collaborator Slogan ‘Heroiam Slava’

A number of modern neo-Nazi groups have claimed to be the political heirs of the historically important Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), including Svoboda and Right Sektor, two of the paramilitary groups that drove the US-backed coup in Kiev in February 2014. Republican US Senators Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Chuck Grassley (R-IA) announced on Wednesday that they were introducing a new bill to further sanction Russia by targeting state-owned enterprises. 

The bill is called the Halting Enrichment of Russian Oligarchs and Industry Allies of Moscow’s Schemes to Leverage its Abject Villainy Abroad Act, an unwieldy title the acronym for which is HEROIAM SLAVA, a Ukrainian nationalist phrase that translates to “Glory to the Heroes.”

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"The HEROIAM SLAVA Act would deny companies controlled or owned by Moscow, such as Rosneft, Gazprom, Rosatom, Aeroflot, and RT, access to critical American capital," reads a statement announcing the bill.

"Heroiam Slava" has been uttered numerous times in recent days by Western leaders seeking to show support for Kiev following Russia's launching of a special military operation in Ukraine, including European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson. However, it's not just some bog-standard slogan evoking national pride - it's long been a rallying cry of some of Ukraine's most far-right groups, including those who collaborated with the Nazi invasion and aided in the Holocaust.

Any Ally Against Communism

The slogan first arose in the 1920s, when the Legion of Ukrainian Nationalists, a predecessor to the OUN, adopted it as a response to the cry “Slava Ukraini” (Glory to Ukraine), according to US state media outlet Radio Svoboda. The right-wing nationalist group was formed in Czechoslovakia to resist socialism in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (UkSSR), which in 1922 formed the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) as a founding member republic. In 1929, the OUN was formed in Vienna when the Legion merged with several other far-right groups.

There's an expression in Germany from this period that says "if someone sits down with 11 Nazis, there are a dozen Nazis at the table," and this situation was no different. When Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, the OUN declared an independent Ukrainian state and pledged its allegiance to Nazi leader Adolf Hitler.

However, this relationship was at times uneasy, as the Ukrainians wanted to collaborate with the Nazis but not give up statehood. For example, OUN leader Stepan Bandera was placed under house arrest by the Gestapo and later held in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp before being released in 1944 to fight the advancing Soviet Red Army. The OUN also fought both Soviet and Nazi troops for a time, before switching to solely fight the Soviets in 1944, welcoming Nazi German aid to their forces.

The Ukrainian Insurgent Army, the OUN military wing, collaborated with the Nazi massacres in the Holocaust and carried out its own massacres, including most notoriously the killing of 60,000 Volhynian Poles in 1943 and 1944, but also pogroms against Jewish communities, such as in Lvov in 1941.

"The Jews in the USSR constitute the most faithful support of the ruling Bolshevik regime, and the vanguard of Muscovite imperialism in Ukraine," the OUN party program declared. "Moskali [an ethnic slur for Russians], Poles, and Jews that are hostile to us are to be destroyed in struggle."

During the period of Nazi collaboration, "Slava Ukraini/ Slava Heroiam" was said accompanied by a “Roman salute,” i.e. the full-arm Nazi salute, according to Deutsche Welle. The slogan was banned in the Soviet Union, as were all forms of fascist ideology and expressions of racial hatred.

After the Red Army liberated Ukraine from Nazi occupation, the OUN/UIA continued its guerrilla and terrorist war against the Soviets until a combination of counterinsurgency operations and extensive government investment in rebuilding the region weakened them and they were defeated by 1948. Some went underground, but others fled to the west, including OUN co-founder Mykola Lebed, who was given shelter by the CIA, for whom Lebed gathered intelligence on the Soviet Union through a front group called Prolog Research Corporation.
A CIA report declassified in 2007 revealed that Prolog, as a research arm of the OUN-formed Ukrainian Supreme Liberation Council (UHVR), "publish[ed] periodicals and select books and pamphlets which seek to exploit and increase nationalist and other dissident tendencies in the Soviet Ukraine."

"In an effort to achieve Ukrainian independence, the ZP/UHVR has collaborated with the CIA in clandestine operations since 1949," the report states.

"During the early years of its association with the CIA, ZP/UHVR re-established communications with resistance forces in the Ukraine [...] in its distribution operations, Prolog has utilized the services of Ukrainian emigres in various countries who are sympathetic to the ZP/UHVR. Since the Fifties, Ukrainian collaborators in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia have infiltrated a great amount of Prolog material into the USSR ... Prolog has been more able than other CIA assets to ferret out and approach dissident Soviet Ukrainians in the USSR."

Post-Soviet Resurgence

After the Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991, the slogans "Slava Ukraini" and "Slava Heroiam" again gained popularity with nationalists. During a 1995 visit to Kiev, then-US President Bill Clinton uttered the phrase. It gained more popularity after the US-backed coup in 2014, in which far-right nationalists stormed the Verkhovna Rada and overthrew President Vyktor Yanukovych after he rejected an EU association deal that would have forced large loans on Kiev.

The coup effort was explicitly directed by the United States and spearheaded by neo-Nazi groups Right Sektor, Svoboda, and the Ukrainian National Assembly – Ukrainian People's Self-Defense (UNA-UNSO), who hold bigoted views of Russians, Jews, and other non-Ukrainians in Ukraine and who attempted to force some of the most radical aspects of "Ukrainization," including the attempted removal of Russian as one of the national languages of Ukraine. The groups also led an assault on Russian-speaking regions of Ukraine, including the Donbass, but also the anti-coup protests in largely-Russophone Odessa, the crushing of which culminated in the torching of the Trade Unions House and the deaths of 46 people trapped inside.

In 2018, then-Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko made it the official greeting of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and later of its national police as well.

On Tuesday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky appointed Col. Maksym Marchenko to be the new head of the Odessa Administration, according to the Kyiv Post. Marchenko was once commander of one of the neo-Nazi army formations that fought Russian separatists in the Donbass, the Aidar Batallion, which was accused of war crimes in the Donbass in an Amnesty International report in September 2014.

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Texas Gov. Abbott, Beto O'Rourke Secure Gubernatorial Noms as Primaries Trigger GOP Runoff

By - Evan Craighead
Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R) will face off against Beto O'Rourke (D) in November, as the two-term incumbent and former US congressman both secured their respective party's nomination in Tuesday's primaries. Additionally, a GOP runoff for AG is set for May, with Trump-endorsed incumbent Ken Paxton facing billionaire-backed challenger George P. Bush. Texas voters who took part in Tuesday's primary elections widely rejected progressive state government candidates from both sides of the aisle, resulting in several predictable GOP and Democrat nominations ahead of the general elections on November 8.

Abbott, endorsed by former US President Donald Trump, and seeking a third gubernatorial term, was the clear victor in the GOP primary, quickly beating out a slew of right-wing opponents by surpassing the necessary 50% support threshold to avoid a runoff election.

"Tonight, Republicans sent a message," Abbott told supporters during a Tuesday night speech. "They want to keep Texas on the extraordinary path of opportunity that we have provided over the past eight years."

Conservative critics and individuals running against Abbott for the GOP nomination stated that the Texas government had an insufficient conservative response to the COVID-19 pandemic and illegal crossings at the US-Mexico border.

Abbott, who observed a dip in base support over early COVID-19 lockdowns, made a political power move with an order issued last week that calls on the child welfare agency in the state to probe gender-affirming medical treatment for transgender youth, as the practice could, according to the GOP, amount to abuse. The incumbent governor's decision comes as part of a slew of socially-conservative measures he has introduced ahead of the November election.

A Democrat has not been elected to the Texas state government since 1994.

Beto O'Rourke, real name Robert Francis O'Rourke, an El Paso, Texas, native, and a former US representative for Texas' 16th House District, has secured the state gubernatorial nomination for the Democratic Party.

"THANK YOU, TEXAS! We are going to win this race with one another, for one another," O'Rourke tweeted Tuesday night.

O'Rourke rose to national fame in a narrow loss to Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) in the 2018 Senate race, and further increased his US name recognition during a failed 2020 presidential campaign for the Democratic nomination.

The former US lawmaker from Texas has been vocal about his opposition to Abbott's government, telling Nexstar's Maggie Glvnn that state Republicans have blood on their hands in association with the 2021 winter blackout and power grid debacle that resulted in over 200 deaths in Texas and allegations of price fixing at the capitol.

"You know, I think there's no shortage of reasons for people to fire Greg Abbott as governor," he said in a November 2021 interview with the outlet.

O'Rourke also pushed back on Abbott's education policy, as well as the latter's COVID-19 pandemic response, attributing the then-72,000 deaths related to the coronavirus to Abbott's "failure to meet the challenges" of the pandemic.

The gubernatorial race between Abbott and O'Rourke is expected to be one of the most contentious state elections in the past 30 years. At the same time, new voting legislation in the state has reportedly led to an increase in ballot rejections and new accusations of voter suppression by the GOP.
Per a UT Tyler/Dallas Morning News poll conducted between January 18 and January 25, Abbott held a mere seven percentage point advantage over O’Rourke. Dan Patrick, the 42nd lieutenant governor of Texas since January 2015, and Comptroller Glenn Hegar, who has held the Public Accounts position since 2014, are two incumbents who also secured the GOP nomination. Meanwhile, embattled Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, a Republican, has seen a loss in support since his 2015 indictment in a federal campaign finance-related probe. The FBI’s indictment remains active. Paxton’s waning support and questionable conduct has allowed for the emergence of Texas Land Commissioner George P. Bush - the eldest son of former Republican Florida politician and sometime presidential candidate Jeb Bush as a possible nominee. Tuesday’s ballot submissions have triggered a runoff primary between Paxton and Bush in May. “Last night, over 57% of Texas voters made a statement at the ballot box: corruption will not be tolerated in our state,” Bush tweeted on Wednesday. “Paxton, I look forward to holding you accountable to Texans for your crimes.” “I guess what I’d say is, clearly, to the establishment: they got what they wanted,” Paxton - who is considered by many to be part of the long-standing Texas political elite - said in an address to supporters late Tuesday night. “They got me in a runoff.” The Texas Democratic primary for attorney general is also projected to advance to a runoff.

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Cockpit Cocktails: JetBlue Pilot Yanked From Tarmac With Alcohol Levels Four Times Legal Limit
By - Evan Craighead

JetBlue confirmed in a Wednesday memo that a co-pilot reported under suspicion of on-duty intoxication "has been removed" from airline operations, as all airlines must adhere to a strict zero-tolerance internal policy regarding alcohol. Airport authorities administered a breathalyzer test prior to releasing the offending employee to JetBlue. A male co-pilot formerly employed by JetBlue is now facing possible federal charges after reportedly attempting to conduct a three-hour commercial flight on Wednesday while very drunk. JetBlue Flight 2465, from Buffalo, New York, to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, was subsequently delayed as airport authorities confirmed that a breathalyzer registered a Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) of 0.17% — over two times above the legal limit to operate a surface-based motor vehicle in most US states. JetBlue employees agree to random alcohol testing as part of its drug and alcohol program, which prohibits a blood alcohol content over 0.04%, the Federal Aviation Administration’s legal limit. The individual in question has been identified as James Clifton, a 52-year-old resident of Orlando, Florida.
Passenger Bill Murphy lauded the professionalism of the pilot and crew, telling WGRZ that there was never any major disruption for passengers in his section, which was close to the cockpit. "The captain and the crewmembers of the flight were absolutely fantastic," Murphy said. "They handled the situation great and my hat goes off to the captain because whatever was going on up there, he was professional."

Per the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA), a Transportation Security Administration (TSA) employee initially alerted authorities to the co-pilot's unusual behavior during the pilot pre-check process. Clifton's co-pilot also informed authorities of the 52-year-old's behavior ahead of their planned takeoff.

"We adhere to all DOT rules and requirements concerning alcohol at all times and have a very strict zero tolerance internal alcohol policy," read a JetBlue company statement on the matter. The flight was initially slated to depart New York's Buffalo Niagara International Airport around 6:15 a.m., local time, but passengers remained on the tarmac until personnel were cleared to resume travel at around 10:25 a.m., local time. The flight landed safely in Ft. Lauderdale around 1:11 p.m., local time.

"We are aware of the incident that occurred this morning in Buffalo and are cooperating fully with law enforcement," the airline's memo detailed. "We are also conducting our own internal investigation. The crewmember involved has been removed from his duties."

JetBlue reportedly provided passengers with vouchers due to the inconvenience.

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Trump Claims China Ready to Post-Olympic Taiwan Grab as Pompeo, US Delegation Meet Taipei Officials
By - Evan Craighead

Last month, former US President Donald Trump claimed that China would follow Russia's Donbass claims by mobilizing its own forces to invade the Republic of China, which Washington on the surface recognizes as a province of Beijing. Strained US-China relations were recently tightened by the dispatch of Washington delegates to Taiwan.

"Taiwan is next," former US President Donald Trump proclaimed in a Wednesday morning interview with Maria Bartiromo, host of Fox Business 'Mornings With Maria.'

Such a move will be carried out sooner, rather than later, according to the one-term 45th president of the US, who claimed Beijing is "seeing how stupid the United States is run."

He additionally proclaimed that this is China's "time" to conduct an offensive against Taiwan, particularly because Beijing has observed how "incompetent" Washington has become.

"President Xi happens to be a man with a high intelligence level," Trump suggested, adding that the chaotic US pullout from Afghanistan was an example of the Biden administration's foreign policy and military failures.

"[Xi] saw the way that we left Afghanistan like a surrender and left $85 billion and death behind and left American citizens there that are still trying to get out," Trump said. "This is his
opportunity to do what he wants to do, which is ... he’s wanted to do that, and China’s wanted to do that for decades.”
Trump expressed similar views during a February broadcast of ‘The Clay Travis and Buck Sexton Show.’ The former US president has also maintained that such a move would not have occurred under his administration.
The former US president’s reiterated claim comes alongside continued US efforts to support the state, with Taiwanese Premier Su Tseng-chang proclaiming on Tuesday that “the importance of Taiwan-US relations” was exemplified with same-day visit from members of a US delegation, as well as Mike Mullen, former chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff.
Responding to the dispatch of US officials to Taiwan, the Chinese Foreign Ministry has since declared that Beijing remains “firmly determined and resolved to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity.”
Mullen is expected to hold a series of meetings this week with President Tsai Ing-wen and a number of high-ranking Taiwanese officials.

Former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo also arrived in Taiwan this week ahead of planned discussions with President Tsai Ing-wen. Pompeo is among the 28 Trump-era officials sanctioned after US President Joe Biden took office in January 2021.
“It is wonderful to be here. I’ve been looking forward to coming to visit with the people of Taiwan for a very long time,” Pompeo told members of the press at the airport in Taiwan, as reported by Reuters.
“I’m so much looking forward to my trip to meet with business people, people from government, people all across your great nation,” he said, signaling a possible departure from the ‘One China’ policy.

The visit comes just days after the guided-missile destroyer Ralph Johnson conducted a reported routine freedom of navigation transit through the Taiwan Strait. China panned the destroyer’s movement as “provocative,” while the 7th Fleet emphasized the “transit through the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the United States’ commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific.”
While both Beijing and Washington recognize Taiwan as part of China, concerns have been raised regarding a possible mainland response to the island’s recent decision to support US-led anti-Russian sanctions and remove Russian banks from the global SWIFT financial messaging network. Beijing has previously spoken out against the imposition of such unilateral sanctions over the situation in Ukraine.

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‘This is Painful Stuff’: Melinda Gates to Open Up About What Led to 2021 Divorce From Bill
By - Mary Manley

In a recent interview with “CBS Mornings,” Melinda French Gates, 56, shared her insight regarding her much talked about divorce from Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, 65, after a marriage of 27 years. Opening up about what led to the divorce, she detailed that she just “couldn’t trust what we had.”
To the shock of many, one of the wealthiest - and apparently one of the most stable - couples in the world announced their divorce in May 2021. The philanthropists and co-founders of the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation announced their decision to split in a joint statement. “After a great deal of thought and a lot of work on our relationship, we have made the decision to end our marriage," the couple announced on Twitter on May 3. “We will continue our work together at the foundation, but we no longer believe we can grow together as a couple in this next phase of our lives.” Gates is now opening up about what led to her divorce from the Microsoft co-founder, and her experience after the slow-burning intimate calamity. The interview, with Gayle King on the “CBS Mornings” show, is set to air on Thursday, but a teaser of what’s to come is already being dissected.

“I certainly believe in forgiveness, so I thought we had worked through some of that. It wasn’t one moment or one specific thing that happened. There just came a point in time where there was enough there that I realized it just wasn’t healthy, and I couldn’t trust what we had,” Gates said in reference to an affair her ex-husband had with a Microsoft employee in 2000. The affair became public knowledge once Bill Gates confirmed the assignation through a spokesperson for the company in 2019, leading to Microsoft’s board, aided by an outside law firm, conducting an investigation into the tryst.

Bill Gates stepped down from Microsoft’s board in March 2020, but a spokesperson denies the investigation played a role in the former’s departure. The Microsoft co-founder reportedly has a net worth of $131.4 billion, making him currently the fourth richest man in the world. Of their divorce he stated in 2021 that it was the “most unusual and difficult year of my life,” noting that they had continued to work together as philanthropists.

“I had a lot of tears for many days, I mean, days where I’m literally laying on the floor and the carpet is close to me,” Melinda Gates said of their public split, “and I’m literally thinking, ‘How can this be? How can I get up? How am I gonna move forward?’” “That’s part of the grieving process. You’re grieving a loss of something you thought you had and thought you had for your lifetime. I mean, this is painful stuff,” she said. Melinda Gates, in one striking article detailing the fallout from the split, is now said to be worth at least $11 billion. But the global advocate for women and girls is looking on the brighter side of things. “I do feel like I’m turning a page in the chapter,” she said. “I mean, it’s 2022, and I’m actually really excited about what’s to come and life ahead for me.”

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Kablam! Three Tons of Space Junk Set to Collide With Earth’s Moon
By - Mary Manley

The moon is about to be severely impacted by 3 tonnes of space junk that should leave an enormous 33 to 66-foot crater on its already heavily-pockmarked surface. It’s speculated the space junk belongs to the Chinese government, but Beijing has refused to claim the celestial litter.
Three tonnes of space junk is hurtling towards the moon at approximately 5,800 miles per hour (MPH), and the collision course will leave a crater large enough to fit several tractor-trailers. Bill Gray, who is the creator of the Guide astronomy software used to track space junk, asteroids, minor planets and comets, initially suggested the debris belonged to aerospace company SpaceX. He first identified the projected crash in January, believing it to belong to an upper stage of a SpaceX Falcon rocket from a 2015 launch.
Gray corrected himself a month later, though, and observed that it was the property of the Chinese government. The astronomer has since claimed the space junk is the third stage of a Chinese rocket used to send a test sample to and back from the moon in 2014.
The US Space Command, of the United States Department of Defense, confirmed on Tuesday that the Chinese upper stage from the 2014 lunar mission never deorbited; however, the agency did not confirm that this same object is destined to crash into the moon.
"I've become a little bit more cautious of such matters. But I really just don't see any way it could be anything else," noted Gray, who is confident of his conclusions. "I had been hoping for something (significant) to hit the moon for a long time. Ideally, it would have hit on the near side of the moon at some point where we could actually see it."
A team from the University of Arizona has also identified the Chinese Long March rocket segment during telescope observations in which they recognized the light reflecting off of its paint.
Both Gray and fellow astrophysicist Jonathan McDowell agree that regardless of ownership, the effects of the collision will be the same.
"It's not a SpaceX problem, nor is it a China problem. Nobody is particularly careful about what they do with junk at this sort of orbit," Gray said.
McDowell, who serves as an astrophysicist at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics further commented: "The effect will be the same. It'll leave yet another small crater on the moon."
The moon has no atmosphere, so it's defenseless against asteroids and comets. It has 9,137 craters, however, of which only 1,675 have been dated. Now, with debris leftover from human involvement in space, the possibility of new craters being inflicted on the moon's surface increases.
Space debris can include anything from dead satellites to the remains of missiles fired at objects in space, or even to wandering nuts and bolts. These objects can collide with working satellites or manned spacecraft, resulting in damage and even more space debris.
In 2019, a reported 23,000 man-made fragments with a diameter of or larger than 4 inches were orbiting our planet. An additional 500,000 pieces flying within 1,250 miles of Earth's surface are said to be between 0.4 inches and 4 inches in diameter, making them much more difficult to track.
While most of the debris may be small, their speed is faster than a bullet (22,300 mph) causing likely damage or deadly impact on the items they collide with, such as spacecraft, satellites, telescopes, and even the moon.
Since the start of the Space Age in the late 1950s, countries around the world have launched over 4,700 space-related missions, leaving behind both a legacy in human technological achievement, as well as a trail of orbiting garbage.
Space debris will only continue to multiply over the coming centuries.
But debris located in deep space is much more difficult to track, says McDowell, and the moon’s gravity can alter an object’s trajectory, leaving astrophysicists unaware. He says there is no available database to track deep space litter, except what he, Gray, and a couple of others have been able to jury-rig.

“We are now in an era where many countries and private companies are putting stuff in deep space, so it’s time to start to keep track of it,” McDowell said. “Right now there’s no one, just a few fans in their spare time.”

How does humanity clean up its mess? Thus far some pretty bizarre ideas have been proposed to clean up all the space junk. JAXA, Japan’s space agency, is testing an electronic space whip half a mile long that would be used to grab at the larger pieces of space debris to dispose of them by knocking them out of orbit so that they can burn up in Earth’s atmosphere.

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Russian Cats Barred From Competing in International Competitions Over Ukraine Crisis
By - Mary Manley

Frisky felines in Russia are sure to be on their toes after getting slapped with a sanction that will ban them from international competition. The sanction is one of many the world has hit against Russia as punishment for their ongoing special military operation in the Donbass region.

The International Feline Federation (FIFe), which first originated in Paris in 1949, has banned all Russian-owned cats from competing in its shows. Cats bred in Russia will not be allowed to be imported or registered in FIFe’s pedigree book, so even if a Russian’s kitty has a highly stamped passport with pawprints and all, there’s no travelling out of the Big Village for the condemned pets.

"The FIFe executive board is shocked and horrified that the army of the Russian Federation invaded the Republic of Ukraine and started a war", the group noted on Tuesday. "Many innocent people died, many more are wounded and hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians are forced to flee their homes".

The group added in their statement that they will organise donations to support cat breeders in Ukraine, and will follow through with restrictions against Russian-owned felines until at least 31 May, and could extend the sanction depending on Russia’s operation in Ukraine.

FIFe is an international organisation based in Paris, France, made up of 41 members from 39 countries across Europe, South America, and Asia. FIFe is responsible for organising over 700 events a year where over 200,000 cats are shown, according to their website.

The decision to punish cats for Russian "aggression" is so surreal that many thought it was a joke, at first. The news broke on the Chinese social media platform Sina Weibo, where one user asked: "What's all this [Russia-Ukraine conflict] going on with cats?"

Another said, "I thought this was fake news..."

Russia has been sanctioned by many international sports organisations (not fur-related) including the international football bodies FIFA/UEFA, which have sanctioned all Russian-owned teams from all competitions.
Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has garnered heaps of criticism in recent days, with US President Joe Biden labelling him a "dictator", has been stripped of his black belt by World Taekwondo.

"Those non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international organisations should be non-political", complained Cui Heng, reportedly an assistant researcher at the Centre for Russian Studies of East China Normal University.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday lamented that sanctions are not only being imposed on government officials, but also affect the daily lives, similar to a military attack on your community, of average people, despite their political beliefs.

"I did not think that these sanctions, caused by impotent anger, would cover the sports movement, cultural exchange and would concern contacts between people", remarked Lavrov.

US Cannot Confirm Use of Cluster Munitions, Thermobaric Bombs in Ukraine - Senior Official

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The United States cannot confirm reports of the use of cluster munitions or thermobaric bombs in Ukraine, a senior Defense Defense official said on Thursday.
The US cannot independently verify reports that the Russian military used cluster munitions or thermobaric "vacuum" bombs during its special operation in Ukraine, the official said.

US Supreme Court Says Terror Suspect Cannot Subpoena CIA Contractors for Information

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court on Thursday reversed and remanded the case of a Palestinian terror suspect who is attempting to subpoena former CIA contractors to provide details about a potential detention site he was kept at in Poland due to concerns about state secrets.

"The government argues that the privilege should apply because [Abu] Zubaydah’s discovery request could force former CIA contractors to confirm the location of the detention site and that confirmation would itself significantly harm national security interests. In our view, the Government has provided sufficient support for its claim of harm to warrant application of the privilege. We reverse the Ninth Circuit’s contrary holding,” the Supreme Court said.

In 2010, Zubaydah filed a criminal complaint in Poland seeking to hold accountable any Polish nationals involved in his alleged mistreatment at a CIA detention site in the country, where he said was tortured. The US government intervened in the case to prevent state secrets from being discovered during the legal process.
The case worked its way up to the Ninth Circuit, who concluded that because the CIA contractors who Zubaydah wished to subpoena for information were private parties and not representatives of the US government, they could not officially confirm or deny anything on the state’s behalf.

However, the Supreme Court reversed the Ninth Circuit’s decision, arguing that the contractors’ confirmation or denial of a CIA site in Poland would be tantamount to disclosure by the CIA itself and potentially harm national security interests.

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ANALYSIS - Europe May Be Hit Hard by Anti-Russia Sanctions After 30 Years of Commercial ‘Ostpolitik’

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - Europe will likely be hit hard by new anti-Russian sanctions after three decades of commercial "Ostpolitik" that increased interdependence with countries outside the Western sphere, analysts told Sputnik.

On Wednesday, the US and its allies unveiled new sanctions against 22 Russian defense-related entities over the military operation in Ukraine. On the same day, US Republican senators Marco Rubio and Chuck Grassley introduced a "Heroiam Slava" bill that would deny companies controlled or owned by Moscow, such as Rosneft, Gazprom, Rosatom, Aeroflot, and RT, access to critical American capital.

The moves mark the latest in a massive wave of sanctions, bans, and export control restrictions levied by the US and Europe targeting Russian airlines, oil firms, financial institutions, business leaders, and media outlets, among other companies and sectors.

BLOWBACK ON EUROPE - AND THE WORLD

Several European countries, led by Germany, since near the end of the Cold War gradually embraced a policy called "Ostpolitik" which encompassed boosting political and trade ties outside the Western sphere - including with the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc satellites. This rapprochement, while providing many benefits for the West, some experts think also made European states more vulnerable.

"Europe will be hit hard by the sanctions due to the three decades of its commercial 'Ostpolitik' that has increased its interdependence with Russia/China thus making Europe vulnerable to US-imposed sanctions," California State University Political Science Professor Beau Grosscup told Sputnik. "It is why the Europeans, France and Germany in particular remain reserved about all the US-NATO saber rattling."

Despite these concerns in Berlin and Paris, the world was now so interdependent that a lot of "collateral damage" was sure to occur as a result of the economic sanctions, particularly since this conflict has rallied so many countries against Russia, Grosscup said.

Historian and political commentator Dan Lazare expressed his concern that the crisis and the US reaction to it was creating a transition period to a new, more dangerous era of international instability and economic upheaval.
"I think the world has passed through a wormhole separating the 'normal' world of yesteryear from a brave new world of inflation, recession, and war. Here in the US, gasoline prices have nearly doubled since mid-2020, oil is up 33% since January 1 while natural gas prices in Germany over the last twelve months have more than quadrupled," Lazare told Sputnik. These problems were certain to get even worse in the coming months, Lazare warned.

"The pain can only increase as energy prices continue to rocket and the war intensifies. This means more inflation, a deepening Fed crackdown, and recession. Bottom line: the economic consequences are not going to be pretty and the political consequences won't be either," he said.

The major nations of Asia might well cushion some of the impact of the Western sanctions against Russia, Lazare advised.

"China is the great unknown, and so to a certain degree is India. If the former buys Russian gas, that will take some of the economic pressure off [Russian President Vladimir] Putin and facilitate Russia's integration into the East Asian economy. That in turn implies a reversal of globalization and a return to regional power blocks," he said.

The same thing will occur if Moscow and Beijing join forces against Washington's politicization of the SWIFT international financial messaging system, Lazare cautioned.

Western punitive sanctions against Russia are likely to damage most of all developing economies of the Global South that were not directly connected to the crisis at all, Lazare pointed out.

SANCTIONS UNCERTAINTY

Former EU consultant Professor Paolo von Schirach, president of the Global Policy Institute in Washington, assessed that the new sanctions had the potential to inflict serious damage on the Russian economy but great uncertainty remained on how comprehensively they would be imposed and for how long.

However, the expert also agreed that the sanctions would have negative effects on the countries imposing them although it was not yet clear what those would be.

"It is understood that these extraordinary measures aimed at freezing all or most international financial and trade transactions involving Russia will have some negative repercussions on Western countries. But it is not clear how severe they will be," von Schirach told Sputnik.

It was unlikely that Russia will be able to sufficiently develop overnight new, significant trade and financial relationships with countries not enforcing sanctions.

"For sure, Russia will be able to continue to do business with China, Iran, maybe India and other countries in Latin America or Africa. But this will not be enough to offset the loss of business with Europe and other developed economies," he said.

In the end, sanctions alone may not be enough to bend Russia's political will regarding Ukraine, von Schirach said.

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US Software Company Sabre Terminates Agreement With Aeroflot - Statement
WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The US software and technology company Sabre Corporation on Thursday announced its decision to terminate a distribution agreement with Russia's air carrier Aeroflot amid the crisis in Ukraine.

"Today, we announced that Sabre has terminated its distribution agreement with Aeroflot, removing its content from our global distribution system (GDS)," Sabre CEO Sean Menke said in a statement.

Sabre is taking immediate steps to remove Aeroflot flight content from its GDS, a marketplace used by travel agencies, travel websites and corporations around the world to shop, book and service flight reservations, the statement said.

Menke noted that Sabre has been monitoring the situation in Ukraine with concern and promised to continue complying with the Western sanctions imposed against Russia.

The Texas-based company said it serves the global travel industry, including airlines, hoteliers, travel agencies and other suppliers and is working with partners in more than 160 countries.

On Thursday, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine after the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhanks requested help to defend themselves from intensified attacks by Ukrainian troops. In response, the United States, European Union and their allies have imposed comprehensive sanctions against Russia. However, Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a decree for Moscow to implement counter sanctions.

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US, Allies Pause Participation in Arctic Council, Will Not Travel to Russia for Meetings (Adds background in para 5)

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) – Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the United States said on Thursday they are pausing their participation in Arctic Council sessions and will not travel to Russia for its meetings.

"Our representatives will not travel to Russia for meetings of the Arctic Council. Additionally, our states are temporarily pausing participation in all meetings of the Council and its subsidiary bodies, pending consideration of the necessary modalities that can allow us to continue the Council's important work in view of the current circumstances," the joint statement read.

These countries accused Russia of "flagrant violation" of the core principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, the basis of the Arctic Council, which Russia currently chairs, the statement added.

Russia launched an operation in Ukraine last week after the breakaway Donbas republics appealed for help in defending themselves against the Ukrainian military. In response, Western nations have rolled out a massive sanctions campaign against Moscow.

The Arctic Council was established in 1996 as a high-level intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation in the region with a focus on environmental protection. The council includes Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States.
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US Jobless Claims Down 2nd Week In Row, Extending Downtrend - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - US jobless claims fell last week for a second straight week, resuming their downtrend in a labor market showing steady growth as the economy rebounds from the effects of the coronavirus pandemic measures.
"In the week ending February 26, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 215,000, a decrease of 18,000 from the previous week's revised level," the US Labor Department said in a statement.
Jobless claims fell by 16,000 to stand at 233,000 in the prior week to February 19.
Economists polled by US media had expected jobless claims to average 225,000 in the latest week to February 26, just slightly above what the Labor Department reported.
The weekly update on jobless claims statistics came ahead of Friday's non-farm payrolls report from the Labor Department that will show job gains and losses for all of February. Economists polled by US media expect job growth to have slowed last month to 418,000 from January's 467,000. But the unemployment rate is expected to have improved to 3.9% from 4.0%.
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 January's unemployment rate of 4.0% reaching the Federal Reserve's definition of "maximum employment".
WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - A Falcon 9 rocket with a reusable first stage successfully launched 47 more Starlink micro communications satellites into low earth orbit (LEO), SpaceX announced on Thursday. The launch was podcast live.
SpaceX said liftoff successfully took place at 9:26 a.m. from the Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral in Florida on Thursday morning. Within 20 minutes, the company reported their successful placement in orbit around 200 miles above the earth.
The satellites were scheduled to be deployed for the so-called HALO deployment an hour after orbital placement, SpaceX added.
The launch follows an earlier successful placement of 50 Starlink micro-satellites into orbit on February 25 and the loss after an apparently successful launch of at least 40 of 49 Starlink satellites launched on February 3 due to a geomagnetic storm prompted by a powerful M-class solar flare on January 30.

TORONTO, March 2 (Sputnik) – Canada will provide Ukraine with 1 million Canadian dollars ($790,000) for the purchase of high-resolution satellite imagery amid Russia’s military operation in the country, Defense Minister Anita Anand announced on Thursday.
"In addition to the various tranches of military equipment we have pledged ... we will be providing Ukraine with C$1 million towards the purchase of high-resolution, modern satellite imagery," Anand told a news conference.
Last week, Russia launched a military operation, responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansky republics in countering the aggression of Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger.

Canada Says to Send More Lethal Aid to Ukraine, Including Rocket Launchers, Hand Grenades
TORONTO, March 2 (Sputnik) - Canada is sending additional lethal aid to Ukraine, including rocket launchers and hand grenades, in light of Russia’s military operation in the country, Defense Minister Anita Anand said on Thursday.
"In addition to the various tranches of military equipment we have pledged ... we intend to supply additional lethal aid to Ukraine, which includes up to 4,500 M72 rocket launchers and up to 7,500 hand grenades," Anand told a news conference.
Last week, Russia launched a military operation in Ukraine, responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics in defending themselves against the aggression of Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger.

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Canada, G7 Allies Preparing More Sanctions Against Russia Over Ukraine - Finance Minister

TORONTO, March 2 (Sputnik) - Canada and its G7 allies will impose further sanctions on Russia in response to its military operation in Ukraine, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said on Thursday.
"The G7 has already imposed the strongest sanctions ever inflicted on a major economy, on Russia, and more will follow in the days to come," Freeland told a news conference.
Russia launched an operation in Ukraine last week after the breakaway Donbas republics appealed for help in defending themselves against Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger.

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IOM Urges End to Discrimination, Racism Against Third Country Nationals Fleeing Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The International Organization of Migration (IOM) expressed alarm on Thursday over discrimination and racism which third country nationals have been subjected to as they attempt to leave conflict-torn areas of Ukraine.
"I am alarmed about verified credible reports of discrimination, violence and xenophobia against third country nationals attempting to flee the conflict in Ukraine," Director General Antonio Vitorino said.
Countries should investigate such cases and address them immediately, he added.
"Men, women and children from dozens of nationalities, including migrant workers and students living in Ukraine, are facing acute challenges as they attempt to leave conflict-affected areas, cross borders into neighboring countries and seek life-saving assistance," Vitorino continued.
He called on neighboring countries to ensure that all these people are granted unhindered access to the territory, regardless of status and in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Russia launched an operation in Ukraine last week after the breakaway Donbas republics appealed for help in defending themselves against the Ukrainian military. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger.

Russia, Belarus to Be Subject to Tariff of 35% on Exports to Canada – Finance Minister

TORONTO, March 2 (Sputnik) – Canada is imposing a tariff of 35% on all exports from Russia and Belarus in retaliation for the special military operation in Ukraine, Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland said on Thursday.

"Russia and Belarus will no longer receive the benefits, particularly low tariffs that Canada offers to other countries that are fellow members of the WTO [the World Trade Organization]. Instead, Russia and Belarus will be subject to a tariff of 35% on their exports to Canada," Freeland said during a press briefing.

UN Says All Staff in Kharkiv Safe, Accounted for After Reports of Abduction

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - All UN staff in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv are safe and accounted for, spokesman Stephane Dujarric told Sputnik on Thursday, following reports of an abduction.

Earlier in the day, the Donetsk People’s Republic said that Ukrainian nationalists had kidnapped a UN employee in Kharkiv and taken them away in an unknown direction.

"All staff in Kharkiv is safe and accounted for," Dujarric 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.
WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - All UN staff in Kharkiv are safe and accounted for, spokesman Stephane Dujarric told Sputnik on Wednesday, following reports of an abduction. Earlier in the day, the Donetsk People’s Republic said that Ukrainian nationalists had kidnapped a UN employee in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv and took them away in an unknown direction. “All staff in Kharkiv is safe and accounted for,” Dujarric said.

US Delays Release of National Defense Strategy in Face of Ukraine Crisis - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - Russia’s military operation in Ukraine has forced the Pentagon to revisit the new National Defense Strategy just before it was to be released and put the publication on hold, Politico reports on Thursday. The Biden administration was to unveil the document in February, but has delayed it indefinitely, a Pentagon official told the news outlet. The strategic planning document is still expected to be released ahead of Secretary Lloyd Austin’s posture hearings in Congress “sometime this spring,” according to a source in the know. Though China will still be viewed as the number one threat to the United States, the revised strategy will make a larger focus on Russia, the report said. Russia launched an operation in Ukraine last week after the breakaway Donbas republics appealed for help in defending themselves against the Ukrainian military. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger. In response, the West has rolled out still more sanctions against Moscow and moved to boost military assistance to Ukraine, with the US sending additional troops to NATO members on the eastern flank.

RPT - Biden Team Risks Regional War for Sake of Ukraine Escalation - Ex-Pentagon Analyst

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and his advisers seem "more than willing" to run the risk of a continuing regional war in Ukraine and consequences for neighboring countries to keep stoking the conflict involving Russia, former Pentagon analyst and retired US Air Force Lt. Col. Karen Kwiatkowski told Sputnik. Last week, Russia launched 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 forces. The Russian Defense Ministry said it is targeting Ukrainian military assets only
and civilians are safe. In response, the West has rolled out still more sanctions against Moscow and moved to boost military assistance to Ukraine, including lethal weapons.

"Biden's advisers are more than willing to risk regional war, regional humanitarian crises, and higher energy costs for Ukraine and its European neighbors," Kwiatkowski said. The United States has lobbied hard for Ukraine to join NATO since 2009, and US military aid and weapons to Ukraine have been sold and delivered several times under both Presidents Donald Trump and Joe Biden, Kwiatkowski noted.

"These actions have, as they were intended, escalated the conflict. This is US and NATO policy, and it was cited by Putin last week as a reason for Moscow's recognition of the two eastern republics, and his military attacks on Ukraine's military capabilities, chemical and biological laboratories, and political command and control," she said.

A report published three years ago by a highly influential US think tank gave important insights into the goals and methodologies of Washington's policymaking on Ukraine, Kwiatkowski advised.

"The US playbook on Russia, put forth in a 2019 report by the Pentagon's RAND Corporation can help us understand that both Biden and Putin understand what is happening, and how it is happening," she said.

The report is titled "Overextending and Unbalancing Russia: Assessing the Impacts of Cost-Imposing Options" and it noted that providing lethal aid to Ukraine was desirable, but would need to be "carefully calibrated" so as not to provoke conflict with Russia beyond Ukraine, Kwiatkowski said.

"The RAND study assessed the cost and risk of a variety of US and NATO actions, all geared towards destabilizing Russia," she said.

The recent rebellion in Kazakhstan, with significant Western intelligence involvement, failed to cause much international concern, as Russian forces as part of the Collective Security Treaty Organization peacekeeping mission quickly restored order, and withdrew afterward, Kwiatkowski noted.

"The Kazakhstan initiative does support the idea that overextending and unbalancing Russia remains a US objective," she said.

US policies continued to be quietly hostile to Russian interests in its own region rather than seeking compromise and accommodation with Moscow, Kwiatkowski observed.

"US low-level war with Russia includes ongoing efforts to deny oil and gas markets to Russia (hence the US hysteria over the already completed Nord Stream 2 being turned on), as well as denial of financial exchanges, and US advocacy for global economic sanctions on Russia," she said.

The United States was continuing to pursue conflict with Russia, beyond Cold War containment and into purposeful destabilization, Kwiatkowski commented.

"It most certainly is, and this effort may include an eventual regime change operation in Moscow," she said.

Nor was US activity vis a vis Ukraine, the Black Sea, the Arctic and the other borders of Russia, being "carefully calibrated" as the 2019 RAND report had recommended, according to Kwiatkowski.
"Since the Russian invasion last week, nearly 200 tons of additional weapons have been sent to Ukraine from the Pentagon, and EU and NATO countries are pouring weapons into the country," she said.

Escalating the conflict was clearly in the publicized interest of the United States government, and its closest NATO allies like Britain, Kwiatkowski explained.

"On one hand, these are self-defense weapons, and without training and command and control, don't add a lot to the ability of the Ukrainian government to resist the Russian army. But it is very much in line with ensuring that the cost to Russia will be higher on the ground," she said.

The continuing behavior and policy making decisions of Biden and his top advisers and political allies gave cause for concern about whether the current crisis would be brought under control, Kwiatkowski warned.

"[Given Biden's] past culpability in Ukrainian government corruption and machinations, his chicken hawk foreign policy team none of whom have worn a military uniform and the worry of the US Democratic Party about possible loss of Congressional majorities nine months from now, the world should be worried," she said.

Ukraine's own leaders should still seek a genuine neutrality solution to their security problems rather than try to join NATO, the expert advised.

"If Ukraine can withstand the destruction of its military capability, while maintaining its independence, all parties, including the US, ought to be seeking a Switzerland-esque solution -- a heavily armed population, trading with all and allying with none, and ultimately enriching the Ukrainian people, and not just their elites," Kwiatkowski said.

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UPDATE 2 - UNGA Passes Resolution Demanding Russia Stop Military Operation in Ukraine

(Updates with Biden response in paras 9,10)

UNITED NATIONS, March 2 (Sputnik) - The UN General Assembly passed a resolution on Wednesday demanding that Russia cease its military operation in Ukraine, UN General Assembly President Abdulla Shahid said.

"The result of the vote is as follows: in favor - 141, against - five, abstentions - 35. Draft resolution... is adopted," Shahid said.

The resolution was adopted by a majority of the 193-member UN General Assembly. Russia, Belarus, Syria, North Korea and Eritrea voted against the adoption.

The adoption comes after the General Assembly held its Emergency Special Session on the situation in Ukraine on Monday and Tuesday.

The resolution called "Aggression Against Ukraine" demands that "the Russian Federation immediately cease its use of force against Ukraine and to refrain from any further unlawful threat of use of force against any UN member state."

It also deplores Russia's recognition of the status of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and calls on Moscow to "immediately and unconditionally" reverse its decision.

A similar resolution in the UN Security Council was not adopted last Friday due to a veto by Russia, a permanent member state of the Council.
In the UN General Assembly, the passage of a resolution requires a simple majority and there is no right to veto by any member states. US President Joe Biden said in a statement later on Wednesday that the UN General Assembly's vote isolates Russia and holds Belarus accountable for its role in the military operation. Biden added that the global community must and will hold Russia accountable for its actions.

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Chevron Says Monitoring Ukraine Situation, Caspian Pipeline Vital for Consumers Worldwide

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - Chevron is monitoring developments related to Russia's military operation in Ukraine, such as Western sanctions against Moscow, but it currently considers the Caspian Pipeline Consortium crucial for consumers around the world, a company spokesperson told Sputnik. "We are monitoring developments," the spokesperson said on Wednesday when asked if the Chevron had plans to withdraw its partnership with the Caspian Pipeline Consortium. "As always, we comply with all current applicable laws and regulations... Chevron's involvement in Russia is solely in relation to its 15 percent stake in the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) which transports crude oil from Kazakhstan to global markets... Given current supply concerns, access to Kazakh energy supplies remains very important for consumers around the world." The spokesperson noted that Chevron does not have exploration or production activities in Russia.

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Biden's First State of the Union Address Attracts 38Mln Viewers - Nielsen Ratings

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - More than 38 million people in the United States tuned in to President Joe Biden's first State of the Union Address, well below his predecessor's figures, a Nielsen TV ratings report revealed. "An estimated 38.2 million people tuned in to watch coverage of the US Presidential State of the Union address during primetime on Tuesday, March 1, 2022," the research marketing firm said in a press release on Wednesday. Biden's speech focused on Russia and Ukraine, the US economy, efforts to rebuild US infrastructure, and the novel coronavirus pandemic. Former President Donald Trump's attracted the most in his first address to a joint session of Congress in February 2017 with almost 48 million viewers, which is about 20 percent more than Biden's speech on Tuesday night.
Former President Barack Obama also had more viewers during his first address to a joint session of Congress in February 2009, attracting some 52 million viewers.

US Defense Chief Says No-Fly Zone Over Ukraine Would Start War With Russia

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - Enforcing a no-fly zone over Ukraine as requested by the government in Kiev would require the United States to go to war with Russia, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said during an interview.

"President Biden's been clear that US troops won't fight Russia in Ukraine, and if you establish a no-fly zone, certainly in order to enforce that no-fly zone, you have to engage Russian aircraft, and again, that would put us at war with Russia," Austin told NBC on Wednesday.

Wall Street Sees First Rebound in 3 Days as Fed Chief Suggests Softer Rate Hike

NEW YORK, March 2 (Sputnik) - US stocks closed up for the first time in three days after Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said he would support a nominal 25 basis-point, or quarter percentage point, increase in the first US rate hike in two years due tentatively in March. Wall Street's three major stock indexes - the Dow Jones Industrial Average index, the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq Composite - closed Wednesday's trading up between 1.6% and 1.9%. The indexes had fallen about 3% on the average in the first two sessions of the week on fears about the Russian-Ukraine war and how that might impact the US and global economies. Investors who fled to the safety of havens such as gold and the dollar between Monday and Tuesday regained their appetite for stocks and other risk assets following Powell's assurance that the US central bank will be nimble with rate hikes, and not aggressive as many had feared.

"I'm inclined to propose and support a 25 basis point rate hike," Powell said during his semi-annual testimony to the US Congress on the state of the economy. "The near-term effects on the US economy of the invasion of Ukraine, the ongoing war, the sanctions, and of events to come, remain highly uncertain. 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's policy-making Federal Open Market Committee, or FOMC, will meet March 15-16 and another six times through December 13-14. There is a chance that the FOMC could raise rates by 25 basis points or a quarter percentage point at each meeting. But economists say that's unlikely as the Fed would want some pause to see how its monetary tightening was working and the impact that was having on the labor market and economy.
Prior to Powell’s remarks on Wednesday, some Fed bankers, such as Charles Evans and James Bullard - who lead the Chicago and St Louis chapters of the central bank — were suggesting rapid rate increases at each forthcoming Fed meeting. Bullard had even called for a 50-basis point, or half percentage point, increase, if necessary, until there was evidence of a significant drop in inflation.

After contracting 3.5% in 2020 from disruptions forced by the 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.

In Wednesday’s trade, the Dow Jones Industrial Average, made up mostly of industrial stocks, closed up 1.8%. The Dow has lost almost 6.7% since the year began.

The S&P 500, which groups the top 500 US stocks, settled up 1.9%. For the year, it was down 8%.

The Nasdaq Composite, made of highly-valued tech stocks such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Nasdaq and Google, finished up 1.6%. It has lost 12.1 % so far for 2022.

US Eyeing Cryptocurrency Networks That May Help Russia Evade Sanctions - Yellen

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The United States is tracking cryptocurrency networks that may help Russia evade sanctions imposed on it for the war on Ukraine, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said at an event.

"Cryptocurrency networks are subject to anti-money laundering and sanctions if they help Russia evade sanctions," Yellen told a live-streamed event on Wednesday.

As Western governments try to isolate Russia from the global financial system, a growing number of officials and experts worry that Russia might bypass their restrictions through greater cryptocurrency use.

Yellen said the US financial system has "very little exposure" to Russia. Even so, "when it comes to sanctions leakage, crypto is a channel to keep an eye on," the treasury secretary added.

Though crypto exchanges in the United States, Europe and Asia will likely stop nearly all dealings with Russia, there may be exchanges that are complicit in facilitating illicit activity, said David Carlisle, the director of policy and regulatory affairs at Elliptic. He cited as suspects the SUEX and Chatex services sanctioned by US authorities last year for facilitating over $350 million in crypto transactions for Russian individuals.

But some cryptocurrency experts have rejected the notion. Jake Chervinsky, head of crypto policy at the US Blockchain Association, said on Twitter thread on Wednesday that "Russia can’t and won’t use crypto to evade sanctions."
Chervinsky said financial necessities of a nation like Russia far exceed the current capabilities of crypto markets, which he called "too small, costly, and transparent to be useful for the Russian economy."

The US Department of Justice announced early Wednesday a new task force broadly designed to enforce sanctions. As part of the effort, the task force will target efforts to use cryptocurrency to evade US sanctions, and launder proceeds of targeted foreigners.

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World Bank Group Halts All Programs in Russia, Belarus Effective Immediately - Statement

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The World Bank said it immediately halted all programs in Russia and Belarus due to the military operation in Ukraine. "[T]he World Bank Group has stopped all its programs in Russia and Belarus with immediate effect," the group said in a statement on Wednesday.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik)

DEVELOPMENTS IN UKRAINE
* A total of 498 Russian servicemen were killed, and 1,597 sustained wounds during the special military operation in Ukraine, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Wednesday.
* The Russian army is eliminating the real threat which was supposed to appear in Ukraine, namely, NATO bases, nuclear weapons, and means of its delivery, the Russian Defense Ministry said.
* President Joe Biden on Wednesday extended the national emergency regarding Ukraine by one year due to continued national security and foreign policy threats posed to the United States by the situation in the Eastern European country.
* Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba claims that more than a thousand mercenaries from 16 countries are going to Ukraine.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE NEGOTIATIONS IN BELARUS
* Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called Wednesday Volodymyr Zelenskyy's willingness to receive security guarantees a positive step, and said that Moscow is ready to discuss it at talks.
* The Russian delegation arrived at talks with the Ukrainian side in the same composition as at the first meeting, the head of the Russian delegation, presidential aide Vladimir Medinsky said.
* The Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) wished for successful talks between Russia and Ukraine.
WESTERN SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA, BELARUS
* The European Commission expects the direct impact of anti-Russia sanctions on the EU financial system to be contained, EU Executive Vice-President and Commissioner for Trade Valdis Dombrovskis said.
* The Biden administration is issuing a new rule designed to deny sensitive items that support Belarus’ defense, aerospace and maritime industries, the US Commerce Department said.
* New US sanctions on Belarus include measures against the country’s defense ministry, encompassing all sorts of the national armed services and intelligence organizations amid the ongoing military conflict in Ukraine, the Commerce Department said.
* With its sanctions against Russia, the West returned to the bandit-style wild capitalism, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in an interview with the Al Jazeera broadcaster.
* The United States will restrict the import of technological goods by Belarus and extend stringent export control policies placed on Moscow to Minsk in response to ongoing military operations by Russia in Ukraine, the White House said.
* The United States is imposing full blocking sanctions on 22 Russian defense-related entities in response to Russia’s military operation in Ukraine, the White House said.

PUTIN-MODI TALKS
* Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi discussed Wednesday issues associated with evacuation of Indian nationals from Ukraine during a phone call, and Putin underscored that all the necessary directives had been given, the Kremlin said.

NORD STREAM 2
* The German company Wintershall Dea has announced a decision not to implement new gas and oil projects in Russia and to write off $1.1 billion Nord Stream 2 financing.
* The operator of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline did not confirm on Wednesday media reports that it launched proceedings on its bankruptcy.
* The infrastructure of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline is ready to operate, it will not disappear, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

ENERGY MARKETS
* OPEC+ will proceed with the planned increase in oil production by 400,000 barrels per day in April, as expected, the next meeting will be held on March 31, the alliance said in a statement following the meeting on Wednesday.
* The prices of April futures for gas in Europe are rising by almost 60% to its new historic maximum of $2,226 per one thousand cubic meters on Wednesday, according to the London-based ICE exchange.

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US Sent Hundreds of Stinger Missiles to Ukraine, Including 200 on Monday - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The United States delivered hundreds of stinger missiles to Ukraine, including over 200 on Monday, NBC News said citing two Congressional sources familiar with the matter.
The delivery became a part of a $350 million lethal and non-lethal support package, which was announced by Washington last week and includes Javelin anti-tank missiles and ammunition, the report said on Wednesday.

US Senators Introduce 'Heroiam Slava' Bill to Sanction All Russian State Enterprises

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - US Republican senators Marco Rubio and Chuck Grassley introduced a "Heroiam Slava" or "Glory to Heroes" bill that would impose sanctions on all Russian state-owned enterprises in retaliation for its special military operation in Ukraine, the office of Senator Rubio said in a press release.

"US Senators Marco Rubio and Chuck Grassley introduced the Halting Enrichment of Russian Oligarchs and Industry Allies of Moscow's Schemes to Leverage its Abject Villainy Abroad (HEROIAM SLAVA) Act, which would impose sweeping sanctions on all Russian state-owned enterprises," the release said on Wednesday. "The HEROIAM SLAVA Act... would deny companies controlled or owned by Moscow, such as Rosneft, Gazprom, Rosatom, Aeroflot, and RT, access to critical American capital."

US Continues Efforts to Get India to Condemn Russia on Ukraine - State Dept. Official

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is continuing to try and persuade India to join US-led international criticism of Russia over the Ukraine conflict, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

"We continue to have a dialogue with India at the highest levels to try [and] close that gap [on Ukraine policy]," Lu said at a hearing on Wednesday.

India abstained in a United Nations General Assembly vote condemning Russia over the continuing Ukraine conflict earlier on Wednesday. And while Lu said US relations with New Delhi had never been better, he acknowledged US "concern" over a number of domestic human rights issues in India.

Last week, Russia launched a special operation it said aimed 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.

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Bipartisan Coalition of US Attorneys General to Investigate TikTok - Iowa AG
WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller joined a nationwide probe of TikTok for allegedly allowing its social media platform to harm the mental health of children and young adults, his office said in a statement.

"Attorney General Tom Miller has joined a nationwide investigation into TikTok for providing and promoting its social media platform to children and young adults while use is associated with physical and mental health harms. Attorneys general nationwide are examining whether the company violated state consumer protection laws that put the public at risk," the release said on Wednesday.

The investigation is also going to focus on, among other things, techniques used by TikTok to boost young user engagement, including increasing the duration of time spent on the platform and frequency of engagement with the platform, the release said.

Leading the investigation is a bipartisan coalition of attorneys general from California, Florida, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Jersey, Tennessee, and Vermont. They are joined by a broad group of attorneys general from across the country.

TikTok isn't the only social media platform that has come under scrutiny. In May 2021, a bipartisan coalition of 44 attorneys general urged Facebook to abandon its plans to launch a version of Instagram for children under 13. And in November 2021, attorneys general from across the country announced an investigation into Meta Platforms, Inc., formerly known as Facebook, for providing and promoting Instagram to young people.

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US Launches Task Force to Trace, Seize Russian Oligarchs' Assets - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The United States has launched a new task force, KleptoCapture, to trace and seize assets of Russian oligarchs in response to the special military operation in Ukraine, the US Justice Department said in a press release.

"Today, Attorney General Merrick B. Garland announced the launch of Task Force KleptoCapture, an interagency law enforcement task force dedicated to enforcing the sweeping sanctions, export restrictions, and economic countermeasures that the United States has imposed, along with allies and partners, in response to Russia's unprovoked military invasion of Ukraine," the release said on Wednesday.

The task force will include prosecutors, analysts and various experts in sanctions and export control enforcement, anticorruption, anti-money laundering, and foreign evidence collection, the release said.

The Justice Department explained that assets seizures and civil forfeitures of unlawful proceeds will be used to deny resources enabling Russian actions in Ukraine even if defendants cannot be immediately detained.
KleptoCapture will be complementing the work of the transatlantic task force announced by the United States and its European partners on February 26 to identify and capture the assets of sanctioned individuals and companies, the release said.

"We will leave no stone unturned in our efforts to investigate, arrest, and prosecute those whose criminal acts enable the Russian government to continue this unjust war. Let me be clear: if you violate our laws, we will hold you accountable," the release cited Garland as saying.

The move is a US response to Russia’s 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.

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US House Passes Resolution Conveying Support for Ukraine, Calling for End to Conflict

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives passed a resolution conveying support for Ukraine and calling for an end to the conflict in the country.

The House passed the "Supporting People of Ukraine" resolution on Wednesday with a 426-3 vote.

The measure backs US support for Ukraine, including calling for an immediate ceasefire and full withdrawal of Russian forces from the country.

Moreover, the measure urges the Biden administration to deliver additional security assistance to Ukraine immediately.

In addition, the resolution pledges to support working with Europe and international partners to bolster Europe’s energy security and reduce its dependence on Russian energy imports. The measure also emphasizes maintaining US energy independence.

Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine last week after the breakaway Donbas republics appealed for help in defending themselves against the Ukrainian military. In response, Western nations have rolled out a comprehensive sanctions campaign against Moscow.

Earlier on Wednesday, Russia’s Defense Ministry said a total of 498 Russian servicemen and 2,870 Ukraine soldiers have been killed in the operation so far.

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Fitbit Recalls Ionic Smartwatches Over Burn Hazard - US Consumer Safety Agency

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - Fitbit issued a recall of one million Ionic smartwatches because they pose a burn hazard to consumers, the US Consumer Product Safety Commission said in a notice.
"The lithium-ion battery in the Ionic smartwatch can overheat, posing a burn hazard," the recall notice issued on Wednesday said. "Consumers should immediately stop using the recalled Ionic smartwatches and contact Fitbit to receive pre-paid packaging to return the device."

When customers return the watch, the release added, they will get a $299 refund. In addition, Fitbit said it will also give customers a discount code that takes 40 percent off certain devices, according to the release.

Fitbit, the release added, received at least 115 reports in the United States and 59 internationally of the battery in the watch overheating. It also saw 78 reports of burn injuries in the US and another 40 internationally.

This recall was conducted voluntarily by the company, the agency said.

US Crude Oil Closes at Decade Highs, Brent at Mid-2014 Peak on Russia-Ukraine Crisis
(Adds closing prices, details in paragraphs 2-17)

NEW YORK, March 2 (Sputnik) - Oil prices extended their rally with US crude settling at its highest in a decade while global crude benchmark Brent soared to a June 2014 peak on worries about tight supplies amid a raft of international sanctions on major oil producer Russia over the war in Ukraine.

US crude’s West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, benchmark settled up $7.19, or 7%, at $110.60 a barrel on its front month. It was WTI’s highest settlement since May 2011. Earlier in the session, WTI hit $112.47, also its highest in more than a decade.

The most-actively traded contract on global crude benchmark Brent, meanwhile, settled up $7.96, or 7.6%, at $112.93 a barrel, its highest since June 2014. Its intraday peak of $113.93 also marked a 7.5-year high.

WTI has jumped some 46% this year and Brent 44%, responding to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Western governments have imposed a litany of financial sanctions against Moscow over the past week as the conflict worsened, and oil traders said the restrictions 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 aggressively from the two-year long coronavirus pandemic.

Wednesday’s rally also came as the OPEC+ alliance of oil producers did little to offset the energy supply crisis heightened by the Russia-Ukraine war.

"And at a time when the market is already extremely tight ... OPEC+ still seems unwilling to acknowledge" that, Craig Erlam, analyst at online trading platform OANDA.

OPEC+, chaired by Saudi Arabia with the assistance of Russia, authorized the 23 oil producing countries in the alliance to increase output by a total of 400,000 barrels per day in April.

It's a quantum OPEC+ had stuck to for the past nine months. But analysts also note that it's an aspiration the group has barely met, either due to production constraints at under-invested oil wells or a deliberate miss of the target — especially on the part of the Saudis — to ensure the oil rally doesn't get short-circuited.
"The Saudis have it within their power to snuff out some of this rally that we’re seeing for sure,” John Kilduff, partner at New York energy hedge Again Capital, said in comments carried by CNBC. “They could easily put another 1 million to 2 million barrels per day of oil on the market with almost the flick of a switch.”

Adding to Wednesday’s market fervor was data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration showing an across-the-board drop in crude and fuel stockpiles.

Crude stockpiles slid by 2.6 million barrels during the week to Feb. 25 after a build of 4.5 million barrels the previous week.

Of particular concern were inventory levels at the Cushing, Oklahoma delivery point for WTI which showed a critically-low balance of 22.8 million barrels versus the period week’s level of 23.8 million.

U.S. crude inventories have moved between declines and builds over the past month, responding to economic trends pressured by shifts in the coronavirus pandemic and inflation growing at its fastest pace in 40 years.

Stockpiles of gasoline dipped by 468,000 barrels last week, adding to the previous decline of 582,000 barrels. Automobile fuel gasoline, also known as petrol outside the United States, is America’s most-consumed oil product. Prior to the past four weeks, gasoline saw builds of around 37,000 barrels in the preceding eight weeks, indicating weaker demand.

Distillate inventories slid by 574,000 barrels, on top of the previous week’s decline of 1.6 million barrels. Distillates, which are refined into diesel for trucks, buses, trains and ships as well as fuel for jets, have been the strongest growth component of the US oil complex for months, seeing non-stop inventory declines since mid-January.

US Sees No Indications Belarus Ready to Get Involved in Ukraine Conflict - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The United States sees no indications that the Belarusian military is preparing to get involved in the conflict in Ukraine, Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said on Wednesday.

"No indications Belarusian military preparing to get involved," Kirby told journalists.

UNGA Passes Resolution Demanding Russia Stop Military Operation in Ukraine

(Adds quote in para 2, new details in paras 3-6, context in paras 7,8)

UNITED NATIONS, March 2 (Sputnik) - The UN General Assembly passed a resolution on Wednesday demanding that Russia cease its military operation in Ukraine, UN General Assembly President Abdulla Shahid said.
"The result of the vote is as follows: in favor - 141, against - five, abstentions - 35. Draft resolution... is adopted," Shahid said.
The resolution was adopted by a majority of the 193-member UN General Assembly. Russia, Belarus, Syria, North Korea and Eritrea voted against the adoption.
The adoption comes after the General Assembly held its Emergency Special Session on the situation in Ukraine on Monday and Tuesday.
The resolution called "Aggression Against Ukraine" demands that "the Russian Federation immediately cease its use of force against Ukraine and to refrain from any further unlawful threat of use of force against any UN member state."
It also deplores Russia’s recognition of the status of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions calls on Russian 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 that is a permanent member state of the Council.
In the 193-member UN General Assembly, the passage of a resolution requires a simple majority and there is no right to veto by any member states.

US Would Like to See Moscow Reciprocate on Nuclear Posture - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The United States would like to see Russia reciprocate on changes to its nuclear posture after Washington announced the suspension of a US missile test, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said on Wednesday.
"As I said in my opening statement, I would certainly like to see Moscow reciprocate by taking the temperature down on the rhetoric about nuclear posture," Kirby said during a press briefing. Kirby earlier in the press briefing announced that the US postponed a Minuteman III test launch scheduled for this weekend in order to demonstrate that the country has no intention of engaging in actions that could be misunderstood.

Pentagon Says US to Postpone Minutemen3 Test Launch This Weekend

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The United States is postponing the test of Minutemen this weakened, Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said on Wednesday.
"Last weekend, Putin directed special alert of Russian nuclear forces. We saw this as dangerous and irresponsible. Such provocative rhetoric is unacceptable. The US has not taken any similar steps. In an effort to demonstrate that we have no intention to engage in actions that could be misunderstood, our Minutemen3 test launch will be postponed from this weekend," Kirby said.
Federal Reserve Chief Powell Proposes Quarter Percentage Point Rise for March US Rate Hike
(Adds details, context and comments, paragraphs 3-17)
WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said on Wednesday he would likely support a quarter percentage point increase at the first upcoming US rate hike in two years in March.
"I'm inclined to propose and support a 25 basis point rate hike," Powell said during his semi-annual testimony to the US Congress on the state of the economy.
Powell said the Fed is expected to go ahead with the rate hike at its March 15-16 meeting despite the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on the American economy remaining largely unknown.
"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," the Fed chairman said. "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. 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 the 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.
One of the main catalysts for inflation has been US oil prices, which reached a decade-high of above $112 a barrel in Wednesday's trading, heightened by the Russia-Ukraine war. Even before the conflict in Ukraine, U.S. pump prices of fuel had retailed at seven-year highs for months.

The other driver of inflation has been wage increases, which grew year-on-year 9.2% in December.

Powell expressed confidence that the Fed’s rate hikes will overcome in due course inflation from energy.
"The spike in oil won't necessarily lead to repeated inflation," he said. While the price of oil is determined by where the Ukraine conflict goes, "the economy will be able to withstand our rate hikes," Powell said, adding: "In that regard, we are in a good position to control inflation."

He also said that he expected "employees will still get decent employment, and salary will rise for a while".
The Fed’s policy-making Federal Open Market Committee, or FOMC, will meet March 15-16 and another six times through December 13-14.

There’s a chance that the FOMC could raise rates by 25 basis points or a quarter percentage point at each meeting, though economists say that’s unlikely as the Fed would want some pause to see how its monetary tightening is working and the impact it’s having on the labor market and economy.

But some Fed bankers, such as Charles Evans and James Bullard — who lead the Chicago and St Louis chapters of the central bank — are suggesting rapid increases at each Fed meeting, with even 50 basis point or half percentage point increases if necessary, until there’s evidence of a significant drop in inflation.

"We can raise rates more swiftly if we hike in 25-basis-points increments for three meetings in a row and discover it’s not fast enough," Evans said in a live-streamed speech on Wednesday.

"As the Fed rises rates, if inflation worsens, we can hike rates even faster...I am sure that we might see moves in the next several meetings. Inflation will most likely remain above 3% by the end of the year."

Wall Street bank Goldman Sachs said it expected the Fed’s preferred inflation tool, the Personal Consumption Expenditure Index, to reach 3.7% by the end of 2022 compared with its previous forecast of 3.1%. From there, price growth could slow to 2.4% by the end of 2023 compared with its earlier view of 2.2%, Goldman said.

Blinken Says Discussed With Ukraine Counterpart Security Assistance

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday said that he discussed security assistance with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba and is planning to raise the issue at meetings with allies and partners during an upcoming trip to Eastern Europe.

"I can't comment in detail in my conversations with Foreign Minister of Kuleba. We talked about a lot of things, including the ongoing provision of security assistance to Ukraine and that is something that I will be talking to European allies and partners about in a couple of days in Brussels," Blinken said during a press briefing.

US Apprehended 27 Romanians Illegally Crossing Border From Canada - CBP

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) said on Wednesday that border patrol agents recently apprehended 27 Romanians illegally crossing into the United States from Canada.
"On February 25, 2022, a convoy of four vehicles was interdicted after illegally crossing the border near Union Corners, Maine," CBP said in a press release. "Border Patrol Agents from the Houlton Station, Sector Intelligence Unit, and Houlton Sector Headquarters responded and interdicted the four vehicles as they attempted to further entry into the US. Agents encountered 27 Romanians present illegally in the United States."

US immigration enforcement immediately returned the Romanian migrants back to Canada under the title 42 policy, which authorizes border patrol officers to immediately turn migrants away at the US border in order to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus.

One of the Romanian migrants was taken to a local hospital due to a health concern but was later released back to US custody, the release said.

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Top US General, Ukrainian Counterpart Discuss Continuing Support to Kiev - Spokesman

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mark Milley in a recent telephone call with his Ukrainian counterpart discussed the United States’ commitment to continue supporting Ukraine, Joint Staff Spokesperson Col. Dave Butler said on Wednesday. "Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark A. Milley spoke with Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces Lt. Gen. Valery Zaluzhny today by phone," Butler said in a statement. "The Chairman reaffirmed President Biden and Secretary of Defense Austin’s commitment of continued support to Ukraine."

Butler added that Ukraine is a key partner to NATO.

Russia launched an operation in Ukraine last week after the breakaway Donbas republics appealed for help in defending themselves against the Ukrainian military. In response, Western nations have rolled out a comprehensive sanctions campaign against Moscow.

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US, Russia Have Long Agreed Use of Nukes Would Be Devastating for World - Blinken

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday that Russia and the United States have long agreed that the use of nuclear weapons would be devastating for the globe.

"Russia and the United States have long agreed that the actual use of nuclear weapons would be devastating and have devastating consequences for the entire world," Blinken said at a press conference.

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US Sanctions on Russia Not Aimed at Its Citizens - Blinken

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday that the sanctions on Russia are not aimed at its citizens and Washington stands with the Russian people.

"The economic costs that we've been forced to impose on Russia are not aimed at you [Russian citizens]," Blinken said at a presser. "They are aimed at compelling your government to stop its actions."

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Blinken Says US Keeping Door Open to Diplomacy With Russia

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The United States remains open for diplomacy with Russia over the Ukraine conflict, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday.

"The United States is continuing our diplomatic efforts. We're keeping the door open to a diplomatic way forward," Blinken said at a press conference.

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UPDATE - US Has Not Made Judgment on Whether Russia Should Be Removed From UNSC - State Dept.
(Fixes typo in lede, adds details)
WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The US has not made a decision on whether Washington supports Russia being removed from the UN Security Council, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman told lawmakers on Wednesday.

"We are looking at all options... We have not made that judgment at this time," Sherman said when asked about removing Russia from the UNSC.

Sherman said she believes removing a member from the UN Security Council requires a change in the UN charter.

Russia launched an operation in Ukraine last week after the breakaway Donbas republics appealed for help in defending themselves against the Ukrainian military. In response, Western nations have rolled out comprehensive sanctions campaign against Moscow.

Earlier, the US unveiled new sanctions targeting Belarus' defense and intelligence agencies.

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Pentagon Lifts Mask Requirement Effective Immediately - Spokesman

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon announced that per new recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) it is no longer requiring employees to wear masks indoors, a Pentagon spokesman said Wednesday.

"Effective immediately, per the new CDC guidelines, and CDC rating COVID-19 community levels for Arlington County and City of Alexandria as "low," masks are no longer required indoors at the Pentagon," the spokesman said. "Individuals may wear a mask if they choose, regardless of (the) COVID-19 community level."

The press statement added that other changes include occupancy moving up to less than 50 percent, replacing the original guidance of 25 percent.
The size of gatherings has increased, and the options for seating in the food court have been expanded as well.

Blinken to Travel Across Europe March 3 to 8 to Discuss Ukraine With Partners - State Dept

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will travel across Europe from Belgium to the Baltic nations from March 3 through March 8 to discuss with allies and partners the ongoing situation between Russia and Ukraine, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said on Wednesday.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken will travel to Belgium, Poland, Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia from March 3 to 8, 2022. The trip continues extensive consultations and coordination with our NATO Allies and European partners about the Russian Federation’s continued premeditated, unprovoked, and unjustified war against Ukraine," Price said in a statement.

US Has Not Made Judgment on Whether Russia Should Be Removed From UNSC - State Dept.

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Sherman said she believes removing a member from the UN Security Council requires a change in the UN charter.
Russia launched an operation in Ukraine last week after the breakaway Donbas republics appealed for help in defending themselves against the Ukrainian military. In response, Western nations have rolled out comprehensive sanctions campaign against Moscow.

Most Countries Include Refugees in COVID-19 Vaccine Programs, But Issues Remain – UN

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) – Most countries of the world have formally included refugees in their COVID-19 vaccination programs, but many refugees still have not gotten the first shot, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) said on Wednesday. "While on paper refugees in 162 states are now included in national schemes, and there have been improvements in the supply of vaccines to countries, administrative barriers, capacity issues and logistical challenges have meant that many refugees are yet to receive their first dose," the agency said in a statement. Refugees and other displaced people have received 8.3 million vaccine doses in 68 countries in Asia-Pacific, Europe, Africa and the Americas, and another 82 countries have confirmed that they have begun the vaccination, according to the statement. Director of UNHCR’s Division of Resilience and Solutions Sajjad Malik acknowledged that most of the refugees are hosted in developing countries facing critical vaccine inequity and implementation challenges. "Vaccine inequity is taking the greatest toll on those most vulnerable. Not enough doses are making it into the arms of those who need them most," he said. To address this issue, the UNHCR urges the international community to provide greater support to hosting countries. The agency also called for bigger investment to strengthen national health systems in low- and middle-income states that are facing refugee crises. Governments should also address specific issues that prevent refugees from receiving vaccines. "According to available UNHCR data, where doses are being administered, vaccination rates for refugees are lower than the average for national populations. This is largely due to logistical challenges and administrative requirements that refugees may not be able to meet," the UNHCR added. In the meantime, the UNHCR acknowledged great progress in refugee vaccination in many countries, including Angola, Bangladesh and South Africa.

Biden May Ban Russian Ships From Entering US Ports - Reports
WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration may restrict the entry of Russian ships into US ports in response to the country's ongoing military operations in Ukraine, The Wall Street Journal said on Wednesday in a report.
"I expect an announcement from Washington today that will ban all Russian ships from our shores," Port of Los Angeles executive director Gene Seroka said in the report.
A White House spokeswoman said that the Biden administration has yet to make a decision on the matter, according to the report. The move would follow a series of other sanctions and restrictions by the US on Russian entities, including a decision on Tuesday to ban Russian flights from US airspace. The United Kingdom on Tuesday banned Russian ships from UK ports, including any vessels owned or operated by individuals connected to Russia. However, a US ban on Russian ships would be largely symbolic due to the fact that Russian commercial ships account for less than 1% of cargo volume to the US, the report added.

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US to Restrict Sensitive Items Supporting Belarus Defense, Aerospace, Maritime Industries

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is issuing a new rule designed to deny sensitive items that support Belarus' defense, aerospace and maritime industries, the US Commerce Department said on Wednesday.
"Today's rule imposes a policy of denial on sensitive items that support Belarus's defense, aerospace, and maritime industries," the Commerce Department said in a press release.

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New US Sanctions Target Belarus' Defense Ministry, Intel Organizations - Commerce Dept

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - New US sanctions on Belarus include measures against the country’s defense ministry, encompassing all sorts of the national armed services and intelligence organizations amid the ongoing military conflict in Ukraine, the Commerce Department said on Wednesday.
"[New export rule] adds two entities, including the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Belarus (this listing encompasses the national armed services, including the army, navy, marine, air force, or coast guard; national guard and police; and government intelligence or reconnaissance organizations of Belarus)," the Commerce Department said in a press release.

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US Travel Mask Requirements to Remain in Place Until at Least Mid-March - White House

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The US administration is not going to reconsider current COVID-19 travel requirements at list until mid-March when the current rules should expire, White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator Jeff Zients told reporters on Wednesday. "No change, but an evaluation [is] taking place at this point," Zients said in a virtual press briefing. "Those requirements are currently in place through March 18, and we will continue to do so while we evaluate leading up to March 18 the duration of requirements based on the state of the virus."

He reminded that last week the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a new guidance with regard to mask wearing while traveling by air or railroad.

Last week, CDC lifted mask mandate in buses and publicly operated vans, but left it in place for airplanes and trains where it is difficult to maintain social distancing.

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US to Restrict Tech Imports, Extend Export Control Policies to Belarus - White House

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The United States will restrict the import of technological goods by Belarus and extend stringent export control policies placed on Moscow to Minsk in response to ongoing military operations by Russia in Ukraine, the White House said on Wednesday.

"Today's actions include: Sweeping restrictions on Belarus to choke off its import of technological goods," the release said. "The Department of Commerce will extend the stringent export control policies put in place for Russia to Belarus. This action will help prevent diversion of items, technologies, and software through Belarus to Russia and will significantly degrade both countries' ability to sustain their military aggression and project power," the White House said in a fact sheet on the policy.

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US Weekly Oil Stockpiles Tumble as Crude Prices Hit Decade Highs - EIA Data

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - Crude and fuel stockpiles fell across the board in the United States last week, the Energy Information Administration (EIA) said on Wednesday as US oil prices hit more than 10-year highs on worries about tight global supplies amid a raft of sanctions on major oil producer Russia.

Crude inventories fell 2.6 million barrels during the week ended February 25 after a build of 4.5 million barrels the previous week, the EIA said in its Weekly Petroleum Status Report. US crude inventories have moved between declines and builds over the past month, responding to
economic trends pressured by shifts in the coronavirus pandemic and inflation growing at its fastest pace in 40 years.

Stockpiles of gasoline dipped by 468,000 barrels last week, adding to the previous decline of 582,000 barrels. Automobile fuel gasoline, also known as petrol outside the United States, is America’s most-consumed oil product. Prior to the past four weeks, gasoline saw builds of around 37,000 barrels in the preceding eight weeks, indicating weaker demand.

Distillate inventories slid by 574,000 barrels, on top of the previous week’s decline of 1.6 million barrels. Distillates, which are refined into diesel for trucks, buses, trains and ships as well as fuel for jets, have been the strongest growth component of the US oil complex for months, seeing non-stop inventory declines since mid-January.

By 12:02 pm Eastern US (17:02 GMT), the West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, benchmark for US crude was up $4.86, or 4.7%, at $108.27 a barrel. It earlier hit $112.47, its highest since the previous peak of $114.18 on May 2011.

Global crude benchmark Brent showed a gain of $5.17, or 4.9%, at $110.14 a barrel. Brent earlier hit $113.93, marking a new peak since the June 2014 high of $115.71.

WTI has jumped some 44% this year and Brent 42%, responding to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

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US Imposing Full Blocking Sanctions on 22 Russian Defense-Related Entities - White House

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The United States is imposing full blocking sanctions on 22 Russian defense-related entities in response to Russia’s military operation in Ukraine, the White House said on Wednesday.

"The Department of State will impose sweeping sanctions that target Russia’s defense sector," the White House said in a press release. "This action will impose significant costs on Russian weapon development and production companies. In total, 22 Russian defense-related entities will be designated, including firms that make combat aircraft, infantry fighting vehicles, electronic warfare systems, missiles, and unmanned aerial vehicles for Russia’s military."

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US With Allies Imposing Additional Economic Sanctions on Russia, Belarus - White House

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The United States in coordination with allies is imposing additional economic sanctions on Russia and Belarus amid the military operation in Ukraine, the White House announced on Wednesday.
"Today, the United States, in coordination with Allies and partners, is imposing additional economic costs on Russia and Belarus in response to President [Vladimir] Putin’s brutal invasion of Ukraine. The United States will take actions to hold Belarus accountable for enabling Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, weaken the Russian defense sector and its military power for years to come, target Russia’s most important sources of wealth, and ban Russian airlines from U.S. airspace,” the White House said in a press release.

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US Sees No Changes From Russia That Causes Concern in Its Deterrence Posture - Official

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The United States has not seen any changes to Russia’s nuclear posture that would cause less comfort in its own current deterrence posture, a senior US defense official said on Wednesday.

“We’ve seen nothing that gives us pause to reconsider the strategic deterrent posture that we have in place for the homeland and the defense of our allies and partners,” the official said when asked if the United States has seen any changes that Russia has actually changed its nuclear posture over the last 24 hours. "We're watching it every day after Mr. [Russian President Vladimir] Putin's announcement, but we've seen nothing that would give us less comfort in our own strategic deterrence posture."

On Sunday, Putin ordered that Russia’s deterrence forces be put on high alert.

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US Security Assistance Continues to Flow to Ukraine, Even in Last 24 Hours - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - US security assistance continues to flow into Ukraine and it has been the case even in the last 24 hours, a senior US defense official said on Wednesday.

"We are going to continue to flow security assistance to the Ukrainians, and we have done that even in the last 24 hours, and we are going to continue to look for ways to do that to the maximum effectiveness possible," the official said during a press briefing.

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Biden Team Risks Regional War, Energy Costs for Sake of Ukraine Escalation -Ex-DoD Analyst

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and his advisers seem "more than willing" to run the risk of a continuing regional war in Ukraine and consequences for neighboring

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Last week, Russia launched 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 forces. The Russian Defense Ministry said it is targeting Ukrainian military assets only and civilians are safe. In response, the West has rolled out still more sanctions against Moscow and moved to boost military assistance to Ukraine, including lethal weapons.

"Biden's advisers are more than willing to risk regional war, regional humanitarian crises, and higher energy costs for Ukraine and its European neighbors," Kwiatkowski said.

The United States has lobbied hard for Ukraine to join NATO since 2009, and US military aid and weapons to Ukraine have been sold and delivered several times under both Presidents Donald Trump and Joe Biden, Kwiatkowski noted.

"These actions have, as they were intended, escalated the conflict. This is US and NATO policy, and it was cited by Putin last week as a reason for Moscow's recognition of the two eastern republics, and his military attacks on Ukraine's military capabilities, chemical and biological laboratories, and political command and control," she said.

A report published three years ago by a highly influential US think tank gave important insights into the goals and methodologies of Washington's policymaking on Ukraine, Kwiatkowski advised.

"The US playbook on Russia, put forth in a 2019 report by the Pentagon's RAND Corporation can help us understand that both Biden and Putin understand what is happening, and how it is happening," she said.

The report is titled "Overextending and Unbalancing Russia: Assessing the Impacts of Cost-Imposing Options" and it noted that providing lethal aid to Ukraine was desirable, but would need to be "carefully calibrated" so as not to provoke conflict with Russia beyond Ukraine, Kwiatkowski said.

"The RAND study assessed the cost and risk of a variety of US and NATO actions, all geared towards destabilizing Russia," she said.

The recent rebellion in Kazakhstan, with significant Western intelligence involvement, failed to cause much international concern, as Russian forces as part of the Collective Security Treaty Organization peacekeeping mission quickly restored order, and withdrew afterward, Kwiatkowski noted.

"The Kazakhstan initiative does support the idea that overextending and unbalancing Russia remains a US objective," she said.

US policies continued to be quietly hostile to Russian interests in its own region rather than seeking compromise and accommodation with Moscow, Kwiatkowski observed.

"US low-level war with Russia includes ongoing efforts to deny oil and gas markets to Russia (hence the US hysteria over the already completed Nord Stream 2 being turned on), as well as denial of financial exchanges, and US advocacy for global economic sanctions on Russia," she said.

The United States was continuing to pursue conflict with Russia, beyond Cold War containment and into purposeful destabilization, Kwiatkowski commented.

"It most certainly is, and this effort may include an eventual regime change operation in Moscow," she said.
Nor was US activity vis à vis Ukraine, the Black Sea, the Arctic and the other borders of Russia, being "carefully calibrated" as the 2019 RAND report had recommended, according to Kwiatkowski.

"Since the Russian invasion last week, nearly 200 tons of additional weapons have been sent to Ukraine from the Pentagon, and EU and NATO countries are pouring weapons into the country," she said.

Escalating the conflict was clearly in the publicized interest of the United States government, and its closest NATO allies like Britain, Kwiatkowski explained.

"On one hand, these are self-defense weapons, and without training and command and control, don't add a lot to the ability of the Ukrainian government to resist the Russian army. But it is very much in line with ensuring that the cost to Russia will be higher on the ground," she said.

The continuing behavior and policy making decisions of Biden and his top advisers and political allies gave cause for concern about whether the current crisis would be brought under control, Kwiatkowski warned.

"[Given Biden's] past culpability in Ukrainian government corruption and machinations, his chicken hawk foreign policy team none of whom have worn a military uniform and the worry of the US Democratic Party about possible loss of Congressional majorities nine months from now, the world should be worried," she said.

Ukraine's own leaders should still seek a genuine neutrality solution to their security problems rather than try to join NATO, the expert advised.

"If Ukraine can withstand the destruction of its military capability, while maintaining its independence, all parties, including the US, ought to be seeking a Switzerland-esque solution -- a heavily armed population, trading with all and allying with none, and ultimately enriching the Ukrainian people, and not just their elites," Kwiatkowski said.

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Anti-Russia Sanctions Will Have More Profound Consequences for Europe Than US - Sherman

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The consequences from anti-Russian sanctions will be more significant for Europe than for the United States, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said on Wednesday.

"My European colleagues have shown extraordinary courage. Their economic interaction with Russia is much more profound than ours is," Sherman said. "They have trading and commercial relationships with Russia that we do not as well as energy relationships as you've pointed out and so for them to have taken the steps that they have really can come back on them in much more profound ways even than it can come back on us."

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US Senator Introduces Measure to Strip Russia of Permanent Normal Trade Relations Status

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - US Senator Ron Wyden introduced legislation on Wednesday to terminate Russia from the normal trade relations status with the United States. "Senate Finance Committee Chair Ron Wyden, D-Ore., introduced the No Most Favored Nation Trading with Russia Act today...The bill revokes Russia’s Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) status and provides the president the power to raise tariffs on a host of Russian products," Wyden’s press office said in a press release.
The United States has provided permanent normal trade relations to Russia since 2012, after it joined the World Trade Organization, the release said.

US Likely to Unveil New Sanctions on Belarus, Russian Defense Sector Wednesday - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration will likely announce on Wednesday a number of new restrictive measures on Belarus and Russia’s defense sector, Bloomberg reported, citing sources.
Russia launched an operation in Ukraine last week after the breakaway Donbas republics appealed for help in defending themselves against the Ukrainian military. In response, Western nations have rolled out a comprehensive sanctions campaign against Moscow.

Blinken Visits Ukrainian Church in Washington, Says Now 'Moment for Faith'

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday visited a Ukrainian church in Washington accompanied by Ukrainian Ambassador to the United States Oksana Markarova and said that now is a moment for faith amid conflict in the country. "I think it’s particularly fitting to be here today, because this is also, I’m convinced, irrespective of your faith, a moment for faith: faith in the power of democracy; faith in the ability of peace to triumph over aggression; faith in the conviction that good will prevail over evil; and, of course, it’s in the most difficult moments that our faith is tested. This is a difficult moment.” Blinken said. The Secretary of State also said the United States has tremendous faith in Ukraine’s future and in the peace and prosperity of its people.
Blinken praised Markarova, who attended President Joe Biden’s State of the Union address on Tuesday evening, saying that she is seen as an embodiment of everything the Ukrainian people are going through.
On Thursday, Russia launched a special operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine after the Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics requested help to defend themselves from intensified
attacks from Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation solely targets Ukrainian military infrastructure and civilians should are not in danger.

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UNGA Passes Resolution Demanding Russia Stop Military Operation in Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS, March 2 (Sputnik) - The UN General Assembly passed a resolution on Wednesday demanding that Russia cease its military operation in Ukraine. The resolution was adopted by a majority of the 193-member UN General Assembly. The vote follows a UN General Assembly emergency special session on the situation in Ukraine on Monday and Tuesday.

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Russian Envoy Urges UNGA Not to Vote for Resolution on Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS, March 2 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia urged the General Assembly on Wednesday not to support a draft resolution that decries Moscow's military operation in Ukraine.
"We call on you not to support this draft," Nebenzia said. "We know about the unprecedented pressure that our Western partners are exerting on a large number of countries urging them to vote as they see fit."
"There were open and cynical threats, and we know about it," he added

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US 2001 Authorization for Military Force Cannot Be Applied to Russia’s Actions - Sherman

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) can not be applied to Russia’s activities in Europe, officials from the departments of Defense and State said during a congressional hearing on Wednesday.
When asked by the congressmen during a US House of Representatives hearing whether the 2001 AUMF can be applied to Russia’s "aggression" in Europe, the officials, including US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, said "No."
The officials were testifying before the US House Foreign Affairs Committee on the 2001 AUMF and war powers.
The US Constitution gives Congress the power to wage war. But Congress gave the president broad war powers with the two resolutions - the 1991 AUMF gave the president the power to use US military force in the Gulf War and the 2001 AUMF approved using force against those responsible for the September 11 terror attacks. Successive US presidents have broadly interpreted the two AUMFs to send armed forces to countries around the world, including Afghanistan, Libya, Turkey, Georgia, Yemen, Djibouti, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Iraq, Somalia, the Philippines, Cuba and the Balkans.

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US Delivering Weapons to Ukraine at Present, Has Many Ways to Do So - Sherman

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The United States is delivering weapons in Ukraine amid the ongoing conflict there and has various means of doing so, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said on Wednesday. "We understand the challenges to getting weapons in in the middle of a conflict but I can assure you, congressmen, that those weapons are getting in even now," Sherman said. "There are many ways that we have to do this."

On Tuesday, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said he told US Secretary of State Antony Blinken that Ukraine needs more weapons to repel Russia and is also insists on additional sanctions being imposed on its neighbor. Western nations have increased sanctions on Russia after Moscow launched a special operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine following requests by the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to help defend them from intensified attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry has said that the operation is solely targeting the Ukraine's military infrastructure and that the civilian population is not in danger.

On Sunday, EU Foreign Ministers agreed to supply $500 million worth of arms to the Ukrainian forces. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the aid would also include $55 million for non-lethal supplies, such as fuel and protective equipment, and the bloc would also provide fighter jets. The United States, Canada and Australia have also approved weapons assistance to Ukraine.