Sudanese Military Gov Reaffirms 'No Problem' With Opening Russian Naval Base in Red Sea Port

The US has long operated a major military base out of Djibouti, which occupies a strategic position at the mouth of the Red Sea, but in recent years Washington has felt threatened by a new Chinese base in the same city-state, one of Beijing's few military bases abroad. Defense leaders in Khartoum have reaffirmed their willingness to host a Russian naval base in Port Sudan, a strategic port in the Red Sea. A deal agreed to in 2019 was put on hold after Sudan's longtime military ruler, Omar al-Bashir, was overthrown in a popular revolution months later.

"We have 730 kilometers along the Red Sea. If any country wants to open a base and it is in our interests and doesn't threaten our national security we have no problem in dealing with anyone, Russian or otherwise," Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, commonly known as Hemedti, told reporters in Khartoum on Wednesday. Hemedti is the deputy head of Sudan's ruling council and commands the powerful paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. His Tuesday comments followed his return from a trip to Moscow to discuss the issue with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak and Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolay Patrushev.

Talks on establishing the naval facility have been held since 2017, but after Bashir's overthrow in the April 2019 revolution, the deal was put on hold. Last year, the Sovereign Council, which ruled Sudan after Bashir's overthrow, proposed adding military and economic aid to the deal. A deal was reportedly agreed to in November 2020, but it has continued to be revised, including on central issues such as the location of the base. In September 2021, Sudanese Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammed Sharif said one of the biggest obstacles to finalizing the deal is that Sudan presently doesn't have sufficient legislative institutions with the authority to do so.

The Sovereign Council has since been dissolved by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the head of the military junta that seized power in Sudan in October 2021. Port Sudan is Sudan's largest coastal city, sitting about halfway from the mouth of the Red Sea to the Suez Canal, which connects to the Mediterranean Sea. It's also a short distance from Jeddah, a major Saudi port. Aside from several facilities in former Soviet republics, Russia's only overseas naval base is in Tartus, Syria, a 1,200-mile transit from Port Sudan.

The waterway is one of the world's great trade arteries, handling more than $1.8 trillion in trade traffic annually - a value that is expected to triple by 2050, according to the Fletcher School at Tufts University. Other nations also maintain military facilities in the Red Sea, including China and the United States, both of which have bases in Djibouti.
“Anywhere [Russian President Vladimir Putin] expands his sphere of influence is bad for us,” said retired US Air Force Maj. Gen. Mark Hicks, who commanded US special-operations units in Africa, to the Wall Street Journal on Wednesday about a proposed Russian base in Sudan. Countries such as Mali and the Central African Republic have discussed or agreed to military cooperation of various sorts with Moscow, including military training, after years of relying on French and European Union specialists yielded few positive results.

The US has postured against the expansion of Russia’s relationships with African nations, claiming that Moscow has sent private military contractors to perform security work, but the Russian government has denied accusations of a connection to mercenary groups and said that as long as they follow Russian laws, the activities of private companies are none of their business.

“There are no current or past historical examples for a successful outcome from Russian paramilitary presence - no peace, no enduring stability,” Maj. Gen. William Zana, commander of the US military force in Djibouti, told the WSJ, without a hint of irony. “Instead you see violence, populations abused and exploited for their resources, and Russian oligarchs lining their pockets.”

A more recent complication for negotiations is the imposition of economic sanctions on Russia by Western powers in response to the launching of a special military operation in Ukraine last week. The incursion is aimed at removing the potential for NATO to use the country as a base from which to attack Russia, or from which reported neo-Nazi groups can continue to wage war against Russian-speaking minorities in the Donbass region.

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Lukashenko Says Belarusian Army Does Not and Will Not Take Part in Special Op in Ukraine
By - Tim Korso

Kiev has repeatedly accused Minsk of taking part in what it calls a "Russian invasion". Russia launched a special operation to demilitarise and "de-Nazify" Ukraine on 24 February following the failure of the Minsk agreements and Kiev’s threats to reverse the country’s nuclear status. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has said that the country’s army has not and will not take part in Russia’s special military operation in Ukraine. The latter has been underway since 24 February.

"And no matter how certain forces - you know which ones - try today to draw us into the hostilities on the territory of Ukraine, you [the citizens of Belarus] have no reason to worry", he said.

Lukashenko stressed that Belarusian forces are currently employed in guarding the nation’s border against external threats. He added that special attention is being paid to the western and northwestern portion of the border with the EU.

"Our guys have tightly closed the border and reinforced outfits are guarding it, protecting our land, and not some land where, besides this conflict, some other undercover battles and wars are unfolding, spurred on by certain forces", Lukashenko said.
The president underscored that the country's military will fight and die protecting their homeland, but expressed hope it won't come to that.

Lukashenko thus once again rejected allegations by Ukraine that Belarus is aiding Russia in its special military operation, which Kiev calls an "invasion". The operation was ordered by President Vladimir Putin on 24 February. He said that Russia was left with no other choice after Kiev essentially gave up on fulfilling the Minsk agreements opting for a military option to resolve the conflict with the Donetsks and Lugas People's Republics (DPR and LPR).

The Russian president outlined the goals of the operation as demilitarisation — the removal of weapons endangering Russia, including possibly nuclear devices that Kiev threatened to obtain, and to de-Nazify the country — removing nationalists from its leadership and defeating nationalist battalions.

Western nations slapped Russia with harsh economic sanctions in response to the start of the operation. They also imposed sanctions on Minsk, whom they accuse of aiding Moscow in the operation, despite Minsk denying it.

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As End of ‘Grueling Marathon’ of JCPOA Revival Draws Near, IAEA Warns Iran Nearing Uranium Milestone

Israeli media recently revealed that Tel Aviv’s Mossad intelligence agency has for years been waging a covert war against Iran’s nuclear program, including acts of sabotage and assassination, as Jerusalem remains convinced Tehran is in pursuit of a nuclear bomb to use against the Jewish state.

A recent memorandum by the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA), the United Nations’ nuclear watchdog, warned that Iran could soon pass a notable threshold in uranium enrichment, according to the Wall Street Journal.

According to the Thursday report, as of February 19, Iran had accumulated 33.2 kilograms of uranium with a purity of 60% U-235 — nearly double the quantity it possessed when the IAEA last reported on the topic in November 2021. According to the WSJ, the report warns that this is a nearly sufficient quantity of highly enriched uranium for Iran to extract enough fissile material to build a nuclear bomb; 40 kilograms is the cutoff point.

However, that process would require much more refining at a level Iran is not known to be trying for; thus far, 60% is the highest purity it has admitted to or been found to possess. Further, Iran has forewarned the use of a nuclear bomb or any weapon of mass destruction, and Israeli military intelligence has reported that while Iran’s uranium enrichment process has accelerated in recent years, there has been no parallel effort in the field of weapons technology, meaning that even if Iran did create 90% enriched uranium, it would not be able to turn it into a useable weapon.

The news comes as negotiations in Vienna aimed at resurrecting the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) seem to be drawing to a close. The 2015 deal, shredded in 2018 by the administration of former US President Donald Trump, set strict limits on Iran’s uranium
purification in exchange for the removal of economic sanctions against the Southwest Asian country. After the US pulled out of the deal, claiming without evidence that Iran was secretly violating the rules, Iran began backing away from its commitments under the deal, increasing the quantity and quality of uranium it produced.

Following the withdrawal, the Trump White House imposed crippling sanctions on Iran’s economy, part of a “maximum pressure” effort by his administration to destroy the government of the Islamic republic, which is sharply critical of US foreign policy in the region. After US President Joe Biden took office in January 2021, talks on reviving the deal began, as Biden believes the deal is the best way to stop Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.

“Yesterday marked 11 months since the Vienna Talks started. A long and grueling marathon,” tweeted Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia’s top negotiator in Vienna, on Thursday. “Now it is almost over.”

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian said on Saturday that a deal was very close, and the two sides were reviewing a draft of the agreement for outstanding issues that need to be settled.

“Our red lines are made clear to Western parties. Ready to immediately conclude a good deal, should they show real will,” Amir Abdollahian tweeted.

On Thursday, the US State Department said there had been significant progress toward an agreement, but that a number of difficult and essential issues remained unresolved. One issue is an IAEA probe into undeclared nuclear material found in Iran, which Iranian officials want to end with a new deal, IAEA chief Rafael Grossi said recently.

US State Department deputy spokesperson Jalina Porter told reporters there was “very little remaining time” to reach a deal. “We will not have a deal unless we resolve quickly the remaining issues,” she said.

Iran says its nuclear program is only for electrical generation and research purposes. Last month, the US waived sanctions on Iran’s civil nuclear program for the first time in several years, allowing foreign companies and governments to cooperate with Iran’s several nuclear power plants.

Nine countries are known to possess nuclear weapons, including the United States, Russia, United Kingdom, France, China, Pakistan, India, Israel, and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

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Watch: Explosion Rips Apart Maryland Apartment Building, Hospitalizing 10

A powerful explosion tore through the Friendly Garden Apartments in the Washington, DC, suburb of Lyttonsville, Maryland, on Thursday morning. The blast lifted the roof of the building up and sent its facade flying across the street, as seen on nearby security camera footage passed to local media.
The explosion then ignited a fire that was visible for a long distance. Observers, including a local news crew, reported the blaze was so intense that its heat could be felt a significant distance from the flames.

Montgomery County Fire & Rescue Chief Scott Goldstein told reporters on Thursday afternoon that 10 people had been taken to area hospitals, three of whom had suffered serious injuries. “There are unaccounted-for people,” he added, but couldn’t say how many or why, stressing that some people may simply be at work.

In addition, the blast has damaged three other buildings, which have now been declared unsafe, displacing dozens of people and families.

Goldstein said “it’s too early to speculate” on the cause of the explosion.

However, one resident told NBC Washington there was a “heavy smell of gas” in the building in the hours before.

Another massive explosion in nearby Silver Spring leveled an entire apartment complex in 2016, killing seven people. According to an investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board, that explosion was caused by a faulty vent and regulator on a gas line.

As Sputnik has reported, the United States’ gas infrastructure is aging and brittle, with the Department of Transportation’s Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) burdened by a shortage of regulators to monitor safety and a set of regulations written under the watchful eye of the industrial giants they are expected to oversee.

"This isn't like the fox guarding the hen house," Carl Weimer, executive director of the Pipeline Safety Trust, a public charity that promotes fuel transportation safety, told Propublica in 2012. "It's like the fox designing the hen house."

California Governor Unveils ‘Care Court’ Compelling Mental Health Treatment for Homeless

California Governor Gavin Newsom has unveiled a plan to allow homeless people to be ordered into to mental health treatment by trial court judges in a bid to “clean up” the streets of California’s cities.

“There’s no compassion with people with their clothes off defecating and urinating in the middle of the streets, screaming and talking to themselves,” Newsom told the San Francisco Chronicle on Wednesday. “There’s nothing appropriate about a kid and a mom going down the street trying to get to the park being accosted by people who clearly need help.”

“I’m increasingly outraged by what’s going on in the streets,” he said. “I’m disgusted with it.” The program is called “Care Court.” It would create a new mental health-focused arm in California’s county courthouses, before which people suffering from psychotic symptoms, either due to a mental illness such as schizophrenia or due to severe drug addiction, could be brought. According to the Chronicle, this could happen in one of three scenarios: they are suspected of a crime, an involuntary hold in a psychiatric emergency room is about to end, or a family member or outreach worker believes they cannot take care of themselves. They would be represented by a public defender; a lawyer in the US legal system employed by the court to represent clients.
unable to afford a lawyer. A clinical team would create a care plan in conjunction with the person and a county case manager, who would help them navigate the process. The plan could include clinical visits, prescriptions for medication, or housing at a board-and-care facility or “halfway house.”
If the person refuses this process, then a normal criminal case would begin. According to the San Francisco paper, the rule would not apply exclusively to homeless people, either.

The Golden State has an estimated 161,548 homeless, as of January 2020, according to the US Interagency Council on Homelessness - roughly 40% of the entire homeless population the United States.

There are many contributing factors to the rise in unhoused persons in the US and in California especially, including rising rent and other costs of living and a lack of funding for adequate care services. Deinstitutionalization, or the closing of the once-massive psychiatric hospitals that became so popular in Victorian times, has also been blamed for the rise in homeless Americans, but that process is thought to have only been a minor factor.

The San Francisco - Bay Area, in particular, is one of the nation’s most unaffordable places to live. A September 2021 report by the Bay Area Equity Atlas found that nearly half of Bay Area residents are either low income or very-low income, according to California Department of Housing and Urban Development data. United Ways of California also noted in July that one-quarter of Bay Area residents aren’t making enough money to cover the cost of housing, food, medical care, childcare, and other essentials.

Newsom, a former mayor of San Francisco, has long postured as “tough on crime,” pledging in November of 2021 a police crackdown on "smash and grab" theft from boutique shops and pharmacies.

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Former Louisville Cop Acquitted on All Charges Stemming From Fatal Raid of Breonna Taylor's Home
By - Mary Manley

Ex-officer Brett Hankison was acquitted on all three counts of felony wanton endangerment resulting from a botched police raid which wrongly killed Breonna Taylor, a Black emergency medical technician who was just 26 years old.
The former Louisville Metro Police Department detective was the only officer of three charged in connection with the March 12, 2020, shooting, although those charges were not related to Taylor's death. Instead, the only criminal charge to come out of the botched police raid was the wanton endangerment of Taylor's neighbors.
On the sixth day of the trial, a jury deliberated for three hours and acquitted Hankison of all three charges, each of which carried a maximum sentence of five years in prison. The charges
were not for the death of Taylor, but for endangering the couple who lived next door to Taylor and her boyfriend. The couple who lived next door included Cody Etherton, his pregnant girlfriend, and her five year-old child. They were woken up by police breaking down the door of Taylor's apartment next door. Etherton took the stand on the first day of the trial against Hankison, and described the danger he felt he was put in.

"So, this shot here I believe was the one that was inches away from hitting me," he testified, pointing to an image of a bullet hole which damaged a clock in his apartment.

"One or two more inches and I would have been shot, which kind of upsets me because I think about it all the time. My son would have never got to meet me, I would have never got to meet my son," he added.

Taylor and her boyfriend has been asleep in bed when they were woken by what they assumed was an intruder. Kenneth Walker, Taylor's boyfriend, used his legally-owned gun to fire a single shot which wounded Sergeant Jonathan Mattingly's leg. The non-fatal warning shot prompted white officers Mattingly, Myles Cosgrove, and Brett Hankison, who were not in uniform but wearing plain clothes during a narcotics investigation, to shoot 32 times into the dark, striking Taylor six times. Taylor was killed immediately.

No drugs were found in Taylor's home.

Similar to the deaths of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery, Taylor's death stirred national outrage and prompted severe backlash and retaliation from the Black Lives Matter movement, and protests over no-knock warrants. The controversial police tactic was highly used between the 1990s and the 2000s, as an attempt to tackle the United States' so-called "war on drugs".

"You have to go back years to understand why we have no knocks," said Thor Eells, executive director of the National Tactical Officers Association. "They were developed as a tool, through courts, for the preservation of evidence... primarily crack cocaine. That's no longer the case, and hasn't been for at least ten years. (We)’ve been strongly teaching, advocating, for other alternatives."

The Louisville Metro Council have subsequently passed an ordinance known as "Breonna's Law", which bans no-knock search warrants, in June 2020. The city of Louisville also agreed to pay Taylor's family $12 million in a settlement for her death. Currently, Oregon and Florida are the only states that prohibit the use of no-knock warrants. The two other officers involved in the raid, Mattingly and Cosgrove, asserted the Fifth Amendment to avoid testifying. They did not face charges, according to Kentucky Attorney General Daniel Cameron, because their use of force was justified after Taylor's boyfriend fired his gun.

Hankison was fired in June 2020, Cosgrove was fired in January 2021, and Mattingly retired in April 2021. It is possible, however, that Mattingly and Cosgrove may be included in an ongoing federal investigation on the deadly raid.

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'He Was Evil Personified': Melinda Gates Addresses Jeffrey Epstein's Friendship With Ex-Husband Bill
By - Mary Manley

Melinda French Gates, the billionaire philanthropist who married Bill Gates in 1994, opened up about what led to her shocking divorce last year in a candid interview with CBS Mornings Gayle King. Melinda says her ex-husband's friendship with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein played a role in their divorce.

It wasn't one thing but "many things" that led to their divorce, Melinda said in the interview when King asked her about Bill Gates' friendship with Epstein.

"I did not like that he had meetings with Jeffrey Epstein, no. I made that clear to him", Melinda said. "I also met Jeffrey Epstein exactly one time, because I wanted to see who this man was, and I regretted it from the second I stepped in the door. He was abhorrent. He was evil personified".

"He was awful", she added. "I had nightmares about it afterward".

When King asked Melinda if Bill, the co-founder of Microsoft, continued to share correspondence with Epstein, she seemed resolved to not make an excuse for her ex-husband. "Any of the questions remaining about their relationship, those are for Bill to answer".

Bill Gates, 66, released a statement to CBS saying, "Meeting with Epstein was a mistake that I regret deeply. It was a substantial error in judgment".

Jeffrey Epstein was a convicted paedophile who died in jail via suicide at the age of 66, while waiting on additional child sex trafficking charges that would've placed him in jail without bail for 45 years.

The disgraced multimillionaire financier was connected to a string of high-profile individuals, some of which the victims said they were forced to perform sex acts with, including former Maine Senator George Mitchell, former New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, money manager Glenn Dubin, and MIT Professor Marvin Minsky.

Other celebrities whose names are connected to Epstein include: former US President Bill Clinton, former US President Donald Trump, Prince Andrew, and actor Kevin Spacey, all of whom Epstein's former pilot testified flew on Epstein's private plane.

Beginning in 2011, Bill Gates met with Epstein on a number of different occasions, including at Epstein's townhouse where it was reported that Gates stayed "late into the night". Epstein and Gates had also discussed a possible charitable fund involving the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, a key asset in Melinda Gates' life and career.

"His lifestyle is very different and kind of intriguing although it would not work for me", Bill Gates emailed colleagues in 2011, after he first met Epstein.

In the interview, Melinda Gates addressed her ex-husband's affair with a Microsoft colleague in 2000. The affair became public knowledge in 2019 and led to an internal corporate investigation. Melinda Gates believed they had gotten past the affair prior to their divorce.

"I certainly believe in forgiveness, so I thought we had worked through some of that", she said. "There just came a point in time where there was enough there where I realised it just wasn't healthy, and I couldn't trust what we had".

In May 2021 the pair announced that they would split and finalised their divorce the following August. The news interviewer asked if Gates felt as if the divorce was her fault. She said she
had been committed to her marriage from the day she and Bill became engaged, to the day of their divorce.

"I don't question myself now. Not at all. I gave every single piece of myself to this marriage. I was committed to this marriage from the day we got engaged and until the day I got out of it", she explained.

According to Melinda Gates, she and her ex are not "friends" but are "friendly". She says she does not wish her ex-husband any ill will, and that the two will continue to work together on their Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation charity.

"If you're lucky enough to be a billionaire, believe me you can give away half of it and not change your life. And you should".

Melinda's current net worth is reported to be at least $11 billion. Her ex, the Microsoft co-founder, reportedly has a net worth of $131.4 billion, currently making him 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".

Melinda says despite experiencing "lots of tears for many days", she's excited about 2022, and is open to dating and falling in love again. When asked if she had started dating, she told King she is "dipping her toe in that water".

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'I Wish to Explore This': Conor McGregor Eyes Buying Chelsea FC From Roman Abramovich
By - Mary Manle

UFC star and business tycoon Conor McGregor may be on track to secure his next high-profile business investment. On Wednesday, McGregor tweeted a screenshot of a WhatsApp message reading, "Chelsea for sale, £3bn. Let's buy it."

The caption which accompanied the screenshot said, "I wish to explore this @ChelseaFC."

Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich has owned the football club, based in London, since 2003. He announced that he is selling the club as a result of pressure from the British government in retaliation for Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine.

"As I have stated before, I have always taken decisions with the Club's best interest at heart. In the current situation, I have therefore taken the decision to sell the Club, as I believe this is in the best interest of the Club, the fans, the employees, as well as the Club's sponsors and partners," Abramovich announced in a statement on Wednesday, adding that he would set up a trust fund with the proceeds from the sale to benefit Ukraine.

Last week, British Member of Parliament Chris Bryant had called for Abramovich to sell Chelsea FC as response for a leaked UK document from 2019 that accuses Abramovich of having, "links to the Russian state and his public association with corrupt activity and practices".

Abramovich has reiterated that he is not an official political figure for Russia, and said in his statement that he would be setting up a "charitable foundation where all net proceeds from the sale will be donated. The foundation will be for the benefit of all victims of the war in Ukraine."
He first bought Chelsea FC in 2003 for $190 million, and has since then turned down offers of the team for $2.9 billion.

Wednesday was not the first time UFC champ and business mogul, who owns a $2.2 million Dublin Pub, has expressed interest in buying a Premier League club. In April 2021 he showed interest in buying Manchester United.

Despite his repeated interest in purchasing a football club, McGregor does not have the means to purchase the billion dollar investment from Abramovich, according to Sports Illustrated. He was listed as the wealthiest sportsman in 2021 by Forbes with a net worth of just 170 million euros.

The mixed martial artist from Dublin is known for his Irish whiskey brand Proper No. 12, which generated $1 billion in sales in its first year. Rumors in Irish and British tabloids have also circulated regarding his possible connections with Irish gangster Graham 'The Wig' Whelan. Abramovich is a Russian billionaire who is the largest shareholder of Evraz, Russia's second-biggest steelmaker. He also owns stakes in Norilsk Nickel, the globe’s largest manufacturer of refined nickel.

According to Bloomberg, Abramovich was able to amass his wealth by quickly selling Russian state-owned assets he acquired after the fall of the Soviet Union, including Russian airline Aeroflot and oil firm Sibneft. In 2019, his net worth was estimated at $12.9 billion.

A shipwreck from the 1890s has been discovered by the Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Society (GLSHS) under 650 feet of water in Lake Superior. The 172-foot schooner-barge "Atlanta" was found 35 miles off of Deer Park in Michigan, 130 years after sinking.

In the summer of 2021, GLSHS partnered with Marine Sonic Technology (MST) to map over 2,500 miles of Lake Superior through the use of Side Scan Sonar-Marine Sonic Technology. That same tech has been used by first responders, the US Coast Guard, as well as archaeologists and treasure hunters.

The Atlanta sunk during a storm on 4 May 1891. The ship was carrying a load of coal when it was caught in a northwest gale, breaking all three masts, and forcing its crew members to flee the doomed ship in a lifeboat. Only two survived trying to reach the Crisp Point Life-Saving Station.

Lake Superior is the coldest of the Great Lakes, with an average temperature of 40 degrees Fahrenheit. The team that found the Atlanta says that the lake's cold temperatures helped to preserve the shipwreck.

"It is rare that we find a shipwreck that so clearly announces what it is and the name-board of the Atlanta really stands out", said Bruce Lynn, executive director of the GLSHS. "It is truly ornate, and still beautiful after 130 years on the bottom of Lake Superior".

Various parts of the ship are clearly visible including its name "Atlanta" in shining gold letters, and its wheel.

"It is truly ornate and still beautiful after 130 years on the bottom of Lake Superior", Lynn said. In October of last year, GLSHS also discovered three other shipwrecks in Lake Superior, which date back to the 1800s. Those include "The Dot", "The Frank W. Wheeler", and "The Michigan". 
"This has been a great year for us at the Shipwreck Museum, and we have never located so many new wrecks in one season", Lynn said. "Each shipwreck has its own story...and the drama of the Drake and the Michigan, and the rescue of both crews...These are fantastic, true stories that we can tell in the museum someday".

The Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Society was founded in 1978 by educators and divers. The society researches and documents historic shipwrecks every year during the diving season, and provides newsletters, booklets, and commissioned maritime artworks.

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By - Tim Korso

Kiev has repeatedly accused Minsk of taking part in what it calls a "Russian invasion". Russia launched a special operation to demilitarise and "de-Nazify" Ukraine on 24 February following the failure of the Minsk agreements and Kiev's threats to reverse the country's nuclear status. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has said that the country's army has not and will not take part in Russia's special military operation in Ukraine. The latter has been underway since 24 February.

"And no matter how certain forces - you know which ones - try today to draw us into the hostilities on the territory of Ukraine, you [the citizens of Belarus] have no reason to worry", he said.

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Western nations slapped Russia with harsh economic sanctions in response to the start of the operation. They also imposed sanctions on Minsk, whom they accuse of aiding Moscow in the operation, despite Minsk denying it.
White House: US Imposing New Sanctions on Kremlin Spokesman, 19 Russian 'Oligarchs'
By - Evan Craighead

During his Tuesday State of the Union address, US President Joe Biden warned Russian oligarchs that the US Department of Justice was assembling a task force targeting "crimes" perpetuated by wealthy individuals in support of Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent military action in Ukraine. The White House announced in a Thursday memo that the US, in coordination with European allies, has moved to sanction eight wealthy Russians, as well as members of their families, and impose visa restrictions on 19 other Russian nationals. "The United States and governments all over the world will work to identify and freeze the assets Russian elites and their family members hold in our respective jurisdictions – their yachts, luxury apartments, money, and other ill-gotten gains", the memo read. Full blocking sanctions, which prohibit the use of US-based property and block Americans from operating said property, were extended to individuals believed to "enable" Russian President Vladimir Putin, according to the memo. Those named include Kremlin press secretary Dmitry Peskov; Nikolai Tokarev, wife Galina, daughter Mayya, and two luxury real estate companies; Boris Rotenberg, wife Karina, and sons Roman and Boris; Arkady Rotenberg, sons Pavel and Igor, and daughter Liliya; Sergei Chemezov, wife Yekaterina, son Stanislav, and stepdaughter Anastasiya; Igor Shuvalov, his five companies, wife Olga, son Evgeny and his company (as well as a jet), and daughter Maria and her company; Yevgeniy Prigozhin, his three companies, wife Polina, daughter Lyubov, and son Pavel; and Alisher Usmanov, as well as his private jet and superyacht, which has been detained by German authorities and is "one of the world's largest" such vessels. These penalties and seizures of "ill-gotten gains" come days after the US president touted the sanctions-related economic troubles of Russia, declaring that Washington was in the process of a coordinated campaign to choke Russia's access to technology, thus weakening the country's military and its economy. "We are joining with our European allies to find and seize your yachts your luxury apartments your private jets", he announced shortly after Washington moved to block Russian flights from US airspace. "We are coming for your ill-begotten gains".

An additional 19 Russian oligarchs, and 47 of their family members or close associates, have been slapped with new visa restrictions imposed by the US Department of State. Their names were not provided in the readout.

US Citizen Arrested in London Over Alleged Violation of 2014 Sanctions Against Konstantin Malofeyev
US prosecutors also announced on Thursday that John "Jack" Hanick, a 71-year-old American citizen, has been charged with violating US sanctions and making false statements regarding "his year-long work for the sanctioned Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeyev".

Hanick was provisionally arrested in London on 3 February, although the announcement comes exactly one month after his detention. The US national is due to be extradited back to the states.

US sanctions against Malofeyev were imposed in December 2014, and prohibited US citizens from working for, or doing business with, him. American prosecutors allege that Hanick violated the restrictions by "working directly with Malofeyev on multiple television projects" that span several years.

"Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeyev was previously sanctioned for threatening Ukraine and providing financial support to the Donetsk separatist region", said Assistant Attorney General Matthew Olsen in a statement.

The accusations against Hanick notably amount to the first US criminal indictment in association with the 2014-era sanctions.

"The defendant Hanick knowingly chose to help Malofeyev spread his destabilising messages by establishing, or attempting to establish, TV networks in Russia, Bulgaria, and Greece, in violation of those sanctions", Olsen added.

If convicted of violating US sanctions and making false statements, the 71-year-old US national will face a cumulative maximum penalty of 25 years behind bars, with the sanctions charge accounting for 20 years.

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Convicted Rapist Harvey Weinstein Reprimanded After Prison Guards Discover Milk Duds in Cell
By - Evan Craighead

Convicted rapist Harvey Weinstein is being held at a medical facility within the Los Angeles, California, Twin Towers jail, as he awaits trial on 10 counts of rape and sexual assault. The ongoing trial comes alongside Weinstein's move to appeal a New York court's 23-year prison sentence on the basis of a tainted juror pool.

Harvey Weinstein, 69, was reprimanded by the LA County jail after guards for the facility discovered "contraband," in the form of Milk Duds, stashed with the convicted sex offender's belongings.

The chocolate-coated caramel candies were promptly confiscated upon discovery on November 10, according to records reviewed by Variety.

Jail officials assume the Milk Duds were passed off during a same-day, face-to-face meeting between lawyer Shawn Burkley and Weinstein, who reportedly has a laundry list of health problems, including diabetes and cardiac issues.
Guards have warned the former top Hollywood boss that his attorney's legal binders and laptop bags will now be subject to searches. Weinstein reportedly claimed that the incident was a misunderstanding and that the chocolate-covered contraband was brought to the jail during his extradition from New York in July 2021.

"This was an innocent misunderstanding," Weinstein told Variety. "It will not happen again. I have been a model inmate, following the rules and regulations and I am sincerely sorry," Alan Jackson, his attorney, also issued a public apology, adding that the incident had "not happened since" the reprimand late last year.

Jail officials documented that such items were not with Weinstein during his initial search at the Correctional Treatment Center, the medical facility of the Twin Towers jail in LA. Following his New York-to-California extradition, the disgraced 69-year-old ex-mogul pleaded not guilty to four counts of both forcible rape and forcible oral copulation, as well as two counts of sexual battery via restraint and one count of sexual penetration by use of force.

Weinstein secured a minor legal victory in August 2021 when one charge was dropped due to surpassing the 10-year statute of limitations. An amended filing was issued after the fact, but was denied by Judge Lisa B. Lench, the same judge who dismissed the charge.

Weinstein, if convicted in California, faces 10 counts of rape and sexual assault, and well over 100 years in prison. This would be in addition to the New York court’s 23-year sentence handed down in 2020. Weinstein’s legal team is currently crafting an appeal on the East Coast, with a ruling expected within the next few months.

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Def-Con Pelosi - Cartoon

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), set social media ablaze earlier this week by appearing preemptively excited about US President Joe Biden's remarks on burn pits, a practice involving the open-air combustion of trash and chemical waste. Burn pits have been linked to fatal conditions, including the cancer that killed Biden's eldest son, Beau.

While announcing the administration’s plans to support US veterans, Biden's 'Unity Agenda for the Nation' was upstaged by what appeared to some to be the premature giddiness of the House speaker.

"Our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan faced many dangers. One was stationed at bases and breathing in toxic smoke from 'burn pits,'" Biden said as Pelosi, 81, was seen smiling and rubbing clasped fists together.

While it might appear to some that Pelosi was trying to repurpose her viral clap toward then-US President Donald Trump at the 2020 SOTU, it is more likely that the House speaker was happy about the additional support for US veterans.

SCOTUS Blocks Gitmo Detainee From 'State Secrets' on His Post-9/11 Torture at CIA Site in Poland
By - Evan Craighead

Abu Zubaydah, a Guantanamo Bay detainee, filed a discovery request with the US government in an effort to obtain testimony from Central Intelligence Agency contractors James Mitchell and John Jessen, psychologists who helped craft the CIA's 'enhanced interrogation techniques,' which included rectal feeding, hanging by handcuffs, and waterboarding.

The US Supreme Court on Thursday ruled in favor of the US government regarding Abu Zubaydah's request to learn more about the torture he endured at a CIA black site in Poland after being taken from Pakistan in 2002 under suspicion of terrorism.

"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 interest," read an opinion written by SCOTUS Justice Stephen Breyer, along with six colleagues.

"In our view, the Government has provided sufficient support for its claim of harm to warrant application of the privilege," Justice Breyer added.

SCOTUS Justice Neil Gorsuch, joined by Justice Sonia Sotomayor, argued that their colleagues may be "ignorant as judges of what we know to be true as citizens."

"Ending this suit may shield the government from some further modest measure of embarrassment," wrote Gorsuch, along with Sotomayor. "But respectfully, we should not pretend it will safeguard any secret."

Testimony and other information sought by Zubaydah and his lawyer would have been passed to Polish authorities that have been investigating his time at the secret CIA facility.

At the time of his 2002 capture in Pakistan, the US believed Zubaydah to be a high-ranking official of the al-Qaeda* terrorist group behind the September 11, 2001, terror attacks in the US. He was held at CIA 'black sites' until he was transferred to the Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp in 2006. It has been reported that Zubaydah may have also been transported to the CIA's first 'black site' in Thailand between 2002 and 2006.

A 2014 US Senate report confirmed that Zubaydah was waterboarded more than 80 times and spent more than 11 days in a coffin-sized box. Zubaydah was subjected to starvation, a mock burial and other torture tactics approved by the Pentagon and developed by so-called 'psychologists' James Mitchell and John Jessen, who were compensated some $81 million for their efforts to invent and implement their 'enhanced interrogation techniques.'

"After the use of the CIA's enhanced interrogation techniques ended, CIA personnel at the detention site concluded that Abu Zubaydah had been truthful and that he did not possess any new terrorist threat information," the unclassified report detailed.

Although seven SCOTUS Justices argued that the release of such information could endanger national security or tarnish the reputation of the US, both Jessen and Mitchell have provided
several testimonies and stories on their CIA torture program. Mitchell has also written a book on the subject.
During a 2020 testimony, Mitchell notably confessed to personally torturing Zubaydah over 60 times through the use of his waterboarding technique.
Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, one of the alleged co-conspirators of the 9/11 terror attacks, was tortured by Mitchell and Jessen through waterboarding.
While accepted by the Pentagon at the time, such tactics are now deemed torture.
Although the US government has granted the disclosure of information on how Zubaydah was treated, further details, including locations of the post-9/11 CIA 'black sites,' have been kept from public knowledge, with officials citing national security concerns and commitments to foreign partners.
Zubaydah, who has never been convicted or charged with a crime by the US, remains an indefinite inmate at the Guantanamo detention center.

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FedEx Suspends Services in Russia, Belarus - Statement
WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The US transportation and e-commerce company FedEx announced on Friday its decision to suspend services in Russia and Belarus due to the crisis over Ukraine.
"As we support the people of Ukraine, we also have made the decision to suspend all FedEx services in Russia and Belarus," FedEx said in a statement.

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US Supreme Court Reinstates Death Sentence for Boston Marathon Bomber Tsarnaev - Ruling
WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The US Supreme Court on Friday reinstated the death penalty against surviving Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev despite his attempts to have the capital sentence vacated by lower courts.
"Dzhokhar Tsarnaev committed heinous crimes. The Sixth Amendment nonetheless guaranteed him a fair trial before an impartial jury. He received one. The judgment of the United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit is reversed," the Supreme Court said in a written opinion. Tsarnaev attempted to avoid execution by arguing that his brother Tamerlan masterminded the bombing and pressured Dzhokhar to participate using his domineering nature, evidence of which he unsuccessfully tried to have included at trial.
US Puts Export Controls on Russian Oil Refining Sector, 91 Entities Linked to Military

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is imposing export controls against Russia’s oil refining sector and targeting 91 entities across 10 countries that support Russian military in response to the latter’s operation in Ukraine, the Commerce Department said on Friday.

"The new regulations target Russia’s oil refining sector with new stringent export controls and identify 91 entities that support Russian military activities. These actions will further restrict access to U.S. commodities, software, and technology as part of our ongoing efforts to degrade Russia’s ability to acquire the items it needs to sustain its military aggression," the Commerce Department said in a press release.

In another move, the US adds 91 entities in 10 countries to the Commerce Department’s Entity List "based upon their involvement in, contributions to, or other support of the Russian security services, military and defense sectors, and military and/or defense research and development efforts."

"These entities are located in: Russia (81), United Kingdom (3), Estonia (3), Spain (2), Malta (2), Kazakhstan (1), Latvia (1), Belize (1), Singapore (1), and Slovakia (1) (NOTE: Total entries is 96 as some entities operate in multiple countries)," it added.

Biden to Speak With Poland’s Duda at 11:30 a.m. EST on Friday - White House Pool Reporter

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will speak with Polish President Andrzej Duda at 11:30 a.m. EST on Friday, White House Pool Reporter said.

On Wednesday, Duda told journalists that his country would not send troops and military vehicles to Ukraine, the White House Pool Reporter said via Twitter.

Microsoft Says Suspending All New Sales of Products in Russia Over Ukraine Crisis

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) – Microsoft said on Friday it is suspending all new sales of products and services in Russia due to the Ukraine conflict.

"We are announcing today that we will suspend all new sales of Microsoft products and services in Russia," the statement read.
"In addition, we are coordinating closely and working in lockstep with the governments of the United States, the European Union and the United Kingdom, and we are stopping many aspects of our business in Russia in compliance with governmental sanctions decisions," it said.

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US, EU Allies Call UNSC Emergency Meeting on Zaporizhzhia NPP at 16:30 GMT - Source

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The United States and its European allies have requested an emergency meeting on Ukraine over recent developments near the Zaporizhzhia NPP, with the meeting scheduled for 11:30 EST (16:30 GMT), a source told Sputnik on Friday. "We have just received a request [from] US, UK, Albania, France, Norway and Ireland," the source said.

Earlier in the day, the Russian Defense Ministry said that Ukrainian authorities attempted a provocation overnight by accusing Russia of creating a source of radioactive contamination at Zaporizhzhia NPP. While patrolling the area adjacent to the station, a group of the Russian National Guard was attacked by a Ukrainian sabotage unit who opened fire on them from the windows of several floors of an educational and training complex located outside the NPP. The firing points of the Ukrainian sabotage group were suppressed by return fire. Leaving the building, the sabotage group set it on fire.

The fire was put out and the NPP is working as usual, with radiation background at normal level, the Russian military said.

Microsoft Suspends All New Sales of Products in Russia – Company Statement

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - Microsoft has suspended all new sales in Russia and will halt many aspects of its business in the country, the company said in a statement on Friday. "We are announcing today that we will suspend all new sales of Microsoft products and services in Russia," the statement said. "In addition, we are coordinating closely and working in lockstep with the governments of the United States, the European Union and the United Kingdom, and we are stopping many aspects of our business in Russia in compliance with governmental sanctions decisions."

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US Adds 678,000 Jobs in February, Unemployment Rate at 3.8% - Labor Dept.
WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - US employers added 678,000 jobs in February, some 50% higher than economists’ expectations, and the jobless rate moved down to 3.8% from a previous 4%, Labor Department data showed on Friday.
"Total nonfarm payroll employment rose by 678,000 in February, and the unemployment rate edged down to 3.8 percent," the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a unit within the Labor Department, said in a news release. An unemployment rate of 4.0% or below is defined by the Federal Reserve as maximum employment.
Economists polled by US media had forecast jobs to grow by just 423,000 in February from a growth of 467,000 in January.

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Russian Operation Constrains US Ability to Collect Real-Time Intel on Ukraine - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is constrained in its ability to collect real-time intelligence on Ukraine while no longer having boots on the ground, or surveillance drones and aircraft flying in its airspace, as Russia conducts its military operation, CNN reported on Friday, citing sources.
The country has multiple channels open and is sharing intelligence with Kiev, though the information transferred is less specific and not being conveyed fast enough, a Senate source said.
The intelligence is being downgraded to protect sensitive sources and methods due to logistical issues with setting up fully secure lines with Ukrainian authorities amid the Russian operation, sources close to the intelligence confirmed to the channel.
Still, the intelligence being shared reportedly concerns Russian troop movements and intercepted communications about their military plans. Ukrainian officials sometimes receive information within thirty minutes to an hour of the Americans receiving it, other sources told the channel.
In addition, a portal was recently set up through which the US can upload intelligence so that the Ukrainians can access it in near real time, a source said.
The US, however, is not providing detailed "targeting intelligence," a type used in lethal "find, fix and finish" operations in the Middle East and Afghanistan, so as not to be involved as a co-combatant in the conflict, and due to the more practical reason of having no drones flying overhead, as "Russians would just shoot them down," another source explained.
Last week, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine in response to calls from the Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics to defend themselves against intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger.
The move has elicited condemnation from Western leaders and the start of still more sanctions.
WASHINGTON, March 3 (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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Biden Speaks to Zelenskyy Amid Reports of Fire Outside Nuclear Power Plant - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden spoke to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy this evening, Reuters reported citing a person familiar with the matter.

The call comes just as news broke of a fire near a Ukraine nuclear power plant on Thursday.

The fire has erupted outside the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (NPP), with one of its units having been switched off, the Ukrainian State Emergency Service said.

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Biden Speaks to Zelenskyy Amid Reports of Fire Outside Nuclear Power Plant - Reports

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Ex-Louisville Police Officer Tied to Breonna Taylor Murder Acquitted - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - Jurors in Kentucky acquitted the former police officer who was charged for firing ten bullets during a botched police raid that left Breonna Taylor dead, The New York Times reported. Detective Brett Hankison, found not guilty on three counts of "wanton endangerment," told the jury on Thursday he fired into Taylor’s apartment when he thought other officers were in danger after her boyfriend Kenneth Walker fired at what he thought were intruders. Two police officers returned fire, hitting Taylor, a 26-year-old Black emergency room technician. Her death, along with the murder of Ahmaud Arbery by vigilantes and the killing of George Floyd by former Minnesota Police Officer Derek Chauvin, triggered nationwide protests in 2020. Hankison ran from the doorway to the side of the building and fired 10 shots into Taylor’s apartment through a window and sliding-glass door. Three of the bullets entered Taylor’s apartment and a neighboring unit where Chelsey Napper, then pregnant, her boyfriend and her 5-year-old son were sleeping. Napper testified that it felt as if bullets were "flying everywhere" as she checked on her son and took refuge on the floor. The bullets struck Napper’s kitchen table, a wall and a glass patio door. None of the officers believed to be responsible for shooting and killing Taylor while she slept have been charged or held in any way responsible and accountable.

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Expert Says Ukraine Circulating Photos of Captured Troops May Violate International Law

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - Ukraine’s tactic of circulating media footage of killed or captured soldiers across social media platforms could be a violation of international law and may possibly undermine Kiev’s strategy, Southwestern Law School Professor Rachel VanLandingham told the Washington Post. "The law doesn’t allow for, ‘They’re [Russia] doing bad things, so we can, too,’” VanLandingham, a former US Air Force judge advocate and CENTCOM legal adviser, said in an article published
on Thursday. "They [Ukraine] don't want to turn the international community against them. They've got to be on the straight and narrow here. It's really dangerous for them in desperation to do things that are clearly prohibited."

The authenticity of the photos and videos used by Ukraine cannot be independently verified, the report said. In addition, the report said Ukrainian officials' claims all of the dead and captured soldiers in the photos are Russian also cannot be confirmed.

There have been pictures and photos posted on various social media platforms since the conflict erupted showing dead Russian soldiers on battlefields across Ukraine, the report said. One Telegram channel circulating such photos has over 620,000 subscribers, according to the report.

Telegram, Twitter and Youtube have been some of the key social media platforms where these photos and videos can be found.

Ukraine's Ministry of Internal Affairs since Sunday has been posting extremely graphic images and inviting Russians to view them to possibly identify anyone they might know, the report said.

Ukrainian officials have argued that the images will show Russians the devastation of the military operation, the report added.

The report also said the tactic could be considered a violation of the Geneva Conventions, which states that governments at all times must protect prisoners of war from humiliating and degrading treatment.

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Israel Asked UAE to Back UN General Assembly Resolution Votes Condemning Russia - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - Israel lobbied the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on behalf of the United States to vote in favor of the resolution presented in the UN General Assembly to condemn Russia over its special operation in Ukraine, Axios reported citing US and Israeli officials.

The report said on Thursday that the UAE was on the fence about condemning Russia in the UN General Assembly vote but eventually decided to support the resolution.

The UAE had previously abstained from supporting a similar US-led resolution in the UN Security Council last week.

The UAE reportedly withheld support for the resolution because of its disappointment in the Biden administration's response to a Yemen's Houthi missile and drone attack on Abu Dhabi several weeks earlier. The UAE had asked the United States to re-designate the Houthis as terrorists, the report said.

The United States brokered a deal in 2020 aimed at normalizing relations between Israel and Arab countries. The UAE and Bahrain joined the Abraham Peace Accords and were later followed by Morocco and Sudan. The accords entailed resumption of embassy operations, opening direct flights, and lifting the ban on tourist trips and official visits. The Palestinian
authorities have criticized the Arab countries taking steps to normalize relations with Israel to the detriment of advancing the rights of the Palestinians.

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Not Admitting Ukraine, Georgia in NATO 'Right Decision,' Now Not on Agenda - Scholz

BERLIN, March 3 (Sputnik) - The decision not to admit Ukraine and Georgia was right one and it was not and is not on the agenda amid the ongoing military conflict in Ukraine, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said in an interview with ZDF.

"It was the right decision. There were very long negotiations in NATO on this issue back then," Scholz said on Thursday. "I also want to emphasize that even now it was not on the agenda, and it continues to be so."

Senior US Diplomat to Visit Spain, Turkey, Egypt March 4-11 - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman will travel to five Mediterranean countries from March 4 to 11 to discuss a range of issues with global leaders, the State Department said.

Sherman will travel to Turkey, Spain, Morocco, Algeria and Egypt, the State Department said in a statement on Thursday.

Sherman will begin her trip in Turkey, where she will meet with Deputy Foreign Minister Sedat Onal and other officials to discuss the Russian special operation in Ukraine as well as further US-Turkey cooperation, the statement said.

Sherman will then travel to Spain from March 6 to 8, during which time she will co-open the US-Spain Cybersecurity Dialogue. While in Spain, Sherman will also meet with State Secretary Angeles Moreno Bau to discuss a range of issues, including the Russia-Ukraine situation, the statement said.

She will then visit Morocco from March 8 to 9 to lead the US delegation to the US-Algeria Strategic Dialogue on Regional Political Issues, the statement said. Sherman will have a working lunch with Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita and deliver keynote remarks at an International Women's Day event, the statement also added.

While in Algeria from March 8 to 10, Sherman will meet with Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune to discuss an array of bilateral and regional issues, lead the US delegation to the US-Algeria Strategic Dialogue, and meet with women participating in US-sponsored STEM programs, the statement added.

Sherman will then travel to Egypt to meet with Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and other senior Egyptian officials, the statement said. Sherman will also meet with the head of the
National Council of Human Rights, Moushira Khattab, and meet with Egyptian youth and human rights advocates, according to the statement.

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Russia-Ukraine Crisis Heightens US-EU Growth Risks, Commodity Price Shocks - Moodys

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The Russia-Ukraine crisis escalates risk in almost everything, from European to US growth while dramatically boosting the potential commodity price shocks, Moody's said in an outlook on the crisis.

"The economic sanctions that the US, European governments and other allies have subsequently imposed on Russia have increased risks to the global economic outlook," Moody's said on Thursday. "In particular, further escalation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict would put Europe's economic recovery at risk. Possible retaliation by Russia in response to sanctions could also cause further energy price shocks, particularly in Europe."

The Moody's outlook came on a day when prices of US oil hit their highest since the 2008 financial crisis, crossing $116 a barrel, while those of global benchmark Brent surged to just short of $120.

Some 40% of Europe's gas and 10% of the world's oil come from Russia. The country and Ukraine jointly provide 14% of global wheat supply.

"Heightened geopolitical risks are unambiguously negative for economic activity," Moody's said, citing inflation from commodity prices as a major catalyst for this. "The magnitude of the effects will depend on the length and severity of the crisis."

The eurozone's inflation rate jumped to a new high in February, with the European Union's statistics agency reporting on Wednesday that consumer prices were 5.8% higher last month from a year earlier, accelerating from January's 5.1% rate. It was the fourth straight month of record highs for inflation.

Moody's said that while the net impact from the Russia-Ukraine crisis on US gross domestic product will likely be limited, "distributional consequences of higher energy prices could be consequential."

Prior to the Russia-Ukraine crisis, 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 price indicator closely followed by the Federal Reserve, rose by 5.8% in the year to December and 6.1% in the 12 months to January. Both readings indicated the fastest growth since 1982. The US central bank's own tolerance for inflation is a mere 2% per year.

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West Uses Sanctions to Pressure Russia, Open Way for Diplomacy - Scholz
BERLIN, March 3 (Sputnik) - The West uses sanctions against Russia to pressure Moscow and, at the same time, to open a way for diplomatic solution of the conflict in Ukraine, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said in an interview. "It is important that we do not give up, but to continuously continue implementing all the various measures that we have launched - on the one hand, with the sanctions that we are implementing in order to apply pressure, and on the other hand, we open space for diplomacy," Scholz told ZDF on Thursday.

S&P Lowers Russia's Credit Rating to 'CCC-' From 'BBB-' - Statement

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The financial services company S&P Global Ratings said it has downgraded Russia's credit rating to CCC- from its BBB- as a result of complications caused by Western sanctions. "[W]e have lowered our long-term foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings on Russia to 'CCC-' from 'BB+' and 'BBB-', respectively, and kept them on CreditWatch with negative implications," S&P Global Ratings said in a report on Thursday.

Russia Seeks Response From Ottawa on Aircraft With Russian Citizens Held in Canada - Envoy

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The Russian Embassy in Canada is seeking a response from the Canadian government to its request for information about the incident involving a charter aircraft carrying Russian nationals that was held at the Yellowknife airport, Russian Ambassador to Ottawa Oleg Stepanov told Sputnik. "We continue to seek a response from the Foreign Ministry. We Submitted a request last night," Stepanov said. "As of this morning, they had no information about this incident. They said that just like us, they learned about it from media reports. Our consul is dealing with the situation." Canadian Transport Minister Omar Alghabra said on Thursday that a charter aircraft carrying Russian nationals has been held in a remote northern region of Canada in retaliation for Russia's special operation in Ukraine.

US to Resume Limited Immigrant Visa Processing in Cuba - State Dept.
WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The US embassy in Havana, Cuba, intends to resume some of its immigrant visa services as part of the diplomatic mission expansion in the country, US Department of State Deputy Spokesperson Jalina Porter said in a press briefing.

“The embassy in Havana look forward to initiating a limited resumption of some Immigrant Visa Services as a part of the broader expansion of the embassy to facilitate diplomatic and civil society engagement and also to expand the provision of consular services,” Porter said on Thursday.

US State Department will explore options to augment staffing at the US embassy in Havana in order to facilitate consular services and at the same time maintain an appropriate security posture, Porter also said.

Meanwhile, Georgetown, Guyana, will remain the primary location for Cuban immigrant visa applications, Porter added.

Former US President Barack Obama took steps to normalize bilateral relations with Cuba and reestablished full diplomatic relations in 2015. However, the Trump administration in 2017 reversed the policy following the emergence of the mysterious Havana syndrome among US diplomats and withdrew most of its diplomatic personnel.

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US Treasury Expects Sanctions to Make Russian Economy Shrink, Have Less Investment
WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) – The United States expects that the Russian economy will shrink and have less investment due to sanctions Washington has introduced, Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said on Thursday.

"They are going to have less investment in Russia, the economy is going to shrink," Adeyemo said during a Washington Post Live conversation.

He projected that Russia will have fewer resources to support its financial institutions. Adeyomo argued that the Russian stock market remains closed because Moscow is afraid of capital outflow. "Russia is afraid that once they open it, anyone who can will take money out of Russia," he said.

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

In response, the US and its allies imposed comprehensive sanctions against Moscow, including restrictions on the Russian central bank, export control measures, SWIFT cutoff for select banks, and closure of airspace to all Russian flights.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORY OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) -

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS
* The United States is not interested in establishing a no-fly zone over Ukraine because it would require the military to shoot down Russian airplanes and that would mean entering a war with Russia, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Thursday.
* Hundreds of foreigners seek to leave the hostilities zone in Ukraine, but nationalists are holding them hostage, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.
* Russians and Ukrainians are one people, Putin said, noting that he would never give up this belief.
* The United States cannot confirm reports of the use of cluster munitions or thermobaric bombs in Ukraine, a senior Defense official said.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE TALKS
* The United Nations welcomes any positive movement that would help to protect civilians and de-escalate the conflict in Ukraine following talks between the Russian and Ukrainian delegations resulting in an agreement to create humanitarian corridors with a possible ceasefire, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing.
* Delegations of Russia and Ukraine have reached an understanding on the humanitarian corridors and the ceasefire during evacuations, an adviser to the head of the Ukrainian presidential office, Mikhail Podolyak, said.
* Delegations from Ukraine and Russia have agreed to continue negotiations, a new round may take place soon, Podolyak said.
* Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said that Kiev will not make concessions on the country's territorial integrity in negotiations with Russia.
* A peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine must include a provision for the destruction of weapons threatening Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

WESTERN SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA
* Over a dozen US senators have introduced a bill aiming to bar Russian energy imports, while the House of Representatives is set to introduce a companion legislation, Senator Joe Manchin's office said in a press release on Thursday.
* The United States is imposing full blocking sanctions on Russian "oligarchs" and other persons, including President Vladimir Putin's press secretary Dmitry Peskov and businessmen Boris and Arkady Rotenberg in response to Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, the White House said.
* China continues to convey mixed messages with regard to developments in Ukraine and Russia's military operation there, a senior US defense official said.
* Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova commented about the recent statements from the European leadership on blocking Russia's gold and foreign exchange reserves by saying that the West's hypocrisy is always accompanied by greed.

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS
* White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki on Thursday did not rule out a potential in-person meeting between US President Joe Biden and Russian Vladimir Putin in the future, but added that there are currently no plans for direct engagement between the two leaders.
* The United States has provided many offers to Putin over the course of several months, including on transparency and missile defense, Psaki said.
* Moscow has urged Washington to refrain from further escalation regarding operation of diplomatic missions and diplomats, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

PUTIN-MACRON TALKS
* Russian President Vladimir Putin told French President Emmanuel Macron that the tasks of Russia's special military operation would be fulfilled anyway, the Kremlin said on Thursday.
* Putin, in a phone conversation with Macron, outlined to him in detail the fundamental approach and conditions in the context of negotiations with representatives of Kiev, the Kremlin said.

State Dept. Believes Deal on JCPOA Can Be Reached Within Days If Iran Shows 'Seriousness'
WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The United States believes that a deal on mutual return to the Iran nuclear deal can and should be struck within days if Tehran demonstrates a serious approach, Department of State deputy spokesperson Jalina Porter said on Thursday.
"If Iran shows seriousness, we can and should reach an understanding on mutual return to full implementation of the JCPOA within days," Porter told a press briefing.

US Pauses Deportation Flights to Ukraine Over Ongoing Humanitarian Crisis - Customs Agency
WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The United States paused deportation flights to Ukraine due to the humanitarian crisis in the country, a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) spokesperson said on Thursday.
"Amid the ongoing humanitarian crisis occurring in Ukraine, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has paused repatriation flights to Ukraine," the spokesperson said. "ICE will continue to monitor the ongoing situation and make operational changes as necessary."
UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said the number of refugees caused by the current crisis in Ukraine has reached 1 million.
Earlier on Thursday, European Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson warned that the European Union should be ready to receive millions of refugees from Ukraine, adding that nearly one million people have already arrived in the bloc.

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - US prosecutors charged American citizen John Hanick for violating Crimea-related sanctions for his work as a television producer for Russian businessman Konstantin Malofeyev, who created the Russian cable television network Tsargrad and was designated by the US government, the Justice Department said on Thursday.

"JOHN HANICK, a/k/a 'Jack Hanick,' a United States citizen, is charged with violations of United States sanctions and false statements in connection with his years-long work for the sanctioned Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeyev," the Justice Department said in a press release.

The release said Hanick was arrested on February 3 in London and will be extradited. The US government designated Malofeyev in December 2014 under Crimea-related sanctions, the release said.

Hanick faces a maximum of 20 years in prison, the release said.

US Crude Oil Settles Down 2.7%, Potential Iran Nuclear Deal Snaps 3-Day Rally

NEW YORK, March 3 (Sputnik) - US oil hit 2008 highs before settling down almost 3% on Thursday in its first retreat in four days, pressured by the likelihood of an imminent Iranian nuclear deal that could bring fresh crude supply to a market amid worries about the impact of sanctions on Russian oil.

US crude's West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, benchmark settled down $2.93, or 2.7%, at $107.67 a barrel. It earlier surged to $116.57, its highest since September 2008, extending a three-day run-up on concerns that the sanctions on Russia could severely impact energy exports from a country that provides 10% of the world's oil needs.

Along with WTI, global oil benchmark Brent settled down $2.47, or 2.2%, at $110.46 a barrel, also sliding for the first time in four days. Brent's session peak of $119.78 on Thursday was the highest since May 2012.

Oil's retreat came after headlines suggesting brisk progress in talks between Iran and global powers to reactivate Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal that could free the Islamic Republic itself from US sanctions on its oil.

Iranian media quoted Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's chief negotiator at the nuclear talks, as saying an agreement was likely over the next few days, paving way for the legitimate return of Tehran's oil to the market.

Iran and the UN Security Council's Five Permanent Members - the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France - along with Germany, originally agreed to a nuclear accord in 2015 that would allow Tehran to export oil so long as it did develop atomic weapons. But in 2018, the
then US president, Donald Trump, pulled America out of the deal and unilaterally put sanctions on Iranian oil.

Iran’s crude exports were averaging 2.4 million barrels per day, with a peak of more than 2.8 million, before Trump’s move.

Thursday’s slide in WTI and Brent also came on the back of “some profit-taking because the price has risen so far so fast,” said Craig Erlam, analyst at online trading platform OANDA. Both crude benchmarks had rallied about 30% over just three days of trading before the slide.

Musk Warns That Probability of Starlink Being Targeted in Ukraine is High, Urges Caution

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - SpaceX founder Elon Musk warned on Thursday that there is a high probability his Starlink internet provider is being targeted by Russia in Ukraine and urged users to use with caution.

"Important warning: Starlink is the only non-Russian communications system still working in some parts of Ukraine, so probability of being targeted is high. Please use with caution," Musk wrote on Twitter.

Charter Carrying Russians Held in Canada in Act of 'Holding Russia Accountable' - Minister

TORONTO, March 3 (Sputnik) - A charter aircraft carrying Russian nationals has been held in a remote northern region of Canada in retaliation for Moscow’s military operation in Ukraine, Transport Minister Omar Alghabra said on Thursday.

"A charter aircraft that carried Russian foreign nationals has been held at the Yellowknife airport. We will continue to hold Russia accountable for its invasion of Ukraine," Alghabra said in a statement via Twitter.

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

Pentagon Says Established De-Confliction Line With Russia on March 1 Amid Ukraine Crisis
WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) – Pentagon confirmed to Sputnik on Thursday it established a de-confliction line with the Russian Ministry of Defense on March 1 to prevent miscalculation and military incidents amid the crisis in Ukraine.

"The United States retains a number of channels to discuss critical security issues with the Russians during a contingency or emergency. The Department of the Defense recently established a de-confliction line with the Russian Ministry of Defense on March 1 for the purposes of preventing miscalculation, military incidents, and escalation," Pentagon said in a statement.

US Senate Passes Resolution to End COVID-19 National Emergency, Sends to House
WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The US Senate on Thursday passed a resolution to end the national emergency in place with respect to the novel coronavirus pandemic. The Senate passed the measure with a 48-47 vote, sending it to the House of Representatives for consideration.

The White House said earlier that President Joe Biden would veto the measure. The COVID-19 national emergency was first declared by former President Donald Trump in March 2020 and later extended by Biden.

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - US prosecutors charged American citizen John Hanick for violating Crimea-related sanctions for his work as a television producer for Russian businessman Konstantin Malofeyev, who created the Russian cable television network Tsargrad and was designated by the US government, the Justice Department said on Thursday.

"JOHN HANICK, a/k/a 'Jack Hanick,' a United States citizen, is charged with violations of United States sanctions and false statements in connection with his years-long work for the sanctioned Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeyev," the Justice Department said in a press release. The release said Hanick was arrested on February 3 in London and will be extradited.

Maryland Man Arrested, Charged for Involvement in January 6 Riot – Department of Justice
WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - A Maryland man has been arrested and charged for his involvement in the January 6 riot at the US Capitol, the Department of Justice said Thursday. "Narayana Rheiner was among rioters at the front of a police line on Jan. 6. He waved others to come forward towards the line as he and others said to 'push up,'" the department said. "He made contact with officers with his arm and then grabbed an officer's riot shield and attempted to pull it away. Rheiner later went inside the Capitol, telling officers to 'stand down and go home.'"

Rheiner, 40, of Baltimore, was charged with civil disorder and related offenses in a criminal complaint filed in the District of Columbia. Rheiner was identified after the Federal Bureau of Investigation asked the public to identify him from photos.

In the 13 months since January 6, more than 750 people, from nearly all 50 states, have been arrested for crimes related to the US Capitol riot, which saw Trump supporters protest a joint session of Congress where lawmakers were meeting to ascertain and count electoral votes to determine who won the 2020 presidential election.

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US Lawmakers Introduce Bill to Ban Russian Energy Imports

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - Over a dozen American senators have introduced a bill aiming to bar Russian energy imports, while the House is set to introduce a companion legislation, Senator Joe Manchin's office said in a press release on Thursday. "Today, US Senators Joe Manchin (D-WV), Chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee introduced the Ban Russian Energy Imports Act which would prohibit the importation of Russian crude oil, petroleum, petroleum products, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and coal," the release said. "Representatives Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA-1) and Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ-5) will introduce companion legislation in the US House of Representatives."

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US Puts Sanctions on Russian 'Oligarchs', Including Rotenberg Brothers - White House

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is imposing full blocking sanctions on Russian "oligarchs" and other persons, including President Vladimir Putin's press secretary Dmitry Peskov and businessmen Boris and Arkady Rotenberg in response to Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, the White House said on Thursday. "Full blocking sanctions on an expansive new list of Russian elites and their family members who enable Putin: ... Boris Rotenberg (his wife Karina, and his sons Roman and Boris), Arkady Rotenberg (His sons Pavel and Igor and daughter Liliya), ..., Igor Shuvalov (His five companies, his wife Olga, his son Evgeny and his company and jet, and his daughter Maria and her
The White House said in a press release. Full blocking sanctions have also been imposed on Nikolai Tokarev, Sergey Chemezov, Yevgeniy Prigozhin, and Alisher Usmanov, according to the release.

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US Provided ‘Many Offers’ to Putin on Missile Defense Over Several Months - White House

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The United States has provided many offers to Russian President Vladimir Putin over the course of several months, including on transparency and missile defense, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Thursday. "We have provided many offers to Putin over the course of several months... on transparency, missile defense," Psaki said during a press briefing.

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US Not Ruling Out Biden-Putin Meeting, But No Engagement Planned at Present - White House

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki on Thursday did not rule out a potential in-person meeting between US President Joe Biden and Russian Vladimir Putin in the future, but added that there are currently no plans for direct engagement between the two leaders.

"I can't make an assessment of that," Psaki said when asked if there is any situation where Biden would sit down with Putin in person again so long as Russian forces are engaged in the special operation in Ukraine. "Right now they're invading a sovereign country and continuing to escalate every day. We're never going to take diplomacy ever off the table. But again, knows that not the moment for that."

When asked why the United States does not rule out such a meeting, Psaki said, "We have discussions internally about what the best steps are to de-escalate" but now is not the moment to plan an engagement between the two leaders."
US IMPOSING VISA RESTRICTIONS ON 19 RUSSIAN 'OLIGARCHS,' THEIR 47 FAMILY MEMBERS AND CLOSE ASSOCIATES - WHITE HOUSE

Sputnik

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is doubtful that China can supply Russia with most complex semiconductors, Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said on Thursday.

"There are a number of things that Russia needs that China can't give them because they don't have them. For example, when you look at the most complex chips, when I am talking about chips, I am talking about semi-conductors. You don't have those in China today," Adeyemo said.

"They only exist in the United States and they exist with our allies."

Biden Says Will Discuss With His Cabinet Russia Sanctions, Lowering Costs for Americans

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Thursday that he will meet with his cabinet later in the day to discuss additional sanctions against Russian businessmen and lowering the price of goods for Americans amid rising inflation in the United States.

"This afternoon, I'll be meeting with my Cabinet at the White House," Biden said via Twitter. "We'll be discussing additional sanctions on Russian oligarchs, our plans to lower costs for Americans, our unity agenda, and more."

US Fed Ready to Go Beyond Quarter-Point Rate Hike if Inflation Does Not Cool - Powell

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The Federal Reserve might raise US interest rates by more than the conventional quarter percentage point if inflation does not cool quickly enough amid surging oil prices and uncertainties from the Russia-Ukraine war, Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said Thursday.

"Right now, we need to move away from very low interest rates. They're not appropriate for the current situation," Powell said in his semi-annual testimony to the US Senate. "If we don't see
inflation behaving as we expected [it] to behave, which is to peak and begin to come down... then we're prepared to raise by more than that amount in a meeting or meetings."

Powell’s comments came as US oil prices hit 2008 highs at above $116 a barrel on Thursday while global crude benchmark Brent reached 2012 peaks at above $119.

As a rule of thumb, a $10 increase in the price oil equaled around two-tenths of a percentage point increase in inflation, Powell said, adding: "We don't want is to have inflation become entrenched and self-perpetuating."

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 the central bank says it may need a series of rate hikes 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. The Fed’s own tolerance for inflation is a mere 2% per year.

Powell told a separate briefing of the US Congress on Wednesday that he was inclined to support a 25 basis-point, or quarter-percentage point, hike in the Fed’s first pandemic-era rate hike in mid-March.

But at Thursday’s testimony to the Senate, he said rate decisions going forth would likely yield to inflation caused by surging oil and commodity prices from the war in major wheat-grower Ukraine and sanctions on giant energy exporter Russia.

"I would say in this very sensitive time at the moment, I think it’s appropriate for us to be careful in the way we conduct policy, simply because things are so uncertain and we don’t want to add to that uncertainty," Powell said.

But the Fed chairman said he was also comforted by the burgeoning US labor market, which had seen unprecedented growth after being ravaged initially by the pandemic.

"The labor market is incredibly tight, with wages rising at their quickest rate in years," Powell said.

US unemployment reached a record high of 14.8% in April 2020, following the loss of some 20 million jobs in the aftermath of the COVID-19 breakout. Since then, jobs have picked up in most months, with January’s unemployment rate of 4.0% reaching the Federal Reserve’s definition of "maximum employment".

Layoffs in the United States dropped by 20% in February as employers announced the largest hiring plans in five months in an economy rebounding aggressively from the coronavirus pandemic, Challenger, Gray & Christmas Inc said in its monthly report on US employment trends.

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WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The United States' defense spending budget for 2023 will be bigger than originally thought following the Russian military operation in Ukraine, House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith said on Thursday. "Without question it's going to have to be bigger than we thought," Smith said during a panel discussion with the American Enterprise Institute. "The Russian invasion of Ukraine fundamentally altered what our national security posture and what our defense posture needs to be, it made it more complicated and it made it more expensive."

Last month, US media reported that Biden is expected to ask Congress for a defense budget next year exceeding $770 billion, a record level even beyond Trump administration requests. Smith, a Democrat, added that there is no doubt the 2023 defense budget will go up. Smith said the 2023 US defense spending budget is probably the most impactful and important budget that he has seen in his 25-year tenure in Congress.

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

Since the operation began a large number of states across the globe - led by the US and Europe - have hit Russia with sanctions, bans, and restrictions targeting its financial, energy, defense, and media sectors - along with top political and business leaders.

On Wednesday, the UN General Assembly by a 141-5 vote, with 35 abstentions, passed a resolution demanding that Russia cease its military operation in Ukraine.

US Not Interested in Establishing No-Fly Zone Over Ukraine - White House

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is not interested in establishing a no-fly zone over Ukraine because it would require the military to shoot down Russian airplanes and that would mean entering a war with Russia, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Thursday. "The United States is not interested in no-fly zone because [it] requires essentially US military shooting down Russian planes, war with Russia, that is a step we want to avoid," Psaki said during a press briefing.

UN Security Council Engaging in No Discussions on Sending Peacekeepers to Ukraine - Source
WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council is not presently discussing sending peacekeepers to Ukraine, a source told Sputnik on Thursday. "At the moment, there are no discussions in the Security Council about sending a UN peacekeeping mission to Ukraine," the source said.

US Does Not See Russia Being Removed From UN Security Council - White House

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The United States does not see Russia being removed from the UN Security Council, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Thursday. "We don’t see that happening. We certainly understand they have a permanent seat on UN Security Council," Psaki told journalists when asked about the possibility of Russia being removed from the body.

UN Welcomes Announcement of Possible Ukraine Ceasefire - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, March 3 (Sputnik) - The United Nations welcomes any positive movement that would help to protect civilians and de-escalate the conflict in Ukraine following talks between the Russian and Ukrainian delegations resulting in an agreement to create humanitarian corridors with a possible ceasefire, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing. "Any positive movement that would help with the protection of civilians and lower the intensity of the conflict we would welcome," Dujarric said on Thursday. Dujarric also said the United Nations still sees the possibility to resolve the crisis through diplomatic channels. "We do not believe diplomacy is dead," he added.

UN Says Up to Security Council to Decide on Peacekeeping Operations in Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS, March 3 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council has to decide on the establishment of a possible peacekeeping mission in Ukraine, United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Thursday.
On Monday, Ukrainian parliament speaker Ruslan Stefanchuk said factions of the parliament are unanimous in their backing of the deployment of a UN peacekeeping mission in Ukraine. "There are procedures for setting up peacekeeping operations and that's up to the Security Council to decide," Dujarric said.

US to Impose Travel Bans, Sanctions on Families of Russian ‘Tycoons’ - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is planning to announce additional restrictive measures against Russian so-called “tycoons” amid the conflict in Ukraine, including imposing travel bans on them and members of their families, CNN reported on Thursday.

The planned move is another attempt to pressure Russian President Vladimir Putin to withdraw military forces from Ukraine, which are taking part in a special military operation since last week, the report said citing sources.

The Biden administration has already introduced measures against a number of Russian oligarchs who are allegedly close to Russian President Vladimir Putin, including the launch of a special task force by the Justice Department on Wednesday to hunt down assets of wealthy Russians who are supporting Moscow’s special operation in Ukraine.

President Joe Biden is expected to meet with his cabinet later on Thursday to discuss foreign policy issues as well as the latest developments in Ukraine.

Last Thursday, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine in response to requests from the Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics to defend themselves against intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation was solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and the civilian population is not in danger.

UN Says Expects to Learn More About Russia Creating Ukraine Aid Response Center

UNITED NATIONS, March 3 (Sputnik) - The United Nations looks forward to learning more about Russia setting up an interagency group to respond to the humanitarian situation in Ukraine, spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.

"We also saw an announcement by the Russian Defense Ministry that it had created an interagency coordination center on humanitarian response in Ukraine. We, of course, look forward to hearing more about this reported initiative," Dujarric told a press briefing.
Biden to Veto US Senate Bill to Terminate COVID-19 National Emergency - White House

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The US Senate is set to vote on Thursday on whether to end the declared COVID-19 national state of emergency and President Joe Biden has promised to veto the measure if it passes, the White House said.

"COVID-19 has posed an unprecedented public health challenge for the United States. Although we have made tremendous progress in combating the virus and are moving forward safely, the virus continues to pose a risk to the American people and our health care system," the White House said in a statement.

The White House explained that the United States must be prepared for possible future variants of the coronavirus.

"The national emergency enables the Administration to more effectively respond to COVID-19, including ensuring that necessary supplies are promptly available to respond to the virus and facilitating the delivery of health care at a time when our health system has been under tremendous and prolonged stress," the statement said.

The US federal response is strengthened by the ongoing declaration of national emergency to save lives, improve health outcomes, prevent shutdowns and support the US economy, the statement added.

UN Says Liaising With Russia on Movement of Humanitarian Convoys in Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS, March 3 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is in touch with the Russian Defense Ministry to make sure they are aware of the movement of UN humanitarian convoys across Ukraine, spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Thursday.

"We've already been liaising with the Russian Ministry of Defense to ensure that they were aware of the movements of UN convoys within Ukraine. So, we're in touch with the Russian Ministry of Defense also, obviously with the Ukrainian authorities," Dujarric told a press briefing.

"Whenever you operate in a conflict zone, it is important that you have lines open with everyone involved to ensure the safety of civilians, to ensure the safety of humanitarian staff and humanitarian goods," he added.

'Catastrophic' Explosion at Maryland Apartment Building Injures Up to 17 - Fire Dept.
WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - Five people are in critical condition and up to 12 others suffered minor injuries after an explosion at an apartment building in the state of Maryland, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue spokesman Pete Piringer said. "We have catastrophic damage with explosion, the cause has not yet been determined," Piringer said on Thursday. The five people with critical injuries have been taken to local hospitals and up to 12 others suffered minor injuries, Piringer added.

Quad Leaders Agree to Form New Disaster Relief Mechanism Amid Ukraine Crisis

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - Leaders of the Indo-Pacific Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) agreed during a call on Thursday to form a new humanitarian assistance and disaster relief mechanism amid the ongoing situation in Ukraine, a joint readout of the call said. "They agreed to stand up a new humanitarian assistance and disaster relief mechanism which will enable the Quad to meet future humanitarian challenges in the Indo-Pacific and provide a channel for communication as they each address and respond to the crisis in Ukraine," the joint readout said.

Quad Leaders to Convene in Tokyo in Coming Months - White House

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - Leaders of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) agreed to meet in person in Tokyo in the coming months to continue collaboration on Indo-Pacific policy, a joint readout of the leaders’ call on Thursday said. "Today the Quad Leaders – Prime Minister Scott Morrison of Australia, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan, and President Joe Biden of the United States – convened to reaffirm their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific," the joint readout said. "In their continuing pursuit of a free and open Indo-Pacific, the Quad Leaders agreed to meet in person in Tokyo in the coming months."

US Considering Sanctions on India Under CAATSA Over Purchase of Russian Arms - Official
WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) – The United States is weighing the possibility of putting sanctions on India over its reliance on Russian military equipment, Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Donald Lu told a Senate hearing.

"It's a question we're looking at very closely, as the administration is looking at the broader question over whether to apply sanctions under CAATSA [Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act] or to waive those sanctions," Lu said on Wednesday.

Lu assured lawmakers that Washington is trying to determine whether defense technology which it provides to New Delhi is safeguarded given India's partnership with Russia.

CAATSA, passed in 2017, gives the authority to hold third parties liable for transactions with Russian defense and intelligence sectors.

Anna Netrebko Withdraws From Met Performances Due to Refusal to Condemn Russia - Opera

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - Metropolitan Opera soprano Anna Netrebko has withdrawn from her upcoming performances due to her refusal to condemn Russia's military operation in Ukraine, the Met said on Thursday in a statement.

"Not complying with the Met's condition that she repudiate her public support for Vladimir Putin while he wages war on Ukraine, soprano Anna Netrebko has withdrawn from her upcoming Met performances in Puccini's Turandot this April and May, as well as the run of Verdi's Don Carlo next season," the statement said.

The departure is a great artistic loss for the Met, but there was "no way forward" given Russia's ongoing actions in Ukraine, Met General Manager Peter Gelb said in the statement. Gelb called Netrebko one of the greatest singers in Met history.

Netrebko will be replaced in Turandot by Liudmyla Monastyrska, and a replacement for Don Carlo will be announced at a later date, the statement said.

Monastyrska, a Ukrainian soprano who has performed previously at the Ukrainian National Opera and Bolshoi Theatre, made her Met debut in 2012 singing the title role in Verdi's Aida, the statement added.

Pelosi Says She Backs Senators' Bill to Block Russian Oil Exports to US

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told a Capitol Hill conference on Thursday that she has come out strongly in favor of a bipartisan bill to ban nearly a quarter of a billion dollars worth of annual Russian oil exports to the United States.

"I'm all for that: Ban it," Pelosi told reporters when asked her opinion of the bill presented by Senators Joe Manchin and Lisa Murkowski, the ranking Democrat and Republican on the
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee to block all of Russia’s energy exports to the United States in response to its special operation in Ukraine. The Manchin-Murkowski bill would ban all imports of Russian crude, liquid fuels and liquefied natural gas (LNG). Last year, the United States imported almost 245 million barrels of crude and refined oil products from Russia and 8% of its LNG needs, the Energy Information Administration said. However, National Economic Council Deputy Director Bharat Ramamurti said this week that the Biden administration opposes such a move as it would raise global prices for oil and gas and therefore could boost revenues for Russian energy products overall.

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US Recovers F-35 Fighter Jet That Fell Into South China Sea Earlier This Year - Navy

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The United States recovered an F-35 fighter jet that crashed into the South China Sea in late January the US Navy said on Thursday. "US 7th Fleet’s Task Force (CTF) 75 and Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) successfully retrieved the F-35C Lightning II aircraft which crashed earlier this year in the South China Sea, March 2," the Navy said in a press release. The F-35 jet crashed on January 24 during a landing attempt on the USS Carl Vinson following a routine flight operation in the South China Sea. The Navy said it recovered the wreckage from a depth of about 12,400-feet. The aircraft will be delivered to a nearby US military base for further help with the ongoing investigation of the crash and possibly taken to the United States.

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Canada, Allies Call for Suspending Russia From Interpol - Trudeau

TORONTO, March 3 (Sputnik) - Canada and its allies are calling for Russia to be suspended from the International police (Interpol) in response to Moscow’s ongoing special operation in Ukraine, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Thursday.

"Today, Canada and other close partners are calling to suspend Russia from Interpol," Trudeau said at press briefing in Ottawa.

Last Thursday, Russia launched a special operation in Ukraine in response to requests by the Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics to defend against intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the operation was solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and emphasized that the civilian population is not in danger.

China Continues to Send Mixed Messages About Ukraine-Russia Crisis - Senior US Official

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - China continues to convey mixed messages with regard to developments in Ukraine and Russia’s military operation there, a senior US defense official said on Thursday.

"China continues to send mixed messages out here about their concerns over what’s going on in Ukraine. What we have not seen them do is being willing to sanction Russia like so much of the rest of the international community, to condemn what the Russians are doing inside Ukraine, and for all their bluster about wanting to see a peaceful outcome here, they’ve done nothing to propose or suggest or show an interest in becoming involved in any kind of diplomatic solution here," the senior official said.

US Continues to Provide Intelligence, Other Information to Ukraine - Defense Official

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - The United States continues to provide Ukraine with intelligence and other information pertinent to the ongoing conflict with Russia, a senior US Defense Department official said on Thursday.

"What I can tell you is we continue to provide intelligence and information to the Ukrainians, and that’s ongoing, and we share with them what we believe can be helpful to them, that’s continuing," the official said.
US Job Cuts Down 20% in February as Employers Announce Most Hirings in 5 Months - Report

WASHINGTON, March 3 (Sputnik) - Layoffs in the United States dropped by 20% in February as employers announced the largest hiring plans in five months in an economy recovering from the coronavirus pandemic, Challenger, Gray & Christmas Inc said on Thursday in its monthly report on US employment trends.

US-based employers cut 15,245 jobs in February, 20% down from 19,064 in January, while announcing 215,127 hiring plans, the highest monthly total since September 2021, the report said. "The latest numbers give more evidence that job creation is strong, and employers continue to hold fast to their workforces," Andrew Challenger, senior vice president at the firm, said. "The churn in the labor market is coming from resignations."

For a third month in a row, the health care/products sector, which includes hospitals, health care products manufacturers, and other care-related entities, had the most job cuts, with 3,875 in February, the report showed. The government sector saw the second highest number of cuts with 3,010, followed by entertainment/leisure with 1,032.

Shifts in market conditions were responsible for 5,558 job cuts in February, or one-third of the total. The balance were due to store, unit or plant closings (4,671) and workers' refusal to get vaccinated for COVID-19 (1,430).

The Challenger report came ahead of Thursday's weekly update on US jobless claims that showed a second straight weekly drop. For the week ending February 26, there were 215,000 claims, a decrease of 18,000 from the previous week, the Labor Department said.

The jobless claims update itself preceded Friday's non-farm payrolls report from the department that will show job gains and losses for all of February. Economists polled by US media expect jobs 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%.

US unemployment reached a record high of 14.8% in April 2020, following the loss of some 20 million jobs in the aftermath of the COVID-19 breakout. Since then, jobs have picked up in most months, with January's unemployment rate of 4% reaching the Federal Reserve's definition of "maximum employment."

US Remains Concerned for Zelenskyy's Safety, in Touch With Him - Defense Official

WASHINGTON, March 2 (Sputnik) - The United States continues to be concerned about Volodymyr Zelenskyy's safety, a senior American defense official said on Thursday.
"Obviously we remain concerned about his safety, of course, we do, and we are in touch with him," the official told reporters.

Canada Preparing 2 Types of Visas for Ukrainians Fleeing Conflict - Immigration Minister

TORONTO, March 3 (Sputnik) - Canada is preparing two special visa programs for Ukrainians fleeing from conflict zones in their country amid Russia's special operation there, Immigration Minister Sean Fraser announced on Thursday.

"We're launching two new special programs for Ukrainians who want to come to Canada - temporarily and for those, who wish to stay," Fraser told a news conference.

The temporary special visa will grant Ukrainians the right to reside and work within Canada for up to two years, Fraser said.

In addition, Ottawa will simplify the sponsorship and family reunification process for Ukrainians wishing to relocate to Canada permanently, Fraser said.

Unlike previous Canadian resettlement programs, including for individuals fleeing violence in Afghanistan and Syria, the number of applications will not be capped.

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

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

WASHINGTON, March 3 (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 3 (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.

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

WASHINGTON, March 3 (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.

US Software Company Sabre Terminates Agreement With Aeroflot - Statement

WASHINGTON, March 3 (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.

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

WASHINGTON, March 3 (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.