

3/15/22 Tuesday

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Goodbye, Petrodollar? Riyadh Reportedly Weighs Accepting Chinese Yuan for Oil Purchases

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Tuesday said that talks in Vienna to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which limits Iran's uranium production in exchange for lowering US economic sanctions, "have entered the homestretch." Saudi Arabia strongly opposes the deal.

In part of a continuing trend of spurning Washington, Riyadh is reportedly considering pricing some of its oil sales in Chinese yuan instead of US dollars, the [Wall Street Journal](#) reported on Tuesday.

According to the paper, talks have been ongoing for six years, but have accelerated in recent weeks due to increasing frustration in Riyadh with Washington, including over the Biden administration's hostility toward the Saudi-led coalition's war in Yemen and its intent to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

"The dynamics have dramatically changed. The US relationship with the Saudis has changed, China is the world's biggest crude importer and they are offering many lucrative incentives to the kingdom," a Saudi official familiar with the talks told the WSJ. "China has been offering everything you could possibly imagine to the kingdom."

After news of the potential deal broke on Tuesday, the value of offshore yuan surged relative to the US dollar during Asian trading, [Bloomberg reported](#). However, it remained down relative to its value just a few days ago.

When asked by a reporter about the rumored deal on Tuesday, a US State Department spokesperson said that the US was not asking its allies to choose between them and China. A decline in oil purchases made in US dollars means fewer international buyers will have surplus US currency that needs to be recycled, which is typically done by trade or investment. In contrast, a petroyuan would increase those same dynamics for China, potentially leading to increased trade and investment.

Those petroyuans could then be recycled to pay, for example, for [Belt and Road Initiative](#) infrastructure projects underwritten by Beijing.

China already buys one-quarter of Saudi Arabia's massive oil export, which are the world's largest, and, since 2018, Beijing has [offered renminbi-priced oil contracts](#). Last week, Saudi Aramco, the kingdom's state-owned oil corporation, [announced it would help build](#) a massive new oil and petrochemical refinery in northeastern China. The facility will be able to produce 300,000 barrels of oil per day and will have a 1.5 million metric ton-per-year ethylene cracker and a 1.3 million metric ton-per-year paraxylene unit.

The news comes after the rulers of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates both [refused to answer](#) phone calls from the White House. The US has long enjoyed a close strategic relationship with the two oil-exporting Arab nations, and US President Joe Biden was looking for them to increase oil production to offset [the loss of Russian oil](#) due to the US boycott. A similar

deal in the early 1980s helped create a glut in the oil market that collapsed its value, driving the Soviet Union into its first recession and spelling the ultimate end of the socialist state in 1991. While the US has long been hands-off about Saudi politics, Biden has been far more critical than his predecessors, and it's reportedly left a dent in US-Saudi relations.

Last year, the Biden administration claimed it was ending offensive support for Saudi Arabia's war against the Yemeni Houthi movement, which ousted Yemeni President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi in 2015. Roughly 400,000 Yemenis have died since the war began in 2015, more than half of them due to the total collapse of infrastructure and the Saudi blockade of the country, according to the United Nations.

Despite the claims, [US-made bombs](#) are reportedly still falling on Yemeni cities.

Also in 2021, [declassified files](#) from the Office of the US Director of National Intelligence were shown to claim that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is directly connected to the 2018 murder of Saudi dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey. The crown prince has denied his involvement. In 2019, [Biden said he would](#) "make them pay the price, and make them in fact the pariah that they are."

In an interview with [The Atlantic earlier this month](#), the Saudi crown prince told the magazine "Simply, I do not care" whether Biden understands him or not. "It's up to him to think about the interests of America. Go for it."

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US Looks to Block Indian Deal for Russian Oil, But Says Buy Won't Violate Sanctions

The US is navigating a complex web of oil markets in an attempt to secure petroleum supplies for itself and dodge spiking gas prices while simultaneously denying Russia a market for the oil exports that Washington has boycotted. However, the US has made many enemies and the task is easier said than done.

Speaking before the Indian Parliament on Tuesday, Indian Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri told lawmakers the government was engaged in talks "at the appropriate level of the Russian Federation" to buy Moscow's glut of oil created by a Western boycott.

"Discussions are currently underway. There are several issues to be gone into like how much oil is available," Puri said, adding that the government was weighing questions of insurance, freight and payment.

India is the world's third-largest importer of oil after China and the United States, but gets just 3% of its petrol from Russia, according to Agence France-Presse.

The news follows talks last week between Puri and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak.

"What we have is a particularly privileged strategic partnership; the leaders of our countries maintain regular contact. Mutually beneficial cooperation is actively promoted, including the Arctic LNG 2 and Sakhalin 1 projects. Gazprom supplies LNG to India, and Rosneft continues its systematic work with its Indian partners. We are interested in further attracting Indian

investment to the Russian oil and gas sector and expanding Russian companies' sales networks in India," [Novak said in a statement](#) on Thursday.

"Russia's oil and petroleum product exports to India have approached \$1 billion, and there are clear opportunities to increase this figure," he added.

In response, on Tuesday, Washington sought to dissuade New Delhi from the deal: "think about where you want to stand," White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said. However, she noted that India buying Russian oil wouldn't violate US sanctions against Moscow.

"When the history books are written in this moment in time, support for Russia – the Russian leadership – is support for an invasion that obviously is having a devastating impact," Psaki said.

So far, India has plotted a fairly neutral course on the situation in Ukraine, where Russia launched a special operation in late February to neutralize the country as a potential NATO springboard into Russia and eliminate neo-Nazi forces responsible for an eight-year-long war against Russian-speaking separatists in the eastern Donbass region. [New Delhi has abstained](#) during United Nations votes as the international drama plays out, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra [Modi has urged Kiev and Moscow](#) to settle their differences via direct talks.

"That is the price to pay for India to maintain its strategic autonomy," New Delhi web developer Shivansh Rajeev told the [South China Morning Post](#) on Sunday, referring to Modi's attempts to balance Indian relations between competing power blocs. Despite the posturing, New Delhi has grown closer to Australia, the US and Japan in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or "Quad," [which is widely seen](#) as an anti-China formation.

The US announced [a total boycott](#) of Russian petroleum and sanctioned Russia's state-owned corporations Gazprom and Rosneft in response to Russia's operation, and the United Kingdom announced it would [phase out Russian oil](#) imports by the end of the year. The two Anglo powers have pressured the European Union to follow suit, but many of the bloc's members get the majority or a plurality of their oil from Russia, so the [economic and social ramifications](#) of a boycott are being extensively debated.

In fact, despite the move, Russians oil and gas condensate production rose to 11.12 million barrels per day in March, according to data [obtained by Reuters](#).

Oil prices came back down below \$100 a barrel on Tuesday, having [spiked to \\$130 a barrel](#) last week following US President Joe Biden's announcement of the gas boycott.

"Oil prices might continue moderating this week as investors have been digesting the impact of sanctions on Russia, along with parties showing signs of negotiation towards (a) ceasefire," Tina Teng, an analyst at CMC Markets, told Reuters.

In response to the price spike, Biden has attempted to persuade Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to increase oil production to offset the loss of Russian oil, but neither Arab leader would [answer the White House's calls](#). On Thursday, Saudi state-owned oil firm Saudi Aramco announced a new deal to [build a huge petroleum refinery](#) and associated petrochemical complex in northeastern China capable of producing 300,000 barrels of oil per day.

In early February, China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) [signed a 10-year agreement](#) with Russian state-owned gas firm Rosneft for refineries in northwestern China to receive 100 million metric tons, or 200,821 barrels per day of oil.

Iran has also been caught in the turmoil as efforts to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - a deal to which both the US and Russia were parties - are nearing fruition.

Moscow has sought to use the unresolved talks to secure an exemption for Iran in US sanctions, while the US has dodged claims it wants to “replace Russian oil with Iranian oil.” “Whether or not there is a JCPOA, our posture toward Iranian oil ban would not change,” State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters Tuesday. “We would not replace Russian oil with Iranian oil. That would not be on the table.”

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Photos: Iran’s Revolutionary Guards Unveil New ‘Smart’ Drone Submarine, Faster Speedboats

Iran’s fleet of submarines and so-called “midget subs” are currently operated by the Iranian Navy, not by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), meaning the drone submarine revealed on Tuesday is a new foray into subsurface operations for the force.

The IRGC unveiled several new weapons on Tuesday, including its first drone submarine, described as a “smart submarine” in a [broadcast carried](#) by state television.

An unveiling ceremony took place in Iran’s southern port of Bandar Abbas, which sits at the center of the Hormuz Strait, the strategic entrance to the Persian Gulf. It was observed by IRGC Commander Maj. Gen. Hossein Salami and IRGC Navy Chief Rear Adm. Ali Reza Tangsiri, according to the [Tasnim News Agency](#).

Also unveiled at the event were new fast attack water craft boasting a top speed of 95 knots and the capability of firing missiles and rockets, as well as carrying out reconnaissance missions. The IRGC operates a massive speed boat flotilla of thousands of boats, which it uses to exercise control over its extensive coastline and would likely use to wage a form of [asymmetric naval warfare](#) in the event of any conflict.

The IRGC also revealed that it has new missiles with a longer range and better ability to withstand electronic interference.

Iranian media gave no indication of how the new drone submarine would be used. Various other nations [use unmanned submarines](#) for everything from reconnaissance [to combat](#), including the United States, Russia [and China](#).

The IRGC is an elite paramilitary formation that complements the Iranian military. The US has [designated the group](#) a foreign terrorist organization, despite the IRGC never having been linked to a terrorist attack.

In January 2020, the US under the Trump administration assassinated its commander, [Maj. Gen. Qasem Soleimani](#), in a drone strike outside of Baghdad, Iraq. The Trump White House claimed Soleimani was there to coordinate attacks on several US embassies, but the Iraqi government later revealed that the military commander was on a secretive mission aimed at healing relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

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Investors Increasingly Fear US Recession as Federal Reserve Poised to Hike Interest Rates

Even before the US severed normal trade relations with Russia earlier this month, inflation was at a 40-year high and the Federal Reserve was all but certain to increase interest rates.

However, the spike in oil prices has created a ripple effect amplifying existing trends.

A recent survey of top money managers, strategists, and economists by [CNBC found that](#) one-third of those surveyed believe that the US economy will enter a recession in the next 12 months, and half believe Europe will do so. The survey was conducted from Thursday through Saturday of last week.

[According to CNBC](#), some of the expectations from the Federal Reserve, the US central bank, are dramatic: they expect the Federal Funds Rate to reach 1.4% by the end of 2022 and 2% by the end of 2023; [at present the rate sits](#) at 0.08%.

The FFR represents the interest rate at which depository institutions like banks and credit unions lend reserve balances to other banks on an overnight basis. The higher the rate, the more money banks are required to hold in their vaults and the less they can lend, which results in less money creation.

The aim, ultimately, is to limit inflation by preserving the dollar's value. However, the Fed has kept interest rates artificially low for more than a decade - first in an effort to help the economy recover from the [2008 financial crash](#), and then to help it [recover from the 2020 crash](#) caused by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw governments around the globe institute severe travel restrictions in a bid to control the virus spread. Especially in the latter case, Fed Chair Jerome [Powell has faced criticisms](#) that the policy has made the US economy weaker overall.

"I expect six quarter-point rate hikes from the Fed in 2022," Rob Morgan, senior vice president at Mosaic, told CNBC in the survey. He added that if the consumer price index (CPI), the US Bureau of Labor Statistics' metric for tracking average price fluctuations, reached 9% in the bureau's March or April reports, the Fed might take the drastic step of making a 50-basis point increase the following month.

Before the results were published, [BLS released its March](#) numbers, showing a 7.9% increase in CPI over the last 12 months. The Federal Reserve Board of Governors began its March meeting on Tuesday.

US stocks [have slid for days](#) on expectations of an interest rate hike, continuing a downward trend prompted by [increasing crude oil prices](#) caused by fears that the US would sanction or boycott Russian petroleum exports, as it has.

Rising gas prices will only deepen price increase trends created by the COVID-19 pandemic, which strangled international trade and made shipping goods more expensive. The BLS February report revealed the [highest inflation rate](#) in 40 years, which Fed board members said was primarily [caused by the "supply chain"](#) and not by large spending bills passed by Democrats, as [Republicans have claimed](#).

"For a long time US investors broadly and US equity investors in particular have been heavily shielded from risk — by fiscal and monetary policy, the steady economic recovery from the great financial crisis and the bottomless global appetite for US assets," Goldman Sachs strategists argued in a recent note viewed by the [Financial Times](#).

"The rising probability economists, analysts and pundits are placing on an American recession shows that risk is returning to markets. The process of accurately pricing risk, after this long holiday, is likely to be a long and choppy process."

When US President Joe Biden announced the Russian oil boycott earlier this month, he called the gas price increases ["Putin's price hike."](#)

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Jan. 6 Defendants Receiving 3-Year Probation Stints as US Judges Seek to Nix Plans of Repeat Riot

By - Evan Craighead

Around 225 individuals who stormed the US Capitol building on January 6, 2021, have pleaded guilty to their respective charges, and about 120 of those rioters have been sentenced—including 51 rioters ordered to serve jail time. Overall, more than 750 people have been charged in relation to the government probe, with more than half facing felonies.

As courts continue to issue sentences to Capitol rioters, US judges—including those appointed by Republican presidents—are attempting to quell a 2024 repeat by sentencing individuals to three-year terms of probation, the Washington Post reported on Tuesday.

Per the outlet, judges such as US District Judge Royce C. Lamberth, a Reagan appointee, have warned that the peaceful transfer of presidential power remains under threat due to former US President Donald Trump's continued claims of election fraud, as well as the downplaying of deadly violence that took place on January 6.

On Monday, Judge Lamberth sentenced 52-year-old James "Les" Little to 60 days behind bars and 36 months of probation. Little, a part-time delivery driver and store worker from North Carolina, is the first January 6 defendant to receive three years of probation on top of a roughly two-month jail sentence.

The 52-year-old pleaded guilty last year, after telling Federal Bureau of Investigation agents that he viewed US President Joe Biden's electoral college victory as "the second Bolshevik revolution." He also suggested that the US was "on the brink of civil war."

Little's attorney, assistant federal public defender Peter Adolf, argued that his client deserved probation, as he did not take part in any violence or destroy any property while participating in the riot.

Lamberth detailed in a sentencing memo that Little and others accused of lesser crimes were "an essential component to the harm" endured by law enforcement officers who "were overwhelmed by the sheer swath of criminality."

"The Court must not only punish Little for his conduct but also ensure that he will not engage in similar conduct again during the next election," Lamberth wrote in his 16-page opinion filed after the hearing. "Only a longer-term period of probation is adequate to ensure that Little will not become an active participant in another riot."

"The riot was not 'patriotic' or a legitimate 'protest' — it was an insurrection aimed at halting the functioning of our government," wrote Lamberth.

In a Tuesday hearing, US District Judge Dabney Friedrich sentenced US Army veteran Kevin Daniel Loftus, 53, to three years of probation for his role in the US Capitol insurrection. Loftus, a Wisconsin resident, pleaded guilty in October 2021 to a single misdemeanor charge of 'parading and picketing in the Capitol building,' which is punishable by up to six months in prison.

During the proceedings, Assistant US District Attorney Emory Cole highlighted that the 53-year-old took to a gaming app in August to brag about his role in the insurrection, as well as the publicity associated with the federal charges.

"I do appreciate the government's concern [about] troubling comments he made while on supervision," said Friedrich, who was appointed to the District Court by then-President Trump in December 2017.

"He showed a real lack of judgment following the offense and it's hard to fathom why he fancied himself a hero for his actions on that date, particularly given his service of the country as a member of the US Army."

Speaking on his own behalf, Loftus said that although he took part in the Capitol riot due to his rejection of the US electoral and justice system, his "faith in the system has been restored through this case."

"[A]t every turn of the road, you folks cared about my rights. You made sure all of my rights were protected," the 53-year-old said on Monday. "And so in that I would like to say that my faith in the system has been restored through this case."

Loftus was also ordered to perform 60 hours of community service and pay \$500 in restitution associated with the \$1.5 million in damage to the US Capitol building.

More than 750 people were federally charged in connection with the Capitol riot, with nearly 200 pleading guilty to misdemeanors. Rioters convicted of felonies have been handed prison terms averaging 34 months, while those incarcerated for misdemeanor offenses have received an average 45 days behind bars, according to the Washington Post.

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No-Go for Joe - Cartoon

By - Ted Rall

The Russian Foreign Ministry announced on Tuesday that, due to a "series of unprecedented sanctions," Moscow has accordingly updated its "stop list" to include US President Joe Biden, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley.

The Russian Foreign Ministry proclaimed on Tuesday that its updated blacklist comes as an "inevitable consequence of an extremely Russophobic policy adopted by the current US administration."

In addition to US President Joe Biden and the aforementioned US officials, those now barred from entering Russian territory include former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Central

Intelligence Agency Director William Burns, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki, and Hunter Biden--the US president's 52-year-old son.

As for Canada, which has blacklisted 560 Russian nationals, Moscow has barred Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly, Defense Minister Anita Anand and "most of the lawmakers from the Canadian parliament's House of Commons."

Moscow highlighted that the Russian government remains open to contact with those on the blacklist, and may readdress the measure in the event of high-level discussions.

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US Senators Unveil Bipartisan Bill Proposing Seizure, Sale of Russian Assets in Support of Ukraine

By - Evan Craighead

The 'Asset Seizure for Ukraine Reconstruction Act' enables the US federal government to confiscate and sell off assets of sanctioned Russians, or those tied to the Kremlin, that are valued at over \$2 million. The proposed bill also seeks to provide cash rewards to those who provide information leading to the seizure of such high-priced assets.

A bipartisan group of US senators introduced legislation on Tuesday that would grant the federal government authority to seize multimillion-dollar assets of sanctioned Russians and others, in an effort to help raise funds for the defense of Ukraine.

H.R.6930, dubbed the 'Asset Seizure for Ukraine Reconstruction Act,' was co-sponsored by Sens. Roger Wicker (R-MS), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Lindsey Graham (R-SC), and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT).

"Any serious attempt to punish [Russian President Vladimir] Putin for his unprovoked attack on Ukraine requires seizing the illicit funds of Russian oligarchs," Sen. Wicker said.

The US senator from Mississippi argued that the proposed legislation would directly impact Russia's "ruling class" by providing the US Department of Justice "increased latitude to act swiftly in preventing the liquidation of assets by Russian oligarchs."

[Per the bill draft](#), funds derived from the sale of seized assets would go directly to "post-conflict reconstruction in Ukraine" and related programming such as "humanitarian assistance," military aid for Kiev's forces, efforts on refugee resettlement, "or technology and services ensuring the free flow of information to the Ukrainian people."

The latter program would reportedly involve efforts geared toward countering internet censorship imposed by the Kremlin, circumventing efforts to disrupt or shut down internet services and bolstering cybersecurity capabilities.

"It is imperative Congress work with the Department of Justice in a timely manner to update our laws and create new authorities to go after the bad guys," tweeted Sen. Graham, who adopted a less radical rhetoric following [a congressional rebuke earlier this month](#).

The draft also proposes the authorization of cash rewards administered by the US Department of the Treasury, that will be awarded to those who provide information "leading to the

confiscation of funds or other property” of a sanctioned Russian or “foreign person,” as defined in the bill.

The proposed legislation details that a “foreign person” is defined as a foreign (non-US) individual subject to US sanctions whose wealth, “according to credible information, is derived in part through corruption linked to or political support for the regime of” Russian President Vladimir Putin.

While the funds are intended to go to Ukraine-related efforts, the US president holds the authority to impose additional terms and conditions related to the confiscation, sale, or ultimate transfer of assets.

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RNC Sues Salesforce to Block Email Vendor From Providing Sensitive Member Data to Jan. 6 Panel

By - Evan Craighead

Last week, the Republican National Committee filed a lawsuit against House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and members of the House’s Jan. 6 panel over a subpoena issued to Salesforce Inc., demanding records of RNC fundraising efforts. The committee claimed their action was required to block the panel from “unlawfully seizing confidential information.”

Salesforce, a major data and communications vendor for the RNC, informed GOP committee leaders that, unless a court intervenes by Wednesday, it will begin turning over relevant documents to the US House Select Committee probing the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the US Capitol, according to a Tuesday evening court filing by the RNC.

Salesforce’s deposition date with the January 6 panel is now slated for Wednesday, March 23, one week after the deadline for production to the Select Committee.

As a result, the RNC has amended its initial lawsuit, and has since named Salesforce a defendant “to ensure effective relief.”

“Although the RNC has named Salesforce as a defendant in this action, the RNC does not believe that Salesforce has breached any contractual or other duty to the RNC,” [read the Tuesday filing in the US District Court for the District of Columbia.](#)

The RNC suit claims that the House Select Committee’s subpoena violates the First and Fourth Amendments of the US Constitution, is “staggeringly broad” in scope, and includes “unduly burdensome” requests that refer or relate to GOP committee documents “that have no connection to the attack on January 6.”

[The subpoena, issued on February 23.](#) demands the production of sensitive and proprietary data over a period of more than two months, per the filing. Such a release would grant the House Select Committee “unprecedented access” to the internal political strategies of the RNC, as well as private and personal information regarding supporters of the political party.

Without court intervention, Wednesday marks the deadline for Salesforce to disclose RNC data, including whether and how individual RNC supporters responded to emails (as well as the time

the electronic mail was opened), reactions to specific political messaging, and details on signed RNC petitions, issue-specific surveys, policy proposals, and fundraising appeals.

Information on RNC supporters' individual voting habits, coalition involvement, and even preferences on political merchandise will also be included to satisfy the subpoena.

While the RNC argues that the subject matter of the requested materials should be protected via the First and Fourth Amendments of the US Constitution, the court has not granted a motion for emergency relief, and Salesforce has concluded that it must comply with production obligations, despite the company's counsel initially reserving the right to supplement its objections.

During talks prior to the RNC's March 9 filing, House Select Committee staffers reportedly informed Salesforce counsel that the initiation of a complaint was insufficient to relieve the data and communications company of its production obligations.

"The Select Committee issued a subpoena to an email fundraising vendor in order to help investigators understand the impact of false, inflammatory messages in the weeks before January 6th, the flow of funds, and whether contributions were actually directed to the purpose indicated," Tim Mulvey, communications director for the Jan. 6 panel, [argued in a same-day response to the RNC's initial complaint](#).

"This action has absolutely nothing to do with getting the private information of voters or donors."

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Serial Shooter Targeting Unsheltered People Arrested in Washington, DC

By - Mary Manley

A gunman who had been targeting and killing people sleeping on the streets of New York City and Washington, DC was apprehended by police on Tuesday. The 30 year-old Washington, DC man had been identified by relatives and law enforcement as Gerald Brevard III.

Brevard was arrested at around 2:30 a.m. local time in southeast DC following an intense manhunt conducted by both the New York Police Department and the Metropolitan Police Department that was launched on Sunday. DC officials say he will be charged with first-degree murder.

The assaults took place between March 3 and March 12, with Brevard [allegedly](#) shooting two men who were sleeping on the streets. The gunshot wounds which he inflicted on his first two victims, one on March 3 and the other on March 8, were non-fatal.

On March 9, Brevard allegedly killed his first victim, by stabbing the man multiple times, shooting him and lighting his tent on fire. This took place in Washington, DC at 3:00 a.m. Brevard then traveled to New York City where he shot a man while he was sleeping on King Street around 4:30 a.m. on March 12. The man was shot in the arm, but reportedly survived. Following the assault, Brevard murdered a New Yorker who was living on the streets by shooting him in the head while he slept in a sleeping bag.

The victim was found by police 11 hours later after a passerby called 911. A surveillance camera caught the suspect at around 6 a.m. approaching the victim at 22 Howard Street, a 15-minute walk from King Street.

Castings of the bullet casings exchanged between NYPD and DC police showed that the bullets in each city came from the same gun.

“As you watch, you’re kind of taken aback and just shocked that someone could commit such a jarring act against a defenseless person,” Chief of Detectives James W. Essig [said](#).

Brevard has a string of misdemeanors and felonies in Washington, DC and northern Virginia which include several charges of assault. He was also found mentally incompetent after a court-ordered examination and was subsequently committed to Saint Elizabeths Hospital in 2019, according to court records.

In an interview, Brevard’s father said his son’s mental health issues were never properly addressed. He said Saint Elizabeths kept him for only a week, declared him competent to stand trial, and released him despite his family’s objections.

“They said he was healthy so they let him out,” said Brevard’s father. “I knew he wasn’t healthy. I know my son.”

“I’m not holding DC responsible, but they could have done more. They let him out, and he wasn’t right. They let him out of St. Elizabeths, and they let him out of jail,” he added.

Brevard’s aunt, Sheila Brevard, revealed that he had been homeless off and on for many years. According to Essig, the suspect returned to Washington on Sunday. He had called his father and told him he was being followed and plotted against by coworkers at a restaurant in DC where he worked as a server. Brevard’s father said he did not mention anything about the shootings.

On Monday, authorities shared a photo of the suspect taken at an ATM in Union Station, attached to the photo was a \$70,000 bounty for the serial shooter. It was also on Monday that the NYPD received about a dozen tips, one of which included Brevard’s name.

Authorities arrested Brevard at a gas station some five miles from the White House and took him into custody at 2:30 a.m.

“We said that the work to remove this man from our streets was urgent, and our communities responded,” said DC Mayor Muriel Browser, who believes tips from the public helped authorities find the suspect.

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Video: Suspect in MoMA Stabbing Attack Arrested in Philadelphia After Three-Day Hunt
By - Mary Manley

Gary Cabana, 60, suspected for stabbing two 24-year-old employees at New York City’s Museum of Modern Art, was arrested on Tuesday at a Greyhound Bus Terminal in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Police confirmed that they had arrested Cabana at the Greyhound Bus Terminal, asleep on a bench at 1:35 a.m. local time, after he set a hotel room on fire.

Around 6 p.m. on Monday, Philadelphia police contacted the New York Police Department to report the fire at the Best Western hotel, set by a man who was using the alias Joseph Cabana. Gary Cabana wrote on social media that his middle name was "Joe".

Security at the Greyhound station spotted Cabana after they were alerted of his identification by police.

"I'm the guy you're looking for," he reportedly said. "I had a bad day." Footage shows Cabana being led away in handcuffs. "I appreciate you guys, really. I really do. Best cops in the United States over here," Cabana said, referring to Philadelphia police.

Philadelphia police say they are unsure as to why Cabana traveled from NYC to Philadelphia. On Saturday, Cabana attacked two 24-year-old employees at MoMA in midtown Manhattan. The attack prompted the museum to evacuate and close the following day while police began a manhunt.

Surveillance footage shows Cabana ramming his way through the museum's revolving doors, jumping over the front counter, cornering three frightened employees and stabbing two helpless 24-year-olds. The security guard on duty threw items at Cabana, who asked, "Where's your gun?", before fleeing the scene.

Reportedly, Cabana's membership to MoMA had been revoked on Friday following two incidents of disorderly conduct. On Saturday, when Cabana arrived at the museum, ostensibly to see a film, he was denied entrance. Cabana told The Post that he received a letter from the museum's security director stating that he was "aggressive [and] disruptive". Allegedly, this led him to "[snap](#)" and stab the two museum employees.

Before his arrest, Cabana was relatively active on social media, posting on both Instagram and Facebook. In one Facebook post he alluded to possible mental health issues.

"Bipolar disorder is a tough road to hoe. Dr. Jekyll to Mr. Hyde," posted Cabana, who claimed a woman named "Barbara" was responsible for a "frame job", a term he used in reference to the revocation of his museum membership. In a message on Instagram to The [Post](#), Cabana blamed the people he stabbed for conspiring with "Barbara".

The two museum employees were stabbed several times but were rushed to Bellevue hospital after the attack. They have since then been released.

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Tired of Changing Your Clocks? Senate Has Cleared a Bill to Do Away With US' Daylight Savings

By - Mary Manley

On Tuesday the US Senate passed The Sunshine Protection Act which will make Daylight Savings Time permanent starting in 2023. The unanimous decision would put an end to the back and forth battle Americans face with their clocks twice a year.

In rarely seen unity, the US Senate unanimously agreed to approve the bill in a voice vote. The House of Representatives has held a committee hearing on the bill, and will have to decide

whether or not to let The Sunshine Protection Act pass before it can head to US President Joe Biden's desk for his signature.

Americans lost an hour of their day on Sunday to Daylight Savings, which will resume standard time in November, but on Tuesday the US Senate approved to do away with that time change for good.

Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL), one of the bill's proponents, says making Daylight Savings permanent could decrease crime, child obesity, and help Americans who are battling seasonal depression. He adds that it's difficult to keep kids outside and playing sports longer when it gets dark out [earlier](#).

"For these 16 weeks a year, if you don't have a park or an outdoor facility with lights, you're basically shut down at 5 p.m. In some places as early as 4, or 4:30 p.m.," stated Rubio, one of the bill's sponsors.

Daylight Savings, which was first first adopted over 100 years ago in 1918, and after harboring criticism and change following WWI, was re-instituted in 1942 by former US President Franklin Roosevelt. It gained permanency in 1966 as a way to save energy and reduce the use of electric light. That effort was flawed by a consequent spike in the use of air [conditioning](#). While some state representatives filed bills last year in an effort to make Daylight Savings permanent in their states, states actually have to receive Congressional approval so that times do not differ across the nation.

Thus far, 15 states, including Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maine, Oregon, and Tennessee have all passed bills to make the pesky time change permanent, but must wait for federal approval before they can touch their clocks.

"I'm hoping that after today, [the bill] will go over to the House, they'll act quickly on it. I know it's not one of the most important issues confronting America, but it's one of those issues where there's a lot of agreement. And I think a lot of people wonder why it took so long to get here," said [Rubio](#).

"The good thing is that if we can get this passed, we don't have to keep doing this stupidity anymore ... pardon the pun, but this is an idea whose time has come," he added.

According to the Florida senator, if The Sunshine Protection Act succeeds in the House and gets its stamp of approval from Biden, the change would take effect in November 2023, so as to best correspond with "the airlines, the rails, transportation methods, [and] others, [who] have already built out schedules based on the existing timeline."

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Study: Dancing is Good for Masculinity, Helps With Understanding One's Identity
By - Mary Manley

Calling all tobacco-chewing, gun-shooting, mustache-twirling men, science says dancing is good for your masculinity and helps you understand your own identity.

A research team in Finland set out to find how dancing during childhood affects men later in life. The study focused on men who took dance lessons as children between the 1990s and 2008. Those who were [interviewed](#) said dancing was a positive way of expressing their bodies and helped their self esteem. The study also shows that while dancing helped men understand their own bodies, it also helped them in reading the body language of others.

The men who were interviewed also said dancing made them more accepting of being in a diverse group of people, and aided them in building a “sense of community”.

Separate [studies](#) have shown that dancing improves a person’s brain health by supporting motor, emotional, and intellectual brain functions, can help to fight depression, assists in reducing the risk of dementia, and stimulates nerve growth factors helping to intervene and treat neurological diseases, like strokes, Parkinson’s disease, and cerebral palsy.

Scientists have also revealed that a person’s dance style is as unique as their own fingerprint. Researchers from the University of Jyväskylä in [Finland](#) discovered that every person’s dance style is unique, so much so that computers are able to detect who a person is just by identifying their dance style.

Expressing one’s identity may help men in confronting identity crises.

“Although men say they have evolved in the last 40 years, they haven’t. They are in a transition state without an idea of where they want to go or what they want to do,” said Paul A.

[Buongiorno](#), a clinical psychologist, in an article published by The Washington Post in 1993.

According to Buongiorno, the “modern man” is struggling with how his identity is seen both at home and in the public eye.

Dancing can also tell researchers a lot about the dancer’s personality, including if they are extroverted, introverted, neurotic, how they’re feeling, and whether or not they are able to empathize with others.

While the boys who were in dance groups as kids had the ability to move freely and express their own unique “fingerprint” through dance, the environment gave them a place free of judgment unlike their schools and homes.

“Many of the interviewees pointed out that dancing is a way to express oneself physically without competition or measuring the performance. Dance served as an outlet for discussing the important questions in life,” says study author Dr. Kai [Lehikoinen](#).

“Body awareness is part of humanity, and we increase our knowledge of the world through our senses. If people ignore the bodily dimension of themselves, it reflects negatively on their wellbeing. Everyone has equal rights to develop their own body awareness. That’s why men should get to dance, too,” adds Lehikoinen.

Unfortunately, there is a social stigma surrounding the sport of dance which leads some to view it as effeminate, with women often outnumbering men as participants. And while attitudes towards dance may vary depending on culture, dancing typically subjects the athlete to an audience’s gaze, a societal aspect which is seen as more acceptable to be inflicted upon women.

The interviewees said they felt pressured by peers to conceal their favorite activity, and that ultimately, giving it up inflicted [trauma](#) on the then-adolescents.

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Prices for Goods Reach Record Highs, Energy Costs and Supply Chain Issues Add to Pain

Much of the increase is said to be the result of rising energy and food costs as a result of global unrest. When not considering the increases in energy, food and services, wholesale prices rose 0.2% in the month of February, compared to a 0.8% increase last month, according to recent reports.

The price of wholesale goods rose 2.4% for the month of February and 10% the last year. [This is the highest](#) increase since the Department of Labor started tracking the statistic over a decade ago.

Supply chain issues caused by the ongoing COVID pandemic, as well as global markets reacting to the Kremlin's special military operation in Ukraine and a crippling sanctions backlash by the West and many other nations against Russia, are primary drivers for the increase.

The [consumer price of goods](#) jumped 7.9% over this time last year, the highest since 1982, resulting in a 2.6% drop in real wages for American workers.

The wholesale goods price or Producer Price Index (PPI) does not always move in lockstep with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) but the two are correlated. PPI looks at the cost for sellers, considering everything that goes into products before being bought by consumers. CPI, however, is concerned with the consumer price of goods and services, relative to income.

A few notable goods [didn't see an increase](#), with vegetable prices dropping in February and beef and sheet metal staying flat.

According to Stephen Stanley, chief economist at Amherst Pierpont via The Wall Street Journal, the increase in CPI [will be felt by consumers](#) in the "next month or two" as wholesale price increases are passed down to consumers, particularly in the meat and dairy industries.

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Zelenskyy Calls for Creation of 'U-24' Alliance of Nations to Stop Conflicts Immediately

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - Volodymyr Zelenskyy in his address to the US Congress on Wednesday called for the creation of a new "U-24" alliance of countries to stop conflicts immediately.

"We need new institutions, new alliances and we propose creating an association U-24 - united for peace, a union of responsible countries that have the strength and consciousness to stop conflicts immediately," he said.

The alliance should be capable of providing "all the necessary assistance" in 24 hours, Zelenskyy added.

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Zelenskyy Asks US Congress to Sanction Russia Every Week, Target All Politicians There

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - Volodymyr Zelenskyy appealed to the US Congress on Wednesday to introduce sanctions against Russia every week and target all its politicians. "I call on you to do more, new packages of sanctions are needed constantly, every week until the Russian military machine stops," Zelenskyy said. "We propose that the United States sanctions all politicians in the Russian Federation who remain in their offices and do not cut ties with those responsible for their aggression against Ukraine." All American companies must leave Russia immediately and ports should be closed to Russian goods, he added.

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Zelenskyy Tells US Congress If No-Fly Zone Is Too Much to Ask, Kiev Needs Planes, S-300s

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - Volodymyr Zelenskyy told US Congress on Wednesday that if a no-fly zone is too much to ask for, Ukraine could be given aircraft and S-300 air defense systems. "Is this a lot to ask for to create a no-fly zone over Ukraine to save people? If this is too much to ask, we offer an alternative. You know what kind of defense systems we need - S-300 and other similar systems. You know how much depends on the battlefield on the ability to use aircraft, powerful strong aviation to protect our people, our freedom, our land, aircraft that can help Ukraine, help Europe. And you know they exist, you have them but they are on the ground, not in the Ukrainian sky," he said.

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US, Allies Sending Surface-to-Air Missile Systems to Kiev, Including Soviet-Made - Reports
WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - The United States and its NATO allies are sending surface-to-air missile systems to Ukraine, including Soviet-era SA-8, SA-10, SA-12 and SA-14 systems, CNN reported on Wednesday, citing a senior US official. The systems have a lower altitude range than the S-300 system, which Ukraine has requested. However, they have a range higher than the Stinger shoulder-fired missiles which the US sent to the country. According to the official, the systems are "on the way" to Ukraine.

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US Weighing Supply of Cutting-Edge Guided Missiles to Ukraine - Reports

(Adds details in paras 3-4)

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is mulling supplying Ukraine with cutting-edge US-made guided missiles which could target Russian tanks and artillery positions from miles away, NBC News reported, citing two congressional officials.

In particular, the US is considering whether to provide Ukraine with explosives-laden "loitering missiles," which are called Switchblades. The issue will be discussed by President Joe Biden on Wednesday.

According to the officials, there are two types of the Switchblade - 300 and 600 - which can be sent to Ukraine. The weaponry is developed by AeroVironment, which is based in the suburbs of Washington, D.C.

If they are sent to Ukraine, it could lead to the most significant use of the weapon in combat to date, according to NBC.

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RPT - Russian Orthodox Church Abroad Raising Funds for People in Ukraine, Donbas – Priest

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - Almost all of the parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCOR) are now collecting money for humanitarian aid to people in Ukraine and Donbas, rector of Cathedral of St. John the Baptist of Washington DC, archpriest Victor Potapov, told Sputnik.

"I know that in every diocese and almost every parish of the ROCOR people collecting money for the refugees in Ukraine and in Donetsk, so we hope when all is said and done we will have

collected a generous amount of money for those who are in need," Potapov, who is also a board member of the Fund for Assistance to the ROCOR (FFA), which is distributing the aid, said. Some parishes have just begun raising money, so it is too early to say how much assistance has been given, and the whole process may take a couple of weeks, the priest added. While all details have yet to be discussed, the church will send the first portion of aid right away as it is needed immediately. The rest of the money will be distributed as soon as parishes transfer the donations to the FFA, he stated.

The fund plans to provide the money to ROCOR's diocese in Germany, whence it will be sent to Metropolitan Onufrii, the primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

"Metropolitan Onufrii knows better than anybody else who needs these funds most of all," the priest said.

Speaking of his own parish in Washington, DC, the priest noted that the fundraising has already raised over \$12,000, and people are still sending money.

"When the military operation began in Ukraine, we were of course shocked and disturbed that the crisis has blown up to such an extent. The first thing that came to my mind was that we as Orthodox Christians need to gather and to pray so that the Lord sends peace to the Russian and Ukrainian lands," the priest said.

On the very first day of the conflict, the clergy and the faithful held a special prayer service in front of a copy of the Kursk Root icon of Mother of God, which is the main sacred artifact of ROCOR, the priest noted.

"Then we had a second prayer service, which we directed to St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco, who is the founder of our parish and who was born in the village of Adamovka in the Donetsk region of Ukraine when it was part of the Russian Empire," he said.

On February 24, Russia began a special operation to demilitarize and "denazify" Ukraine, responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics in countering the aggression of Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only. Several days into the operation, the Russian armed forces accused the Ukrainian military of using typical terrorist methods, such as hiding behind civilians and civilian quarters.

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Astronauts Prepare Space Station for New Solar Array in Nearly 7 Hour Spacewalk - NASA

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - Two US astronauts have prepared the International Space Station (ISS) for the installation of a new solar array (iROSA) boosting its electrical generating power in a nearly seven hour spacewalk, NASA announced in an official blog report.

"NASA astronauts Kayla Barron and Raja Chari concluded their spacewalk at 3:06 pm EDT after 6 hours and 54 minutes in preparation for upcoming solar array installation," the space agency said on Tuesday.

The astronauts completed their major objectives in the spacewalk to prepare the space station for upcoming solar array upgrades by assembling and installing modification kits. They built a

support bracket onto which a future ISS roll out solar array will be mounted. So far, two of six iROSAs have been deployed on the ISS, NASA said.

"The arrays will ultimately augment six of the station's eight power channels, increasing the station's total available power from 160 kilowatts to up to 215 kilowatts," NASA added.

It was the 247th spacewalk in support of space station assembly, upgrades and maintenance, and was the first in Chari's career and the second for Barron. Both astronauts are serving on a six-month science mission on the ISS, according to NASA.

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US Senate Passes Resolution Condemning Russia Over Military Operation in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - The US Senate adopted a resolution condemning Russia and Russian President Vladimir Putin over the military operation in Ukraine.

The Senate passed the resolution by a voice vote on Tuesday.

Russia started a special military operation in Ukraine on February 24 in response to calls from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics for protection against intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops.

The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only and the civilian population is not in danger. Moscow has repeatedly said it has no plans to occupy Ukraine. Western nations have imposed numerous sanctions on Russia.

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Increasing Threats to Women in US Pose Specific Challenge - Secret Service

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) 16 - The National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) has released a case study of a Florida man who killed and injured six women in 2018 in order to illustrate the growing threat posed by "misogynistic extremism," a US Secret Service said in a press release on the study.

"This attacker's history highlights the specific threat posed by misogynistic extremism," researchers said in the 28-page case study about Scott Beierle," the release said on Tuesday.

"This gender-based ideology, sometimes referred to as 'male supremacy,' has received increased attention in recent years from researchers, government agencies and advocacy groups due to its association with high-profile incidents of mass violence."

The study pointed out that the behavioral history of the attacker illustrates many of the behavioral threat assessment themes identified through years of Secret Service research examining targeted violence, the release said.

Consequently, the study's purpose was to identify red flags and other criteria law enforcement can use to head off other instances of deeply misogynistic men seeking to kill or injure women, the release said.

"This detailed review of Beierle's history illustrated common behavioral patterns and highlights many opportunities for intervention," the release said. "For example, Beierle had a history of being bullied which is thought to be the origin of his misogyny; exhibited homicidal ideations; engaged in persistent inappropriate behavior, such as touching girls and women without their consent; had failed life aspirations; and was an admirer of Hitler and Aryan nations."

Men like Beierle, who call themselves "anti-feminists" or "involuntary celibates," represent a growing terrorism threat, the release added.

Early intervention and behavioral threat assessments by law enforcement are critical and could be the difference between whether women targeted by these men live or die, according to the release.

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Biden Expected to Announce Over \$1Bln in New Military Aid for Ukraine This Week - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is expected to announce that his administration will provide Ukraine with a new \$1 billion security assistance package as early as Wednesday, the Wall Street Journal reported citing US officials.

The report said on Tuesday that the military assistance package will include anti-armor and anti-air systems, including Javelin and Stinger missiles.

The \$1 billion security package will come from the \$13.6 billion that Congress recently approved to assist Ukraine.

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Blinken Says Ukraine Not Joining NATO Would Not Be Concession to Russia

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Ukraine not joining NATO would not be a concession to Russia.

Earlier on Tuesday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that it is time to admit that Ukraine will not become a NATO member.

"I don't think that's a concession," Blinken told CNN on Tuesday when asked if Ukraine not joining NATO would be a concession to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

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Second Gentleman Tests Positive for COVID, Harris Cancels Event Appearance - White House

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - US Second Gentleman Douglas Emhoff tested positive for COVID-19 and caused Vice President Kamala Harris to cancel an appearance at an Equal Pay Day event despite testing negative herself, spokesperson Sabrina Singh said in a statement. "Earlier today, the Second Gentleman tested positive for COVID-19. Out of an abundance of caution, the Vice President will not participate in tonight's event. The Vice President tested negative for COVID-19 today and will continue to test," Singh said on Tuesday. Harris was scheduled to attend an Equal Pay Day event alongside President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden. Biden during remarks at the event said that Emhoff is "very well" and that Harris chose not to take a chance of potentially spreading the virus by attending the event.

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Fitch Downgrades 31 Russian Banks to 'CC' Rating - Statement

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - Fitch Ratings is downgrading 31 Russian banks to a CC rating amid an array of Western sanctions on Moscow for their military operation in Ukraine, the credit rating provider said in a statement. "Fitch Ratings has downgraded 31 Russian banks' Long-Term Foreign Currency (LTFC) Issuer Default Ratings (IDRs) to 'CC' from 'B' and removed them from Rating Watch Negative (RWN)," the Tuesday statement said. Short-Term IDRs have also been downgraded to a C rating from B and removed from RWN, the statement also said.

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US Stocks Up as Much as 3%, Ending 3-Day Rout Ahead of Likely Federal Reserve Rate Hike

NEW YORK, March 15 (Sputnik) - US stocks rose as much as 3% on Tuesday, snapping a three-day selloff, as investors rediscovered their risk appetite on the belief that the Federal Reserve will likely be patient with a series of rate hikes this year, the first of which could come within 24 hours. Wall Street's three major stock indexes - the Dow Jones Industrial Average index, the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq Composite - closed Tuesday's trading up between 2 and 3%. The Nasdaq, which groups high-priced technology stocks, led gains for the day. It was the first positive close in US stocks since Thursday and came amid the idea that the Federal Reserve "won't have to be aggressive with tightening policy over the next few meetings," Ed Moya, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said.

Moya cited a ramp-up in international mediation efforts in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and a 25% drop in oil prices from 14-year highs just a week ago as factors likely to convince the central bank to go easy with rate hikes in an environment where preserving growth was as important as fighting inflation.

The Federal Reserve is widely expected to raise rates by 25 basis points, or a quarter percentage point after at its monthly meeting on Wednesday. The Federal Reserve had left rates virtually at zero since the COVID-19 outbreak of March 2020. But inflation running at 40-year highs at almost 8% a year is forcing the US central bank to consider a series of rate hikes this year. The Federal Reserve's own tolerance for inflation is a mere 2% per year. On top of a maximum of seven potential rate hikes this year the Federal Reserve will also attempt to reduce its balance sheet, which now stands at \$8.9 trillion after the central bank loaded up on Treasuries and mortgage-backed securities to support the economy since the COVID-19 outbreak.

That action will reduce the cash in the financial system but will also bring uncertain consequences for bond and stock markets. Economists warn that if inflation does not begin to subside in response to these initial moves, policymakers will end up raising rates too high, sending the economy into a recession and financial markets into a slump.

In Tuesday's session, the Dow Jones Industrial Average, made up mostly of industrial stocks, closed up 1.8%. The Dow has lost about 7.7% since the year began.

The S&P 500, which groups the top 500 US stocks, rose 2.1%. For the year, it was down 10.6%.

The Nasdaq Composite, made of highly-valued tech stocks such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Nasdaq and Google, finished up 2.9%. It has lost 17.2% year-to-date.

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Russian-Backed Cyber Actors Allegedly Hacked US Non-Governmental Organization - CISA WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - The FBI and Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) said in a joint statement that Russian state-sponsored actors allegedly breached the network of a non-governmental organization in the United States.

"As early as May 2021, Russian state-sponsored cyber actors took advantage of a misconfigured account set to default MFA protocols at a non-governmental organization (NGO), allowing them to enroll a new device for MFA and access the victim network," CISA said in a press release on Tuesday.

The hackers exploited a flaw in the default multifactor authentication (MFA) protocols and accessed the NGO's cloud, the release said.

The US agencies recommend organizations bolster their multifactor authentication security systems, the release added.

Russia has repeatedly denied accusations that it conducts cyberattacks against entities in the United States.

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US Approves \$950M In Sale of 8 Seahawk Helicopters to Spain - Defense Security Agency

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - The US State Department has approved the sale of eight MH-60R Seahawk anti-submarine warfare helicopters costing \$950 million to Spain, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) announced.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Spain of MH-60R Multi-Mission Helicopters with Support and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$950 million," the DSCA said in a press release on Tuesday. The DSCA delivered the required certification notifying Congress of this possible sale on Tuesday, the release said.

"The Department of State has approved the possible sale to the Government of Spain of eight MH-60R helicopters; 20 T-700-GE-401C engines [and]; 32 AGM-114R(N) Hellfire missiles," the release added.

The sale also includes 100 WGU-59/B advanced precision kill weapon system II guidance sections; eight Link 16 multifunctional information distribution systems joint tactical radio systems; and four airborne low frequency sonars with other equipment, according to the release.

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US Diplomats Suffer, Morale Falls as State Dept. Payroll System Malfunctions - Reports

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - The US State Department installed a new payment system for its officials that is disrupting the proper payment of salaries to thousands of US diplomats and officials including some working in war zones, The Wall Street Journal reported. The new system was installed in 2021 but it has forced some diplomats to waste time tracking down their payments instead of just doing their jobs, the report said on Tuesday, citing interviews and documents.

The failure of senior officials running the department to respond to the problem is significantly damaging morale across the US diplomatic corps, the report continued. Delays including disruptions in the extra pay ordinarily approved for diplomats carrying out difficult and dangerous missions, the report said.

Patrick Ellsworth, a Russian speaker who previously served as an adviser on developments in Ukraine was among those who have resigned over frustrations with the new system and the failure of State Department leaders to tackle it, according to the report.

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UPDATE - Oil Ends Below \$100/Barrel on Russia-Ukraine Diplomacy Efforts, China Covid Fears (Update prices, milestones to market settlement, paragraphs 1-5)

NEW YORK, March 15 (Sputnik) - Oil prices tumbled more than 6%, adding to Monday's drop of more than 5%, as both the New York- and London-traded benchmarks settled below the key \$100 per barrel mark for the first time since the start of Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine.

Crude prices were also pressured by a ramp up in new coronavirus cases in major consumer China and over concerns about near-term demand expressed by oil exporter group OPEC. At Tuesday's settlement, US crude oil's West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, benchmark was down \$6.57, or 6.4%, at \$96.44 a barrel. It earlier fell to \$93.56, its lowest since February 25 - the day after the Russian operation in Ukraine began. WTI surged to 2008 highs of \$130.50 on March 7. London-traded Brent crude oil settled down \$6.99, or 6.5%, at \$99.91 a barrel. Earlier in the session, Brent fell to \$97.50, also its lowest since February 25. Brent hit a 2008 high of \$139.12 on March 7.

Diplomatic activity quickened on multiple fronts on Tuesday as the conflict in Ukraine entered its 20th day, media reports said, adding that the leaders from Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia were traveling to Kiev on Tuesday.

China, meanwhile, reported an increase in daily COVID-19 infections on Tuesday, with new cases more than doubling from a day earlier to hit a two-year high, raising concerns about the rising economic costs of its tough measures to contain the disease, media reports said.

On the OPEC front, the 13-member Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, which leads the wider 23-member OPEC+ alliance, said its 2022 forecasts for demand growth, supply growth and global economy were "under assessment" due to shifting market conditions. The 13-member cartel said its output rose by 440,000 barrels daily in February, exceeding its pledged increase under the OPEC+ deal.

Adding to oil's weight was the likelihood of reaching an imminent nuclear deal for Iran.

A US official said on Monday that negotiators were "close to the finish line" on a deal that could end nearly four years of sanctions on Iran's oil and pave the way for the return of hundreds of thousands of barrels daily to a market starved of supply.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) -

RUSSIA-UKRAINE TALKS

* Talks between Ukraine and Russia will resume on Wednesday, Volodymyr Zelenskyy's top aide Mykhailo Podolyak said on Tuesday.

- * Talks between Russia and Ukraine are now more constructive as the sides are discussing a future agreement, Ukrainian President's Office Deputy Head Ihor Zhovkva said.
- * A ceasefire in Ukraine is possible when Russia's demands, including demilitarization and denazification, are fulfilled, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said.
- * The issue of change of power in Ukraine has not been raised at the talks between the Russian and Ukrainian delegations, Russian Ambassador to France Alexey Meshkov said
- * The purpose of the current negotiations between Moscow and Kiev is to ensure the neutral status of Ukraine, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

ENERGY MARKETS

- * OPEC maintained its forecast for the growth of global oil demand in 2022 by 4.2 million barrels per day, but will adjust it in the coming weeks, when the influence of the geopolitical factor on the market becomes more pronounced, the organization's monthly report said on Tuesday.
- * OPEC maintained its forecast for the growth of oil and condensate production in Russia in 2022 to 11.76 million barrels per day, an increase of 960,000 barrels per day from last year, however, due to current geopolitical events, the estimate may be revised, the organization's March report says.

IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL DEVELOPMENTS

- * The United States will not sanction Russia for its participation in nuclear projects related to the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.
- * The United States does not plan to replace Russian oil with Iranian oil in any potential new Iran nuclear deal, Price said.
- * Statements alleging that Russia is obstructing restoration of the JCPOA are not true, Maria Zakharova, the Russian Foreign Ministry's spokeswoman, said.
- * Russia is waiting for the US to return to the JCPOA, also known as the Iranian nuclear deal, and the lifting of anti-Iranian sanctions, and lift anti-Iranian sanctions, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

- * The United States will continue to provide Ukraine with massive amounts of security assistance and deliveries are occurring almost daily, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.
- * The United Nations will welcome any progress toward reaching a ceasefire and humanitarian access in Ukraine, UN spokesperson Farhan Haq said in comments about Russia's initiative to propose its own draft resolution on Ukraine.
- * The United Nations needs more information about Monday's deadly attack on Donetsk, Haq said.
- * Fox News cameraman Pierre Zakrzewski has been killed outside the Ukrainian capital of Kiev, the news company said.
- * Russian paratroopers have seized a large amount of foreign weaponry in the Kiev region, the Defense Ministry said.

* Ukrainian forces are holding 17 children hostage in Slovyansk in the Donetsk region, they plan to forcibly take them out in an unknown direction, the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) Territorial Defense Headquarters said.

SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA, BELARUS

* The United Kingdom on Tuesday imposed sanctions against Tigran Khudaverdyan, the new CEO of Yandex, and two Russian reporters, according to a document published by the UK government.

* Extraordinary sanctions imposed against Moscow over the Ukraine crisis will weaken financial intermediation and trade and will surely lead to the recession, International Monetary Fund (IMF) officials said in a blog.

* The European Union introduced another package of sanctions against Russia over the situation in Ukraine, according to a document published in the official EU journal.

* Russian assets worth 6 million euros (\$6.5 million) are frozen in Dutch banks, investment and pension funds, Finance Minister of the Netherlands Sigrid Kaag said.

* The US Treasury unveiled new Russia- and Belarus-related sanctions on Tuesday, with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's wife among the targets.

RUSSIAN SANCTIONS AGAINST THE WEST

* Russia is imposing sanctions against Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and over 300 lawmakers, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday.

* Russia is imposing individual sanctions against US President Joe Biden, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and other top US officials, the Foreign Ministry said.

* Top US officials including President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken do not intend to travel to Russia and do not maintain bank accounts in that country, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Tuesday when asked about the new sanctions imposed against them by Moscow.

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Arizona Man Charged With Attacking Police During Assault on US Capitol - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - A man from the state of Arizona faces charges of assaulting law enforcement officers during the assault on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, the Justice Department said in a press release on Tuesday.

"An Arizona man was arrested today for assaulting law enforcement during the breach of the US Capitol on January 6, 2021," the release said. "Jacob Zerkle, 50, of Bowie, Arizona, is charged in a criminal complaint filed in the District of Columbia with assaulting, resisting, or impeding officers."

Zerkle also faces charges of civil disorder, engaging in physical violence in a restricted building or grounds, and related offenses. He was arrested in Tucson, the Justice Department said.

He threw several punches at one officer, pushed at least one other officer, and grabbed the baton of another. At the time, officers were attempting to get to the Lower West Terrace, where they were to provide reinforcements to law enforcement there, the release added.

The Justice Department said more than 775 individuals have been arrested for crimes related to the January 6 attack including over 245 charged with assaulting or impeding law enforcement.

The investigation remains ongoing, the release added.

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Blinken Discusses With Kuleba US Humanitarian Support to Ukraine - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a call with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba has reiterated Washington's commitment to provide humanitarian support to the people of Ukraine and discussed ongoing diplomatic efforts to stop the conflict with Russia, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke by phone today with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba to reiterate the United States' ironclad commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and our resolve to provide security, economic, and humanitarian support to the people of Ukraine," Price said in a statement.

Blinken and Kuleba discussed ongoing diplomatic efforts to stop the conflict in Ukraine, the statement said.

Both officials expressed their deep concern over significant damage to infrastructure and buildings as well as civilian deaths and injuries, according to the statement, the statement added.

On February 24, Russia began a special operation to demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine responding to requests from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics for help to defend from intensifying attacks from Ukrainian troops. Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure. More than two weeks into the operation, the Russian armed forces accused the Ukrainian troops of using terrorist methods, such as hiding behind civilians and positioning military equipment in civilian quarters.

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Biden Says Withdrawing Controversial Nominee Raskin From Federal Reserve Job

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden acknowledged on Tuesday that he was withdrawing his nomination of economist Sarah Bloom Raskin to the board of the Federal Reserve due to opposition by his Senate Republican rivals, urging them to fast-track instead four other names he put up for the governance of the central bank.

"I am grateful for Sarah's service to our country and for her willingness to serve again, and I look forward to her future contributions to our country," Biden said in a statement issued by the White House. "I urge the Senate Banking Committee to move swiftly to confirm the four eminently qualified nominees for the Board of Governors — Jerome Powell, Lael Brainard, Philip Jefferson, and Lisa Cook — who are still waiting for an up-or-down vote. This group has the experience, judgment, and talent necessary to lead the Federal Reserve at this critical moment in our economic recovery, and the Senate should move their nominations forward."

Powell is the current chairman of the Federal Reserve, nominated for a second term of four years. Brainard will serve as vice chair of the central bank.

Raskin's nomination was opposed by Senate Republicans who feared she would be too aggressive when it came to policing climate risks within the financial system and would overstep the unelected central bank's boundaries. That aside, they alleged that she helped a hedge fund obtain a coveted master account at the Federal Reserve, using her influence as a deputy Treasury Department secretary.

Biden expressed regret with the opposition shown toward Raskin, saying her nomination had broad support — from the banking and financial services community, former members of the Federal Reserve's Board of Governors, multiple Nobel Prize winners, consumer advocates and respected economists from around the country.

The president also argued that after serving as the second-in-command at Treasury and with prior service on the Federal Reserve Board of Governors, Raskin knew better than many others about the central bank's role in fighting inflation and continuing sustainable economic recovery. Biden also described as "unparalleled" Raskin's experience in pursuing solutions to enhance US critical financial infrastructure, due to her expertise in cybersecurity and climate risk, and protecting consumers in the financial marketplace.

"Despite her readiness — and despite having been confirmed by the Senate with broad, bipartisan support twice in the past — Sarah was subject to baseless attacks from industry and conservative interest groups," he said. "Unfortunately, Senate Republicans are more focused on amplifying these false claims and protecting special interests than taking important steps toward addressing inflation and lowering costs for the American people."

Prior to Biden's statement, Raskin herself sent a letter to the White House on Tuesday, asking that her name be withdrawn from consideration for the Federal Reserve job, according to a report by the New Yorker.

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State Dept. Says Not Asking Saudis to Choose Between US, China in Oil Negotiations

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - The United States is not asking allies and partners to choose between the United States and China when negotiating trade deals, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday referring to the Saudi-Chinese talks on oil sales.

US media reported earlier on Tuesday that Saudi Arabia is negotiating with China to partially switch from dollars to yuan in oil sales amid souring relations between Riyadh and Washington. "Our allies and partners around the world are going to have their own relationships with the PRC [People's Republic of China]," Price said during a press briefing on Tuesday. "What we are not asking countries to do is to choose between the United States and China. When it comes to many of our partners, what we seek to do is to give them choices and to make partnership with the United States and all that we bring to the table, all that we could bring to a bilateral relationship."

Saudi Arabia, according to the report, is growing discontent with US foreign policy, in particular, Riyadh is unhappy with the lack of US support for the Saudi-led Arab coalition in the Yemen war, the unexpected withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Biden administration's efforts to negotiate a nuclear deal with Iran.

Saudi Aramco, the national oil company, is also considering using yuan-denominated futures contracts, known as the petroyuan, in its pricing model, the report said.

A senior US official told the Wall Street Journal that the transition is unlikely to happen. The official was quoted in the report describing the negotiation as "highly volatile and aggressive" and "not very likely." The unnamed official also clarified that the Saudi currency is pegged to the dollar, and selling oil to China in yuan will likely stagger the Saudi economy and undermine the Saudi government's fiscal outlook.

Other sources familiar with the talks were cited as saying that Saudi Arabia still plans to sell most of its oil in dollars. However, if it sees through the partial transition from dollar, this could prompt other oil-producing countries to sell crude to China in yuan, dealing major blow to the supremacy of the US dollar on the global oil market.

China is among the top buyers of Saudi crude oil, accounting for over 25% of Saudi export, and the sale of oil, if priced in yuan, would boost the standing of Beijing's currency and would shake the dominance of the US dollar on the world petroleum market, according to the report.

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Eli Lilly Becomes First US Pharma Group to Partly Suspend Sales to Russia

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - The US pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly has become the first US company which announced a partial suspension of sales of its products to Russia, the company said on Tuesday.

"We also have suspended all investments, promotional activities, and new clinical trials in Russia, as well as the exportation of non-essential medicines to that country," the company said.

Now the operations in Russia of the group is focused on the sales of the drugs for those suffering from diseases like cancer and diabetes.

"Should we generate any profits from our sales in Russia, we will donate them to organizations dedicated to humanitarian relief," it added.

On Monday, US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer announced that it will continue to supply medicines to Russia, but all profits from them will be directed to humanitarian aid for the Ukrainian people. Pfizer will work with FDA and other regulators to transition all ongoing clinical trials to alternative sites outside Russia.

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US Providing Over 186Mln in Additional Humanitarian Aid for Ukrainian Refugees - Blinken

WASHINGTON, March 16 (Sputnik) - The United States is providing more than \$186 million in humanitarian aid to support refugees from Ukraine, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said. "The United States is providing over \$186 million in additional humanitarian assistance to support internally displaced persons and the more than three million refugees," Blinken said in a statement on Tuesday.

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Journalist Assisting Fox News in Ukraine Killed Alongside Cameraman - Network

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - A 24-year old Ukrainian journalist assisting Fox News covering the situation in Ukraine was killed on Monday alongside a Fox News cameraman, the network said on Tuesday.

"Ukrainian journalist Oleksandra 'Sasha' Kuvshinova, who was serving as a consultant for Fox News on the ground during the course of the Russian invasion, was killed Monday alongside Fox News cameraman Pierre Zakrzewski when their vehicle was struck by incoming fire," the network said.

Kuvshinova was serving as a consultant to Fox News helping crews navigate Kiev while gathering information, Fox News Media CEO Suzanne Scott reportedly told staff on Tuesday.

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US, Italian Officials Discuss European Energy Diversification - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Luigi Mattiolo, Diplomatic Advisor to the Italian Prime Minister discussed Europe's energy diversification amid Russia's ongoing special operation in Ukraine, the State Department said on Tuesday.

"[They] talked about US support for European efforts to establish alternative energy sources," the State Department said in a statement.

The two officials also discussed engagement with China, which is facing pressure from the United States and its allies to condemn the military operation in Ukraine, the statement said. Sullivan also met with Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi regarding cooperation in response to Russia's special operation.

Russia launched the special operation in Ukraine on February 24 after the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics requested help to defend themselves from intensifying attacks by the Ukrainian troops. In response, Western nations have implemented comprehensive sanctions against Russia.

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US Producer Prices Up 10% in Year to February, Adding to Inflation Ahead of Rate Hike

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - US producer prices jumped 10% in the year to February, according to Labor Department data on Tuesday that showed no let up in inflation in the world's largest economy as the Federal Reserve embarks on the nation's first pandemic-era rate hike.

"On an unadjusted basis, final demand prices moved up 10.0 percent for the 12 months ended in February," the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a unit within the Labor Department, said in a news release, referring to the Producer Price Index, or PPI. The index gauges the average fluctuation in selling prices received by domestic producers over time.

For February itself, the PPI grew by 0.8%. Economists polled by US media had projected a 0.9% growth in monthly PPI. But they were way behind on the annual figure, predicting a rise of just 8.7%.

"Given the shock to raw materials prices, March will be higher again, and inflation is going to be a Fed problem for a while," economist Adam Button said on the ForexLive platform.

The Fed's policy-making Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) is widely expected to raise interest rates by 25 basis points, or a quarter percentage point, at its March 16 meeting on Wednesday. The FOMC had left rates at virtually zero since the COVID-19 outbreak of March 2020.

Many economists say the hike planned by the Fed might not be enough in an environment where the Consumer Price Index jumped 7.9% in the year to February. The central bank's own tolerance for inflation is just 2% per annum.

On top of a maximum of seven potential rate hikes this year — as per the number of FOMC calendar meetings — the Fed will also attempt to reduce its balance sheet, which now stands at \$8.9 trillion after the central bank loaded up on Treasuries and mortgage-backed securities to support the economy since the COVID outbreak.

That action will reduce the cash in the financial system — but it will also bring uncertain consequences for bond and stock markets. Economists warn that if inflation doesn't begin to subside in response to these initial moves, policymakers will end up raising rates too high, sending the economy into a recession and financial markets into a slump.

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White House Offers Condolences to Family of Fox News Cameraman Killed in Ukraine
(Updates with more details in paras 4, 5)

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - The White House offers its condolences to the family of Fox News cameraman Pierre Zakrzewski who was killed in Ukraine, spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Tuesday.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with his family and the entire community as well," she told a briefing.

Earlier on Tuesday, Fox News said that Zakrzewski was killed in Horenka, outside of Kiev. Zakrzewski was with correspondent Benjamin Hall on Monday newsgathering when their vehicle was struck by incoming fire, the channel said. Hall received injuries.

Ukrainian journalist Oleksandra Kuvshynova was also found dead alongside Zakrzewski, according to media reports.

US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in later remarks that the United States is doing its own analysis of the incident and is treating the matter with urgency.

The State Department is currently compiling all of the information it can to form its own conclusion but there is no timeframe on when it is expected to finish its investigation, Price added.

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Russian Orthodox Church Abroad Raising Funds for People in Ukraine, Donbas – Priest

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) – Almost all of the parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCOR) are now collecting money for humanitarian aid to people in Ukraine and Donbas, rector of Cathedral of St. John the Baptist of Washington DC, archpriest Victor Potapov, told Sputnik.

"I know that in every diocese and almost every parish of the ROCOR people collecting money for the refugees in Ukraine and in Donetsk, so we hope when all is said and done we will have collected a generous amount of money for those who are in need," Potapov, who is also a board member of the Fund for Assistance to the ROCOR (FFA), which is distributing the aid, said.

Some parishes have just begun raising money, so it is too early to say how much assistance has been given, and the whole process may take a couple of weeks, the priest added.

While all details have yet to be discussed, the church will send the first portion of aid right away as it is needed immediately. The rest of the money will be distributed as soon as parishes transfer the donations to the FFA, he stated.

The fund plans to provide the money to ROCOR's diocese in Germany, whence it will be sent to Metropolitan Onufrii, the primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

"Metropolitan Onufrii knows better than anybody else who needs these funds most of all," the priest said.

Speaking of his own parish in Washington, DC, the priest noted that the fundraising has already raised over \$12,000, and people are still sending money.

"When the military operation began in Ukraine, we were of course shocked and disturbed that the crisis has blown up to such an extent. The first thing that came to my mind was that we as Orthodox Christians need to gather and to pray so that the Lord sends peace to the Russian and Ukrainian lands," the priest said.

On the very first day of the conflict, the clergy and the faithful held a special prayer service in front of a copy of the Kursk Root icon of Mother of God, which is the main sacred artifact of ROCOR, the priest noted.

"Then we had a second prayer service, which we directed to St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco, who is the founder of our parish and who was born in the village of Adamovka in the Donetsk region of Ukraine when it was part of the Russian Empire," he said.

On February 24, Russia began a special operation to demilitarize and "denazify" Ukraine, responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics in countering the aggression of Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only. Several days into the operation, the Russian armed forces accused the Ukrainian military of using typical terrorist methods, such as hiding behind civilians and civilian quarters.

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Nearly 16Mln Low-Income Americans May Lose Health Benefits After COVID Emergency - Report

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - US state agencies and managed care plans are warning that millions of Medicaid recipients will be kicked off of rolls when the COVID national public health emergency ends later this year, the Morning Consult research firm said in a report on Tuesday.

"Nearly 16 million people could lose their Medicaid coverage after the national public health emergency ends, new estimates show, and while health care groups are asking for months of notice before that happens, the burden that the end of the emergency period will cause them will only grow the longer it wears on," the report said about the US government program that provides health coverage to low-income residents.

The US federal government, the report added, gave funding to state Medicaid programs if they agreed not to cut people during the public health emergency - even if beneficiaries lost eligibility in that period. From February 2020 to September 2021 enrollment in Medicaid and a children's health program surged by almost 20 percent to around 85 million, the report said citing Urban Institute data.

"That means that as states eye the winding down of the emergency and the loss of extra federal funding, which could be triggered as soon as July, they're facing a massive backlog of work to

determine who's still eligible for Medicaid coverage," the report said. "New estimates from the Urban Institute show that coverage losses will climb the longer the COVID health emergency continues: 12.9 million if it expires at the end of March, 14.4 million in June and 15.8 million in September."

Medicaid spending also depends on when the emergency ends, the report added. If the public health emergency expires in the second quarter, spending on acute care for non-elderly patients will cost as much as \$583 billion in 2023, according to Morning Consult.

Many who lose Medicaid could be eligible for subsidized Obamacare plans depending on where they live, the report said. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) are searching for ways to ensure the process does not cause a massive surge in the number of uninsured. CMS is hoping managed care companies that offer both marketplace and Medicaid plans take time to do outreach to people being kicked off Medicaid and help move them onto the exchange, the report added.

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US Would Not Replace Russian Oil With Iranian Oil in Any JCPOA Deal - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - The United States does not plan to replace Russian oil with Iranian oil in any potential new Iran nuclear deal, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"Whether or not there is a JCPOA [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action], our posture towards Iranian oil ban would not change," Price said during a press briefing. "We would not replace Russian oil with Iranian oil. That would not be on the table."

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US Will Not Sanction Russian Participation in JCPOA-Related Nuclear Projects – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) – The United States will not sanction Russia for its participation in nuclear projects related to the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"We, of course, would not sanction Russian participation in nuclear projects that are part of resuming full implementation of the JCPOA. We can't and we won't, and we have not provided assurances beyond that to Russia," Price said during a press briefing.

The United States believes that over the recent days negotiators in Vienna have made significant progress in getting closer to returning to the JCPOA, Price added.

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High Level Engagements With Russia Has Not Diminished Violence in Ukraine - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - US partners' high-level engagements with Russia have not resulted in the diminishment of violence in Ukraine amid the conflict there, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"A number of our partners are engaged directly with the Russian Federation at high levels. I think what is clear is that none of these engagements have yet resulted in the diminution of violence, in an end to the war, in a reduction of the loss of life that we have seen across Ukraine," Price said during a press briefing.

He added that the US is "absolutely" prepared to engage with Russia at high levels if it would put an end to the conflict in Ukraine.

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US Officials Discussing How to Get MiG Fighter Jets Into Ukraine - Senate Minority Leader

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - US officials are discussing the question of sending MiG fighter jets to Ukraine, Senate Republican Minority leader Mitch McConnell told reporters on Tuesday.

"Exactly how to make that happen is still under discussion," McConnell said in a press briefing. The Republican leader said he did not see anyone in the Senate who would oppose the idea of sending MiGs to Ukraine.

These fighter jets are very effective in controlling air space, he added.

The Wall Street Journal reported on Friday that US President Joe Biden vetoed Poland's proposal to send Polish MiG-29 fighter jets to Ukraine in order to avoid provoking Russia to get directly confronted with NATO.

Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine on February 24 after the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics requested help to defend themselves against intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only. Two weeks into the operation, Russia's military said the Ukrainian troops have been using terrorist methods, such as shielding behind civilians and positioning weaponry in civilian quarters.

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US to Continue to Provide Ukraine With Massive Amounts of Security Aid - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue to provide Ukraine with massive amounts of security assistance and deliveries are occurring almost daily, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"[W]e will continue simultaneously to provide our Ukrainian partners with massive amounts of security assistance ... Those deliveries are continuing just about every day — anti-armor, anti-tank, anti-aircraft [weapons], small arms, munitions," Price said during a press briefing.

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State Dept. Says 'Only Appropriate' Russia No Longer a Member of Council of Europe

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) – The United States believes Russia does not share the values of the Council of Europe and finds it "only appropriate" that it is no longer a member of this international organization, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday. "We share the Council of Europe's values, human rights, democracy, the rule of law. Russia clearly does not share the same values. I think it is only appropriate that Russia is not a member of such a council," Price said during a press briefing.

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Biden Signs Bill Funding US Government, Providing \$13.6Bln in Assistance to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden on Tuesday signed legislation funding the US federal government and providing an array of aid to Ukraine amid the ongoing Russian military operation in the country.

Biden signed the Consolidated Appropriations Act for 2022, which funds the federal government through September 30, 2022 and provides \$13.6 billion in humanitarian, economic and defense assistance for Ukraine.

The legislation sends a message that Republicans and Democrats can come together to get something done and fulfill their responsibility to keep the government open and serving Americans, Biden said during remarks prior to signing the bill.

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US Senate Passes Bill to Make Daylight Saving Time Permanent, End Time Switches

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - The US Senate on Tuesday passed legislation that would make Daylight Saving Time permanent, consequently ending time switches in the springtime and autumn should the House pass their own version.

The Senate by unanimous consent passed S.623, known as the Sunshine Protection Act, in an effort to make Daylight Saving Time permanent.

The legislation, if also passed by the House of Representatives and signed into law by President Joe Biden, would establish a permanent Daylight Saving Time and eliminate the need to change clocks' times every March and November.

The Sunshine Protection Act was first introduced to the Congress in 2018, sponsored by Rep. Vern Buchanan and Sen. Marco Rubio, and re-introduced by the two lawmakers to each subsequent Congress until it made it out of committee this session.

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Psaki Tells Nations Considering Discount Russian Oil to Think About Place in History Books
WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - Countries that are considering buying discount Russian crude oil should abide by US sanctions and think about their place in history books written about this time period, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Tuesday.

"Our message to any country continues to be: abide by the sanctions we've put in place and recommended – I don't believe this would be violating that – but also think about where you want to stand when the history books are written on this moment in time," Psaki told a press briefing when asked about the possibility of countries such as India purchasing the discount oil. India is negotiating with Russia the price and logistics of shipping discounted oil after Moscow was hit with a US imports ban, Indian Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said on Tuesday.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said last week that Russia wanted to attract Indian investment in the oil and gas industry after the United States said it would abandon Russian oil over Ukraine, causing prices to surge.

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US Confident Will Have Ability to Continue Talks With Russia - White House

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - The US government is confident that it will continue direct or indirect talks with the Russian government having imposed comprehensive sanctions against Russia, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Tuesday.

"We are confident that if we need to have continued - and we will need to have continued direct and indirect conversations with Russia - we will have the ability to do that," Psaki said.

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White House Offers Condolences to Family of Fox News Cameraman Killed in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - The White House offers its condolences to the family of Fox News cameraman Pierre Zakrzewski who was killed in Ukraine, spokeswoman Jen Psaki said on Tuesday.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with his family and entire community as well," she told a briefing. Earlier in the day, Fox News said that Zakrzewski was killed in Horenka, outside of Kiev. Zakrzewski was with correspondent Benjamin Hall on Monday newsgathering when their vehicle was struck by incoming fire, the channel said. Hall received injuries.

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IMF Says Unprecedented Sanctions to Impair Financial Intermediation, Trade in Europe (Adds details, background in paras 3-9)

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - Extraordinary sanctions imposed against Moscow over the Ukraine crisis will weaken financial intermediation and trade and will surely lead to the recession, International Monetary Fund (IMF) officials said in a blog published on Tuesday.

"The toll is already immense in Ukraine. Unprecedented sanctions on Russia will impair financial intermediation and trade, inevitably causing a deep recession there," the article, written by Alfred Kammer, Jihad Azour, Abebe Aemro Selassie, Ilan Goldfajn and Changyong Rhee, said. "The ruble's depreciation is fueling inflation, further diminishing living standards for the population."

The authors went on to say that energy is the "main spillover channel for Europe" due to Russia being a vital source of natural gas imports.

"Wider supply-chain disruptions may also be consequential," the blog said. "These effects will fuel inflation and slow the recovery from the pandemic."

Moreover, Eastern Europe will see increasing financing costs and a refugee influx, the authors added.

"European governments also may confront fiscal pressures from additional spending on energy security and defense budgets," the article said. "While foreign exposures to plunging Russian assets are modest by global standards, pressures on emerging markets may grow should investors seek safer havens. Similarly, most European banks have modest and manageable direct exposures to Russia."

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Sunday that the fund believes that the Ukrainian crisis and sanctions against Russia will not lead to a worldwide crisis. Russia, however, is expected to experience a deep recession, she added, due to sanction pressure. She also said the IMF does not consider a default in Russia as an impossible scenario, given its funds to pay the state debt are frozen.

On Sunday, Russian Finance Minister Anton Siluanov said that Moscow remained committed to its obligations on the state debt and will continue to pay it in rubles until the West unfreezes its gold and foreign currency reserves.

On February 24, Russia undertook a special operation to demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine in response to requests from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to defend from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry has said the special operation is solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure. In response, the United States, European Union and their allies have imposed comprehensive sanctions on Russia.

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IMF Predicts Ukraine Crisis to Affect Entire Global Economy Including Trade, Supply Chains (Adds details, background in paras 5-11)

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - The entire global economy will face consequences of the Ukraine conflict including slower growth and faster inflation, International Monetary Fund (IMF) officials said in a blog published on Tuesday.

"The conflict is a major blow to the global economy that will hurt growth and raise prices," the article, written by Alfred Kammer, Jihad Azour, Abebe Aemro Selassie, Ilan Goldfajn and Changyong Rhee said. "Beyond the suffering and humanitarian crisis from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the entire global economy will feel the effects of slower growth and faster inflation."

The authors of the article explained that the impacts will flow via three main channels.

"One, higher prices for commodities like food and energy will push up inflation further, in turn eroding the value of incomes and weighing on demand," the blog said. "Two, neighboring economies in particular will grapple with disrupted trade, supply chains, and remittances as well as an historic surge in refugee flows. And three, reduced business confidence and higher investor uncertainty will weigh on asset prices, tightening financial conditions and potentially spurring capital outflows from emerging markets."

The authors pointed out in the blog that Russia and Ukraine are major commodities producers, and disruptions have led to global prices increase, particularly for oil and natural gas. Moreover, the article added, food costs have risen, with prices for wheat hitting a record.

"Beyond global spillovers, countries with direct trade, tourism, and financial exposures will feel additional pressures," the official said. "Economies reliant on oil imports will see wider fiscal and trade deficits and more inflation pressure, though some exporters such as those in the Middle East and Africa may benefit from higher prices."

Sharp food and fuel price increases may prompt unrest in some regions, from Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America to the Caucasus and Central Asia, according to the blog post.

"Longer term, the war may fundamentally alter the global economic and geopolitical order should energy trade shift, supply chains reconfigure, payment networks fragment, and countries rethink reserve currency holdings," the article said. "Increased geopolitical tension further raises risks of economic fragmentation, especially for trade and technology."

Russia and Ukraine are the world's top wheat producers. The United Nations Food Program says they account for 30% of global wheat exports, 20% of corn sales and 76% of the global export of sunflower seeds, making the Black Sea region the world's breadbasket.

Last Monday, trading in US wheat futures was suspended for the week after prices surged above the 7% limit allowed in a day to reach 14-year highs amid worries the Russia-Ukraine confrontation would affect global supplies.

On February 24, Russia began a special operation to demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine, responding to requests for assistance from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to defend against intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and the civilian population is not in danger. Moscow has repeatedly stressed that it has no plans to occupy Ukraine.

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US Few Ties to Russia, Ukraine to Mitigate Crisis Impact, But Prices May Keep Rising - IMF

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - While the United States has few connections with Ukraine and Russia, which will mitigate the impact of the crisis on the American economy, prices may continue to rise, International Monetary Fund (IMF) officials said in a blog published on Tuesday. "The United States has few ties to Ukraine and Russia, diluting direct effects, but inflation was already at a four-decade high before the war boosted commodity prices," the article, written by Alfred Kammer, Jihad Azour, Abebe Aemro Selassie, Ilan Goldfajn and Changyong Rhee, said. "That means prices may keep rising as the Federal Reserve starts raising interest rates."

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Top US Officials Sanctioned by Moscow Do Not Have Russian Bank Accounts - White House

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - Top US officials including President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken do not intend to travel to Russia and do not maintain bank accounts in that country, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Tuesday when asked about the new sanctions imposed against them by Moscow. "None of us are planning tourist trips to Russia. None of us have bank accounts that we won't be able to access. So, we will forge ahead," Psaki said during a press briefing. In addition to Biden and Blinken, Russia also sanctioned Psaki, CIA Director William Burns, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, among other US officials.

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White House Says Works on Finalizing Details of Biden's Trip to Europe

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - The details of US President Joe Biden's forthcoming trip to Europe are being finalized, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said during a press briefing on Tuesday.

"We are still working though the final details of President Biden's trip," Psaki said in response to a question whether Biden would visit Poland.

Psaki added that she could not confirm whether Biden would visit Poland or to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

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Oil Prices Extend Tumble on Russia-Ukraine Diplomacy Efforts, China COVID-19 Cases

NEW YORK, March 15 (Sputnik) - Oil prices extended their tumble on Tuesday, falling more than 5% for a second day in a row based on international efforts to mediate over the Russia-Ukraine conflict and on renewed COVID-19 measures implemented by China after an unexpected surge in Omicron cases.

Oil was also pressured by concerns expressed by oil exporter group OPEC about near-term supply-demand.

Global crude benchmark Brent was down \$5.84, or 5.5%, at \$101.06 a barrel by noon. Earlier, it fell to \$97.50, the lowest price since February 25. Brent surged to a high of \$139.12 on March 7, after Russia launched its special military operation in Ukraine.

US crude's West Texas Intermediate (WTI), benchmark was down \$6.01, or 5.8%, at \$97 a barrel. It earlier fell to \$93.56, its lowest since February 25. WTI surged to 2008 highs of \$130.50 on March 7.

Oil prices have lost more than 10% since this week began. The drop is even more precipitous - at around 30% - when compared to the 14-year highs of above \$130 a barrel attained by both WTI and Brent just over a week ago.

Diplomatic activity quickened on multiple fronts on Monday as the conflict in Ukraine entered its 20th day, media reports said, adding that the leaders from Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia were traveling to Kiev on Tuesday.

China, meanwhile, reported an increase in daily COVID-19 infections on Tuesday, with new cases more than doubling from a day earlier to hit a two-year high, raising concerns about the rising economic costs of its tough measures to contain the disease, media reports said.

On the OPEC front, the 13-member Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, which leads the wider 23-member OPEC+ alliance, said its 2022 forecasts for demand growth, supply growth and global economy were "under assessment" due to shifting market conditions. The 13-member cartel said its output rose by 440,000 barrels daily in February, exceeding its pledged increase under the OPEC+ deal.

Adding to oil's weight was the likelihood of reaching an imminent nuclear deal for Iran.

A US official said on Monday that negotiators were "close to the finish line" on a deal that could end nearly four years of sanctions on Iran's oil and pave the way for the return of hundreds of thousands of barrels daily to a market starved of supply.

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Biden to Visit NATO Headquarters for Extraordinary Meeting of Allied Leaders - US Mission

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will visit the NATO headquarters in Brussels next week to participate in the extraordinary meeting of the member states' leaders, US mission to the alliance said on Tuesday.

"President Biden comes to NATO HQ next week to participate in an extraordinary meeting of the leaders of all NATO allies," the US mission said via Twitter.

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Biden to Join European Council Summit on Ukraine During Overseas Trip - White House

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden during his trip to Europe next week for an extraordinary meeting of NATO leaders about Russia's military operation in Ukraine will also attend a European Council summit on the matter, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Tuesday.

"[Biden] will also join a scheduled European Council summit to discuss our shared concerns about Ukraine, including transatlantic efforts to impose economic costs on Russia, provide humanitarian support to those affected by the violence, and address other challenges related to the conflict," Psaki said during a press briefing.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on Tuesday announced that he will convene an extraordinary summit of the alliance on March 24 to discuss the situation in Ukraine.

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Sherman, French Counterpart Agree to Continue Imposing Sanctions on Russia - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman and her French counterpart Francois Delattre discussed the situation in Ukraine and agreed to continue imposing sanctions on Russia in response to its special military operation in the neighboring country, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman spoke today with French Foreign Ministry Secretary General Francois Delattre," Price said in a statement. "They agreed on the need for continued support for Ukraine and committed to continue to impose costs on Russia for its aggression." Earlier on Tuesday, the European Union adopted the fourth package of economic and individual sanctions against Russia, including prohibiting all transactions with some state-owned

enterprises, ceasing all new investments in the Russian energy sector and enacting trade restrictions on iron, steel and luxury goods.

On February 24, Russia undertook a special operation to demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine in response to requests from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics to defend from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry has said the special operation is solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure. In response, the United States, European Union and their allies have imposed comprehensive sanctions on Russia.

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UN Welcomes Any Progress Toward Ceasefire, Humanitarian Access in Ukraine - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - The United Nations will welcome any progress toward reaching a ceasefire and humanitarian access in Ukraine, UN spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Tuesday in comments about Russia's initiative to propose its own draft resolution on Ukraine. "We encourage any progress by the various parties in terms of getting to a cessation of hostilities and getting to a situation where we can provide humanitarian aid. We will have to see what the results of these discussions are, however," Haq said during a press briefing. Earlier on Tuesday, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said Russia will put forward its own humanitarian resolution in the United Nations. The resolution will call for a ceasefire to be reached through negotiations, he said.

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UN Says Needs More Information About Donetsk Missile Attack

UNITED NATIONS, March 15 (Sputnik) - The United Nations needs more information about Monday's deadly attack on Donetsk, deputy spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Monday. The city came under missile fire on Monday, which resulted in 20 people killed and 37 others injured. The Donetsk republic leader, Denis Pushilin, said that downtown Donetsk was hit by a Ukrainian Tochka-U missile filled with cluster munitions. "We would need further information to see whether we can confirm that," Haq said when asked whether the UN has any evidence of Ukrainian forces using cluster munitions.

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Police Arrests Man for Shooting of 5 Homeless People in New York, Washington - Mayors

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - The search for the person suspected of shooting five homeless men in New York City and Washington has led to an arrest, New York City Mayor Eric Adams and Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser said on Tuesday.

"We want to thank everyone in Washington, DC, New York City and elsewhere who sent in tips about this suspect," the mayors said in a joint press release. "We said that the work to remove this man from our streets was urgent and our communities responded."

Between March 3 and March 9, three men were shot in Washington and one succumbed to his injuries, while another two men were shot in New York City and one of them succumbed to his injuries, the release said.

The mayors explained in the release the public provided numerous tips and other information that led to the suspect's apprehension.

The authorities have not yet released the suspect's name, the release added.

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US Targets Lukashenko's Wife in New Russia, Belarus Sanctions - Treasury
(Adds details in paras 3, 6-7, background in para 8)

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - The US Treasury unveiled new Russia- and Belarus-related sanctions on Tuesday, with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's wife among the targets.

"SPECIALLY DESIGNATED NATIONALS LIST UPDATE. The following individuals have been added to OFAC's SDN List: LUKASHENKA, Halina Radzivonawna ... Belarus; DOB 01 Jan 1955; nationality Belarus; Gender Female (individual) [BELARUS]," the statement said. Halina Lukashenko was designated "pursuant to E.O. 13405 for being a senior-level official, family member of such an official, or a person closely linked to such an official who is responsible for or has engaged in public corruption related to Belarus," the Treasury explained. The sanctions also target the Kurchaloy district branch of the Chechnya interior ministry. "The following entity has been added to OFAC's SDN List: KURCHALOI DISTRICT OF THE CHECHEN REPUBLIC BRANCH OF THE MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION," the statement said.

A number of Russian deputy defense ministers, as well as the heads of the Federal Service of Military-Technical Cooperation and Rosoboronexport, Dmitry Shugayev and Alexander Mikheev, respectively, were also added to the sanctions list.

Commenting on the sanctions, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said they are related to alleged human rights abuses and the Russian military operation in Ukraine, and accused Belarus of supporting and facilitating Moscow's actions.

On February 24, Russia began a special operation to demilitarize and "denazify" Ukraine, responding to calls for help from the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics in countering the aggression of Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only. Several days into the operation, the Russian

armed forces accused the Ukrainian military of using typical terrorist methods, such as hiding behind civilians and civilian quarters.

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Russian UNSC Resolution Calls for Humanitarian Ceasefire, Civilian Evacuation in Ukraine
(Updates with more details, background in paras 3-5)

UNITED NATIONS, March 15 (Sputnik) - A Russian UN Security Council resolution calls for a humanitarian ceasefire in Ukraine in order to enable the safe evacuation of civilians, a draft text of the resolution released on Tuesday said.

The draft text calls for a "negotiated ceasefire for enabling the rapid, safe, voluntary and unhindered evacuation of all civilians" and underscores the need for the parties concerned to agree on "humanitarian pauses" to this end.

The resolution condemns all violations of international humanitarian law and human rights, including the Geneva Conventions. It also demanded respect and protection for all medical and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical and related duties.

The UN Security Council has recently held a series of discussions about the ongoing situation in Ukraine, which began with the launching of Russia's special operation to demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine in defense of the breakaway Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics. A UN Security Council resolution could be needed to approve any agreement reached between Russia and Ukraine, the head of the Russian Foreign Ministry's international organizations department, Pyotr Ilyichev, told Sputnik on Monday.

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Russian Forces in Syria Can Disrupt NATO Operations in Middle East - CENTCOM Chief

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - Russia's military forces in Syria are in position to disrupt NATO operations in the Middle East and thwart the alliance's southern flank, US Central Command (CENTCOM) head Gen. Kenneth McKenzie said during a congressional hearing on Tuesday.

"From its Syrian footprints, the Russians are ideally placed to disrupt NATO operations in the Middle East and present a potential hedge against NATO's southern flank," McKenzie told the US House Appropriations Committee.

McKenzie cited as an example the seaport of Tartus, which is actively used by Russia for its activities in Syria and plans to invest \$500 million to develop the port.

The Syrian war has been going on since 2011, with different insurgent groups - including terrorist groups - fighting to topple the government of President Bashar Assad.

Russia became engaged in the war starting 2015 at the invitation of the Assad government and has since maintained a significant military presence in Syria.

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Fox News Says Cameraman Pierre Zakrzewski Killed in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - Fox News cameraman Pierre Zakrzewski has been killed outside the Ukrainian capital of Kiev, the news company said in a statement to its employees on Tuesday.

"It is with great sadness and a heavy heart that we share the news this morning regarding our beloved cameraman Pierre Zakrzewski," the statement said. "Pierre was killed in Horenka, outside of Kiev, Ukraine. Pierre was with Benjamin Hall yesterday newsgathering when their vehicle was struck by incoming fire,

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New US Defense Package for Ukraine Includes Anti-Air, Anti-Armor Capability - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - The new US defense package for Ukraine will include anti-air and anti-armor capabilities, tactical gear, small arms ammunition, medical supplies and intelligence support, Defense Department spokesperson Christopher Sherwood said on Tuesday.

"The \$6.5 billion budget includes operations mission support, the deployment of personnel, and intelligence support in the US European Command area of responsibility," Sherwood said. "Of the \$6.5 billion, \$3.5 billion is for replenishment of US stocks for equipment sent to Ukraine through drawdown."

Sherwood said although the types and quantities of specific equipment to Ukraine may vary, the Defense Department would consider anti-air capability, anti-armor capability, small arms and ammunition, tactical gear, meals-ready-to-eat and medical supplies.

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Canada Imposes Sanctions on 15 Senior Russian Officials – Global Affairs

(Adds details, background in paras 4-5)

TORONTO, March 15 (Sputnik) – Canada is introducing sanctions against 15 Russian government officials in response to Moscow's ongoing military operation in Ukraine, the country's foreign ministry announced on Tuesday.

"These new measures impose restrictions on 15 Russian officials who enabled and supported President [Vladimir] Putin's choice to invade a peaceful and sovereign country," Global Affairs Canada said in a statement.

The latest round of sanctions targets deputy commander in chief of the navy Vladimir Kasatonov, Minister of Economic Development Maxim Reshetnikov, Federal Guard Service Director Dmitry Kochnev, and Ministry of Defense spokesman Igor Konashenkov among others. The sanctions package is the fourth since the start of the military operation last month and brings the number of individuals targeted to nearly 500.

On February 24, 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. Several days into the operation, the Russian armed forces accused the Ukrainian military of using typical terrorist methods, such as hiding behind civilians and civilian quarters.

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US Congressmen Urge Meta to Resist 'Pro-Russian' Ads Run by Chinese Media - Letter

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - A group of six US lawmakers has urged Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg in a letter to take a tougher stand on China's state media in connection with the latter allegedly promoting a pro-Russian stance on the Ukraine crisis.

"Dear Mr. Zuckerberg, We write to you with deep concern regarding advertisements run by Chinese-based organizations and broadcasters amplifying pro-Russian talking points about Russia's invasion of Ukraine proliferating on Facebook," the letter, published by Rep. Young Kim, said.

As an example, the appeal cites Chinese publications spreading "false reports" on Facebook that Russia's objective in Ukraine is American biological laboratories.

"This is emblematic of a larger push by Chinese Communist Party-directed propaganda operations to influence global dialogue and policy on Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and must be met with a strong, coordinated public-private response," the letter said. The lawmakers urged the company to answer their questions by March 31. They hope to find out what steps Meta is taking to prevent the spread of Russian "disinformation" through non-Russian accounts, and whether the company will expand its measures that ban state media from buying ads worldwide. The lawmakers also want to know how much Chinese broadcasters have spent on advertising and whom it is targeting.

On February 24, Russia launched an operation in Ukraine after the breakaway Donbas republics appealed for help in defending themselves against Ukrainian troops. The Russian Defense Ministry said the special operation is targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure only. Several days into the operation, the Russian armed forces said the Ukrainian military were using typical terrorist methods, such as hiding behind civilians and civilian quarters.

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US Targets Lukashenko's Wife in New Russia, Belarus Sanctions - Treasury

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Russia Will Propose to UNSC Own Draft Humanitarian Resolution on Ukraine - Nebenzia

WASHINGTON, March 15 (Sputnik) - Russia will propose to the UN Security Council its own draft humanitarian resolution on Ukraine, Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Tuesday.

"We will put forward our own draft, which is humanitarian," Nebenzia said. The document will call for a ceasefire to be reached through negotiations, he added.

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Ceasefire Possible After Demilitarization, Denazification of Ukraine - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, March 15 (Sputnik) - A ceasefire in Ukraine is possible when Russia's demands, including demilitarization and denazification, are fulfilled, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said on Tuesday.

"The ceasefire will take place when conditions that were put forward by Russia are implemented and they are very well-known," Nebenzia said. "Demilitarization of Ukraine, denazification of Ukraine, no threat which would come from that territory, that country to Russia, no joining NATO ... The goal of Ukraine joining NATO is in the Ukrainian constitution so it should be dropped from there first and foremost."