

**6/7/22 Tuesday**

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Photo: Taiwanese F-16 Fighter Crash-Lands at Hawaii Airport in Ninth Crash in 2 Years

A Taiwanese F-16 fighter jet returning to the autonomous island from training in the United States crash-landed at a Hawaii airport on Monday. It was just the latest such incident to plague the self-styled Republic of China Air Force.

The Taiwanese government has made no official comment as of yet, but a source in the Defense Ministry told [Taiwan's Central News Agency](#) that an F-16A fighter had suffered a landing gear malfunction while returning from training in Arizona and requested to land in Hawaii.

Local Hawaiian news outlets quickly circulated footage of the aircraft, which made a “hard landing” at Daniel K. Inouye International Airport in the state capital of Honolulu. Photos show its nose gear collapsed, and the aircraft’s nose and engine air intake duct resting on the tarmac. Hawaiian military officials were similarly shy about the details, but the [Honolulu Star-Advertiser](#) was able to reasonably confirm that it wasn’t a US aircraft. The Hawaii Department of Transportation told the paper the crash would cause some minor issues for travelers.

“With the distance that the planes have to travel to get back to the gates, it could cause some delays,” HDOT spokesperson Jai Cunningham told the paper. “Nothing major, but it could cause a little bit of delays because it’s a pretty good drive to get back from out there.”

A military source told CNA the jet was one of 10 F-16A/Bs currently [deployed to Luke Air Force Base](#) in Phoenix, Arizona, for a training mission. The jets come from the earliest model of F-16, which the US agreed to sell to Taiwan in the 1990s after the Pentagon adopted a more updated model. Now, the US is helping Taipei to retrofit all 141 of its F-16A/B fighters into equivalents of the F-16V “Viper,” the latest model of the jet that sports advanced avionics, including a new radar, and electronic warfare systems.

The US formally ended relations with Taiwan in 1979 when it switched recognition of the Chinese government from the ROC in Taipei to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in Beijing; however, it has continued to funnel support to Taipei ever since, in order to stop the autonomous island from reuniting with the Chinese mainland and becoming a part of the PRC. Their relationship has [grown closer in recent years](#) as Washington has shifted toward seeing China as its primary adversary, accusing Beijing of seeking to upend the “rules-based international order” by surreptitious means.

Taiwan has also [regularly roused its fighter jets](#) in response to what it claims are incursions of its air defense identification zone by Chinese aircraft. The zone, which has no basis in international law, extends across a large stretch of sea and even the Chinese mainland, and Chinese flights through it are often incorrectly reported in the Western press as violations of Taiwanese airspace. The escort missions have clearly taken their toll, as Taiwanese military aircraft have crashed with increasing frequency over the last three years.

Since 2020, Taiwan has been forced at various times to ground all of its [F-5E Tiger II](#) fighters, [AT-3 trainer](#) aircraft, [F-16V Vipers](#) and [Dassault Mirage 2000](#) strike aircraft due to crashes.

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## US Environmental Groups Sue EPA for Ignoring Own Smog Reduction Regulations

A pair of environmental groups have brought a lawsuit against the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), accusing it of ignoring its own deadlines regarding enforcing harsher restrictions on smog in several US urban areas.

According to [the suit, filed Tuesday](#) in the US District Court for the Northern District of California, in 2017 the EPA [singled out 15 US states](#) and the District of Columbia for not submitting plans to bring their smog emissions into compliance with new EPA regulations. The agency gave them until March 2019 before it would begin enforcement, but in several locations never did so, the lawsuit claims.

Among those areas named in the suit as not being held to new EPA smog regulations are Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties and the [Sacramento metro area](#) in California, as well as the state of New Hampshire.

“The EPA is simply not doing its job to protect people and the environment from dangerous smog pollution,” Camilla Getz, a law fellow at the Center for Biological Diversity, one of the groups that brought the suit, [said in a news release](#).

“Regulators can’t turn their backs on the reality that smog pollution is a driver of catastrophic global warming and the loss of biodiversity, two of the greatest threats to human health and life on Earth as we know it,” she added.

“Beyond the damage caused to the health of people living in areas with unsafe ozone levels there are also national and even global impacts,” Kaya Allan Sugerman, illegal toxics threats director at the Center for Environmental Health, the other plaintiff, said in the release.

“Unfortunately litigation is sometimes necessary to spur the EPA to take action to ensure we have clean, safe air.”

Smog is an informal name for serious air pollution composed of nitrogen oxides, sulfur oxide, and ozone, among other chemicals, which can cause serious health problems. At its worst, [so-called “pea soup” smog](#) like that seen in London, England, before the 1960s, killed more than 10,000 people in four days via asphyxiation. Many of the same chemicals also play a role in global warming.

Emissions of chemicals like ozone began being comprehensively controlled following the 1963 Clean Air Act and the creation of the EPA seven years later. The EPA’s 2015 rule change slightly reduced the allowable ozone in a metropolitan area from 75 parts per billion to 70 parts per billion.

However, after Donald Trump became president in January 2017, progress on implementation stalled, and 15 states and Washington, DC, [sued the EPA for reversing](#) its plans after Trump said the new regulations would inhibit economic growth. The EPA made many such reversals during Trump’s four years in office, [reducing regulations](#) on a variety of emissions, including

mercury [and methane](#). Shortly after US President Joe Biden took office in January 2021, many of [those changes were reversed](#) and the stringent rules returned.

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'We Need the Iron Dome' Urges Ukraine's Envoy to Israel, But Kiev Unlikely to Get Air Defense System

While eager to export some weapons, such as drones and Spike missiles, Israel has been extremely protective of its Iron Dome air defense system, which has single-handedly enabled Israel to politically survive thousands of rockets fired by Gaza militants in response to Israel's bombing campaigns.

Speaking to reporters in Tel Aviv on Tuesday, Yevgen Korniychuk, Ukraine's ambassador to Israel, urged Jerusalem to give Ukraine some of its Iron Dome air defense systems.

"We need the military-technical support, we need the Iron Dome," he said. "That will allow us to save our civilian women and children from the shelling of the Russian missiles."

Korniychuk said he was sure Washington wouldn't stand in the way of the arms transfer, and criticized Israel for its failure to provide Ukraine with military assistance.

"I want the Israeli government to move away from its comfort zone and get back to reality," he added.

"We are not begging you for help," he said, according to the [Jerusalem Post](#). "We do believe that on the moral side, Israel has to take the part of the rest of the Western world and help Ukraine with all possible means."

Despite a personal appearance in the Knesset by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, and the Western capitalization on his Jewish ethnicity to parry criticism of Western support for the Azov Regiment and other neo-Nazi units in Ukraine's military, Israel has so far provided little help to Kiev since Russia's special operation began in February.

Israel's first and only defensive aid was announced last month and came in the form of 2,000 helmets and 500 flak jackets intended for civilian emergency workers; it has also sent some 100 tons of humanitarian aid and operated a field hospital for several weeks in western Ukraine, the [Times of Israel noted](#).

Last week, Jerusalem blocked a US request for Germany to be allowed to send Spike anti-tank missiles to Ukraine, which are built in Europe under license. According to Israeli military officials [who spoke with Axios](#), the issue was not discussed when Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz held meetings with Pentagon leaders in Washington the week prior.

Jerusalem sending its Iron Dome air defense system, which is designed to shoot down incoming rockets fired from Gaza and Lebanon, is even less likely. Israel is extremely protective of the Iron Dome, [refusing to share its source code](#) even with the US Army. When Washington bought two Iron Dome batteries in 2020, Israeli engineers had to [come to the US and operate](#) the device, including integrating it with other US air defense systems.

In other words, Israeli engineers would most likely also have to go to Ukraine and operate the systems themselves, creating an awkward situation in which Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers and Russian soldiers could find themselves shooting at each other.

The Iron Dome launcher system is built by Rafael and its radar by Elbit Systems, both Israeli defense contractors. In Israel, several launchers are networked to a single command center wirelessly, and each launcher contains 20 Tamir interceptors, which destroy their targets via kinetic impact. [According to the IDF](#), each Iron Dome battery is capable of protecting an urban area of approximately 150 square kilometers.

Ukraine has also been supplied with air defense systems by Eastern European NATO allies like Slovakia, who [shipped Kiev some Soviet-era](#) systems still in their inventories. Germany is also [rumored to be considering](#) sending its modern IRIS-T surface-to-air missile system to Ukraine.

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### Cosmologists Draw Up Plans to Find Gravitational Waves From Universe's Early Expansion

Although German physicist Albert Einstein initially theorized the existence of gravitational waves in his general theory of relativity in 1916, he later rejected his own ideas and dismissed the possibility they could exist. The elusive waves were only observed for the first time in 2015. According to a [new paper published](#) in the Astrophysical Journal, researchers believe they have found a new way to pierce through telescope signal contamination and nearly double the amount of data that can be collected about elusive Cosmological Gravitational Waves (CGWs). The research is the product of a collaboration between the International School for Advanced Studies (SISSA) in Trieste, Italy, and [POLARBEAR, a mission](#) to study Cosmic Microwave Background polarization at the University of California, Berkeley.

"According to the current understanding in Cosmology, just after the Big Bang, the Universe was very small, dense and hot. In 10-35 seconds, it stretched by a factor of 1030," Carlo Baccigalupi, coordinator of the Astrophysics & Cosmology group at SISSA, explained in [a Monday news release](#).

"This process, known as Inflation, produced Cosmological Gravitational Waves (CGW) that can be detected through the polarization of the Cosmic Microwave Background (CMB), the leftover radiation from the Big Bang. The POLARBEAR experiment, which SISSA is part of, looks for such signals using the Huan Tran Telescope in the Atacama Desert of northern Chile in the Antofagasta Region," he said.

In other words, scientists are looking for remnant information leftover from the early moments of the universe, which is still detectable because of the universe's steady expansion since then. The researchers figured out that by applying a new correction algorithm to data collected by the observatory, they could remove much of the signal contamination caused by galactic gas.

"They are very difficult to measure, in particular, because of the contamination of the signal due to the emissions of the diffuse Galactic gas. This must be removed with exquisite accuracy to isolate the unique contribution of CGWs," explained Nicoletta Krachmalnicoff, researcher at SISSA, and Davide Poletti, previously at the same institute, in the release.

Cosmic microwave background radiation, another signal remnant from the birth of the universe roughly 13.8 billion years ago, has been known since it was accidentally discovered in 1965 by scientists who blocked out all Earth-made radio waves and pointed their receivers to the skies. [Gravitational waves](#), however, have proven a good deal more elusive, not being directly observed until 2015, when [two black holes collided](#) and merged. Thus, those waves left over from the birth of the universe, when all matter exploded outward from a collapsed ball and the laws of physics applied to matter for the first time, are all the harder to spot.

"All these efforts will lead to the ultimate measurement of CGWs, revealing at the same time most important clues about the Dark Energy and Matter cosmological components," Baccigalupi said. "Through the main mission of SISSA as a Ph.D. school, training students to become young researchers, our Institute is and will be contributing significantly to the main contemporary challenges for Physics, as the present one, targeting Gravitational Waves from a tiny fraction of a second after the Big Bang."

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Brad Pitt Says Ex-Wife Angelina Jolie is Seeking to 'Inflict Harm' by Selling Share of Vineyard  
By - Mary Manley

The winery is located in southern France in the village of Correns. Angeline Jolie and Brad Pitt were married on August 23, 2014, in Correns after purchasing the vineyard in 2008 for \$28.4 million. The two later called it quits in September 2016. Pitt initially sued Jolie when she sold her share of Château Miraval Winery in February.

According to Pitt and his lawyers, the couple had an agreement that neither of them would sell their share of [Château Miraval](#) without first obtaining the approval of the other party. Now, according to court documents filed in Los Angeles Superior Court, Pitt is suing his ex-wife for selling her share of the business to Yuri Shefler, a British billionaire businessman.

Shefler owns the alcoholic beverage company Stoli Group, whose wine division Tenute del Mondo bought Jolie's 50% stake in the vineyard after contentious legal proceedings that kept Jolie from being able to do so.

"Jolie consummated the purported sale without Pitt's knowledge, denying Pitt the consent right she owed him and the right of first refusal her business entity owed his," the suit [reads](#).

"She sold her interest with the knowledge and intention that Shefler and his affiliates would seek to control the business to which Pitt had devoted himself and to undermine Pitt's investment in Miraval."

"Jolie seeks to recover unearned windfall profits for herself while inflicting gratuitous harm on Pitt. Jolie long ago stopped contributing to Miraval — while Pitt poured money and sweat equity into the wine business. Jolie seeks to seize profits she has not earned and returns on an investment she did not make," the suit added.

The suit also claims that Pitt poured in roughly 70% of the couple's investment into Miraval. After filing for divorce just two years into their marriage, Jolie requested sole physical custody of the couple's six children. That decision could have something to do with the fact that Jolie

allegedly [sued the FBI](#) under a pseudonym for information related to a domestic abuse incident that occurred on one of their private jets in 2016, just days before she filed for a divorce.

The drama between the couple continues even after Pitt finally received joint custody of his and Jolie's six children: Maddox, Pax, Zahara, Shilo, and twins Vivienne and Knox in May of 2021.

Jolie sold her share of the Château because she wanted to avoid becoming a "disregarded business partner with her ex-husband," according to one of her lawyers who the [Wall Street Journal](#) cited. Jolie's lawyer argues that after two years of a back-and-forth battle to reach a buyout agreement with Pitt, Jolie's attorneys began looking for a third party purchaser.

Jolie said she had purchased Miraval together with Pitt as a "family business" and envisioned the mansion and its vineyard as the place where they "would grow old together," according to a January 2021 suit.

But Jolie says she could "no longer maintain any ownership position in an alcohol-based business given her personal objections," perhaps alluding to Pitt's rumored issues with substances, which was an alleged catalyst for the couple's divorce.

In a [2017 GQ article](#), Pitt said, "I can't remember a day since I got out of college when I wasn't boozing or had a spliff or something."

"And I'm running from feelings," the actor added. "I stopped everything except boozing when I started my family. But even this last year [...] I was boozing too much. It's just become a problem. You either deny them all your life, or you answer them and evolve."

Pitt says the news of the purchase came as a surprise to him and that he had been planning to use the Château — a 35-room mansion which is located in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur— as his private home.

"The purported sale deprives Pitt of his right to enjoy his private home and to oversee the business he developed from scratch," the suit alleges. "Miraval's success and associated rise in value allowed Jolie an opportunity to capitalize on Pitt's success and cash out, without ever having lifted a finger to grow the enterprise."

Damia McKinney, the global chief of Stoli Group, said in a statement at the time of their deal with Jolie, "We are not aware of any issues related to our purchase of 50% of Miraval nor do we have any concerns."

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BoJo Continues Work Despite No-Confidence Vote - Cartoon

By - Mary Manley

By the skin of his teeth, Boris Johnson beat back a vote of no confidence, effectively receiving a rebuke from his fellow Conservative as their party leader. Johnson won 211 to 148, scraping by the 180 votes he needed to hold onto office.

[The vote](#) is a major red flag for the UK's 57 year-old prime minister, who has also been raked over the coals for partying at Downing Street during COVID-19 lockdowns. He also faces an uphill battle in tackling unwavering inflation that has Britons fearing a recession. Despite helping his party win a landslide victory in 2019, Johnson's current credibility is clearly slipping.

Johnson's polling numbers are faltering too, with 54% of Britons saying that Johnson is unfit to be in office. The PM was booed by some members of the public during a jubilee service on Friday at St. Paul's Cathedral, and allied Europe and the United States have picked up the scent of BoJo's crashing popularity.

BoJo doesn't see it that way, however, and has labeled the tallied vote as "a golden chance" to "end the media's favorite obsession" with the intoxicated bashes thrown at his home and office at Downing Street. He surmised the vote as a "decisive" decision that would allow the Tories to "move on" and focus on the "stuff" that is most important to Brits.

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Will Los Angeles Have a Billionaire Mayor as San Francisco Boots Liberal District Attorney?  
By - Mary Manley

As liberal San Franciscans powered by conservative donors begin a recall campaign against their district attorney Chesa Boudin due to the impression that he's too soft on crime, which they believe has risen since his time in office, another blue city in California is also preparing to elect a billionaire business tycoon to be their next mayor.

In a city that is famously liberal, the tides may be turning red as residents in San Francisco are fed up with crime they believe is being neglected. But even though the COVID-19 pandemic may be the actual culprit for the spike in [violent crime](#)— with overall crime rates actually dropping since Boudin took office— San Franciscans are looking to their political leaders to make a change.

Watching Boudin's career tank, whether just or unjust, has given conservatives in other major cities fuel to criticize what has become a "liberal" way to deal with crime in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, which sought to defund the police and reform the criminal justice system.

Riding on the coattails of liberal backlash is another city in California. In [Los Angeles](#), which is also a famously progressive city, unrelenting crime and homelessness are motivating residents to back Rick Caruso, 63, a billionaire businessman who has spent a majority of his adult life as a Republican before switching to the Democratic party just weeks before the mayoral race deadline.

Caruso has been endorsed by Elon Musk, who donated more than 34\$ million to his campaign. He's also been building a cache of political clout while hiring one of the state's top Democratic consulting firms. The mega billionaire is running a political campaign that promises to "clean up LA" and to be "a doer... not just a talker" when it comes to crime and homelessness in the city. For some, Caruso offers a faint glimmer of hope in a city that struggles to keep housing costs, gas costs, and crime rates down. As for the city's more "loyal" liberals, the mogul's Republican past doesn't appear to add up.

"That is not the sort of mayor that a heavily Democratic city like Los Angeles deserves to have," said Garry South, a Los Angeles Democratic consultant. "If you look at his background, he doesn't reflect the heavily Democratic values that voters in Los Angeles support."

Caruso is tied with Democratic Representative Karen Bass, who has been a social worker, and political activist, and has served as the U.S. representative for California's 37th congressional district since 2011. She is also the first African American woman in U.S. history to serve as a speaker of a state legislative body.

Bass and her team have called Caruso a "fraud" and equated him to former President Donald Trump, who changed political parties at least five times since the late '80s and, like Caruso, is a real estate developer who has an excessive amount of money to play with. Others have accused Caruso of alarmism, considering the fact that crime in the area is nowhere near the high numbers the city experienced in the 1990s. However, voters say that this year, public safety is their top priority.

Boudin, like Bass' allies, has also accused his opponents of fear-mongering. And while some Asian Americans in San Francisco who wish to recall him have legitimate fears for public safety— an increase in anti-Asian hate crime which increased by 567% following the COVID-19 pandemic— he may be right, considering that overall crime dropped since his time in office. "People read the story, they see the video, and they perceive crime as being out of control," [Boudin](#) said. "When in fact things like shoplifting are down dramatically. It doesn't mean we don't have a real problem with auto burglaries, but the notion that it's out of control today and it wasn't in 2019 is just demonstrably false."

Caruso has also promised to declare a state of emergency on homelessness if elected mayor. He believes that by doing so he will be able to bypass the city council on some affordable-housing decisions. Others are saying he wouldn't have the ability to do so considering that Los Angeles' bylaws are structured so the mayor and his council members must share their governing power 50/50.

"This is why the, 'I can do it myself, I'm the savior' trope is a little bit tired and dangerous," said Los Angeles City Councilmember Marqueece Harris-Dawson. "Those of us who are in the trenches doing the work, we know what the rules are, and we know what can and cannot be done."

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Supreme Court Asks Biden Administration if it Should Hear NSO Group WhatsApp Spying Case  
By - Ian DeMartino

WhatsApp is a subsidiary of Meta\*. It is a messaging app that includes security and privacy as some of its main selling points.

The Supreme Court has asked the Biden administration to weigh in on if the court should hear a case involving WhatsApp and Israel's NSO Group.

The court asked the Justice Department to give an overview of what it thinks about the case on Monday.

In October 2019, WhatsApp sued NSO group for allegedly accessing their servers six months earlier without permission. They then allegedly installed their Pegasus spyware on over 1,400 users' phones, including journalists, human rights activists and dissidents.

NSO Group argues that it is immune to lawsuits because it was acting as an agent for unidentified foreign governments. They said their actions should fall under "conduct-based immunity," a common-law doctrine that protects foreign officials acting in their official capacity. The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals denied their claim, calling it an "easy case" because NSO licensing and offering technical support for Pegasus violates a federal law called the "Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act," which the court says takes precedence over the common law. Pegasus software can be installed covertly on mobile phones, including most versions of iOS and Android. It was the first piece of spyware known to use jailbreaking to install itself without physical access to the device. Jailbreaking is a process that unlocks the software on phones and other electronic devices. It [was discovered](#) in August 2016 after human rights activist Ahmed Mansoor received a text message promising leaks about torture happening in the United Arab Emirates. Instead of clicking the link, he sent it to Citizen Lab of the University of Toronto, who discovered the spyware and its links to NSO Group.

The spyware is capable of reading all communications from the phone, as well as wifi passwords and other sensitive information. It has been used by the governments of dozens of countries, including Uganda, which [used it to spy on diplomats](#) and employees of the US embassy in Uganda last year.

It was also used in Spain to spy on Spanish government officials, leading to an investigation. On Tuesday, the high court of Spain asked the CEO of NSO Group to testify for the investigation. NSO Group has not indicated if they will respond to the request.

NSO Group claims that the Pegasus software is used by governments to catch criminals and protect national security.

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Uvalde Teacher Who Survived the Attack Says He Will 'Never Forgive' Law Enforcement  
By - Ian DeMartino

On May 24, a gunman entered Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas, and killed 19 children and two teachers. The attack came shortly after another mass shooting in Buffalo, New York, left ten people dead. Both attacks were carried out using AR-15 style rifles.

A fourth grade teacher who survived the tragic mass shooting at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas, after being shot twice says he will never [forgive law enforcement](#) for their inaction during the rampage.

Arnulfo Reyes told the eleven students in his classroom to get under their desks and pretend to sleep after they heard gunshots outside their classroom door. Moments later, Salvador Ramos, 18, appeared in the doorway and shot Reyes twice, with one bullet hitting his arm and lung and another hitting his back. Ramos then turned his AR-15 rifle on the students, eventually killing 19 children and two teachers. Reyes says none of the children in his classroom survived.

Meanwhile, police officers waited in the hallway, asking for more backup and protective equipment like body armor.

"After everything, I get more angry because ... I had nothing" to protect himself, like the body armor police were reportedly waiting on before engaging the gunman, Reyes told Amy Robach on Good Morning America on Tuesday.

"You're supposed to protect and serve. ... There is no excuse for their actions. And I will never forgive them," Reyes added.

During the rampage, at least two students called 911, asking in vain for help from law enforcement. Reyes says that other students were asking for help from the officers through the door.

"One of the students from the next-door classroom was saying, 'Officer, we're in here. We're in here,'" Reyes described. "But they had already left."

Texas DPS Director Col. Steven McCraw would later say that the order to wait to engage the shooter was "the wrong decision."

That order has been traced back to Police Chief Pedro "Pete" Arredondo, who has been the subject of intense criticism as more details have come to light. Arredondo completed active shooter training [in December](#).

Arredondo has been avoiding public view since the shooting. He was recently elected to city council on May 7. His swearing-in ceremony was supposed to be a public event, but instead, the city council canceled the event and held a private ceremony on May 31.

Last week, the Texas Department of Public Safety accused Arredondo of not cooperating with the investigation into the shooting, an accusation that Arredondo briefly broke his silence to refute.

According to the Texas Tribune, city officials have also been less than forthcoming with the public. [The doors](#) to City Hall have been locked during business hours. And they seem to be, despite complaints from the public, supporting Arredondo.

A special meeting held on Friday included an agenda item to remove Arredondo from his new post on the City Council, but the board decided against it.

Arredondo was scheduled to appear at his first City Council meeting on Tuesday but [no-showed the event](#). The meeting went on without him.

In April, as a candidate, Arredondo pledged to provide transparency to the position.

"I guess to me, nothing's complicated, everything has a solution," he said in April, "and that solution starts with communication."

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Crab-like Creatures Discovered 1,600 Feet Below Antarctic Ice

By - Ian DeMartino

Antarctic ice sheets are melting at an alarming rate. A 2016 study estimated that in a worst case scenario, nearly all of the West Antarctic ice sheet could melt within 500 years and by 2100, the ocean levels may rise by 2.5 feet.

A group of New Zealand researchers [has discovered](#) a new species of crab-like creatures living 1,600 feet below the surface of Antarctica. The scientists were there to study the impact climate change is having on the freshwater river that sits hundreds of kilometers from the Ross Ice Shelf and far below the surface.

Professor and National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) Physical Oceanographer, Craig Stevens called the discovery a big surprise. The researchers were drilling through the ice into the river when the small amphipods were captured on camera.

“For a while, we thought something was wrong with the camera but when the focus improved, we noticed a swarm of arthropods around 5mm in size,” Stevens said. ““We were jumping up and down because having all those animals swimming around our equipment means that there's clearly an important ecosystem there.”

The creatures are in the same family as lobsters, crabs and mites and share a common ancestor with the more familiar species. The estuary was first discovered by project lead Huw Horgan, who noticed a groove in the arctic ice while looking at satellite images of the area. That groove suggested to him that there was an estuary under the ice but he didn't expect what the research team found. Horgan said it was “like being the first to enter a hidden world.”

The team left instruments under the ice to continue observations for years. “This will tell us about the water flow, temperature and pressure at two-minute intervals so we can get a good picture of how the river behaves and how it interacts with the ocean and ice sheet,” Horgan stated.

Antarctica is one of the least studied landmasses on the planet, due largely to its inhospitable environment. Climate change has thawed much of the ice, giving scientists an opportunity to find out what secrets lie beneath it.

Both the amphipods and samples of the water have been gathered so scientists can examine them further. But discoveries like these may not be worth the cost of climate change. The continent's ice sheets, which are breaking apart at an alarming rate, have a significant impact on global sea levels.

“We care about this because the loss of land-based ice is now the largest single contribution to sea-level rise. While some ice shelves are melting rapidly,” Professor and NIWA marine physicist Craig Stevens said, “others such as the Ross Ice Shelf are close to equilibrium. Understanding these differences is key to predicting how the ice sheet will evolve in the future.” The research team also observed the effects of the Tongan underwater volcano. When it erupted, the team saw a significant change in pressure as the tsunami made its way through the ice cavity.

“Seeing the effect of the Tongan volcano, which erupted thousands of kilometers away, was quite remarkable,” Stevens said.

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Gas Prices Hit Another New High, Thirteen States at or Over \$5/Gallon  
By - Ian DeMartino

Gas prices have been rising since the start of the year. Households are now expected to spend an average of \$5,000 on gasoline this year, up from \$2,800 a year ago, according to CNBC. Gas prices have hit yet another new high. The national average is nearing \$5, [sitting at \\$4.919](#) as of Tuesday, more than five cents higher than it was just one day earlier.

The national average is up \$0.30 from a week ago, \$0.62 from a month ago and \$1.87 from a year ago. Diesel, primarily used for shipping goods and food, is also at a record high, sitting at \$5.684 nationally.

Memorial Day weekend travel has been cited by AAA as a major contributing factor to rising prices this week. Oil prices also continue to rise, sitting at \$117.5 at the time of this writing. "People are still fueling up, despite these high prices," Andrew Gross, AAA spokesperson said in a statement. "At some point, drivers may change their daily driving habits or lifestyle due to these high prices, but we are not there yet."

California has the highest gas prices in the country, sitting at \$6.37. That is far above the second highest state, Nevada, which sits at \$5.52. Hawaii is third with an average gas price of \$5.48 per gallon.

The other states currently at or over \$5 a gallon include Oregon (\$5.46), Washington (\$5.46), Illinois (\$5.45), Alaska (\$5.42), Michigan (\$5.17), Arizona (\$5.16), Indiana (\$5.15), Maine (\$5.00), Massachusetts (\$5.00), and New Jersey (\$5.00)

Washington, DC is also over \$5, sitting at \$5.14.

OPEC+ announced that it will be increasing production to 648,000 barrels of oil in July and August, but that is unlikely to decrease prices much as the market prepares for the European Union's sanctions on Russian oil set to be implemented over the course of the year.

Even the cheapest states in the country have a price per gallon of over \$4.00. The cheapest gas in the country can be purchased in Georgia, where the average price sits at \$4.33. That is higher than even California was just one year ago.

President Biden has taken measures in an attempt to lower prices. In March, he authorized the release of 180 million barrels of oil from the strategic reserve. He has also publicly attacked oil and gas companies for padding their profits. However, these attempts only had a temporary effect, if at all.

On Tuesday, White House Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo [admitted that](#) there is little the White House can do to tackle gas prices.

According to [recent polling](#), the price of gas could hurt Democrats come November.

Seventy-four percent of voters say that gas prices will be a major deciding factor when they head to the polls. Only 27% of those polled said they approve of Biden's handling of gas prices.

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Biden Advisers Secretly Travel to Saudi Arabia in Effort to Lobby For More Oil – Report  
By - Wyatt Reed

The US government's ongoing pressure campaign for more Saudi oil seems unlikely to meet with success, with the Gulf state's foreign minister saying yesterday "the kingdom has done what it can" in terms of production.

US officials are currently on a secret mission to Saudi Arabia aimed at pushing the Gulf state to increase oil production and normalize relations with Israel, according to [a report](#) published Wednesday. Citing "three current and former U.S. officials," Axios says White House Middle East coordinator Brett McGurk and State Department energy envoy Amos Hochstein touched down Tuesday.

The news that two senior Biden advisers have reportedly been dispatched to Riyadh comes the same day that Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm [described US President Joe Biden](#) as "obsessed with the fact that gas prices are so high."

But with Biden looking for relief at the pump for US consumers ahead of November's midterm elections, it seems the Saudis aren't too keen to help.

"The kingdom has done what it can," Saudi Prince Faisal bin Farhan told the World Economic Forum at Davos on Tuesday. "As far as we are aware, there is no shortfall of oil."

The country has so far ignored repeated calls to ramp up production to cushion the largely self-inflicted impacts of anti-Russian sanctions on energy markets in the West. Instead, in an interview published Tuesday, Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman told the Financial Times that Saudi Arabia expects "to work out an agreement with Opec+," which, he noted, "includes Russia."

Abdulaziz went on to suggest that politics should be kept separate from Opec+, and that the "world should appreciate the value" of the energy alliance.

"This situation needs people to sit together, focus, take out the masquerade and the so-called political correctness . . . it's about trying to relate to existing reality and find remedies to it."

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DHS Sec. Tells Immigrants 'Do Not Come to the Border' After US Streamlines Process For Ukrainians

By - Wyatt Reed

Immigrants from Latin America have reacted with disgust as they're forced to endure dangerous refugee camp conditions while 100,000 Ukrainians get to jump to the front of the line under Biden's so-called "Uniting for Ukraine" plan.

US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas commanded potential immigrants abroad not to come to the US in a video posted to Twitter Tuesday.

"Do not come to the border," Mayorkas demanded in the footage. "Families encountered will continue to be expelled... under Title 42."

But not all families are created equal—at least according to the DHS. In March, Mayorkas issued a memo which, [according to CBS News](#), "is designed to remind Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers that their power to exempt certain migrants from Title 42... applies to Ukrainians seeking U.S. refuge."

Since the establishment of the pandemic-related clause in 2020, Title 42 has reportedly been invoked to deport nearly 1.8 million immigrants—the vast majority of them from Latin American nations.

In late April, US President Joe Biden announced a “humanitarian parole program” known as “Uniting for Ukraine,” which his administration said will “provide an expedient channel for secure legal migration from Europe to the United States for Ukrainians who have a U.S. sponsor.” The DHS described the “streamlined process” accorded to the privileged potential immigrants as the fulfillment of “President Biden’s commitment to welcome up to 100,000 Ukrainians.” Secretary Mayorkas has denied there’s a double standard in the US treatment of asylum-seekers and refugees, but immigrant rights activists have reacted with outrage after reportedly watching thousands of Ukrainians cross the border in just days, with few apparent hurdles.

“We have rights as migrants to cross the border just like the Ukrainians,” said one demonstrator at an April 29th protest held outside the US consulate in Tijuana [denouncing](#) the discriminatory policy.

“We’ve seen people from other countries given access, but it’s not fair we can’t get in,” another protester explained to Border Report.

When the selective easing of Title 42 restrictions for Ukrainians was announced in March, the associate director of the immigration advocacy group Human Rights First expressed [similar indignation](#):

“Where were the exemptions for Haitian asylum-seekers arriving last fall? Where are those exemptions... for asylum-seekers from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras?”

With no end in sight as Biden signs off on another \$40 Billion in mostly military aid to Ukraine, it seems everyone from the Palestinians shot dead for demanding a state of their own to American mothers [relying on GoFundMe](#) to feed their infants will be forced to continue asking similar questions.

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Israel ‘Deliberately Murdered’ Journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh, Palestinian Probe Reportedly Finds  
By - Wyatt Reed

An investigation by the Palestinian Authority is the latest to confirm what many observers have insisted for weeks: Israeli forces intentionally targeted journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh, which constitutes a war crime under international law.

Palestinian Authority officials announced Thursday that they’ve established that Israeli forces ‘deliberately murdered’ acclaimed Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh when she attempted to seek cover from Israeli fire. The news came following a two-week investigation into the grisly killing of the Al-Jazeera reporter, who died after being shot while covering an Israeli raid on a Palestinian refugee camp on May 11th.

Highlighting the PA’s official findings Thursday, Palestinian Attorney General Akram Al-Khatib explained that Israeli forces fatally shot Abu Aqleh in the head with a 5.56 mm armor-piercing

bullet. Al-Khatib [cited the presence](#) of an iron fragment used in special armor-penetrating ammunition discovered during the autopsy of her body, which was carried out at the Forensic Medicine Institute of Al Najah University in Nablus.

Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz reacted with fury to the announcement, describing the investigation's findings as a "crude and blatant lie." Gantz later took to Twitter to insist "the Palestinians refuse to cooperate" before demanding Palestinian officials "hand over the bullet and [their] findings" to Israel. But, for the first time, Gantz conceded the Israelis would be "willing" to participate in an unspecified "investigation in collaboration with international actors." On May 19th, the Israeli army's Military Police Criminal Investigation Division declined to open an investigation into the killing—a decision which Israeli newspaper Haaretz [claimed stems in part](#) from "the belief that such an investigation, which would necessitate questioning as potential criminal suspects soldiers for their actions during a military operation, would provoke opposition and controversy within the IDF and in Israeli society in general."

After first insisting Abu Aqleh was killed by errant fire from armed Palestinian nationalists, Israeli authorities have since acknowledged the possibility that she was killed by Israeli Defense Forces.

Multiple independent investigations—including those carried out by CNN, the AP, and B'Tselem—have all suggested Israeli forces were behind the killing of Shireen Abu Aqleh. But Israel's Gantz has been similarly dismissive of their findings, seemingly accusing CNN of pushing "false assessments," and declaring that "any claim that the IDF intentionally harms journalists or uninvolved civilians is a blatant lie."

But it's almost impossible to conclude anything else, according to Palestinian officials.

"The only source of fire in that place came from the occupation forces with the intention to kill," Al-Khatib said Thursday. Likely speaking for the overwhelming majority of Palestinians, the Attorney General flatly declared that "this represents a war crime."

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Iran Condemns 'Blatant Piracy' As US Seizes Oil Tanker, Dealing Blow to Nuclear Deal Chances- Report  
By - Wyatt Reed

Washington's latest maritime seizure comes as US leaders impose more sanctions on Iran and are increasingly downplaying the possibility of a return to the JCPOA deal from which the US unilaterally withdrew in 2018.

The US has seized a shipment of Iranian oil being carried by a Russian-owned tanker, according to an article published Thursday by Reuters. A source at the Greek shipping ministry claimed that the oil was "transferred to another ship that was hired by the U.S." after the US Department of Justice "informed Greece that the cargo on the vessel is Iranian oil."

Neither US nor Greek authorities have commented on the matter publicly, but according to [ship-tracking services](#), the Greek-owned tanker Ice Energy has been stationed alongside the

Russian-owned Lana since Monday, and shipping journal Lloyd's List reports the former [initiated "a ship-to-ship transfer"](#) on Monday afternoon.

According to Reuters, a source within Dynacom—the company whose tanker the US reportedly chartered—confirmed that the "transfer of the oil was underway from the vessel to Dynacom's Ice Energy, which will then sail to the United States".

On Wednesday, Greece's Charge d'Affaires was reportedly summoned to the Iranian Foreign Ministry to account for the incident and convey Iran's outrage. The Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), an official Iranian outlet, [noted that](#) the Director of the Foreign Ministry's Mediterranean Department "told the Greek diplomat that the seizure of the ship is an example of international banditry" and condemned the "unacceptable" move to "surrender to US illegal pressures."

It's unclear whether Washington is invoking its unilateral anti-Iran sanctions or anti-Russia sanctions to justify its latest seizure of another country's energy exports. The ship in question, the Lana, was detained by Greek authorities acting on US orders in response to anti-Russia sanctions in April, but questions remain about the official US rationale, given the lack of official statement by those responsible and the timing of the newest raft of American sanctions.

On Thursday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said the latest anti-Iran sanctions, which target the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, demonstrate "ill will" on the part of the US. In an unprecedented move against the military of another country, the US branded the IRGC a "terrorist organization" in 2019, and has used the designation to justify its seizure of Iranian oil ever since.

The designation is considered to be the last major sticking point in indirect negotiations between Iran and the US over the restoration of the 2015 nuclear deal. On Wednesday, Robert Malley, the official US special envoy to Iran, [seemed to throw cold water](#) on the possibility of reaching a consensus with Iran, describing the odds of the agreement being revived as "tenuous at best."

The Lana was reportedly stranded in Greek waters after a rash of bad weather and a slew of technical issues left the tanker inoperable and it was forced to anchor at the Karistos port. However, Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization [reports that the ship and its crew](#) "received no help" from Greek authorities. On the contrary, "its cargo was discharged," which the IRNA noted Wednesday "is a blatant act of piracy."

The US has repeatedly leaned on its unilateral sanctions against adversarial governments to rationalize the seizure of their goods. In 2021, [the US seized](#) approximately 2 million barrels of Iranian oil from a ship off the coast of the United Arab Emirates, and the spoils were reportedly sold for a tidy sum of \$110 million—another considerable haul, especially when combined with the 1.16 million barrels the US took by force from Iran in 2020. Such actions have been repeatedly denounced as "piracy" by both international observers and the targeted nations. The seizures have done little to curb growing cooperation between Iran and Russia. Amid Washington's aggressive enforcement of sanctions against both states, the countries reportedly [signed three new cooperation agreements](#) on Wednesday, including a memorandum of understanding on "sharing technical know-how and knowledge-based cooperation in the area of petrochemical industries equipment." Per the IRNA, both Iranian Petroleum Minister Javad Owji and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak stressed the need for expansion of trade relations during their meeting.

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Latin American & Caribbean Leaders Condemn US For Excluding Nations From Summit of the Americas  
By - Wyatt Reed

At the ALBA-TCP conference, eight heads of state and high-ranking representatives urged greater cooperation within the Latin American and Caribbean community, and spoke out on behalf of the three countries shut out from the upcoming Summit of the Americas by the US government.

Latin American leaders participating in the 21st summit of ALBA-TCP (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America – Peoples' Trade Treaty) celebrated a growing regional unity and denounced the US for excluding leftist governments from the upcoming Summit of the Americas in a two-hour session which took place in Havana Friday.

ALBA-TCP is one of several regional bodies which many Latin nations are gravitating towards amid what speakers at Friday's event repeatedly denounced as the "exclusionary" policies of the US, which is hosting next month's Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles. As a result of the exclusions, over a dozen Latin American and Caribbean countries are considering skipping the event.

On Thursday, the US State Department's Coordinator for the Summit of Americas, Kevin O'Reilly, reportedly told journalists the Venezuelan government was "absolutely not" invited. As to the question of whether Nicaragua could attend, according to Reuters, O'Reilly responded "with a terse "No."

Such responses were undoubtedly fresh in the minds of the heads of state of Nicaragua and Venezuela as they delivered impassioned and lengthy addresses harshly criticizing the US. "There's no need to call it the summit of the Americas," explained Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega. "It's the summit of the empire."

"The empire thinks that there's still space for this type of summit, where the empire summons the countries of its backyard, subjects them to the Monroe Doctrine," Ortega continued. "Why does it summon them? To give them orders."

"They [the US] think this is the moment to establish the total hegemony of Yankee imperialism over the whole planet. Now we're not just talking about applying the Monroe Doctrine over" Latin America. "What we're talking about is converting the whole planet into the backyard of North American potencia. "

Referencing the US' stated intention of 'weakening' Russia, Ortega went on to link US efforts to control access to the upcoming Summit of Americas to broader US foreign policy.

"They want to subjugate the Russian Federation. They want to subjugate the PRC... [they're] thinking that the moment came for them to dominate the whole planet. And they haven't realized that that's no longer possible."

"In their craziness, we see that the US President and European leaders have turned into a bunch of Rambos. They're giving away bullets here, bullets there, guns here, guns there, imposing sanctions here, sanctions there... They're destroying their own countries. They're

destroying their own economies. They're destroying the lives of their own people, and threatening the entirety of humanity."

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro took a similarly defiant tone towards American efforts "to exclude from that meeting in Los Angeles—which calls itself the 'Summit of the Americas'—the peoples of Nicaragua, Cuba, and Venezuela." But Maduro largely seemed to emphasize the "enormous power" demonstrated by the burgeoning cooperation between Latin American and Caribbean nations, which, he said, is shown by the probable boycott of the Los Angeles summit. "We have seen solid and courageous voices, such as that of the president of Honduras, Xiomara Castro, that of our beloved president of Bolivia present here, [Luis] Arce, and that of governments from all over the continent, who... have been forceful and clear in condemning the exclusion of Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua," Maduro noted.

"And that should fill us with joy. It has been worth the entire struggle of several generations of Latin American and Caribbean people to raise the flag of dignity... New and better times are coming for us. New and better times are coming for the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean... Because our continent is respected. Because our people are respected."

The theme of Latin American and Caribbean cooperation was a frequent one among the day's speakers. Heads of state including Bolivia's Luis Arce, Dominican Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerit, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves, and Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel all praised the efforts to bring together the region's countries during the 21st ALBA summit.

But Dominica's Skerit noted that despite the emerging harmony among many of the region's players, "we are seeing a reversal of the advances we have made in the hemisphere... because of the attitude of Western powers and of course the United States." Denouncing the exclusion of Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba as "completely unacceptable," Skerit went on to question why the Organization of American States, the group which largely sponsors and organizes the Summit of the Americas, wasn't in charge of the invitations:

"We are part of an organization—or so I thought—and so it is for them to decide who can go or not," rather than the US.

Cuba's Diaz-Canel, who served as the Master of Ceremonies, opened and closed the event. After denouncing the "hegemonic and anti-democratic practices" of the US and calling for a change in "hemispheric relations" away from the US-led order, Diaz-Canel offered a fitting summary:

"Our America changed. Exclusions are no longer possible, the decision not to invite everyone is a historical setback. And all countries must be invited, on an equal footing. It is disrespectful and harmful to the sovereignty of nations, trying to decide from the privileged condition of host, who is represented. In the face of attempts at exclusion and selectivity, it is urgent to strengthen the authentic mechanisms of Latin American and Caribbean integration and coordination. United we will be able to effectively defend our sovereignty and self-determination without interference or external pressure."

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China and Samoa Ink New Bilateral Cooperation Agreements Amid Chinese Pacific Goodwill Tour  
By - Wyatt Reed

The Samoan Foreign Ministry celebrated growing ties between Beijing and Apia as China seeks to step up its engagement in the Pacific Islands region.

China and Samoa signed a new bilateral cooperation agreement aimed at strengthening economic, technical, and security cooperation between the two states, Samoan authorities announced Saturday.

The Samoan Foreign Ministry explained [in a statement](#) that “Samoa and the People’s Republic of China will continue to pursue greater collaboration that will deliver on joint interests and commitments, and address key priorities that are in line with Samoa’s Pathway for the Development of Samoa.”

The deal’s signing reportedly followed a meeting between Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and the Samoan Prime Minister which covered a range of “issues of mutual interest and concern, including key regional priorities such as climate change, the pandemic and peace and security.”

The statement by Samoa’s Foreign Ministry noted that “China is a key development partner for Samoa, providing infrastructural developments in the health, education and public administration sectors, human resource development, sports development and technical cooperation in the agriculture sector.”

Wang Yi’s visit to Samoa was the third stop on a lengthy goodwill tour of Pacific Islands nations which has been met with suspicion by Western regimes. On Thursday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken [labeled China](#) “the most serious long-term challenge to the international order” in a lengthy and contradictory address which the Chinese Foreign Ministry [slammed](#) Friday as an effort to “contain and suppress China’s development and maintain US hegemony and power.”

“As to the rules-based international order that the U.S. advocates, all people with insight can see through that they are nothing but the rules formulated by the U.S. and a few other countries with the aim at upholding the U.S.-dominant international order,” China’s foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin noted.

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Throw That Apple Away—World’s Oldest Man Says Glass of Liquor A Day Is Secret to Long Life  
By - Wyatt Reed

Venezuela’s Juan Vicente Perez Mora had the following advice for would-be centenarians on his 113th birthday: ‘work hard, rest on holidays, go to bed early, drink a glass of aguardiente every day, love God and always carry him in your heart.’

The world’s oldest man turned 113 on Friday, crediting his impressive vitality to a daily glass of aguardiente, or “fire water,” an inexpensive liquor that’s popular throughout Latin America. In

Venezuela, it's made from sugarcane, and Juan Vicente Perez Mora reportedly drinks a glass each day with his morning coffee.

His doctor reportedly [described Mora's condition](#) as "totally fine" aside from slightly elevated blood pressure and hearing issues, and said the aging Venezuelan doesn't take any medication. Family and friends say the world's oldest man is still completely lucid.

According to Guinness, Mora has 41 grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren, and 12 great-great-grandchildren. The record-keeping organization crowned Mora the world's oldest man [earlier this month](#), writing that he was "officially confirmed" as the oldest man alive since February 4th.

The ninth of ten children, the Venezuelan centenarian was born on May 27th, 1909 in the small mountain town of El Cobre, in the state of Táchira. Mora moved to the village of Los Pajuales in San José de Bolívar at a young age and would go on to spend most of his life farming there.

The aging Venezuelan reportedly also served as a sheriff for over a decade.

The nephew of the world's oldest man told Guinness, "My uncle Vicente transmits a lot of peace, tranquility and radiates a lot of joy. He is a person who has a lot to give. He enjoys the basics of life and is very grateful to God. His family is his support."

Iran Responds in Kind to Greek Seizure of Oil Tanker, Expert Says Nuclear Deal Chances 'Decreasing'

By - Wyatt Reed

As Iran retaliates to Greece's decision to 'rob' its oil shipment from a Russian tanker this week, Sputnik spoke with one Middle East analyst who says the chances of a positive outcome to negotiations over a nuclear deal restoration are growing increasingly slim.

The Iranian government seized two Greek tankers in the Persian Gulf, it announced Friday, in response to the seizure of around 700,000 barrels of Iranian oil by Greek authorities acting on behalf of the US this week.

Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization said Saturday that "two Greek ships have been impounded for now" and dismissed reports that the crews were detained, saying the ship's workers were "safe and sound" onboard their ships and "being protected in accordance with international laws and offered required services."

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh confirmed that "tanker crews are safe and in good health" and described the seizures as a response to a "deeply shortsighted miscalculation" in a statement Saturday which expressed hope that Greco-Iranian ties wouldn't be "hampered" by what he described as Greece's "highway robbery on the command" of the US.

Greece described Iran's moves to impound the Delta Poseidon and Prudent Warrior as "tantamount to piracy" in a Friday statement that did not mention Greece's seizure of around 700,000 barrels of Iranian oil from a Russian-owned tanker earlier in the week on behalf of the United States. The two Suezmax tankers confiscated by Iran were reportedly loaded with [nearly a million barrels each](#) and had recently departed from Iraq's Basra oil terminal.

"These tensions between Greece and Iran need to be seen within the context of the tense relationship between Washington and Tehran, especially considering the extent to which Greece's actions are assisting Washington's agenda against Iran," said Giorgio Cafiero, CEO of Gulf State Analytics, a Washington-based political risk consultancy.

Cafiero warned Sputnik News that “there is good reason to conclude that the chances of the JCPOA being revived are decreasing” as the back-and-forth tanker seizures “increase friction between the Islamic Republic and the West.”

Ultimately, “both Iran and Western countries are showing their willingness to resort to more coercive means to advance their interests, which undermines the potential for tensions to ease through some diplomatic breakthrough in Vienna,” Cafiero said.

Ties between the United States and Iran have been largely hostile since 1979, when the Iranian revolution overthrew the CIA-installed Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, but Iran and Greece have historic ties stretching back thousands of years.

Following Greece’s sovereign debt crisis, the Mediterranean nation leaned heavily on the Islamic Republic for energy when its European neighbors proved unwilling to assist. According to Reuters, “Greece relied on Iran for more than half of its oil imports during some months [in 2011] after traders and oil majors pulled the plug on supplies and banks refused to provide financing for fear that Athens would default on its debt.”

In 2016 Greece’s then-Prime Minister Alexis Tsipra was the first Western leader to travel to Iran following the signing of the nuclear deal, and he expressed hopes that his country would become the Islamic Republic’s economic bridge to Europe. However, ties between the states have largely soured since, especially under the administration of Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who sparked a diplomatic incident with his Iranian counterparts in 2020 by declaring Greece’s support for the US assassination of Qasem Soleimani.

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VIDEOS: Israelis Chant Racial Slogans, Clash With Palestinians in Muslim Quarter of Jerusalem

By - Wyatt Reed

Over a hundred Palestinians were injured Sunday as thousands of Israelis descended on the Palestinian areas of Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa mosque with the blessing of the Israeli government.

An estimated 70,000 Israeli nationalists rampaged through the Muslim Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem Sunday, chanting racist slogans and assaulting Palestinians, as Israeli security forces largely declined to intervene and reportedly detained dozens of Palestinians who protested or flew Palestinian flags.

At least 163 Palestinians were injured in the West Bank, the Palestinian Red Crescent reportedly said Sunday. Viral photos and videos from the annual Israeli ‘Flag march’ showed Israeli youth engaging in a variety of extremely provocative actions like kicking and pepper-spraying an elderly Palestinian woman.

Other footage showed Israelis screaming racist slogans like “death to Arabs” and “Mohammed is dead” and taunting Palestinian journalists over the killing of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh, who—according to a [number of independent investigations](#) – was intentionally murdered by Israeli security forces earlier this month.

More footage captured Israeli security forces looking on as Israeli men beat Palestinian women with batons and attempted to steal their bags.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh denounced the “attacks on Palestinian citizens in the occupied city of Jerusalem”, Wafa news agency reported, and a spokesman for Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said Israel is “playing with fire irresponsibly and recklessly” by condoning the march.

One Hamas spokesman said the group holds the Israeli government “fully responsible” and another promised Palestinians “will continue their resistance in defense of Jerusalem until the last soldier and settler is swept off... every inch of our occupied land.”

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WATCH: Colombia's Right-Wing Candidate Once Declared Admiration For 'Great Thinker' Adolf Hitler

By - Wyatt Reed

One of the two candidates who'll be facing off in the second round of Colombia's presidential elections next month was forced to apologize in 2021 for pronouncing himself an “admirer” of the notorious Nazi leader responsible for killing millions of Jews, Roma, and Soviet civilians. Recently-unearthed footage on social media shows Rodolfo Hernandez, the right-wing ‘populist’ candidate who's headed for next month's presidential runoff in Colombia, once declared his support for Adolf Hitler. While giving an interview to Colombia's RCN Radio in 2016, the wealthy business explained:

“I'm an admirer of a great German thinker. His name is Adolf Hitler.”

[Footage of the full incident](#) shows this declaration of support for the infamous nazi leader was met with incredulity by the hosts, but, apparently undeterred, Hernandez urged his interviewers to “listen to [Hitler's] recommendations”:

“Don't act like things will change if we always do the same.”

One of the presenters quickly noted that internationally-renowned physicist Albert Einstein “said the same thing, that one possible definition of human stupidity is for you to do the same thing over and over expecting different results,” before informing the then-Mayor of Bucaramanga that “Hitler was certainly not a great thinker at all.” Another host subsequently recommends that “perhaps” it would be “better” to quote Einstein instead.

Footage of the conversation went viral in Colombia in 2021, prompting Hernandez to take to Twitter in hopes of salvaging his reputation five years after his declaration of admiration for the notorious Nazi dictator.

“Regarding the Hitler thing, I apologize, anyone can have a slip [of the tongue] and I was wrong. The phrase was not his, it was Einstein's. I apologize to the Jewish community and to all the Colombian people”.

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**Top Mexican Legal Scholar Slams Colombia's 'Desperate Attack' On President AMLO**

**By - Wyatt Reed**

Sputnik News caught up with Dr. John Ackerman, the Director of the Mexican Law Review, after a massive rally in Puebla aiming to rejuvenate the grassroots base of President Lopez Obrador's party, Morena. As well as a widely-published journalist and TV host, Ackerman is also an adviser for Morena's Institute of Political Formation.

Leading Mexican legal scholar Dr. John M. Ackerman lambasted accusations by the Colombian Foreign Ministry that Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador 'interfered' in the country's upcoming presidential election as a "desperate attack to silence international public opinion" following a huge rally of Morena Party supporters in Puebla Saturday.

In an exclusive interview with Sputnik News, the widely-acclaimed journalist denounced Colombian authorities for "attacking the Mexican government," and heralded President Lopez Obrador's "180-degree shift" in foreign policy away from the policies of the "neoliberal governments" that preceded him, which Ackerman dismissed as "servants of Washington."

"The fact the Colombians are so preoccupied" with the Mexican president's comments, "says more about them than about Lopez Obrador—that they are feeling insecure and fearful about what might happen in the upcoming elections," Ackerman said.

On Friday, Colombia's foreign ministry issued a statement accusing President Lopez Obrador of an "offensive" act of "interference in the internal affairs" of the country after Mexico's head of state said he was sending "a hug" to progressive Colombian candidate Gustavo Petro "because he is facing a most cowardly and undignified dirty war" from oligarch-owned media outlets.

The tactics are akin to "everything we have already seen and suffered in Mexico," Lopez Obrador explained, before summarizing Colombian media coverage of the candidate: "Petro [is] a danger to Colombia, communist, guerrillero; Colombia is going to be like Venezuela, etc."

But as Dr. Ackerman told Sputnik News, "Lopez Obrador has not done anything to actually get involved in the Colombian elections."

"He hasn't funded anybody, hasn't done anything. There's been no act of government to intervene in the elections. That would be absolutely against our principles on foreign policy in Mexico. All they've done is express some opinions about, you know, politics in Colombia, in the world."

Dr. Ackerman broke down the situation following a gathering of over 2,000 Morena members in the city of Puebla—the first stop in what he called "a very necessary" response towards a "tendency towards bureaucratization and a tendency towards opportunism" in the party. The well-known TV host and political commentator spoke at length about the need for internal reforms to bring the party's priorities in line with the desires of its membership, and said attendees are "following in the example of Lopez Obrador, who has always said democracy needs to be exercised from the base up."

On issues of foreign policy, there's little daylight between Morena's base and leadership, Ackerman pointed out. He lauded Lopez Obrador's pledge to skip the Summit of the Americas

in light of the US refusal to include Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba as “a very symbolic gesture” on the part of Mexico’s President because it “returns Mexico to being a part of Latin American unity instead of sort of the representative of the United States in the region.” “The shift in Mexican foreign policy has been 180 degrees since the arrival of Lopez Obrador. Before Lopez Obrador, neoliberal governments were basically servants of Washington,” Dr. Ackerman explained.

Mexico’s president has “recuperated the close relationships with Cuba, with other governments throughout Latin America on a very basic, sound policy of working together in Latin America in union, respecting sovereignty of foreign countries, not conditioning diplomatic relations on ideological issues—which is exactly the opposite of what the United States do, they always run their diplomacy based on ideological issues. And so this has been the principle that Lopez Obrador has been defending in terms of the Summit of the Americas. And that’s why he has insisted that everybody attend.”

On Wednesday, senior White House Latin America adviser Juan Gonzalez [said US President Joe Biden](#) “personally wants the president of Mexico” to attend the upcoming Summit. However, there’s little indication Lopez Obrador plans to break his promise, and while fifteen US Congress Members called on Biden to “reconsider the omission of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela to this year’s Summit of the Americas” last week, his administration doesn’t seem to be budging either.

As a [CNN headline](#) noted on Thursday, the “potential for a high-profile flop looms.” Regardless of what transpires between now and the scheduled start of the summit on Monday, it won’t be Mexico’s Lopez Obrador who’s left picking up the pieces.

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Blame Game Begins As Biden’s Summit of the Americas Stumbles Towards ‘Summit Without Americas’

By - Wyatt Reed

As the US-sponsored Summit of the Americas appears increasingly irrelevant, a key anti-imperialist organizer behind the alternative ‘People’s Summit of the Americas’ says the Biden administration has no one to blame but itself.

The 9th Summit of the Americas hasn’t even started, but efforts to pin the blame for the meeting’s anticipated failures have already begun in earnest. While President Biden’s top Latin America advisor, Juan Gonzalez, continues to insist publicly that the US is “really confident that the summit” slated for June 6th - 10th “will be well-attended,” promises by a number of Latin American heads of state to skip the gathering suggest otherwise.

Last month, Mexico’s President Lopez Obrador publicly objected to the US refusal to include the governments of Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Cuba, and pledged to skip the event unless the decision was reversed. A number of the region’s nations followed suit, and now Bolivian

President Luis Arce, Honduran President Xiomara Castro, St. Vincents and the Grenadines Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves, all appear likely to be no-shows.

Many other leaders, including Chile's Gabriel Boric and Argentina's Alberto Fernandez, have said they'll be in attendance but condemned the ostracism of their neighbors. According to Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, "almost 90% of the governments of the continent have had the courage, in different ways, to express their protest against the exclusion." On May 26th, [15 members of US Congress](#) publicly called on Biden to "reconsider the omission of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela to this year's Summit of the Americas."

On Sunday, the editorial board of the Washington Post—a relatively reliable barometer of the US foreign policy —[pointed the finger at the region as a whole](#) for purported fractures in regional unity, claiming "it's hard to get the Americas together" since "the Americas are coming apart" and suggesting that "the lingering influence of Cuba's regime" bears much of the responsibility.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro offered a different perspective. In [comments to Venezuela's Radio del Sur](#), the country's commander-in-chief explained that by not inviting countries it disagrees with politically, "the US government itself took it upon itself" to sabotage "the possibility of success at this summit." And he's certainly not the only one to view the divisions bubbling over into public view as the handiwork of the host country.

"The exclusion of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, already have made Biden's summit a failed summit," said Manolo de los Santos, Co-Coordinator of the [People's Summit of the Americas](#), an alternative to Biden's gathering that's slated to take place in Los Angeles concurrently, and which is billed as "a coming together of social movements, trade unions, community organizations, social justice groups from... across the Americas."

De Los Santos told Sputnik News that Biden's "intention of making it a summit only for his friends, for those who agree fully with him and align with his policies," means that "most of Latin America is not included," and "not just the formally excluded countries."

That's why De Los Santos says he's working "not just to offer an alternative vision, but to confront the narrative of US foreign policy that continues to see Latin America simply as its backyard—or as Biden calls it, its 'front yard,'" but to show that "there's actually something bigger stronger and that's coming together not just from Latin America but in unity with the progressive forces inside the United States."

In an ironic twist, it's likely that the most visible unity on display in Los Angeles in the coming days will be outside the Convention Center where numerous Latin American leaders will be absent.

According to De Los Santos, Citlalli Hernandez, the Secretary General of Mexican President Lopez Obrador's Morena Party, and influential figures from the Landless Workers Movement, the party of leading Brazilian presidential candidate Lula da Silva, will be in Los Angeles—but they'll be addressing the People's Summit, instead of the State Department-organized meeting inside.

"That's why this people's summit is so important," De Los Santos says: "because it offers a direct challenge to these designs of the US government to not only exclude but to impose itself on the Latin American region." In this sense, "it's an expression of all the changes and movements that are happening as we speak across the continent, not just for a better life but for the actual transformation of society."

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Number of Americans Who Say Trump Is Responsible For Jan. 6th Drops—Poll  
By - Wyatt Reed

The new results come as the House committee responsible for investigating the events of January 6th, 2021, is set to reveal its findings in a primetime hearing Thursday night. The number of Americans who view former US President Donald Trump as “solely” or “mainly” responsible for the events of January 6th, 2021, has plummeted over the past year, [according to a new poll](#) released by NBC News.

When the same questions were asked in January 2021, a whopping 28% of respondents said Trump was solely responsible and 24% said he was mainly to blame. Those numbers have since shifted to 17% and 28%, respectively, according to the results released by NBC. The number of Americans who believe Trump was “not really” responsible for Jan. 6 has since increased from 29% to 35%, the poll indicates.

The House committee tasked with investigating the events of early 2021, when thousands of Donald Trump supporters descended on US Congress in opposition to what they claimed was a fraudulent presidential election result, is [slated to deliver its results Thursday](#). In an unusual twist, the hearing is set to be broadcast at 8 PM. The timing of the broadcast reportedly reflects a desire by Democrats in Congress to reach as broad an audience as possible.

“The goal here is to construct this narrative,” according to Molly Reynolds, a Brookings Institute senior fellow, who reportedly told The Hill on Monday that Congressional Democrats want to “go through the countless depositions that they’ve taken... and figure out a way to try and convey a story to the public.”

Rep. Adam Schiff [suggested as much](#) in an interview with CBS’s “Face the Nation” on Sunday, telling host Margaret Brennan that Democrats’ “goal is to present the narrative” they’ve built to a public that he said has “not seen it woven together.”

Another recent poll suggests waning interest in the House committee’s findings among a broad swath of the US population. According to a poll conducted by the University of Amherst, 52% want to learn more about the events of January 6th, and 48% believe it’s “time to move on.” The results reportedly came down almost entirely to partisan leanings. One of the pollsters responsible for the survey, UMass political science professor Jesse Rhodes, reportedly told The Hill that “the most important thing” is that the hearing not be “perceived as a Trump versus Biden frame” but rather “a Trump versus Pence framework” so that viewers don’t perceive the Democratic-led efforts as being “as political or partisan” as it would otherwise seem. Whether such framing will do much to sway an electorate that is now far more focused on skyrocketing inflation and other more immediate issues is yet to be seen.

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## Military Recruiters Set Up Shop Outside 'Top Gun' Screenings In Effort To Lure Young Moviegoers

By - Wyatt Reed

Amid a steady decline in young people wishing to join the US military, recruiters reportedly hope the titillating new hit movie will boost their numbers.

"Top Gun: Maverick" has only been out two weeks, and it's already the highest-grossing domestic release of Tom Cruise's career. But actors aren't the only ones cashing in on the runaway success of the sequel to the popular 1986 film "Top Gun." The US military is too—and as was the case with the original, they say they expect a big boost in recruitment to result.

"We think "Top Gun: Maverick" will certainly raise awareness and should positively contribute to individual decisions to serve in the Navy," US Navy spokesman Dave Benham [reportedly told FLYING magazine](#). And all across the country, recruiters are actively working to ensure that's the case.

Photos posted across social media platforms show recruiters in Michigan, Arizona, Texas, and South Dakota have been setting up shop in theaters showing the new film in an effort to coax impressionable teens into pursuing military careers.

The US military has struggled to hit its recruitment targets in recent years, with a [RAND Corporation study finding](#) that enlistment contracts have decreased across all four branches throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Earlier this month, [NBC News reported](#) the number of sailors who deserted the Navy doubled between 2019 and 2021, and 5 of the 2,500 sailors on board the USS George Washington committed suicide in the last year alone.

In a [leaked memo from January](#), Air Force Recruiting Service commander Maj. Gen. Ed Thomas wrote that "not two years into a pandemic, and we have warning lights flashing" in terms of recruitment numbers. That same month, the Army seriously boosted its financial incentive to join, offering bonuses of up to \$50,000. In April, the Air Force followed suit, and now the Navy has upped its offer to \$25,000 for those who say they'll ship out immediately.

Commander Rick Dorsey, executive officer of the Navy Talent Acquisition Group Red River in Irving, Texas, told NBC Dallas-Forth Worth last week that the first Top Gun "basically opened up [the previous] generations' eyes to naval aviation and what the Navy can do, and we're hoping this film can do exactly the same thing for this generation." In a reference to the movie's main characters, Dorsey reportedly went on to claim that "those folks who start here—ground level—are going to be the next Maverick, they're going to be the next Rooster," though [according to military outlet SOFREP](#), "for every 1,000 applicants" to the US Naval Academy, just "3 will become a fighter pilot."

Interest in joining the US military plummeted in the wake of the massively unpopular Vietnam War, and "Top Gun" was widely credited with restoring the reputation of not just the US Navy, but other military branches as well. But while the Navy [claimed to receive](#) a 500% boost in interest among potential recruits following the release of the original film, [a newly published article](#) from the US Naval Institute chalked it up to a sharp increase in military advertising budgets, conceding that "if history is any guide, the sequel to the naval aviation blockbuster might not do much to bring in new recruits."

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European Firms Double Shipments of Russian Oil In Spite of Sanctions—Report

By - Wyatt Reed

Economists say Russia is on track for record energy earnings as European shipping firms move unprecedented quantities of Russian oil—just not to Europe.

The amount of Russian oil being transported by European shipping firms has skyrocketed from 31 million barrels in February to 58 million barrels in May, [according to a new analysis](#), as anti-Russian sanctions imposed by the European Union and the United States continue to backfire.

Though a recently-passed sixth round of sanctions aimed at blocking EU consumption of Russian energy has largely succeeded in preventing European customers from accessing affordable oil, there are no such restrictions preventing firms from moving Russian oil elsewhere.

As a result, companies in major shipping hubs like Greece, Malta, and Cyprus have reaped record profits as sanctions ostensibly meant to isolate and impoverish Russians have instead wreaked havoc on European economies. According to a shipping industry source reportedly interviewed by The Independent, “a large tanker departing Primorsk could collect \$32,500 a day as of Friday, compared with less than \$10,000” before the Russian special military operation in Ukraine began in February.

The uptick in profitability is due mainly to the fact that global oil prices have shot through the roof as Western efforts to destroy Russia’s economy seem to have had the opposite effect. On Tuesday, the cost of a barrel of crude oil hit \$119.95, its highest level since prices peaked in the summer of 2008 amid the Great Recession. As a number of economic analysts have already noted, the trend means Russia is on track for [record energy earnings](#) this year.

Meanwhile, working people throughout the West have largely been left to figure out how to handle surging gas prices on their own. As one vehemently anti-Russian academic reportedly complained to The Independent, “ordinary citizens in European countries have been paying more for Russian oil without actually punishing Russia—in fact, only increasing Russia’s revenues.” As the EU ponders how to pursue a seventh round of sanctions on the country, officials in Moscow are likely wondering: with enemies like these, who needs friends?

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US, South Korea, Japan Discuss Situation Concerning North Korea, ASEAN - Statement

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - Top officials from the United States, South Korea and Japan met in Seoul to discuss major issues the three countries face, including North Korea, Ukraine,

Myanmar and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the officials said in a joint statement on Wednesday.

"Republic of Korea (ROK) First Vice Foreign Minister Cho Hyundong, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, and Japan Vice Foreign Minister Mori Takeo met today in Seoul to discuss how our three countries will work together to address the challenges of the 21st Century for the benefit of the region and the world," the statement said.

The officials strongly condemned North Korea's ballistic missile test launches and urged Pyongyang to abide by its international obligations under relevant UN Security Council resolutions, the statement said.

In addition, the officials reaffirmed their commitment to advance the trilateral security partnership as well as continue engaging North Korea.

"They stressed that a path to serious and sustained dialogue remains open and urged the DPRK [North Korea] to return to negotiations, while also expressing their hope that the DPRK will respond positively to international offers of assistance to fight against COVID-19. They reaffirmed the importance of achieving a swift resolution to the abductions issue," the statement added.

The officials also focused on a range of regional and global issues, including the situations in Ukraine and Myanmar, and bolstering engagement with ASEAN, according to the statement.

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Canada Bans Export of 28 Services Vital for Russia's Oil, Gas, Chemical industries - Joly  
(Adds details in paras 3, 5, 6)

OTTAWA, June 8 (Sputnik) – Canada is banning 28 types of consultants from working for Russian oil, gas, and chemical firms, Foreign Minister Melanie Joly announced on Wednesday. "These new measures impose a ban on the export of 28 services vital for the operation of the oil, gas and chemical industries, including technical, management, accounting and advertising services. The banning of the exportation of oil, gas and chemical services targets an industry that accounts for about 50% of Russia's federal budget revenues," Joly said.

To enact the new measures, the Canadian government made amendments to the Special Economic Measures (Russia) Regulations.

"It is prohibited for any person in Canada and any Canadian outside Canada to provide to Russia or to any person in Russia any service referred to in Part 1 of Schedule 8 in relation to any industry referred to in Part 2 of that Schedule," the official document read.

Part 1 of Schedule 8 lists the 28 services, including transportation of petroleum and natural gas, and extraction of crude petroleum and natural gas.

Since 2014, Canada has sanctioned more than 1,500 Russian individuals and entities.

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## US Does Not Support Exchanges for Americans Imprisoned Abroad - Whelan Family

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration does not support anymore releasing foreign nationals who are imprisoned in the United States in exchange for Americans serving prison sentences abroad, David Whelan, brother of US citizen Paul Whelan who is imprisoned in Russia for espionage, said on Wednesday,

"As we understand it, the US Department of Justice will not support the release of any foreign nationals in their custody to free wrongfully detained Americans," David Whelan said in a statement.

In April, the United States and Russia exchanged Russian pilot Konstantin Yaroshenko for former US marine Trevor Reed, who was sentenced to nine years in Russia, after engaging in lengthy negotiations.

However, Whelan said the swap was not a part of the Biden administration's policy but due to a personal engagement by President Joe Biden.

"The door was never open. The Department of Justice [DOJ] was not even willing to concede Yaroshenko for Reed. That release would not have occurred if President Biden had not made the executive decision to act," he said.

The Whelan family has advocated that the US government use every tool at its disposal to secure Paul's freedom, the statement said.

"We are at arms-length from the Executive branch agencies who make decisions surrounding concessions and recommend - or not, in the case of the DOJ - possible solutions for wrongful detainees to the President. We know, from Ambassador John Sullivan's statements to Russian press, that trades have been discussed as recently as the last few months," the statement added.

Paul Whelan, who holds American, British, Canadian and Irish citizenship, is serving his sentence in Russia's Mordovia region. A Moscow court sentenced him to 16 years in June 2020 on charges of espionage. He denies the charges but did not challenge the verdict in hope of being part of a potential prisoner exchange between the US and Russia.

The charges in Whelan's case were not disclosed, but a press release from Russia's Federal Security Service said he was detained in Moscow at the end of 2018 during a spy operation. Whelan's legal defense team said he was a victim of a provocation.

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## Biden Administration Eases Restrictions on Travel to Cuba - Treasury

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The United States has eased restrictions on group educational and professional travel to Cuba and removed limits on remittances put in place by the previous administration, the Treasury Department said on Wednesday.

"This rule authorizes group people-to-people educational travel to Cuba and removes certain restrictions on authorized academic educational activities, authorizes travel to attend or organize professional meetings or conferences in Cuba, removes the \$1,000 quarterly limit on

family remittances, and authorizes donative remittances to Cuba," the Treasury said in a notice on its website.

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US Not Engaged in Talks on Ukraine, Believes Russia Not Ready - Donfried

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is not currently engaged in negotiations on a diplomatic solution to the Ukraine crisis and believes Russia is not ready yet for such talks, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Karen Donfried said on Wednesday.

"The United States is not currently engaged in negotiations on diplomatic solution," Donfried said. "Russia is not ready yet for such talks."

Donfried reiterated Washington's position that the United States stands with Ukraine and will continue to provide Kiev with the support it needs.

Last Wednesday, the Biden administration announced another US military aid package for Ukraine that includes 1,000 anti-tank Javelin missiles, 50 command launch units and four Mi-17 helicopters in addition to four initial High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS).

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US Mulls Sanctions Waiver for Belarus Potash Fertilizer to Get Ukraine Grain Out - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) – The United States is weighing a six-month sanctions waiver for the Belarusian potash fertilizer industry in exchange for Minsk allowing a rail corridor to export Ukrainian grain, The Wall Street Journal reported, citing sources.

Officials at the State Department allegedly express concerns that the measure will not work because of close ties between Minsk and Moscow. However, supporters of the proposal in the US National Security Council believe that it is a complicated but good alternative, which should be considered, the report said.

The discussion over the grain export from Ukraine shows that policy makers in the US and other countries are facing problems balancing between their desire to keep pressure on Russia and attempts to maintain export of grain, the newspaper noted.

A NSC spokesperson told The Wall Street Journal that Washington is actively discussing various options with its partners around the world.

The State Department sent cables to several countries in recent weeks, calling on them not to accept Ukrainian grain, allegedly looted by Russia, the report said. The list of states, which received such notices, includes Turkey, Egypt, Libya, Pakistan, India, Eritrea and Ethiopia, according to the WSJ. Moscow has vehemently rejected the accusations.

Exporting Ukrainian grain via Belarus could help do without using the Black Sea route and avoid delays when shipping through Poland, as Belarus, Ukraine and Lithuania have the same wider-gauge railroads, the report said.

The foreign ministers of Russia and Turkey met in Ankara on Wednesday to discuss options of resuming grain export in the Black Sea. Moscow has welcomed Ankara's potential help in clearing Black Sea ports of Ukrainian-planted mines, which it says are the root cause of stalled shipments.

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US, Allies to Resume Arctic Council Projects Without Russia – Joint Statement

OTTAWA, June 8, (Sputnik) – The governments of the United States, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden will resume limited cooperation on their work in the Arctic Council on projects that do not include Russia, the allies said in a joint statement on Wednesday.

"We intend to implement a limited resumption of our work in the Arctic Council, in projects that do not involve the participation of the Russian Federation. These projects, contained in the workplan approved by all eight Arctic States at the Reykjavik ministerial, are a vital component of our responsibility to the people of the Arctic, including Indigenous Peoples," the statement said.

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US Confident of Positive Talks With Turkey on Sweden, Finland Accession to NATO - Donfried

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is confident about a positive outcome of talks with Turkey on Sweden and Finland's NATO membership bids, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Karen Donfried said on Wednesday.

"The US is confident there will be a positive conclusion to talks with Turkey on Sweden, Finland membership," she said.

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Canada Bans Export of 28 Services Vital for Russia's Oil, Gas, Chemical industries - Joly

OTTAWA, June 8 (Sputnik) – Canada is banning 28 types of consultants from working for Russian oil, gas, and chemical firms, Foreign Minister Melanie Joly announced on Wednesday.

"These new measures impose a ban on the export of 28 services vital for the operation of the oil, gas and chemical industries, including technical, management, accounting and advertising services. The banning of the exportation of oil, gas and chemical services targets an industry that accounts for about 50% of Russia's federal budget revenues," Joly said.

"From now on, it'll be prohibited for any person in Canada and any Canadian outside Canada to provide to Russia or to any person in Russia any service referred to in Part 1 of Schedule 8 in relation to any industry referred to in Part 2 of that Schedule," an official document read.

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**Sherman Discusses DPRK Missiles, COVID Outbreak With Japanese, S. Korean Officials**

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Secretary Wendy Sherman met with senior Japanese and South Korean officials on Wednesday to discuss North Korea's latest missile launches and a coronavirus outbreak in the country, the State Department said.

"Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman met today with Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Mori Takeo in Seoul.... he Deputy Secretary and Vice Foreign Minister condemned DPRK [North Korea] missile launches and emphasized the importance of trilateral U.S.-Japan-ROK cooperation to tackle the most pressing regional and global challenges of the 21st Century," the statement said.

Sherman also met with South Korean Minister of Unification Kwon Young-se and Vice Minister of Unification Kim Ki-woong.

"The Deputy Secretary, Minister, and Vice Minister also expressed concern about the impact of the DPRK's COVID-19 outbreak on the North Korean people. Deputy Secretary Sherman expressed support for efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the DPRK, including inter-Korean cooperation efforts," the State Department added.

In May, North Korea reported its first coronavirus outbreak, as several citizens tested positive for the Omicron BA.2 variant, and introduced an "emergency anti-epidemic system of the highest level." According to the state-run Korean Central News Agency, an "unfamiliar fever" has been spreading in the country since late April. The fever is believed to be COVID-19.

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**Moderna Says Booster Targeting Original Strain, Omicron to be Available in Fall**

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - American biotechnology company Moderna announced on Wednesday that it hopes to launch a new COVID-19 booster shot this fall which will target both the original strain and the Omicron variant after promising early clinical trials.

"Looking at these data alongside the durability we saw with our first bivalent booster candidate, mRNA-1273.211, we anticipate more durable protection against variants of concern with mRNA-1273.214, making it our lead candidate for a Fall 2022 booster," Moderna CEO Stephane Bancel said.

Bancel added that the company is submitting the preliminary data to regulators "with the hope that the Omicron-containing bivalent booster will be available in the late summer."

"Taken together, our bivalent booster candidates demonstrate the power of Moderna's mRNA platform to develop vaccines that meet immediate, global public health threats," Bancel added. The US has so far approved the Pfizer/BioNTech, Johnson & Johnson, and Moderna coronavirus vaccines.

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**Biden to Travel to Europe for G7, NATO Summits on June 25-28 - White House**

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will visit Germany and Spain from June 25-28 for G7 and NATO summits, White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said on Wednesday.

"President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. will travel to Schloss Elmau in southern Germany on June 25 to attend the G7 Leaders' Summit. The President and G7 leaders will discuss a range of the most pressing global issues, including the G7's unwavering support for a democratic, sovereign, and prosperous Ukraine, economic and democratic resilience, tackling the climate crisis, development infrastructure, global health security, and the food and energy crisis caused by Russia's war of aggression," Jean-Pierre said in a statement.

On June 28, the president will attend the 2022 NATO summit in Madrid, where "allied leaders will endorse a new Strategic Concept to guide NATO's transformation over the next decade," she added.

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**RPT - US Should Match Colombia, Germany in Expanding Services for Refugees Worldwide - NGO**

LOS ANGELES, June 8 (Sputnik) - The United States should do a lot more for migrants and refugees coming from any country including by expanding its capacity to match what Colombia and Germany are doing across the world, Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA) Executive Director Angelica Salas told Sputnik.

"Our perspective is the United States can do very much more for all countries, not just for Ukrainian, not just for Afghanistan, but for Central American refugees, migrants," Salas said on the sidelines of the Summit of Americas in Los Angeles. "It can actually expand its capacity and

actually match with countries like Colombia or Germany are doing that are actually expanding the number of services to migrants around the world."

Salas said while President Joe Biden's rhetoric has been more favorable to immigrants compared to his predecessor, his administration is still having a hard time reversing Trump-era policies such as Title 42, which allows border authorities to immediately reject entry or expel migrants deemed a threat to public health. She pointed out that the Biden administration's effort to get rid of Title 42 was stymied by Republican judges and courts.

"We still are dealing with a lot of the aftermath of the Trump-era policies. Some have been able to be lifted and others remain. And so it's important for us to recognize that while we have the Biden administration, much more work has to be done in order for our communities to feel safe and protected in this country," Salas said.

With respect to the Summit of Americas, she underscored that these forums lead to agreements that are often never implemented.

"So number one on migration, I hope that the forum actually creates an agreement that upholds human and civil rights of immigrants, that upholds their rights for asylum and for legal status in the country. That's my hope," she stated. "I also hope that there are resources to actually implement this work and that there is a commitment from the countries to create conditions so people aren't forced to migrate from their home countries."

Salas also hopes to see a regional approach, one that goes beyond just the United States and Mexico, which is based on human rights,

"And the regional approach is based on human rights and also that it recognizes that people don't want to leave their countries, they are forced to leave their countries, and that the response is really based on humanity, not on expulsion, deterrence or enforcement," Salas added.

Salas stressed that in order to solve the immigration issue, there should be more conversation between the regional governments. The conversation, she added, should be focused on how migrants will be received as opposed to the current conversation which is based on how to deter migrants and stem the flow heading north.

The Biden administration has come under fire for excluding some countries over human rights concerns. Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador announced on Monday that he will not participate in this week's summit because the United States refused to invite Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua. On Tuesday, the Mexican president said he will meet with Biden in July "without that regrettable, embarrassing summit blackmail."

Salas said the absence of the representatives of such governments will complicate discussions about migration because they need to be in dialogue.

"I understand that it's very complex. You have a lot of people in civil society summit of the Americas who actually don't want these governments to be here because they feel that the reason that they have left those countries and are migrants is because of the government," she said. "So it's a very complicated issue. My perspective is that you need all countries to sit down and recognize their leadership role and that they have to collaborate and engage in a process that allows for the benefit of the people that they are supposed to be serving as presidents of their countries."

The Ninth Summit of the Americas is taking place in Los Angeles from Monday to Friday.

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RPT: ANALYSIS - US Culture, Republican Opposition Make Any Gun Control Proposals 'Dead on Arrival'

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden looks unlikely to get gun control reforms through Congress despite the spate of mass shootings in the US due to the country's settler colonial culture and the Republican Party's obsession with the Second Amendment, analysts told Sputnik.

Biden in a prime-time address last week urged Congress to act fast on legislation to ban automatic weapons, raise the buying age to 21, end immunity for gun manufacturers, and enhance background checks.

Biden's move followed three mass shootings within less than a month, including the May 24 massacre of 19 students and two teachers at an elementary school in Texas and the shooting of ten Black people by a White supremacist in Buffalo, New York on May 14. Both gunmen were 18 and wielded legally obtained AR-15-style automatic rifles during the mass shootings.

On June 1, just one day before the president delivered his address, a gunman killed four at a hospital in Tulsa using an AR-15-style weapon he purchased just hours before the shooting.

On Tuesday, more than 45,000 flowers commemorating the victims of gun violence were put on display at the US National Mall in Washington, DC as lawmakers held a memorial. According to government data, the US saw a shocking 45,000 gun-related homicides within a 12-month period in 2020, the highest number reported since 1994 and an increase of 35% from the previous year.

This year alone, the US has seen more than 200 mass shootings including 27 at schools, according to the Gun Violence Archive, an independent data collection organization.

#### CENTURIES' OLD CULTURAL BARRIERS

Despite these horrifying tragedies and body counts, experts are skeptical any significant gun control reforms will be passed by this or any Congress.

"Proliferation of arms underpins settler colonialism, the current system in the United States, inaugurated by the invasion of European settlers centuries ago who used weapons to seize the land from the Indigenous people and keep enslaved Africans in line," University of Houston Professor of African-American History Gerald Horne told Sputnik when asked about the prospects for progress on reforms.

This dark heritage remained a strong force in 21st century US politics and society, Horne added. "It is deeply embedded in the culture and made more potent because there is a widespread denial of this horrendous reality," Horne said.

US senators have recently claimed they are making progress on bipartisan legislation to counter gun violence, although such pronouncements have been met with skepticism. Previous efforts to tighten gun laws have been struck down in the Senate because of the so-called filibuster, which requires 60 votes in the 100-seat chamber.

The so-called nuclear option, removing the filibuster, would allow Democrats to use their slight majority to pass something, but a couple lawmakers within their own party have refused to approve such a tactic.

To justify opposing gun restrictions many have pointed to the US Constitution's Second Amendment, ratified in 1791, which says the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed given a well-regulated militia is necessary to the security of a free state.

US constitutional historian and political commentator Dan Lazare, author of "The Frozen Republic," predicted that any effort at effective reform would flounder on the power of the Second Amendment and on the paralysis that now pervaded all national political institutions.

"No, it's not possible. All talk about a bipartisan compromise on the gun question is nothing more than empty blather," Lazare told Sputnik. "Significant gun-control measures by this point are dead on arrival – D.O.A."

Because of the Second Amendment, Lazare added, the United States is "simply incapable of responding to the epidemic of mass shootings in a coherent and constructive way."

Lazare said Republicans will never relinquish what has become a crucial buttress of their party's increasingly conservative worldview.

"Sure, ten-year-olds may die from time to time as a consequence. But freedom, as they say, is never free," he said.

Therefore more massacres of schoolchildren like the Uvalde, Texas killings would continue to occur, Lazare added.

"The whole thing is idiotic, but thanks to America's unchangeable 18th-century constitution, it's essentially etched in stone. This country really has painted itself into a corner," Lazare concluded.

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US Immigrant Rights NGO Sees Increasing Number of Ukrainian Refugees - Executive Director

LOS ANGELES, June 8 (Sputnik) - The United States is seeing an increase in the number of Ukrainian and Afghan refugees as the immigration pattern shifts, Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA) Executive Director Angelica Salas told Sputnik.

"Immigration is changing. For many years, there was a lot of migration. It still remains to be the highest number of migrants are from Mexico and then from Central America," Salas said on the sidelines of the Summit of the Americas. "But now we have folks from Haiti... many from Cameroon, from the African diaspora here, but also increasing Ukrainian refugees and Afghan refugees."

Salas stressed that as an organization they have to ensure that they are able to support the changing demography of refugees and new arrivals.

"Even as we continue to support immigrants who have been here in the United States for many years, who still need our support because they have not been able to, they're still vulnerable," she said. "And so it's a way by which to expand our services, even while not making sure that we're very supportive of the migrants who've been here for a very long time."

Salas said the purpose of California-based CHIRLA is to work directly with immigrant communities - immigrant workers, immigrant youth and their families - in order for them to be

able to know their rights and what resources are available to them so that they can integrate into society.

"Part of the organization is to provide the services that immigrants need, but also to engage them to participate in their communities in order to improve their communities so that policies and laws are changed in order for them to be able to be welcomed and to be treated humanely," she said.

Salas stressed, however, that right now CHIRLA is focusing a lot on asylum.

"We believe that the United States can do much more to actually allow individuals who are coming seeking asylum in the southern border to be allowed to come into the United States," she stated, adding that there are some 11 million undocumented workers and their families in the United States.

"We've been demanding that there'll be legal status given to these 11 million individuals who are contributing to the country. Majority of them have lived in this country for more than ten years, a vast majority for more than 20 years. And so we believe that this is something fundamental towards advancing immigrant rights in the United States," Salas said.

Salas said they receive over 5,000 calls each month from migrants who are seeking their support and service.

"We help them with legal services, if that is what they need. If not, we will help them find the resource that they need," she added.

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US Should Match Colombia, Germany in Expanding Services for Refugees Worldwide - NGO

LOS ANGELES, June 8 (Sputnik) - The United States should do a lot more for migrants and refugees coming from any country including by expanding its capacity to match what Colombia and Germany are doing across the world, Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA) Executive Director Angelica Salas told Sputnik.

"Our perspective is the United States can do very much more for all countries, not just for Ukrainian, not just for Afghanistan, but for Central American refugees, migrants," Salas said on the sidelines of the Summit of Americas in Los Angeles. "It can actually expand its capacity and actually match with countries like Colombia or Germany are doing that are actually expanding the number of services to migrants around the world."

Salas said while President Joe Biden's rhetoric has been more favorable to immigrants compared to his predecessor, his administration is still having a hard time reversing Trump-era policies such as Title 42, which allows border authorities to immediately reject entry or expel migrants deemed a threat to public health. She pointed out that the Biden administration's effort to get rid of Title 42 was stymied by Republican judges and courts.

"We still are dealing with a lot of the aftermath of the Trump-era policies. Some have been able to be lifted and others remain. And so it's important for us to recognize that while we have the

Biden administration, much more work has to be done in order for our communities to feel safe and protected in this country," Salas said.

With respect to the Summit of Americas, she underscored that these forums lead to agreements that are often never implemented.

"So number one on migration, I hope that the forum actually creates an agreement that upholds human and civil rights of immigrants, that upholds their rights for asylum and for legal status in the country. That's my hope," she stated. "I also hope that there are resources to actually implement this work and that there is a commitment from the countries to create conditions so people aren't forced to migrate from their home countries."

Salas also hopes to see a regional approach, one that goes beyond just the United States and Mexico, which is based on human rights,

"And the regional approach is based on human rights and also that it recognizes that people don't want to leave their countries, they are forced to leave their countries, and that the response is really based on humanity, not on expulsion, deterrence or enforcement," Salas added.

Salas stressed that in order to solve the immigration issue, there should be more conversation between the regional governments. The conversation, she added, should be focused on how migrants will be received as opposed to the current conversation which is based on how to deter migrants and stem the flow heading north.

The Biden administration has come under fire for excluding some countries over human rights concerns. Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador announced on Monday that he will not participate in this week's summit because the United States refused to invite Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua. On Tuesday, the Mexican president said he will meet with Biden in July "without that regrettable, embarrassing summit blackmail."

Salas said the absence of the representatives of such governments will complicate discussions about migration because they need to be in dialogue.

"I understand that it's very complex. You have a lot of people in civil society summit of the Americas who actually don't want these governments to be here because they feel that the reason that they have left those countries and are migrants is because of the government," she said. "So it's a very complicated issue. My perspective is that you need all countries to sit down and recognize their leadership role and that they have to collaborate and engage in a process that allows for the benefit of the people that they are supposed to be serving as presidents of their countries."

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Colombian President Warns of Migration 'Explosion' Driven by Climate Change Decades Ahead

LOS ANGELES, June 8 (Sputnik) - Colombian President Ivan Duque Marquez warned during a panel discussion about the Venezuelan refugee crisis that there will be an explosion of migration around the world in the coming decades that will be driven by climate change.

The panel discussion took place on the sidelines of the Summit of the Americas that kicked off in Los Angeles on Monday at the same time as a 10,000-strong US-bound migrant caravan left the town of Tapachula on the Mexico-Guatemala border. Most of the migrants in the caravan are reportedly from Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua - the three countries the United States did not invite to the summit.

"The world migration problem is not going to start diminishing," Duque said on Tuesday. "I think we're going to see in the course of the next decades more and more migration, and there's some phenomenon that I think we all have to consider, and it's that we're going to see an explosion of climate driven migrants around the world."

Floods, transmittable diseases, rising of the sea levels and coastal erosion are commonly reoccurring events in today's world that are leading to poverty, illness and despair in certain countries, leading to increased migration, Duque said.

The Colombian president pointed out that another challenge will be addressing refugees' needs while at the same time trying to reduce the xenophobia that exists against migrants in host countries.

USAID Assistant Administrator for the Bureau of Latin America and the Caribbean Marcela Escobari said during the event that there is a very short window of opportunity for the international community to take a really bold response to resolve the immigration crisis in Latin America.

Escobari added that the crisis can be turned into an economic boom if countries coordinate and share the burden. However, the potential for collectively resolving the situation will become untenable if only a few countries participate.

US Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration Julieta Valls Noyes said the global community has to get creative and look for new solutions like the World Bank's new global concessional financing facility in order to provide substantial support to countries that are hosting migrants in Latin America.

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**Canada, US to Strengthen Enforcement of Export Controls Against Russia - Border Services**

OTTAWA, June 8 (Sputnik) - US and Canadian law enforcement agencies have agreed to enhance joint efforts to enforce export control measures related to technologies and other products that could strengthen Russia's military, the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) said in a press release.

"Today, we are strengthening our US-Canada enforcement relationship through a joint commitment to leverage our authorities and resources to detect, deter, and stop violations of export controls and to ensure compliance with laws and regulations," the release said on Tuesday.

The two countries had played an important role in the coordinated efforts to restrict access to technologies and other goods that Russia needs to sustain its military capabilities, the release

added. Now, the US and Canada, as part of the new deal, will share information, seize shipments, and cooperate on probes and enforcement actions, according to the release. In the same statement, Canadian Public Safety Minister Marco Mendicino said the renewed collaboration with the United States will help bolster efforts to stop critical goods and technologies "from falling into Russian hands."

To underscore the importance of the agreement, the release added, US Commerce Department Assistant Secretary for Export Enforcement, Matthew Axelrod, met virtually with CBSA officials earlier in the day.

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#### SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, June 8 (Sputnik) -

#### FOOD CRISIS

\* The head of the Russian National Defense Control Center, Mikhail Mizintsev, said on Tuesday that Ukrainian forces have deliberately set fire to the Mariupol port and destroyed over 50,000 tons of grain.

\* The World Food Program has been unable to verify allegations of Russia "stealing" Ukrainian grain, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said.

\* A meeting of delegations of Turkey, Russia, Ukraine and the United Nations will take place in Istanbul this week to discuss the unblocking of Ukrainian grain shipments in the Black Sea, Turkish broadcaster TRT Haber reported on Tuesday, citing sources in the government.

\* The head of the Russian National Defense Control Center, Mikhail Mizintsev, said that Ukrainian forces have deliberately set fire to the Mariupol port and destroyed over 50,000 tons of grain.

#### KOREAN PENINSULA

\* North Korea is using rhetoric that could suggest an intent to use tactical nuclear weapons, US Special Representative for North Korea Sung Kim said on Tuesday.

\* The United States hopes China will be more forthcoming to cooperate on efforts to address concerns over North Korea's recent ballistic missile tests, Kim said.

\* The United States has continued to reach out to North Korea through multiple channels about engaging diplomatically on issues including COVID-19-related assistance, but Pyongyang has not shown any interest, Kim said.

#### ENERGY MARKETS

\* The United States wants Russian oil to flow to the world to relieve the global supply deficit in the commodity but it also hopes to limit the revenue Moscow can earn from this, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Tuesday.

\* European embargo on Russian oil supplies is "stupid" because Moscow will only enrich itself by selling oil to other countries, French right-wing opposition leader Marine Le Pen said.

#### UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

- \* Poland will sign a contract for the supply of weapons to Ukraine worth almost \$630 million, the largest in 30 years, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said while visiting the Stalowa Wola defense industry enterprise.
- \* Russian Foreign Minister will discuss with his Turkish counterpart, Mevlut Cavusoglu, prospects for resuming peace talks between Moscow and Kiev during his visit to Ankara, the Russian foreign minister said.
- \* Media reports claiming that Russia refuses to discuss the status of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions at talks with Ukraine are not true, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

#### WORLD BANK FORECAST

- \* The Russian economy is projected to shrink by 8.9% this year and 2% in 2023, the World Bank said on Tuesday in its Global Economic Prospects report.
- \* The World Bank has revised its 2022 global growth forecast downward from 4.1% to 2.9%.
- \* The GDP of Ukraine is projected to shrink 45% this year, the World Bank said.

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#### White House Says Will Not Get Involved in US House Committee's Probe on January 6 Events

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden will not get involved in matters related to the US House Select Committee's efforts to probe the events at the Capitol on January 6, 2021, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters on Tuesday.

"[Biden] supports the January 6 Select Committee's bipartisan effort, but we're not going to get involved. That is something that is independent. It needs to stay independent," Karine said when asked about Biden's potential engagement in the issue.

The Select Committee is set to televise on Thursday a series of hearings on their findings, including testimony from live witnesses and pre-recorded interviews with Trump family members.

The Select Committee, based on its findings, may only refer cases for prosecution to the US Justice Department and does not itself determine whether to pursue criminal action.

However, several individuals, including former chief Trump strategist Steve Bannon and economic adviser Peter Navarro, have been charged with contempt of Congress for not complying with the Select Committee's subpoenas.

Trump and other critics have said the work of the Select Committee is a sham intended to score political points since the FBI had already investigated the matter and also is biased because US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi refused to admit proposed Republicans who may question and challenge the panel's work.

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#### PayPal Now Allows Cryptocurrency Transfers to Other Wallets, Exchanges - Official

NEW YORK, June 7 (Sputnik) - PayPal said its users will be able to transfer digital coins from their accounts to other wallets and exchanges with immediate effect, enabling the payment service to become a broader part of the cryptocurrency trade.

"Starting today, PayPal supports the native transfer of cryptocurrencies between PayPal and other wallets and exchanges. This feature was the most demanded from our users since we began offering the purchase of crypto on our platform," Jose Fernandez da Ponte, SVP and general manager of blockchain, crypto and digital currencies at PayPal, said in a statement. The new functionality will allow PayPal customers to instantly transfer supported coins into PayPal and move cryptocurrency from its app to external addresses that include exchanges and hardware wallets, the company said.

Customers will be responsible for network fees when they conduct external transfers, depending on the blockchain and the crypto asset they use, PayPal said. Internal transfers, made from PayPal to PayPal accounts, will incur no fees.

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#### US Defense Giant Raytheon to Move World Headquarters Close to Pentagon - Statement

WASHINGTON, May 7 (Sputnik) - Raytheon, one of the largest defense contractors in the United States and the world, is moving its world headquarters from the northeastern state of Massachusetts to Arlington, Virginia, just south of Washington, DC and right beside the Defense Department, the company announced in a press release on Tuesday.

"Raytheon Technologies announced today that it will establish its global headquarters in Arlington, Virginia," the release said. "The location increases agility in supporting US government and commercial aerospace customers and serves to reinforce partnerships that will progress innovative technologies to advance the industry."

Raytheon said in the release the US capital serves as a convenient travel hub for the company's global customers and employees.

"The company will maintain its strong US presence, which includes 600 facilities across 44 states and territories. Each of the company's four business units currently have operations in Virginia. The new global headquarters office will be in Arlington's Rosslyn neighborhood alongside the Raytheon Intelligence & Space business," the release said.

Raytheon Technologies was formed in 2020 through the combination of the Raytheon Company and the United Technologies Corporation aerospace businesses. The company has 174,000 employees worldwide and is valued at more than \$100 billion. In terms of annual sales, it is the second largest aerospace and defense company in the world behind Boeing, which has recently

moved its own world headquarters from Chicago to northern Virginia and close to Washington, DC and the Defense Department as well.

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Trump Ally Bannon Subpoenas Pelosi, Other Lawmakers as Part of Trial Defense - Reports

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - Former chief Trump strategist Steve Bannon subpoenaed 16 lawmakers, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and members of the January 6 investigative committee as part of his legal team's defense in an upcoming contempt of Congress trial, CNN reported on Tuesday.

Bannon's lawyers subpoenaed 16 lawmakers and congressional staffers to testify at the trial in July, as well as to produce relevant documents, the report said. Subpoenas were issued to Pelosi, all nine members of the Select Committee on the events of January 6, 2021, House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and House General Counsel Douglas Letter, the report said. Bannon was charged with contempt of Congress for refusing subpoenas from the Select Committee to testify and produce documents, the report noted.

However, it has been historically difficult to compel testimony from lawmakers due to their legislative activity being protected under the US Constitution's Speech and Debate Clause, the report said.

Bannon's legal team will challenge the Select Committee's composition and motives for targeting him, as well as argue that testifying could have jeopardized the executive privilege of former President Donald Trump, the report added.

The subpoenas issued to the lawmakers requested documents related to the committee's establishment, decisions to refer Bannon for contempt and communications with one of Bannon's attorneys, according to the report.

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US Energy Agency Expects Global Oil Benchmark Brent to Drop to \$108 by End of Q2

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - Brent crude is expected to trade at \$108 a barrel by the end of the second quarter, the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) said Tuesday as it forecast a 10% drop in the global oil benchmark by the end of June.

"We expect the Brent price will average \$108/barrel in the second half of 2022," the EIA said in its Short-Term Energy Outlook.

Brent settled up \$1.06, or 0.9%, at \$120.57 in Tuesday's trade.

The EIA said it expected the London-traded global crude benchmark to continue declining in price over the remainder of the year and fall to \$97 per barrel in 2023.

Notwithstanding its forecast, the EIA said Brent's real value will depend on global supply-demand dynamics, as dictated by the West's sanctions on major energy exporter Russia. "Actual price outcomes will largely depend on the degree to which existing sanctions imposed on Russia, any potential future sanctions, and independent corporate actions affect Russia's oil production or the sale of Russia's oil in the global market," the EIA said. "Current oil inventory levels are low, which amplifies the potential for oil price volatility."

The agency forecast Russia's production of total liquid fuels to decline from 11.3 million barrels per day in the first quarter to 9.3 million barrels per day by the fourth quarter of 2023.

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**US Actor McConaughey Advocates for Gun Control in Moving Speech of Uvalde School Victims**

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - Oscar-winning actor Matthew McConaughey on Tuesday advocated for responsible gun ownership in an emotional speech at the White House that revealed touching and gruesome details about the victims of the mass shooting that took place last month in his hometown of Uvalde, Texas.

"We came here to speak to them [US lawmakers], to speak with them and to urge them to speak with each other to remind and inspire them that the American people will continue to drive forward the mission of keeping our children safe, because it's more than our right to do so, it's our responsibility to do so," McConaughey said. "I'm here today in hopes of applying what energy, reason and passion that I have into trying to turn this moment into a reality."

On Monday, McConaughey was at the US Capitol to lobby for gun control measures, according US Democratic Senator Dick Durbin. White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierres said the US actor also had a one-on-one personal meeting with President Joe Biden on Tuesday afternoon to emphasize the importance of taking action on this issue.

McConaughey said his mother taught kindergarten less than a mile from the Robb Elementary School, where an 18-year-old gunman shot and killed 19 children and two teachers with an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle on May 24.

The actor said the bodies of the young victims needed extensive restoration for their open casket viewings because of the substantial damage done by the AR-15 rifle. Most of the bodies were so mutilated by the large exit wounds from the rifle that only a DNA test could identify the victims.

McConaughey advocated for a restoration of American values and responsible gun ownership, such as stronger background checks, raising the age to purchase for an AR-15 rifle to 21 years old, red flag laws and consequences for people who abuse gun control regulations.

"Responsible gun owners are fed up with the Second Amendment being abused and hijacked by some deranged individuals," McConaughey said. "These regulations are not a step back. They're a step forward for civil society and the Second Amendment."

US senators have recently claimed they are making progress on bipartisan legislation to counter gun violence, although such pronouncements have been met with skepticism. Previous efforts

to tighten gun laws have been struck down in the Senate because of the so-called filibuster, which requires 60 votes in the 100-seat chamber.

The Second Amendment to the US Constitution, ratified in 1791, guarantees the right of Americans to keep and bear arms.

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US House Democrats Open Probe Into Trump's Failure to Account for Foreign Gifts

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - A US Democratic-controlled House of Representatives committee is seeking to gather documents on former President Donald Trump's alleged failure to disclose gifts he received while in office from foreign governments, the House Committee on Oversight and Reform said on Tuesday.

"Representative Carolyn Maloney, the chairwoman of the Committee on Oversight and Reform, sent a letter to Debra Steidel Wall, the Acting Archivist of the United States, seeking documents and information on former President Trump's apparent failure to account for gifts from foreign government officials while in office, as required by the Foreign Gifts and Decorations Act," the press release said.

The committee noted, citing The New York Times, that Trump accepted multiple gifts from foreign sources in 2020, yet they did not appear on the Department of State's list of foreign gifts as required by law.

"These revelations raise concerns about the potential for undue influence over former President Trump by foreign governments, which may have put the national security and foreign policy interests of the United States at risk, and about possible violations of the Constitution's Emoluments Clause, which prohibits the president from obtaining benefits from foreign entities while in office," Maloney wrote in her letter.

In April, the State Department said it could not fully account for the foreign gifts Trump officials received during the final year of his administration and its Office of the Chief of Protocol failed to obtain a list of foreign gifts received in 2020 from the White House.

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US Mission in Vienna Says Iran Must Drop Demands for Sanctions Lifting That Go Beyond Deal

UNITED NATIONS, June 7 (Sputnik) - Tehran should drop demands for sanctions lifting which go beyond the 2015 nuclear deal and are now preventing the participants from resuscitating the accord, US ambassador to the UN international organizations in Vienna Laura Holgate said on Tuesday.

"Iran would need to drop demands for sanctions lifting that clearly go beyond the JCPOA and that are now preventing us from concluding a deal. Should Iran choose to join us, a mutual

return to JCPOA implementation would be a significant achievement of international diplomacy and mark a new opportunity for creating the necessary assurances about Iran's nuclear program going forward," Holgate said in a statement.

The US is ready to provide the sanctions lifting necessary to return to the full implementation of the deal, according to Holgate.

"We remain committed to working with our allies and partners to fully achieve that outcome if Iran is willing to do so," she added.

In 2015, the P5+1, Iran and the European Union signed the multiparty nuclear agreement, formally known as the JCPOA, to provide sanctions relief to Iran in exchange for scaling back its nuclear activities. In 2018, the US unilaterally withdrew from the agreement and reimposed sanctions on Iran.

In April 2021, the parties to the agreement, together with the United States, began negotiations to restore the nuclear deal. However, the talks have since stalled.

In May, International Atomic Energy Agency chief, Rafael Grossi, said that nuclear aspects of the deal with Iran concerning its atomic research have been "pretty much finalized" but the talks have come to a standstill over non-nuclear issues. Last week, the agency said that Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium was 18 times more than the limit set in the JCPOA.

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RPT: ANALYSIS - US Culture, Republican Opposition Make Any Gun Control Proposals 'Dead on Arrival'

(Repeats to fix date in dateline)

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden looks unlikely to get gun control reforms through Congress despite the spate of mass shootings in the US due to the country's settler colonial culture and the Republican Party's obsession with the Second Amendment, analysts told Sputnik.

Biden in a prime-time address last week urged Congress to act fast on legislation to ban automatic weapons, raise the buying age to 21, end immunity for gun manufacturers, and enhance background checks.

Biden's move followed three mass shootings within less than a month, including the May 24 massacre of 19 students and two teachers at an elementary school in Texas and the shooting of ten Black people by a White supremacist in Buffalo, New York on May 14. Both gunmen were 18 and wielded legally obtained AR-15-style automatic rifles during the mass shootings.

On June 1, just one day before the president delivered his address, a gunman killed four at a hospital in Tulsa using an AR-15-style weapon he purchased just hours before the shooting.

On Tuesday, more than 45,000 flowers commemorating the victims of gun violence were put on display at the US National Mall in Washington, DC as lawmakers held a memorial. According to government data, the US saw a shocking 45,000 gun-related homicides within a 12-month period in 2020, the highest number reported since 1994 and an increase of 35% from the previous year.

This year alone, the US has seen more than 200 mass shootings including 27 at schools, according to the Gun Violence Archive, an independent data collection organization.

#### CENTURIES' OLD CULTURAL BARRIERS

Despite these horrifying tragedies and body counts, experts are skeptical any significant gun control reforms will be passed by this or any Congress.

"Proliferation of arms underpins settler colonialism, the current system in the United States, inaugurated by the invasion of European settlers centuries ago who used weapons to seize the land from the Indigenous people and keep enslaved Africans in line," University of Houston Professor of African-American History Gerald Horne told Sputnik when asked about the prospects for progress on reforms.

This dark heritage remained a strong force in 21st century US politics and society, Horne added. "It is deeply embedded in the culture and made more potent because there is a widespread denial of this horrendous reality," Horne said.

US senators have recently claimed they are making progress on bipartisan legislation to counter gun violence, although such pronouncements have been met with skepticism. Previous efforts to tighten gun laws have been struck down in the Senate because of the so-called filibuster, which requires 60 votes in the 100-seat chamber.

The so-called nuclear option, removing the filibuster, would allow Democrats to use their slight majority to pass something, but a couple lawmakers within their own party have refused to approve such a tactic.

To justify opposing gun restrictions many have pointed to the US Constitution's Second Amendment, ratified in 1791, which says the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed given a well-regulated militia is necessary to the security of a free state.

US constitutional historian and political commentator Dan Lazare, author of "The Frozen Republic," predicted that any effort at effective reform would flounder on the power of the Second Amendment and on the paralysis that now pervaded all national political institutions.

"No, it's not possible. All talk about a bipartisan compromise on the gun question is nothing more than empty blather," Lazare told Sputnik. "Significant gun-control measures by this point are dead on arrival – D.O.A."

Because of the Second Amendment, Lazare added, the United States is "simply incapable of responding to the epidemic of mass shootings in a coherent and constructive way."

Lazare said Republicans will never relinquish what has become a crucial buttress of their party's increasingly conservative worldview.

"Sure, ten-year-olds may die from time to time as a consequence. But freedom, as they say, is never free," he said.

Therefore more massacres of schoolchildren like the Uvalde, Texas killings would continue to occur, Lazare added.

"The whole thing is idiotic, but thanks to America's unchangeable 18th-century constitution, it's essentially etched in stone. This country really has painted itself into a corner," Lazare concluded.

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## ANALYSIS - US Culture, Republican Opposition Make Any Gun Control Proposals 'Dead on Arrival'

WASHINGTON, June 3 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden looks unlikely to get gun control reforms through Congress despite the spate of mass shootings in the US due to the country's settler colonial culture and the Republican Party's obsession with the Second Amendment, analysts told Sputnik.

Biden in a prime-time address last week urged Congress to act fast on legislation to ban automatic weapons, raise the buying age to 21, end immunity for gun manufacturers, and enhance background checks.

Biden's move followed three mass shootings within less than a month, including the May 24 massacre of 19 students and two teachers at an elementary school in Texas and the shooting of ten Black people by a White supremacist in Buffalo, New York on May 14. Both gunmen were 18 and wielded legally obtained AR-15-style automatic rifles during the mass shootings.

On June 1, just one day before the president delivered his address, a gunman killed four at a hospital in Tulsa using an AR-15-style weapon he purchased just hours before the shooting.

On Tuesday, more than 45,000 flowers commemorating the victims of gun violence were put on display at the US National Mall in Washington, DC as lawmakers held a memorial. According to government data, the US saw a shocking 45,000 gun-related homicides within a 12-month period in 2020, the highest number reported since 1994 and an increase of 35% from the previous year.

This year alone, the US has seen more than 200 mass shootings including 27 at schools, according to the Gun Violence Archive, an independent data collection organization.

### CENTURIES' OLD CULTURAL BARRIERS

Despite these horrifying tragedies and body counts, experts are skeptical any significant gun control reforms will be passed by this or any Congress.

"Proliferation of arms underpins settler colonialism, the current system in the United States, inaugurated by the invasion of European settlers centuries ago who used weapons to seize the land from the Indigenous people and keep enslaved Africans in line," University of Houston Professor of African-American History Gerald Horne told Sputnik when asked about the prospects for progress on reforms.

This dark heritage remained a strong force in 21st century US politics and society, Horne added. "It is deeply embedded in the culture and made more potent because there is a widespread denial of this horrendous reality," Horne said.

US senators have recently claimed they are making progress on bipartisan legislation to counter gun violence, although such pronouncements have been met with skepticism. Previous efforts to tighten gun laws have been struck down in the Senate because of the so-called filibuster, which requires 60 votes in the 100-seat chamber.

The so-called nuclear option, removing the filibuster, would allow Democrats to use their slight majority to pass something, but a couple lawmakers within their own party have refused to approve such a tactic.

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Texas Brothers Arrested for Assaulting Police in Attack on US Capitol - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - Federal authorities have arrested two brothers from the US state of Texas and charged them with attacking law enforcement officers during the riot that stormed the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, the Department of Justice said on Tuesday.

"Two Texas men were arrested today for assaulting law enforcement officers during the breach of the US Capitol on January 6, 2021," the press release said. "Brian Jackson, 47, and his brother, Adam Jackson, 42, both of Katy, Texas, are charged in the District of Columbia with assaulting, resisting, or impeding officers [and] civil disorder."

The two men were arrested in Katy, Texas and were expected to make their initial court appearances later today in the Southern District of Texas, the Justice Department said.

"According to court documents, the Jacksons were among rioters illegally on the grounds of the Capitol on Jan. 6. At approximately 5 p.m. that day, they assaulted a line of law enforcement officers outside of the tunnel area of the Lower West Terrace. Brian Jackson hurled a flagpole at officers," the release said.

Adam Jackson hurled a large red or orange object at officers and then charged at the line of officers with what appeared to be a US Capitol Police riot shield, the Justice Department said.

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US Closely Watching Russia's Gold Transactions to Ensure No Skirting of Sanctions - Yellen

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The United States is closely monitoring Russia's gold transactions to determine if any of them are helping Moscow circumvent US sanctions related to the conflict in Ukraine, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Tuesday.

"This is an important matter," Yellen told a Senate hearing held to debate President Joe Biden's budget projections for 2023. "We're closely monitoring any efforts we can see to circumvent our Russia-related sanctions through the use of gold."

Yellen said such gold transactions may be sanctionable on their own under an executive order issued by Biden if Moscow were found to be using these to skirt the primary sanctions imposed on it over the conflict in Ukraine.

Sanctions on gold were originally proposed in March by a bipartisan group of US senators who said Moscow's \$130 billion of gold reserves were a loophole that could allow it to circumvent restrictions on trade or business with sanctioned Russian entities, assets and individuals.

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Blinken, Australian Counterpart Discuss G20 Meetings, Ukraine – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his Australian counterpart, Penny Wong, discussed upcoming G20 meetings and the current situation in Ukraine, State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"Blinken spoke yesterday with Wong about our ongoing coordination on regional issues, as well as to discuss the upcoming G20 Ministerial meetings in Bali. Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Wong also discussed our collective efforts to hold Russia accountable for its unprovoked and unjust war of choice against Ukraine, including in multilateral institutions and bodies," Price said.

The two also exchanged views on Wong's recent trips to Indonesia, Fiji, Samoa, and Tonga. Blinken confirmed Washington's commitment to strengthening economic opportunity, resilience, and freedom across the Indo-Pacific, as well as readiness to cooperate openly and transparently with regional partners and allies, Price added.

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Over 1 in 5 Canadians Report Eating Less Than They Should Due to Inflation - Food Banks

OTTAWA, June 7 (Sputnik) – Over 20% of Canadians say they are eating less than they should due to rising inflation, and 61% believe the biggest contributor to food insecurity in the country is the cost of housing, charity Food Banks Canada said.

"[O]ne-in-five (an estimated 7 million) Canadians now report going hungry — with 23% reporting that they are eating less 'than they think they should' because there isn't enough money for food," Food Banks Canada said in a report on Monday.

One in three Canadians with revenues below 50,000 Canadian dollars (\$39,500) says they had instances of not having enough money for food during the same period.

Overall, data show that out of the 7 million affected by food insecurity, indigenous and black households were the most vulnerable. The main driving factor behind these difficulties is the cost of housing, according to 61% of Canadians.

Nationwide statistics shows usually that food banks observe a decrease in demand during summers, but this won't be the case in 2022. "Food banks in most regions of Canada are experiencing an influx of Canadians visiting food banks for the first time — a number that's increased by up to 25% in some regions, which we haven't seen since the first few months of the pandemic," Kirstin Beardsley, CEO of Food Banks Canada, said.

Former "clients" who didn't rely on their services for the past five years are also seen coming back.

Rising food, oil and housing prices are increasingly worrying Canadians from middle and lower class. As of June 2022, inflation has reached 6.8% in the country, with a liter of gas costing up to 2.17 Canadian dollars (\$5.15/gal.) in some places, the highest on record.

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**New Bill to Increase Indigenous People Presence on Canada Historic Sites Board - Minister**

OTTAWA, June 7, (Sputnik) - A new measure has been introduced in parliament to increase the presence of Indigenous people on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and help better address the climate change crisis, Minister of Environment and Climate Change Steven Guilbeault said on Tuesday.

"The proposed legislation not only strengthens Indigenous voices at the table, but also provides flexibility to adapt and reuse historic places as a sustainable way of addressing the climate change crisis," Guilbeault said. "This strong legislative framework - the first of its kind in Canada - will help ensure Canada's treasured historic places can continue to be enjoyed by future generations."

The measure calls for allocating \$4.5 million for Parks Canada to fulfill its new duties and also taps into \$22.6 million from the 2021 budget to be distributed over a period of five years.

This announcement came as the Canadian government has taken new steps to implement ideas from the Call to Action 79 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Final Report that was released in 2015. The Commission had recommended creating a framework for reconciliation with the Indigenous people.

Last week, a historic agreement was signed between the head of the Siksika Nation and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for the Canadian government to provide the Siksika Nation \$1 billion in compensation.

Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister Marc Miller said the legislation will help to promote recognition and understanding of the history of Indigenous peoples, including their significant, ongoing contributions to Canada.

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American Woman Pleads Guilty to Leading Islamic State Female Unit in Syria - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - An woman from the US state of Kansas has entered a guilty plea admitting that she organized and led an all-female military force for the Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia) over the past decade in Syria, the Justice Department announced in a press release.

"According to court documents, Allison Fluke-Ekren, aka Allison Ekren, aka Umm Mohammed al-Amriki and aka Umm Mohammed, 42, a former resident of Kansas, traveled overseas and from in or about September 2011 through in or about May 2019, engaged in terrorism-related activities in multiple countries, including Syria, Libya and Iraq," the release said.

Fluke-Ekren served as the leader and organizer of an Islamic State military battalion, known as the Khatiba Nusaybah, where she trained women on the use of automatic firing AK-47 assault rifles, grenades and suicide belts. More than 100 women and young girls, including as young as ten- or 11-years-old, received military training from Fluke-Ekren in Syria on behalf of the Islamic State, the release said.

"Fluke-Ekren led and organized an effort to establish a Women's Center in Raqqa, Syria.

...[She] also provided and assisted other female Islamic State members in providing training to numerous women and young girls on the use of automatic firing AK-47 assault rifles, grenades and explosive suicide belts," the statement added.

In late 2016, the Islamic State approved the creation of the "Khatiba Nusaybah" - a military battalion composed solely of female members - that began operations around February 2017, according to the statement.

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US Senators Introduce Bill to Create Regulatory Framework for Cryptocurrencies - Statement

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - A bipartisan group of US Senators have introduced legislation seeking to create a "complete regulatory framework" for cryptocurrencies, the bill's co-author Cynthia Lummis said in a statement on Tuesday.

"The Responsible Financial Innovation Act, a bipartisan framework that I crafted in conjunction with Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, creates regulatory clarity for agencies charged with supervising digital asset markets, provides a strong, tailored regulatory framework for stablecoins, and integrates digital assets into our existing tax and banking laws," Lummis said in the statement. The senator acknowledged in the statement the importance to integrate digital assets into existing law and urged Congress to maintain legislation that promotes innovation while protecting the consumer against bad actors.

Gillibrand said digital assets, blockchain technology and cryptocurrencies have experienced tremendous growth and offer substantial potential benefits, but it is very important for the US government to play a leading role in developing policy to regulate the new financial products.

"The bipartisan Responsible Financial Innovation Act is a landmark bill that will establish a regulatory framework that spurs innovation, develops clear standards, defines appropriate jurisdictional boundaries and protects consumers," Gillibrand said.

The bill is setting a clear standard for determining which digital assets are commodities and securities by looking at the purpose of the asset and the rights or powers it conveys the consumer, while giving digital asset companies the ability to determine what their regulatory obligations will be and giving regulators the clarity they need to enforce existing securities and commodities trading laws, the statement said.

While creating definitions for digital assets, the legislation assigns regulatory authority over digital asset spot markets to the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC). The bill also gives the CFTC "clear authority" over applicable markets, the statement said.

"Digital assets that meet the definition of a commodity, such as bitcoin and ether, which comprise more than half of digital asset market capitalization, will be regulated by the CFTC," the statement said.

Lummis and Gillibrand also insist on creating requirements for stablecoins that will protect consumers and markets and promote faster payments by proposing to establish full disclosure requirements for all payment stablecoin issuers, the statement said.

"This guarantees that a payment stablecoin holder can always redeem the stablecoin in exchange for the equivalent dollar value, which maintains its value and protects consumers from many of the potential risks associated with stablecoins," the statement said.

The senators also proposed to create an advisory committee that would develop guiding principles, empower regulatory agencies and advise lawmakers on fast-developing technology. They called on relevant federal agencies to develop comprehensive guidance on cybersecurity for digital asset intermediaries, the statement also said.

"As more is learned about the ways in which countries like China and Russia are participating in cryptocurrency and other digital assets markets, we need to prioritize the development of robust cybersecurity standards," the statement added.

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Biden's Inflation Forecast for 2023 Needs to Be Higher Than 4.7% Cited in Budget - Yellen

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden's inflation forecast of 4.7% in the 2023 budget likely needs to be revised higher as current price pressures are almost double to that and unlikely to moderate in time to reach levels in the budget estimate, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in a congressional hearing on Tuesday.

"We're in the process of producing a new forecast, for the mid-session review [of the budget]," Yellen told a US Senate Finance Committee hearing on the the 2023 budget projections. "The numbers aren't locked in but it's likely to be higher [for inflation]."

Yellen also said the United States was experiencing "unacceptable" levels of inflation as a result of the Ukraine conflict and the Biden administration is seeking to dampen the runaway growth in prices without hurting the resilient US labor market.

"We currently face macroeconomic challenges, including unacceptable levels of inflation as well as the headwinds associated with the disruptions caused by the pandemic's effect on supply chains, and the effects of supply side disturbances to oil and food markets resulting from Russia's war in Ukraine," she said.

After tumbling 3.5% in 2020 due to the complications caused by the coronavirus pandemic measures, the US economy expanded by 5.7% in 2021, growing at the fastest pace in 40 years. But inflation grew even faster.

The Consumer Price Index (CPI), a major price gauge, expanded by 7.5% last year, also at its fastest in four decades, due to lingering supply constraints caused by the pandemic.

This year, the CPI has expanded more aggressively, growing at an annualized rate of 8.5% in March before moderating to 8.3% in April. The Federal Reserve's target for inflation is 2% per year.

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**Six Democrat Lawmakers Urge Biden to Secure Saudi Commitments to Stabilize Energy Markets**

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - A group of six Democrat US congressmen on Tuesday sent a letter to President Joe Biden urging him to secure commitments from Saudi Arabia to stabilize the situation in the global energy markets as well as to stop human rights abuses.

"Among the issues we recommend you prioritize are: securing further Saudi commitments to stabilize global energy markets and definitively abandon its Trump-era oil production deal with Russia," the congressmen said in the letter.

The lawmakers welcomed the latest OPEC+ decision to boost oil output and called on undertaking additional steps in that direction moving forward.

While noting that Saudi Arabia is a long-time US partner, the lawmakers said its policies provide support to US opponents such as Russia and Iran.

"Saudi Arabia's refusal to stabilize global energy markets is helping bankroll Vladimir Putin's war crimes in Ukraine, while inflicting economic pain on everyday Americans," the letter said.

"Additionally, the prolonged Saudi-led war in Yemen has not reduced Iran's malign influence, but instead created an unprecedented humanitarian disaster that will fuel regional instability."

The lawmakers also urged Biden to exert pressure on Saudi Arabia to stop the arbitrary detention of human rights activists as well as halt other rights violations.

"We further encourage you to renew the US demands for an end to Saudi Arabia's abusive and arbitrary detention practices, as well as its use of mass executions, particularly for individuals who did not have access to a fair trial, such as the 81 people executed in March 2022," the letter said.

The lawmakers also insisted on the necessity of preventing a strategic partnership between Saudi Arabia and China from developing and maintain the existing US policy of requiring robust safeguards for any civil-nuclear cooperation.

The six lawmakers include Intelligence Committee Chair Adam Schiff, Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Gregory Weeks, Armed Services Committee Chair Adam Smith, Oversight and Reform Committee Chair Carolyn Maloney, Homeland Security Committee Chair Bennie Thompson and National Security Subcommittee head Stephen Lynch.

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Narrative That US Leaving Middle East, North Africa 'Wholly Incorrect' - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The narrative that the United States is leaving the Middle East and North Africa region as an engaged party is entirely untrue, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Yael Lempert said on Tuesday.

"Unfortunately, as we've pursued [US] goals, a narrative has emerged in some corners that the United States is leaving the Middle East and North Africa," Lempert said during an Atlantic Council event. "That narrative is wholly incorrect, as becomes abundantly clear upon reviewing the breadth of American engagement throughout the region."

Lempert said the United States will continue to keep a focus on human rights as a central issue during engagements with countries in the region.

The diplomat also addressed the growing Russian and Chinese efforts to grow influence in the Middle East and North Africa, including through economic investments and security assistance. However, Moscow and Beijing have not met commitments or helped resolve conflict in the region, Lampert also said.

The United States still views the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action as the best path to addressing Iran's nuclear program despite warnings from the Biden administration about the negotiations' long-term tenability amid Iran's nuclear advancements, Lempert added.

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US Record-Climbing Fuel Prices Double Costs to Plant Crops in 2022 - Farmers

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - American farmers, already burdened by high fertilizer prices, are spending more than twice as much on fuel to plant crops this year due to the record-high prices that continue to climb in the United States daily, the Ohio Farm Bureau's senior communications director Ty Higgins told Sputnik.

Last June, the average price for a gallon of diesel fuel in the United States was \$3.19, but on Monday it hit an all-time record high of \$5.64, according to the American Automobile

Association (AAA). Records from the US Energy Information Administration show that the average price for a gallon of diesel during the Trump administration's last week in power on January 20, 2020, cost about \$3.03.

"Diesel fuel is one of, if not the most used energy product, on the farm," Higgins said. "When you think about planting season and you think about those tractors that run on diesel, working night and day, what was maybe \$300-\$400 a day last year to plant is upwards to \$1,000 a day this year."

Farmers are also coping with significantly higher prices on seeds, fertilizer, and farming equipment used to plant this year's crop, Higgins added.

"It does put a strain on the bottom line and makes farmers think a little bit more about what they're doing, be a little more cognizant about how they spend their money in order to continue to do what they have to do in order to grow a successful crop," Higgins said.

Javier Zamora, a certified organic farmer in the central coast of California, told Sputnik he's spending twice as much on diesel fuel to run his farm this year.

"The rise of diesel and gasoline, it's a big issue for us because we actually deliver our crops directly to grocery stores, hospitals and schools and stuff," Zamora said. "So the the amount of money we're spending in fuel now and also for tractors, it's almost double what we did the year before, so definitely it's really hard for the bottom line."

Zamora, who has 40 years experience in the agricultural industry and has run his own farm for the last 10 years, said he's concerned these high input costs may last longer than expected.

"The concern is that this thing drives along and lasts longer than what's expected, I think if it lasts more than one season and then we're gonna be fucked," Zamora said. "A lot of things like packaging has gone up, diesel, gasoline and then the scarcity of certain things coming out of COVID and then we get this [conflict], it's having an impact on some of the inputs that we're using."

Higgins predicts US consumers will see higher food prices for a significant amount of time, but he does not expect there to be a food shortage in the United States.

Although farmers are facing high input costs on crop production, the high market prices for corn, soybeans and wheat are offsetting and allow farmers to make a little bit of money or breakeven, Higgins said. However, a surplus of corn, soybeans and wheat in the market amid high input costs could mean trouble.

"They'll find a way to get it done, but that's where things could really get complicated, is when they have to spend more for a crop that they don't make enough money to pay for the bills,"

Higgins said. "We're not there, but if we start to see supply pick up and prices fall on the commodity side and fertilizer and diesel prices stay higher. It's gonna be a tightrope to walk."

US farmers are not at risk of losing their farms at the moment, but they have been pushing US lawmakers to address the dire situation, Zamora said.

"There's definitely a big concern and I think we are raising our concerns, raising our voices to demand attention to the situation," Zamora said. "So there's a big movement where the communities are just getting pissed and yelling at our representatives. So we are raising our concerns to our representatives, whether local, mostly local, but when the opportunity comes when we get to the state and federal officials, we do that."

Zamora said he believes the geopolitical tensions, especially surrounding Ukraine, are leading to the rise in fuel prices.

"Yes, there is a problem because of what's going on in Russia and Ukraine, obviously it trickles down to America and other countries because the world is connected these days," Zamora said. "Grains come from parts of where all this war is happening, so of course it's going to have an impact."

The United States has imposed numerous sanctions this year that have complicated imports of Russian fertilizers and food products, which has caused substantial disruptions to food supply chains around the world.

#### AMERICAN FARMERS EXPECTED TO HELP REPLACE CROPS LOST IN UKRAINE

US farmers are expected to step up to plant the crops in high demand around the world to help curb the supply chain disruption on Ukraine's agricultural industry, Higgins said.

Ukraine and Russia account for almost a third of the world's wheat and barley production and half of the sunflower oil. The West has accused Russia of stopping grain exports from Ukraine. Russia has repeatedly rejected this claim, stressing that seaports will be reopened as soon as Ukrainian naval mines are cleared.

"I think the markets are telling them to do that, we're seeing higher markets for corn, soybeans and wheat and I think when farmers see that opportunity to make a little bit more money in order to pay for the fertilizer and diesel fuel costs, they're going to take advantage of it," Higgins said. "I think that we are going to see a little bit more aggressive wheat planting this year."

American farmers will do whatever they can in order to stretch out what they do on the farm in order to get that product to people who need it the most, Higgins said.

On Friday, Russian President Vladimir Putin told the Rossiya 24 broadcaster that ships carrying wheat will be able to leave the Black Sea without any problems, provided that Kiev clear the Ukrainian ports of mines.

#### SKYROCKETING FERTILIZER PRICES

The huge hike in fertilizer prices has been a burden on US farmers, long before the conflict in Ukraine began in late February, Higgins explained.

Some fertilizer and nutrient prices increased as much as 300% last year, according to the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF). Compared to September 2020 prices, ammonia rose by 210%, urea by more than 155%, liquid nitrogen by nearly 160 %, while three other key products at least doubled, AFBF economists said in a report in December.

The AFBF attributed the phenomenon to several factors, including rising energy costs, supply chain disruptions, increased demand for fertilizer, along with high prices for raw nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium.

Higgins said 80% of the fertilizer American farmers use is produced in the United States, but the other 20% of fertilizer must be imported, but the US supply chain has gone through a series of bumps over the last two years.

US fertilizer plants were affected by catastrophic events, including fire damage at one plant in North Carolina, the Texas winter storm in February 2021 temporarily shut down a plant, and a hurricane in the US Gulf region temporarily shutdown another facility for a short period of time, Higgins said.

All these domestic disruptions combined with the shakeup caused by the conflict in Ukraine have caused fertilizer prices to increase more than 400%, Higgins said.

"It will continue to be a challenge and then the Biden administration has pushed for more production of fertilizer here in the US and that's why, to give ourselves more independence from

having to import from Russia and Ukraine which by the way, Russia is a big supplier of natural gas, that whole part of the world is and natural gas is a huge component of fertilizer, and that's why we saw the prices go up after the conflict because we rely so heavily on that part of the world in order to produce fertilizer for other parts of the world and that includes the US," Higgins said.

Higgins added that US farmers are not being directly affected by US sanctions, but he believes these measures have caused speculation in the market.

"I know that there's always speculation in the markets and I'm sure those sanctions have something to do with why corn and soybean prices are higher, there's no doubt in my mind about that when it comes to speculation at the market, but I think directly speaking so far those sanctions have not had a direct impact on agriculture," Higgins said.

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#### WFP Unable to Verify Allegations of Russia 'Stealing' Ukraine Grain

UNITED NATIONS, June 7 (Sputnik) - The World Food Programme (WFP) has been unable to verify allegations of Russia "stealing" Ukrainian grain, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday.

On Monday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said, citing "credible reports," that Russia is pilfering Ukraine's grain exports to sell for its own profit. Russia dismisses the claim.

"We've seen [recent media reports], are talking to our colleagues at the WFP, they have no way of verifying these allegations, we are advocating for free movement in the Black Sea," Dujarric told a briefing.

Ukraine and Russia account for around 30% of global exports of wheat, 20% of maize, and 76% of sunflower. The West has accused Russia of stopping grain exports from Ukraine. Russia has repeatedly rejected this claim, stressing that seaports will be reopened as soon as Ukrainian naval mines are cleared.

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#### US Senate Confirms Wagner Nomination to Assistant US Air Force Secretary

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The US Senate on Tuesday confirmed the nomination of Alex Wagner to serve as an assistant secretary of the air force, putting him in charge of much of the branch's personnel issues.

Senate lawmakers confirmed Wagner in a vote of 76-21.

Wagner most recently worked as an executive in the aerospace industry, having previously served in roles at the Pentagon including Chief of Staff to the Secretary of the Army, Defense

Department Rule of Law and Detainee Policy Advisor, and Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Global Strategic Affairs.

Wagner received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Brown University and a Juris Doctor from Georgetown University Law Center, where he has also held an appointment as adjunct professor since 2011.

Wagner's principal duty as an assistant secretary for manpower and reserve affairs will be to manage the air force's manpower and reserve component affairs. Wagner will replace John Fedrigo, who has been serving as acting assistant secretary since 2019.

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### Congress Must Pass New Laws to Tackle Growing Gun Killings Crisis in US - Pelosi

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - Congress must pass sweeping gun control legislation to crack down on gun trafficking, raise the age of purchase of automatic weapons and outlaw high capacity gun magazines, US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told a rally on the National Mall to commemorate the 45,000 victims of gun violence in the United States last year.

"We must act," Pelosi said. "We must pass extreme risk protection order legislation. We must raise the age of purchase [for] weapons of war, crack down on gun trafficking [and] outlaw high capacity magazines. ... We owe the children of our country so much more than excuses."

More than 100 people are killed in shootings across the United States every day, Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence Engagement Director Sheila Isong told the rally, adding that there were at least 13 mass shootings last weekend in which 17 people were killed.

"Forty thousand Americans die every year from gun violence Last year that figure soared to 45,000. ... Leaders in Washington must take action. The Senate needs to pass universal background checks. The House and Senate must act quickly to [pass] legislation banning large capacity gun magazines," Isong said.

The organizers of the rally had planted 40,000 white flowers on the National Mall to commemorate the 40,000 Americans killed every year in gin violence, including domestic disputes, suicides and accidents, Isong also said.

An additional 5,000 orange flowers had been planted for the additional 5,0000 people who died in 2021, bringing that year's toll up to 45,000. she added.

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### US Envoy for Yemen Says Current Truce Best Chance for Peace in Years

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The current truce in Yemen is the best opportunity for peace in years, US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking said on Tuesday.

Lenderking has recently visited Gulf states to discuss diplomatic efforts toward a durable and inclusive resolution to the Yemen conflict.

"This is the best opportunity Yemen has for peace in several years," he said.

The diplomat noted that Yemen remains a priority for the US administration.

"The sides must agree to a permanent ceasefire and start negotiations ... we really call on all parties to continue to adhere to the terms," he said.

Last week, UN special envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg announced a truce extension. The renewed agreement was extended under the same conditions as the original document, which came into effect on April 2.

The conflict between Yemen's government forces and the Houthis has been going on since 2014. The situation was aggravated in 2015 after a coalition led by Saudi Arabia joined the conflict on the side of Yemen's government and began conducting air, land and sea operations against the Houthis. The latter have retaliated by attacking Saudi forces and firing missiles into Saudi Arabia.

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US Wants Russian Oil to Flow to World While Limiting Moscow's Revenue - Yellen

(Updates with more details, background in paras 3-7)

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The United States wants Russian oil to flow to the world to relieve the global supply deficit but it also hopes to limit Moscow's revenue from it, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in a congressional hearing on Tuesday.

"I think what we want to do is keep [a] portion [of] oil flowing into the global market to hold down global prices, and try to avoid a [price] spike that causes a worldwide recession," Yellen told the US Senate Finance Committee. "But absolutely, the objective is to limit the revenue going to Russia. There are different ways, technically, of accomplishing that. But it's certainly a desirable strategy."

A Western-led boycott of Russian oil in response to its special military operation in Ukraine has weighed on the country's production of the commodity. Russian oil output averaged 10.05 million barrels per day in April, down from 11.01 million barrels daily in March, according to OilX, a data provider that uses government statistics and satellite imaging to measure activity at oilfields.

Russian Finance Minister Anton Siluanov cautioned in April that oil production might fall 17% this year, equal to a drop of about 2 million barrels per day. Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak has since presented a more optimistic outlook, saying production increased in May by between 200,000 and 300,000 barrels per day and a further recovery was expected in June. Last week, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Western sanctions on Russia would have no effect on the country's oil exports and predicted a surge in profits from energy shipments this year.

"Considering the price level that has been established as a result of the West's policies, we have suffered no budgetary losses," Lavrov said. "On the contrary, this year, we will significantly increase the profits from the export of our energy resources. Oil, generally speaking, is not

subject to politics, there is a demand for it ... we have alternative sales markets, where we are already increasing sales.”

European Union leaders agreed in principle last week to cut 90% of oil imports from Russia by the end of this year, in response to its special military operation in Ukraine that began on February 24.

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North Korea Using Rhetoric That Could Suggest Use of Tactical Nuclear Weapons - US Envoy

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - North Korea is using rhetoric that could suggest an intent to use tactical nuclear weapons, US Special Representative for North Korea Sung Kim said on Tuesday.

"The DPRK [North Korea] and senior officials have used rhetoric that could suggest the use of tactical nuclear weapons," Kim said during a conference call with reporters.

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US Hopes China Will Be More 'Forthcoming' to Cooperate on North Korea - Special Envoy

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The United States hopes China will be more forthcoming to cooperate on efforts to address concerns over North Korea's recent ballistic missile tests, Special Representative for North Korea Sung Kim said on Tuesday.

Last month, China and Russia vetoed a US-proposed resolution to tighten sanctions against North Korea for a series of missile tests conducted the day before.

"So we hope that China will be more forthcoming in working with us with the situation on the [Korean] peninsula," Kim said during a conference call.

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US Continues Diplomatic Outreach But North Korea Showing No Interest - Special Envoy

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The United States has continued to reach out to North Korea through multiple channels about engaging diplomatically on issues including COVID-19-related assistance, but Pyongyang has not shown any interest, US Special Envoy Sung Kim said on Tuesday.

"We seek dialogue with Pyongyang without preconditions. We continue to remain committed to diplomacy, even as the DPRK launches an unprecedented number of ballistic missiles," Kim

said during a press briefing. "So in the past year we have sent messages in multiple ways... and included specific proposals, including regarding humanitarian cooperation and COVID-19 related assistance."

However, North Korea has neither responded nor shown interest in engagement to date, Kim said.

The outreach occurred publicly through offers for engagement by figures like US President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken as well as via high-level private channels, Kim added.

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**N. Korea Hasn't Responded to US Through Third Parties, Shows No Interest in Talks - Envoy**

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - North Korea has not responded to US requests for denuclearization talks sent through third parties and Pyongyang appears to show no interest in returning to the negotiating table, US Special Representative for North Korea Sung Kim said on Tuesday.

According to South Korean military, Pyongyang test-fired eight short-range ballistic missiles toward the Sea of Japan on Sunday. This was North Korea's 18th missile test since the start of this year.

"We have also reached out to pass this message through private channels as well, this includes high-level personal messages from senior US officials to senior DPRK officials," Kim said during a conference call. "Over the past year we have sent such messages in multiple ways: through third parties, directly in writing."

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**US Wants Russian Oil to Flow to World, While Limiting Moscow's Revenue - Treasury Chief**

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The United States wants Russian oil to flow to the world to relieve the global supply deficit in the commodity but it also hopes to limit the revenue Moscow can earn from this, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Tuesday.

"I think what we want to do is keep [a] portion [of] oil flowing into the global market to hold down global prices, and try to avoid a [price] spike that causes a worldwide recession," Yellen told a US Senate hearing. "But absolutely, the objective is to limit the revenue going to Russia. There are different ways, technically, of accomplishing that. But it's certainly a desirable strategy."

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**CORRECTION - Canada's Merchandise Trade Surplus Shrinks to \$1.2Bln in April – Statistics Canada**

(Corrects headline to read "April" instead of May)

"OTTAWA, June 7, (Sputnik) - Canada's merchandise trade surplus with the world dropped from 2.3 billion Canadian dollars in March to 1.5 billion Canadian dollars (\$1.2 billion) in April, Statistics Canada said in a report on Tuesday.

"Following two months of strong increases, growth in Canadian merchandise imports and exports slowed in April, with imports rising 1.9% and exports increasing 0.6%. As a result, Canada's merchandise trade surplus with the world narrowed from \$2.3 billion in March to \$1.5 billion in April," the statistics entity said, adding that imports of consumer goods were the main driving force behind April's increase.

April ended with a smaller trade surplus with the neighboring United States, as imports rose by 4.4% and exports by 2.1%, going from a record 12.2 billion Canadian dollars in March to 11.6 billion Canadian dollars in April.

Exports to countries other than the US contracted by 4.7% in April. The country exported less gold to the United Kingdom, saw a decrease in demand for minerals in South Korea, while nations like France and Spain reduced their agricultural and pharmaceutical imports.

Canada also decreased its imports of goods from China by 15.3% following two monthly increases.

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**US Inflation 'Unacceptable,' Treasury Seeks to Dampen Ukraine Conflict's Impact - Yellen**

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Sputnik) - The United States is experiencing "unacceptable" levels of inflation as a result of the Ukraine conflict and the Biden administration is seeking to dampen the runaway growth in prices without hurting the resilient US labor market, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Tuesday.

"We currently face macroeconomic challenges, including unacceptable levels of inflation as well as the headwinds associated with the disruptions caused by the pandemic's effect on supply chains, and the effects of supply side disturbances to oil and food markets resulting from Russia's war in Ukraine," Yellen told a US Senate hearing debating President Joe Biden's budget for 2023.

After tumbling 3.5% in 2020 due to the complications caused by the coronavirus pandemic measures, the US economy expanded by 5.7% in 2021, growing at the fastest pace in 40 years. But inflation grew even faster. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) another major price gauge, expanded by 7.5% last year, also at its fastest in four decades, due to lingering supply constraints caused by the pandemic.

This year, the CPI has expanded more aggressively, growing at an annualized rate 8.5% in March before moderating to 8.3% in April. The Federal Reserve's target for inflation is 2% per year.

Yellen said while the administration wanted to slow inflation, it was being careful not to disrupt the most dynamic US labor market in generations.

In order to halt inflation, the Federal Reserve says it may have to cool wage growth, one of the principal drivers of price growth - and that could temper the expansion of the jobs market.

"To dampen inflationary pressures without undermining the strength of the labor market an appropriate budgetary stance is needed to complement monetary policy actions by the Federal Reserve," Yellen said, adding that Biden's proposed legislation for clean energy initiatives and reforms to reduce prescription drug prices could help lower costs for Americans.

Unemployment among Americans reached a record high of 14.8% in April 2020, with the loss of some 20 million jobs in the aftermath of the coronavirus breakout that year. Jobs recovery has, however, been strong over the past year, with the jobless rate being at 4% or below since January - a level defined by the Federal Reserve as "full employment."

Despite the burgeoning labor market, US gross domestic product (GDP) itself contracted 1.5% in the second quarter. If GDP does not return to positive territory in the second quarter, the United States could technically be in a recession given that it takes two straight quarters of negative GDP to make up for a recession.

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