

1/30/23 Monday

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Photos: Car Flies Upside Down Into Home in DC Suburb, Driver Miraculously Walks Away Unscathed
By - Fantine Gardinier

A suburb of Washington, DC, was the site of a bizarre car accident on Sunday in which the vehicle was launched into a house in mid-air.

Late on Sunday night, the town of Chillum, Maryland, which abuts the federal capital city, was rocked by a car flying into a home. Photos of the scene show a Honda CR-V sport utility vehicle upside down, sitting halfway into a brick house in a hole it undoubtedly created by plowing through the wall. Remarkably, the SUV is sitting on an intact porch railing - a hint of how it arrived in its final resting spot.

"He drove up a hill, got some air-time, and ended up inside of a house," a local citizen journalist summarized the incident by saying. "Craziest scene I've been on."

According to news reports, the driver was able to exit the vehicle after impact without any help, telling police officers he had been driving 40 miles per hour at the time of the crash - the posted speed limit in the area is 35 miles per hour.

The area seems to be prone to such crashes: yellow concrete bollards can be seen installed in several neighbor's yards of the kind used to block automobile access.

Last month, a New York City suburb was also scene to a disastrous crash in which a [school bus full](#) of students from a nearby Jewish yeshiva flew off the road and plowed into several cars and a house. However, in that incident, more than a dozen children had to be hospitalized.

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Senator Cruz Urges FBI to Search Hunter Biden's Home for Classified Files Amid POTUS Office Finds
By - Fantine Gardinier

Thanks to the contents of the so-called "laptop from hell," federal investigators have compiled enough evidence to charge Hunter Biden with tax crimes and falsifying paperwork related to a gun purchase, but the US attorney's office in Delaware has not yet brought charges against the US President's son.

As more and more batches of classified documents from his prior times in office are found among the files of US President Joe Biden, US Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) is urging the Department of Justice to widen its search for missing files to include Hunter Biden, Joe's prodigal

businessman son who infamously abandoned his laptop full of business and personal files at a repair shop.

“It seems he leaves classified documents wherever he goes,” Cruz said in a US media interview on Sunday. “And we also know that Hunter Biden at times was - declared his residence to be those very same places.”

Cruz added that it was “[critical for the FBI](#) to search Hunter Biden’s homes, home and office residences to make sure there are no classified documents there, given all the evidence that’s piling up. We need to ascertain who’s had access to what and when.”

He added that it seemed a “natural next step” for the FBI to also look through the massive trove of [senatorial papers](#) donated by Biden to the University of Delaware, which span his 36 years in the US Senate. Cruz first made the suggestion last week on his personal podcast.

However, when the [FBI raided](#) former US President Donald Trump’s estate in Florida last August to seize hundreds of missing classified documents, Cruz was among the first to denounce the seizure as an abuse of power.

“The FBI raiding Donald Trump is unprecedented. It is corrupt & an abuse of power. What Nixon tried to do, Biden has now implemented: The Biden Admin has fully weaponized DOJ & FBI to target their political enemies,” Cruz tweeted at the time.

Cruz’s suggestion comes at the conjunction of several developments in recent weeks, including news the DOJ [considered using the FBI](#) to raid Biden’s family home for more files, as well as the new Republican-majority US House of Representatives taking up an agenda that includes investigations into the Biden family.

Their quest for information may also be aided by Twitter’s new CEO, Elon Musk, who late last year gave journalists access to internal documents showing the company’s collaboration with the Democratic Party and parts of the US federal government to prune users’ news feeds, including blocking access to a story about the contents of Hunter Biden’s laptop. House Republicans have [requested more materials](#) from Musk.

That laptop, found at a repair store in Wilmington, Delaware, in October 2020, included [extensive information](#) about Hunter’s personal issues and business affairs, shedding light on how several members of the Biden family profited from its connections to Joe Biden when he was US Vice President, from 2009 to 2017. The revelations came just weeks before the US presidential election in which Joe Biden was the Democratic challenger to then-President Trump.

Those business dealings included lucrative meetings with foreign leaders, including from Russia, Ukraine, and China, many of which [happened either in conjunction](#) with trips by then-Vice President Biden or by carefully name-dropping the VP to suggest they were close to the halls of power.

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Deadly Gambit: 90 Years Since Adolf Hitler Appointed Chancellor of Germany
By - Fantine Gardinier

It's been 90 years since Nazi leader Adolf Hitler was appointed to the office of Chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933, setting in motion the fascist seizure of power and ultimately the Second World War.

There is much debate in German historiography as to whether or not Hitler's appointment as chancellor was "Machtergreifung" (seizure of power) or "Machtübernahme" (rise to power). On the one hand, Hitler was appointed chancellor by President Paul von Hindenburg using his legal powers, making the move strictly constitutional. On the other, the Nazis had been steadily escalating street violence against leftist groups, especially the powerful Antifaschistische Aktion led by the Communist Party, and Hindenburg faced extensive political and social pressure by Germany's industrial magnates to appoint Hitler as chancellor or face open civil war.

Rise of Nazism

The National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP, or Nazis) was formed in 1920 in the aftermath of the First World War, but many of its core ideas were formed decades earlier. A racialized nationalism that saw Germany as populated by "pure" ethnic Germans and "impure" other races was combined with an irredentist fury aimed at the Entente powers for the humiliating terms of Germany's de facto surrender in 1919, as well as people inside Germany who the Nazis claimed had conspired with them. It also came about in the wake of a civil war in which Freikorps, or right-wing groups of demobilized veterans, came to the aid of the social democratic government to crush a communist uprising.

Hitler, an Austrian who fought for Germany in the war, did not found the NSDAP - in fact, he was assigned by his commanding officer to infiltrate an earlier iteration of the party in 1919, which he joined after becoming convinced of its ideology. Early-on, the party solidified its hostility to international socialism as well as to the Jewish people, who numbered only about 500,000 out of Germany's 66-million-strong population.

The NSDAP took inspiration from Benito [Mussolini's seizure of power](#) in Italy in October 1922, which brought the first fascist government to power in Europe. A year later in November 1923, the Nazis launched an attempted seizure of power in Munich, the capital of the German state of Bavaria. Although they counted war hero Gen. Erich Ludendorff among their ranks, the German Army garrison refused to support them and suppressed the uprising, with the ringleaders captured and jailed afterward.

When Hitler was released a year later, the [New York Times described him](#) as "tamed" by prison and "no longer to be feared" after having been the "demi-god of the reactionary extremists." "It is believed he will retire to private life and return to Austria, the country of his birth," the Times wrote.

In fact, the Nazis went back to work, and had some new friends to help them.

Bailed Out by Big Business

The fanatical anticommunism of the Nazi Party in Germany and the Fascist Party in Italy drew to them the support of those elements of capitalist society most fearful of a seizure of power by the working class: the wealthy capitalist elite who owned the country's industries and land.

Hitler's attempted seizure of power in Munich had failed, but was also bold, and German businessmen began to secretly throw their weight behind the movement as the Communist Party of Germany began to grow in numbers, the Soviet Union began to recover from its catastrophic civil war, and the Social Democratic Party in power in Berlin tolerated both as well as flourishing cultural renaissance at the center of which were Jews and LGBTQ people.

Supporters include Fritz Thyssen, son of industrial magnate August Thyssen, who funneled the Nazis 1 million Reichsmarks before 1932. The director of Thyssen's American holdings was Prescott Bush, the father of former US President George H.W. Bush and grandfather of former US President George W. Bush. Bush's assets were seized in 1942 under the Trading with the Enemy Act, and many at the time expected him to be prosecuted for aiding the enemy. Other financial backers included industrialist Ernst von Borsig, one of the richest men in Prussia; Gustav and his son Alfred Krupp of the Krupp industrial dynasty; and the IG Farben conglomerate. These and other backers would play a key role in pressuring Hindenburg to appoint Hitler as chancellor, penning a [letter to him in November 1932](#) alongside conservative politicians Franz von Papen and Alfred Hugenberg, in which they urged the German president to appoint Hitler as leader of a government "independent from parliamentary parties" that could turn into a movement that would "enrapture millions of people."

These and many other corporations in Germany and other countries would go on to profit handsomely from the German war machine and the Holocaust, with IG Farben making the infamous Zyklon B poison gas used in the extermination camps.

Political Breakdown

The contradictions of the Weimar Republic, the German state formed after the abolition of the monarchy in 1918, continued to come toward a head in the late 1920s. Economic stagnation and hyperinflation, caused in part by the massive indemnity the government owed to victorious France and Britain and the loss of the country's most industrialized areas, became even worse after the Great Depression hit in October 1929. The steady decline in support for the SPD government was paralleled by the rise in popularity of the communists and the fascists, both of whom offered answers and solutions to Germany's problems.

Outside of the Soviet Union, the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) was the world's largest and most powerful. It had formed out of a split from the SPD during the war after several members, including Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and Clara Zetkin, rejected the SPD's sudden reversal of its anti-war position. Although the SPD crushed a KPD uprising in 1919 and Luxemburg and murdered thousands of its members, including Luxemburg and Liebknecht, the party rebounded later in the 1920s. It blamed the capitalist ruling class for the ails of the German working class and rejected the militarism and racism of the nationalist movement. As the NSDAP grew in strength and began to attack communists, Jews, and other groups, the KPD formed militant organizations to fight back: the Roter Frontkämpferbund (Red Front-Fighters' League) and later Antifaschistische Aktion (Anti-fascist Action), the latter of which has served as inspiration for the modern "Antifa" movement.

Both the communists and the Nazis gained electoral strength, too, and the Reichstag, once dominated by the SPD, became a political free-for-all in which parties struggled to form and maintain coalitions.

The social and economic chaos led to a breakdown of democracy, and in 1930, Heinrich Brüning of the Centre Party was given de facto dictatorial power by President von Hindenburg, who issued decrees in Brüning's name until May 1932.

In March 1932, Hitler ran against Hindenburg in the presidential election and lost badly, taking 36.7% of the vote to Hindenburg's 53%. The Communist Party's Ernst Thälmann trailed in third place with 10%. However, the NSDAP as a whole continued to rise, and in the Reichstag elections that July, won an astounding 123 seats, doubling its strength and making it the largest

party in the legislatures, although it still lacked a majority. The communists and social democrats outnumbered the fascists if their numbers were combined, but bitter factional disputes kept them from uniting.

When the Reichstag convened that August, KPD co-founder Clara Zetkin gave the opening speech because she was the oldest lawmaker in the chamber. Though she was nearly blind and struggled to walk, the 75-year-old woman was carried to the podium by her comrades, where she [denounced the Nazis](#) and called on all of German society to unite against them. However, her advice went ill-heeded, and no anti-Nazi majority was formed. Von Papen's minority government remained in power and new elections were called for November.

The November elections saw the Nazis lose 21 seats and several million votes, with the Communist Party making most of the gains. However, the election settled none of the problems behind the failure of the July elections. Under pressure from the country's industrial elite and its conservative non-Nazi political leaders, Hindenburg reluctantly agreed to appoint his former election rival as head of government, believing his vulnerable position would make him totally dependent on Hindenburg and von Papen for power.

They were wrong.

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Biden Reveals US Will Not Provide Ukraine With F-16 Fighter Jets

The F-16 fighter jet is a fourth-generation supersonic fighter developed for the US Air Force by manufacturer General Dynamics. It was officially introduced into the service in August 1978. US President Joe Biden revealed on Monday that Washington would not be providing F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine in its future military aid packages.

The American president remarks came as he spoke to reporters on the White House South Lawn, moments after he returned from an event in Baltimore, Maryland.

Asked whether F-16s were Ukraine-bound in upcoming military aid packages, Biden replied to reporters' question with a simple "no." He also indicated that he intends to visit Poland but remains unsure as to when that trip will take place.

Ukraine has been calling on the Biden administration and congressional lawmakers to provide F-16 jets in order to bolster the regime's forces amid Russia's ongoing special military operation. Hours after Biden spoke to reporters, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby [explained](#) that the reasoning behind the move was because "there's a lot of capability that is being sent, and will be sent in the coming weeks and months" to Ukraine. "The kinds of capabilities that we know will be critical to helping Ukrainians again in the fighting now in the wintertime, as well as the kind of fighting that we expect that they're going to be doing in the spring," he added.

Amid reports of the US' Abrams deliveries, talk of potentially sending F-16s to Ukraine gained strong momentum in Washington over the last several weeks. In fact, US media earlier reported a group of US military officials had been working behind the scenes to [lobby for the shipment](#).

However, experts have noted F-16 jets in Ukraine carried more of a domestic propaganda quality, as opposed to actually helping Ukrainian forces amid hostilities.

"F-16s to Ukraine function only as domestic propaganda for more war, and they would create more opportunity for domestic rage on both sides, and they reduce the ability to get to real agreement and settling of the Ukrainian border in a war that serves the actual people who still live there," Lt. Col. Karen Kwiatkowski, a retired Pentagon analyst, previously told Sputnik. Biden's Monday declaration came as officials also confirmed that Washington shipped out its first batch of Bradley fighting vehicles to Ukraine, noting that approximately 60 vehicles had been dispatched from South Carolina.

To date, the US has provided Ukraine with \$27.1 billion worth of security assistance since the start of Russia's special military operation, which is set to mark one year in February.

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Phone Calls Help Mental Health Despite Causing Some People Anxiety, Study Finds
By - Mary Manley

Telephobia is the fear of conversations over the phone and it's a surprisingly common social anxiety disorder. The anxiety disorder is even more common among millennials, with a 2019 survey in the UK finding 76% of millennials and 40% of baby boomers felt anxious when hearing their phone ring.

Despite the fact that a majority of millennials are too anxious to make phone calls—with one study finding that [81% of millennials](#) get apprehension anxiety before they're able to make a phone call—calling someone you feel close to and participating in a meaningful conversation on the phone can help one feel less lonely, and help young people reconnect with others.

According to [Study Finds](#), anxiety and depression is on the rise among young adults, who felt the negative effects of loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic more than any other age group.

A [study](#) conducted between October 2020 and February 2021 found that areas with a higher concentration of people aged 16 to 24 had higher rates of loneliness. And while remote learning was able to be implemented in some environments when schools shut down, and some young people still had technology like computers and cellphones as a readily available tool to reconnect with their loved ones, not all forms of media communication were the same in improving one's mental health.

Even before the pandemic a 2018 study by the [BBC](#) found 40% of 16 to 24-year-olds reported feeling lonely.

But certain forms of communication over the phone can alleviate those feelings of loneliness.

One [study](#) found that media interactions which incorporate a person's voice such as video chat, phone calls or voice clips can create a stronger social bond when compared to texting or e-mailing. The study also found voice-based communications were no more uncomfortable than text-based communications.

Text-based conversations can also lead to confusion and misunderstandings because it doesn't allow people to ask or answer questions in real time. The text-based form of communication can also make it harder for people to convey the tone of their messages.

However, in order for a person to increase their mental health and reduce feelings of loneliness the phone call should be with a person one has a meaningful relationship with whether it be a friend, partner, or family member.

[John Cacioppo](#), a social neuroscientist, emphasizes that those who are lonely seek out meaningful connections with others—so a short, detached phone call won't help alleviate those feelings of loneliness compared to one which is engaging or intimate.

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Shocking Video Shows Massive Boulder Smash Through Hawaii House, Barely Miss

Homeowner

By - Mary Manley

A video released to social media shows a large boulder smashing through a family's home in Hawaii. The incident, which happened on Saturday, is the third of its kind to occur within 24 hours after a nearby development in Palolo began construction.

Palolo resident Caroline Sasaki had a near-death experience over the weekend when a massive boulder smashed through her home. Sasaki and other long term residents are blaming a recent development project that has begun on a mountain behind Sasaki's home.

The boulder, which according to the [Fire Department](#) is five feet by five feet, can be seen on the video smashing through a cinder block wall into the house and then crashing through a second wall before coming to a rest in a bedroom. A car was damaged while at least four people were home at the time of the incident - luckily, no one was injured.

Long term residents of Palolo explained that boulders had not been rolling down the mountain prior to recent construction being carried out in the area.

"We lived in this same location. We just knocked down the old house and rebuilt it; and it's never happened before, heavy rain and hurricane warnings nothing. So, no rocks ever came down," Sasaki said, adding that they had just moved into the new home earlier that month. "We've had some issues with them carving the mountain, and I don't know if that's the cause."

"Last night, I was very shaken," she told a local [news station](#). "I really didn't know what happened except for the loud boom."

A second homeowner had previously complained about a smaller boulder, about two feet by two feet, striking his property's retaining wall.

The development's owner, Bingning Li, told local news outlets that his project is to blame for the rolling boulders, explaining he had protective measures put in place for his development but admitted a preventative cable had snapped when it was struck by the massive rock, and failed to stop it.

"Not at all, this is from way above, I looked at one of those rocks about 50 feet away from on top of the property and landed over there and then made its way down here," Li explained. "So it hit

one of the cables that was supposed to stop it and the cable snapped. That took a lot of energy away otherwise this damage would be way more."

But [Sasaki](#) wants the government to step up and address the situation before more property gets damaged, or worse, someone gets hurt. "Department of permitting and planning, the Department of Emergency Management, the mayor, the councilman, they should all get involved because people's lives are at stake," she said.

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Florida Police: At Least 10 Injured After Drive-By Shooting, Gunmen Not Apprehended
By - Mary Manley

The Monday shooting happened near Iowa Avenue North and Plum Street around 3:43 p.m. local time, when four shooters discharged their firearms from inside a dark blue Nissan sedan. At least 10 people were injured in a drive-by shooting [Monday](#) afternoon in Lakeland, Florida, law enforcement officials have detailed.

Two of those injured are now in critical condition, whereas eight others are experiencing nonlife-threatening wounds. All of the victims are men between the ages of 20 and 35.

"The vehicle slowed, did not stop, and the four windows went down. It appeared to be occupied by four shooters in the vehicle," explained Lakeland Police Department Chief Sam Taylor. "They started firing from all four windows of the vehicle and shooting males on both sides."

"This is something that doesn't happen in Lakeland," said Taylor, who has been working in the department for 34 years. "I have never worked an event where this many people have been shot at one time."

[Taylor](#) added that police believe the shooting was a targeted event but have not identified their suspect, nor released a motive for the shooting. Investigators revealed they found a "felony amount" of marijuana at the crime scene suggesting there was a "narcotic sale" going on at the time, but did not specify if the sale was connected to the shooting.

"We don't believe there's any reason that the public would need to be concerned right now," Taylor said. "We think that the individuals in the car shot at and shot who they wanted to shoot." Police are now looking for a dark blue Nissan four-door with dark windows and a temporary tag, and are asking any information regarding the shooting to contact the police.

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Actress Eva Green Blames Her 'Frenchness' After Blasting Film Bosses as 'Weak and Stupid'
By - Mary Manley

The former Bond girl was due to play the lead role in a sci-film "A Patriot," however the production collapsed in October of 2019. She is now suing the film's production company saying she is entitled to her fee of £810,000 (\$1 million) based on a "pay or play" clause.

French actress [Eva Green](#) explained to a UK courtroom on Monday that her "Frenchness" was to blame after text messages in which she blasted her film bosses as "weak and stupid" were read aloud.

Green is suing White Lantern Film after a movie she was signed to collapsed in October of 2019. The actress had said the film was becoming a "B movie" after the producers began cutting corners, with producers since arguing that Green made "excessive creative and financial" demands and undermined the production.

In court, the production company read out aggressive WhatsApp messages which Green, 42, blamed on her "Frenchness."

The actress described her film bosses as "weak and stupid" and referred to one as a "f***** inexperienced, pretentious moron." Max Mallin, a King's Counsel for White Lantern, said Green had an "animosity" towards executive producer Jake Seal's vision for the film.

The barrister explained that Green said Seal was planning on making a "cheap B movie," and described him as "the devil" and "evil." She further described the local crew members as "s***** peasants... from Hampshire."

Green said during an evidence session at the High Court in London that she had "nothing against peasants" but was concerned about "working with people who are not experienced." [Green](#) did not dispute the "B movie" claim either, saying: "When an actor has appeared in a B movie they are labeled as a B actor, you never get offered quality work ever again. I never wanted this to be a B movie but I realized more towards the end that it was going to happen."

Green also argued about safety concerns on the set and referred to the "Rust" film shooting, during which cinematographer Halyna Hutchins was accidentally killed by a prop gun that was discharged on the movie set. The film's young and inexperienced weapons supervisor as well as actor Alec Baldwin now face voluntary manslaughter charges.

"You can't make a quality film by cutting corners," Green said. "You look at what happened with Alec Baldwin on the movie 'Rust,' the producers were cutting corners, no safety measures and a young woman got killed."

Green apologized for "some horrible things" she had said in her messages which she called an "emotional response" to feeling betrayed, including calling one of the producer's a "pretentious moron," but blamed the tone of the messages as her "Frenchness coming out sometimes."

"I'm probably talking about [producer] Adam [Merrifield] at the time, but it was an emotional response, I felt betrayed," Green said in response to the "inexperienced, pretentious moron" description that was read in court.

Green has denied the producer's allegations that she breached her contract and argues she was prepared to continue filming despite the film collapsing.

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New Court Filings Reveal Ukraine is Jailing Draft Dodgers Now, MP Says
By - Wyatt Reed

Amid a wave of viral videos showing aging Ukrainian men desperately trying to avoid conscription, the Zelensky regime has begun handing down multi-year prison sentences to accused would-be draft evaders.

Newly-released documents indicate Ukrainians who fail to report to the Kiev regime's conscription authorities are being sentenced to several years in prison – even if they are injured. Referencing a verdict handed down just two weeks ago, Ukrainian member of parliament Alexander Dubinsky [noted](#) on Monday that “in Ukraine, the courts began to issue decisions on evasion of mobilization.”

In the [case](#) referenced by Dubinsky, a Ukrainian man who did not arrive on time to a recruiting station in the Sumy region was sentenced to three years in prison for alleged “deliberate evasion of conscription for military service during mobilization.”

Though legal documents show the accused repeatedly pointed out he was unable to serve due to periarthritis of the knee – a painful condition which often makes walking difficult and can take up to three years to heal – his protests apparently fell on deaf ears.

Thousands have been charged with attempting to elude the Kiev regime's conscription forces, and, though many of the accusations have since been dismissed, [hundreds](#) of cases are now reportedly working their way through Ukraine's notoriously-dubious judicial system.

In recent months, [footage](#) has circulated widely on social media showing physical altercations between Ukrainians and the Kiev regime enforcers attempting to press them into military service.

One particularly heart-wrenching video shows two masked Ukrainian militants shoving a small child who attempts to intervene as they physically restrain a middle-aged man who appears to be his father.

It's unclear how soldiers conscripted in such a way will perform on the battlefield. For some, at least, it seems they prefer to take their chances in prison.

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US Democrats Urge Biden to Cut Peru Funding Over Deadly Coup Crackdown

By - Wyatt Reed

A serious split over how far the Democratic Party is willing to go to ensure a US-friendly regime oversees Peru's bountiful natural resources has emerged, a newly-surfaced letter has detailed. Twenty Democratic members of Congress have signed a [letter](#) calling on US President Joe Biden to pause US security funding for Peru over “human rights violations committed by Peruvian state security forces” as they attempted to crush a largely working-class and indigenous uprising that has raged for nearly two months.

“We urge your administration to temporarily halt all Title 10 and Title 22 security assistance funding from the United States to the government of Peru until your administration can confirm

to members of Congress that this pattern of repression has ended and that Peruvian authorities are taking effective steps to ensure justice and accountability on behalf of victims and survivors,” reads the letter, which was published Monday and signed by lawmakers, including Reps. Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), Chuy Garcia (D-IL), Jan Schakowsky (D-IL).

Since Peruvian President Pedro Castillo was arrested and jailed over charges of alleged “rebellion” on December 7, dozens of Peruvians have been killed by the country’s military and police forces.

In the letter, US legislators urged Biden to “publicly denounce these ongoing human rights violations” and “apply pressure on the Peruvian government,” which they note has “substantially increased tensions – including [by] classifying protesters as ‘terrorists’ and limiting citizens’ right of movement.”

The representatives appeared to suggest the American government may have had a hand in the violent seizure of power in Peru, with legislators writing they are “particularly concerned” by US “Ambassador Lisa Kenna’s recent meeting with the Peruvian Minister of Defense.”

Many observers saw the meeting between CIA-officer-turned-Ambassador Kenna and then-Peruvian Defense Minister Alberto Otarola – just two days prior to the putsch – as proof of American involvement. Otarola’s succession to prime minister immediately following the coup’s consolidation did little to assuage their fears.

Also of “particular concern” to the lawmakers was “the announcement of \$8 million in further US funding for CORAH,” an anti-coca growing initiative which officials noted “includes funding for forces involved in the egregious human rights violations that are currently taking place.”

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US Poised to Expand Philippines Presence Amid Push for War With China

Just days after a top Air Force general said he expects to be in a hot war with Beijing by 2025, reports that the US military is increasing its Pacific footprint suggest the Biden administration got the memo as well.

The US military is likely to obtain access to up to four military bases in the Philippines in the coming days, corporate media outlets are claiming.

Citing unnamed American and Filipino officials, the Washington Post [wrote](#) Monday that the proposed expansion “involves access to Philippine military bases, likely including two on the northern island of Luzon,” which they insisted “could give US forces a strategic position from which to mount operations in the event of a conflict in Taiwan or the South China Sea.”

The report comes as US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin is expected to visit the Philippines as the second stop of an Asian tour which kicked off Sunday in South Korea – a trip that China’s Global Times suggested was “Washington’s latest effort to beef up military integration that targets China in the western Pacific, especially in a cost-effective way of using “allies” as its disposable pawns.”

Per the Post, a Philippine military official said a deal to put American troops in the Pacific bases has “more or less” been made, but it won’t be “formalized” until Austin meets with his Philippine counterpart.

The US has increasingly attempted to impose its forces along Beijing’s maritime borders in recent years. In December, China’s navy warned off a US [warship](#) that it said was “illegally” patrolling near the hotly-contested Spratly Islands, which Beijing views as a buffer to help prevent US forces from invading or blockading their ports in the South China Sea.

In April, reports that China was seeking to step up security cooperation with the Solomon Islands prompted multiple [veiled threats](#) by the US to invade the tiny island nation if its government voted to allow China to build a military base of any kind.

Peace activists have repeatedly warned a potential new Cold War against Beijing may be brewing amid the surge in anti-China rhetoric among American media and military members alike.

Last week, a Pentagon spokesman referred to China as the “pacing challenge of the Department of Defense,” and one top Air Force general recently called on his troops to be ready for war with China in as little as two years.

“My gut tells me we will fight in 2025,” Gen. Michael Minihan wrote in a recent memo to airmen, who he urged to “aim for the head” when attacking Chinese forces because “unrepentant lethality matters most.”

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Two More Cops Relieved, EMTs Fired After Beating Death of Tyre Nichols
By - Wyatt Reed

The emergence of the first white officer involved in the brutal beating death of Tennessee resident Tyre Nichols has added a new wrinkle to the controversial case.

Another two police officers have been relieved of duty and three emergency responders with the local fire department have been fired following the release of shocking footage showing the death of Tyre Nichols at the hands of the Memphis Police Department (MPD).

MPD announced Monday that Officer Preston Hemphill was removed in the immediate aftermath of the beatdown police gave to Nichols on January 7. Later, the department said without elaborating that another officer had also been relieved.

Memphis Fire Department said Monday that the employment of Lt. Michelle Whitaker and emergency medical technicians Robert Long and JaMicheal Sandridge had been terminated as well.

In total, seven officers have now faced disciplinary action for their role in the deadly encounter. The first five – all Black officers – were fired and charged with second-degree murder the day before video of their brutalization of Nichols was released to the public. Hemphill is the first white officer involved to emerge, and his race has dominated discussions of the incident.

The attorney representing the Nichols family [suggested](#) Monday that Hemphill received preferential treatment from his superiors, saying the timing of the release of information about

his race and employment status “certainly begs the question why the white officer involved in this brutal attack was shielded and protected from the public eye, and to date, from sufficient discipline and accountability.”

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SCORPION Unit That Included Officers Who Beat Tyre Nichols Disbanded Permanently
By - Ian DeMartino

Tyre Nichols died three days after being brutally beaten by Memphis Police Department officers earlier this month. His death has led to nationwide protests against police brutality.

The Memphis Police Department announced on Saturday that the controversial SCORPION unit is being permanently disbanded. The five officers who were fired and charged with second-degree murder in the beating death of Tyre Nichols were in the unit.

It was previously reported that at least two officers were a part of the unit but a spokesperson confirmed on Saturday that all five officers were SCORPION unit officers.

“In the process of listening intently to the family of Tyre Nichols, community leaders and the uninvolved officers who have done quality work in their assignments, it is in the best interest of all to permanently deactivate the SCORPION Unit,” the police department said in a statement. “The officers currently assigned to the unit agree unreservedly with this next step.”

The Street Crimes Operation to Restore Peace in Our Neighborhoods, or SCORPION unit, was a so-called “saturation unit” that would pack high-crime areas with a large number of officers. Part of the strategy was to reduce crime through the visibility of the officers, but they were also intended to focus on violent crimes like homicides, robberies, assaults, and other felonies. Nichols was initially pulled over for alleged reckless driving.

The statement from the police department put the blame on “a few” who cast a “cloud of dishonor” but said the decision to deactivate the unit was done to help the community heal.

“While the heinous actions of a few casts a cloud of dishonor on the title SCORPION, it is imperative that we, the Memphis Police Department take proactive steps in the healing process of all those impacted. The Memphis Police Department remains committed to serving our community and taking every measure possible to rebuild the trust that has been negatively affected by the death of Mr. Tyre Nichols,” the statement reads.

The unit was launched less than two years ago. It was temporarily deactivated after Nichols’ death. A lawyer for his family, Antonio Romanucci, has been calling for its permanent deactivation.

Romanucci and co-counsel Ben Crump released a statement praising the decision and calling on other cities to follow suit.

“The Nichols family and their legal team find the decision to permanently disband this unit to be both appropriate and proportional to the tragic death of Tyre Nichols, and also a decent and just decision for all citizens of Memphis. We hope that other cities take similar action with their saturation police units in the near future to begin to create greater trust in their communities. We

must keep in mind that this is just the next step on this journey for justice and accountability, as clearly this misconduct is not restricted to these specialty units. It extends so much further." Protests in response to body camera footage of Nichols' beating and arrest started in multiple cities on Friday and have continued Saturday, including in Washington DC, Memphis, and Atlanta where protesters are also fighting against the construction of a \$90 million law enforcement training center nicknamed "Cop City."

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Top US Treasury Official Discusses Anti-Money Laundering Efforts During Oman Trip

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) – US Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian Nelson traveled to Oman to discuss cooperation on countering illicit finance and other economic issues, the Treasury Department said on Tuesday.

The visit took place on January 29.

"Under Secretary Nelson met with government officials, including H.E. Sheikh Khalifa al Harthy, Foreign Ministry Under Secretary for Diplomatic Affairs and H.E. Tahir bin Salim al Amir, Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman, to discuss continued partnership on anti-money laundering and terrorist financing (AML/CFT) efforts," the statement read.

They also discussed investment opportunities and agreed on the importance of a risk-based approach to addressing illicit finance, the statement added.

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Hunter Biden Supporters Mulling Legal Defense Fund – Reports

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) – Supporters of Hunter Biden are in preliminary talks to create a legal defense fund to help pay the mounting legal fees of the US president's son as he faces a long-running federal tax investigation and new inquiries by the Republican-majority Congress, The Washington Post reported on Tuesday, citing sources familiar with the matter. Sources estimate that his legal debt is already in the millions of dollars and will likely grow. Biden, a former investment manager, also lacks a steady source of income after being mired in various scandals. His fledgling career as an artist has only resulted in the sale of about a dozen paintings.

It is unclear who would manage the fund and how it would be operated, the report said. While creating a defense fund is a common move by high-profile figures facing legal cases, disclosures around such funds tend to lack transparency and could introduce issues about donors and their motives, the newspaper noted. There are few federal regulations on legal defense funds for non-politicians and no rules for those of the children of elected officials.

Republicans have zeroed in on the possibility that financial support for Hunter Biden could constitute an in-kind political contribution to US President Joe Biden, meaning funds would need to be reported and subject to restrictions, the report said. House Oversight Committee Chairman Rep. James Comer has already sent a letter to Biden's gallerist, seeking information about the identities of the buyers of the paintings and the prices paid. The committee also plans to pursue a request for information from one of Biden's lawyers, Kevin Morris, who has loaned his client money, about his financial support.

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Blinken, Israeli Defense Minister Discuss Security, Bilateral Cooperation – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant met in Jerusalem on Tuesday to discuss security and bilateral cooperation, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

"In their first meeting since Defense Minister Gallant assumed his role, they discussed the enduring US commitment to Israel's security and the strength of the US-Israel bilateral relationship," Price said in a statement.

Blinken reiterated US commitment to preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapon and to deepening cooperation with Israel in the face of the fuller set of challenges Tehran poses, the statement read.

The secretary also condemned the terrorist attacks that Israel has faced in recent days, Price added.

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Over 75% of Americans Dissatisfied With Nation – Poll

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - More than 75% of Americans express dissatisfaction with the way things are going in their country, but the share of those experiencing "intense" dissatisfaction has declined, a fresh Gallup poll revealed on Tuesday.

"Continuing a two-decade trend, most Americans remain dissatisfied with the way things are going in the US -- 23% say they are satisfied, and 76% are dissatisfied," the pollster said.

Forty-eight percent are "very dissatisfied," down from the record-high 66% measured in January 2021.

The 23% of those satisfied is an increase from the 17% recorded in January 2022 and the 11% registered in January 2021.

The poll also showed a divide along partisan lines.

"While a larger proportion of Democrats are 'somewhat' (36%) rather than 'very' (28%) dissatisfied, the largest shares of independents (46%) and Republicans (75%) are very dissatisfied," it said.

The poll was conducted from January 2-22 among 1,001 adults from all US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of sampling error is ± 4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

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IMF Economist Says Trade Restrictions on Chinese Microchips Could Harm Global Economy

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - Trade restrictions on China's microchip industry could be harmful to the global economy, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Chief Economist and Director of the Research Department Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas said during a press conference. "Our analysis suggests that such reshoring... would be something that potentially could be harmful to the global economy," Gourinchas said on Monday night when asked about impact of Japan and the Netherlands agreeing to adopt certain US export controls on China's chip-making industry.

Gourinchas added that the IMF is looking at these developments in the semiconductor sector and trying to understand its implications for the global economy.

The IMF official reemphasized that their initial analysis suggests that moves by the United States and its allies will not necessarily leads to stronger growth.

The United States has reached a deal with Japan and the Netherlands to restrict China's access to their advanced semiconductor chip-making technology, according to media reports. Several key companies in Japan and the Netherlands, as part of the agreement, will implement some US export control measures the United States adopted in October.

The new agreement will restrict China's access to semiconductor technology from Dutch firm ASML and Japanese firms Nikon Corp and Tokyo Electron Ltd., media reported.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said that it is unclear if the Netherlands will disclose details about the agreement.

In October, the Biden administration expanded controls on the export of US semiconductor technology going to China to restrict Beijing's ability to make certain high-end microchips used in military applications. Beijing took the matter to the World Trade Organization (WTO), filing a lawsuit challenging the US export controls.

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Growth in Euro Area to Bottom Out at 0.7% in 2023, to Reach 1.6% in 2024 – IMF

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) – Economic growth in the euro area will bottom out at 0.7% in 2023 before rebounding to reach 1.6% in 2024, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in its updated World Economic Outlook (WEO).

“Growth in the euro area is projected to bottom out at 0.7 percent in 2023 before rising to 1.6 percent in 2024,” the WEO said on Monday.

The 0.2 percentage point upward revision to the forecast for 2023 reflects the effects of faster rate hikes by the European Central Bank and eroding real incomes, the report added.

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IMF Projects Economic Growth in China to Reach 5.2% in 2023, Drop to 4.5% in 2024 - Report

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - Economic growth in China is projected to increase to 5.2% this year and drop to 4.55 in 2024, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in its updated World Economic Outlook on Monday.

“Growth in China is projected to rise to 5.2% in 2023, reflecting rapidly improving mobility, and to fall to 4.5% in 2024 before settling at below 4% over the medium term amid declining business dynamism and slow progress on structural reforms,” the report said.

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IMF Expects US Economic Growth to Slow to 1.4% in 2023 - World Economic Outlook

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) – The International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects economic growth in the United States to slow from 2% in 2022 to 1.4% in 2023 and 1% in 2024, according to its updated World Economic Outlook.

"In the United States, growth is projected to fall from 2.0 percent in 2022 to 1.4 percent in 2023 and 1.0 percent in 2024 ... There is a 0.4 percentage point upward revision for annual growth in 2023, reflecting carryover effects from domestic demand resilience in 2022, but a 0.2 percentage point downward revision of growth in 2024 due to the steeper path of Federal Reserve rate hikes, to a peak of about 5.1 percent in 2023," the IMF said.

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IMF Does Not Expect West's Price Cap to Significantly Affect Russian Oil Exports – WEO

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) – The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said the current price cap imposed by Western countries on Russia's oil exports will not significantly affect it volumes of petroleum trade.

“At the current oil price cap level of the Group of Seven, Russian crude oil export volumes are not expected to be significantly affected, with Russian trade continuing to be redirected from

sanctioning to non-sanctioning countries," the IMF said in its updated World Economic Outlook on Monday.

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IMF Revises Russia's 2023 Growth Forecast Upward by 2.6% to 0.3% For 2023 – WEO

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) – The International Monetary Fund (IMF) revised Russia's economic growth forecast upward by 2.6 percentage points to 0.3% in 2023, according to its updated World Economic Outlook (WEO).

The IMF in its new WEO on Monday also projected that in 2024 economic growth in Russia will reach 2.1%, which is 0.6 percentage points better than its previous forecast.

The WEO also noted that the economic contraction of -2.2% in Russia in 2022 was much smaller than it had predicted at -3.4%.

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IMF Expects Global Inflation to Fall to 6.6% in 2023 – World Economic Outlook

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) – Global inflation will slow to 6.6% this year and 4.3% in 2024, still remaining well above pre-pandemic levels, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said.

"Global inflation is expected to fall from 8.8 percent in 2022 to 6.6 percent in 2023 and 4.3 percent in 2024, still above pre-pandemic (2017–19) levels of about 3.5 percent," the IMF said in its updated World Economic Outlook (WEO) on Monday.

The global fight against inflation, the conflict in Ukraine and new COVID-19 breakouts in China weighed on global economic activity in 2022, the report noted.

"The first two factors will continue to do so in 2023," the IMF added.

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IMF Revises Global Growth Forecast Upward to 2.9% for 2023 - World Economic Outlook

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) – Global economic growth will slow to 2.9% in 2023, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said, revising its previous forecast upward by 0.2 percentage points.

"Global growth is projected to fall from an estimated 3.4 percent in 2022 to 2.9 percent in 2023, then rise to 3.1 percent in 2024. The forecast for 2023 is 0.2 percentage point higher than

predicted in the October 2022 World Economic Outlook (WEO) but below the historical (2000–19) average of 3.8 percent," the IMF said on Monday in its updated World Economic

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F-16s Not Needed in Ukraine With US Already Sending New Capabilities - White House

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The United States does not need to provide Ukraine with F-16 fighter jets because it is already providing Kiev with lots of new capabilities that were recently announced in the latest aid packages, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said in an interview.

Earlier in the day, President Joe Biden told reporters that the United States would not send F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine.

"What I can tell you is that there's a lot of capability that is being sent, and will be sent in the coming weeks and months," Kirby told CNN on Monday. "The kinds of capabilities that we know will be critical to helping Ukrainians again in the fighting now in the wintertime, as well as the kind of fighting that we expect that they're going to be doing in the spring."

The United States recently announced that it will send up to 31 M1A2 Abrams battle tanks, up to 109 Bradley fighting vehicles armed with anti-tank rocket systems, and dozens of other Stryker fighting vehicles.

Kiev has long been lobbying Washington to provide F-16 fighter jets to bolster its forces amid Russia's special military operation.

Last week, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on NATO countries to unlock the supply of long-range missiles and military aircraft to Kiev after Western countries announced their intention to supply Ukraine with main battle tanks.

A group of US military officials is quietly lobbying to send F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine, which is gathering momentum in the Defense Department as Kiev braces for a planned offensive this spring, Politico reported, citing sources.

It may take weeks for the United States to make a decision on such deliveries, the report said, adding that the fighter jets would have to be sourced from the country's own reserves or reexported from other countries.

Russia started the special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. In April, Moscow sent a note to NATO member states condemning their military assistance to Kiev amid the conflict. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that providing Ukraine with weapons did not contribute to the success of peace negotiations.

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Biden Says Will Go to Poland at Some Point, Does Not Know When
(Updates with change in attribution in headline, details in paras 2,3)

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden told reporters that he will go to Poland at some point in the future, but he does not know when.

"I'm going to be going to Poland. I don't know when though," Biden said on Monday at the White House.

Biden further said he was unsure if he would travel to Europe in light of the upcoming anniversary of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine.

Earlier in January, media reported that Biden is planning a trip to Europe that can coincide with the first anniversary of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine on February 24. Last week, the White House refuted the reports.

Biden also said the United States will not provide F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine amid rumors of such considerations by the US government, a Fox News correspondent said via Twitter on Monday.

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Northrop Grumman, Global Military to Supply Artillery Ammunition to US Army - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - Two armaments companies will compete for orders in a more than half a billion dollar US Army contract for heavy artillery ammunition, the US Defense Department announced in a press release.

"Northrop Grumman Systems Corporation [of] Radford, Virginia and Global Military Products will compete for each order of the \$522,279,434 ... contract for the procurement and delivery of 155 mm rounds," the release said on Monday.

The contract is scheduled to last four the next four years with an estimated completion date of January 30, 2027, the release added.

The US Army Contracting Command at Rock Island Arsenal in the state of Illinois is the contracting activity to oversee the production of the ammunition, according to the release.

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Blinken Raises Concern About West Bank Security Situation to Israel's Herzog - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken raised concern about the security situation between Israeli and Palestinian forces in the West Bank during a meeting with Israeli President Isaac Herzog, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said in a statement.

"The Secretary raised concern over the deteriorating security situation in the West Bank and the need to take steps to de-escalate the situation," Price said on Monday. "The Secretary reiterated that Israelis and Palestinians deserve to have equal measures of security, prosperity, and freedom."

Blinken met with Herzog in Jerusalem as part of a trip to the region that also includes stops in Cairo and Ramallah. In Ramallah, Blinken will meet with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to underline the Biden administration's commitment to a two-state solution. The heightened tensions come after an Israeli raid in the West Bank city of Jenin killed nine Palestinians and wounded 20 others. Israel claims to have neutralized Palestinian militants suspected of preparing major terrorist attacks.

The next day, seven Israelis were killed in a suspected terrorist shooting in Jerusalem, and another two in a shooting at an archaeological site in the city the day after that. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has promised a "strong, fast" response to the suspected terror attacks.

US CIA Director William Burns also traveled to Tel Aviv and Ramallah to meet with Israeli and Palestinian leadership amid the situation.

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Biden Administration to End COVID-19 Emergencies on May 11 – Letter

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The US Office of Management and Budget said in a letter to Congress that the Biden administration is planning to extend both national health emergencies, related to the COVID-19 pandemic, to May 11 and then end them.

"The COVID-19 national emergency and public health emergency (PHE) were declared by the Trump Administration in 2020. They are currently set to expire on March 1 and April 11, respectively. At present, the Administration's plan is to extend the emergency declarations to May 11, and then end both emergencies on that date. This wind-down would align with the Administration's previous commitments to give at least 60 days' notice prior to termination of the PHE," the letter said on Monday.

The Trump administration declared the twin COVID-19 emergency on January 27, 2020, and on January 11, 2022 the PHE was renewed by Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra.

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US Lawmakers Launch Bill to Train Students, Schools on Human Trafficking Signs - Statement

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - US House Representatives Vern Buchanan and Debbie Wasserman Schultz introduced a bipartisan bill to fund training programs for students and educators on the warning signs of human trafficking, the lawmakers said in a statement. Buchanan and Wasserman Schultz, both members of the Florida congressional delegation, introduced the Human Trafficking and Exploitation Prevention Training Act on Monday, the

statement said. The bill would create a grant program to provide training to students, teachers and other school personnel on the warning signs of human trafficking, the statement said.

“As we close National Human Trafficking Prevention Month, we need to prioritize educating students and teachers about the horrors of this monstrous crime. This is critical to helping current victims and preventing future instances of trafficking, which is especially important in hotspots like Florida,” Buchanan said in the statement.

Schools should be at the center of the strategy to protect young people from human trafficking, Wasserman Schultz said.

The bill would authorize \$75 million in funding for the program over a five-year period, the statement said. The grant program would fall under the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Trafficking in Persons, the statement said.

It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of human trafficking victims are currently working in exploitative conditions in the sex, beauty and hospitality industries, the statement said.

However, exact figures are imprecise given the illegal and covert nature of the crime, the statement added.

A total of 2,198 persons were referred to US Attorneys for human trafficking offenses in fiscal year 2020 – a 62% increase from 2011, according to Bureau of Justice Statistics data.

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Biden Says US Will Not Provide F-16 Fighter Jets to Ukraine

(Updates with new headline, lede and quote in para 2; background in paras 3-7)

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden told reporters that the United States will not provide F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine.

"No," Biden said on Monday when asked if the United States will provide F-16 jets to Ukraine. Kiev has long been lobbying Washington to provide F-16 fighter jets to bolster its forces amid Russia's special military operation.

Last week, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on NATO countries to unlock the supply of long-range missiles and military aircraft to Kiev after Western countries announced their intention to supply Ukraine with main battle tanks.

A group of US military officials is quietly lobbying to send F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine, which is gathering momentum in the Defense Department as Kiev braces for a planned offensive this spring, Politico reported, citing sources.

It may take weeks for the United States to make a decision on such deliveries, the report said, adding that the fighter jets would have to be sourced from the country's own reserves or reexported from other countries.

Russia started the special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. In April, Moscow sent a note to NATO member states condemning their military assistance to Kiev amid the conflict. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that providing Ukraine with weapons did not contribute to the success of peace negotiations.

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US Air Force Orders 15 Additional KC-46 Air Refueling Tankers For \$3.2Bln - Boeing

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - Boeing has won a \$2.3 billion order from the US Air Force to build 15 more KC-46 air refueling tankers, the company announced in a press release on Monday.

"The US Air Force has awarded Boeing a \$2.3 billion contract for the ninth production lot of 15 KC-46A Pegasus tanker aircraft, expanding its fleet of the world's most advanced multi-mission aerial refueler," the release said on Monday.

So far, 128 KC-46A Pegasus are on contract with the US Air Force, with 68 delivered and operational worldwide, the company said.

"The KC-46A Pegasus delivers crucial fuel and data for the fleet, as well as cargo, personnel and aeromedical transportation for joint force rapid mobility, global reach and agile combat employment," the release said.

In 2022, the US Air Force Air Mobility Command approved the KC-46A for global operations including combat deployment, the release added.

During 2022, KC-46A aircraft operating in a series of Air Force global employment exercises in the European theater, Indo-Pacific region and the Middle East performed at a greater than 95% mission capable rate, according to the release.

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Biden Says Will Go to Poland at Some Point, Does Not Know When - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden told reporters that he will go to Poland at some point in the future, but he does not know when.

Biden also said the United States will not provide F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine amid rumors of such considerations by the US government, a Fox News correspondent said via Twitter on Monday.

Earlier in January, media reported that Biden is planning a trip to Europe that can coincide with the first anniversary of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine on February 24. Last week, the White House refuted the reports.

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US Sends First Shipment of Bradley Combat Vehicles to Ukraine - Army

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The United States sent its first shipment of Bradley fighting vehicles to Ukraine last week, the US Transportation Command said in a press release. "US Transportation Command is delivering the first shipment of Bradley fighting vehicles to Ukraine as part of the United States' \$2.85 billion military aid agreement announced earlier this year," the release said on Monday.

According to the release, the first shipment sent to Ukraine contains more than 60 Bradley vehicles and set off from North Charleston, South Carolina, last week.

As of Monday, the United States is providing Ukraine with 109 Bradley vehicles armed with anti-tank missiles.

The United States announced its decision to send Bradley fighting vehicles to Ukraine in early January.

The United States has provided Ukraine with \$27.1 billion worth of security assistance since the start of Russia's special military operation in the country in late February 2022.

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Biden Says US Will Not Provide F-16 Fighter Jets to Ukraine - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden told reporters that the United States will not provide F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine, Reuters reported.

Kiev has long been lobbying Washington to provide F-16 fighter jets to bolster its forces amid Russia's special military operation.

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US Sent Nearly \$5.5Bln of COVID-19 Loans to Over 69,000 Shady Recipients - Watchdog

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - The Pandemic Response Accountability Committee (PRAC) said on Monday that it has found that nearly \$5.5 billion worth of COVID-19 pandemic loans were sent to more than 69,000 shady social security numbers.

"This Fraud Alert from the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee (PRAC) identifies 69,323 questionable social security numbers (SSNs) used to obtain \$5.4 billion from the Small Business Administration's (SBA) COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loan (COVID-19 EIDL) program and Paycheck Protection Program (PPP)," PRAC said in a new report on Monday. PRAC analyzed information from over 33 million COVID-19 EIDL and PPP applications and found that \$5.4 billion was disbursed between April 2020 and October 2022, the report said. On top of the social security numbers that managed to obtain the disbursements, PRAC identified another 175,768 of them that were used in COVID-19 EIDL or PPP applications that did not get any funds, the report said.

During its investigation, PRAC determined that a total of 221,427 SSNs, used on applications for EIDL and/or PPP, were either not issued by SSA or that identifying information in SSA's records did not match the name or date of birth information provided by the COVID-19 EIDL or PPP application, the report added.

SBA disbursed nearly \$1.2 trillion in assistance to small businesses and their employees affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Former Brazilian President Bolsonaro Applying for US Visa Amid Legal Concerns - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) - Former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro is seeking a visitor visa for the United States amid accusations of wrongdoing in his native country, Financial Times reported, citing a Bolsonaro attorney.

US authorities received an application on Friday from Bolsonaro for a six-month visitor visa, the report said on Monday. Felipe Alexandre, a lawyer representing Bolsonaro, reportedly said that the former president is likely to stay in the US state of Florida.

Bolsonaro faces allegations of responsibility for riots in Brasilia earlier this month by supporters of the former president who rejected his defeat by new president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

Bolsonaro also faces allegations of wrongdoing during his time as head of state.

Bolsonaro has been staying in the US on a visa reserved for diplomats and other top government officials, which expired on the day he left office, although it has a 30-day grace period, the report said. Bolsonaro's presence in the US led 41 Democratic lawmakers to sign a letter urging the Biden administration to revoke his visa.

Alexandre denied any evidence of Bolsonaro committing a crime related to the Brasilia riots, the report added.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, January 31 (Sputnik) -

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

* US Ambassador Lynne Tracy pays special attention to maintaining a dialogue between Moscow and Washington, as well as protecting the interests of US citizens detained in Russia, the US Embassy in Moscow said on Monday.

* Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said at a meeting with Tracy that Washington's current confrontational course was counterproductive and noted that the Russian side expected non-interference in Russia's internal affairs from the ambassador, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

TERRORIST ATTACK IN PAKISTAN

* A suicide bomber carried out an explosion at a mosque in Pakistan's Peshawar, 13 victims are in critical condition, Pakistani broadcaster GEO TV reported on Monday, citing security services.

* The death toll from blast in a mosque in Pakistan's Peshawar increased to 44, another 157 people were injured, the Geo broadcaster reported, citing local officials.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* UK Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said that the Challenger 2 tanks Britain allocated for Ukraine could arrive on the front line before the summer, in May or closer to Easter.

* French President Emmanuel Macron said he did not rule out the possibility of delivering military aircraft to Ukraine.

RUSSIA-PAKISTAN OIL DEAL

* Islamabad hopes that third countries will not interfere in oil trade between Russia and Pakistan, Pakistani Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said on Monday.

* Russia has no doubt that the United States will try to hamper the oil deal between Moscow and Islamabad, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

* There will soon be progress on the construction of the Pakistani Stream, as the project is already in an advanced stage of development, Lavrov said.

DRONE ATTACK IN IRAN

* Moscow strongly condemns the drone attack on a military facility in Iran, which could have unpredictable consequences, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Monday.

* The Russian intelligence services are analyzing information regarding recent attacks on Iran, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

* Iran has not yet appealed to Russia, asking for assistance in investigating drone attacks on military facilities in Isfahan, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko said.

* The European Union does not know who is behind the recent attack in Iran's Isfahan, but calls for all parties to refrain from further escalation in the region, EU spokesperson for foreign affairs and security policy Peter Stano said.

* Tehran says that preliminary data point to Israel's involvement in the recent Isfahan attack, the Al Jazeera broadcaster reported, citing an Iranian official.

US BIOLOGICAL PROJECTS

* The Russian military has received new information about the key figures involved in US military biological projects in Ukraine, who have been "in the shadows" until now, Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov, the head of the radiation, chemical and biological defense troops of the Russian armed forces, said on Monday.

* The US is actively transferring military biological research that has not been completed in Ukraine to the states of Central Asia and Eastern Europe, Kirillov said.

* The United States is transferring the materials left behind from curtailing the military biological work in Ukraine to Poland and the Baltic States, Kirillov said.

* The development of the COVID-19 pandemic according to the scenario of the exercises that were held in New York in 2019 raises questions about its deliberate nature and the involvement of the United States in them, Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov, the head of the radiation, chemical and biological defense troops of the Russian armed forces, said on Monday.

* EcoHealth Alliance specialists from the United States have been looking for new strains of the coronavirus and mechanisms of their transmission from animals to humans since 2015, Kirillov, said.

* The high level of readiness of US manufacturers of mRNA vaccines for the pandemic of a new coronavirus infection raises questions, Kirillov said.

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US Court Rejects Johnson & Johnson Bid to Dismiss Talc Product Lawsuits - Ruling

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - The US 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals on Monday ruled against multinational corporation Johnson & Johnson's (J&J) attempt to have lawsuits over health concerns about their talc-based products dismissed.

Following concerns about trace amounts of asbestos in talc-based J&J products such as baby powder, which could cause ovarian cancer and mesothelioma, tens of thousands of lawsuits were filed against the company.

J&J subsidiary Old Consumer attempted to isolate the liabilities in a new subsidiary, LTL, that could file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy without subjecting Old Consumer's entire operating enterprise to bankruptcy proceedings.

"Good intentions – such as to protect the J&J brand or comprehensively resolve litigation – do not suffice alone. What counts to access the Bankruptcy Code's safe harbor is to meet its intended purposes. Only a putative debtor in financial distress can do so. LTL was not. Thus we dismiss its petition," the court said in an opinion.

The decision restricts J&J's ability to move thousands of lawsuits out of trial courts and into bankruptcy court.

In August 2022, J&J announced their decision to transition to an all cornstarch-based baby powder, with plans to discontinue talc-based baby powder globally in 2023. In the same statement, the company reiterated their position that J&J talc-based baby powder is safe and free of asbestos, citing "decades of independent scientific analysis" and medical experts.

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US Prosecutors to Start Presenting Evidence to Grand Jury on Trump Case Today - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) – US prosecutors will start providing evidence related to the case of former President Donald Trump today to a grand jury, which may prompt criminal charges against him, the US media reported.

The Manhattan district attorney's office will reportedly present evidence about Trump's role in paying money to a porn star during the 2016 presidential campaign, according to New York Times, citing people familiar with the matter.

The newspaper went on to say that earlier in the day, one of the witnesses was seen with his attorney entering the building in Lower Manhattan where the grand jury is sitting.

The newspaper explained that the witness is David Pecker, who used to be a publisher of The National Enquirer, which allegedly helped arrange the deal with Stormy Daniels.

Moreover, the prosecutors have started contacting officials from Trump's 2016 campaign, the newspaper said, citing one of the people.

The district attorney's office is also continuing to probe the way that Trump valued his assets, the New York Times said, citing the people familiar with the matter.

The newspaper noted in the report that an impaneled jury consists of 23 randomly selected Manhattan residents who are sworn in to serve for six months to hear complex cases.

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Congresswoman Says US Possibly Backing Ukraine Invasion of Crimea 'Insanity'

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - The possibility the United States could support Ukrainian military operations to attack Crimea is insanity, US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said on Monday.

The Biden administration is considering providing Ukraine with the weapons necessary to target the Crimean Peninsula, according to the New York Times.

"Full blown insanity!" Greene said on Twitter. "Now the US warmongers say that in order to defend Ukraine that Ukraine must invade Crimea and take it back from Russia. All US led, financed, supported, and stocked with military equipment and weapons of course."

Greene described the situation as "out of control."

The Biden administration, according to media reports, believes Kiev's position in future negotiations will be improved if the Ukrainian military can threaten Russia's control of Crimea, though such a move may increase the risk of escalating the conflict.

US officials are discussing with their Ukrainian counterparts the use of US-supplied weapons, including High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) and Bradley fighting vehicles, to cover targets like the main land bridge that connects Crimea with the rest of Russia, media reported.

However, the United States has so far been reluctant to provide Ukraine with the long-range missiles that Kiev would need to attack Crimea out of fear that such a move could provoke Russia and widen the conflict.

Crimea became part of Russia in a referendum held in March 2014 in which nearly 96% of Crimeans voted for accession to Russia. Ukraine still considers the peninsula to be its own

territory that was illegally occupied by Russia. Moscow has repeatedly stated that the decision made by the Crimean people was in full compliance with international law and the UN Charter.

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US Rejected Yeltsin's 1992 Offer of Alliance, Global Missile Defense – National Archives

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) – The Bush administration in early 1992 rejected a proposal by the first president of modern Russia, Boris Yeltsin, to build a joint global missile defense system and proclaim the two former adversaries "allies," according to declassified US documents published by the National Security Archive on Monday.

In January 1992, the leader of modern Russia, which had just appeared on the ruins of the USSR, wrote a letter to his American counterpart, George H. W. Bush, in which he stated that the two countries had every chance to transit to relations of "deep mutual trust and alliance." In his long letter, Yeltsin speaks of Moscow's readiness to make unprecedented, radical reductions in offensive nuclear capabilities if the US reciprocates. In particular, Yeltsin promises to discontinue the production of Tu-160 and Tu-95 strategic bombers, all existing types of long-range ballistic missiles, and to halve the number of nuclear submarines on combat patrol, among other things.

Yeltsin also proposed that Bush completely eliminate Multiple Independently Targetable Re-Entry Vehicles (MIRVs) on ballistic missiles, according to the letter.

"We are counting on reciprocity in this form from the US side. Moreover, by acting jointly, it would be possible to accelerate this process," the unclassified document quoted Yeltsin as saying in the letter.

During a bilateral meeting at Camp David in February 1992, Bush reacted positively to the idea of completely abandoning land-based MIRVs, but refused to eliminate submarine-launched ballistic missiles. Also, Bush did not agree to Yeltsin's proposal to build a joint global missile defense system and also refused to purchase Russian uranium.

When Yeltsin asked Bush ahead of the joint press conference: "Are we still adversaries or not?", the US president replied: "No, we are not. We have a statement to make on this which shifts the gears. This moves us away from the old era. This joint statement will help to do that. I can assure you that I will emphasize this point at the press conference. Why don't you look at the statement?"

Yeltsin responded: "You have nothing here which says that we are no longer adversaries and are moving to be allies."

Secretary James Baker noted: "It says friendship."

The Russian president insisted: "No, no. We should say that we are moving from a stage of adversaries to allies. This gives a new quality."

Bush was unmoved: "We are using this transitional language because we don't want to act like all our problems are solved."

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US Justice Dept. Declines to Provide House Lawmakers Info on Biden Document Probe - Letter

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - The US Justice Department is declining to provide House lawmakers with information they requested regarding the federal government's probe into President Joe Biden's potential mishandling of classified documents, Assistant Attorney General Carlos Uriarte said on Monday.

On January 13, the Justice Department received a letter from congressmen Jim Jordan and Mike Johnson requesting information on the department's investigation into the possible unauthorized removal and retention of classified documents by Biden. The request comes following the discovery of sensitive materials at locations including a think-tank office and Biden family garage.

"Your letter also requests non-public information that is central to the ongoing Special Counsel investigation. The Department's longstanding policy is to maintain the confidentiality of such information regarding open matters," Uriarte said in a response letter to Jordan and Johnson. Special Counsel Robert Hur was appointed earlier this month to investigate the potential mishandling of classified materials by Biden.

Disclosing non-public information about an ongoing investigation could violate statutory requirements or court orders, reveal investigatory road maps or interfere with the Justice Department's ability to effectively pursue prosecution, Uriarte said.

Disclosures to Congress about active investigations may also risk creating the appearance of improper political pressure or attempting to influence the Justice Department's decisions, Uriarte added.

"Judiciary Republicans are rightly concerned about the Justice Department's double standard here, after all, some of the Biden documents were found at a think tank that's received funds from communist China," the House Judiciary Committee Republican majority said via Twitter, in response to Uriarte's letter.

The US House Oversight Committee is also probing Biden's potential mishandling of classified documents as part of its probe into possible influence peddling by the Biden family, particularly though the foreign business dealings of Joe Biden's son, Hunter Biden.

Earlier on Monday, House Oversight Committee Chair James Comer said that lawmakers need to know whether the classified documents were used in a way to profit the Biden family, which the congressman claimed would be an impeachable offense.

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UN Asks Taliban for Exemptions to Ban on Women From Work in International NGOs - Griffiths

UNITED NATIONS, January 30 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has asked the Taliban government in Afghanistan to provide exemptions on its ban on women working for international and national non-governmental organizations (NGO) and hopes the decision will be rescinded, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths said on Monday.

"So we expressed our opposition to the ban. Hope for it to be rescinded and in the meantime, asked... to be granted these exemptions or authorizations for the role and the function of women," Griffiths said.

Senior Taliban officials said the United Nations should wait for further guidelines to be issued on the matter and the international community should see if they do come through, Griffiths said. The InterAgency Standing Committee asked Griffiths to visit Kabul to take a closer look at the effects of the ban on women being employed in international and local NGOs implemented on December 24.

Also in December, Afghanistan's Education Ministry ordered the suspension of women's education in private and public higher education institutions.

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RPT - White Supremacists Sentenced for Attack on Black DJ - US Justice Dept.

(Repeats to fix date in dateline)

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - Four members of a white supremacist group were sentenced for attacking a Black disc jockey at a tavern in the US state of Washington, the Justice Department said on Monday.

"Four men who assaulted a Black man because of the man's actual and perceived race at a bar in Lynnwood, Washington, were sentenced today in the US District Court for the Western District of Washington," the department said in a press release.

All four men - Jason DeSimas, Jason Stanley, Randy Smith, and Daniel Dorson - previously each pleaded guilty to one count of committing a hate crime and one of making false statements to investigators, the release said.

DeSimas was sentenced to four years, Stanley to just over 47 months, Smith 42 months, and Dorson 28, according to the release.

The four men were charged in an indictment in 2020 after beating a Black man named in an AP report as Tyrone Smith.

They admitted to entering the bar with fellow members of Crew 38 - a support group for the Hammerskins, a white supremacist organization, the release explained. Many in the group also had swastika tattoos, the release added.

"All four defendants punched and kicked T.S., even after he fell to the floor, while some in the group called T.S. racial slurs," the release said.

The victim suffered physical injuries, including bleeding and swelling of one eye, loss of consciousness, and bruising on his back, chest and legs, according to the release

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More Than 10% of US Adults Over Age 50 Show Signs of Food Addiction - Poll

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - Approximately one in eight US adults over the age of 50 show signs of addiction to highly processed foods, a University of Michigan poll released on Monday said.

The poll, conducted in July 2022, asked a national sample of more than 2,000 adults aged 50–80 about symptoms of processed food addiction and how the symptoms related to their physical, mental and social health, the release said.

A total of 13% of adults in the United States between the ages of 50 and 80 met the criteria for addiction to highly processed food, the poll found. Moreover, nearly half of older adults, 44%, indicated at least one symptom of addiction to highly processed food, the poll also found.

The poll utilized a set of 13 questions to measure experiences with food addiction indicators.

Respondents who met the criteria for processed food addiction reported at least two of 11 symptoms, as well as significant eating-related or life problems, a release on the poll said.

“Highly processed foods like sweetened beverages, chips and fast food can be addictive for some people, just like cigarettes and alcohol. Symptoms of addiction to highly processed food include feeling a loss of control over consumption, intense cravings, and signs of withdrawal,” the release said.

The most commonly reported symptom of processed food addiction was intense cravings, with 24% of respondents reporting strong urges for such food at least once a week, the poll found. Older adults who rated their mental health as fair or poor were at least three times more likely to meet food addiction criteria compared with those who reported excellent, very good or good mental health, the poll found.

The poll also found a link between feelings of social isolation and processed food addiction, the release said.

“Just as with smoking or drinking, we need to identify and reach out to those who have entered unhealthy patterns of use and support them in developing a healthier relationship with food,” University of Michigan psychologist Ashley Gearhardt said in the poll release.

Additionally, the poll found that women were more than twice as likely as men to meet criteria for addiction to highly processed foods, with 18% and 8%, respectively. Adults aged 50-64 were more likely to meet food addiction criteria as those aged 65-80, the poll also found.

Based on the poll results, Gearhardt recommends including processed food addiction screening questions as part of standard doctors’ office visits, the release said. Identifying older adults with addictive eating habits could help them receive referrals for nutrition counseling, programs to address the addiction or affordable access to healthier foods, the release said.

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White Supremacists Sentenced for Attack on Black DJ - US Justice Dept.

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"Four men who assaulted a Black man because of the man's actual and perceived race at a bar in Lynnwood, Washington, were sentenced today in the US District Court for the Western District of Washington," the department said in a press release.

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They admitted to entering the bar with fellow members of Crew 38 - a support group for the Hammerskins, a white supremacist organization, the release explained. Many in the group also had swastika tattoos, the release added.

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Biden, Dutch Prime Minister Rutte Discuss Security Issues in Ukraine, Region - White House

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden and Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte on Monday discussed by telephone morning the ongoing coordination between the United States and the Netherlands in addressing security issues in Ukraine and the region, the White House said in a statement.

"President Biden spoke this morning with Prime Minister Mark Rutte of the Netherlands as part of our ongoing close coordination on regional security issues, including Ukraine," the White House said.

Rutte issued a separate statement via Twitter saying that he and Biden discussed the latest developments in Ukraine, including arms deliveries to Kiev and NATO cooperation.

In December, the Dutch authorities announced the allocation of \$2.7 billion in assistance for Ukraine in 2023. They said the Netherlands is also set to provide one of its Patriot air defense systems to Ukraine.

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Memphis Police Dept. Relieves 6th Officer From Duty Following Tyre Nichols Death - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - The Memphis Police Department removed a sixth officer from duty following the death of black man Tyre Nichols, who died three days after a group of officers beat him during an altercation earlier this month, NBC News reported on Monday. The department relieved officer Preston Hemphill after firing five other officers, whom prosecutors are charging with crimes including second-degree murder and official misconduct for their alleged role in Nichols' death, the report said.

"Officer Hemphill is relieved of duty. This is an ongoing investigation. Once additional information is available, we will update our social media platforms. Hemphill was hired in 2018," the Memphis Police Department said in a statement quoted in the report.

On Friday night, authorities released footage showing the group of officers beating Nichols after he fled from police during a traffic stop. Nichols died three days after the incident.

The footage of Nichols' death sparked protests in cities across the United States, including Memphis, New York City and Washington. In New York City, police arrested three people at a demonstration on Friday.

On Saturday, the Memphis Police Department announced its decision to deactivate the special police unit where the five officers being charged with Nichols' death served.

Other personnel linked to Nichols' death, including two Shelby County Sheriff's Office deputies and two Memphis Fire Department employees were also relieved of duty amid probes into the matter, the report said.

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Renowned Hockey Player Bobby Hull Dies at Age 84 - National Hockey League

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - The renowned hockey player Bobby Hull died at the age of 84, the National Hockey League (NHL) Alumni Association announced in a statement via Twitter on Monday.

"The NHL Alumni Association is deeply saddened to learn that Bobby Hull has passed away at the age of 84," the statement said.

Hull, born in Canada, began his NHL career with the Chicago Blackhawks in 1957 and played 15 seasons for the team. Hull then continued to play for the Winnipeg and Hartford teams, amounting to 1063 regular-season games, the statement said.

Hull won the Art Ross Trophy three times, the Hart Memorial Trophy twice and the Lester Patrick, Lady Byng Memorial trophies once as well as the Stanley Cup, the statement said.

Hull made it to the Hockey Hall of Fame and is considered as one of NHL's 100 greatest players, the statement added.

During the 1063 NHL games he played, Hull scored 610 times, made 560 assists and received 640 penalty minutes, according to the statement.

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US, Israel Agree to Deepen Cooperation to Counter Iran's Activities - Blinken

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday that the United States and Israel will deepen cooperation to confront and counter Iran's allegedly destabilizing activities in the region and beyond.

"We agree that Iran must never be allowed to acquire a nuclear weapon. And we discussed deepening cooperation to confront and counter Iran's destabilizing activities in the region and beyond," Blinken said following a bilateral meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem.

Blinken arrived in Israel from Cairo where he met with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi. The next and last stop on Blinken's trip to the Middle East will be in the West Bank, where he will meet with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and senior officials to discuss Israeli-Palestinian relations and the importance of a two-state solution.

Earlier in January, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said that Tehran was ready to renew talks on the revival of the Iran nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), but the potential negotiations must be based on a realistic approach without any preliminary conditions.

The JCPOA was negotiated between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany as well as the European Union in July 2015.

However, the United States unilaterally withdrew from the JCPOA in 2018 and reintroduced comprehensive sanctions because Iran allegedly violated the accord by developing nuclear weapons in secret. In response, Iran suspended parts of its own obligations under the deal, demanding the United States lift the sanctions regime.

In December 2021, the sides achieved an agreement on two segments of reviving the accord during talks in Vienna. The United States then claimed no significant progress was reached and urged Iran to treat the issue more seriously.

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Bill Gates Complained to Tech Companies Over COVID-19 Plot Claims About Him - Reports

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) -Billionaire entrepreneur Bill Gates has revealed that he complained to high tech companies about conspiracy theories on social media linking him to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) said in a report on Monday.

Some of the conspiracy theories alleged that Gates pushed mandating the COVID-19 vaccines in order to profit, to enforce a system of electronic surveillance and control and even for the purposes of depopulation, among others.

Gates described the allegations as false stories and silly misinformation, the report said. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has donated \$751 million to the UN World Health Organization to fight the COVID-19 pandemic - a sum larger than any provided by national governments with exception of Germany, the report added.

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US House Oversight Panel Chair Says Holding First Biden Family Probe Hearing Next Week

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - The US House Oversight Committee will hold its first hearing next week on the business dealings of US President Joe Biden's family and potential influence peddling, Oversight Committee Chair James Comer said on Monday.

"We can play a huge role in investigating this administration... the investigation that's going to get the most press - obviously, it's the Biden family influence peddling," Comer said during an interview. "We have evidence that we've been transparent with and will continue to be transparent with as we start our hearings next week, where this family has taken in millions and millions of dollars from our adversaries, mainly in China."

The committee needs to determine who made payments to the Biden family and for what reason, Comer said.

The panel is not planning to request Joe Biden's son, Hunter Biden, speak with lawmakers during the probe's initial stages, although they could potentially bring him in for questioning depending on where the investigation leads, Comer said.

The panel would like to know what sort of consulting work Hunter Biden did in foreign countries, Comer said. Hunter Biden's links to Ukrainian energy company Burisma have also not been thoroughly investigated, Comer added.

The panel's probe into the Biden family's business dealings and potential influence peddling are linked to other ongoing investigations into Biden's handling of classified documents from his time as a US Senator and Vice President.

"It's impeachable if [Biden] was using those documents in a way to profit for his family, which there's no evidence that happened, but that's something that I think needs to be looked into," Comer said. "The reason that I'm concerned about the Biden documents is because there is some reason that China has donated so much money to the different Biden interests. I don't think they are doing it out of the kindness of their heart."

On Tuesday, the Oversight Committee will meet with the National Archives' General Counsel Gary Stern to discuss the discovery of classified documents in locations including a Biden family garage and think tank office.

Comer proposed reforms to address influence peddling by government officials, as well as how sensitive materials are handled when a president leaves office.

Next week, the Oversight Committee will speak to former Twitter employees about the Hunter Biden laptop story, which was suppressed on social media based on recommendations from federal officials, according to the so-called "Twitter Files" releases.

The committee sent letters to former Twitter Chief Legal Officer Vijaya Gadde, former Trust and Safety chief Yoel Roth and former Deputy General Counsel James Baker requesting their testimony.

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RPT - Pompeo Says Solution to Conflict Should Be Acceptable to Both Russians, Ukrainians (Repeats to fix dateline)

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) – Former CIA director and ex-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that a solution to the Ukraine conflict needs to be acceptable to both Russians and Ukrainians.

"Every day this goes on creates enormous risk for us, for America - the risk that he [Russian President Vladimir Putin] uses a tactical nuclear weapon, risk that he conducts a cyber campaign here in the States to send a message to us," Pompeo told Dave Rubin in a YouTube interview, published on Sunday. "We've got to get this to end. I only know one way to get it to end and that is to provide the Ukrainians with the tools that they need ... We should then find a solution that had two features - one, it's going to have to be acceptable to both, to Russian people and the Ukrainian people."

A solution needs to have a permanency, Pompeo stressed.

"We have the capacity to use American power - not our soldiers, airmen, marines - but American power to facilitate a hastier conclusion to this and a relatively permanent conclusion," he said. "I am convinced there are very few conflicts like this when end with one side totally annihilating and defeating the other... they always end up with some level of compromise. I am confident this one will end up this way as well."

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine. President Putin said that the goal is to defend the people of the Russian-speaking region of Donbas, who have been "subjected to bullying and genocide" by the authorities in Kiev for eight years. Russia "had no chance to do otherwise" given security risks, the president said.

Since the beginning of the Biden administration, the United States has provided approximately \$27.8 billion in security assistance to Ukraine.

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Treasury Dept. Sanctions 3 Persons for Trafficking Fentanyl Into US - Statement

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - The Department of the Treasury on Monday issued a statement that it has sanctioned three individuals for trafficking fentanyl and other synthetic drugs into the United States.

"Today, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated the leader of a Mexico-based network and two associates pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 14059 for procuring precursor chemicals to manufacture and traffic illicit fentanyl and other synthetic drugs to the United States," the statement said.

The sanctioned leader Jose Angel Rivera Zazueta's network operates on a global scale with nodes in the United States, Mexico, South and Central America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia, the release said.

Rivera Zazueta imports precursor chemicals from China into Mexico, which are then used to manufacture synthetic drugs, including fentanyl, ecstasy, crystal methamphetamine, 2C-B and ketamine, the statement said.

The Treasury Department also designated two of Rivera Zazueta's associates - Nelton Santiso Aguila from Mexico and Jason Antonio Yang Lopez from Guatemala - for aiding in the

procurement and importation of fentanyl precursor chemicals into Mexico for manufacturing and further distributing the final product in the United States, the statement said.

"Illicit fentanyl has led to unprecedented overdose deaths in the United States, with a majority of these drugs flowing from Mexican cartels, including the Sinaloa cartel, using precursor chemicals from East Asia," the statement said.

All property and interests in property of the three designated individuals that are in the United States or in the possession or control of US persons must be blocked, the statement added.

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US Conducts Successful Test Flight of Lockheed Hypersonic Missile - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - The US Air Force conducted a successful final test flight of the Hypersonic Airbreathing Weapon Concept (HAWC) missile, the Pentagon said on Monday.

"The joint DARPA and US Air Force Hypersonic Airbreathing Weapon Concept (HAWC) completed yet another successful flight test," the Pentagon said in a press release. "The Lockheed Martin version of the missile, with its Aerojet Rocketdyne scramjet, capped a program that accomplished all of its initial objectives. It was the final flight test for HAWC, which is providing critical data to inform Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL) hypersonic technology maturation efforts."

The Pentagon added that the hypersonic missile again flew at speeds greater than Mach 5 at higher than 60,000 feet and farther than 345 miles. The test flight demonstrated improved capabilities and performance, the release said, adding that the United States' hypersonic portfolio now includes two feasible hypersonic airbreathing missile designs from Lockheed Martin and Raytheon that it can continue to further develop in the future.

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Somalia Makes Progress in Fighting Al-Shabaab Terror Group - US Envoy to UN

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - Somalia has made progress in fighting Al-Shabaab (banned in Russia) and the government's efforts against the terror group will continue they destroy it, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said on Monday.

"The government is making progress against Al-Shabaab, and we are working side by side with them to support their strategy," Thomas-Greenfield told reporters after her recent trip to the region.

Thomas-Greenfield noted that the United States is cooperating with various organizations in Somalia and in the region to confront the terrorist group.

"Those efforts will continue until they have been able to destroy Al-Shabaab's ability to terrorize the people of Somalia, to terrorize the region and to terrorize the world," Thomas-Greenfield said.

Al-Shabaab is a Somalia-based extremist Islamist organization with links to the al-Qaeda terror group (banned in Russia). Al-Shabaab has led an insurgency against the Somalian government and staged numerous attacks in an effort to impose Sharia law in the country.

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Blinken Decries Jerusalem Synagogue Attack, Says Violent Retaliatory Acts Never Justified

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Monday condemned the deadly attack by a Palestinian gunman on a synagogue in East Jerusalem, saying that retaliatory acts of violence have no justification.

"Friday's attack was more than an attack on individuals; it was also an attack on the universal act of practicing one's faith. We condemn it in the strongest terms," Blinken said in a statement issued on arrival in Tel Aviv during a three-day trip to the Middle East. "We also condemn the subsequent terrorist attack in Jerusalem on Saturday in which a father and son were wounded." Blinken added that "acts of retaliatory violence against civilians are never justified" and said it was "the responsibility of everyone to take steps to calm tensions rather than inflame them." On Friday, Israeli police reported a terrorist attack at a synagogue in East Jerusalem. According to police, seven people were killed as a result of the shooting in the Neve Yaakov neighborhood. The attacker, a 21-year-old resident of East Jerusalem, was shot and killed by police. The attacks on Friday and Saturday were carried out in response to the killing of 10 Palestinians – nine in the Jenin refugee camp and one in the town of al-Ram – during a raid by Israeli forces. It was one of the deadliest army raids in the occupied West Bank since the Second Intifada.

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Quebec Cardinal Marc Ouellet Previously Accused of Sexual Assault, Resigns – Vatican

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) – The Cardinal of Quebec Marc Ouellet considered as a potential successor to Pope Francis, accused of sexual assault in August, resigned upon reaching "age limit", the Vatican informed on Monday.

"The Holy Father has accepted the resignation from the offices of prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops and president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, presented, upon reaching the age limit, by His Eminence Cardinal Marc Ouellet," According to the statement, Ouellet called on Bishop Francis Prevost, currently serving in the region of Chiclayo in Peru, to succeed him, and assume office on April 12, 2023.

In August 2022, Cardinal Marc Ouellet, aged 78, was named in a class-action lawsuit for sexual assault, by a woman born in 1984 who reported the abuses taking place on multiple occasions between 2008-2010.

The aggressions included non-consensual kisses, touches and caresses according to the lawsuit documents. At the time, Ouellet was still Archbishop of Quebec.

Shortly after, the Holy See said there was no evidence to probe the Cardinal for the alleged sexual assault.

Cardinal Ouellet has since taken legal actions for defamation against the woman who accused him of sexual assault, seeking for \$100 000 in compensation for damaging his reputation.

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US Warns Americans in Istanbul of 'Possible Imminent Retaliatory Attacks' - Embassy

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) - The US Embassy in Turkey on Monday warned Americans of "possible imminent retaliatory attacks" on places frequented by Westerners in Istanbul.

"The US government cautions its citizens of possible imminent retaliatory attacks by terrorists against churches, synagogues, and diplomatic missions in Istanbul or other places Westerners frequent, especially in the Beyoglu, Galata, Taksim and Istiklal areas," the US Embassy said in a statement.

The Turkish authorities are investigating the current threat posed to public safety, the statement said.

On Friday, several Western countries' embassies in the capital of Ankara issued similar warnings about possible attacks in retaliation for incidents involving the burning of Islam's holy book Quran in Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands.

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TikTok's CEO to Testify Before US Congress in March Amid Calls to Ban Popular App—Reports

WASHINGTON, January 30 (Sputnik) – TikTok's CEO Shou Zi Chew has agreed to testify before Congress in March amid a wave of calls to ban the popular Chinese video-sharing app under the pretext of accusations of espionage, The Wall Street Journal reported on Monday. TikTok's head will appear before the House Energy and Commerce Committee on March 23 to respond to Republican lawmakers' concerns over security and privacy issues of the application, the report said citing a committee spokesman.

According to the report, Chew agreed to testify voluntarily and will be the only witness at the committee hearing.

Committee Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers, cited in the report, said that TikTok has knowingly allowed the ability for the Chinese government to access user data and Americans deserve to know what steps the platform is taking to protect them while online.

Rodgers has also requested more information from TikTok regarding its impact on young people amid concerns about harmful content and potential sexual exploitation of minors on the platform, the report said.

The news comes less than a month after President Joe Biden signed a bill into law restricting the use of TikTok on federal government devices. Currently, TikTok access from state government devices is prohibited in more than half of US states due to security concerns about user data being accessed by the Chinese government.

TikTok has at least 100 million users in the United States.