

2/27/23 Monday

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Beijing Dismisses as 'Disinformation' US Claims It's Considering Sending Russia Weapons
By - Fantine Gardinier

Ever since Russia launched its special operation in Ukraine in February 2022, the US has claimed China was preparing to send them weapons and threatened Beijing with the same kind of economic sanctions as the US has put against Russia.

The Chinese government on Monday reasserted its right to have normal relations with any countries it wishes, even if the US doesn't like them. Beijing has maintained relations with both Ukraine and Russia in the year since the conflict began, and encouraged a peaceful resolution. The Biden administration has renewed its accusations that China is preparing to ship weapons to Russia to be used in Ukraine, as well as its threats to punish China if it does so. White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan told US media on Sunday that "if it [China] goes down that road it will come at real costs to China."

When asked about Sullivan's comments, Mao Ning, a spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, [told reporters on Monday](#) that "the US is in no position to point fingers at China-Russia relations."

"On the Ukraine issue, China has been actively promoting peace talks and the political settlement of the crisis," she said.

"In addition to pouring lethal weapons into the battlefield in Ukraine, the US has been selling sophisticated weapons to the Taiwan region in violation of the three China-US joint communiqués," Mao noted. "What exactly is the US up to? The world deserves to know the answer."

While the US has only claimed that Beijing is planning on sending weapons to Russia - and reports in US media only citing anonymous people "familiar with the matter" - the US Treasury has moved ahead with sanctioning several Chinese companies nonetheless. Victoria Nuland, the US under secretary of State for political affairs, said on Thursday the sanctions would target several Chinese companies she accused of "sneaking up to the edge and trying to provide" weapons to Russia.

The reports did not mention which companies had been sanctioned. However, last month, the US [sanctioned Chinese satellite company](#) Spacety for allegedly providing satellite photos to the Wagner Private Military Contractor, which is engaged with Ukrainian forces at the front.

Mao told reporters in Beijing on Monday that the US was "spreading disinformation that China would supply weapons to Russia and sanctioning Chinese companies under that pretext." She called the move an example of "out-and-out hegemonism and double standard, and absolute hypocrisy."

Mao also noted that the Chinese Foreign Ministry released a position paper on the Ukraine crisis on the first anniversary of the special operation, in which [Beijing proposed conditions](#) for a peace settlement and offered to mediate the talks.

While the West has largely dismissed China's 12-point proposal as too favorable to Moscow, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said he was intrigued by it, and intended to discuss it with Chinese President Xi Jinping directly. The proposal calls for a ceasefire before the talks begin.

"[It is important] to abandon the Cold War mentality. The security of one country cannot be achieved at the expense of the security of other countries, and regional security cannot be achieved at the expense of strengthening or even expanding military blocs," the document read. "Legitimate security interests and concerns of all countries must be taken seriously and duly respected."

Moscow launched the operation in February 2022 after months of talks with NATO about security red lines, which included Ukraine's future membership in the alliance and its potential to serve as a base for offensive weapons against Russia, failed to yield results. The operation aims to make Ukraine a neutral state, as well as to end attacks on Russian-speakers in the Donbass by neo-Nazis groups that enjoy patronage from the government in Kiev. The US has funneled more than \$100 billion in various kinds of support to that government, which it helped install in a 2014 coup d'etat.

"Who is promoting peace and deescalation, and who is fueling the tension and making the world more unstable? The answer is fairly obvious," Mao asserted.

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Trump Accuses Fox of Ignoring 'Real News' by 'Promoting' Potential Election Rival DeSantis
By - Fantine Gardinier

Conservative media, especially those outlets owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, have made clear their preference for Florida Governor Ron DeSantis as the 2024 Republican presidential candidate in the wake of the 2022 midterm elections. The outlets have since stepped up their criticisms of former US President Donald Trump.

Trump voiced his discontent with Fox's new favorite on Sunday, accusing the television network of "promoting" DeSantis "so hard and so much that there's not much time left for Real News." "Reminds me of 2016 when they were pushing 'JEB!' The new Fox Poll, which have always been purposely terrible for me, has 'TRUMP Crushing DeSanctimonious,' but they barely show it," Trump wrote, referring to former Florida Governor Jeb Bush. "Isn't there a big, beautiful, Network which wants to do well, and make a fortune besides? FAKE NEWS!"

The former president forgot to mention that US corporate media networks, which hung on his every word during the 2016 campaign, gave Trump and his political message [an estimated \\$1.8 billion](#) in free airtime, helping to propel him to victory over Bush and every other challenger. Trump's criticism of Fox News comes a week after he called it a RINO (Republican in Name Only) network, a derogatory term for centrist Republicans willing to work with Democrats on various issues. He also took a swing at the New York Post, which shares a parent company with Fox and the Wall Street Journal, News Corp, and an owner, Australian media mogul Rupert Murdoch.

The Trump-Murdoch Divorce

Recent [court filings in a lawsuit](#) against Fox News by Dominion Voting Systems have revealed that Murdoch and many Fox News reporters and leaders were deeply skeptical of Trump's claims to have lost the 2020 presidential election due to fraud, but reported on the claims anyway for fear of losing viewers to rival network Newsmax. Dominion has alleged the network defamed them by suggesting its voting machines were rigged to make Democratic candidate Joe Biden win the election - claims for which no material proof has been furnished.

Murdoch-owned media temporarily attempted to distance itself from Trump amid the election fraud claims, and especially after events of January 6, 2021, when thousands of Trump supporters stormed the US Capitol building and temporarily dispersed a joint session of Congress. The failed insurrection has resulted in criminal charges against hundreds of participants and in Trump being impeached for allegedly inciting it, although he was acquitted in a Senate trial after leaving office a few weeks later.

However, the outlets only seemed to truly divorce themselves from Trump after the November 2022 midterm elections. DeSantis, who has become a Republican darling for his defiance of the Biden administration on issues ranging from pandemic public health measures to LGBTQ rights, handily won reelection as Trump-backed candidates across the country fared poorly and he was becoming increasingly beset with lawsuits and scandals. A succession of articles and political cartoons lambasted Trump and hailed DeSantis, including a [New York Post cover](#) that portrayed the former president as "Trumpty Dumpty."

A day prior, the Post had given DeSantis [a lionizing cover image](#) rendered to appear like an oil painting and labeling the Florida governor "DeFuture." Since then, one opinion poll after another has sought voters' thoughts about a Trump-DeSantis race or a Biden-DeSantis election, despite him not having announced a presidential bid yet.

Jeb Hails DeSantis

Jeb Bush added his voice to that chorus on Monday, telling Fox News that 2024 offers DeSantis an opportunity to seek the White House.

"He's been a really effective governor. He's young. I think we're on the verge of a generational change in our politics. Kind of hope so," Bush said. Ironically, former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin last week [said the opposite](#), calling for voters to back Trump instead of DeSantis, criticizing DeSantis for being too young.

However, Bush also had words of criticism for Trump, too.

"I think it's for a more forward-leaning, future-oriented conversation in our politics as well," he said. "And who better to do it than someone who has been outside of Washington, who's governed effectively, who I think has shown that Florida can be a model for the future of our country."

In addition to Trump, former UN ambassador [Nikki Haley](#) and New York-based businessman [Vivek Ramaswamy](#) have also declared their candidacy for the GOP presidential nomination.

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Watch: Israeli Settlers Burn Dozens of Palestinian Homes, Cars in Deadly Nablus 'Pogrom'

By - Fantine Gardinier

The latest spat of violence in the West Bank city of Nablus has left two Jewish settlers dead and dozens of Palestinian homes and cars burned to the ground, killing at least one person. The city was recently the site of a deadly Israeli raid that killed nine Palestinians and injured more than 100 - just one of several such recent operations.

An estimated 400 Israeli settlers attacked Palestinians and their homes and property in the West Bank town of Huwara, a southern district of Nablus, on Sunday night in what has been called the worst outbreak of settler violence there in decades.

According to local news reports, roughly 30 Palestinian homes and cars were set on fire, one of which had a Palestinian family inside. Israeli authorities who responded to the conflagration reportedly rescued the family. Palestinians responded to the attacks by throwing rocks at the rioters.

Video posted on social media showed columns of fire and smoke pouring in the sky, and captured Israeli settlers pausing their attack for evening prayers, drawing criticism from Jews online for doing so.

According to the Palestinian health ministry, a 37-year-old man was shot and killed by Israelis during the riot, and two others had been wounded by gunfire. Another person was treated for stab wounds, and a fifth had been beaten with an iron bar. Another 350 people were also being treated for tear gas inhalation.

The violence was widely denounced in the US, France, and the Israeli human rights NGO B'Tselem, the lattermost of which accused the Israeli government of encouraging the attack, which it called a "pogrom."

"The Jewish Supremacist regime carried out a pogrom in the villages around Nablus yesterday. This isn't 'loss of control'. This is exactly what Israeli control looks like. The settlers carry out the attack, the military secures it, the politicians back it. It's a synergy," B'Tselem said in a statement. "The Huwarah Pogrom was an extreme manifestation of a long-standing Israeli policy. It was carried out by the state of Israel."

After the attack, a large number of protesters gathered in Tel Aviv carrying signs that read "Palestinian Lives Matter" and demonstrating against the settlers' attack.

Brothers Killed

The events were largely set in motion earlier in the day, when two Jewish Israelis were shot dead in the town.

21-year-old Hillel Yaniv and 19-year-old Yagel Yaniv, two brothers from the nearby settlement of Har Bracha, were shot dead at close range in their car in Hawara. They were transported to Beilinson Hospital in Petah Tikva for treatment, where they were pronounced dead. According to witnesses cited in Israeli media, the Palestinian gunman was wearing a shirt bearing the insignia of the Lion's Den, a militant group based in Nablus.

As Israeli police mounted a manhunt for the shooter, checkpoints were set up and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) rushed reinforcements into the West Bank in anticipation of violence. After the shooting, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir issued a joint statement saying they had just approved a law legalizing the death penalty for anyone convicted of terrorism against Israelis.

Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, one of the new controversial far-right ministers in Netanyahu's government alongside Ben-Gvir, said that "calm will only be achieved once the Israeli army strikes the terror cities without mercy."

He called for the return of Israeli delegates to a security summit in the Jordanian city of Aqaba with Palestinian, Jordanian, Egyptian, and American delegates to talk about the situation in the West Bank and Gaza.

Months of Deadly Raids

The West Bank, which has been under Israeli control since 1967 but over much of which the Palestinian National Authority claims some level of control, has been the site of increasing violence between Jewish settlers and Palestinians.

Since late last year, operations by the IDF and Shin Bet, Israel's internal security agency, in the West Bank have been almost nightly occurrences. One raid [in Nablus last October](#) saw more than 100 IDF vehicles rush into the city after sunset for a raid against the Lion's Den that resulted in five Palestinian deaths and 21 others being wounded. Another in the Jenin refugee camp in January allegedly aimed at detaining several members of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). However, the raid resulted in the [deaths of 10 people](#), including children and elderly, and over a dozen others were injured by, among other things, the tear-gassing of a hospital. Then in Nablus last week, [another IDF raid](#) resulted in the deaths of 11 Palestinians and the wounding of more than 100 others. Afterward, when IDF soldiers were accused of shooting randomly into crowded streets in the Old City, Israel Defense Forces international spokesman Lt. Col. Richard Hecht said that "the IDF only shoots at threats."

Tensions have been building in the West Bank for years, though, and the recent violence has many fearing the beginning of a "Third Intifada," or Palestinian mass uprising. Two previous uprisings, from 1987 to 1993 and from 2000 to 2005, resulted in Israel granting major concessions to Palestinians at the cost of thousands of lives on both sides.

During a recent meeting with PNA President Mahmoud Abbas, US Secretary of State Antony [Blinken reportedly advised him](#) to reassert PNA control over Nablus and Jenin; PNA officials replied that they had already lost the legitimacy needed to operate in both cities. Abbas' government, in power since 2006, has been widely criticized for its corruption and for cooperating with Israeli authorities against grassroots Palestinian resistance groups.

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Astronomers Claim First Detection of Universe-Spanning 'Cosmic Web' Magnetic Field
By - Fantine Gardinier

A group of astronomers have claimed to have found the first observed evidence of a universe-spanning magnetic field long theorized to exist, but which had remained too faint for humans to detect.

At the intergalactic scale, astronomers have long observed galactic superclusters, or groups of galaxies traveling through the universe together and surrounded by barren voids of empty space.

Stretching between them are [long filaments of plasma](#), a dilute gas full of ionized particles. Those filaments were observed for the first time in 2021 using the MUSE instrument, a 3-D spectrograph installed on the European Southern Observatory's Very Large Telescope in Chile.

However, what these scientists have found is evidence of faint magnetic fields created by those filaments because they are ionized.

Ionization simply means the atoms have picked up an extra electron from another atom or lost an electron to another atom. As those electrons move, they generate an electric current along what is effectively a wire (the filament), and electric currents generate electromagnetic fields.

Those ions can also emit electromagnetic radiation in the form of light waves, with famous examples being neon lights and the Aurora borealis.

However, when looking for magnetic fields [billions of light-years away](#), it's impossible at the present to detect them, so the scientists looked for evidence of such fields by looking for the radio waves they emit - another type of electromagnetic radiation just like visual light.

Another problem then arose: [lots of things emit radio signals](#) in the universe, and most of them are louder and closer to Earth than these filaments. Fortunately, the scientists only needed polarized radio light, which they found easy to sort out of other kinds of radio emissions.

The scientists used data from a sweeping collection of all-sky radio maps, overlaying them and comparing them to look for evidence of the polarized radio signals they suspected might be there. And there they were.

"Our interpretation is well supported by a detailed comparison with state-of-the-art cosmological simulations," they noted.

The scientists summarized their findings in a recent paper in [Science Advances](#), a peer-reviewed journal published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

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New Report Adds Credence to Theory That CIA Gave Info Leading to Nelson Mandela's Arrest
By - Ian DeMartino

Nelson Mandela served 27 years in a South African prison before his release in 1990 as the South African apartheid government collapsed. In 1993, he would become the president of nation's new multiracial government.

In 1962, when Nelson Mandela was arrested by South African police shortly after returning to the country, it led many to speculate that the CIA may have been involved in helping the South African police find the then-controversial revolutionary.

The United States and the Soviet Union were embroiled in the Cold War at the time and Africa was a major battleground for the two superpowers, with multiple newly independent states either officially working with the Soviets or were suspected to be by the US intelligence community. Apartheid South Africa was an ally of the United States and gave it a major foothold on the continent. It also had a large supply of uranium which was a strategically important resource in the nuclear arms race.

Richard Stengel, a former editor for TIME and the author of Mandela's Way and a podcast chronicling his conversations with the future South African president titled Mandela: The Lost Tapes, wrote [an article](#) on Monday outlining the evidence supporting the theory so far and a few more tidbits that add more credence.

The suspicions initially began while Mandela was still incarcerated.

In 1986, the Johannesburg Star ran an article without a byline that stated "a retired senior police officer" said the South African police had been tipped off by an American diplomat at the US consulate in Durban that was "the CIA operative for the region." The Star noted the diplomat revealed his role to the police officer while drunk at a party at the apartment of a mercenary named Mike Hoare.

Then, right after Mandela's release in 1990, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution published an article that a "retired intelligence official" said a senior CIA operative named Paul Eckel walked into his office after Mandela's arrest.

"We have turned Mandela over to the South African security branch," Eckel allegedly said. "We gave them every detail, what he would be wearing, the time of day, just where he would be. They have picked him up. It is one of our greatest coups."

More than two and a half decades later, retired CIA officer Donald Rickard, who was then 88 and nearing the end of his life, told a British filmmaker that he informed the South African police about Mandela. Rickard never expressed regret for doing so, insisting until his death two weeks later that it was the right move because had the communists taken South Africa, it may have led to war between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Reports from both the United States and South Africa at the time said that Rickard had been removed from his post in South Africa for having a penchant for talking about CIA activities while drunk. Hoare would later confirm in a 2018 biography written about him that Rickard's story was accurate.

Classified CIA documents released in 2017 but not reported on until Stengel's article on Monday, confirm the CIA thought the African National Congress (ANC), of which Mandela was a part of, was "communist-dominated" and dubbed Mandela a "probable communist." Another declassified document hints the CIA was monitoring his movements outside of South Africa. After Mandela's death in 2013, both the ANC and the South African Communist party would confirm the CIA's suspicions. Mandela was not just a member of the Communist party, he was a member of its central committee.

Ultimately, what Stengel lays out is not a smoking gun per se, but a continually building story that gained its first piece of evidence in 1985 and has been gaining corroborating evidence in the decades since, without any contrary evidence presenting itself. Stengel filed a Freedom of Information Act with the CIA, asking for documents from the time that mention Mandela or Rickard, but they denied him and refused to confirm or deny the existence of any documents mentioning either of them.

Stengel ponders if the CIA may be better served by admitting to its alleged role in Mandela's arrest. The United States government is currently attempting to limit China and Russia's influence in the continent while increasing its own. The first step to that, says Stengel, is to come clean about its past.

For his part, Mandela didn't care much to find out if the CIA was behind his arrest. When Stengel asked him about it in an interview in 1993, Mandela said he had no evidence either way

and never asked the US government about the possibility. Instead, Mandela insisted he was happy the United States had become an ally of the newly-desegregated South Africa.

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Rupert Murdoch Admits Fox Hosts Knowingly Spread Falsehoods About Election Fraud
By - Ian DeMartino

Dominion Voting Systems and competitor Smartmatic have both filed separate defamation lawsuits against Fox Corporation and Fox News for allegedly promoting election fraud conspiracies that they knew to be false.

In court documents released Monday, Fox Corporation Chairman Rupert Murdoch admitted that some Fox News hosts purposely spread conspiracy theories that they knew to be false at the time.

“They endorsed,” Murdoch said under oath as part of his deposition last month in a \$1.6 billion defamation lawsuit filed by Dominion Voting Systems. “I would have liked us to be stronger in denouncing in hindsight.”

Murdoch was responding to questions specifically about Fox News hosts Sean Hannity, Jeanine Pirro, Lou Dobbs and Maria Bartiromo. All of whom hosted guests who continually promoted election conspiracies, including that Dominion Voting Systems was a foreign company and a front for another company created to help the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez rig elections in his country.

While Murdoch admitted that the hosts endorsed the conspiracies, he insisted it was the actions of those individual hosts and not of Fox itself, stressing it was only “some of our commentators [who] were endorsing it.”

The documents were filed in response to Fox’s motion for a summary judgment in the case. It contends that Fox executives were aware of the falsehoods, were concerned about spreading them and even took action to stop them, until it became apparent that the network was losing viewers to Newsmax, and to a lesser extent, One America News (OAN).

The documents outlined that Murdoch had daily communications with other top-level executives and Fox News CEO Suzanne Scott about the outlet’s coverage of the 2020 election and its aftermath.

Murdoch also admitted in his testimony that he knew the claims were false when they were first made.

“Yes. I mean, we thought everything was on the up-and-up, I think that was shown when we announced Arizona [for then-candidate Joe Biden],” Murdoch testified.

Fox News was the first major network to declare Arizona for Biden, which angered former US President Donald Trump and many viewers, though the call ultimately proved to be correct.

The emails and testimonies in the documents also reveal more about what the hosts and executives thought about Trump, his allies, and their claims at the time. Murdoch admitted to calling then-Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and said it was “probably true” that

he “urged him to ask other senior Republicans to refuse to endorse Mr. Trump’s theories and baseless claims of fraud.”

The documents also show that other top executives at Fox were concerned about spreading the claims made by Trump and his allies. Former House Speaker and current Fox Board of Directors member Paul Ryan emailed Murdoch after the January 6 riots, saying he was concerned Fox News’ coverage of the 2020 election may have contributed to some Americans’ belief the election was stolen. “[Many Americans believe Trump’s claims] because they got a diet of information telling them the election was stolen from what they believe were credible sources.”

In an email, Murdoch responded that the event was a “wake-up call for [Sean] Hannity, who has been privately disgusted by Trump for weeks, but was scared to lose viewers.”

The comment reflects communications that were revealed in previous court documents showing Fox News hosts, including Hannity, being openly dismissive about claims of election fraud from former Trump lawyers Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell.

“That whole narrative Sidney was pushing,” Hannity was quoted as saying in last week’s court document release. “I did not believe it for one second.”

More quotes mocking Trump allies were also revealed in Monday’s release. “[Rudy Giuliani is] unhinged. Has been for a while,” said former New York Post (another Murdoch-owned publication) editor Col Allan. “I think the booze got him.”

Dominion contends Fox News hosts not only brought on guests they knew were going to promote conspiracies that the hosts knew were false and didn’t push back, but also points to instances when hosts, such as Lou Dobbs, actively promoted the claims themselves on social media.

In its motion for a summary judgment, Fox defended its coverage saying the company is “proud of our 2020 election coverage, which stands in the highest tradition of American journalism, and will vigorously defend against this baseless lawsuit in court.”

Fox also claimed that the amount Dominion is asking for, far exceeds any possible damages it suffered from its coverage.

The court ruled earlier this month that the lawsuit can move forward. While defamation lawsuits are hard to prove, Dominion’s response to Fox’s motion for summary judgment appears to show Fox hosts and executives knew the statements were false and allowed them to air regardless. That may reach the standard of “actual malice” in their reporting which would be required to win a defamation judgment.

The document further claims that Dominion sent 3,682 emails to Fox or Fox employees to get them to stop spreading the election fraud claims and provided them with verifiable third-party information that proved they were false. Dominion says it also asked the producers of several shows to allow its representative on but they were denied.

Barring a settlement, the trial is scheduled to start on April 17 and will last five weeks.

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Dodging the Cameras: Joe Biden on Pace to Become Most Evasive President Ever

By - Ian DeMartino

Former US President Woodrow Wilson held what is commonly considered the first presidential news conference in 1913. The practice continued with every consecutive president but it was ex-Commander-in-Chief John F. Kennedy who increased their popularity tenfold by airing them live on national television.

President Joe Biden is on pace to hold fewer news conferences than any US president since Ronald Reagan left office, and is on pace for the third-least number of conferences behind Reagan and Richard Nixon.

Counting only solo news conferences - appearances not shared with another world leader or government official, Biden is on pace to be the least accessible president of the modern age, including Reagan, Nixon and Trump.

[According to](#) the American Presidency Project at the University of California, Santa Barbra, Biden has given 11 solo press conferences during his first two years in office and none in 2023 so far. He has also been a part of ten joint conferences since his time in office, including one so far in 2023.

Assuming Biden's pace continues in 2024, he will have given 22 solo conferences and 18 joint appearances by the time his first term expires; however, that is not a sure bet.

Trump was on pace to easily beat the record for the least number of solo press conferences, only giving nine press conferences in his first three years in office, but that changed in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic spread around the nation and prompted Trump to start using his near daily briefings as de facto [campaign speeches](#).

Trump had an adversarial relationship with the press, referring to the media as "the enemy of the people." Trump was commonly referred to as the most adversarial president in regards to the press since [at least Nixon](#) - if not in history. Biden, by contrast, promised a "media reset" and described journalists as "indispensable to the functioning of democracy." Still, when you include joint press conferences, even Trump's pace through his first two years nearly doubles Biden's.

The problem is not simply the number of press conferences. Biden also gives fewer sit-down interviews than his predecessors. While Reagan quickly scaled back his press appearances after being shot during a failed assassination attempt, he did [59 interviews](#) with the press in his first year. Biden gave 22 in his first year and 19 in 2022, but four of the 2022 interviews came from celebrities like Ryan Seacrest, Drew Barrymore, or Jay Leno - not news reporters.

Biden has reasons to avoid the press. [According to](#) David E. Clementson, an assistant professor at the University of Georgia, modern politicians may be avoiding the press because there are very few advantages for politicians to interact with the press and a lot of disadvantages.

Clementson's research shows that voters are likely to think politicians from another party are being evasive or dishonest, even when they are not. Each time in front of the camera also holds the risk of doing or saying something that could turn off voters on both sides of the political aisle, a risk likely heightened by Biden's penchant for gaffes [seemingly every time](#) he is seen in public. The US has come a long way since Kennedy used live press conferences to great effect. Then, the American public found it refreshing, entertaining and informative to hear their president speak live. But Trump proved social media could be a more effective way to speak to your base than answering questions from sometimes hostile reporters trying to get a bombastic quote.

"The more a politician's words inevitably diverge from voters' feelings and experiences, the less presidential he will seem to them," says Clementson.

But just because there is no political advantage for Biden to engage with the press, doesn't mean he shouldn't do it. Voters installed Biden into arguably the most powerful position in the world. He has his finger on a button that could end all life on the planet, and the US has grown [closer](#) to that button being pressed than it has ever been in history. Biden, and all elected officials, have a moral and dutiful responsibility to take hard questions and not, as Trump was [often accused of](#), govern by tweets.

"Of course, if what the president is aiming for is not strategic expediency but simply fulfilling an obligation to be held accountable in his role," Clementson writes, "then the country wins when he holds a press conference – and in that way he does, too."

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White House Calls for Congress to Renew Warrantless Surveillance Statute – Sullivan

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) – The White House has called for Congress to reauthorize Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, which allows for warrantless surveillance on foreigners, including when they interact with Americans, according to a release.

"The Biden-Harris Administration strongly supports the reauthorization by Congress of Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), a vital intelligence collection authority, which the Attorney General and the Director of National Intelligence conveyed today in a joint letter to congressional leadership," National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said in a release. Sullivan called Section 702 "a cornerstone of U.S. national security" and "an invaluable tool that continues to protect Americans every day and is crucial to ensuring that U.S. defense, intelligence, and law enforcement agencies can respond to threats from the People's Republic of China, Russia, nefarious cyber actors, terrorists, and those who seek to harm our critical infrastructure."

Sullivan added that he had assigned Principal Deputy National Security Advisor Jon Finer to coordinate the reauthorization effort for the White House, which would work closely with the Department of Justice, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, and other federal partners to lobby Congress.

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US Congresswoman Greene Says Attacked by 'Insane Woman' at Restaurant

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) – US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said she had been attacked by an "insane woman" and her adult son at a restaurant.

"I was attacked in a restaurant tonight by an insane woman and screamed at by her adult son," Greene wrote on social media late on Monday.

The incident, which happened while she was dining out with her staff on Monday night, was prompted by the mother and son's inability to respect people "who simply have different political views," Greene said.

"People used to respect others even if they had different views," Greene noted, adding that she believes the US is "gone."

This is not the first time Greene has experienced threats. A man pleaded guilty earlier in February to making "threatening" phone calls to her office in DC.

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Biden Administration Considers Revoking Huawei Export Licenses - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) – The United States is considering revoking export licenses issued to US companies for sales to Chinese telecom giant Huawei Technologies Co., The Wall Street Journal reported on Tuesday, citing sources familiar with the matter.

The Biden administration is weighing up this measure as part of a broader policy of tightening technology trade over national security concerns, the report said.

The White House has indicated in the past that it may not grant any new export licenses to Qualcomm Inc. and Intel Corp., and other entities which provide chips needed for smartphones and other devices, according to the report.

The revocation of existing licenses would be a step further, the report added.

The US is considering this measure amid tensions with Beijing over balloon incidents in US air space, as well as allegations of China's assistance to Russia amid the Ukraine conflict, the newspaper noted.

The White House is reportedly telling the Commerce Department to cut off 4G sales and to inflict "more pain" on Huawei, a former senior security official familiar with the matter told the Journal.

The decision to revoke existing licenses could significantly impact US chip makers, many of which have received permission to continue selling to Huawei older-generation phone chips and other processors, the report said.

Restrictions on Huawei were introduced under the presidency of Donald Trump, when shipments were only possible with government permission as part of a crackdown on Chinese firms the United States thought posed a threat to national security.

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Biden's Overall Approval Rating Steady at 42% – Poll

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) – US President Joe Biden's overall approval rating has remained steady so far this year, according to a Gallup poll released Tuesday.

The poll, conducted from February 1 to 23, found Biden's approval rating at 42%, just one percentage point higher than January's.

While 46% of Americans approve of his handling of the situation in Ukraine, fewer approve of his handling of relations with Russia (37%) and China (32%). The ratings of his handling of the economy (34%) and immigration (33%) remain low.

Unsurprisingly, Biden's approval ratings remained sharply polarized along partisan lines. Among Republicans, less than 10% approved of Biden overall or on most individual issues. The only exceptions were Biden's response to the coronavirus (18%) and the situation in Ukraine (20%).

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Blinken Reiterates Concerns of Potential Chinese Lethal Assistance to Russia

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken reiterated Tuesday that the Biden administration maintains concerns that China may escalate its assistance to Russia in the form of lethal material support.

At a press briefing during his visit to Kazakhstan, Blinken said he had raised the matter again with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi last week "because of concern we have based on information that we have that China is considering moving beyond the non-lethal support that some of its companies have been providing to actually lethal material support for Russia's war effort in Ukraine."

"China can't have it both ways when it comes to the Russian aggression in Ukraine," Blinken added. "It can't be putting forward peace proposals on the one hand, while actually feeding the flames of the fire that Russia has started with the other hand."

He said that the US had been monitoring the issue "very carefully" from the start and would not hesitate to target Chinese companies or individuals violating US sanctions on Russia.

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RPT - Crew-6 Mission Great Example of US Cooperation With Russia, Other States - NASA Scientist

ORLANDO, February 28 (Sputnik), Lenka White - SpaceX's Crew-6 illustrates the benefits of the US continuing space cooperation with Russia and other nations and making room for commercial partners, NASA's International Space Station (ISS) Program Chief Scientist Kirt Costello told Sputnik.

The SpaceX Crew-6 mission is now scheduled for takeoff on March 2 after two previous launches were canceled this week. Roscosmos cosmonaut Andrey Fedyaev will join United

Arab Emirates astronaut Sultan Alneyadi and NASA astronauts Stephen Bowen and Warren Hoburg on the mission to the ISS for a duration of six months.

"It's a great example of our continued partnership with our international partners and also making a new space for our commercial partners," Costello said.

Costello also said he is pleased that the rotation with Roscosmos continues, underscoring some of the important work the two space agencies including partnering on crucial scientific research. "We... do some collaborative research and those get worked out in protocols between Russia and the United States as to how they participate," Costello said. "We've always been interested in sharing data where we can: on human research and the effects of spaceflight on the human body."

NASA and Roscosmos, he added, are collaborating on a number of initiatives such as the Solid Fuel Ignition and Extinction (SoFIE) project.

According to NASA, the SoFIE project studies flammability of certain solid spacecraft materials in real atmospheric conditions to improve fire safety for future long-term missions to the Moon and Mars.

With respect to US long-term projects, he said NASA is testing all needed technologies on the ISS for missions to the Moon and Mars.

"Well, I think certainly with a target date now of 2030 on the ISS side, everybody is getting more focused on making sure that we're testing technologies that are on the roadmaps for exploration for both the Moon and Mars. And we're trying to identify the uses of the ISS that are most important to prove out those technologies," Costello told Sputnik.

Costello said he hopes that all technologies will be lined up and those which can be tested in lower Earth orbit will be tested on the ISS.

According to Costello, the tests differ based on surface destinations and whether the microgravity of the ISS or the high radiation environment outside the ISS is needed.

Fedyaev will be the second Russian cosmonaut to board the US Crew Dragon spacecraft as part of the ISS integrated flights agreement. In October, the spacecraft carrying the Crew-5 mission team, including Russian cosmonaut Anna Kikina, successfully docked on the ISS.

The launch initially scheduled to take off on February 26, then it was moved to February 27 from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida to the ISS. Two minutes before the start, however, the take-off was called off because of technical issues. The launch time is set for 12:34 a.m. EST (5:34 a.m. GMT) on Thursday.

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Locals, Tourists Watch SpaceX Launches From Cocoa Beach in Florida

COCOA BEACH, Florida, February 28 (Sputnik) - Locals and tourists gathered during a gorgeous sunset on the Cocoa Beach in Florida to watch the launch of the first of a new generation Starlink internet satellites.

On Monday, a SpaceX rocket called Falcon 9 launched 21 Starlink satellites from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida. The 21 satellites are "V2 mini" type, which are designed to fit onboard SpaceX's workhorse Falcon 9.

The satellites headed toward orbit after sunset, about 5 hours later than originally planned, due to weather concerns. If everything went according to the plan, the satellites would be deployed 64.5 minutes after takeoff.

"I am here for the SpaceX rocket launch and excited to see it," one of the attendees said, while sitting on her chair which she brought onto the beach to have a relaxed rocket show. "I was even at the Kennedy Space Center yesterday to see the Crew-6 launch but it did not happen. So I have to see something before I leave."

On February 27 early morning, NASA's Commercial Crew under SpaceX's Crew-6 mission was supposed to be launched and land onto the International Space Station (ISS). The takeoff, however, was called off 2 minutes before the start. NASA later clarified that it was due to a ground system issue.

"I come here very often. It's always a great view," John said, who is one of the locals living nearby. "I also watched the Crew-6, which didn't take off."

While walking by on the beach, one could see many people with NASA, Artemis or SpaceX logos on their t-shirts or caps.

One can also see many painted pictures and motifs of space, astronauts and planets on everything around - starting from wallpapers in a coffee shop to utility boxes along the streets.

No surprise then, that this place is called the "rocket coast." Even the NASA press center advises to watch the launches there for professional coverage.

At the moment, there are over 3,000 Starlink satellites and there are many more to come. Their primary goal is to provide internet in remote areas.

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US Uncovers Over 3,800 Cases of Child Worker Abuse, Launches Crackdown - Labor Dept.

Washington, February 28 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is responding to the burgeoning problem of child labor exploitation, especially of migrant children, with tougher new measures designed to punish violators after discovering thousands of cases of abuse, the Labor Department said in a press release.

"In the last fiscal year, the department found 835 companies it investigated had employed more than 3,800 children in violation of labor laws," the release said on Monday.

To combat the rising challenge of child labor exploitation - particularly of migrant children, the release added, the Labor Department and Health and Human Services announced a number of initiatives to increase efforts on vetting sponsors, probing violations, and holding companies accountable.

Labor chief Marty Walsh said everyone has a moral and legal obligation to prevent the "scourge of child labor." Too often, he added, companies look the other way or blame staffing agencies and subcontractors.

"This is not a 19th century problem - this is a today problem. We need Congress to come to the table, we need states to come to the table. This is a problem that will take all of us to stop," Walsh was quoted as saying in the statement.

Earlier in February, the Wisconsin-based Packers Sanitation Services Inc. (PSSI) paid a fine of \$1.5 million for illegally employing over 100 children in hazardous conditions at meatpacking sites across several US states, the Labor Department said in a statement.

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NASA Hopes to Maximize Testing on ISS Amid Transition to New Platforms - Official

ORLANDO, February 28 (Sputnik), Lenka White - NASA hopes it can maximize low Earth orbit (LEO) technology testing on the International Space Station (ISS) including by overlapping for a couple years with programs on new commercial platforms, the agency's ISS Program Chief Scientist Kirt Costello told Sputnik.

Last year, NASA announced the extension of its presence at the America side of ISS through 2030. In late February, the Scientific and Technical Council of Roscosmos approved the decision to extend the operation of the Russian segment of the ISS through 2028.

"The ISS serves as a great platform in LEO [lower Orbit economy] to test out technologies that we need to make sure we're going to operate either on transit to moon or Mars," Costello said. "We are planning to continue to operate up till 2030 [ISS]. But we're also trying to make space for commercial LEO developments. So a new space station platform or multiple space station platforms in low Earth orbit, and we hope to have an overlap between those programs and the ISS, so about two or so years of overlap is what we're hoping for."

NASA, he added, is getting ready for Artemis II and III missions, where the ISS is useful, he added. NASA is now officially targeting the Moon with the Artemis III mission as soon as 2025 and it is also under presidential orders to land humans on Mars by 2033.

With respect to the upcoming launch of SpaceX's Crew-6, Costello said it illustrates the benefits of the US continuing space cooperation with Russia and other nations and making room for commercial partners.

The SpaceX Crew-6 mission is now scheduled for takeoff on March 2 after two previous launches were canceled this week. Roscosmos cosmonaut Andrey Fedyayev will join United Arab Emirates astronaut Sultan Alneyadi and NASA astronauts Stephen Bowen and Warren Hoburg on the mission to the ISS for a duration of six months.

The launch initially scheduled to take off on February 26, then it was moved to February 27 from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida to the ISS. Two minutes before the start, however, the take-off was called off because of technical issues. The launch time is set for 12:34 a.m. EST (5:34 a.m. GMT) on Thursday.

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US House Passes Resolution Applauding Response to Turkey-Syria Earthquakes

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives passed a resolution praising the international response to the catastrophic earthquakes that struck Turkey and Syria earlier this month, as well as calling on the Biden administration to work to open border crossings between Turkey and Syria for United Nation aid.

House lawmakers passed the resolution on Monday in a bipartisan vote of 414-2, with 18 members not voting.

On February 6, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck southern Turkey, followed by a 7.5 aftershock later the same day. Thousands of other aftershocks later hit the area. More than 44,000 people were killed as a result of the earthquakes in Turkey and more than 1,400 more in Syria. Tens of thousands of others were also injured in the earthquakes.

The resolution applauds ongoing response efforts by the United States and others, including civilian volunteers in Turkey and Syria.

The resolution also condemns alleged attempts by the Syrian government to exploit the disaster to evade international pressure and accountability, including by allegedly hindering UN aid access through border crossings with Turkey.

The resolution calls on the Biden administration to use all available diplomatic tools to open the Turkey-Syria border crossings for the purpose of delivering United Nations assistance. The resolution also calls for increased oversight of aid to ensure that US-funded assistance is not diverted for the benefit of the Syrian government.

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Crew-6 Mission Great Example of US Cooperation With Russia, Other States - NASA Scientist ORLANDO, February 28 (Sputnik), Lenka White - SpaceX's Crew-6 illustrates the benefits of the US continuing space cooperation with Russia and other nations and making room for commercial partners, NASA's International Space Station (ISS) Program Chief Scientist Kirt Costello told Sputnik.

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US Military Falls Short in Maintenance, Coordination of Arms Stocks for Ukraine - Watchdog

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The US fell short of military standards in the maintenance and coordination of pre-positioned stocks of weapons issued to support Ukraine, the Defense Department inspector general said in a report.

"We found that the 405 AFSB [Army Field Support Brigade] can improve its equipment maintenance and coordination processes. Maintenance and coordination shortfalls occurred because 405 AFSB lacked clearly defined and consistent procedures during the APS-2 equipment issuance at the equipment configuration and handover area," the report said on Monday.

In an interview published on February 16, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley told the Financial Times the United States is reviewing its weapons stockpiles and may have to increase military spending after seeing the high rate at which ammunition has been used in the Ukraine conflict.

Earlier in February, The Wall Street Journal reported that US senior oversight officials are going to press for the deployment of auditors and investigators directly onto the battlefield in Ukraine to ramp up US security assistance monitoring on the ground.

The US has committed more than \$32 billion in military assistance to Ukraine over the past year under the Biden administration, including 38 HIMARS, a Patriot air defense battery, eight National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems, 31 Abrams tanks, 109 Bradley combat vehicles, 8,500 Javelin anti-armor systems, 232 howitzers, and 1,600 Stinger anti-aircraft systems, the Pentagon said last week.

Overall, US Congress in 2022 alone approved more than \$100 billion in military and financial assistance to Ukraine.

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Boeing Wins \$50Mln Deal to Upgrade 8 Poseidon Anti-Submarine Aircraft - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - Boeing has won a more than \$50 million US Navy modification contract to upgrade eight P-8A Poseidon maritime reconnaissance aircraft with anti-submarine warfare capabilities, the Defense Department announced.

"The Boeing Company [of] Seattle, Washington is awarded a \$50,815,986 ...modification to an order [that] exercises options to procure eight P-8A Increment 3 retrofit A-kits ...in support of anti-submarine warfare capabilities upgrades for the Navy," the Defense Department said in a press release said on Monday.

Most of the work on the project will be performed in Jacksonville, Florida (92.6%) with the rest in St. Louis, Missouri (7.4%) over the next three-and-a-quarter years and is expected to be completed in July 2026, the release said.

The Naval Air Systems Command, Patuxent River, Maryland will supervise the project as the contracting activity, the release added.

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Tesla Shareholders Sue Company Over Claims About Self-Driving Car Safety - Filing

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - Tesla's shareholders are suing the electric car manufacturer over allegations that the company misled the public about the safety and efficacy of their self-driving vehicles, according to a class action complaint filed in the US District Court for the Northern District of California.

In 2014, Tesla announced an autopilot feature that included a number of advanced driver-assistance systems. Since then, the company has announced refinements to the technology, including so-called full self driving (FSD) software, which enables the vehicle to drive autonomously to a destination.

"[Tesla] made materially false and misleading statements regarding the Company's business, operations, and prospects. Specifically," the filing said on Monday. " Defendants had

significantly overstated the efficacy, viability, and safety of the Company's Autopilot and FSD technologies."

Tesla CEO Elon Musk, who also heads the social media platform Twitter, is named as a defendant in the lawsuit as well.

Tesla's Autopilot and FSD features created a serious risk of accident and injury, increased regulatory scrutiny and reputational harms, the lawsuit alleges. The filing cites instances of crashes involving Teslas and subsequent stock price drops.

Earlier this month, the US National Highway Traffic Safety Administration ordered a recall of nearly 363,000 Teslas over concerns that their FSD software may enable the vehicles to act in an "unlawful or unpredictable" manner. Tesla's stock fell 5.69% in response.

The Plaintiffs believe that there are hundreds or thousands of members eligible to participate in the class action lawsuit, the filing said.

The filing requests the court require the defendants to pay damages and award plaintiffs prejudgment and post-judgment interest, attorneys' fees and other costs. The Plaintiffs are also requesting a trial by jury, the filing said.

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US Arms Control Chief to Visit Brussels, London for Talks on Risk Reduction - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - US Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control Mallory Stewart will visit Brussels, London and Geneva from February 28 to March 3 for talks with officials on arms control and risk reduction, the State Department said in a statement.

"From February 28-March 3, 2023, Assistant Secretary for Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, Mallory Stewart, will travel to Brussels, Belgium, London, UK, and Geneva, Switzerland," the statement said on Monday.

In Brussels, Stewart will brief NATO allies on key arms control issues, the statement said. In London, Stewart will participate in talks at Wilton Park on strategic risk reduction, the statement also said.

Stewart will then hold a series of bilateral meetings in Geneva on the margins of the Conference on Disarmament's High Level Segment, the statement added.

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NATO No Longer Acts as Russia's 'Conditional Opponent' But as Enemy - Peskov

MOSCOW, February 28 (Sputnik) - NATO has switched from acting as Russia's adversary to being an enemy, with the alliance's intelligence operating round the clock amid the Ukraine conflict, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in an interview with the Izvestia newspaper.

"As a matter of fact, NATO is currently, as a single bloc, no longer acting as our conditional opponent, but as our enemy. Their intelligence is working against us 24 hours a day, their weapons... are supplied to Ukraine for free and shoot at our military, not to mention that they shoot at Ukrainian citizens, shell Ukrainian cities and villages," Peskov said on Monday.

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China's Strategic Forces in 'Dangerous Position' Near Taiwan - US Army Pacific Chief

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - China has already deployed major strategic rapid strike and rocket forces near the island of Taiwan and they are in a "dangerous position," Indo-Pacific Land Forces Commander Gen. Charles Flynn told a meeting at the American Enterprise Institute.

"PLA [People's Liberation Army] rocket forces and strategic support forces are in a dangerous position," Flynn said on Monday. "Both [deployments indicate] very irresponsible and dangerous behavior."

China has created twelve new airfields in its Western Military District and has been gradually amassing other large and formidable forces in the region, Flynn said.

"They have choked off access to fresh water in the Mekong River. ...They have moved two (army) corps on the Line of X Control (LOC) with India," Flynn said.

Chinese companies have also been establishing new transportation lines of communication across Myanmar in order to be able to rapidly deploy forces overland to the Andaman Sea, Flynn added.

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US Reaches \$20Mln Settlement Agreement Over Alleged Arms Exports Violations - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The US government has reached a \$20 million settlement agreement with 3D Systems Corporation over alleged violations of arms export regulations, the State Department said in a statement.

The State Department and 3D Systems Corporation reached the agreement following an extensive review by the Office of Trade Controls Compliance, the statement said on Monday. The settlement addresses alleged violations of the Arms Export Control Act and International Traffic in Arms Regulations, the statement said.

"Under the terms of the 36-month Consent Agreement, 3D Systems Corporation will pay a civil penalty of \$20,000,000. The Department has agreed to suspend \$10,000,000 of this amount on the condition that the funds will be used for Department-approved Consent Agreement remedial compliance measures to strengthen 3D's compliance program," the statement said.

The settlement demonstrates the State Department's role in strengthening US industry by protecting US-origin technical data from unauthorized exports, the statement said. The alleged ITAR violations occurred between 2012 and 2018 and involved potential unauthorized export of technical data to Germany, China and Taiwan, the statement also said. The company cooperated with the State Department's review and began implementing remedial compliance measures, the statement said. As such, the department determined it is not appropriate to administratively debar 3D Systems Corporation at this time, the statement added.

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Putin Has Not Yet Made Any Statements on Running for President in 2024 - Peskov

MOSCOW, February 28 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin has not yet made any statements regarding his candidacy in the 2024 presidential elections and he has a lot of other issues to focus on at the moment, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in an interview for Izvestia.

"Towards the end, by the middle of the second half of this year, we will enter the electoral season one way or another. So far, there are no pre-election or electoral moods. Putin has a lot to do. He's definitely not up to it now," Peskov said on Monday. "We haven't heard from him [Putin] so far, any statements where he would talk about nominating or not nominating his candidacy. It is still a little premature. You just need to be patient."

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US Wants to Avoid Any Land War in Asia, Seeks Better Ties With China - Army Secretary

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The goal of the Biden administration is to avoid having to fight any land war in Asia and with this aim in mind it is seeking to reduce tensions in diplomatic relations with China, Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth said.

"Our goal is to avoid fighting a land war in Asia: We want to reduce the temperature," Wormuth told an audience at the American Enterprise Institute on Monday. "I am not of the view that a Chinese invasion of Taiwan is imminent."

In order to deter China from any military moves against Taiwan, the US Army is deploying increasingly significant forces in the Indo-Pacific region on rotational tours every year, Wormuth said.

"Our goal is to have Army forces in the Indo-Pacific seven to eight months of the year," Wormuth said.

The United States was looking to preposition supplies and build up logistics hubs in preparation for any such conflict in allied nations such as Japan, the Philippines, Singapore, Australia and also on the Indonesian major islands of Java, Borneo and Sumatra, Wormuth added.

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US Homeland at Risk From Kinetic, Cyber Attacks in Any War With China - Army Secretary

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) - The US homeland would be at risk from both direct kinetic attacks and cyber disruptions in the event of any full-scale conflict with China over Taiwan, Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth told a meeting at the American Enterprise Institute on Monday.

"If we got into a major war with China, the US... The US Army, I have no doubt homeland would be at risk as well whether with kinetic attacks or cyber attacks," Wormuth said. "They are going to go after the role of the US public. They are going to try and erode support for the conflict." In the event of a full-scale war with China, the US Army would also be called upon to play a significant role in maintaining order domestically as well as combat operations in the Indo-Pacific region, Wormuth said.

"I think the Army will play a role at home. ...The US Army, I have no doubt would be put on alert to provide support for civil authorities," she said

Wormuth recalled that during crises in the 1950s, then President Dwight Eisenhower said he would be impeached for sending more forces overseas if they were required to maintain law and order after, for example, a nuclear attack on a US city.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, February 28 (Sputnik) -

JANET YELLEN VISIT TO KIEV

* US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen made an unannounced visit to Ukraine on Monday to meet Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Bloomberg reported.

* Yellen announced in Kiev that the first transfer of \$1.25 billion out of the \$9.9 billion in US budget support for Ukraine, the US TreasuryDepartment said.

NEW START TREATY

* The United States considers that Russia's decision to suspend participation in the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) is "fixable" should Moscow decide to return to the transparency and risk reduction benefits of the accord, US Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, Verification and Compliance Mallory Stewart said on Monday.

* The United States is still awaiting notification from Russia regarding officialization of Moscow's decision to suspend participation in New START, Stewart said.

* The United States does not see any "material breach" of the New START by Russia and is trying to understand what does Moscow's decision to suspend participation in the accord mean, Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security Bonnie Jenkins said.

EU-UK TRADE DEAL

* The United Kingdom and the European Union reached an agreement on a new trade deal within the Northern Ireland Protocol framework, Sky News reported, citing a senior UK government source.

* UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced that the EU and UK have made a "decisive breakthrough" in the negotiations on the Northern Ireland Protocol.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* Hungary supports China's plan for a peaceful settlement in Ukraine and considers the proposed plan important, Prime Minister Viktor Orban said on Monday.

* Kazakhstan did not send any military equipment to Ukraine, and all such allegations are not true, the Kazakh Defense Ministry said.

* Kiev has lost up to 250 military, 12 equipment units in the Donetsk direction and an ammunition depot near Bakhmut, also known as Artyomovsk in the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* Russia is paying great attention to China's peace plan for Ukraine, its details should be subject to careful analysis, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

* Moscow considers the new EU sanctions list absurd, as it targets doctors and human rights activists, who are not involved in Russia's special operation, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday.

* Moscow is disappointed by South Korea's decision to expand sanctions against Russia that will affect not only the bilateral relations, but also the cooperation on the Korean peninsula settlement, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

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Lukashenko's China Trip in Line With US Concerns About Sino-Russian Ties - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's upcoming trip to China is in line with the United States' concerns about growing ties between Beijing, Moscow and its allies, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"It is very much in line with the concerns we have," Price said during a press briefing. "The fact that the PRC is now engaging with Lukashenko... is just another element of the PRC's deepening engagements with Russia."

Lukashenko is scheduled to visit China from February 28 to March 2 to meet with Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping.

The leaders are expected to hold negotiations and produce documents on ways to develop bilateral relations in key areas.

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US Advances \$506M In Sale of Anti-Radiation Guided Missiles to Australia - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration granted preliminary approval for the sale of advanced missiles by the United States to Australia, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Monday.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Australia of Advanced Anti-Radiation Guided Missiles-Extended Range (AARGM-ERs) and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$506 million," the DSCA said in a statement.

Australia requested to purchase up to 63 AARGM-ERs and related equipment, the statement said. The proposed sale would support US foreign policy and national security objectives, as well as improve Australia's capability to meet current and future threats, the statement said. The sale would not alter the basic military balance in the region or impact US defense readiness, the statement added.

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US Concerned by Violence Between Israelis, Palestinians in West Bank - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The United States is concerned by increased violence between Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank and calls on all parties to refrain from escalation, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Monday.

"The United States is extremely concerned by the events of this weekend and the continuing violence in Israel and the West Bank," Price said during a press briefing.

On Sunday, two Israeli settlers were shot and killed in Huwara, the West Bank, in what local authorities said was a terrorist attack. The shooting sparked revenge attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians.

On Sunday night, a 37-year old Palestinian died as a result of an attack by Israeli settlers and army units in the Zatarra area, south of the West Bank city of Nablus, the Palestinian Health Ministry said.

Moreover, nearly 100 other Palestinians were injured during clashes with Israeli troops in the town of Huwara on Sunday evening, the Palestinian Red Crescent said.

Last week, Israeli forces launched an operation in Nablus to apprehend alleged Palestinian terrorists, during which the Palestinian Health Ministry claims at least 11 people were killed and more than 100 others injured.

The US appreciates statements by Israeli leadership calling for the cessation of vigilante violence against Palestinians and calls on all parties involved to refrain from further inflaming tensions, Price said.

A US citizen was among those killed in escalating violence in Huwara, US Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides said in a statement on Monday.

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US Citizen Killed in Terror Attack in West Bank - Ambassador to Israel

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - A US citizen was among those killed in escalating violence in the West Bank town of Huwara near the city of Nablus, US Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides said in a statement on Monday.

"Sadly, I can confirm that a US citizen was killed in one of the terror attacks in the West Bank tonight. I pray for his family," Nides said via Twitter.

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US Navy Used COVID-19 Crisis to Boost IT Networks Use, Resiliency - Information Chief

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has leveraged its information technology resources during the multi-year COVID-19 pandemic to develop a far more widespread and deeper network of virtual network for training and communications to provide unprecedented flexibility and new operational capabilities, Navy Chief Information Officer Aaron Weis said on Monday.

"The pandemic was a catalyst: We can do things we couldn't do before," Weis said. "With hybrid work, the tech stack is still deploying. ... We are deploying this across the Navy Reserve. This is a game changer for reservists."

Naval Information Forces Commander Kelly Aeschenbach agreed that since the pandemic, the US IT networks had become far more resilient, flexible, robust and far reaching.

"It gives us much more flexibility in how we raise the capability of the whole force. Now we have the ability to deliver training on site," she said. "We can bring up a group (online) worldwide and exchange information."

The Navy is continuing to develop remote capability across integrated networks, Aeschenbach added.

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Georgia State Legislature Panel Passes Bills Allowing Atlanta Neighborhood to Separate

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - A Georgia State Senate panel advanced two bills allowing Atlanta's Buckhead neighborhood to separate from the city, the chamber's press office said on Monday.

The State and Local Governmental Operations Committee passed two bills on the matter, the press office said via Twitter.

The first bill, SB 113, related to the formation of municipal corporations "so as to provide for the transition of services and facilities" from an existing municipality to a newly incorporated one, an official summary said.

The other bill, SB 114, incorporates Buckhead City, providing a charter, boundaries and powers for the municipality.

The effort comes amid concerns about crime and lack of law enforcement in Atlanta, which prompted residents of the city's more affluent areas to attempt to separate and create their own municipal services, such as police.

The measures are opposed by Atlanta's business community and Democratic lawmakers, who claim separation would not stop criminals from coming to the area and could weaken the remaining parts of the city.

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Canada to Ban TikTok from All Government Devices for Security Reasons - Directive

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - Canada will ban the Chinese social media application TikTok from all mobile devices belonging to the federal government for national security reasons, a directive sent to Global Affairs Canada (GAC) employees said on Monday.

"As of February 28, the TikTok app will be automatically removed and blocked from use on all government-issued mobile devices. This decision was made by the Chief Information Officer of Canada to ensure the security and protection of government information systems and networks. A review of the mobile application behaviour in relation to Policy on Service and Digital found that TikTok's data collection methods may leave users vulnerable to cyber attacks," the directive said.

The directive was sent via email to all GAC employees and was signed by the Assistant Deputy Minister Stephane Levesque, Chief Security Officer Sebastien Beaulieu and Chief Information Officer Jean Paul Donoghue.

Canada's federal government will continue to monitor the situation, and will collaborate with "partners" to maintain the networks' safety, the directive continued.

Treasury Board Secretary Mona Fortier said in a statement that the decision to ban TikTok from government devices was taken as a precautionary measure and emphasized that no data has been compromised.

"While the risks of using this application are clear, we have no evidence at this point that government information has been compromised," Fortier said.

The statement warned the Canadian public that although Canadians are free to choose what social media platform they use, the communications security establishment recommended they fully understand the risks undertaken in using platforms like TikTok.

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US Navy Orders \$145Mln Modernization of Guided Missile Destroyer Nitze - BAE Systems

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has ordered a \$145 million modernization program to be carried out on the Arleigh-Burke-class guided missile destroyer Nitze, BAE Systems announced in a press release on Monday.

"BAE Systems has received a \$145 million contract from the US Navy for the maintenance and modernization of the Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Nitze," the release said.

"The value of the competitively awarded contract could reach \$161 million if all options are exercised."

Under the terms of the contract, BAE Systems' shipyard at Norfolk, Virginia, will dry-dock the ship, carry out underwater hull preservation work and upgrade the ship's Aegis combat system and its command and control equipment, the release said.

"The depot maintenance periods are necessarily complex and critical to maintain the combat effectiveness of DDGs [destroyers]. BAE Systems Norfolk looks forward to conducting the assigned DMP work that will enable the USS Nitze to move into its next phase of fleet readiness," the release added.

BAE Systems recently began a similar modernization and maintenance program on the USS Lassen at its Jacksonville, Florida shipyard and is conducting similar work on the USS Mustin at its San Diego shipyard, according to the release.

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US Congressman Says Launching New Northern Border Security Caucus Amid Rise in Crossings

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - US Congressmen Mike Kelly and Ryan Zinke will co-chair a new Northern Border Security Caucus to address a rise in human and narcotics trafficking from Canada into the United States, Kelly said on Monday.

"I'm chairing a new Northern Border Security Caucus with [Zinke]. The numbers don't lie: the Biden administration's open-border policies have allowed for a surge in human and drug trafficking from Canada into the US," Kelly said in a statement via Twitter.

The 28-member caucus will draw attention to the problems at the US northern border and create solutions to address smuggling across it, Fox News, which first reported on the caucus' formation, said.

The number of Customs and Border protection encounters with migrants at the US-Canada border rose from 32,376 in Fiscal Year 2020 to 109,535 in Fiscal Year 2022, according to the report.

"The first thing bad guys do is go where the good guys aren't," Zinke is quoted as saying in the report. "Right now, all our good guys are dealing with Biden's crisis on the Southwest border leaving the north unprotected and vulnerable to criminals, cartels and terrorists."

The forming of the caucus comes as the new Republican-led US House of Representatives pursues oversight of the Biden administration's border and immigration policies. The House Oversight Committee on Monday requested interviews with Customs and Border Patrol sector chiefs from the southern border in order to address a rise in the flow of migrants between the United States and Mexico.

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Nuland Says 'Fringes' of Both Parties Starting to Question US Aid to Ukraine

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland on Monday said members on the fringes of both the Democrat and Republican parties are beginning to question the US assistance to Ukraine.

"You're not wrong, that on the fringes of both parties, folks are starting to question, but fundamentally, when you look at how this issue is polling around the country, Americans hate a bully. They do not want to stand on the sidelines while Russia eats its neighbor" Nuland said during a discussion on United States leadership hosted by the US Chamber of Commerce. Nonetheless, Nuland said US aid sent to Ukraine so far would not have been possible without "overwhelming" Congress support from both parties, she continued.

Last week, the US Department of Defense said that the total amount of US military assistance to Ukraine has exceeded \$30 billion since US President Joe Biden took office.

Polls in recent weeks have revealed that Americans' support for Ukraine is sliding since Russia launched its special military operation. Earlier in February, an AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll showed 48% of voters back sending weapons to Ukraine, down from 60% who said so in May.

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US Seeks to Engage China on Risk Reduction Via Better Crisis Communication - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The United States seeks to engage the People's Republic of China (PRC) on nuclear risk reduction mechanisms, including on improved crisis communications and information sharing for the period of intensified competition between the

world's two biggest economies, US Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control Mallory Stewart said on Monday.

"The PRC's rapid nuclear weapons buildup raises questions about its intent and policies," Stewart said during a discussion at the Brookings Institution. "We also seek to engage the PRC on risk reduction through improved crisis communication, information sharing, and measures of restraint even more important during this intensified period of competition."

Stewart said that getting rid of nuclear weapons is not a path forward at present given that the other nuclear powers, China and Russia included, never speak about their readiness for nuclear disarmament.

Earlier in February, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said in a position paper on the Ukraine conflict that it is necessary to counter the use and the threat of nuclear weapons.

On Tuesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that Russia was suspending participation in the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START). Putin also accused the United States of developing new types of nuclear weapons and of considering conducting new nuclear weapon tests. r

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US 8th Air Force Strike Command Chief Fires 6 Commanders at Minot Base - Report
WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The head of the US 8th Air Force has sacked two air group commanders and approved the removal of four more in a shake up at Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota, the Air Force Strike Command (AFSC) announced on Monday.

"Major General Andrew Gebara, commander of 8th Air Force, relieved two commanders today from their positions of leadership at Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota, due to a loss of confidence in their ability to complete their assigned duties," the AFSC said in a statement. Gebara relieved the Commanders of the 5th Mission Support Group and the 5th Logistics Readiness Squadron. Also, four more officers described as subordinate leaders were relieved by commanders at the same base, the statement said.

"Eighth Force continues to safeguard global combat power and conduct around-the-clock strategic deterrence operations in a safe, secure and effective manner. Our mission is foundational to our nation's defense," Gebara said in the statement.

Minot Air Force base is the only dual-wing nuclear capable base in the US Air Force that has two different elements of the nuclear strategic triad. The 5th Bomb Wing operates 26 B-52 strategic bombers and the 91st Missile Wing operates 150 intercontinental ballistic missile sites.

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UN Launches Initiative to Hold Elections in Libya in 2023 - Official

UNITED NATIONS, February 27 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is starting an initiative for holding presidential and legislative elections in Libya in 2023, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Libya Abdoulaye Bathily said on Monday.

"I have therefore decided to launch an initiative aimed at enabling the organization and holding of presidential and legislative elections in 2023. In this regard, I plan to establish a High-level Steering Panel for Libya," Bathily said.

The mechanism should bring together all Libyan stakeholders and advance consensus around matters such as the elections, he added.

On February 16, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov discussed the issue of resolving the internal Libyan crisis under the leadership of the United Nations with Bathily and expressed Moscow's support for his work.

Libya has been in turmoil since a NATO invasion helped topple Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. His death led to a decade-long rivalry between the UN-backed administration in Tripoli and the parliament in Tobruk. A UN-brokered reconciliation process put a caretaker unity government in charge in 2021, but it failed to hold elections in December as scheduled.

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Petition Against Ukraine Church Persecution Draws 3,000 Signatures, Including US Lawmakers

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) – Over 3,000 individuals and entities, including Orthodox religious institutions across the world as well as US lawmakers, have signed a petition urging Western religious, education and other organizations to condemn the persecution of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church by Ukrainian authorities.

"We signers of this petition call upon the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, all Orthodox jurisdictions in the West, all official Orthodox Christian ministries and institutions of higher education, all human rights organizations, the Roman Catholic Church, all other Christian bodies of good will, and any other concerned organizations to immediately draft statements decrying the persecution of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and demanding its immediate cessation. We cannot be silent in the face of Christian persecution enabled by our own governments," the petition published at OrthodoxReflections.com reads.

The list of petitioners includes the Moscow Patriarchate, Constantinople Patriarchate, Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Patriarchate of Antioch, Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, Orthodox Church in America, along with other Christian churches and jurisdictions in North America and other countries.

US Senators Rand Paul, Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio, as well as Representatives Thomas Massie and Daniel Webster also signed the petition, according to the list.

The petition, which has also been signed by many Ukrainians, notes that among many other violations of human rights, Orthodox Christians in Ukraine have been targeted with the forcible seizure or closure of parishes, unlawful arrests, physical abuse, abusive searches of holy sites, and desecrations of holy objects.

"Recently, local governments have banned the Ukrainian Church from even operating in their areas. President Zelensky of Ukraine has threatened to make this ban nationwide. The main churches of Kiev Caves Lavra have been removed from UOC jurisdiction, and schismatics have been allowed to use them for services," it added.

Since the Ukrainian government is "wholly dependent on Western financial and military support for its continued existence," Christians in the West bear a "substantial responsibility to speak for the Ukrainian victims of persecution," the petition said.

Since the beginning of Russia's special military operation, the Ukrainian authorities have intensified their crackdown on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. In January this year, the Ukrainian government submitted a bill with the parliament to ban the activities of "Russia-affiliated" religious organizations in the country.

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US-China Trade Keeps Increasing Despite Difficult Relationship - Ambassador Burns
WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - Two-way trade between the United States and China is increasing despite the current difficult state of the bilateral relationship, US Ambassador in Beijing Nicholas Burns said on Monday.

"One of the ironies of the present relationship between the United States and China, which has been so difficult across the board, is that our two-way trade is increasing," Burns said during a discussion on United States leadership hosted by the US Chamber of Commerce.

Burns cited US Commerce Department statistics, according to which trade between the United States and China stood at \$690 billion - a major increase over the last several years.

Burns pointed out that US businesses are doing well in some areas of trade such as the agriculture sector, with nearly \$41 billion worth of products exported to China in 2022.

"That's one fifth of all our agricultural export," he said.

Burns also said frictions between the two countries in the technology area will be one of the most challenging and compelling issues in their bilateral trade given that the United States considers tech products to be important for its national security.

Discouraging US companies from investing in the Chinese civil-military and national security complexes will be very important in the future, Burns added.

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Yellen in Kiev Announces 1st Transfer of \$1.25Bln Out of \$9.9Bln in Budget Support

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen during her visit to Kiev announced the first transfer of \$1.25 billion out of \$9.9 billion in US budget support for Ukraine, the US Department of the Treasury said on Monday.

Earlier on Monday, Yellen made a surprise visit to Kiev, where she met with Volodymyr Zelenskyy to discuss US measures to support the Ukrainian government amid the ongoing conflict with Russia.

"Secretary Yellen discussed the ongoing U.S. economic support that helps Ukraine continue to be able to provide vital basic services to its people, including the first transfer of \$1.25 billion out of \$9.9 billion in U.S. budget support to be provided over the first three quarters of 2023," the department said in a press release.

During the bilateral meeting with Zelenskyy, Yellen pointed out that "Ukraine's fight is our [US] fight" and reiterated US President Joe Biden's message that the United States will stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes.

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Younger Americans Say Mass Layoffs at Tech Firms Avoidable - Poll

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - Younger Americans reject the corporate narrative that fears of a recession prompted the recent mass layoffs of more than 100,000 employees across several major tech firms in the United States, a new Morning Consult poll revealed.

The poll found that 60% of persons belonging to the so-called Generation Z (Gen Z) and 52% of Millennials believe the layoffs were actually avoidable in the current economic climate.

While older Americans were more likely to believe the opposite, 23% of Generation Z and 31% of Millennials said companies had no other choice, while 38% of Baby Boomers and 37% of Generation X adults said the same, the poll showed.

Tech conglomerates such as Alphabet, Amazon and Microsoft have laid off more than 10,000 employees each in the past three months after going on hiring sprees during the height of the coronavirus pandemic, the poll also showed.

The poll was conducted among a representative sample of 2,205 Americans from February 17-19, with an unweighted margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points.

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UPDATE - US Must Galvanize Rest of World to Ensure China Does Not Coerce Taiwan - Ambassador

(Updates with background in para 8; modifies lede, corrects name)

WASHINGTON, February 27, (Sputnik) - The United States is responsible for galvanizing the world to ensure that China cannot get away with coercing and intimidating Taiwan, US Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns said on Monday,

"It's also, I think, our responsibility to galvanize the rest of the world to make sure that the Chinese cannot get away with coercion or intimidation against Taiwan itself," Burns said during a discussion on United States leadership hosted by the US Chamber of Commerce.

Burns explained that the United States has a unique responsibility toward Taiwan, including ensuring that the island can deter any potential Chinese offensive actions.

Per the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, the US military has an obligation to be deployed in and around Taiwan to protect it from hostile acts, he said.

Burns recalled that the Chinese military conducted military exercises and test-launched missiles over Taiwan after former US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited the island despite strong protests by Beijing.

The actions of the Chinese military highlight Beijing's intimidation toward Taipei, Burns said. "We want to live in a world where big countries can't push small countries around," Burns added.

Taiwan has been governed independently from mainland China since 1949. Beijing views the island as its province and opposes any official contacts by foreign states with Taipei as well as considers Chinese sovereignty over the island indisputable.

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Russian Suspension of New START Not Officialized, US Awaiting Notification - State Dept. (Updates with more details in paras 4-5)

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The United States is still awaiting notification from Russia regarding the officialization of Moscow's decision to suspend participation in the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), US Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control Mallory Stewart said on Monday.

"We haven't received any formal notifications with respect to the treaty that suspends additional notifications," Stewart said during an interview with the Brookings Institution. "The suspension hasn't been officially affected yet, in the sense that we're still receiving notifications as recently as today under the treaty - regular notifications - but we expect that as soon as that suspension has been formalized, that those will stop pursuant to what we've heard from our Russian colleagues."

The United States is trying to follow up with Russia to better understand the situation, Stewart said.

Washington and Moscow need to implement New START before moving onto discussions of building upon the treaty, Stewart also said.

The United States is struggling to understand how to bring Russia back into compliance with the treaty, as well as how to convey to Moscow why it is in their interest to comply, Stewart added.

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US Treasury's Yellen Makes Surprise Visit to Ukraine, Meets Zelenskyy - Reports

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen made an unannounced visit to Ukraine on Monday to meet Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Bloomberg reported.

The report said the visit is supposed to reinforce the Biden administration's support for Ukraine a week after President Joe Biden made the secret trip to Kiev as well.

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Canada Sanctions 12 Senior Officials From IRGC, Iranian Law Enforcement Forces

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) – Canada has imposed sanctions on 12 senior officials from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and law enforcement agencies for alleged human rights abuses, Global Affairs Canada said on Monday.

"Today's sanctions list 12 senior officials from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Law Enforcement Forces (LEF) who have participated in gross and systematic human rights violations in Iran, including through the lethal suppression of demonstrations across Kurdish areas of Western Iran," Global Affairs said in a statement.

Among the sanctioned individuals are Morteza Mir Aghaei, commander of the Basij paramilitary forces in Sanandaj, and Seyeh Sadegh Hosseini, IRGC general and commander of the IRGC's Beit al-Moqqadas Corps, both located in the Kurdistan province.

The list also includes Esmaeil Zarei Kousha, governor of the Kurdistan province, and Rahim Jahanbakhsh, commander of the LEF in West Azerbaijan Province.

The Canadian government will also freeze all assets they might have in Canada.

As of today, the Canadian government has sanctioned 139 Iranian individuals and 189 entities, including the IRGC.

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Russian Suspension of New START Not Officialized, US Awaiting Notification - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The United States is still awaiting notification from Russia regarding officialization of Moscow's decision to suspend participation in the New START nuclear arms control treaty, Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control Mallory Stewart said on Monday.

"We haven't received any formal notifications with respect to the treaty that suspends additional notifications," Stewart said during an interview with the Brookings Institution. "The suspension hasn't been officially affected yet, in the sense that we're still receiving notifications as recently as today under the treaty – regular notifications – but we expect that as soon as that suspension has been formalized, that those will stop pursuant to what we've heard from our Russian colleagues."

The US is trying to follow up with Russia to better understand the situation, Stewart added.

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US House Oversight Panel Seeks Interviews With Border Patrol Sector Chiefs - Letter

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The US House Oversight Committee is requesting to hold transcribed interviews with seven Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) sector chiefs to help better understand the situation at the United States-Mexico border, Chairman James Comer said on Monday.

Earlier this month, two Chief Patrol Agents from sectors along the US-Mexico border testified at a panel hearing, during which they frequently pointed to the uniqueness of different sectors and their situations.

"The uniqueness of each sector demonstrates a need for the Committee to obtain additional information regarding other sectors on the southern border," Comer said in a letter to CBP Acting Commissioner Troy Miller. "The Committee believes Chief Patrol Agents managing other sectors have additional, valuable information that will assist the Committee in fully understanding the crisis at the southern border."

The panel is requesting transcribed interviews from Chief Patrol Agents in charge of sectors including those covering San Diego, El Paso, Yuma and Del Rio.

To minimize impact to agency operations, the panel will conduct the interviews in the chiefs' respective sectors at a location convenient to the agents, the letter said.

US President Joe Biden and his administration have created the "worst border crisis" in US history, Comer said in a statement on the letter.

Earlier this month, a Gallup poll found that US public satisfaction with the country's immigration situation is at its lowest point in a decade, with only 28% of respondents holding a positive view.

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US Believes Russia Suspending Participation in New START Treaty 'Fixable' - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The United States considers that Russia's decision to suspend participation in the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) is "fixable" should Moscow decide to return to the transparency and risk reduction benefits of the accord, US Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, Verification and Compliance Mallory Stewart said on Monday.

"Russia's noncompliance with inspection and BCC [the Bilateral Consultative Commission] provisions is problematic. And [Russian] President [Vladimir] Putin's suspension of the treaty is not in anyone's interest. But the good news is that these are readily fixable problems should Moscow choose to return to the benefits of transparency, stability, and nuclear risk reduction," Stewart said during a discussion at the Brookings Institution.

On Tuesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced in his address to the Federal Assembly that Russia was suspending participation in the New START treaty. Putin also accused the United States of developing new types of nuclear weapons and considering conducting new nuclear weapon tests.

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US Must Galvanize Rest of World to Ensure China Does Not Coerce Taiwan - Ambassador

WASHINGTON, February 27, (Sputnik) - The United States must inspire the world is responsible the international community to ensure that China cannot get away with coercing and intimidating Taiwan, US Ambassador to China William Burns said on Monday, "It's also, I think, our responsibility to galvanize the rest of the world to make sure that the Chinese cannot get away with coercion or intimidation against Taiwan itself," Burns said during a discussion United States leadership hosted by the US Chamber of Commerce. Burns explained that the United States has a unique responsibility toward Taiwan, including ensuring that the island can deter any potential Chinese offensive actions. Per the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, the US military has an obligation to be deployed in and around Taiwan to protect it from hostile acts, he said. Burns recalled that the Chinese military conducted military exercises and test-launched missiles over Taiwan after former US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited the island despite strong protests by Beijing. The actions of the Chinese military highlight Beijing's intimidation toward Taipei, Burns said. "We want to live in a world where big countries can't push small countries around," Burns added.

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US Sees No Material Breach of New START by Russia - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The United States does not see any "material breach" of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) by Russian and is trying to understand what does Moscow's decision to suspend participation in the accord mean, Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security Bonnie Jenkins said. "They [Russia] were not in material breach of the treaty," Jenkins told reporters on Monday. The United States is trying to understand what does Russia's decision to suspend participation in the New START mean given that Moscow made the announcement only a few days ago, she said. Jenkins called on Russia to continue meeting with US officials to discuss the implementation of the New START.

"We have questions of each other to find common ground," Jenkins added.

On Tuesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced in his address to the Federal Assembly that Russia was suspending participation in the New START treaty. Putin also accused the United States of developing new types of nuclear weapons and considering conducting new nuclear weapon tests.

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US to Provide \$444Mln in Additional Humanitarian Assistance for Yemen – Blinken

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) – The United States on Monday unveiled a new package of humanitarian assistance for the people of Yemen worth \$444 million amid an ongoing conflict and dire food situation in the country, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement. "Today, I am announcing our contribution of more than \$444 million, exemplifying the continued generosity of the people of the United States for the people of Yemen. As one of the largest donors, this brings our total to the humanitarian response in Yemen to over \$5.4 billion since the conflict began," the statement said.

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US Continues to Believe JCPOA 'Best Way' to Manage Iran's Nuclear Ambitions - Nuland
(Updates with background in paras 3, 4)

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration still believes that the Iran nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), is the "best way" to manage Iran's nuclear ambitions, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland said on Monday.

"We tried very, very hard to get back into the JCPOA when President Biden came into office and we continue to believe that that is the best way to deal with the nuclear problem, thereby giving us space to deal with other problems," Nuland said.

Nuland made the comments at the US Chamber of Commerce's International Security, Trade and Economic Platform series.

In December, National Security Council Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby expressed doubt regarding making any progress on the JCPOA in the near future given Tehran's crackdown on protesters and weapons sales to Russia. In addition, President Biden has said that the Iran nuclear agreement is "dead."

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US Undersecretary of State Nuland Declares World Now in 'Post-Post Cold War Period'

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland said on Monday that the world has entered a "post-post Cold War period."

"We are now at the end of the post Cold War period, we're in the post-post Cold War period," Nuland said. "We have a large power contesting the rules of the road that favor freedom. They are doing it by threatening their neighbors, by coercing countries around the world, and therefore US leadership, which has always been essential, is even more essential."

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US Believes JCPOA Still 'Best Way' to Manage Iran's Nuclear Ambitions - Nuland

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration still believes that the Iran nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), is the "best way" to manage Iran's nuclear ambitions, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland said on Monday.

"We tried very, very hard to get back into the JCPOA when President Biden came into office and we continue to believe that that is the best way to deal with the nuclear problem, thereby giving us space to deal with other problems," Nuland said.

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US Ambassador to China Calls for Pushing Beijing to 'Be More Honest' About COVID Origin

WASHINGTON, February 27 (Sputnik) – US Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns said Monday that building a working relationship with China includes pushing it to "be more honest" about the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"If we're going to do something to strengthen the World Health Organization then we're going to have to push China to be more active in it and to of course, be more honest about what happened three years ago in Wuhan with the origin of the COVID-19 crisis," Burns said at the US Chamber of Commerce's International Security, Trade and Economic Platform series.