

4/21/23 Friday

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60 Killed in Burkina Faso

At least 60 people were reported to be killed by men wearing military uniforms, said a prosecutor.

Sixty or more people have been reported to be killed in Burkina Faso by "men wearing military uniforms", according to prosecutor Lamine Kabore in the northern city of Ouahigouya. The prosecutor added in his announcement on Sunday that they would be launching an investigation into the attack.

According to Kabore, those 60 people were killed by people "wearing the uniforms of our national armed forces" on Thursday in the village of Karama in the northern Yatenga province.

During their attack the offenders had also reportedly stolen "various goods".

Survivors of the attack told the Agence France-Presse (AFP) that more than 100 people on motorbikes and pick-up trucks raided Karma. Survivors believe around 80 people were killed during the violent attack.

"The wounded have been evacuated and are currently being taken care of within our health facilities," said Kabore.

Burkina Faso, one of the world's poorest countries, has been experiencing extreme violence since a jihadist insurgency spread to the country from Mali, which first began experiencing violence in 2012. Just over a week ago 34 defense volunteers and six soldiers were killed in a similar attack by suspected jihadists.

At least 10,000 people have been left dead, and two million have been displaced from their homes since the violence in Burkina Faso first began.

Burkina Faso's government has announced a plan to recruit 5,000 more soldiers to address the insurgent groups.

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More Than 60 Liberal Groups Call on Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein to Resign

Feinstein, who was diagnosed with shingles in February, has missed Senate votes due to her absence which has lasted for about two months.

More than 60 progressive grassroots groups have formed a coalition asking Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) to resign. The letter includes more than 100,000 Californians who have asked the female senator to step down and focus on her health which has prompted her absence.

Feinstein is 89 years old and is the longest-serving female senator in US history. She has already decided not to run again in the year 2024. The coalition, however, has called for her immediate resignation.

“Complications from your illness threaten [your] storied legacy. Your absences hobble the elected Democratic Senate majority from doing the work of the people of California and our nation,” the groups [wrote](#).

“We ask that you resign from the Senate to focus on your health. Please allow Gov. [Gavin] Newsom to appoint an interim senator who can provide robust and constant representation for California through the election of 2024.”

Those who penned the letter include Activate America, Berkeley Now, Change Begins With ME, Democracy Action Marin, Feminists in Action Los Angeles, Generation Blue, and members of the Indivisible movement.

Feinstein had announced her plans to step down temporarily on April 12.

“When I was first diagnosed with shingles, I expected to return by the end of the March work period. Unfortunately, my return to Washington has been delayed due to continued complications related to my diagnosis,” Feinstein said at the time.

Feinstein’s absence from Washington, DC as the Senate Judiciary Committee remains gridlocked on issues that evenly divide Republicans and Democrats. Were Feinstein to be present the Democrats would have an 11-10 majority on the Committee.

Earlier this week, Senate Republicans blocked requests from Democrats to temporarily replace [Feinstein](#) on the Committee with a temporary fill-in, driving the Senate gridlock into further upheaval. Democrats are hoping to confirm as many of President Joe Biden’s judicial nominees as possible while they control the Committee.

The gridlocked Committee is also unable to allow Chairman Dick Durbin (D-Illinois) to subpoena witnesses for an investigation into the Supreme Court’s ethics rules and reports that Justice Clarence Thomas accepted favors from Texas billionaire Harlan Crow and failed to disclose them on public forms.

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Supreme Court Allows Access To Abortion Pill During Appeals

Earlier this month, the Biden administration and the company that manufactures mifepristone, Danco Laboratories, requested the High Court to pause a ruling from Judge Matthew J. Kacsmaryk, a US district judge based in Texas who was appointed by former President Donald Trump in 2017, and confirmed in 2019.

On Friday the Supreme Court moved to protect access to the drug mifepristone, which has been approved for use in the US since 2000. The drug is used in part to end pregnancies during the early part of a person’s pregnancy.

The ruling overturns Kacsmaryk’s ruling to ban the drug mifepristone and allows it to remain on the market while the legal process continues in the lower courts. The court voted 7-2 in favor of

granting the stay with Justices Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas dissenting, the votes of the other judges were not disclosed.

Mifepristone, in combination with misoprostol, has been used by more than 5 million people to end their pregnancies which makes up more than half of all medical abortions in the US. The pill, according to medical professionals, is as dangerous as Ibuprofen and safer than Viagra. Friday's ruling is just a temporary victory for the Biden administration, Danco, and pro-choice advocates. The 5th Circuit's three-judge panel will work to issue their ruling.

Despite the 5th Circuit's decision last week to block portions of Kacsmaryk's politically biased decision, the appeals court is trying to instill restrictions on the pill which the FDA medically determined unnecessary in March of [2016](#). These restrictions include banning the approval of mifepristone for pregnancies after seven weeks as opposed to 10, and barring the pill from being sent in the mail.

"As a result of the Supreme Court's stay, mifepristone remains available and approved for safe and effective use while we continue this fight in the courts," Biden said in a statement Friday evening.

Danco, a manufacturer of the drug, also commented on Friday's ruling.

"The lower courts' reversal of longstanding FDA approvals has caused widespread chaos among providers, patients, and healthcare systems. Today's order provides continuity to all concerned as we litigate the underlying issues in this case," Jessica Ellsworth, Danco's attorney, said in a [statement](#).

In 2022 the Supreme Court overturned the 1973 ruling Roe v. Wade, ending Americans' rights to govern their own reproductive choices. Since then 18 states have entirely, or partially banned most abortions.

"Nothing changes for the third of the country that bans mifepristone because it bans all abortions," said Rachel Rebouché, dean of Temple University Beasley School of Law.

The next hearing in the litigation process will be on May 17.

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Nearly 1,000-Year-Old Native American Canoe is Found in North Carolina Lake

The canoe was first discovered by a group of teenagers in the summer of 2021, the three boys were inner tubing on a lake in North Carolina when they discovered the canoe.

A 930-year-old, 28-foot Native American canoe was retrieved from Lake Waccamaw on Wednesday, two years after it was accidentally discovered by a group of teenagers. A team of archaeologists, locals including the boys who discovered the canoe, and members of the Waccamaw Siouan Tribe all worked together to retrieve the exciting discovery.

The three teenagers who first discovered the canoe in the 9,000-acre lake include eyewitness Eli Hill, who mistook the canoe for a log. He and his friends then returned to remove it with a shovel.

"I tried to pick it up and it never came up," said Hill. "So we kept digging at it and it just kept going. And then the next day, we came back and we started digging some more and it just kept going."

Hill and his family then reached out to the state's archeology office, beginning the two-year process of retrieving the artifact.

"This canoe is about 1,000 years old, and it's a south-eastern Indian canoe, and it originated from this area... so we wanted the local Indian group to be part of it and share with the agency of it," added North Carolina archaeologist John Mintz.

Michael Jacobs, the Waccamaw Siouan Chief said it was a rare and emotional moment for him and his elders who sat on the bank and cried tears of "joy, tears of sadness, tears of a future for our youth [and] how this is going to impact them and help them overcome some of the trauma they've experienced through being excluded at times, and even counted as not worthy".

"That canoe at 28 feet long would have carried many a brave," said Jacobs. "We feel like in our heart, it's a history that we're still exploring and understanding because this is the first time we've had access."

The canoe will be taken to a lab where its wood will be treated to help preserve the relic before studying it. The canoe will be on display during an open house at the Queen Anne's Revenge Conservation Laboratory in Greenville on [Saturday](#).

"We're looking forward to examining it, running some tests on it, really finding out and going back to our elders and getting the history of it to where we can teach the truth to our people and know that we've got concrete evidence to stand on," said Jacobs.

"Our history is still unfolding," said Jacobs. "When the colonists made contact with our tribe, there's a lot of the things that we hailed as historical and meaningful to us that we're still putting together."

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Simone Biles Marries NFL Player Jonathan Owens

The US gymnastics athlete and the Houston Texans player first met on the private dating app Raya, which is most often used by celebrities and other affluent persons.

US gymnast and world champ Simone [Biles](#), 26, has married NFL player Jonathan Owens, 27. Biles, who has seven Olympic medals, shared a social media post on Saturday announcing the exciting news. Paired with her newlywed announcement, the athlete shared a collection of photos of her and her new husband.

One of the photos includes Biles in a tiered white wedding gown, and Owens in a tan suit. Owens shared the same collection of photos of what appeared to be a courthouse wedding, writing: "My person, forever."

The two reportedly met during a Texans game in 2019, but then matched on the dating app Raya in March of 2020. Biles then announced their engagement in February of last year after Owens proposed to her under a gazebo in Houston, Texas.

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'Growing Frustration' At FBI Over Failure to Charge Hunter Biden – Report

If the impatient federal agents have their way, '10 percent for the big guy' could mean felony criminal charges for the little one.

There's "growing frustration" among the FBI as US President Joe Biden's unruly son Hunter has yet to be charged in multiple felonies and misdemeanor investigations over a year after agents concluded the bulk of their research, US media is reporting.

Investigators in the FBI "finished the bulk of their work on the case about a year ago," according to NBC News, which [noted](#) that "a senior law enforcement source said the IRS finished its investigation more than a year ago" as well.

Per the outlet, "the possible charges are two misdemeanor counts for failure to file taxes, a single felony count of tax evasion related to a business expense for one year of taxes, and the gun charge," which is "also a potential felony."

The revelation comes just two days after a lawyer representing an anonymous IRS employee wrote in a letter to Congress that his client, a "career IRS Criminal Supervisory Special Agent who has been overseeing the ongoing and sensitive investigation of a high profile, controversial subject since early 2020," is seeking to testify before the legislators as a protected whistleblower.

According to the lawyer, the IRS Special Agent, who's reportedly spent over a decade on the job, is [seeking](#) to provide information that would "contradict sworn testimony to Congress by a senior political appointee," "clear conflicts of interest" in the case, and specific instances of "preferential treatment and politics improperly infecting decisions and protocols."

It's unclear whether authorities are still considering charging the younger Biden with money laundering and failing to register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act as well. But over the past several years, the Justice Department has seriously ramped up prosecutions of alleged FARA violations – though so far they've largely focused on those politically opposed to the Biden family.

In 2018, Former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort was sentenced to 60 months in prison for supposed FARA violations relating to work carried out in Ukraine. He was hit with a further 30 months for other charges as well.

This week, several Black socialists in Florida were indicted for allegedly failing to register under FARA by prosecutors who accuse them of not telling US officials they received funds from someone supposedly acting on behalf of the Russian government, further fueling suspicions that the Biden administration's prosecutions are politically motivated.

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Twitter Scraps All 'State-Affiliated Media' Labels, Sparking Media Meltdown

Just after midnight on April 21st, Twitter's new ownership capped off a momentous day which saw thousands of celebrities' verified check marks suddenly disappear from their profiles by reversing one of the social media giant's most widely-criticized decisions and eliminating 'state-affiliated media' labels altogether.

Social media behemoth Twitter is being both celebrated and vilified after reversing course on a controversial decision which saw outlets which receive money from governments get publicly labeled "state-affiliated media."

The labels have existed for several years, but were applied exclusively to publications like Sputnik and RT which receive funding from countries the US is targeting for regime change – including Russia, Iran, Cuba, and more.

After Twitter was purchased by billionaire Elon Musk, similar labels were affixed to Western government-sponsored outlets as well, including NPR, PBS, and Canada's CBC – a decision which led the outraged North American publications to abandon the platform altogether.

But, strangely, none of those publications seemed terribly enthused by the decision.

"Twitter once muzzled Russian and Chinese state propaganda. That's over now," read a particularly morose [headline](#) from US government-funded NPR. A spokesman for CBC reportedly said the outlet still has no plans to return at this time, and is "reviewing this latest development and will leave [its] Twitter accounts on pause before taking any next steps."

Meanwhile, a former Twitter executive interviewed by NPR complained bitterly that "it's disheartening to see labels that were built to inform people be used as a tactic to mislead." More independent voices, however, tended to welcome the decision.

As Australian journalist Caitlin Johnstone noted, "I've been very critical of Elon Musk's Twitter takeover and generally dismissive of claims that his ownership is a marked improvement over the previous owners, but if this is for real I'll have to eat a big steaming pile of crow, because Twitter functioning less as a US propaganda organ is indisputably a significant improvement." In February, following Russia's intervention in the civil war that had been plaguing Ukraine since 2014, Twitter extended the labels to a number of individual journalists employed by these outlets, including this reporter.

Last April, Twitter [announced](#) it was taking steps to "drastically" reduce the chance that users would come across content made by those the platform declared "state-affiliated – a category that includes numerous American journalists. Even after numerous 'Twitter Files' disclosures, it remains unclear what role the Biden administration may have played in the effort to stifle those users' speech, but any government-directed censorship of US citizens would almost certainly constitute a violation of the First Amendment. As of Friday, however, it may be a moot question.

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Kirby Says Unsafe to Carry Out 'Larger Evacuation' From Sudan, Fighting Very Tense

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) – The United States considers it unsafe to carry out a "larger evacuation" of Americans from Sudan due to intensity of the hostilities, National Security

Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby said on Monday.

"Right now, it is not very safe to try to run some larger evacuation," Kirby told ABC News.

The fighting is "so tense," he added.

Most of the Americans in Sudan have dual citizenship and do not want to leave the country, the official said.

"The safest thing for Americans to do, those who have decided to stay in Sudan despite the warning, is to shelter in place," Kirby noted.

President Joe Biden said on Sunday that the US military has conducted an operation to extract US government personnel from Khartoum. The United States is temporarily suspending operations at the US embassy in the country, he added.

Sudan has been gripped by intense fighting between the armed forces and the rival paramilitary group known as Rapid Support Forces since mid-April.

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Kirby on US Denying Visas to Reporters Traveling With Lavrov: These Are Propaganda Organs

WASHINGTON, April 24 (Sputnik) – US National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby on Monday labeled Russian state media as propaganda organs while commenting on the US failure to provide visas to journalists who were supposed to travel with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to New York.

"Russian state media, these are propaganda organs, and we feel like it is important to speak up and stand up for freedom of the press, a free press, an independent press that is able to do its job freely," Kirby told CNN.

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US Supreme Court Rejects Ruling Banning Abortion Pill Mifepristone - Filing

WASHINGTON, April 22 (Sputnik) - The conservative-majority US Supreme Court rejected a lower court ruling that imposed a nationwide ban on the abortion drug mifepristone, court documents revealed.

Earlier this month, US District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk suspended the federal license for mifepristone, which has been on the US market for more than 20 years.

The abortion drug was at risk of becoming an unapproved drug if the Supreme Court did not act within a seven-day window that was granted by a judge in Texas to appeal the ruling, however, the Supreme Court decided to give itself extra time to study the case.

A US federal judge from the state of Washington had issued a ruling in early April to prohibit the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) from changing the status quo with respect to mifepristone. President Joe Biden applauded the decision in a statement after the ruling.

"As a result of the Supreme Court's stay, mifepristone remains available and approved for safe and effective use while we continue this fight in the courts. I continue to stand by FDA's evidence-based approval of mifepristone, and my Administration will continue to defend FDA's independent, expert authority to review, approve, and regulate a wide range of prescription drugs," Biden said later on Friday.

Biden also called on the American people to elect a Congress that will pass a law restoring the protections under Roe v Wade.

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US Awards \$2.45Bln for Patriot PAC-3 Missile Production - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, April 22 (Sputnik) - Lockheed Martin won more than \$2.4 billion for PATRIOT Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) missile production, the Department of Defense announced in a press release.

"Lockheed Martin, Grand Prairie, Texas, was awarded a \$2,451,432,304 modification to contract for Phased Array Tracking Radar Intercept on Target (PATRIOT) Advanced Capability-3 missile production," the release said on Friday.

Work on the contract will be performed in Grand Prairie in the US state of Texas over the next seven years with an estimated completion date of December 31, 2029, the Defense Department said.

The US Army Contracting Command at Redstone Arsenal in the US state of Alabama will oversee the supply as the contracting activity, the release said.

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Top US General Milley, Sudanese Counterpart Discuss Situation in Sudan - Spokesman

WASHINGTON, April 22 (Sputnik) - Top US general Mark Milley spoke on the telephone with his Sudanese counterpart Abdel Fattah Abdelrahman al-Burhan about security concerns in Sudan, Joint Staff spokesperson Joseph Holstead said in a press release.

Sudan has been gripped by intense fighting between the armed forces and the rival paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces (RSF) since last week. The sides agreed to a three-day truce starting Friday in connection with the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr.

"Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark A. Milley spoke with the Chief of the Sudanese Armed Forces, General Abdel Fattah Abdelrahman al-Burhan today via phone," Holstead said in the release on Friday.

The two leaders discussed the safety of Americans and the developing situation in Sudan, Holstead added.

Health Minister of Sudan Haitham Mohamed Ibrahim said on Friday that about 60 people were

killed and more than 200 injured during the first day of Eid al-Fitr.

The Sudanese government forces accused the RSF of mutiny and launched airstrikes against their bases as well as issued a decree disbanding the paramilitary organization.

On Tuesday, the parties agreed to a 24-hour ceasefire beginning at 6:00 p.m. local time (16:00 GMT) and announced another 24-hour ceasefire the following day. However, neither of the ceasefires brought an end to the fighting.

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Musk Says SpaceX Can Be Ready for Second Starship Flight Test in 1 to 2 Months

WASHINGTON, April 22 (Sputnik) - SpaceX can be ready for a second flight test of the Starship and Super Heavy rocket system in one to two months, company founder Elon Musk said in a statement.

"Looks like we can be ready to launch again in 1 to 2 months," Musk wrote on Twitter on Friday. Musk said SpaceX will need to repair the launch pad after the first flight test on Thursday created a big crater underneath the launch mount in Starbase, Texas.

Three months ago, according to Musk, SpaceX started building a massive water-cooled, steel plate to go under the launch mount, but it was not ready in time for the first launch. Musk added that the Starship team thought, based on data from a static fire test, that the original base underneath the launchpad would make it through the first launch.

In early February, SpaceX conducted a static fire test of 31 of the 33 Raptor engines on the Super Heavy booster at 50% thrust.

On Thursday, SpaceX carried out the first combined launch of the Starship spacecraft and the Super Heavy first stage booster. The spacecraft was deliberately blown up during the test flight after it began to lose altitude when multiple engines failed. The spacecraft climbed to an apogee of about 39 kilometers (24 miles) over the Gulf of Mexico, which is the highest point any Starship spacecraft has reached to-date in the program's history.

The Starship is the centerpiece of SpaceX efforts to develop a fully reusable transportation system designed to carry humans to the Moon and on long-duration flights to Mars and beyond. The system is designed for in-space refueling and the ability to land at destinations across the solar system and return to Earth.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, April 22 (Sputnik) -

ARMS CONTROL

* Russia should consider increasing its strategic offensive arms potential and create a single integrated missile defense system amid the risk arising from the expiration of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), Russian Foreign Ministry's Ambassador-at-Large Grigory Mashkov said on Friday.

* Russia considers it necessary to launch a mechanism for discussing the entire spectrum of missile issues on the United Nations platform, Mashkov said.

* There is an evident need for Russia to increase its tactical missile potential and accumulate stocks of missiles in advance so as to effectively respond to any security challenges, including those in the western Kaliningrad region, Mashkov said.

UK GOVERNMENT

* UK Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Justice Dominic Raab said on Friday that he had decided to resign following an investigation into allegations made against him of inappropriate behavior toward civil servants.

* UK Secretary of State in the Cabinet Office Oliver Dowden has been appointed as the country's new deputy prime minister after Raab resigned from the post, the Prime Minister's Office said.

* UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's office announced the appointment of Alex Chalk, who is currently the Minister of State at the Defense Ministry, as the new Secretary of State for Justice.

UNREST IN SUDAN

* About 60 people were killed and more than 200 injured during the first day of the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr, which is celebrated in Sudan on Friday, Sudanese Health Minister Haitham Mohamed Ibrahim said on Friday.

* The armed forces of Sudan announced that they have agreed to a three-day truce starting Friday in connection with Eid al-Fitr.

SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

* The alleged ban on the export of almost all goods to Russia, which was reportedly discussed by the G7 countries, will hit the global economy and may lead to an increase in crisis trends in the world, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Friday.

* The issue of a complete ban on exports to Russia has not yet been discussed by the G7, a senior EU official said.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

* NATO promises to provide Ukraine with membership in the alliance to motivate Kiev to fulfill the alliance's tasks, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Friday.

* Sixty-five Ukrainians have recently completed their training on the Patriot air defense system, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley said.

* The United States' timeline for providing Abrams main battle tanks to Ukraine has been expedited to deliver training tanks to Germany in the coming weeks, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said.

* Ukraine has lost up to 310 soldiers in the Donetsk area over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* The Ukrainian military attempted to use an unknown chemical substance in the Zaporizhzhia area, Vladimir Rogov, a senior official of the Zaporizhzhia regional administration, said.

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JPMorgan Continued Ties With Jeffrey Epstein After Closing Criminal's Account - Reports

WASHINGTON, April 21 (Sputnik) - US bank JPMorgan Chase continued relations with sex offender Jeffrey Epstein despite closing his account in 2013, The Wall Street Journal reported on Friday.

Justin Nelson, one of Epstein's bankers at JPMorgan, held several meetings at Epstein's townhouse between 2014 and 2017, the report said, citing people familiar with the matter. Nelson also traveled to Epstein's New Mexico ranch in 2016, the report said.

JPMorgan claims to have closed Epstein's accounts in 2013, the report said. Epstein was forced to register as a sex offender after being convicted for soliciting a minor for prostitution in 2008.

A JPMorgan spokesman reportedly said that any meetings held with Epstein after 2013 were regarding other JPMorgan bank clients represented by the sex offender.

In July 2019, Epstein was charged with trafficking underage girls for sexual exploitation. Epstein was later found dead in his jail cell with fatal neck injuries, purportedly a result of suicide.

In December, the attorney general of the US Virgin Islands filed a lawsuit against JPMorgan Chase, accusing the bank of assisting Epstein with sex trafficking.

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Blinken Urges Sudan Leaders to Use Eid Al-Fitr Truce for Talks on Sustainable Ceasefire

WASHINGTON, April 21 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged Sudanese leaders on Friday to use a three-day truce to immediately start negotiations on a lasting ceasefire.

Sudan has been gripped by intense fighting between the armed forces and the rival paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces since last week. The sides agreed to a three-day truce starting Friday in connection with the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr.

"With the pause in fighting, Sudan's military and civilians leader must urgently begin negotiations on arrangements for a sustainable ceasefire to prevent further damage to the Sudanese nation," Blinken said in a statement.

These negotiations should address such issues as the delivery of humanitarian assistance, protection of civilians, including the withdrawal of both forces from urban areas, and security for vital health, water, power and communications and other infrastructure, the secretary added.

Blinken reiterated his call for an end to the fighting, despite "serious mistrust between the two

forces." He called on both sides to pause the fighting to enable all civilians, including diplomatic personnel, to reach safety, and allow full and unimpeded humanitarian access.

Health Minister of Sudan Haitham Mohamed Ibrahim said on Friday that about 60 people were killed and more than 200 injured during the first day of Eid al-Fitr.

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UPDATE - US to Strengthen Powers to Mitigate Risks From Non-Bank Financial Firms - Yellen

(Adds comments, details and context, paragraphs 4-6)

WASHINGTON, April 21 (Sputnik) - The United States will strengthen its powers to mitigate risks from non-bank financial firms following regional bank failures, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Friday.

"We are proposing revisions to certain elements of the Council's existing guidance that have made it difficult to use its nonbank designation authority," Yellen said, chairing a meeting of the Financial Stability Oversight Council, or FSOC. "The designation tool serves as an important part of our post-Global Financial Crisis defense. It is an important preventative tool to address systemic risks that may arise from a nonbank financial firm whose activities or distress could threaten the financial system. We are acting today to restore the effectiveness of this authority."

The US banking industry was shaken by the collapse of two regional lenders — Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank — last month that a review by financial regulators later showed was a result of poor management decision-making that prioritized short-term returns over long-term fidelity.

The FSOC is staffed by the most powerful regulators in the US financial industry, including Yellen, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, Securities and Exchange Commission Chair Gary Gensler, Acting Comptroller of the Currency Michael Hsu and Commodity Futures Trading Commission Chair Rostin Behnam.

Yellen said the panel needs to remove "inappropriate hurdles" to designating non-bank firms for supervision. "The March banking turmoil demonstrates that more work is needed to strengthen the regulatory and supervisory regimes," she added.

Yellen said the US banking system has stabilized since the March crisis and "remains sound". Despite that, the FSOC needs to be vigilant and closely monitor financial system conditions, she said.

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US Had More Mass Shootings Than Days in 2023 - DHS Chief

WASHINGTON, April 21 (Sputnik) – The United States has had more mass shootings than days in 2023, Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas said on Friday.

"We have had more mass shootings in this country in 2023 than we have days of the year," Mayorkas said at the Council of Foreign Relations.

Mass shootings are victimizing more and more individuals, he added.

Mayorkas highlighted the importance of cooperation between law enforcement and local communities to prevent massacres. The authorities have to fund and equip communities so they can determine in a timely manner whether a person is planning to take the path of violence, the secretary said.

The US has seen 167 mass shootings this year, according to the Gun Violence Archive.

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US House Requests Info From Blinken After Panels Find Ties to Hunter Biden Lies - Letter

WASHINGTON, April 21 (Sputnik) - US House lawmakers are requesting information from Secretary of State Antony Blinken after new testimony revealed the top diplomat's ties to a statement falsely claiming that reports about Hunter Biden's abandoned laptop were Russian disinformation, Congressmen Jim Jordan and Mike Turner said in a letter.

"We are examining the origins of the infamous public statement signed by 51 former intelligence officials that falsely discredited a New York Post story regarding Hunter Biden's laptop as supposed Russian disinformation. As part of our oversight, we have learned that you played a role in the inception of this statement while serving as a Biden campaign advisor, and we, therefore, request your assistance with our oversight," the letter said on Thursday.

Jordan and Turner chair the House Judiciary and Intelligence committees, respectively. The panels recently conducted an interview with former Deputy CIA Director Michael Morell, one of the 51 signatories to the statement falsely claiming the Hunter Biden laptop story as misinformation, the letter said.

Blinken's outreach to Morell about the story set in motion a chain of events that led to the issuance of the public statement, the letter said. At the time, Blinken was working as a senior advisor to then-candidate Joe Biden's presidential campaign.

The Biden campaign helped to strategize about the public release of the statement, the letter said.

Morell testified that the intent of the statement was to help Biden in a presidential debate and assist him in winning the election, the letter said.

"Based on Morell's testimony, it is apparent that the Biden campaign played an active role in the origins of the public statement, which had the effect of helping to suppress the Hunter Biden story and preventing American citizens from making a fully informed decision during the 2020 presidential election," the letter said.

The letter requests Blinken provide information about communications related to the Hunter Biden story and the related statement. The committees request the materials be produced no later than May 4, the letter said.

The panels are requesting Blinken's assistance in a personal, not professional, capacity due to the events occurring prior to his confirmation as Secretary of State, the letter noted.

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Overtaken Fuel Tanker Shuts Down Major Connecticut Highway - State Police

WASHINGTON, April 21 (Sputnik) - A large fire generated after a fuel tanker rolled over on the Gold Star Bridge in Groton, Connecticut, has led to the shutdown of I-95, State Police announced on Friday.

"Fuel tanker truck rollover on Gold Star Bridge with fire. Bridge is closed. Injuries are unknown at this time. Avoid the area," the Connecticut State Police tweeted on Friday afternoon.

Videos taken of the area show plumes of dark smoke emanating from the bridge, where the tanker's contents have leaked out and caught fire.

Police also confirmed that some of the buildings directly below Gold Star Bridge have also caught fire, and have advised civilians to avoid the area. The extent of injuries is currently unknown, and the site is still under active investigation.

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French Court Convicts Lebanese-Canadian Academic of 1980 Synagogue Bombing – Reports

WASHINGTON, April 21 (Sputnik) – A French court found Lebanese-Canadian academic Hassan Diab guilty in absentia on charges of involvement in the 1980 Paris synagogue bombing and sentenced him to life in prison, CBC reported on Friday.

The court has issued an arrest warrant for the sociologist, the report said.

Diab reportedly expressed disappointment with the verdict, adding he had hoped that "reason" would prevail.

At the moment, Diab's lawyer is waiting to see whether France will issue a request for extradition, the report said, and labeled the verdict as politically motivated.

Diab was arrested in 2008 by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and was extradited to France in 2014 where he spent over three years in prison, but was freed after judges found the evidence was not solid enough to try him.

In 1980, a bomb was detonated at a synagogue located on Rue Copernic in Paris. The explosion killed four people and injured 40 others. No one ever claimed responsibility for the attack.

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US Court Sets Detention Hearing for Suspected Pentagon Leaker on April 27 - Court Document

WASHINGTON, April 21 (Sputnik) - A new detention hearing has been set in Worcester, Massachusetts on April 27 for alleged leaker of classified military documents Jack Teixeira, according to court documents released on Friday.

"ELECTRONIC NOTICE OF HEARING as to Jack Douglas Teixeira. IN PERSON Detention Hearing set for 4/27/2023 at 1:00 PM in Courtroom 1 - Worcester (In person only) before Magistrate Judge David H. Hennessy," the notice read.

Teixeira, a 21-year-old Massachusetts Air National Guardsman, was arrested on April 13 and charged in Boston federal court the next day with unauthorized removal and transmission of national defense information and unauthorized removal and retention of classified documents or materials, to which he pleaded not guilty.

It is alleged that Teixeira, who runs a server on the social media platform Discord, posted more than 40 images of classified documents to the group between December 2022 and March 2023.

Teixeira is being held without bail pending the detention hearing.

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US to Strengthen Powers to Mitigate Risks From Non-Bank Financial Firms - Yellen

WASHINGTON, April 21 (Sputnik) - The United States will strengthen its powers to mitigate risks from non-bank financial firms following regional bank failures, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Friday.

"We are proposing revisions to certain elements of the Council's existing guidance that have made it difficult to use its nonbank designation authority," Yellen said, chairing a meeting of the Financial Stability Oversight Council. "The designation tool serves as an important part of our post-Global Financial Crisis defense. It is an important preventative tool to address systemic risks that may arise from a nonbank financial firm whose activities or distress could threaten the financial system. We are acting today to restore the effectiveness of this authority."

The US banking industry was shaken by the collapse of two regional lenders — Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank — last month that a review by financial regulators later showed was a result of poor management decision-making that prioritized short-term returns over long-term fidelity.

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US Homeland Security Chief Says Establishing Artificial Intelligence Task Force

WASHINGTON, April 21 (Sputnik) – The US Department of Homeland Security is setting up a task force that will utilize artificial intelligence to defend the nation's critical infrastructure and

interests, Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said on Friday.

"I am directing the creation of our Department's first Artificial Intelligence Task Force that will drive specific applications of AI to advance our critical homeland security missions," Mayorkas said at the Council of Foreign Relations.

The task force will enhance the integrity of US supply chains and trade, he added.

"We will seek to deploy AI to more ably screen cargo, identify the importation of goods produced with forced labor, and manage risks," the secretary said.

The task force will also support the DHS mission of preventing the flow of fentanyl into the United States.

"We will explore using this technology to better detect fentanyl shipments, identify and interdict the flow of precursor chemicals around the world, and target for disruption key nodes in the criminal networks," Mayorkas said.

The mission also covers countering the "multi-faceted threat" posed by China, he added. That includes learning lessons from major cyber incidents and other issues, Mayorkas explained.

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Trudeau to Participate in Global Citizen NOW Summit in New York April 27-28 - Statement

WASHINGTON, April 21(Sputnik) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will travel to New York to participate in the Global Citizen NOW Summit on April 27-28, the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement on Friday.

The summit will feature an eclectic group of attendees ranging from world leaders to grassroots activists for a discussion on how to solve the most urgent issues facing humanity via cross-sector collaboration.

"The Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, today announced he will travel to New York City, United States of America to participate in the Global Citizen NOW summit to advance collective efforts in addressing some of the most pressing global challenges and building a better and more equal world for everyone," the statement said.

During his visit, Trudeau will assess the progress toward reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the statement said.

The SDGs were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030.

Trudeau is also expected to highlight current issues affecting women's rights and the importance of women in achieving and maintaining peace, the statement said.

The prime minister will address the Council on Foreign Relations to build on US President Joe Biden's recent visit to Canada, with a focus on the two countries' shared interest in so-called "clean" economies.

Trudeau will additionally engage with investors and financial leaders to promote Canada's economic outlook and reaffirm Ottawa's commitment to developing the North American electric vehicle supply chain and remaining a reliable energy supplier.

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Cygnus Spacecraft Prepares to Depart Space Station for Last Flight Burning Up - NASA

WASHINGTON, April 21 (Sputnik) - The US-built Cygnus spacecraft has detached from the International Space Station (ISS) in preparation for its last flight burning up in the atmosphere, NASA said in an official blog on Friday.

"At 7:22 a.m. EDT, Northrop Grumman Cygnus spacecraft was released from the Canadarm2 robotic arm, which earlier detached Cygnus from the Earth-facing port of the ISS's Unity module. At the time of release, the station was flying southwest of Ireland," NASA said.

The Cygnus spacecraft successfully departed the space station more than five months after delivering 8,200 pounds of supplies, scientific experiments and equipment, commercial products and other cargo, NASA said.

Cygnus is scheduled to have a deorbit firing of its engines on Friday evening and then fly to be burned up in the Earth's atmosphere, NASA added.

The spacecraft is carrying trash packed by the station crew, according to NASA.

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China Has Capability, Intent to Undermine US Interests Inside, Abroad - Mayorkas

WASHINGTON, April 21 (Sputnik) – China has the capability and intent to undermine US interests both inside the United States and overseas, US Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas said on Friday.

"Beijing has the capability and the intent to undermine our interests at home and abroad, and is leveraging every instrument of its national power to do so – from its increasingly aggressive presence in the South China Sea to the overseas police station used to harass and intimidate dissenters," Mayorkas said during a conversation at the Council of Foreign Relations.

On Monday, the US arrested two officers of China's National Police Force for allegedly setting up a secret police station in a nondescript office building in Chinatown in lower Manhattan.

Mayorkas also noted that he has directed a 90-day department-wide sprint to assess threats posed by China. The department, in particular, will assess how to protect US critical infrastructure against China's or China-sponsored attacks.

"Another area of assessment will involve how we can bolster our screening and vetting to identify illicit travelers from the PRC who exploit our lawful immigration and travel systems to collect intelligence, steal intellectual property and harass dissidents, while still we must facilitate lawful travel," he added.

Mayorkas argued that China's possible invasion of Taiwan would have a profound impact on US security and would put its civilian infrastructure at risk of a "disruptive cyberattack."

The US has to ensure it is ready to defend itself against this threat now and in the future, the

secretary added.

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Milley Says 65 Ukrainians Completed Training on Patriot Missile System Recently

WASHINGTON, April 21 (Sputnik) - Sixty-five Ukrainians have recently completed their training on the Patriot air defense system, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley said on Friday.

"[T]here are 65 Ukrainians that completed training on Patriot missile systems just recently," Milley said during a press conference at the Ramstein Air Base in Germany. "In addition, there are about 2,500 Ukrainian soldiers conducting training right now in Germany. Another 8,800, almost 9,000, have completed training and returned to Ukraine."

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Austin Says US Expediting Abrams Delivery to Ukraine, Tanks Will Arrive in Germany Soon

WASHINGTON, April 21 (Sputnik) - The United States' timeline for providing M1 Abrams tanks to Ukraine has been expedited to deliver training tanks to Germany in the coming weeks, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Friday.

"We've also expedited our M1 Abrams timelines to supply Ukraine with more armored capability in the coming months, and the M1s that the Ukrainians will use for training will arrive here in Germany in the next few weeks," Austin said during a press conference.

Earlier on Friday, US media reported that 31 Abrams tanks will arrive in Germany soon, with training expected to last for 10 weeks. The tanks could reach Ukraine by fall, the reports said.

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Deloitte to Cut 1,200 Jobs or 1.5% of US Workforce - Report

WASHINGTON, April 21 (Sputnik) - Deloitte, one of the world's Big Four accounting firms, will slash some 1,200 jobs in the United States that account for about 1.5% of its workforce in the country, the Financial Times reported on Friday, quoting an internal employees' circular.

The layoffs will impact the higher-end financial advisory business of the firm, which has been hurt by a drop in merger and acquisition activity, the report said.

Deloitte had not commented on the Financial Times report at the time of its publication by Sputnik.

The firm is part of the Big Four accounting firms that include Ernst & Young, KPMG, and PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Ernst & Young said earlier this week that it will shed about 5% of its US staff.

Major corporations across the United States have been laying off workers in recent months amid business slowdowns and worries about an impending recession, aggravated by high inflation and aggressive rate hikes by the Federal Reserve.

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US Treasury Official Urges Firms in Austria to Be Vigilant About Russia Sanctions Evasion

WASHINGTON, April 21 (Sputnik) - US Treasury Under Secretary Brian Nelson urged business leaders in Austria to do more to block the flow of defense articles to Russia and crack down on any evasion of Western sanctions on Moscow, according to prepared remarks released by the Treasury on Friday.

"Together, we can stem the flow of defense-related and dual-use goods to Russia by targeting evasion," Nelson said in remarks at the American Chamber of Commerce Austria Roundtable. "Your firms should be carefully communicating with your financial and trade counterparts in jurisdictions that are at higher risk for evasion of Russia sanctions."

Nelson also praised the Western price cap on Russian oil, saying it had deprived Russia of its "most important source of revenue" by driving down the country's budget revenues by more than 40% in January and February compared to the previous year.

Senior Treasury officials Nelson and Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes Elizabeth Rosenberg are currently touring Central Europe and Central Asia to urge countries and private sector entities to counter any evasion of Western sanctions on Russia.

Nelson is traveling to Switzerland, Italy, Austria and Germany from April 16-April 22, while Rosenberg is heading to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan from April 23-April 28.

After the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the West, including the EU, rolled out a massive sanctions campaign against Moscow. To date, the US Treasury has added more than 2,500 Russia-related targets to its sanctions list.

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Trump Would Beat DeSantis by 13 Points in GOP Presidential Nomination Race – Poll

WASHINGTON, April 21 (Sputnik) - Former US President Donald Trump would defeat Florida Governor Ron DeSantis by a landslide of 13 points in a hypothetical head-to-head matchup for the Republican presidential nomination, according to a Wall Street Journal poll published on Friday.

In December, the poll showed DeSantis beating the former president by 14 points, 52% to 38%.

In the fresh survey, Trump tops DeSantis 51% to 38%.

Trump also leads all competitors in a potential field of 12 Republican contenders, enjoying 48% support against 24% for DeSantis, according to the findings.

They are followed by former South Carolina governor Nikki Haley (5%) and South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott (3%). All other candidates gained 2% support or less.

The poll was conducted from April 11-17 by Impact Research and Fabrizio, Lee & Associates. The margin of error was plus or minus 4 percentage points among a sample of 600 likely Republican primary voters.

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