

5/12/23 Friday

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Sullivan Tells China's Wang Yi US Wants to 'Move Beyond' Balloon Incident

Following the downing of a high-altitude balloon over the United States in February, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken postponed his trip to China and Washington severed nearly all high-level relations with Beijing. However, at an unpublicized meeting in Vienna earlier this week, the US signaled it wants to bury the hatchet.

The US is further looking to reestablish its high-level ties with the People's Republic of China (PRC), put largely on hold for more than three months after the US detected and shot down what it claimed was a spy balloon dispatched by the Chinese government to soar over US soil. That was the message of White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan at a series of meetings on Wednesday and Thursday in Vienna, Austria, with Wang Yi, the highest-ranking Chinese diplomat who leads the Communist Party of China's foreign affairs bureau.

A Biden administration official anonymously told US media on Thursday that the White House was "looking to move beyond" the February balloon incident, which both sides described as "unfortunate" and are now looking to "reestablish standard, normal channels of communications."

"This meeting was part of ongoing efforts to maintain open lines of communication and responsibly manage competition," an official [White House readout](#) of the meeting said. "The two sides agreed to maintain this important strategic channel of communication to advance these objectives, building on the engagement between [Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping] in Bali," which happened on the sidelines of the G20 summit last November.

A report in China's Global Times, also based on an anonymous Chinese diplomatic source, revealed the talks went on for 10 hours and covered a wide range of topics, including the balloon incident, ongoing tensions over American support for Taiwan, US moves in what it calls the "Indo-Pacific" region, and the conflict in Ukraine.

The Chinese diplomats emphasized that "the US side overreacted and abused force in the unmanned civilian airship incident and lessons must be learned from the incident," the source said, according to the paper.

Shared Concerns

Zhu Feng, a professor of international relations at Nanjing University, was quoted in Chinese media as saying the meeting was "timely and necessary."

"It was not a total surprise and it's good to see there is consensus on the necessity of resuming direct communications and dialogue for the sake of crisis management and exploring possible opportunities for cooperation," he said. "That's what diplomacy is about. Neither side can dwell on finger-pointing and verbal sparring. Both China and the US share concerns about many pressing issues, including the global implications of a prolonged war in Ukraine."

Sullivan's meeting with Wang was not the only such encounter this week, either, with Nicholas Burns, the US ambassador to China, meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang on

Monday. At that meeting as well, both sides reaffirmed their desire to return to the consensus reached between Biden and Xi in Bali in November: to compete, but not let things get out of hand.

"The top priority is to stabilize China-US relations, avoid a downward spiral, and prevent accidents between China and the United States. This should be the most basic consensus and a bottom line for countries to keep, especially two major countries," Qin told Burns, according to media reports.

"[We] hope the US will reflect deeply, meet China halfway, and push China-US relations out of the predicament and back on track."

Rocky Relations

The downing of the balloon off the South Carolina coast came after tracking the object's flight across the continental United States and Canada for several days, and culminated in US accusations that the balloon's purpose was strategic surveillance. After, a momentary "balloon hysteria" gripped US and Canadian defense officials, with multiple unidentified objects being downed in the skies along their respective border regions.

Beijing confirmed the first balloon was Chinese in origin, but claimed it was a civilian scientific balloon over which it had lost control, and denied any intelligence-gathering purpose behind it. Washington alleged the balloon was just one part of a vast Chinese spying program based on lighter-than-air craft due to the difficulty of detecting them. Blinken, scheduled to travel to Beijing for talks with Wang, Qin, and Xi, suddenly [postponed his trip](#), saying the timing was not appropriate.

The rupture in relations came just as the two nations were beginning to heal the wounds opened by the August visit to Taiwan by then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. China regards the island as a breakaway province destined to be reunited with the mainland, but the US has continued to funnel weapons to the government in Taipei over Chinese objections, even though Washington formally recognizes Beijing's position on Taiwan. The visit was seen as a violation of the PRC sovereignty and sparked major Chinese military drills around the island.

Taiwan figures strongly in [US strategy plans](#) for what it calls "great power competition" with Russia and China, which are based on the idea that Beijing and Moscow are seeking to upend the postwar international order led by the United States.

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US Facing 'Significant Risk' of Default in 'First Two Weeks' of June, Forecaster Warns

Republicans have attempted to use the debt ceiling crisis to force through their own truncated budget, but the effort collapsed earlier this month after rival party factions failed to agree on just how serious the budget cuts should be.

A [new report](#) by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), a nonpartisan federal budget watchdog, has warned the United States government faces imminent default on its debts in the first half of June if the impasse over raising the debt ceiling is not resolved.

According to the Friday report, the US Treasury is set to exhaust the “extraordinary measures” on which it has been relying to pay the government’s bills “at some point in the first two weeks of June.”

“The extent to which the Treasury will be able to fund the government’s ongoing operations will remain uncertain throughout May, even if the Treasury ultimately runs out of funds in early June. That uncertainty exists because the timing and amount of revenue collections and outlays over the intervening weeks could differ from CBO’s projections,” the forecaster added.

However, it noted that if the government does avoid default by June 15, it could get a short second wind, thanks to “quarterly tax receipts and additional extraordinary measures,” which it says “will probably allow the government to continue financing operations through at least the end of July.”

The CBO’s estimation is slightly further out than the Treasury’s, which [warned last week](#) that a government default could come as soon as June 1. That projection was made after tax receipts in April yielded a smaller-than-expected volume of cash.

Despite the dire warnings, Republicans and Democrats have so far failed to even begin serious talks about resolving the impasse. Both sides continued their posturing on Thursday of blaming the other side for refusing to negotiate, with House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), saying talks with US President Joe Biden [had been postponed](#) because the Democratic president lacked “seriousness” about the issue.

“It seems like they want a default more than they want a deal,” McCarthy told reporters.

The crisis is of the GOP’s design: wielding a narrow majority in the House after the November 2022 midterm elections, Republicans have sought to use the threat of a debt default to compel Democrats to agree to stiff budget cuts they would not agree to under normal budget negotiations, such as social programs.

In January, the GOP refused to pass a bill raising the debt ceiling to allow the appropriation of more funds, forcing the Treasury to adopt “extraordinary measures” to shuffle money around and pay outstanding debt payments.

The measures will only work for a time, as the CBO and Treasury have warned. Once they are exhausted, the federal government will default on its debt, destroying the country’s credit rating and plunging it into an economic crisis. A similar showdown in 2011 resulted in S&P downgrading the government’s credit rating from AAA to AA+, even though the two parties agreed to a deal to raise the ceiling and avoid default hours before it was set to occur.

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Daniel Penny Arraigned on Second-Degree Manslaughter Over Strangling Death of Jordan Neely

The strangling death of 30-year-old Jordan Neely, a homeless man who was put in a chokehold by a bystander on a New York subway earlier this month, provoked demonstrations in several US cities after police allowed the bystander, 24-year-old Daniel Penny, to leave without charges. Appearing before a New York magistrate on Friday after surrendering himself to authorities, Daniel Penny was informed he was charged with second-degree manslaughter in Jordan Neely's death.

Penny has not yet entered a plea, as a grand jury has not yet indicted him. He was released on \$100,000 bail and ordered to surrender his passport within 48 hours.

A former US Marine, Penny was not initially charged with the death of Neely on a New York F Train subway on May 1. However, after the medical examiner's office found Neely [died via compression of the neck](#), and following large street demonstrations demanding justice, the Manhattan District Attorney's Office found sufficient cause to charge him with Neely's death. Footage and testimonies from the scene showed Penny had held Neely in a chokehold for more than four minutes as Neely struggled to free himself before his body went limp, after which Penny held Neely in the position for another 50 seconds.

Neely, who was Black and homeless, was well-known in New York as a talented impersonator of R&B singer Michael Jackson, which he performed on subway trains as well as the sidewalk for more than a decade before his death.

He was believed to suffer from mental illness. At the time of the encounter with Penny, Neely was said to have been yelling about his frustration with being hungry and homeless.

Penny's identity was not initially known after the killing, as police released him without charge. After online sleuths purported to have identified him several days later, Penny's lawyers released a statement on his behalf expressing regret for Neely's death. The New York Police Department then confirmed his identity to the press.

Outrage over Neely's death in New York comes amid fury over the death of another homeless Black man, 24-year-old Banko Brown, across the country in San Francisco.

Brown, who was transgender, was shot to death by a security guard at a Walgreens drug store on April 27 after the guard suspected him of shoplifting. The city's District Attorney's Office has said the guard will not be charged, finding he acted in reasonable self-defense.

Demonstrations in that California city have demanded security footage of the incident be released, and similar to those following Neely's death, have called attention to the plight of homeless people amid [rising costs of living](#) driven upward by record inflation.

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JPMorgan Chase CEO: 'So Sad' Bank Had Ties to Epstein But We're Not Liable for His

The investment bank's predictable efforts to distance itself from Jeffrey Epstein's well-documented criminality seemed to fall somewhat short this week.

The CEO of JPMorgan Chase Jamie Dimon insisted in a Thursday [interview](#) that while it's "so sad" the massive investment bank had a "relationship" with disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein, the financial group bears no responsibility for his crimes.

“I am so sad that we had any relationship to that man whatsoever,” Dimon told US media, in a reference to the infamous convicted sex offender whose supposed suicide at New York’s Metropolitan Correctional Center in 2019 remains the source of widespread suspicion.

“You know, we had top lawyers evaluating, from the [US Securities and Exchange Commission] enforcement, the [Department of Justice], you know, and obviously, had we known then what we know today, we would have done things differently.”

“But it’s very unfortunate, and I have deep respect for these women,” Dimon claimed.

Dimon’s comments came ahead of a deposition scheduled for May 26 regarding civil lawsuits filed accusing JPMorgan of enabling and benefiting from Epstein’s sex trafficking ring, including the transfer of young women to the Virgin Islands to facilitate their abuse by the financier and his extremely influential guests on his private island.

[According](#) to one American business channel, “court filings this week show in detail that for years employees of JPMorgan shared with each other concerns about having Epstein as a client,” a timeframe the outlet noted was “well before the bank terminated its relationship with him.”

As a client of JPMorgan Chase, Epstein kept millions in the bank for at least five years after his first child sex crime conviction in 2008.

The infamous financier was sentenced to just 13 months at the time following accusations by dozens of underage girls that he’d abused them and allowed others to do the same for payment. Former Labor Secretary Alexander Acosta — who was the US Attorney in Miami at the time — reportedly [justified](#) Epstein’s lenient sentence by telling then-President Donald Trump’s team: “I was told Epstein ‘belonged to intelligence’ and to leave it alone” as the case was supposedly “above his pay grade.”

As US media [revealed](#) in late April, a trove of recently-unearthed documents showed meetings between Epstein and “several prominent people, including three with William Burns, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, when he was the deputy secretary of state in 2014” — meetings which occurred years after Epstein’s first child sex abuse convictions.

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Scientists Uncover Repeating Fast Radio Burst With 'Reversing' Magnetic Field

The origins of fast radio bursts (FRB) have been the subject of intense debate since their discovery in 2007. Now, a new study has given us a glimpse into what may be behind the massive, hyper-short bursts of energy.

Scientists have discovered the first persistently active repeating fast radio burst in the universe that changes its magnetic field twice, a new study has revealed.

After 17 months of observation of the strange energy phenomenon, dubbed FRB 20190520B, researchers discovered “the FRB’s Faraday rotation is highly variable and twice changes sign,” and that “the FRB also depolarizes below radio frequencies of about 1 to 3 gigahertz.”

"We interpret these properties as being due to changes in the parallel component of the magnetic field integrated along the line of sight, including reversing direction of the field," officials wrote in their findings.

Such a phenomenon "could result from propagation through a turbulent magnetized screen of plasma, located 10–5 to 100 parsecs from the FRB source," according to a [news release](#) from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, which played a leading role in the project.

"This is consistent with the bursts passing through the stellar wind of a binary companion of the FRB source," the researchers maintain.

In order for such an effect to be produced, they say the signal would likely have to pass through "the halo of a companion, be it a black hole or a massive star with [solar] winds."

The monitoring of FRB 20190520B was carried out by an international team of researchers using the Parkes telescope in Australia and the Green Bank Telescope (GBT) in the United States.

Officials noted that the treasured FRB was "an ideal target" for the study since "unlike all other FRBs, FRB 20190520B has produced bursts, detectable by at least one and sometimes multiple telescopes, every time it was viewed."

The [study](#) was published Thursday in the journal Science.

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Top Thai General Claims There's 'Zero Chance' of Coup After Sunday Election

Thailand's top general has promised the military won't intervene ahead of a crucial election whose frontrunners are harshly critical of the country's armed forces.

The head of Thailand's army, Gen. Narongpan Jittkaewtae, insisted Thursday that no coup d'etat will take place in the country regardless of how Sunday's elections play out.

Speaking at a news conference ahead of the upcoming vote, local media [reports](#) Gen.

Narongpan said that the chance of a coup taking place "is zero now."

The general reportedly went as far as to chide reporters for bringing up the subject, responding to a question about the prospect of a coup by urging journalists to refrain from using the word itself.

"The term should not be used. It is not appropriate. I want reporters to remove it from your dictionary," the army chief said.

Asked whether the military would remove the word from its vocabulary as well, Narongpan responded in the affirmative, saying: "Of course, it's removed."

The general pushed back on questions regarding concerns about post-election unrest and the military's potential response, telling reporters:

"I don't worry. We have learned many lessons from the past."

While the general cautioned that he "cannot say whether the country will be peaceful" in the wake of Sunday's vote, he insisted that "peace can only be achieved by everyone working together."

Indeed, “the country needs to be peaceful so the economy can grow,” the general noted. “But if we are in conflict and stir up unrest, the country will be in chaos, and people will be in trouble,” he warned, adding, “everyone must work together in the country's best interests.” “But I can assure you that what occurred [coups] in the past. The chance is zero now.” Over a dozen coups have been carried out in Thailand over the past century — most recently in 2014 — and the army has effectively ruled the country since. Polls indicating anti-military forces could prevail at the polls have given rise to questions about how the generals would respond to electoral defeat. But the top Thai general downplayed suggestions that the Move Forward Party, which is highly critical of the military, would be prevented from forming a coalition government after the poll, telling reporters, “it is up to political parties to form a coalition.” “Military personnel are not political-office holders,” he concluded.

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Ex-NBA Star All Apologies After Sparking Anger by Referring to Taiwan as 'Country'

Even though he currently plays for a Taiwanese team, the 37-year-old former basketball legend admitted later that he never meant to call the island nation a “country.”

American basketball legend Dwight Howard has quietly [walked back](#) comments suggesting he views the breakaway island of Taiwan as a legitimate nation-state, following massive outrage among Chinese fans.

In a short promotional video published Wednesday by the island’s political leaders, Howard can be seen telling the camera: “Since I came to Taiwan, I’ve gained a whole new appreciation of this country.”

Within 48 hours, the line ignited a firestorm of criticism among fans to the north, with the hashtag “Howard Taiwan independence” rocketing to the top of Weibo’s trending topics by Friday morning.

In subsequent comments, Howard has attributed the incident to a “communication barrier.” “Where I’m from, if I say I wanna go to the country, it doesn’t not mean that place is a country — It’s just how we talk,” he said. “If I offended anyone in China, I apologize. It was not my intention to harm anyone with what I said in the commercial.”

“I am not a politician,” Howard continued, adding: “I don’t want to get involved in any politics... I have the utmost respect for Chinese people and utmost respect for Taiwanese people, so it was never my intent to disrespect nobody.”

The eight-time NBA All-Star player is extremely popular in Taiwan, where he’s been playing for the Taoyuan Leopards since he joined the squad last November after the Los Angeles Lakers declined to offer a multi-year contract to the aging athlete.

However, Howard is not the first professional NBA figure to get himself into hot water over a major Chinese political principle. Former Rockets General Manager Daryl Morey also faced withering criticism after making a public statement in support of anti-China rioters terrorizing the city of Hong Kong in 2019.

At the time, Chinese authorities temporarily suspended the broadcast of NBA games in the aftermath, with Morey ultimately resigning from his post.

Virtually every nation on the planet — including the United States — adheres to the “One China” policy, which stipulates that the People’s Republic of China is the sole legitimate government of China and that Taiwan is an inseparable part of the territory.

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NASA's Perseverance Rover Produces First Evidence of 'Wild Martian River'

While a previous probe has uncovered proof of other water sources on Mars, this is the first indication that the barren planet once hosted at least one major river system similar to those on Earth.

The Perseverance rover has produced the first photographic evidence of a huge, long-dead river on Mars, the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has [announced](#). NASA's probe showed the river “was deeper and faster-moving than scientists have ever seen evidence for in the past,” the agency declared in a Thursday release.

“The river was part of a network of waterways that flowed into Jezero Crater, the area the rover has been exploring since landing more than two years ago,” the group noted.

Two new photo mosaics which were “stitched together from hundreds of images captured by Perseverance’s Mastcam-Z instrument” revealed “coarse sediment grains and cobbles” — evidence, scientists say, of a more powerful river system than the “relatively shallow streams” previously discovered by the Curiosity rover.

One researcher at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Southern California, which operates the Perseverance rover, said the clues “indicate a high-energy river that’s truckin’ and carrying a lot of debris.”

“The more powerful the flow of water, the more easily it’s able to move larger pieces of material,” explained the scientist, who added: “It’s been a delight to look at rocks on another planet and see processes that are so familiar.”

The Perseverance rover, which landed on the red planet in February 2021, has been on a mission to collect rock samples and record evidence of past - and potentially present - life on the planet.

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France Vows to Send Further Arms Shipment to Kiev Regime

Amid widespread disenchantment at home, France’s beleaguered president promised to ship more weapons to Ukraine following what Western media dubbed a ‘surprise visit’ from Zelensky.

French President Emmanuel Macron vowed Sunday to send more weapons to Ukraine and train Kiev's militants on their use following a lengthy dinner in Paris with the leader of their struggling regime, Volodymyr Zelensky.

"In the coming weeks, France will train and equip several battalions with tens of armored vehicles and light tanks, including AMX-10RCs," Paris and Kiev insisted in a joint statement. The government of Macron, whose approval rating has reportedly [plunged](#) to the mid-twenties amid widespread outrage over his efforts to circumvent Parliament to force an increase to the retirement age, is also "focusing its effort in supporting Ukraine's air defense capacities," the statement indicated.

Both countries are also demanding that yet another round of sanctions be imposed on Moscow, they announced.

In January, Macron's office [pledged](#) to send AMX-10 RC armored fighting vehicles to Kiev, boasting that it was the first country to send so-called "light battle tanks" to the conflict zone. But it didn't specify the quantity at the time.

The pledge to send "tens" of the military vehicles comes as Zelensky continues his tour of European capitals in a push to extract weapons from politicians throughout the continent ahead of a much-vaunted 'counter-offensive' that's yet to materialize.

In the past several days, the Ukrainian strongman also secured further weapons shipments following meetings with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

After Scholz promised Sunday to provide Kiev with around \$3 billion of tanks, anti-aircraft systems and ammunition, Zelensky reportedly noted that Berlin is now second in providing aid to Ukraine and [joked](#) that he's working to make it the Kiev regime's biggest patron.

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US Pushes Indonesia to Ramp Up Military Cooperation, Jakarta Pledges Neutrality

The latest American overture to Indonesia came via the Army's top general, who insisted he was simply pursuing "peace, security, [and] stability."

The US Army's top general was deployed to Indonesia in an effort to solidify the country's position in the American orbit this week amid Washington's ongoing efforts to encircle China militarily and constrain its growth.

On Friday, the Army's Chief of Staff, James McConville, [described](#) his meeting with Indonesian Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto as a relatively benign effort to bring peace to the Indo-Pacific region.

"We have many friends in the region, and we work closely together," McConville said. "We all share the same interests for the region: peace, security, stability."

“That’s why we work together on maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific for everyone,” he insisted.

For his part, Subianto described peace and stability in the region as a “common concern,” but insisted Indonesia would maintain its neutrality, pledging to continue pursuing relationships with all world’s nations – “especially all the major powers.”

McConville touched down in Jakarta on Thursday on the heels of a visit to the Philippines. That trip came shortly after last month’s massive US-Philippine war drills provoked anger among authorities in Beijing, who simulated an encirclement of their own against the renegade island of Taiwan in response.

But it’s unclear that Jakarta’s leaders are as willing to sign up for a battle with Beijing as their counterparts in Manila. Last November, Subianto promised to restore joint military exercises with China following a meeting with the nation’s defense minister.

In 2017, the US embassy in Jakarta released around 30,000 documents showing “the US actively supported the Indonesian military’s killing of as many as 1 million suspected communist sympathizers in the mid-1960s despite concerns about the reasons behind the massacre,” the Financial Times [reported](#).

But the US maintains close relations with Indonesia’s leaders despite its questionable legacy there.

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Trump to Receive Law Lecture From Judge on How Not to Attack Witnesses With Evidence

In light of the former president’s “longstanding history” of harassing witnesses involved in his legal cases, a US judge recently issued a protective order following a meeting between Trump’s lawyers and prosecutors during which routine evidence was shared.

Former US President Donald Trump was ordered on Thursday to appear for a legal lesson later this month to ensure he understands the full risks of misusing evidence against witnesses.

The order - tied to his [April 4 indictment](#) - was issued by Judge Juan Manuel Merchan, who will specifically inform Trump he will be held in contempt if he violates regulations that restrain him from intimidating witnesses. Trump will be appearing virtually before the court on May 23.

The protective order Merchan laid down on Trump comes at the request of New York [prosecutors](#), who argue the former president has a history of making “harassing, embarrassing, and threatening statements” about people he is legally entangled with.

“[Trump] has a longstanding and perhaps singular history of attacking witnesses, investigators, prosecutors, trial jurors, grand jurors, judges, and others involved in legal proceedings against him,” Assistant District Attorney Catherine McCaw wrote, adding that such behavior can put “individuals and their families at a considerable safety risk.”

Prosecutors are hoping to prohibit Trump from his usual Trumpisms, by restricting him from posting evidence to social media or third parties not involved in the legal proceedings.

Merchan agreed to have Trump appear via video as a means to avoid having to implement presidential-level security measures for the former commander-in-chief. While Trump will be

joining virtually, his lawyers, prosecutors and the presiding judge will be present in the courtroom.

During Trump's April indictment, serious security concerns had been raised and prompted the closure of multiple Manhattan roadways.

Merchan has made clear that he is not attempting to infringe on Trump's right to free speech, and that the law lesson Trump is set to receive should not be seen as a gag order.

"I'm bending over backwards and straining to make sure that he is given every opportunity possible to advance his candidacy and to be able to speak in furtherance of his candidacy," Merchan said. "The last thing I want to do is infringe on his or anybody else's First Amendment rights."

The virtual hearing was also posted to the court's calendar just a day after Trump's CNN town hall appearance, during which he lambasted the court ruling that found him liable of defaming and sexually abusing writer E. Jean Carroll in the mid 1990s. He called the allegations a "fake story, made up story" and labeled Carroll a "whack job."

During his town hall appearance the former president also made claims that New York is a state where one cannot receive a "fair trial," and claimed the judge presiding over the trial was a "horrible Clinton-appointed judge."

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Take That Jupiter! Saturn Wins Back Status as Planet With Most Moons

Saturn first lost its title after it was announced in February that Jupiter added 12 new moons to its tally (making up a total of 95 moons), while Saturn was only known to have 83.

This month, Jupiter lost its crown as the planet in our solar system with the most moons after research from multiple astronomers revealed Saturn has 62 more moons than previously known, bringing its official total to 145 moons.

After tracking 63 objects orbiting Saturn, a team of researchers confirmed its first satellite in 2021, while Saturn's remaining 62 moons were confirmed this month.

"Saturn not only has nearly doubled its number of moons, it now has more moons than all the rest of the planets in the solar system combined," said professor Brett Gladman, an astronomer at the University of British Columbia who was involved in the observations.

The exciting discovery was made by a team led by Edward Ashton, a postdoctoral fellow at the Academia Sinica Institute of Astronomy and Astrophysics, who was able to find Saturn's smaller moons using a method in which a set of images are shifted at the same speed as the moon they are tracking moves -all in order to enhance that specific moon's signal.

While this image system, referred to as "shift and stack," has been applied to Neptune and Uranus, this is the first time the technique has been used in researching Saturn. Additionally, while some of the moons have been spotted as early as 2019, those discoveries had to go unconfirmed until their orbit was tracked for several years.

"At a fixed size there are three times more Saturn satellites than Jupiter satellites," said Gladman. "They're not all known yet, but we already know the final answer."

The latest developments suggest more moons for Jupiter may be found; however, the recent finding of Saturn's moons is so dramatic, it essentially locks in Saturn's status as the planet in our solar system with the highest number of moons.

More data on Saturn's small outer moons are expected to be gathered once NASA's [Dragonfly](#) mission is launched in 2027.

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Probe Launched After Arby's Employee Finds Dead Woman Inside Restaurant Freezer

Authorities from the New Iberia Police Department will now be investigating what they believe is a suspicious death, but will not determine the death as having involved foul play.

A woman's body was found in the freezer of an Arby's restaurant in New Iberia, Louisiana, on Thursday at around 6:20 p.m. local time.

According to New Iberia Police officers who were called to the scene, an employee of the restaurant discovered the woman, who is believed to be the manager of the Arby's restaurant, which is located on Admiral Doyle Drive.

"We are aware of the incident that took place at our franchised location in New Iberia, LA. The franchisee is cooperating fully with local authorities as they conduct their investigation," said the American fast food chain in a statement.

"Due to this being an active investigation, we defer any further comment to the police department."

New Iberia Police Captain Leland Laseter has stated the incident occurred during regular business hours. It was further explained that while the woman's death is not being ruled as a homicide, the captain has suggested the situation is "unusual."

"Nothing is set in stone yet," Laseter said of the [investigation](#).

"A situation like this is unusual, so we're taking extra precautions during the investigation," the police captain added. "[We] pretty much have completed our process at the crime scene. After completely processing the crime scene... this does not seem like a homicide, it seems like an accident."

Criminal authorities are now waiting for the results of a coroner's autopsy in order to identify the victim, and determine her cause of death.

"We're going to re-examine all the evidence tomorrow and they're going to conduct an autopsy to give us the cause and manner of death. So there are a few more steps that we need to take before a (final) determination is made," Laseter said.

A 2015 article shared by [MT Cold Storage Solutions](#) (MTCSS)—a company which sells freezers and cold storage—states that employees becoming trapped inside walk-in freezers is not uncommon.

Additionally, according to the company, the most common cause for a walk-in freezer door getting stuck is ice build-up around the door frame, but typically, a built-in heater keeps this build-up in check, and the responsibility of upkeep and maintenance of that heater is the employer's.

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Archbishop of Canterbury or Speed Demon? Reverend Slapped With Fine for Speeding

Welby pleaded guilty to speeding the same day he shook down the House of Lords for their controversial migration bill.

The Most Reverend Justin Welby recently pleaded guilty to exceeding the posted speed limit on a road in Lambeth, central London.

UK media reported that Welby was caught speeding at a whopping 25 miles per hour (mph), exceeding the posted speed limit by 5 mph on October 2 of last year. It was not until Wednesday that the official faced the legal music - just a few days after he crowned King Charles III, and anointed the sovereign with holy oil during the king's weekend coronation. Lavender Hill Magistrates' Court ordered the 105th archbishop of Canterbury to pay £300 fine, a £120 victim surcharge and £90 in legal costs, as well as added points to his driver's license. The Archbishop was driving his Volkswagen Golf at a speed of 25 mph in a 20 mph. The 67-year-old was heading towards his residence at Lambeth Palace along the Albert Embankment in central London when he was caught by a speed camera.

Welby was prosecuted through a single justice procedure, and was therefore not required to go to a hearing.

Incidentally, the submitted plea came the same day he spoke to the House of Lords to condemn the British government's Illegal Migration Bill as "morally unacceptable and politically impractical."

"The Archbishop knows about [the offence] but hadn't been notified that it had gone to court," said a Lambeth Palace spokesperson of the speeding ticket. "He has tried to resolve this and pay the fine three times. He has all the paperwork to prove that he has tried to pay. Admin errors seem to be causing problems."

The archbishop was one of 90 persons who spoke during the debate, and shared his view that the bill "fails utterly" to take on long-term immigration issues and described the bill as a "short-term fix" which "risks great damage to the UK's interests and reputation, at home and abroad."

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Thai Opposition Parties Lead With 97% of Votes Counted

Both Thailand's opposition parties are currently leading with nearly all the ballots counted, Election Commission data revealed on Sunday.

On Sunday it was revealed that Thailand's military parties are losing to the country's political opposition groups, after more than 90% of votes counted, the Pheu Thai Party and the liberal Move Forward party are shown to be surging ahead in Thailand's elections.

While the two opposition parties have yet to win, their possible victory could mean an end to a decade of a military-backed conservative government.

But the country's military also wrote the country's parliamentary rules after its 2014 coup, and in order to come to power, the opposition parties will have to work with members of a junta-appointed Senate, which has a history of siding with military parities.

The opposition parties have, however, caught the attention of young voters in Thailand. The Pita Limjaroenrat, 43, who leads the Move Forward party and is the former executive of a ride-sharing app, has sworn to create an "anti-dictator" government, should his party win.

"It will be anti-dictator-backed, military-backed parties, for sure," he told reporters, adding that he will be prime minister, should his party win. "I think it's safe to assume that minority government is no longer possible here in Thailand."

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Vice Media Files for Bankruptcy in US, Will Be Sold to Group of Lenders – Statement

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) – The Vice Media Group on Monday filed for bankruptcy protection in the United States and struck a deal to sell itself to a group of its lenders.

The company, popular with websites such as Vice and Motherboard, has struggled for years to generate profits. It was estimated to worth \$5.7 billion in 2017.

"VICE Media Group today announced that it has agreed to the terms of an asset purchase agreement ('APA') with a consortium of its lenders (the 'Lender Consortium'), pursuant to which the Lender Consortium has agreed to purchase the Company, subject to higher and better bids from other parties and to the terms of the APA. The Lender Consortium includes Fortress Investment Group, Soros Fund Management and Monroe Capital, and has agreed to provide total purchase consideration of approximately \$225 million in the form of a credit bid for substantially all of the Company's assets, in addition to the assumption of significant liabilities upon closing," the company said in a statement.

It added that Vice has filed voluntary petitions for reorganization under Chapter 11 in the US Bankruptcy Court for the Southern District of New York and is waiting for approval of the proposed transaction under Section 363 of the same chapter, which allows for outside parties to submit higher bids for the company.

The Lender Consortium has also committed to providing debtor-in-possession financing and allowed Vice to use more than \$20 million in cash to ensure continued operations throughout the sale process, which is expected to conclude in the next two to three months, the statement added.

Vice said that its multiplatform brands such as Vice News, Vice Tv, Vice Studios, Pulse Films, Virtue, Refinery29 and i-D, will continue to operate and further produce content.

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US Arrests 2 Russians for Sending Aircraft Parts to Sanctioned Airlines - Court Filings

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) - The United States arrested two Russian nationals, Oleg Patsulya and Vasilii Besedin, last week on charges of sending aircraft parts to Russia in violation of US export controls and international money laundering, according to court filings.

"This application sets forth probable cause that between at least May 2022 and continuing to on or about May 11, 2023, defendants OLEG SERGEYEVICH PATSULYA ('PATSULYA') and VASILII SERGEYEVICH BESEDIN, AKA VASILIIY BESEDIN ('BESEDIN'), both Russian nationals living in the United States, conspired with each other and with others to send aircraft parts from the United States to Russia in violation of export laws and regulations and also to launder payments for those parts from Russia into the United States," Justin Kent, a special agent for the US Department of Commerce, said in a court complaint.

According to the complaint, Patsulya and Besedin, together with others, carried out a scheme by fielding requests and orders for parts from various Russian airlines, including those that have had their export privileges denied by the US following the beginning of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine.

The two allegedly sought to acquire the requested parts from aircraft-parts suppliers, including those located in the United States, by falsely representing to US suppliers and customs agents and law enforcement officers that their customers were entities other than Russian airlines, such as companies operating out of Turkey, the complaint said.

The defendants used intermediary companies as straw buyers and transshipped the aircraft parts through third-party countries, including Turkey and the Maldives, the complaint stated.

Patsulya and Besedin laundered payments for these parts from Russian accounts into bank accounts they controlled in the US, the documents said. They used the funds not to only purchase the parts but also for personal enrichment, including to fund lavish purchases, such as a 2023 BMW 740i and a 2007 SEA Ray Sundancer 380 Cruiser, the complaint alleged.

Last week, the Miami Herald reported that the FBI had raided a Florida condo owned by two Russian businessmen at the Trump Towers on Sunny Beach Isles. The unit is owned by the shell company MIC-USA LLC, which is allegedly controlled by Patsulya and Agunda Makeeva.

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US Imposes Visa Restrictions on People Allegedly Undermining Nigeria's Democracy – Blinken

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) – The United States imposed visa restrictions on several individuals for allegedly undermining the democratic process in Nigeria, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Monday.

"Today, I am announcing that we have taken steps to impose visa restrictions on specific

individuals in Nigeria for undermining the democratic process during Nigeria's 2023 elections cycle," Blinken said in a statement.

These actions are specific to certain individuals and are not directed at the Nigerian people or the government of Nigeria as a whole, he added.

Blinken did not identify the individuals who were sanctioned but underscored that they would be barred from entering the United States under a policy covering those believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, undermining democracy.

"These individuals have been involved in intimidation of voters through threats and physical violence, the manipulation of vote results, and other activity that undermines Nigeria's democratic process," he said.

Washington took steps to impose these visa restrictions in order to show its commitment to democracy in Nigeria, he added.

5/15/2023 7:52:04 AM -04:00

White House Discussing New Aid Package for Ukraine - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 15 (Sputnik) - The White House is in talks over a new assistance package for Ukraine to keep weapons flowing as Kiev prepares for a counteroffensive, Politico reported on Monday, citing a senior administration official.

The discussion is underway as Ukraine aid is "drying up" with approximately \$6 billion left out of the \$48 billion assistance package approved by Congress in December, the report said.

A US official told the news outlet that it is unclear how Ukraine's needs might change during or after the counteroffensive, but the Biden administration is "fully committed" to supporting Kiev during and after it "for the long haul."

The proposal for new Ukraine aid, however, is likely to face opposition from a group of Republicans who want to cut spending on Kiev amid the ongoing debt ceiling debate, the report noted.

The United States has committed over \$37.6 billion in security aid to Ukraine since the beginning of the Biden administration, including more than \$36.9 billion since the onset of Russia's special military operation.

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Texas Governor Says Biden Pulling Agents From Border Despite Post-Title 42 Migrant Influx

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - Texas Governor Greg Abbott said the Biden administration is pulling agents from the southern border less than 24 hours after a Trump-era expulsion policy ended and a record number of migrants are trying to enter the United States.

Title 42, a pandemic-era immigration restriction, expired at midnight as hundreds of migrants

amassed at the border hoping to get into the United States. The number of illegal crossings of the US border by migrants surged over 10,000 daily this week, an all-time record, The Washington Post reported on Friday.

"The Biden Administration is actually PULLING Border Patrol agents off the line. Texas is stepping up to fill the gap. Thank you to Texas Dept. of Public Safety troopers & Texas National Guard soldiers who are working night and day to hold the line," Abbott said in a tweet on Friday. US President Joe Biden said earlier this week that the administration expects the situation near the border to be chaotic. The state of Texas and the Pentagon have both sent service members to the border to conduct support operations.

An all-time record number of migrants have arrived at the US southern border under the Biden administration, hitting two consecutive records in 2021 and 2022, totaling over 2.3 million people. In fiscal year 2023, which began on October 1, the US authorities said they have already encountered more than 1.2 million migrants.

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White House Says US Looking at All Options to Get Whelan, Gershkovich Home

(Updates with details in paras 3,4; background in paras 5,6)

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration is exploring different options to get US nationals Paul Whelan and Evan Gershkovich back to the United States, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said when asked about reports that Washington is looking for high-valued Russian prisoners in other countries for a potential prisoner swap deal.

"We don't want to get into negotiations in public here, but I can tell you that we are working very hard to get both Evan and of course Paul back with their families where they belong," Kirby told CNN on Friday. "There are lots of different paths, lots of different options that we're looking at and trying to explore, and I think I probably need to leave it right there so we don't we don't jeopardize those efforts by talking about them too publicly."

Kirby, commenting on whether sanctions relief was on the table in exchange for a potential prisoner swap, said he does not see any change to the US sanctions regime against Russia, but reiterated that the United States is working hard to get both Americans released.

He also said the United States will continue to apply sanctions that hold Russian President Vladimir Putin "accountable" for Moscow's special military operation in Ukraine.

On Thursday, CNN reported that the United States is reaching out to countries that have detained alleged Russian spies as part of Washington's effort to secure a prisoner swap for Gershkovich and Whelan. The United States is also considering cutting down on some of the sanctions imposed on Russia as part of an effort to secure a prisoner swap, according to the broadcaster.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, responding to this report, said Moscow will not comment on this matter.

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Biden Says US on Track to Get Rid of Chemical Weapons Stockpile by This Fall

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said in a statement that the United States is on track to complete the destruction of its chemical weapons arsenal by this fall.

"We are on track to complete the destruction of our chemical weapons stockpile by this fall - a disarmament milestone that upholds the highest standards of transparency and public safety," Biden said in the statement on Friday.

In February, Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security Bonnie Jenkins said the United States would finalize the destruction of its chemical weapons this spring.

The US government announced in 2012 that it will complete the destruction of its chemical military arsenal by September 30, by agreement with all state parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention that entered into force in 1997.

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Blinken, S.African Counterpart Talk Amid Claims About Arms Supplies to Russia- State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with his South African counterpart Naledi Pandor amid tensions over US allegations that South Africa provided arms to Russia, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement.

Earlier on Friday, the South African Department of International Relations summoned US Ambassador Reuben Briget after he publicly accused the country of supplying weapons to

Russia for use in the Ukraine conflict. The South African presidency announced an independent inquiry into the matter but said there was no evidence to support the claim.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken spoke with South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Naledi Pandor today," Miller said in the statement on Friday.

"Secretary Blinken underscored the importance of the US-South Africa strategic partnership and reiterated cooperation on shared priorities, including health, trade, and energy."

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Spanish Prime Minister Says Progress Made on Palomares Nuclear Crash Cleanup - White House

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) - Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said that he made progress with US President Joe Biden regarding the cleanup of nuclear contamination caused by the crash of a US strategic bomber in 1966, according to a White House pool report.

Sanchez and Biden met at the White House on Friday to hold talks on a range of shared issues, including cleanup of the crash contamination. In January 1966, a US B-52 bomber carrying four thermonuclear weapons collided with a tanker during mid-air refueling over the Spanish coast, sending its payload to the ground below.

Two of the bombs, which landed near the fishing village of Palomares, contaminated the nearby area with radioactive material after their non-nuclear explosives detonated. The United States has conducted some remediation since the incident.

"Regarding Palomares, there has clearly been progress," Sanchez said, as quoted in the White House pool report. "We have agreed to demonstrate our willingness to solve this problem and have instructed the technical teams to meet as soon as possible to finally be able to extract this contaminated soil and remove it from Spain."

In March, the Spanish Foreign Ministry submitted a formal request to the US government to remove the contaminated soil, pointing to a commitment signed in October 2015 to pursue the matter.

Earlier on Friday, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said that the US expects negotiations on a cleanup agreement to begin soon, adding that the Biden administration looks forward to the effort.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, May 13 (Sputnik) -

UKRAINE CONFLICT

* An explosion occurred in the Russian-controlled city of Melitopol in the Zaporizhzhia region, a Sputnik correspondent reported on Friday.

* Two explosions occurred in Luhansk on Friday and clouds of smoke were seen above an area where one of the factories is located, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

* About 900 Ukrainian military were killed and injured in the Donetsk area over the past 24 hours, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* Ukrainian troops launched an offensive in the Soledar direction on May 11, but their attacks were repulsed and no breakthroughs took place, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

* The Belgian government agreed on a new aid package for Ukraine worth 92 million euros (\$100 million) that will be paid for with profit from Russia's frozen assets.

WESTERN MILITARY AID TO UKRAINE

* The United Kingdom's provision of long-range "Storm Shadow" cruise missiles to Ukraine is a sovereign decision and every country is free to decide for itself, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Friday.

* In case of a default, the United States will still be able to provide assistance to Ukraine through the end of the fiscal year using the appropriations that Congress provided last year, Kirby said.

* London's decision to provide long-range Storm Shadow cruise missiles to Kiev will lead to a serious escalation of tensions, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

* The European Union foreign ministers could agree on the 11th sanctions package against Russia as early as May 22, when they are scheduled to hold the next Foreign Affairs Council meeting, an official with knowledge of the negotiations told Sputnik on Friday.

* The European Union is proposing to officially stop Russian oil supplies via the Druzhba pipeline to Germany and Poland with the exception for Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, Bloomberg reported.

* The use of illegitimate sanctions and the rupture of agreements in the sphere of strategic stability damages the international system, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

VATICAN MEDIATION MISSION

* Russia has no information yet about the Vatican's mediation mission in Ukraine, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Friday.

* Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is expected to visit the Vatican and meet with Pope Francis on May 13, a source in the Holy See told RIA Novosti.

5/12/2023 4:47:06 PM -04:00

Hicks, UK Counterpart Discuss Russia, China, Climate Change During Meeting – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) – US Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks met with her UK counterpart, Permanent Under Secretary for Defense David Williams, at the Pentagon to discuss a range of issues, including security challenges allegedly posed by Russia and China,

and climate resiliency, the US Department of Defense said on Friday.

“Deputy Secretary of Defense Dr. Kathleen Hicks hosted the U.S.-UK Defense Dialogue today with her UK counterpart, Permanent Under Secretary for Defence Mr. David Williams, at the Pentagon. The two leaders discussed U.S. and UK strategic guidance, climate resiliency, Euro-Atlantic security, the AUKUS trilateral partnership, and force development,” the department said in a press release.

“The dialogue also included discussion of the U.S. National Defense Strategy and the UK Integrated Review Refresh, addressing the acute threat Russia poses – evidenced by its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine ... and the People’s Republic of China as the United States’ pacing challenge,” the release added.

The two officials also discussed efforts to increase defense industry production and implementation of the AUKUS trilateral partnership in terms of export controls and information sharing, according to the release.

Hicks and Williams agreed to convene the next Defense Dialogue in London with no specific date provided, the release said.

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Spanish Prime Minister Says World Needs US President Committed to ‘Good Fight’ Like Biden

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) – Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez expressed confidence on Friday that the world needs a US president who, like Joe Biden, would be committed to fighting the “good fight.”

“President Biden, I do believe that the world needs a US president that is committed to fighting the good fight like you do, and you can count on us,” Sanchez told Biden during their bilateral meeting at the White House.

He pointed out that many people around the world would have never imagined that democracy would be under threat in the United States.

Sanchez very positively described the relationship between Spain and the United States. He called the two countries allies, friends, and strategic partners who share common values.

The Spanish prime minister also highlighted the “transatlantic bond” that unites Madrid and Washington over the situation in Ukraine. He accused Russia of aggression against Kiev and stressed the necessity of a lasting and just peace that respects international law and the principles of the UN charter.

Sanchez also noted that the two countries are cooperating on climate change and can work together in order to regulate artificial intelligence.

Biden, in turn, thanked Spain for its support of the government in Kiev. He also mentioned Madrid’s support for the United States in dealing with such challenges as climate change and migration in the Western Hemisphere.

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with the Department of Justice, Washington, District of Columbia.

Ex-US Marine Who Choked Erratic Man on Manhattan Subway Train Released on Bond - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - Former US Marine Daniel Penny, who surrendered to New York City police to face a second-degree manslaughter charge for fatally choking a homeless, mentally disturbed man in a subway train, has been arraigned and released on bond, CNN reported on Friday.

Penny, 24, waived the reading of the charges in court and was not required to enter a plea, the report said.

Penny was ordered to surrender his passport within 48 hours and is prohibited from leaving New York State without a judge's or a court's approval, the report said.

Prosecutors conducted a thorough investigation that included interviews with eyewitnesses, subway riders who called the emergency 911 line and police officers who responded to the incident before moving forward with the criminal charge.

Penny held down Jordan Neely in a chokehold on a subway train in Manhattan after the latter behaved erratically and shouted that he had little to live for, the report cited an eyewitness as saying.

Penny's attorneys said in a statement last week that Neely had been aggressively threatening passengers and Penny, as well as others, acted to protect themselves, the report said.

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Oil Down 4th Week in Row as Weak China Demand Adds to US Woes

NEW YORK, May 13 (Sputnik) - Crude prices settled down a fourth week in a row as weaker-than-expected post-COVID growth in top oil importer China added to the anxiety of investors in a market already disillusioned by a raft of US worries that include a banking and debt crisis.

New York-traded West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, crude settled Friday's trade down 83 cents, or 1.2%, at \$70.04 per barrel.

For the week, the US crude benchmark showed a loss of 1.8%. Over the past four weeks combined, WTI was down 15%.

London-traded Brent crude settled Friday's session down 81 cents, or 1.1%, at \$74.17. The global oil benchmark showed a drop of 1.5% on the week and almost 14% over the past four weeks.

Until early this week, the sell-off in oil was driven largely by the failure of regional and mid-sized US banks, political wrangling that could lead to the first ever debt default by the United States and recession fears that have been growing by the day.

In recent days though, an old phenomena appeared to be making a comeback and could no longer be ignored - weak demand from China.

Analysts say the world's second largest economy isn't rebounding as fast as many thought it would after abandoning all caution over COVID. And that is a problem for most commodities, including oil and copper, which count heavily on Chinese buying.

Data out of Beijing on Thursday showed Chinese consumer inflation barely grew in April, while producer inflation sank to its weakest level since the peak of the pandemic in 2020.

Chinese trade data earlier this week was also disappointing, showing an economy struggling to pick up despite various stimulus measures put into place since the country turned its back on COVID lockdowns early this year.

While headlines about oil output disruptions in Iraq and Canada had provided some fleeting support to crude prices, the broader market sentiment was down "as crude demand concerns emerged from both the US and China", noted Ed Moya, analyst at online trading platform OANDA.

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Detention Hearing for Suspected Pentagon Leaker Set for May 16

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - A detention hearing for accused Pentagon documents leaker Jack Teixeira has been set for May 16 in Worcester, Massachusetts, a court notice said on Friday.

Teixeira will appear in US District Court in Worcester on Tuesday, May 16, at 2:30 p.m. E.T. (18:30 GMT) before Magistrate David Hennessy, the notice said.

The United States arrested and charged Teixeira last month with unauthorized removal and transmission of national defense information, following the leak of more than 100 classified documents online.

The court notice comes after Teixeira's second detention hearing, which was slated for May 11 in US District Court, was canceled.

Teixeira is being held without bail until a decision on his detention.

Teixeira is accused of leaking documents related to the conflict in Ukraine, the United States' espionage activities against its partners and other national security matters.

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Biden, Congressional Leaders to Meet Early Next Week on Raising Debt Limit - White House

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden will meet with congressional leaders next week to discuss the raising of the debt limit, White House spokesperson Karine Jean-Pierre said on Friday.

"The President and the four Congressional leaders will meet early next week," Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing.

Jean-Pierre did not provide a specific date for the meeting but noted that Biden will travel to Japan on Wednesday to participate in the Group of Seven (G7) leaders' summit.

The spokesperson noted that the parties have continued the productive discussions on the raising the debt ceiling issue over the past several days.

"Staff will continue to meet, they are going to meet today and over the weekend, so that will continue," Jean-Pierre said.

Congress must exercise its constitutional duties to resolve the issue and most congressional leaders agree that the United States must not default on its financial obligations.

The meeting between Biden and the congressional leadership was initially scheduled for Friday.

US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said earlier on Friday that postponing the meeting was because not enough progress was made during the staff-level talks and should not be seen as a delay.

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US Extending COVID-19-Related Tariff Exclusions for China - Trade Representative

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - The United States will extend certain COVID-19-era exclusions for Section 301 tariffs on China through the end of September, the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) said in a statement on Friday.

"The Office of the United States Trade Representative today announced the extension of 77 of the 81 COVID-related exclusions in the China Section 301 Investigation," the statement said.

The exclusions, which were set to expire on May 15, will be extended through September 30, the statement said.

The exclusions were initially granted in December 2020 and cover medical-care products, the statement said.

In addition, all 81 of the COVID-19-related exclusions will be extended through May 31 to allow for a transition period, statement added.

The extension allows USTR to continue to consider stakeholder and public feedback on the matter, according to the statement.

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UN Reinforcing Its Response at Mexican Border Amid Title 42 Expiration -UNHCR Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, May 12 (Sputnik), Lenka White - The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) agency has reinforced its presence at the Northern Mexican border given the US lifting of Title 42, the UNHCR spokesperson Deanna Bitetti told Sputnik on Friday.

"In light of the lifting of Title 42 and the announcement of new measures by the U.S.

government, UNHCR is reinforcing its response at the Mexican border," the spokesperson said in a statement.

The UNHCR works with 79 shelters along the northern border, she added, with approximately 25 staff members at the Mexican border.

"UNHCR and partners are providing protection counselling and orientation to persons in Mexico on their options to access protection and how to utilize the CBP One app," the statement also said.

The CBP One app is the main portal to the US asylum system at the southern border and connects them with US Customs and Border Protection.

On the US side, the UNHCR team has been supporting non-governmental shelters with focus on expanding the access to legal assistance for asylum seekers.

As of Thursday night, no mass crossings were seen along the US-Mexico border in West Texas after the Title 42 public health policy expired late Thursday night. Title 42, the Trump-era public health emergency order imposed in March 2020, allowed the US government to turn away illegal immigrants at the border to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The United States anticipated a massive surge of migrants would attempt to cross into the country illegally once it was lifted.

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Russian Ambassador Visits Businessman Klyushin in US Prison Ahead of Acquittal Hearing

KINGSTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov visited his fellow countryman and businessman Vladislav Klyushin at a prison in the US state of Massachusetts on Friday and said that the imprisoned Russian national is optimistic about his situation.

"He behaves with dignity, does not complain, and fights the situation he finds himself in. He has several dozen people in his cell, and all kinds of things happen there, but he has a very optimistic attitude. This fact, of course, makes us glad. Anything can happen. Prison is a prison; God forbid someone gets there," Antonov told reporters following his visit.

According to the ambassador, the meeting lasted about an hour and focused mainly on the conditions of Klyushin's detention in the prison, which is among the most stringent prisons in the United States.

The Russian national, who pleaded not guilty, intends to seek acquittal and in the meantime is able to communicate with his family in Russia over the phone.

"Our compatriot is in constant contact with his family," Antonov said. "He is aware of the events that are taking place in his homeland. Of course, he misses home, he would like to return to Russia as soon as possible and continue working for the benefit of our country."

Antonov noted that the American authorities hinted at a possible deal with the investigation, but Klyushin refused it, as he considers himself innocent. Moreover, the Russian ambassador is convinced that Klyushin's legal team will appeal against a possible prison term in order to achieve not only its reduction but also his full release.

Antonov refused to speculate on the length of the prison term but made it clear that it would likely be a yearslong sentence in an American prison. He also refused to talk about the possibility of including Klyushin in another prisoner swap deal between Washington and Moscow.

"They are calling for a figure of 20 years, maybe more. Then there will be an open civil investigation or process when material damage is also determined. The most important thing that our compatriot is charged with is some sort of conspiracy. You know very well how the American justice works - it is enough to look at American newspapers," the ambassador added.

In April, a US court delayed the sentencing of Klyushin to accommodate a hearing on the judgment of acquittal on May 23.

Klyushin was found guilty by a jury in Boston, Massachusetts on charges including wire fraud and securities fraud, for which he was previously scheduled to be sentenced on May 4.

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UPDATE - Two Migrant Children Have Died in US Custody Since March - Reports

(Updates throughout)

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - Two migrant children have died while under US custody since March, CNN reported on Friday.

The report said that a 17-year-old boy from Honduras died on Wednesday while in US custody. The boy, who migrated to the United States without his parents, was staying at a federally-run shelter in t Florida, but was taken to a local hospital after he was found unconscious, according to media reports.

The boy was pronounced dead an hour after arriving at the hospital, and his parents and sponsor have been notified, the report said.

The Department of Health and Human Services confirmed the death later in the day.

"The US Department of Health and Human Services is deeply saddened by this tragic loss and our heart goes out to the family, with whom we are in touch," HHS said in a press release. "As is standard practice for any situation involving the death of an unaccompanied child or a serious health outcome, HHS' Office of Refugee Resettlement Division of Health for Unaccompanied Children is reviewing all clinical details of this case, including all inpatient health care records."

A medical examiner investigation into the child's death is underway, the release added.

On Thursday, Honduran Foreign Minister Eduardo Enrique Reina said in a statement that the Honduran Embassy in Washington is in contact with the boy's family and requested the United States carry out an investigation into the death.

CNN later reported, citing a congressional notice it obtained, that a four-year-old migrant girl died in March while in US custody. The Honduran girl was taken to a local hospital in the state of Michigan after suffering a cardiac arrest event, where she was pronounced, the report added.

According to media reports, there have been 8,681 unaccompanied migrant children in federal shelters, where they spend an average of 29 days.

Six migrant children died while in US custody between 2018 and 2019.

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DeSantis Attempts to Win Over Conservative Donors Ahead of Anticipated 2024 Run - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has held a series of dinners with conservative donors in recent weeks to pitch his pathway to the presidency ahead of his expected 2024 campaign announcement, Bloomberg reported on Friday.

DeSantis and his wife, Casey, have hosted potential campaign supporters at their Florida residence to pitch their strategy for the 2024 Republican Party nomination, the report said, citing three attendees of the dinners.

DeSantis has framed himself as a candidate who could accelerate former US President Donald Trump's policies without the associated political baggage, the report said.

Trump, who officially announced his 2024 late last year, has been the Republican frontrunner in recent polls, followed by DeSantis, who has not yet formally launched his campaign.

DeSantis could announce his campaign as early as this month, US media reported in April.

DeSantis and his campaign staff believe they can gain support among Republicans who either never wanted Trump to represent the party or desire new leadership, which they estimate is roughly 70% of the party's base, the report said.

DeSantis also reviewed his policy positions with the potential donors, including his position on the Ukraine conflict, the report said. DeSantis told attendees that he is open to continuing to support Ukraine in its conflict against Russia, but that he wants to ensure the United States is not wasting money, the report said.

Casey DeSantis, who the governor referred to as the "first lady," similarly talked about her own policy work, the report added.

DeSantis' pitch also implied advantages to his potential eight years in office, versus the four to which Trump would be limited, the report said.

One attendee also expressed that DeSantis has the infrastructure and funding to take on Trump, the report said.

DeSantis campaign manager Generra Peck, policy adviser Dustin Carmack, pollster Ryan Tyson and other aides attended the dinners as well, the report said.

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Treasury Ability to Fund US Govt. Operations in May 'Uncertain' - CBO

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - The ability of the Treasury Department to fund US government operations this month is uncertain even though it will run out of money in June if the debt limit is not raised by Congress, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) said in a report on Friday.

The CBO projects in the report that the US government will exhaust the initiatives it has been exercising since January to avoid a federal default if Congress does not raise the debt limit.

"The extent to which the Treasury will be able to fund the government's ongoing operations will remain uncertain throughout May, even if the Treasury ultimately runs out of funds in early June," the report said.

CBO diverged in the report from the previous one it issued in February, which projected the government could cease to meet its financial obligations in July.

Predicting precisely when the government will default, provided the debt limit is not raised, is difficult due to the complex balancing of revenue collection and bill payments the Treasury Department is responsible to do in the coming weeks, the report said.

The situation adds urgency to the efforts by the Biden administration to reach an agreement with congressional Republicans to raise the debt limit, the report added.

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US Federal Health Agency Says Migrant Child Died While Under US Custody

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Health and Human Services said on Friday that a migrant child recently died while under federal care.

"The US Department of Health and Human Services is deeply saddened by this tragic loss and our heart goes out to the family, with whom we are in touch," HHS said in a press release. "As is standard practice for any situation involving the death of an unaccompanied child or a serious health outcome, HHS' Office of Refugee Resettlement Division of Health for Unaccompanied Children is reviewing all clinical details of this case, including all inpatient health care records."

A medical examiner investigation into the child's death is underway, the release said.

The release did not provide further details about the child, but noted that children under federal care have access to healthcare, legal services, translation services, and mental health counselors. Migrant children in federal shelters are also able to make telephone calls to family members, the release added.

US media reported earlier in the day that a 17-year-old boy from Honduras died on Wednesday while in US custody.

The boy was staying at a federally-run shelter in the state of Florida, but was taken to a local hospital after he was found unconscious, according to media reports. The boy was pronounced dead an hour after arriving at the hospital, his parents and sponsor have been notified, the report said.

On Thursday, Honduran Foreign Minister Eduardo Enrique Reina said in a statement that the Honduran Embassy in Washington is in contact with the boy's family and requested the United States carry out an investigation into the death.

The boy's death marks the first time a migrant child died while in US custody under the Biden administration. Several migrant children died while in US custody during the Trump administration.

Tens of thousands of migrants surged over the US-Mexico border in recent weeks ahead of the

termination of the Title 42 public health policy on Thursday night.

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US, Allies Increase Patrolling Strait of Hormuz After Iran's Vessel Seizures – Navy

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) – The United States and its partners are cooperating to increase the military rotation of forces patrolling the Strait of Hormuz after merchant vessel seizures by Iran, US Naval Forces Central Command said on Friday.

“U.S. 5th Fleet is working with regional allies and partners to increase the rotation of ships and aircraft patrolling in and around the Strait of Hormuz following Iran's recent unlawful merchant vessel seizures,” the statement said.

The US Navy accused Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) of seizing an oil tanker under the flag of Panama in the Strait of Hormuz last week. Tehran stated that the ship was seized by the order of judicial authorities.

The increased military presence in the area will support multinational efforts to deter threats to commercial shipping, the US Navy statement said.

“In addition to heightened patrols, U.S. 5th Fleet is bolstering international maritime security collaboration among the International Maritime Security Construct and European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz,” it added.

US Naval Forces Central Command accused Tehran of destabilizing behavior violating international law. Tehran has harassed, attacked, or interfered with the navigational rights of 15 internationally flagged merchant vessels over the past two years, according to the statement.

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US Lifts Sanctions From Czech Nuclear Firm After Acquisition From Russia's OMZ - Treasury

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - The United States removed Skoda JS, a Czech nuclear servicing and engineering company, from its sanctions list after it was fully acquired by Czech conglomerate CEZ Group from Russian heavy industry and manufacturing group OMZ in November, the US Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced on Friday.

"The following deletion has been made to OFAC's Sectoral Sanctions Identifications List: SKODA JS A.S., Orlik 266, Plzen - mesto PSC 316 06, Plzen, Czech Republic; Executive Order 13662 Directive Determination - Subject to Directive 1; Secondary sanctions risk: Ukraine-/Russia-Related Sanctions Regulations," OFAC said.

Skoda JS became part of OMZ in 2004 and was indirectly owned by Gazprombank, which controls OMZ. CEZ Group began acquiring Skoda JS from OMZ in March 2022 in light of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine and completed the process in late November.

Following the imposition of sanctions by the United States on Gazprombank in connection with

the special operation in Ukraine, Skoda JS also fell under restrictions that could significantly affect deliveries of key supplies to Czech nuclear plants, operated by CEZ.

In March, a CEZ spokesman said that the Czech Republic intends to replace Russian nuclear fuel used at the Dukovany nuclear power plant (NPP) with the one produced and supplied by US company Westinghouse starting from 2024, following a similar decision with regard to the Temelin NPP.

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Russia Calls on UN to Stop Kiev's Repression of Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, May 12 (Sputnik) - Russia calls on UN states, the UN Secretary-General and other organizations to prevent the repression and coming disaster of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), the Russian Permanent Representative Vassily Nebenzia said on Friday.

"We call on all UN member states and observers, the UN Secretary-General, international human rights organizations to prevent this coming tragedy," Nebenzia told the present member states.

According to the concept note created by the Russian Mission to the United Nations, the goal during this meeting was to provide information and a place for discussion regarding the escalation of repressive policy of Kiev against the UOC.

Tensions between Kiev and the canonical UOC escalated after Russia launched its military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. UOC monks were ordered to leave the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra, jurisdiction over which was divided between the National Kiev-Pechersk Historical and Cultural Preserve, a Ukrainian cultural organization, and the UOC, by March 29 for allegedly violating the terms of the lease.

Ukrainian Culture Minister Oleksandr Tkachenko said the monks could stay in the Lavra if they joined the non-canonical Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Lavra monks have said the unilateral eviction order was illegal and requires a court decision.

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Biden Puts Up 3 Nominees for Federal Reserve Amid Challenging Time for US Central Bank

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is nominating Federal Reserve Governor Philip Jefferson as vice chair while proposing to bring in World Bank Executive Director Adriana Kugler as governor at the US central bank, the White House said on Friday.

The president is also nominating current Federal Reserve Governor Lisa Cook for an additional term, the White House said in a statement.

"Dr. Jefferson and Dr. Cook will continue to bring valuable insight, expertise, and continuity to

the Fed at a critical time for our economy and families across the country," the statement said. "Dr. Kugler is a highly qualified and respected economist with deep expertise in labor markets, worker mobility, and youth employment."

Jefferson had served as an economist on the Fed's board before becoming its governor.

Kugler is said to be an expert on labor markets, international economics and applied econometrics and is widely published in leading journals. She also served as chief economist at the US Labor Department under the Obama administration.

Cook was a senior economist on the Council of Economic Advisers under President Obama. From 2000 to 2001, she served as a senior adviser on finance and development in the Treasury Department's Office of International Affairs.

"These nominees understand that this job is not a partisan one, but one that plays a critical role in pursuing maximum employment, maintaining price stability, and supervising many of our nation's financial institutions," Biden added.

The nominations come at a particularly challenging time for the Fed, which is navigating a crisis of depositor confidence in regional and mid-sized US banks and a likely recession from increases in interest rate hikes meant to counter inflation.

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US Govt. to Run \$1.5Trln Budget Deficit This Fiscal Year - Congressional Budget Office

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - The US government will run a federal budget deficit of at least \$1.5 trillion in Fiscal Year 2023 and it may grow even bigger because of a decrease in tax revenues, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) said in a report on Friday.

"CBO's updated projections show a federal budget deficit of \$1.5 trillion for 2023," the report said. "That estimate is subject to considerable uncertainty, though, in part because of a recent shortfall in tax revenues."

In the agency's updated projections, annual deficits will nearly double over the next decade, reaching \$2.7 trillion in 2033, with an accumulated deficit over the 2024-2033 period of \$20.2 trillion, the report said.

"Measured in relation to the size of the economy, deficits grow from 6% of gross domestic product (GDP) next year to 6.9% in 2033 - well above their 50-year average of 3.6% of GDP," the CBO said.

The updated projections for the FY 2023 budget were finalized in late March. However, since then the CBO has learned that revenue collections through April were less than the agency expected, which could affect total revenues for fiscal year 2023, which ends on September 30, 2023, the report noted.

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Detroit Mayor Urges Restart of Ties With China as City Set to Host APEC Meeting

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - US and Chinese cities have to rebuild relationships because it is important for both economies, Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan said on Friday, as the city is set to host an Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting.

From May 14-26, Detroit will host an APEC senior officials' meeting, as well as meetings that will bring together the bloc's transportation and trade ministers.

"Our relationship with the Chinese is something that needs to be restarted," Duggan told a press briefing.

US media reported earlier this week that US Trade Representative Katherine Tai plans to meet with Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao on the APEC sidelines.

Duggan confirmed that US and Chinese officials will hold meetings, but declined to provide details.

The mayor said that strengthening partnerships with Asian cities, particularly in China, is one of his priorities. He mentioned economic and cultural cooperation with the Chinese city of Shenzhen, but noted that it was complicated by COVID-19.

"I am very anxious to get back to rebuilding that, and I know President [Joe] Biden is doing everything he can to move the relationship where the Chinese and Americans can compete economically without having to be political rivals," Duggan said.

He expressed confidence that local municipalities in both countries are interested in strengthening economic cooperation with each other.

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US-Spain Negotiations on 1966 B-52 Bomber Crash Cleanup to Restart Soon - White House

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - Negotiations between the United States and Spain regarding the cleanup of a 1966 B-52 nuclear bomber crash in the latter will restart soon, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Friday.

In January 1966, a US B-52 bomber carrying four thermonuclear weapons collided with a tanker during mid-air refueling over the Spanish coast, breaking apart the strategic bomber and sending its payload to the ground below, where it landed near the fishing village of Palomares. Two of the bombs' non-nuclear explosives detonated, contaminating the nearby area with radioactive material.

"We conducted remediation following that accident in 1966. We do anticipate that negotiations on an agreement will restart soon, and we're looking forward to that. We're looking forward to working with our Spanish partners on an agreement that's related to further cleanup efforts at the site," Kirby said during a press briefing.

US President Joe Biden is willing to discuss the matter with Spanish President Pedro Sanchez during their talks in Washington on Friday, Kirby added.

In March, the Spanish Foreign Ministry submitted a formal request to the US government to remove the contaminated soil, pointing to a commitment signed in October 2015 to pursue the

matter.

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Elon Musk Confirms Linda Yaccarino Will Serve as New Twitter CEO - Statement

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - Twitter chief Elon Musk said on Friday that NBCUniversal advertising chief Linda Yaccarino will step down from her current role to serve as the social media platform's new CEO, focusing on business operations while Musk focuses on technology and design.

"I am excited to welcome Linda Yaccarino as the new CEO of Twitter!" Musk said in a statement. "[Yaccarino] will focus primarily on business operations, while I focus on product design and new technology."

Musk added that he looks forward to working with Yaccarino to transform Twitter into "X, the everything app."

On Thursday, Musk announced that he will be stepping down as Twitter CEO and transitioning to executive chair and Chief Technology Officer. Yaccarino is expected to start in her new role in approximately six weeks, Musk said.

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White House Says Up to Turks to Decide Their Future in Upcoming Elections, US Not Involved

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - The Turkish people will decide the future of their country in the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for May 14 and the United States is neither involved nor is taking a stance on the matter, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Friday.

"Turkey's got proud democratic institutions and we're going to leave it to the Turkish people to decide their future," Kirby said during a press briefing when asked for opinions on the upcoming elections in Turkey.

Kirby emphasized that the United States does not get involved in speaking to individual elections or candidates.

The United States wants to see free and fair elections in all democracies, Kirby said.

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White House on UK's Long-Range Missiles for Ukraine: Every Country Decides for Itself

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - The United Kingdom's provision of long-range "Storm Shadow" cruise missiles to Ukraine is a sovereign decision, and every country is free to decide for itself, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Friday.

On Thursday, UK Defense Secretary Ben Wallace confirmed that London is sending Storm Shadow missiles to Kiev.

"These are sovereign decisions. Every country gets to make these decisions for themselves, and should be allowed to speak to those decisions," Kirby said during a press briefing.

Kirby underscored that the US policy with regard to sending long-range missile systems to Ukraine has not changed.

Biden administration officials have repeatedly stated that the United States is not going to send long-range missiles to Ukraine.

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Too Soon to Tell if Sullivan-Wang Meeting Will Lead to Talks With Biden, Blinken - Kirby

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - It is too soon to tell whether talks earlier this week between US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Chinese top diplomat Wang Yi in Vienna will lead to talks between US President Joe Biden and other senior administration officials with their Chinese counterparts, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Friday.

"I think it's too soon to tell with any great specificity right now," Kirby said during a press briefing when asked about the impact of the Sullivan-Wang meeting on future talks. "We certainly hope that it will lead to additional opportunities to advance conversations with the Chinese, to include Secretary Blinken getting over to Beijing, to include the potential for Secretaries Yellen and Raimondo to go to Beijing."

Earlier this year, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken postponed an official trip to Beijing in response to a Chinese balloon flying over the United States.

In March, Kirby said that the United States was in talks with Beijing about a potential visit to China by Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen as well.

Kirby pointed out during Friday's press briefing that the Biden administration is confident talks between Biden and Xi will take place at an appropriate time.

On Thursday, Sullivan and Wang concluded two days of talks on bilateral issues, cross-Strait issues and the Ukraine conflict. The meeting was the "first step" to more regular communications in the future, a senior Biden administration said after the talks.

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US to Provide Aid to Ukraine Through Rest of Fiscal Year in Case of Default – Kirby

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) – In case of a default, the United States will still be able to provide assistance to Ukraine through the end of the fiscal year, using the appropriations that Congress provided last year, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Friday.

"As for support to Ukraine, that is tied to appropriations that we got from Congress last year. We are still executing against those appropriations, and we would expect that we'd be able to continue to do that through the rest of this fiscal year," Kirby said during a press briefing.

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US to Bolster Posture in Arabian Gulf Amid Iranian 'Interference' With Vessels - Kirby

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - The United States will bolster its military posture in the Arabian Gulf amid alleged Iranian interference with commercial maritime activity, White House Strategic Communications Coordinator John Kirby said on Friday.

"Today, the Department of Defense will be making a series of moves to bolster our defensive posture in the Arabian Gulf," Kirby said during a press briefing.

In the coming weeks, the US will seek to increase coordination and interoperability of the international maritime security construct, Kirby said. The US does not seek escalation or conflict with Iran, Kirby added.

The move comes after Iran allegedly interfered with the navigation of 15 commercial vessels in the last two years, Kirby said.

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US Launches Small Modular Reactor Simulator in Romania to Train Workforce - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) - The United States has launched in Bucharest its first small modular reactor control room simulator abroad to train the next generation of civil nuclear workers and lay the groundwork for future nuclear deployments in Europe, the US State Department said on Friday.

"Today, US Ambassador to Romania Kathleen Kavalec and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Ann Ganzer joined Prime Minister Nicolae Ciuca, Minister of Energy Virgil Popescu, Politehnica University Rector Mihnea Costoiu and industry executives to officially launch the first NuScale Energy Exploration (E2) Center outside the United States at University Politehnica of Bucharest, Romania," the State Department said in a press release.

The move will support establishing Romania as a regional education and training hub for the next stage of US civil nuclear deployments across that country and throughout Europe, the release said.

In November 2021, the State Department announced a multi-billion dollar deal with Romania to

begin replacing seven of the country's coal power plants with small modular reactor (SMR) technology.

SMRs are nuclear fission reactors that are significantly smaller than traditional nuclear reactors and can be built at one location and then transferred to another. In 2018, the International Atomic Energy Agency said the SMRs are the most promising emerging nuclear power technologies.

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Blinken Announces Retirement of Deputy Secretary Sherman

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced on Friday that Deputy Secretary Wendy Sherman is going to retire.

"On the Retirement of Deputy Secretary of State Wendy R. Sherman. It is with profound gratitude that I thank Wendy R. Sherman for her service to the Department and the American people as Deputy Secretary of State," Blinken said in a statement.

Blinken added that throughout her career in the Department of State, Sherman has strengthened bonds with US allies, including South Korea, Japan and the European Union, and increased the capabilities to manage relationships with China and Russia.

Sherman has served in the Department of State since 1993.

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NBCUniversal Announces Departure of Ad Chief, Rumored to Become Twitter's CEO

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) – NBCUniversal advertising chief Linda Yaccarino is leaving her position, the company said on Friday, amid reports that she is in talks to become Twitter's new CEO.

"NBCUniversal today announced that Linda Yaccarino is leaving the company, effective immediately. Mark Marshall, currently President, Advertising Sales and Client Partnerships, will become interim Chairman of NBCUniversal's Advertising and Partnerships group, reporting to Mark Lazarus, Chairman, NBCUniversal Television and Streaming," the company said in a statement.

The Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday, citing people familiar with the matter, that Yaccarino was in talks to become the new CEO of Twitter.

Elon Musk, who owns Twitter, said on Thursday that he hired a new CEO, and she will start to work in six weeks. The billionaire entrepreneur did not identify the new executive.

Musk also stated that he is transitioning his role at Twitter to the executive chair and CTO in order to oversee product, software, and system operations.

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Canada 'Deeply Concerned' Over Escalation Between Gaza and Israel – Global Affairs

WASHINGTON, May 12 (Sputnik) – Ottawa expressed deep concern over the latest escalation between Gaza and Israel and called on both sides to immediately de-escalate, according to a statement released by Global Affairs Canada on Friday.

“Canada is deeply concerned by the escalation between Israel and Gaza and stands firmly with the Israeli and Palestinian peoples in their right to live in peace, security, with dignity and without fear,” the ministry said. “Canada calls for calm and immediate de-escalation to prevent any further loss of civilian life.”

In addition, Ottawa expressed sadness over the deaths of civilians on both sides, including children in Gaza, underscoring the need to protect the civilian population and respect international humanitarian law.

The Canadian government also condemned the ongoing firing of rockets from the Gaza strip into Israeli territory, the statement said, adding that Tel-Aviv has the right to defend itself from terrorism, in line with the respect of human rights, and humanitarian law.

Canada urged Gazan and Israeli authorities to refrain from further escalation or any act that undermines a peaceful resolution to the conflict, the statement said.

The ministry added that it would continue to cooperate with international partners in support of lasting peace.

On Tuesday, Israel launched the operation "Shield and Arrow," conducting airstrikes against PIJ's militants in the Gaza Strip and their infrastructure, including rocket launchers and mortars. In response, militants of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad fired over 500 rockets at Israel, according to the IDF.

The Palestinian Health Ministry on Thursday said that Israeli strikes against the Gaza Strip killed 25 and injured 76 people.